

**A SPIRITUAL LEADER**

Moses - Part 12

Exodus 18

**Intro:** If you stop for a moment just to think of leaders, you will realize that the Bible has a great deal to say about leaders. Leaders are those whose responsibility it is to guide others. The Bible teaches us that husbands are to lead their wives. Parents are to lead their children. The heads of government are to lead their nations. The priests and the prophets of the OT were also leaders, as are elders and deacons in the NT Church. There are all kinds of leaders, good and bad. The Devil even seeks to lead us when he does what he did with Eve in seeking to get her to disobey God. The Bible warns us that wicked men will seek to lead us into sin.

The best leader of all is the Lord. David had this in mind when he wrote the twenty-third Psalm, and said,

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake (Psa. 23:1-3).

In both the OT and the NT God's people are likened to sheep. Sheep always need a shepherd to guide them, to feed them, to protect them, and to seek them when they go astray.

The first great leader that we come to in the OT is Moses. There are varying estimates of how many people were under his leadership as the Lord led Israel from Egypt to Canaan, but with over six hundred men, when you add women and children to the list, a conservative estimate would be that the Israelites numbered between a million and a half to two million people. So he had a responsibility that, to say the least, was overwhelming!

He was a good leader. He was really concerned about the people of God. Our study of his life up to this point would teach us that he was learning to lead as he led the people. Frequently he was overwhelmed with the problems that he faced, but added to the problems was the opposition of the people which seemed to be almost constant. But even the best of leaders often have to step back to take a look to make sure they are doing the Lord's work in the best possible way. And sometimes the Lord

sends someone along to point out to us that we are not benefitting the people we lead in the best way that we can.

As the Lord's people, we often need to be reminded that it is not up to us to make our own plan for leadership, but we are to follow the Lord's plan. Those of us who are pastors need to keep that always in our minds. Our chapter today speaks of *spiritual leadership*. What do we mean by that expression?

Well, for us today it means leadership under the direction of the Holy Spirit. And we all should know that the Holy Spirit always guides us to know God's will by what God has given us in His Word. We need to remember that it is always God's purpose for His will to be done for His glory. We see from the life of Moses that the Lord did not let Moses loose sight of how much he needed to depend upon the Lord and to trust the Lord for the wisdom that he needed day by day to guide the people of God in the right way. And so a major part of Moses' task as a leader was to show the people he was leading that he stood in constant need of the Lord's wisdom and blessing in fulfilling his role as a spiritual leader.

Now I want to read this eighteenth chapter of Exodus to you so that we will all see the problem, as well as the solution. And the amazing thing is how it was that the Lord gave Moses the guidance that he needed. If you happen to be using a Scofield Bible, I want to inform you that I take a different position on this chapter from Dr. Scofield. I don't do this very often, but I hope to show you from the evidence given to us in this chapter that my interpretation is the right one.

(Read Exodus 18.)

The first thing that we are told in this chapter has to do with:

## **I. THE COMING OF JETHRO, MOSES' FATHER-IN-LAW (Ex. 18:1-27).**

And the first thing that we learn has to do with:

### **A. The primary purpose of Jethro's coming (vv. 1-7).**

It was to bring Moses' wife Zipporah, and their two sons, back to him. The last we heard of Zipporah was back in Exodus 4, and before that in

Exodus 2. When Moses fled from Egypt after he had killed the Egyptian, he went down into Midian where he met the seven daughters of Reuel as he was called then, and later he married one of them whose name was Zipporah. There have been many attempts to explain why Jethro was called both Reuel and Jethro. The explanation of Jamieson in the JFB commentary is that Reuel was his name, but that Jethro was a title that showed his rank in his tribe. But whatever the right explanation is, we know that Reuel was Jethro and Jethro was Reuel.

Here in Exodus 18:2 is the last time Zipporah is mentioned in the Bible. So we don't know anything further about Moses' family.

So in the first seven verses of this chapter we see that Jethro brought Moses' family back to him.

In the next five verses (vv. 8-12) we are told of:

**B. The report that Moses gave to Jethro, and Jethro's response (vv. 8-12).**

To me this is the important part of the chapter as far as Jethro was concerned. Isn't there evidence here that Jethro was convinced when he heard Moses' report that God was the true and living God, and that here we have evidence of his salvation. This is in verses 9 through 11.

And I believe also that when Jethro offered "a burnt offering and sacrifices for God," after which "Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God," that this was their way of confirming that Jethro had demonstrated true faith in God. It takes less than a minute for us to read what Jethro said, and then did, followed by the fellowship that they all had in eating together, but the actual event probably took much longer than it take us to read about it.

All of this is followed by what we can call,

**C. The counsel of Jethro (vv. 13-27).**

Verse 13 begins another day, and Jethro had an opportunity to see how Moses was speaking his time day after day. We have to admire Moses' unselfishness and dedication to the work which the Lord had called him to do. Obviously he did this when they were not "on the road." From the

time that he got up in the morning, until he went to bed at night, he was meeting either with groups or individuals throughout the day to give them advice concerning the problems that they brought to him. It was good that the people came, and it was good that he talked with them. We certainly cannot fault him for that. He had the confidence of the people, and they had a leader who definitely wanted to help them.

But Jethro was amazed by what he saw. And so he asked Moses the questions which we find in verse 14.

Moses' answer was that they people came to him. He apparently had not asked them to come. But they came! And what was Moses doing? He was acting as a judge in disputes that they had with each other, *but he was able also to back up his advice with what they had of the Word of God.* So again we have to commend Moses for what he was doing. What he was doing could have been followed by any child of God who is counseling the people of God. It would actually be difficult to find a leader as devoted to the Lord's people as he was.

But instead of commending Moses, he frankly told him that it was not good. Jethro would not have criticized what Moses was doing, but he knew that Moses was carrying a load which he could not continue to carry. He knew that Moses needed help, and that he needed it right away. He saw that Moses was so busy meeting with people that he had no time for anything else. No one, not even our Lord when He came to earth, could or did spend all of his waking hours with the people.

Now it is one thing to see that a servant of the Lord, a leader of the people, was doing the wrong thing, but it is quite another thing to be able to tell another person what he ought to be doing.

Just yesterday I read in Proverbs 9,

9 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.

10 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning (Prov. 9:9-10).

Now Moses was not a child. Nor was he a young man just starting out. He was well into his eighties, a seasoned leader of the people. But we must not fail to notice how open he was to criticism, and how quick he was to change when he was shown a better way.

We can all learn from what Jethro told Moses. Pastors need this advice. And so do parents. Sunday School teachers can find help here. I doubt if any of us is doing what Moses was doing, but it may be that the majority of the time that we have to give, is given primarily to people. If so, I hope you are listening, and that you will come back to this passage many, many times in the future.

I think I have reminded you more than once of a motto that Alan Redpath, who was at the time the Pastor of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, had on the wall of his study. This is what it said: BEWARE OF THE BARRENNESS OF A BUSY LIFE. As strange as it may sound, busy-ness can be our greatest obstacle to fruitfulness. But let us see what Jethro told his son-in-law.

Jethro made five suggestions to Moses. And notice that he promised, “and God shall be with thee” (Ex. 18:19).

*First* Jethro said, “Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God” (v. 19). Jethro knew by being with Moses a very short time, that he was so busy with people that he was not taking the time to be with the Lord. Moses first responsibility toward the people was to pray for them. He needed to talk to the Lord about the people before he talked to the people about the Lord. Those two things might sound like the same, but they are very different. It is important that we do both, but we are making a big mistake if we are not putting prayer first.

It would be wonderful if we all felt about prayer the way Samuel did about the Lord’s people, a disobedient people, in his day. Listen to his words: “Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you” (1 Sam. 12:23a).

When the work in the early church got so heavy that the apostles could not get everything done that needed to be done, they asked the people to appoint deacons. But then they said this about themselves, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4).

Our Lord was seeking to impress upon His disciples the importance of prayer when it was said about His teaching that “He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).

It is said of Martin Luther that he used to remark that he was so busy that he had to pray!

Now when we read this in our Bibles, we need to ask ourselves, “Where does prayer come in the list of our priorities?” Or is it even on our list? If it is (and I assume that it must be with most of us), but not at the top, what steps are we going to take to put it where Jethro told Moses that it should be? If we are too busy to pray, we are too busy. We all have days when our schedule is interrupted for some good reason, but as soon as we can we should get back to our time with the Lord in prayer.

But let us move on to point #2: **Second** Jethro said, “And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws.” What that means is that Moses was to follow up his praying with good, solid teaching of God’s Word. Let me tell you an experience I had years ago, and I have seen it happen many times during my ministry. A man came up to me as I was about to preach in a certain place, and he told me that he wanted to talk to me after the service about a problem he was having. When the message was over, he came up to me, and to my surprise he said, “I just want you to know that I won’t have to talk to you because you answered my question in your message.” So I did not find out what his question was, nor when during my message I answered it. But it has been a reminder to me that we are counseling people while we teach the Word. This doesn’t mean that we don’t talk one on one, but it shows that we minister to people as we teach. We study and we pray, and then we teach and preach. We don’t just talk about problems when we teach. We teach whatever the Lord leads us to teach, but our teaching must be of the Word, and nothing but the Word.

**Third** Jethro told Moses that we need to “show them the way where in they should walk” (v. 20m). As far as the Lord’s people are concerned, the purpose we should have in teaching the Word is to see their lives transformed. Our “walk” is the way we live. And there is no more powerful instrument for changing lives, for producing saints, than the simple teaching of the Word of God.

But notice that Jethro said, “Show them.” We teach people by the words that we speak, but Jethro was reminding Moses that we also teach people by what they see in us, by our walk. Some of the greatest teachers I have had in my life as a Christian, have been from people who were able to show me by the example of their lives, what they were seeking to teach me with the words of their mouth.

**Fourth**, Jethro mentioned “the work that they must do” (v. 20b). Do you see what prepares us to serve the Lord? Often work is placed first. I have known of pastors who give people a job in the church as soon as they can so they can keep them from going to some other church. If we do that, we will get a lot of “workers” who don’t know what they are doing. God’s work is unique. God’s ways are not our ways, but often we try to make the Lord use our ways and then we wonder why we don’t see the fruit that we want to see.

But there is a **fifth point** that Jethro made with Moses. He was to get men with gifts to serve the Lord, who are spiritually qualified, to join with him in serving the Lord. (Read verses 21 through 23.) Note especially that Jethro said to Moses in verse 23, “If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so . . .” Jethro was submitting his counsel to the Lord, ultimately leaving it up to the Lord to guide Moses according to His will.

**Concl:** What was the outcome? (Read verses 24 through 26.)

Moses needed just exactly what the Lord led Jethro to tell him. And we need it too. Although I have taught this passage of Scripture many times before, it always does me good to go over it again. How quickly we forget the things that are really important in our lives as Christians, as we seek to help others, and in our ministries (which we all have) as we seek to bring glory to God.

Most people know about Moses. But hardly anyone remembers Jethro. But the Lord took Jethro to make Moses in his eighties realize how to put his life in order if He was to see the blessing of the Lord, and to be the greatest help to his people.