

## Jethro, Counselor to Moses

### Introduction:

1. Following Moses killing of the Egyptian, for striking Moses' Hebrew brother, Moses fled to the land of Midian.
2. In the land of Midian he connected with a man by the name of Reuel or Jethro. Jethro is described as the priest of Midian.
3. Jethro gave his daughter, Zipporah to Moses in marriage. From this union two sons were born: Gershom and Eliezer.
4. Who was this man and what was his place in the history of the people of God? You may be more influenced by him than you know.

### Discussion:

- I. Who was Jethro? He is first mentioned in Ex. 2:16-3:1.
  - A. He was a Midianite."
    1. This description raises many questions.
      - a. What religion was the Midianites?
      - b. Is this the religion that Jethro promoted?
      - c. Why is he so supportive of Moses and the God of Israel?
      - d. The answers to these questions are not easy given the limited description of Jethro in Scripture.
    2. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham.
      - a. After Sarah and Hagar Abraham took another wife named Keturah (Gen. 25:1ff; 1 Chron. 1:32).
      - b. To this union 6 sons were born. Midian was one of them.
      - c. Midian had 5 sons (Gen. 25:4; 1 Chron. 1:33).
    3. It was Midianite tradesmen who took Joseph from the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites (Gen. 37:28, cf. v. 36).
    4. The Midianites were nomadic people and therefore it is hard to identify them with one particular area.
  - B. He was "the priest of Midian."
    1. We are probably safe in assuming that since Moses is writing Exodus that the concept of priest would be at least similar to the priests in Israel.
    2. What God did Jethro serve?
      - a. Later in the history of Israel, Midianites influenced Israel with their idolatry with Baal of Peor.
      - b. It was a major item in the history of Israel (Num. 25:1-9; cf. 1 Cor. 10:8). 23 or 24 thousand died in one day. And Phinehas executed an Israelite man and a Midianite woman in their tent.
      - c. One might raise the question of Moses' marriage to a Midianite, but this matter is never addressed in Scripture.
    3. Was this the religion of Jethro? We are not told. We do know that this is the region where God spoke to Moses on Sinai commissioning him to go to Egypt, and of

course, this is the place from which God spoke to Israel, giving them the Ten Commandments, defining the terms of their covenant relationship. God was known in the Palestinian area long before the time of Moses (Gen. 4:26; 6:3, 5; 12:1, 4, et al.). We do not know what level of influence Jethro may have had from God.

- C. The name Jethro means “excellence” or “abundance.”
  - 1. He is called “Ruel in Ex. 2:18.
  - 2. Jethro in Ex. 3:1 and Ex. 18.
  - 3. Evidently he had a son named Hobab (Num. 10:29). Cf. Judges 4:11.
- D. Jethro provided a safe haven for Moses and evidently supported his work of delivering Israel. He took care of Zipporah and his grandchildren while Moses was away on this mission.

II. The next mention of Jethro is in Ex. 18. After the Exodus Moses returns to the area of Sinai with the Israelites and Jethro comes to meet them.

- A. The reunion is interesting (1-12).
  - 1. It is especially cordial.
  - 2. Jethro blessed God who had delivered Moses and the people.
  - 3. He concluded, “Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods.”
  - 4. He made sacrifices for God and ate with Aaron and the elders of Israel.
  - 5. All of this suggests a certain solidarity with Moses, the Israelites and their God.
- B. As I think about this I am reminded of the earlier incident of Moses delivering Jethro’s daughters from the shepherds (Ex. 2:16ff).
  - 1. It seems that such an ethical action by Moses was recognized as commendable by the priest of Midian.
  - 2. It was this kindness that had drawn them together in the first place.
  - 3. If Moses’ behavior of “deliverance” was a reflection of his perception of God, and I believe it was, then Jethro’s perception of God aligns with Moses’. And now God has delivered Israel, and Jethro rejoices in this (Ex. 18:9).
  - 4. This would not prove that Jethro was a worshiper of the true God. It only suggests that his perception of God is that he exists and that he delivers people.
- C. Jethro is most well known for his counsel to Moses (Ex. 18:13ff).
  - 1. People recognize it as a smart thing to delegate responsibility, and while that is certainly Jethro’s recommendation there is more to it than that.
  - 2. Reading of text.
  - 3. Certainly delegation is involved in Jethro’s counsel.
  - 4. This counsel is reflective of the wisdom of God (18:19). Cf. Solomon’s judgment on the matter of the child and the two harlots (1 Kings 3:16ff, esp. v. 28). That it is the wisdom of God is evidenced by Moses’ inclusion of this material in Exodus; the Holy Spirit’s inclusion of this material AND the on-going use of this counsel in the kingdom of God.
  - 5. It is more than delegation. It is a recommendation of a system that is still used today in the kingdom of God and in nearly every governmental system in the world.
    - a. In modern court systems there are various levels of judges. In the US there are various lesser courts, local, state, and federal levels. Then there is the

Supreme Court. This is the system recommended by Jethro. Was he the first to introduce this concept into history? Probably not, but he is introducing it as an effective system for Moses and Israel.

- b. There is an element of Jethro's system often overlooked. Note v. 20: "Teach them the statutes and the laws, and make know to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do."
  - 1) We need to realize the Ten Commandments had not yet been given.
  - 2) But there were things that could be taught that involved principles of right and wrong to provide justice and equity for the people. Note v. 16. These were the "statutes and laws of God."
  - 3) "But the Ten Commandments had not yet been given." Correct, but surely we do not think that these were the first statutes and laws of God. The Patriarchs had lived for years under God's direction. They were not without ethics, nor without revelation from God.
  - 4) So there were things that needed to be taught.
  - 5) The Ten Commandments and the Lord's instructions were then given at Sinai, developing out of this context.
  - 6) Teaching now became a prominent emphasis in Israel. Prophet, priest and parents were charged with the responsibility to teach (Deut. 5:28-6:9).
  - 7) Discipleship in the N.T. is reflective of this same system. This very study is a reflection of this same system. When this system is in place and executed appropriately then things go well (not perfect, but well) (Ex. 18:23). When this system fails kingdoms collapse.

III. We need to be especially aware of this in the 21<sup>st</sup> century church.

- A. We need to elevate the teaching of God's revelation.
  1. "Teaching and learning the law of God is boring." It may very well be, but that does not mean that it is not valuable. It does not have to be boring. Understanding its value and purpose can make it more attractive and palatable. And we need to consider how to make the instruction "not boring," but invigorating.
  2. Neglecting the teaching results in catastrophe.
- B. How we value the teaching is evident in the way we treat the teachers (1 Tim. 5:17-18; Gal. 6:6-10; 2 Tim. 4:3-5).
- C. How we value the teaching is evident in the way teachers value those they teach (1 Tim. 6:3-6). Some take advantage of the flock (Ezek. 34:8-10). Remember Hophni and Phinehas, the priests who took advantage of the people (1 Sam. 2:12-17). If you value your children teach them the way of the Lord.
- D. Indeed we are the salt and light influence for the world (Matt. 5:13-16).
- E. We need to value the teaching, those taught and the teachers. We need to make good judgments based on the teaching of God. We need to perpetuate the teaching intergenerationally.

Conclusion:

1. How much influence has Jethro had on your life? Perhaps more than you realize.

2. Even if he was an idolater, it is evident that God used him to advocate a system founded on the wisdom of God to bring peace to the people.
3. Are we using the system effectively?