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Now Jethro Heard Everything God Had Done for Moses and for His People Isra'el **18: 1-12**

Now Jethro heard everything God had done for Moses and for his people Isra'el
DIG: What kind of relationship did Moses enjoy with his father-in-law? Was it
relaxed or casual? Trusting or suspicious? Affirming or critical? Why?

REFLECT: The burnt offering was atonement for sin. It was an acknowledgement of
sin and a desire to be cleansed. How do we do this today? When you feel the weight
of your sin and you want to get rid of it, where do you go? What happens if we claim
to be without sin? Read First John 1:5-10.

Parashah 17: Yitro (Jethro) 18:1-20:26

(See my commentary on Deuteronomy, **to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah**)

The Key People are Jethro, Moses, Zipporah, Gershom, Eleazer, and Aaron.

The Scenes include **the wilderness of Sinai** and **Mount Sinai**.

The Main Events include **Jethro** hearing what **God** has done, rejoicing, and giving **Moshe**
advice to delegate part of **his** duties as **judge**; **ADONAI** coming down from **Mount Sinai**
and speaking the **Ten Words** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy**, **to see link click [Bk](#)**
- The Ten Words), **the people trembling**, and **Moshe** approaching **YHVH** alone.

The children of Isra'el hardly had enough time to catch **their** breath from crossing **the**
Sea of Reeds when **they** were brought face-to-face with **their Redeemer**. In Parashah
Yitro, **Moshe** learns some leadership principles from **his father-in-law, Yitro (Jethro)**,
then ascends **Mount Sinai** to meet **YHVH** alone and receive the **Ten Words**. This is not
only one of the most important events in the history of **Isra'el**, but also in the history of the
world. There is no code of laws that have influenced the whole world as much as the Bible,
and in the Bible **the Torah** that **ADONAI** gave to **Isra'el** through the hands of **Moshe** at
the foot of **Mount Sinai** is one of the most significant events in **God's** intervention in the

affairs of mankind.



The word of **the Lord's** victory at **the Sea of Reeds** reached **Jethro's** ears. So the timing of his arrival at **the Israelite** camp was no accident. Having **heard of their** victory over the Amalekites at Rephidim, **he** decided to go visit **his son-in-law** and celebrate with **him**. **Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moshe and for his people Isra'el, and how ADONAI had brought Isra'el out of Egypt (18:1). The Midianites** did not have a king like other nations; therefore, **their** highest office was that of **the priest** and **Jethro** was not **his** real name, but **his** official name, like **Abimelech** in **Genesis** or **Pharaoh** in **Exodus**.

Jethro also took along **his two** grandsons and **his** daughter **Zipporah**. **After Moshe had sent his wife Zipporah** back to **Midian, his father-in-law Jethro received her and her two sons (18:2-3a)**. In all likelihood, **she** was sent back to **her** homeland because of **her** negative attitude toward the covenant of Circumcision (**Genesis 17:9-14; Exodus 4:24-26**). As a result, **she** and her **two sons** missed all the miracles that **God** performed in **Egypt**, the crossing of the Red Sea, the cleansing of the bitter water at Marah, the provision of quail and manna in the Desert of Sin, the river of water miraculously gushing out from the rock at Meribah, and the wonderful victory over the Amalekites. It is interesting that **Moses** would later remarry (**Numbers 12**), and **Zipporah's** name would never again appear in the Scriptures. Many commentators have assumed that **Zipporah** died before **he** married; but it may be that **she** remained with her **father** after **he returned to his own country**. Regardless of where **she** ended up, the reason that **she** and her **two sons** are mentioned is to remind the readers of where **Moshe** and **the Israelites** have been.

The name that **Moses** gave to **his two sons** reflected **his** spiritual experiences in **Egypt**.

One son was named Gershom, which means *an alien there* or *banishment*, and refers to **Moshe's** realization that he and **the Israelites** had **become like aliens in a foreign land (18:3)**. **His son's** name was a constant reminder of their *banishment*. **Gershom** was circumcised on the eighth day as **God** had commanded (**Genesis 17:1-27**), but it was **his** circumcision that soured **Zipporah** on its practice.

And we learn for the first time that **the other son was named Eliezer**, which means *God is help*. This name indicated something of the gratitude that **Moshe** had for **God's** protection during his flight from Egypt. By naming his son **Eliezer**, **Moses** indicated that **God was his helper**. **He** remembered how **God** saved **him from the sword of Pharaoh (18:4)**. **Eliezer** was not circumcised, which brought about the death threat against **Moshe (Genesis 17:14)**. Therefore, to save **her husband's** life, **Zipporah** circumcised **Eliezer** even though **she** evidently detested the practice (**4:24-26**). But **she** still didn't believe in circumcision.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moshe's sons and wife, came to him in the desert, where he was camped near the mountain of God (18:5). They camped at Rephidim, which was **their** last stop on **their** way to **Mount Sinai**. The slopes of **Mount Sinai** reached Rephidim, so **they** were **near** it, but **they** had not reached it yet. This points us forward in time because worshipping at **Mount Sinai** would be the sign and fulfillment of the promise the **God** had given to **Moshe** at **the burning bush (3:12)**.

Jethro had sent word to him saying: **I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons**. The greeting of **Jethro** had all the characteristics of an oriental meeting. The formal courtesies that **Moshe** gave to **Jethro** emphasized the respect that **he** had for **him**, for **he** was one of great authority. **Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him** because **he** respected the office of **priest** that **he** held. **They greeted each other and** after the formalities, **they went into the tent (18:6-7)**. This meeting took priority over the return of **Moshe's** family because **Jethro** had the highest social position, even above **Moses**.

Moses told his father-in-law about everything ADONAI had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Isra'el's sake and about the hardships they had met along the way and how ADONAI had saved them. The prophet took no honor for **himself** and **Jethro** showed great interest in everything that **Moshe** told **him**. **Jethro was especially delighted to hear about all the good things ADONAI had done for Isra'el in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians (18:8-9)**

The story of **Jethro's** conversion is a beautiful one indeed.³²⁸ **He said: Praise be to**

ADONAI, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians (18:10). Although neither the Egyptians nor the Amalekites got it, **Jethro**, the Midianite, had learned the lesson of the exodus by saying: **Now I know that ADONAI is greater than all other gods** (see the similar confession of Naaman the Aramean in **Second Kings 5:15**), **for he did this to those who had treated Isra'el arrogantly (18:11).**³²⁹ **Jethro** must be considered unique, for it is clear from Scripture that the Midianites were generally idolaters who worshiped many gods (**Numbers 25:17-18, 31:16**).³³⁰

At that time **Jethro** gave a practical expression to his praise. **Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Isra'el to eat manna with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God (18:12).** The phrase, **brought a burnt offering**, is key to understanding this verse. It always means to *provide an animal for sacrifice* (**Exodus 25:2; Leviticus 12:8**); it never means *to officiate at a sacrifice*. And the fact that it was a **burnt offering** was very significant. A **burnt offering** was a voluntary act of worship on **Jethro's** part. Its purpose was atonement for sin and an expression of complete surrender to **God**. The **burnt offering** was completely consumed by fire but the fellowship offerings (**other sacrifices**) were part of a communal meal that **Jethro** shared with **Aaron and all the elders of Isra'el**. This was evidence that **Jethro** had come to a saving knowledge of **God**.

What a wonderful family conversation we are witnessing. **Moses** and **Jethro** were not talking about the weather, shepherding, or the latest caravan gossip. No, they were talking about the wondrous works of **God**. **Moshe** was sharing his testimony, the good news, with his **father-in-law**. What a joy. Each one of us should consider the manner that we deal with our families. What do you talk about around the dinner table? In what do we rejoice when we hear of it? Not that we are perfect, but we need to think about these things.

Jethro's response to the good news was also amazing. Whereas **the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron (16:2)**, here was a **Midianite** who rejoiced over **God's** goodness to **Isra'el**! The faith of a Gentile put to shame the faith of the people of **Isra'el**. What **Jesus** said about the Roman centurion could also be said of him: **I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Isra'el with such great faith** (**Matthew 8:10**).³³¹