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Moses Chose Capable Men From All Isra'el

18: 13-26

Moses chose capable men from all Isra'el DIG: The judges were to decide the simple cases and bring the difficult cases to Moses. In doing so, the burden upon Moses was made light. How does this impact your understanding of Matthew 11:30?

REFLECT: How did you react the last time you were corrected or criticized ? Your spouse? Your in-laws? How do you wish you had reacted under those circumstances? Whose criticism do you receive the best?

The first scene that this Torah portion opens with is that of **Jethro, the father-in-law of Moshe, a Midianite Priest, a pagan, and a Gentile**, who was watching **Moses** and evaluating how **he** was carrying out **his** responsibilities with **the people**. Now that **Moses** had provided a ministry in the life of **Jethro**, it was **his** turn to return the favor.³³² **Moshe** was not only charged with the responsibility of caring for the spiritual and military needs of the nation, but also for the civil problems as well. Apparently a good deal of **Moses'** time was devoted to civil problems of the nation. The number of **Israelites** was great, 600,00 men between the ages of 20 and 50. **The next day Moshe took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening (18:13)**. This verse sets the tone for the entire passage.

As **Jethro** sized up the situation **he** realized that **Moses** could not be an effective leader if **he** were continually bogged down with civil matters.³³³ **When his father-in-law saw all that Moshe was doing for the people, he** asked two questions. The first one was rhetorical. **What is this you are doing for the people?** The second was an accusation. **Why do you alone judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening (18:14)?** **Moses** was not abusing **his** power; the problem was that **he** was doing too much **alone**. **He** was carrying too great a burden and had no assistance.³³⁴

Moshe answered him saying: Because the people come to me to seek God's will. His response in Hebrew was very straightforward: *to enquire of God*. **Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of**

God's decrees and laws (18:15-16). The new body of the revealed law that would govern the newly formed nation had already begun (also see **15:25-26**). No doubt **Moshe** had already established basic **decrees and laws** upon arriving in the desert. The movement of millions of **people** would not have been possible without such basic structure.

Wisely, **Moses' father-in-law** warned **him** that **he** was overworked, saying very directly: **What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out.** Literally, *fading you will fade*. **The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone (18:17-18).** The word for **heavy** is *kabed*, which as was emphasized earlier, is a key term in the book of **Exodus**, having been used earlier of **Pharaoh's heart (8:15, 32, 9:34, 10:1)**, of the plagues (**8:24, 9:3, 18-24, 10:14**), and of **Moses' arms (17:12)**.³³⁵

Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. Here **Jethro** uses the first of three references to **God**. It is the type of language that an unbeliever would not use. **He** continued: **You must be the people's mediator, or representative before God and bring their disputes to Him.** It didn't take a prophet to decide **disputes** between neighbors. **Moshe's** responsibility was to **teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform (18:19-20)**. Thus, **Moses'** teaching was not merely in religious instruction, but **he** was to teach **the people** how to function in all areas of life. **He** was to educate **them** with a worldview based on the Word of **God**.



But select capable men from all the people - men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain or bribes. The rabbis teach that a man is not fit to act as a judge from whom payment can only be obtained by a lawsuit. There should be a chain of command, he said: **Appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.** Those terms were used to organize the tribes into military and civil units. **Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case**

to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you (18:21-22).

If you do this and God so commands, there will be several benefits. First, **you will be able to stand the strain**, and secondly, **all these people will go home satisfied**. So even at the age of eighty, **Moshe listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said (18:23-24)**. This is just one example of why **God** says that **Moses** was **the most humble man on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3)**. **He accepted the advice of Jethro at Rephidim, but the judges were not appointed until after the giving of the Torah (Numbers 11:16-17; Deuteronomy 1:9-18)**. Perhaps **Moses** wanted to wait for divine approval before proceeding.³³⁶ It was included here to complete the story about **Jethro's** counsel. Occasionally writers from the TaNaKh treated subjects topically rather than in strict chronological order.³³⁷

He chose capable men from all Isra'el and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves (18:25-26). These two verses are the specifics of the instructions given by **Jethro** to **Moshe**. They are repeated almost word for word from **18:22-22**.

This principle of a plurality of leadership, division of authority, and a chain of command is also woven into the community of believers today as well. The Bible does not ever suggest a one-man-show over any congregation. And assemblies that have gone astray on this issue have become hierarchical, where one man is a dictator, micro-managing every detail. The Bible teaches that there should be a plurality of elders who make decisions over the local assembly. So congregations of believers that expect their spiritual leaders to do all the work, actually force believers to act in an unbiblical manner. All should use their spiritual gifts.

In times of great crisis, **God** has always provided men to lead the way to deliverance. **Moses** is an eloquent example of this very fact. The hand of **God** prepared **him** for that very moment in history. **He** was well aware of **Egyptian** customs and was therefore able to articulate demands before **Amenhotep II**, the king of **Egypt**. **He** had been trained in military matters and was able to organize two to three million people to move across the desert. **His** education in **Egypt** had given **him** the ability to write, and therefore provided the means by which the history of **the Jewish people** could be recorded for eternity. Forty years of desert experience had given **Moses** the know-how to travel in the desert as well as



the kind of preparation that would be needed to survive in the desert heat. This was no accident. **God** provided for **His people**. And those who belong to **Him** have every reason to be confident that **He** is a promise keeper.³³⁸