

EXODUS: Lesson Three, Lessons between the Red Sea and Sinai

Exodus 15:22 – Exodus 18

Subject: Israel met challenges while traveling between Egypt and Sinai.

Main Idea: Many of our most important lessons are learned in everyday life.

Principles:

1. *The Lord sends us tests in everyday life to see whether or not we will trust Him.*
2. *When attacked, look to God for defense.*
3. *God's people are to share their workload with one another.*

Introduction

A starry-eyed bride and groom anticipate their wedding day. They have such high hopes for their future. Their wedding is planned with great care and when the day comes, friends and family celebrate along with them. One month later, however, the newlyweds' naïve expectations have been erased. The reality of everyday life with this person to whom they have committed themselves has harshly awakened them from their dreamy state and into the realization that there are many conflicts to be resolved.

Such was the state of the Israelites a short time after their deliverance from Egypt. In the chapters covered by our previous lesson, the Israelites experienced a major victory, witnessing God's mighty hand in delivering them from the Egyptians. They witnessed the plagues, they saw the pillar of cloud and fire, and they watched as the very same waters they safely passed through swallowed up the Egyptian army. They had anticipated their release and celebrated it with so much hope and anticipation. But then the reality of everyday life with a long pilgrimage through the desert set in.

In this lesson, we see Israel beginning their pilgrimage. The dramatic events surrounding their "salvation" from Egypt are behind them. Although they are unaware, another major event lies before them, the giving of the Law at Sinai. We might say that, in the chapters we are covering, the Israelites are living between the Exodus and the Ten Commandments, two major events in their life as a newly independent nation. These chapters describe *everyday life* for the Israelites on their pilgrimage. And they certainly found they had adjustments to make and lessons to learn about their routine.

In the last lesson, we learned that the events of the Exodus symbolize our salvation from eternal death and baptism into new life in Christ, our Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). Once we are saved, our course has been marked for us. Every Christian is on the same pilgrimage. Each person's "map" may look different: our vocational work will vary, as will our circumstances with regard to health, family, and other such things. But the destination is still the same for every believer: The Promised Land. You may have discovered, as I have, that while the momentous, dramatic markers in our Christian pilgrimage set our course, the way we handle everyday life and its challenges is what shapes our character. God has many lessons to teach us in our routine.

I. Lessons About Provisions – Exodus 15:22 – 17:7

- A. The Date of the Exodus:** Although I have spoken of the symbolism of the Exodus and Israel’s pilgrimage, I hope I have been very clear that these were real, historical events. Perhaps you have been wondering about when, in history, these events took place.
- i. The Bible does not give us fixed calendar dates when its events took place. It gives us relative dates. For example, Abram was 75 when he left Haran (Genesis 12:4), Moses was 80 when he returned to Egypt (Exodus 7:7), and Solomon began to build the Lord’s Temple in the fourth year of his reign, 480 years after the Israelites had come out of Egypt (1 Kings 6:1). This reference concerning the number of years between the building of the Temple and the Exodus has been particularly helpful in assigning calendar dates (absolute dates) to Biblical events since there is general agreement that Solomon’s reign began in 970 B.C.
 - ii. Based on this information, we would conclude that the Exodus occurred in 1446 B.C., the middle of the 15th Century. However, some scholars think the number 480 was representative, perhaps meaning twelve generations.ⁱ If the number is representative, then the actual date of the Exodus may not be 1446 B.C. By comparing the Biblical account with archaeological discoveries, most scholars have agreed on one of two dates for the Exodus, either the 15th century date of 1446 or a later 13th century date of somewhere around 1275.ⁱⁱ

B. Grumbling About Water – 15:22-27

- i. Water Shortage: The Israelites came out of Egypt with dough for making bread (12:39) and other provisions (12:35-36). But they could hardly have carried enough water for their families and their animals to last more than a day. When they traveled for *three* days without finding any water, they were very thirsty. Finally, they found water at Marah, but when they discovered it was undrinkable the disappointment was more than they could stand. They grumbled against their leader, Moses.
- ii. God’s Provision: Moses looked to the Lord for an answer and the Lord showed him a piece of wood, apparently instructing him to throw the wood into the bitter water. There was nothing any more special about this piece of wood than there was about Moses’ staff (which had also been a tool in God’s miracles, 14:16). It was simply an indication that the Lord would make the water potable. Thus, the water “became fit to drink” (15:25) and the place became known as “Marah”, meaning “bitter”.

iii. The Rule and the Test

1. The Israelites had had no known revelation about God for the 400 years they were in Egypt. Of course, they had no Bible to read during that time. As discussed in our earlier lessons in Exodus, Israel needed to learn to *know* God (Exodus 6:7). They were given the opportunity to know Him as supremely powerful over the gods of Egypt and as their Deliverer. New lessons were to be learned in their everyday pilgrimage.
2. On the occasion when God miraculously transformed the bitter water in Marah, Moses wrote that God gave Israel a “rule” and a “test” (15:25-26). This was a reference to His new lesson for them.
 - a. If they would listen to Him (that is, hear and put their faith in what He said) and obey His commands, He would keep them from any of the plagues He had brought on Egypt. *The test was whether or not they would trust Him and obey Him.*
 - b. Trust and obedience are closely linked. If the Israelites did not trust God, what would be their motivation to obey Him? God knew their obedience to Him would lead to life! The One who created life knows best how we should navigate it. To obey Him is to avoid the snares of life and to experience life to the fullest (John 10:10). Therefore, they were wise to obey, but would they trust Him enough to do it?
 - c. The Lord’s provision of water was withheld in order to teach them to trust Him, not only when they could see Him at work (slaying the Egyptians or parting the Sea), but when life’s circumstances seemed to indicate that He had left them to figure things out for themselves.
 - d. Sadly, the Israelites continually failed lessons in trust and obedience during their journey to the Promised Land of Canaan.
3. In the context of this test of trust and obedience, the Lord said He would be Israel’s healer.
 - a. If they obeyed Him, He would not bring on them any of the plagues He had brought on the Egyptians. His healing is, thus, linked to their obedience.
 - b. Israel had a lot of “Egypt” in them! God wanted to heal them from their old ways of thinking and behaving. He wanted to heal the damage done to them as slaves, physically and psychologically.

- c. How did the Lord plan to accomplish that? In the same way He works to bring healing into our lives today from the damage of former bondage to sin (both physical and spiritual): Primarily by giving us lessons that teach us to obey His precepts. A life of obedience to the Lord is a blessed life, one in which healing takes place.
- iv. Refreshment at Elim: Soon after, Israel arrived at Elim, a beautiful desert oasis, with plenty of water and shade. They camped right near the water. God often refreshes His children in unexpected ways during our pilgrimage. These serve as reminders of His tender, loving care. But Israel could not remain indefinitely at Elim. She had a destination toward which she had to keep moving: Canaan!

C. Grumbling About Food – 16:1-36

i. Glorifying Their Past in Egypt - 16:1-3

1. *One Month Into the Journey*: On the fifteenth day of the second month after Israel left Egypt, they came into the Desert of Sin. (The name “Sin” connects it to its location in the “Sinai” Peninsula and is *not* related to our word for transgressions). They had left one wilderness (Shur) and found themselves in another (Sin). They had been gone from Egypt a full month (Passover was the night of the 14th day of the first month, 12:6). The dough they had taken from Egypt would have been depleted within a month (or less). They were hungry!
2. *Grumbling Again*
 - a. For a second time, the Israelites began to grumble. The word “grumbling” appears seven times in this chapter! Their grumbling was, once again, directed at their leaders. They accused Moses and Aaron of misleading them by taking them away from Egypt.
 - b. Suddenly, their lives in Egypt seemed to them to have been very pleasant. Their misery (2:23; 3:17), their enslavement and the injustices committed against them, were forgotten. Egypt was a place where they had had plenty of food, and that was all they seemed to remember.
 - c. Aaron and Moses told the Israelites that their grumbling was not really against them but against the Lord. In their hunger, Israel forgot to be thankful for all that the Lord had already done for them and to trust Him to provide.

ii. The Lord's Provision and Test – 16:4-36

1. *Instructions*

- a. The Lord told Moses He would again provide for Israel. Once again, the provision was linked to a test (16:4). And, once again, the provision would enable Israel to “know” the Lord (16:11).
- b. The Lord would provide meat for them that evening and bread the following morning (16:8). The bread would become a daily provision from that time forward (16:4).

2. *Quail*: That evening, quail (birds) covered the camp, providing the Israelites with meat.

3. *Manna*: The following morning, after the dew evaporated, thin flakes covered the desert floor. They were white in color and like coriander seed in appearance. They had a sweet taste, like “wafers made with honey” (16:31).

- a. When the Israelites first saw it, they asked, “What is it?” (16:15). So this bread source came to be known as “manna” (which sounds like the Hebrew for “what is it?”).
- b. For the entire forty years that the Israelites lived in the desert, until they came into the Promised Land, the Lord continued to give them this miraculous “daily bread” (Exodus 16:34-35; Matthew 6:11).

4. *The Test*

- a. The first test had to do with their willingness to trust God to provide one day at a time.
 - i. Each day, they were to gather as much as they needed for just that day, an “omer” for each person in their household (an “omer” is an inexact amount, equal to what would be held in a common bowl, probably about 1-2 liters). They were not to attempt to save food for the following day (16:4, 16, 19).
 - ii. For an agricultural people to gather only enough food for one day was certainly a test, since no crop produces food every day.
- b. The second test had to do with the Sabbath.
 - i. On the sixth day of the week, they were to gather twice as much as they would every other day (16:5). The extra gathered on the sixth day was to be baked or boiled in preparation for the seventh day, the Sabbath, a day of rest (16:30).

- ii. They would have to trust God to preserve overnight what they collected on the sixth day and not attempt to look for food on the Sabbath. The Israelites were to learn daily dependence on the Lord. He wanted them to know Him as their all-sufficient and faithful Provider.

5. *Disobedience*

- a. Some of the Israelites immediately disregarded the Lord's instructions and attempted to save some of the manna overnight. In the morning it smelled and was full of maggots (16:20).
- b. Then, on the seventh day, some of them went out to gather manna, even though they had been instructed against it. There was no manna to be found (16:27).
 - i. This time, the Lord chastised them: "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?"
 - ii. He reminded them that the Sabbath was a day of rest. Although the Law had not yet been given to them, in which work on the Sabbath was forbidden (Exodus 20:8-11), the Lord had ordained Sabbath rest at the time of Creation (Genesis 2:2-3). That particular command antedated the Law.
- iii. Manna Preserved as a Memorial – 16:31-36
 - 1. The Lord instructed Moses to keep one "omer" of the manna in a jar as a memorial for future generations to see.
 - 2. The manna was preserved together with the tablets of the Law. The tablets had not yet been given to Moses at this time. Neither would Moses have known that Israel would be in the desert for forty years. Therefore, we understand that Moses wrote (or edited) the record at a much later date.

D. A Second Test Concerning Water – 17:1-7

- i. The Trouble at Rephidim:
 - 1. The Israelites traveled from place to place in the Desert of Sin, camping at Rephidim where, once again, they found themselves without water. They grumbled against Moses, *demanding* that he give them water.
 - 2. Again, Moses went to the Lord with his trouble. The people, he said, were ready to stone him.

3. The Lord instructed Moses to strike the rock at Horeb (Sinai) with his staff in the presence of Israel’s elders. The Lord caused water to come out of the rock. In 1 Corinthians 10:3-4, Paul equates the rock from which they drank with the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the source of their every provision.
 4. The place was called “Massah and Meribah” meaning “testing” and “quarreling” because the people tested the Lord saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?” (17:7).
- ii. Testing the Lord
1. The Israelites came to Rephidim, near Sinai, “as the Lord commanded” (17:1). He led them to this place, knowing that they would not immediately find water there. Thus, it was another test for them. Instead of trusting the Lord to meet their needs, as He had all along (that very morning they would have received manna from Him), *they “put the Lord to the test” (17:2, 7)!*
 2. There is no indication the Israelites had gone for long without water on this occasion. By Moses’ statement that they “put the Lord to the test”, it seems that when they arrived at this place and did not find water, rather than waiting for the Lord to provide, they resorted to grumbling and demanding, since that method had proved successful in the past.
 3. Their complaint, “Is the Lord among us or not?” was preposterous, considering all the ways they had already experienced His presence and provision. Their question “must be seen as nothing other than a contempt of the Lord’s leadership over them.”ⁱⁱⁱ
 4. Thus, they tested the Lord by distrusting Him and by demanding of Him.

Summary Statement: On three occasions, between Egypt and Sinai, the Lord tested the Israelites with regard to provisions.

Principle: *The Lord sends us tests in everyday life to see whether or not we will trust Him.*

James 1:17 tells us that every provision made for us is a gift from the Lord. He is the source from which we receive every good thing. Crops may grow, but He is the source of the sunshine, water, and soil they need to do so. We may make purchases, but our funds are gifts from Him. We may work, but He grants us the health and the opportunity. Like the Israelites, we may not think our complaint is against God when we are unhappy about a “delayed” (or seemingly withheld) provision. We may be holding another person responsible (the head of the household, our pastor, our employer, a civic leader, etc.), like the Israelites did with Moses. Ultimately, since God is the source of all our provisions, we are really blaming Him!

Jesus was very clear that God will provide for us (Matthew 6:25-32; 7:7-11). He may not grant us everything we *want*, but He will provide for our needs. Worry over our needs is an indication that we distrust God and are ungrateful for what He has already done for us.

We are especially prone to grumble when we glorify the past. How could the Israelites have forgotten their misery in Egypt, we wonder? The truth is that almost every season of our lives has some good and some bad in it. Jesus said that in this world we would have trouble (John 16:33). Yet His followers ought to be characterized by hope and joy. Romans 15:13 says, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him.” Trusting Him: that is the real issue!

Delayed provisions are God’s test to reveal how much (or how little) we trust Him. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. He may withhold a need from us temporarily in order that we might experience the sweetness of leaning into Him in trust and dependence. As Warren Wiersbe wrote, He “is able to change our circumstances, but He would rather change us!”^{iv}

Application: What kinds of things do you grumble about? Maybe your grumbling is aloud or maybe it is inner discontentment. Grumbling and glorifying the past are expressions of distrust and ingratitude toward God.

Perhaps you have a very real need that you are waiting to have met, just as the Israelites needed water after three days without any.

- With regard to what need does the Lord want you to consistently trust Him for daily provision? Food or clothing? Rain? Work? Someone to help you care for your children?
- How will you respond to this test? Will you become sullen and angry or will you lean into Him in dependence and trust?

It may be that *you* are testing *the Lord*, as the Israelites did at Rephidim. Your need may not be urgent, but you have, nevertheless, become demanding. Or, could it be that your “need” is really more of a “want”?

- Grumbling inwardly about your aging body rather than grateful for the health the Lord has given you?
- Complaining about the food you are served rather than grateful that you have something to eat?
- Unhappy about your workload rather than grateful for the Sabbath (or even disobedient in observing it)?
- Focused on your difficult employer or strained work environment rather than thanking the Lord daily that you have a job?

Will we recognize all these situations as *tests* of our gratitude and trust in the Lord?

Transition: Many of our most important lessons about trust are found in the course of everyday life. The following two accounts indicate that Moses was learning lessons along with the Israelites.

II. Lessons About Attacks – Exodus 17:8-16

A. The Amalekite Attack

- i. Amalek: The Amalekites were distantly related to the Israelites. Amalek was a grandson of Jacob’s twin brother Esau (Genesis 36:12). While the Israelites were still at Rephidim, the Amalekites attacked them.
- ii. Commentary in Deuteronomy 25: Further insight into the situation between Israel and the Amalekites is given to us in Deuteronomy 25:17-19. According to this passage, the Amalekites not only attacked Israel when “they were weary and worn out”, they targeted “all who were lagging behind” with no “fear of God”. Their attack represented their failure “to recognize the hand and plan of God in Israel’s life and destiny.”^v

B. Moses’ Two-fold Response

- i. Fighting: Moses took a two-fold approach to the problem. First, he commissioned Joshua (for whom the Biblical book of Joshua is named) to lead the Israelite’s defense against the Amalekites. (This is the first mention of Joshua in the Bible.)
- ii. Appeal to the Lord: In addition to sending Joshua out to fight the Amalekites, Moses went to the top of the hill overlooking the battle and extended his hands, an expression of appeal to the Lord.^{vi}

C. Aaron and Hur’s Assistance

- i. Moses’ hands grew tired. Whenever he lowered them, the Amalekites began winning, but while they were raised, Israel dominated the battle.
- ii. Therefore, Aaron and Hur (Miriam’s husband, according to tradition) assisted Moses. They put a stone under Moses, as a seat, and held his hands up for him. In this way, Israel won the battle.

D. A Written Record and Prophecy

- i. The Lord told Moses he would completely annihilate the Amalekites for what they had done to Israel.
 1. Much later, after Israel had been in the Promised Land for several hundred years, their first king, Saul, was sent by the Lord to wipe out the Amalekites, but he failed to obey completely (1 Samuel 15).

2. King David continued what Saul left undone (2 Samuel 1:1 – 8:12).
 3. The subject of Holy War and the Lord instructing Israel to annihilate certain people groups will be explored in the *Promised Land I* study, in which the Lord commanded the annihilation of large numbers of people.
- ii. 17:14 tells us that the Lord instructed Moses to write the prophecy of the Amalekites' judgment on a scroll, in order that it would be remembered.
1. Whether this scroll refers to the record we have in the book of Exodus or another scroll is not explained.
 2. Throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, Moses was instructed by the Lord to “write down” certain things. However, the Bible does not tell us how or when Moses came to realize that, in addition to his other responsibilities, he was to become the preserver of history.

E. Moses' Altar: Moses built an altar, calling it “the Lord is my Banner”, in recognition that Israel's victory was only by the hand of the Lord.

Summary Statement: Israel was out of Egypt but still had battles to fight. The Egyptians and the Amalekites were not the last of the nations that threatened their existence. Their neighbors continually attacked them. The country in which we live may or may not be at war, but we still encounter trouble with neighbors in everyday life, people to whom we live in close proximity, people with whom we work, people whom we encounter in the course of our day.

Israel fought the Amalekites at God's express command. They were His instruments of judgment on wicked people. We are not free to make to make such judgments (Romans 2:1-3). This raises a question: Are Christians supposed to fight back when attacked or not? After all, Jesus told us, “...not to oppose an evil person. If someone slaps you on your right cheek, turn your other cheek to him as well. If someone wants to sue you in order to take your shirt, let him have your coat too. If someone forces you to go one mile, go two miles with him.” (Matthew 5:39-41)

The apostle Paul refused to defend himself on a number of occasions (Acts 13:49-51; 14:19-20; 16:19-24), yet on other occasions he did (Acts 16:36-40). In Philippi, he allowed himself to be severely flogged and imprisoned without any appeal to his Roman citizenship (by which he was guaranteed a trial before such a punishment). However, when he was released from prison the following morning, he demanded an apology on the basis of his citizenship (Acts 16)! How then, are we to know when to defend ourselves and when to “turn the other cheek”?

It appears that Paul *never defended himself from attack unless something greater was at stake than his own suffering*. On the occasion just described, the apology Paul demanded would have helped protect the new believers in the city of Philippi, who were his known associates, from persecution after he left the city. He was willing to suffer personal loss, but his defense was for the sake of Christ's name and Christ's church.

Prayer is critical in determining whether a greater cause is at stake than our own personal suffering and God would have us put up a defense. We may also need an objective, trustworthy person to help us make such a decision.

In his *Five Vows for Spiritual Power*, the esteemed, late pastor A.W. Tozer suggests we should seek only to defend our service and our reputation. That is what Paul was doing in Philippi. Since we represent the Lord Jesus, His good name and the welfare of His church are at stake when our service and our reputation come under attack.

However, our reputations can be difficult to defend when false stories are passed about us and there are certainly many occasions in which a cause greater than our own personal suffering is *not* at stake and we just need to trust God for our defense. As Tozer points out, we are all born with a desire to defend ourselves, “and if you insist upon defending yourself, God will let you do it. But if you turn the defense of yourself over to God He will defend you.”^{vii}

Principle: *When attacked, look to God for defense.*

Application: Perhaps we are eager to “suffer for Christ's sake.” But can we be sure we will do so in a way that honors Him if we cannot even keep our mouths shut when a family member or co-worker insults us? In fact, some of us have become defensive to the point that we are unwilling to hear or accept even the most helpful criticism. Having a defensive spirit stems from pride and it is sin.

This week, will you practice listening open-mindedly to the advice and suggestions of others? Will you refuse to defend yourself when ill-treated by a “neighbor” in order to establish a habit of looking to God for your defense?

Transition: The Amalekites' attack on Israel is contrasted with the friendliness of a Midianite toward God's people. That Midianite was Moses' father-in-law, Jethro. He helped Moses and the Israelites learn yet another lesson that was important in their everyday pilgrimage.

III. Lessons About Work – Exodus 18

A. Jethro's Arrival – 18:1-4

i. Jethro, Priest of Midian – 18:1

1. We have previously noted that the names “Jethro” and “Reuel” are used interchangeably (he is called “Reuel” in Exodus 2:18 and Numbers 10:29).
2. Jethro was a Midianite.
 - a. Midian was a son of Abraham by his wife Keturah (Genesis 25:2). Like the Amalekites, the Midianites were related to the Israelites.
 - b. Judges 6:3 names the Midianites as enemies of Israel, along with the Amalekites. Here, however, we see that God deals with us as individuals. Jethro was a “priest of Midian”, an important religious leader in his community. However, he chose to worship the God of Israel. The fact that he was a priest of Midian makes his conversion all the more significant.
 - i. Jethro may have been a worshipper of God before Moses fled from Egypt and came to his household, but that seems unlikely since he was a *priest* of Midian.
 - ii. Possibly, he came to worship the Lord due to Moses' influence over the course of Moses' forty years with him.
 - iii. However, there seems to be evidence that Jethro's conversion occurred on the occasion under our present consideration, when he heard (18:1, 9, 10) and saw for himself (18:7-27) the overwhelming evidence of Yahweh's power in delivering an entire nation from bondage.

ii. Zipporah and Her Sons – 18:2-4

1. *Moses Sent Zipporah Away?* Verse 2 mentions Moses having previously sent his wife and sons back to her father. Until we come to this verse, we have been unaware that this occurred. We can only speculate about when that happened. Some think Moses may have sent Zipporah back to her father after the incident concerning their son's circumcision (Exodus 4:24-26).^{viii} Others suggest he may have sent her back as soon as he came to the border of the territory controlled by Egypt, wanting to spare her the impact of the plagues.^{ix} If that was the case, perhaps this reunion had been prearranged between Moses and Jethro. In any case, the main purpose of Jethro's trip was to reunite Moses with his family.

2. *Moses' Sons* were named in ways that are reminiscent of the naming of Joseph's sons while Joseph was a foreigner in Egypt (Genesis 41:51-52). Moses' firstborn was named "Gershom" because Moses was "a foreigner in a foreign land" (18:3). His second son was named "Eliezer" because "God was [Moses'] helper", sparing him from the sword of Pharaoh.

B. The Lord's Work Celebrated – 18:7-12

- i. Moses' Report: 18:1 indicates that Jethro had already heard rumors about Israel's amazing deliverance from Egypt. After their greeting, Moses told his father-in-law the whole story. He also told him about the hardships they had met since leaving Egypt and how God had continued to provide for them and deliver them from enemies ("saved them", 18:8).
- ii. Jethro's Response
 1. Jethro responded by praising the Lord and declaring, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods". This sounds like a statement of conversion.
 2. Then he offered a sacrifice to the Lord. The Israelites had not yet received the Law in which their system of sacrifices was delineated. However, the concept of offering sacrifices was widely known, probably passed down through Adam (Genesis 4:3-4) and Noah (8:20).
 3. Jethro's response of worship and praise stands in sharp contrast to the attack of the Amalekites on God's people. In every age, the unconverted have heard and received the witness of God's people or met them with hostility. Few are neutral in their attitude.

C. Moses' Role as Judge – 18:13-27

- i. Jethro's Observation
 1. The following day, Jethro was able to observe Moses going about his usual responsibilities. These included appearing before the people as an arbitrator. Moses spent the entire day doing so.
 2. However, Moses was also Israel's military leader, teacher, prophet, record keeper, and intercessor. It was plain to Jethro that he could not continue alone in all these roles.
- ii. Jethro's Advice
 1. Jethro advised Moses to share his workload. Specifically, he recommended that Moses set up a hierarchal judicial system in which trustworthy men handled all but the most difficult cases.
 2. This would free Moses to focus on his essential roles of teaching and interceding with God for the people.

3. Jethro stated that if his advice *was approved by the Lord* (18:23), it would benefit everyone. He expected Moses to pray for confirmation before acting on his advice.
4. Moses received and followed Jethro's good counsel.

Summary Statement: A Gentile was converted through the witness of his family member. He, in turn, helped his family member by offering good advice.

Being teachable is one of the finest character qualities we can develop (Proverbs 12:15, 13:10). Moses might have rejected any advice from his father-in-law, seeing himself as "above" the need for suggestions from a Gentile. After all, it was he who had been personally chosen by God to lead Israel! Yet, Numbers 12:3 tells us, "Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." His willingness to listen to his father-in-law's counsel is evidence of his humility.

Principle: *God's people are to share their workload with one another.*

Application: Knowing our priorities and delegating less important matters is certainly an important lesson for everyday life. In this matter, the lesson is for both leaders *and* for those they lead.

Some of us have been too lazy or unwilling to assist the leaders in our lives.

- Words of encouragement, assistance with errands and chores, providing financial contribution or donating materials, asking for specific prayer requests and committing to pray for them are only a few of the ways we can "lighten the load" of someone who is serving us in some leadership capacity.
- Will you ask God to show you how He wants you to be of help?

On the other hand, some leaders are so controlling that they are simply unwilling to delegate.

- In this context, "leaders" are not just pastors but teachers, businessmen and women, parents, and anyone with responsibility for others.
- For some reason, Christians seem to be especially apt to neglect bringing others alongside them to share their workload. Perhaps we fall into the error of thinking we are more pleasing to God if we bear a heavy burden. Or maybe we attempt to cover some guilt we carry unnecessarily. Whatever our excuse, we must learn, as Moses did, to start sharing our workload.
- It is difficult to let go of responsibilities for which you are more qualified than someone else, but it is far more important to remain focused on the essential responsibilities we bear and allow others to help with the rest.
- We should not minimize the importance of this! When we try to do more than we should, we become irritated, worn down, and may eventually suffer the loss of our leadership role, or even our family and our testimony!

- But there is another reason it is important to share our workload. Every leader must always be thinking in terms of replacing themselves. Joshua benefitted from Moses' training, as his aid, and eventually became his replacement. None of us will remain in the roles we have forever. Eventually, someone must take our place. We need to be actively training others to help with our responsibilities so that, one day, they can either replace us or use what they have learned from us elsewhere.
- How can you immediately begin to share your workload?

Conclusion

Israel was living between the Exodus and the Ten Commandments, so to speak. Little did they realize, when they left Egypt, how many routine kind of days they would spend in the desert!

Likewise, the vast majority of our days are apt to be of the “ordinary” sort. Each of us needs provisions. Each of us faces “attacks” of one kind or another. All of us have responsibilities we can share and other people who need our help. So perhaps we ought to get more serious about learning our lessons about how to meet these challenges. Many of our most important lessons can be learned in the course of everyday life.

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