

Worn Out

Exodus 18:17-27

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I. Wear and Tear vs. 17-18

- a. Jethro- No Israelite would have created this potentially threatening account of a pagan priest's participation in the formation and structure of Israel's jurisprudence system, unless it lay at hand in their traditions, whether oral or written. Scripture bears record that Jethro was a priest of Yahweh in a unique capacity (Exod 18:7–11).
 - i. This encounter between Moses and Jethro is an occasion for the author to recap and celebrate what Yahweh has done for Israel, but much more. This Midianite priest, a non-Israelite religious leader, hears Moses recount to him, in Moses' own tent (18:7), the exodus event—Israel's deliverance from the Egyptians
 - ii. Jethro's recognition of the power and authority of Israel's God enabled him and also qualified him to offer sage advice to Moses, for Jethro was, as a priest himself, aware of the need for efficiency in any system in which a leader must organize and administer justice to his people
 - iii. Moreover, Jethro did not arrogate to himself divine wisdom but was careful to couch his words as suggestions subject to God's confirmation
 - iv. But as a new worshiper of Yahweh and a concerned member of the community of faith, he ventured to formulate the plan he thought Moses ought to bring to Yahweh for approval. What he expected of Moses was the willingness to ask Yahweh if such an approach represented his divine will
- b. Not Good – The broad scope included in the Heb. word טוב is clear in the context. The situation was not “good” for anyone, Moses or the people
- c. Wear Out- to **crumble away** to wear oneself out, lose heart; not viable. Wither, decay *sink or drop down*, from exhaustion
 - i. You- “You certainly will wear out” reflects an emphatic Heb. construction (נָבַל תִּבֹּל), for this is the main point for Jethro. The system that Moses is following is not viable.
 - ii. The response of Jethro to Moses' explanation is practical: Moses is wearing out both himself *and* the people, who must wait long hours before they can see him; but the response is also clearly perceptive of the source from which the counsel comes. Jethro tells Moses that he will be unable alone to bear the weight of the work he has undertaken
 - iii. Those with You - That the judicial workload must have been too much for one man is shown by the incontrovertible fact that both Moses and the people who waited for justice could not conclude business in a

reasonable time span. In effect, Jethro's argument is an early version of the now popular legal saying "Justice delayed is justice denied."

- d. Task to Heavy
 - i. Heavy – Difficult
 - ii. You can't do it alone
 - 1. First, newly freed from having few legal rights under Egyptian oppression, the Israelites had a pent-up list of issues and complaints to settle properly as well as an eagerness to take advantage of their sudden freedom to function as free people function, including access by right to legal services. Second, the sheer size of the large group, including non-Israelites, under one visible leader surely meant that matters previously adjudicated by clan heads, village leaders, and the like were now considered by the people themselves to require adjudication by the nation's only divinely approved leader, Moses. Third, Moses' own eagerness both to help and please his people as well as to learn God's standards for the nation must have motivated him to spend much time and careful thought on every decision, including the time involved in waiting for an answer from God to his questions raised on behalf of the people

II. Get Help vs. 19-23

- a. Listen
 - i. Counsel – to advise
 - 1. wise person seeks counsel when making plans: "Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed" (Prv 15:22). One's counselors may be one's parents (Prv 1:8), older people (Ez 7:26), prophets (2 Chr 25:16), wise men (Jer 18:18), or friends (Prv 27:9 ^{KJ¹V}). Some counselors are evil, giving deceitful advice (Prv 12:5).
 - ii. God be with You - That is, may God help you as you consider (cf. v. 23) this recommendation
- b. Roles
 - i. You Representative
 - 1. You bring disputes
 - 2. Teach - to **caution** clarify, caution, inform," rather than "warn," as it does in other contexts
 - a. Statutes- prescription, rule
 - i. For Israel, everything required by the covenant was a matter of life and blessing, if properly observed, or of death and cursing, if ignored or forsaken. There are no circumstances that allow for the antisocial act of one human being killing another

human being with no legal sanction: thou shalt not commit murder

b. Laws

3. Make Known

- a. Way to Walk - The way they should live" is literally "the way they should walk/go " This term becomes the "way of Yahweh" (cf. Exod 32:8; 33:13; Deut 5:33; 8:2; 10:12; 11:22; 32:4) and indicates life lived according to Yahweh's instructions, his words, his acts. When they know God's way, they are expected to follow it. This terminology was picked up as the Way in the NT as a bridge to God's acts in Christ in the book of Acts. The Way described the beliefs and lifestyle of the Christians (Acts 9:2; 19:23, 22:4; 24:22,
- b. consultation of God concerning matters of right behavior, and as synonymous in meaning with "way" and work" in v 20, they are not the language one would expect in the description of "civil law," but are typical of "the deuteronomic sermon."
- c. What to Do

ii. Select

1. Select- "You yourself discern" uses a strong word whose ptc., is used to designate a "seer," or privileged visionary: one who sees God's visions given to his people for discernment. Here, in a purely social context, the word indicates Moses' ability to discern those who have certain intangible qualities, but whose qualities are also visible to those who are sensitive to them.
2. Able Men- competent "Men of ability", are men who have various kinds of gifts, strengths, aptitudes, or skills. They were competent and influential. These men could later serve Moses undoubtedly as skilled men in writing, speech, administration, and other capacities
 - a. Fear The fear of God helped establish them as men of character and truth for they would not corrupt through bribery the jurisprudence system they were being called on to establish. When those who are to operate a system of justice become corrupt, the system is compromised and becomes useless and void.
 - b. Truth
 - c. Hate Dishonesty Gain- Men of ability, men of integrity, and men who will not take a bribe are the centerpiece of Jethro's advice, and in the ancient Near East this requirement for judges and leaders was written into the laws.
3. Lead over - These men would be stalwarts of the ethical, theological, educational, and moral system of Israel. If they failed

to embody the perfect laws of Yahweh, the people would suffer. Functionally, they took much of the load off of Moses in a systematic way and helped to disperse the instructions of Yahweh.

4. Judge people

- a. Difficult dispute bring to Moses Moses would handle each major case (כָּל־הַדָּבָר הַגָּדוֹל) that these excellent and strategically placed guides could not solve. They would judge (יִשְׁפֹּטוּ־הֵם) the minor cases (כָּל־הַדָּבָר הַקָּטָן).
- b. Minor they judge
 - i. In other words, the expression “thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens” seems to be essentially a figure of speech by which is meant “all the various population groupings.” By providing leaders for each population level, Moses could assure an adequate number of judges to handle all but the most complicated court cases.
 - ii. This would leave most of Moses’ time free of judicial responsibilities for him to lead the people in other ways, including his ministry of prayer and worship and his ministry of teaching and preaching all God’s laws. But if a lower court could not make a decision, or if its decision was rejected and appealed by the litigant parties, Moses was available from time to time (perhaps one day a month or the like) for these cases that had already been heard in lower courts and were brought by the judges to him
- c. If God Commands Jethro’s ultimate appeal for the implementation of his jurisprudence system was respectful and appealed to the word of God—“if this ‘system’ you put into effect and God command you” (cf. v. 19)—
 - i. Although it is not stated overtly, it may be assumed that Moses learned from God that Jethro’s advice was either acceptable or even what God had intended all along and Moses had misunderstood. Thus already at Sinai/Horeb, three months after leaving Egypt, Israel had a hierarchical court system using chosen, not inherited, leaders as judges, with Moses as the supreme court.

III. Accept Counsel vs. 24-27

- a. Accepting his father-in-law’s advice, **Moses** apparently implemented the judicial court system after the Law was given at Mount Sinai (Deut. 1:9–15; cf. Horeb in Deut. 1:6).