



# The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V24 N22 May 29, 2022

## WAY OUT "Wisdom Wins the Day" Exodus 18:1-27

### THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

#### Disciple-Making

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues, and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

*"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."*

2 Timothy 2:2



How can leaders be more effective?

Conventional wisdom claims that "many hands make light work." This proverbial saying contains a good example of *synecdoche*, a figure of speech in which the word "hands" represents, not only the hands themselves, but also the whole person, who is helping with the work. "Light," in the saying, means *easy*. It's a pithy way of saying that any job is easier when more people help.

While not found in the book of Proverbs, scriptural illustrations of the saying's truthfulness abound. One of them is found in Exodus 18:1-27. Following the defeat of the Amalekites at Rephidim, Moses finds himself serving as the Israelites' only judge, resolving disputes between them, which proves more than he can handle alone. The fact that Moses is in over his head is made obvious by the fact that "people stand around him from morning till evening," waiting for him to arbitrate their disputes (v. 14). At the end of the day, many of them go home dissatisfied, no closer to resolving their complaints after waiting for hours, and Moses goes home exhausted.

Having recently arrived from Midian, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, sees what's going on and offers his son-in-law this sound advice: "Select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 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. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied" (vv. 21-23). Jethro's plan works when implemented.

Another illustration of the saying's truthfulness is found in Acts 6:1-7. When a crisis arises in the Jerusalem church, the Twelve arrive at a solution that doesn't take them away from the ministry of the word of God. As the number of Hellenistic Jewish disciples increase, they complain

against the Hebraic Jewish disciples because their widows are being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The Twelve wisely refuse to take their eyes off teaching the word to put them on distributing food. They tell the congregation, "Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (vv. 3-4). The Twelve's plan pleases the people when they hear it.

Finally, when Paul appoints elders in the churches he plants, he apparently appoints more than one in each church. On their return to Syria after preaching the gospel in Derbe, the easternmost destination on their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas retrace their steps, returning to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. Luke tells his readers, "Paul and Barnabas appointed *elders* for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" (Ac 14:23). And even if some small house churches have but one elder, each surely has more than one deacon serving in the ministry (1Ti 3:2; cf. v. 8).

Jethro's advice is given to Moses for Moses' benefit, but it no doubt benefited others, too. Its implementation clearly benefited the men appointed as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, who found themselves engaged in meaningful ministry. Delegating freed Moses to teach the people the Lord's decrees and instructions (v. 20), lightened his load (v. 23), and gave many others—perhaps "several hundred to a few thousand" (Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, 143)—the opportunity to put their capabilities to work (vv. 21-22). Dwight L. Moody reportedly said, "It is better to set a hundred men to work, than do the work of a hundred men. You do a service to a man when you evoke his latent faculty. It is no kindness to others or service to God to do more than your share in the sacred duties of Church life."



## EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

### Read Exodus 18:1-27

1 Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.

2 After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her 3 and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land"; 4 and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, "My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh."

5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' sons and wife, came to him in the wilderness, where he was camped near the mountain of God. 6 Jethro had sent word to him, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons."

7 So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent. 8 Moses told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them.

9 Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. 10 He said, "Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." 12 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

13 The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. 14 When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"

15 Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. 16 Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and instructions."

17 Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. 18 You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. 19 Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. 20 Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. 21 But select capable men from all the people – men

who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain – and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

22 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. 23 If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

24 Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. 25 He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 26 They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

27 Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Underline "priest of Midian" in v. 1.
- Bracket "after Moses had sent away" in v. 2.
- Circle "Gershom" in v. 3 and "Eliezer" in v. 4.
- Box "greater than" indicating *comparison* in v. 11.
- Bracket "burnt offering and other sacrifices" in v. 12.
- Circle "judge/s" in vv. 13, 14, 22, 26.
- Underline "I decide . . . and inform" in v. 15.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 21, 22, 26.
- Highlight vv. 20-22.
- Bracket "over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens" in vv. 21, 25.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?



## DIG DEEPER

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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. According to Exodus 4:20, Moses takes his family with him when he returns to Egypt. According to Exodus 18:5-6, Jethro brings Moses' family from Midian to meet him near Rephidim. Explain.
2. Describe the effect hearing about what the LORD did for Israel has on Jethro.
3. What do you make of Jethro's statement in verse 11?
4. Explain the difference between the "burnt offering" and the "other sacrifices."
5. Describe *what* Jethro sees Moses doing and *why* he says it's not good.
6. Moses' problem is a common problem. How so?
7. What advice does Jethro give his son-in-law?
8. List the qualifications required of "officials" (v. 21; cf. Dt 1:16-18).
9. Moses implemented Jethro's but when—immediately or after the giving of the law (cf. Dt 1:9-15)?
10. **Discussion:** Jethro's strategy is good for Moses, good for the appointed officials, and good for us. Talk about it.

### Commentary On The Text

The *NET Bible* provides an excellent overview of Exodus 18:1-27. “This chapter forms the transition to the Law. There has been deliverance, the testing passages, the provision in the wilderness, and the warfare. Any God who can do all this for his people deserves their allegiance. In chap. 18 the Law-giver is giving advice, using laws and rulings, but then he is given advice to organize the elders to assist. Thus, when the Law is fully revealed, a system will be in place to administer it. The point of the passage is that a great leader humbly accepts advice from other godly believers to delegate responsibility. He does not try to do it all himself; God does not want one individual to do it all. The chapter has three parts: vv. 1-12 tell how Jethro heard and came and worshiped and blessed; vv. 13-23 have the advice of Jethro, and then vv. 24-27 tell how Moses implemented the plan and Jethro went home” (1sn on Ex 18:1).

The passage begins with a description of the reunion of Moses’ family with a focus on the reaction of his father-in-law to news of “everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them” (v. 8). Having sent Zipporah and his sons back to Midian sometime after returning to Egypt, Jethro is prompted to reunite them after hearing of the Exodus. One commentator writes: “Every nomad in the peninsula would have heard by now of the Israelite breakaway from Egypt and her clash with Amalek” (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, TOTC, 137). Perhaps none, however, is as delighted to hear “about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians” (v. 9) as is Jethro. First, he says, “blessed be the LORD” (ESV), words “intended ‘to express joy in God’s gracious acts and to proclaim those acts to the world’” (John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3, *Exodus*, 244). Then recognizing Yahweh’s victory of the gods of Egypt, he confesses, “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly” (v. 11), which reflects his growing understanding of the one true God. And finally, he provides a burnt offering and other sacrifices to be offered to God. Perhaps he acted as the presiding priest at the sacrifice before taking part in the communal meal that followed.

Verses 13-23 contain a description of Moses’ problem and Jethro’s wise solution. Moses regularly hears cases brought to him by the people. How often he does this is not specified. But whenever he does, he *sits* in the place of judgment while the people *stand* in the place of petitioners. From morning till evening, he arbitrates their disputes, deciding between them and informing them of the application of “God’s decrees and instructions” to their individual case. Jethro immediately recognizes that what Moses is doing is “not good” (v. 17) — the job is more than any one person can do without incurring burnout. So he advises Moses to *prioritize* and *delegate*. He tells him: “You must be the people’s representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. *But* select capable men from all the people — men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain — and appoint them as offices over thousands, hundreds, fifties and ten. 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” (vv. 19b-22). Apparently, Moses takes his father-in-law’s advice and in consultation with the people selects others to judge, establishing a judicial hierarchy of sorts. To the qualifications Jethro named in Exodus 18:21 — capable, God fearing, trustworthy, men of integrity — Moses adds others in Deuteronomy 1:13, 15 — wise, understanding, respected, leading men from various tribes (cf. Ac 6:3; 1Ti 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). When he does, the shared load becomes lighter.

Verses 24-27 describe the happy outcome of Moses’ decision to take Jethro’s advice. Before sending his father-in-law away, Moses chooses capable men, makes them leaders, and appoints them to serve as judges. Exodus 18 reads as if he does this at Rephidim *before* the giving of the Law, but Deuteronomy 1:9-18 reads as if he does this at Sinai *after* the giving of the Law. It seems best to understand that Moses’ reunion with his family occurs at Rephidim, while the implementation of Jethro’s advice occurs at Sinai (see John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3, *Exodus*, 252).

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## Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *priest of Midian* See 2:16; 3:1; cf. v. 11. "The father-in-law of Moses goes by a number of names in the Bible: Reuel (Ex 2:16-22), Jethro (4:18), Jethro (3:1), and Hobab (Nu 10:29; Jdg 4:11). It is not uncommon in the Bible for the same person to have more than one name" (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 280). "Jethro (Reuel, in Ex. 2:18) is described as the priest of Midian or 'Midian's priest'. To judge by later Hebrew usage, that would mean the chief priest of Midian (1 Sa. 1:9), and thus denote high position" (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, TOTC, 137). "What Moses has told him, coupled with what he knew already, leads him to conclude on his own ['now I know'] that 'Yahweh is greater than all gods.' The assumption implicit in this statement is that Jethro believes, as he *has* believed, that Yahweh is a God among gods. He has believed indeed, that Yahweh is greater than the others. Now he has confirmation that in that belief he was right" (John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3, *Exodus*, 244).

v. 2 *after Moses had . . .* "Zipporah and her sons had perhaps been sent back to Midian by Moses for safety. The phrase is a necessary addition, in order to explain how it was that Jethro was able to bring Moses' family with him on this occasion when, in Exodus 4:20, we read that Moses had already taken them back with him to Egypt" (Cole, 138)—if not before the plagues, then either after the crossing of the Red Sea, or after the Amalekite battle.

vv. 3, 4 *Gershon, Eliezar* "In Genesis 15:2 the 'son of Abraham's house' was Eliezar, whose name epitomized God's help for Abraham, just as in the present narrative the 'son of Moses' was Eliezar, whose name means 'God is my help' (18:4) . . . The Lord showed Abraham in a vision that his seed would be 'a sojourner [gēr] in another's land' (Ge 15:13), and Moses' other son is named Gershon because he said, 'I have become a sojourner [gēr] in a foreign land' (ex 18:3) (Sailhamer, 280, 81)—either Midian (John D. Hannah, "Exodus," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 111) or Egypt (Durham, 243).

v. 12 *burnt offering . . . sacrifices* "The **burnt offering** was totally consumed by fire, but fellowship offerings (**other sacrifices**) were part of a communal meal which Jethro shared with Israel's leaders possibly in making a covenant or peace agreement. The scene is one of jubilant praise and fellowship, but Jethro's true spiritual condition is not explicitly state-

ed" (Hannah, 136).

vv. 13, 14 *judge* Moses is arbitrating disputes between parties based on the standard of "God's decrees and instructions" (v. 16). "The people who come are those who have some question, individually or along with those with whom they have some dispute, about what God has required of them for life in the covenant" (Durham, 250). Some assume chapter 18 is out of place, since the mention of "God's decrees and instructions" suggests it chronologically follows the giving of the Law. But perhaps not. "As far as the mention of other 'laws' is concerned, the Lord had already given them 'commandments and statutes' at Marah (Ex 15:25-26); hence the mention of the 'statutes and laws' is not inappropriate here" (Sailhamer, 281).

v. 21 *officials over thousands . . .* Generally speaking, the officials "were to serve in various levels of civil courts to hear cases of varying degrees of importance" (Hannah, 136). However, "It is not clear how this structure would work in a judicial setting. The language of 'captains of thousands,' etc., is used more for military ranks. There must have been more detailed instruction involved here, for each Israelite would have come under four leaders with this arrangement, and perhaps difficult cases would be sent to the next level. But since the task of these men would also involve instruction and guidance, the breakdown would be very useful" (*The NET Bible*, 48sn, on Ex 18:21).

v. 24 *Moses listened . . . and did* Cf. "at that time" (Dt 1:9; cf. v. 6) referring to when God spoke to Israel at Horeb. "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). If so, then possibly Exodus 18:24-26, about the later implementation of the plan, was included in the narrative here to complete the story about Jethro's advice. Occasionally Old Testament writers treated subjects topically rather than in strict chronological sequence" (Hannah, 136-37). Put differently, Moses' reunion with his family may have occurred before the giving of the covenant at Sinai, and the counsel of Jethro and its implementation after it (Durham, 252).

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## APPLY THE TEXT

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### CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Rather than try to do the work of 100 people, involve 100 people in the work, so they can put their God-given giftedness to good use.

### CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



### 3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



## FAMILY TALK

One of my kids had potty-training and bedwetting issues. They did fine through the day but struggled at night. It was so terrible I had nightmares of sending them off to college with a box of Pull Ups. I was pulling-my-hair-out crazy frustrated to the point that a wedge was forming in my relationship with this child. I remember one day cornering the more experienced home group moms begging for help. The look that passed among them told me we were not the first parents to experience this issue. Each of these wise ladies gave sage advice on several things to try to remedy the situation. More than that, they reassured me that everything was going to work itself out in time and, in fact, that child would not go to college with diapers. They told me I was a good parent, prayed with me right there in the middle of the hallway and walked with me all the way through the process. This is just one of many stories I could share about the value of Biblical community in my parenting, and I'm certain you've got several yourself. What would we do without the body of Christ surrounding us? Where would we be if we hadn't been pointed to Jesus by those who have blazed the trail before us? We were created for community and meant to carry each other's burdens. There is a time for seeking wise counsel and a time for sharing your learned wisdom. Who is your "go to" person? Who are you speaking into? We're praying for you!

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read Exodus 18:1-27.

1. What had Jethro heard about God? What did Moses share about God?
2. What problem was Moses facing?
3. What was Jethro's solution to this problem?

### What Do You Think?

What's the difference between being smart and being wise?

### What Do You Do?

Read Proverbs 9 every day this week. At the end of the week ask yourself what you have learned about wisdom.

## CORE COMPETENCY: Disciple-Making

I multiply godly beliefs, qualities and behaviors in others to encourage them to grow in Christ.

## MEMORY VERSE: Philippians 4:19

*"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."*

## KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: [kids@wearecentral.org](mailto:kids@wearecentral.org)

- \_\_\_\_\_ I completed my Bible Study
- \_\_\_\_\_ I memorized this week's verse
- \_\_\_\_\_ I brought my Bible to church
- \_\_\_\_\_ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

# OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

## CENTRAL BELIEFS

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)  
*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

**Church** (Ephesians 4:15-16)

*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

**Eternity** (John 14:1-4)

*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

**The Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:9)

*I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.*

**Humanity** (John 3:16)

*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)

*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

**Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-4)

*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.*

**Life Purpose** (Acts 20:24)

*I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.*

**Personal God** (Psalm 121:1-2)

*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*



## CENTRAL VIRTUES

**Love** (1 John 4:10-12)

*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

**Joy** (John 15:11)

*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)

*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

**Patience** (Proverbs 14:29)

*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others*

**Faithfulness** (Proverbs 3:3-4)

*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

**Gentleness** (Philippians 4:5)

*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

**Self-Control** (Titus 2:11-13)

*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

**Grace** (Colossians 3:13)

*I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.*

**Hope** (1 Peter 1:3-5)

*I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.*

**Humility** (Philippians 2:3-4)

*I choose to esteem others above myself.*



## CENTRAL PRACTICES

**Bible Study** (Hebrews 4:12)

*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)

*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

**Compassion** (Psalm 82:3-4)

*I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.*

**Disciple-Making** (2 Timothy 2:2)

*I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.*

**Evangelism** (Acts 1:8)

*I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.*

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

*I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.*

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)

*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Single-Mindedness** (Matthew 6:33)

*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

**Spiritual Gifts** (Romans 12:4-6)

*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

**Worship** (Psalm 95:1-7)

*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

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**Stephanie Thomas** (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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