

# CHAPTER 18

## INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 18

This chapter gives an account of Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, with Zipporah his daughter, the wife of Moses, and her two sons, meeting him in the wilderness, who was kindly received by him, (<sup><D180></sup>Exodus 18:1-7) and on Moses' relating the great things God had done for Israel, Jethro expressed his joy on that account, gave praise to God, offered sacrifice, and kept a feast with the elders of Israel, (<sup><D181></sup>Exodus 18:8-12), and observing the constant and fatiguing business Moses had on his hands from morning to evening in judging the people, (<sup><D182></sup>Exodus 18:13-18), he gave him advice to appoint persons under him to receive laws and ordinances from him, he should have from God, and, according to them, judge and govern the people under them, some being rulers of thousands, others of hundreds, others of fifties, and some of tens, (<sup><D183></sup>Exodus 18:19-23), which counsel was acceptable to Moses, and he took it, (<sup><D184></sup>Exodus 18:24-26) and the chapter is concluded with their friendly parting, (<sup><D187></sup>Exodus 18:27).

**Ver. 1.** *When Jethro the priest of Midian, Moses's father-in-law*, etc.] The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan call him the prince of Midian, and so the word <sup>f560</sup> is rendered in some versions; whose daughter Moses had married, and so was his father-in-law, of which see more in (<sup><D126></sup>Exodus 2:16-21).

*heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people*; the miracles he had wrought for them in Egypt, the dividing of the Red sea to make a way for them, the destruction of the Egyptians, providing them with bread and water in such a miraculous manner in the wilderness, and giving them victory over Amalek, and appearing always at the head of them in a pillar of cloud and fire:

*[and] that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt*: which was the greatest blessing of all, and for the sake of which so many wonderful things had been done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. And now Midian being near to Egypt, it is not to be wondered at that Jethro should hear of these things, the fame of which went through all the countries round about, (see

<sup><D1514></sup>Exodus 15:14,15), though it is not improbable that Moses might send messengers to Midian to acquaint his father-in-law, his wife, and sons, of what the Lord had done for him, and by him.

**Ver. 2.** *Then Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses's wife,* etc.] When he had heard of the above things, he determined to pay Moses a visit, and congratulate him on that account; and he took his daughter, the wife of Moses, along with him, to deliver her to her husband, to share with him in his cares and troubles; as to partake with him of his honours and dignity, so to bear part with him in his burdens, so far as she was capable of:

*after he had sent her back:* upon his call and mission to Egypt, he took his wife and children with him; but upon an affair which occurred in the inn by the way, he sent them back again to his father-in-law, where they had remained ever since, (see <sup><M124></sup>Exodus 4:24,25). Jarchi says this was done at meeting with Aaron his brother, (<sup><M127></sup>Exodus 4:27), and relates a conversation between them upon it. As that Aaron should say to him, who are these? to which he replied, this is my wife, I married her in Midian, and these are my sons: he further said to him, and where art thou carrying them? he replied, to Egypt; says he, by reason of those who are before there, we are in straits, and thou wilt add unto them; upon which he said to his wife, go back to thy father's house, and she took her sons and went thither. Kimchi <sup>f561</sup> observes, that some render the words "after her gifts"; whose sense, according to Aben Ezra, is, after she had sent gifts to her husband; but others more probably interpret it of gifts sent by him to her to engage his father-in-law to let her come to him, as well as to prevail upon her to come; perhaps it may be better rendered, "after her messenger"; that is, either after the messenger sent to her by Moses, to acquaint her and her father of what had been done for him, or after the messenger she sent to him, to let him know that she intended shortly to be with him; though perhaps, after all, nearer to our version and others, it may be rendered, "after her dismissions" <sup>f562</sup>; the dismissal or sending away of her and her sons, as before related; for this is by no means to be interpreted of a divorce of her; after which she was brought again to her husband; for there is no reason to believe that ever anything of that kind had passed, as some have thought <sup>f563</sup>: the plain case seems to be this, that Moses finding his family would be exposed to danger, or would be too great an incumbrance upon him in the discharge of his great work he had to do in Egypt, sent

them back to his father-in-law until a fit opportunity should offer of their coming to him, as now did.

**Ver. 3.** *And her two sons*, etc.] Those also Jethro took along with him and his daughter:

*of which the name of the one was Gershom*; which seems to be his firstborn, (<sup>(M)</sup>Exodus 2:22), his name signifies a desolate stranger, as some, or, “there I was a stranger”: the reason of which name follows agreeably thereunto:

*for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land*; meaning, not the land of Egypt, where he was born, and had lived forty years; but in the land of Midian, where he was when this son of his was born; and which name was given him partly to keep up the memory of his flight to Midian, and partly to instruct his son, that Midian, though his native place, was not his proper country where he was to dwell, but another, even the land of Canaan.

**Ver. 4.** *And the name of the other was Eliezer*, etc.] Who seems to be his second son, and was that which was circumcised by Zipporah at the inn, and about which there was such a stir, (<sup>(M)</sup>Exodus 4:24-26), and signifies “my God [is] help”, or, his helper:

*for the God of my father, [said he], was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh*; who, on hearing that Moses had killed an Egyptian, was wroth with him, and sought to slay him; and perhaps drew his sword for that purpose, but was prevented: however, this, in all human probability, would have been the case, that he would have fallen by his sword either in a private or public manner, had it not been for the interposition of divine Providence, and therefore he gave this name to his child, to be a standing memorial of it.

**Ver. 5.** *And Jethro, Moses’s father in law*, etc.] This is the third time he is so called in the chapter already, and many more times besides after in it; the reason of which seems to be, either to distinguish him from another of the same name, or to do him honour, that he should be in such a relation to so great and distinguished a man as Moses now was:

*came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness*; not with his own sons and wife, but with the sons and wife of Moses; Zipporah and her sons, as before related; with those he came into the wilderness of Arabia, where Moses now was, and which was not at a great distance from

Midian, since about the same spot Moses, when he dwelt there, had, and fed the flock of his father-in-law, (<sup><00R1></sup>Exodus 3:1), that part of the land of Midian where Jethro lived lay somewhere eastward of Mount Sinai, and was probably situated where Sharne now stands; which, according to Dr. Pocock <sup>f564</sup>, is about a day and a half's journey from Mount Sinai, from whence the monks of Mount Sinai are chiefly supplied with fish <sup>f565</sup>: it follows: where he encamped at the mount of God: at Horeb, where the Lord had appeared to Moses; and so the Targum of Jonathan adds,

“where the glory of the Lord was revealed to Moses at the beginning;”

and where, afterwards, the Lord, appeared again, and gave the law, and therefore is called the Mount of God; the one as well as the other being past when Moses wrote this book, and called the mountain by this name: it is matter of question at what time Jethro came hither, whether before or after the giving of the law: it seems, by the order in which this story is here placed, as if it was immediately after the battle with Amalek; and Saadiah Gaon is of opinion it was before the giving of the law; and one would think it most reasonable and natural that Jethro would take the first opportunity of visiting Moses, and that Moses would not long defer sending for his wife and children: but Aben Ezra thinks he did not come till the second year after the tabernacle was set up, since, in the context, mention is made of burnt offerings and sacrifices, and no account is given of a new altar built by Moses; and besides, he says, “I do make them know the statutes of God and his laws”, (<sup><02R6></sup>Exodus 18:16), and it is certain from hence, that the children of Israel were removed from Rephidim, and were now encamped at the mount of God, at Horeb; but whether they had got to the other side of the mount of Sinai as yet is not so clear; though it looks as if what Moses did, by the advice of Jethro, was after the law was given on Sinai, (see <sup><00R6></sup>Deuteronomy 1:6-16) so that, upon the whole, it seems as if this account, according to the order of time, should be placed after (<sup><04R3></sup>Numbers 10:28), or, as Dr. Lightfoot <sup>f566</sup> thinks, between the tenth and eleventh verses of that chapter, and is put here to show that though Midian was near Amalek, as he observes, yet Jethro was exempt from the curse and destruction threatened to that, (see <sup><09R6></sup>1 Samuel 15:6).

**Ver. 6.** *And he said unto Moses,* etc.] By a messenger, as Jarchi: or by a written letter, as Aben Ezra: or, as the Septuagint version, “it was told to

Moses, thy father”, etc. for as yet he was not come to him, as appears by Moses going forth to meet him:

*I thy father in law Jethro am come to thee:* or, “am coming”<sup>f567</sup>; for, as yet, he was not in his presence, and they were not personally present face to face: the Targum of Jonathan adds, “to become a proselyte”; but it seems that before, as well as now, he had been a worshipper of the true God, and always speaks like one that had had the fear of God before him continually:

*and thy wife, and her sons with her;* this he thought fit to acquaint him of by messenger or letter, that he might be in expectation of them, and not be surprised at once with their appearance: besides, as some observe, and not amiss, after the late attack of the Amalekites upon their rear, guards or sentinels might be placed in the outer parts of the camp for its safety, and who would not easily, without order, let strangers pass into it, and therefore previous notice was necessary to get admission.

**Ver. 7.** *And Moses went out to meet his father in law,* etc.] Out of the camp, at least out of his tent: the Targum of Jonathan says, from under the cloud of glory; how far he went is not certain, nor material to know: this was an instance of his great humility and modesty, and was doing Jethro a great deal of honour; that one who was in such great dignity, at the head of such a vast body of people, and superior to him both in natural and spiritual abilities, yet condescended to go forth in person to meet him, when he might have sent a guard of his men to escort him to his camp, which would have been honour sufficient; and it is not said he went out to meet his wife and children; for Aben Ezra says it was not usual for honourable men so to do:

*and did obeisance:* to Jethro, bowed unto him and worshipped him in a civil way, after the manner of the eastern nations, who used to make very low bows to whom they paid civil respect:

*and kissed him;* not to make him a proselyte, as the above Targum, nor in token of subjection, but of affection and friendship; it being usual for relations and friends to kiss each other at meeting or parting:

*and they asked each other of their welfare;* or “peace”<sup>f568</sup>; of their prosperity and happiness, temporal and spiritual, of their peace, inward and outward, and of the bodily health of them and their families:

*and they came into the tent*; the Targum of Jonathan says,

“into the tabernacle of the house of doctrine,”

or school room; which is not likely, since Jethro was a man well instructed in divine things, and needed not to be put to school; and if he did, it can hardly be thought that as soon as Moses met him he should set about the instruction of him; but into his tent where he dwelt; that, as Aben Ezra says, which was the known tent of Moses, though it is not expressly said his tent.

**Ver. 8.** *And Moses told his father in law all that the Lord had done unto Pharaoh*, etc.] After the proper civilities had passed, and Jethro had been refreshed with food and drink, as is highly probable, they entered into a conversation about what had lately passed, which Jethro had had a general report of, and which had brought him hither, and therefore it would be very entertaining to him to have the particulars of it; and Moses begins with what the Lord had done to Pharaoh, how he had inflicted his plagues upon him one after another, and at last slew his firstborn, and destroyed him and his host in the Red sea:

*and to the Egyptians, for Israel's sake*; the several plagues affecting them, especially the last, the slaughter of their firstborn; and who also were spoiled of their riches by the Israelites, and a numerous army of them drowned in the Red sea, and all because of the people of Israel; because they had made their lives bitter in hard bondage, had refused to let them go out of the land, and when they were departed pursued after them to fetch them back or cut them off:

*and all the travail that had come upon them by the way*; to the Red sea, and at Marah, and Rephidim, and how Amalek fought with them, as the Targum of Jonathan observes; what a fright they were put into, when pursued by Pharaoh and his host behind them, the rocks on each side of them, and the sea before them; their want of water in the wilderness, not being able to drink of the waters at Marah because bitter; their hunger, having no bread nor flesh in the wilderness of Sin, and their violent thirst, and no water to allay it, in the plains of Rephidim, and where also they were attacked by an army of the Amalekites:

*and how the Lord delivered them*; out of all this travail and trouble, and out of the hands of all their enemies, Egyptians and Amalekites.

**Ver. 9.** *And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel*, etc.] In giving them the manna and the well, as the above Targum, bread to eat when hungry, and water to drink when thirsty; to which Jarchi adds, and the law, for he supposes the meeting of Jethro and Moses was after the law was given on Mount Sinai, though here recorded; but this goodness may be extended to other things, as the saving of their firstborn at the time of the Lord's passover, giving them favour in the sight of the Egyptians, of whom they borrowed or asked things of value, of gold, silver, and jewels, bringing them out of Egypt with an high hand, going before them in a pillar of cloud and fire by day and night, dividing the waters of the sea for them to pass through as on dry land, and doing for them the above things related, and giving them victory over Amalek; and it may be observed that the joy of Jethro was not merely on account of the goodness of God done to Moses, a relation of his, having married his daughter; but because of the great and good things God had done for Israel, his special and peculiar people, the worshippers of the true and living God, for whom Jethro had an affection, because they were so, and therefore rejoiced in their prosperity: whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians; whom he had wrought upon to give them leave to depart from them, and destroyed them when they pursued after them, first delivered them from their bondage, and then from their rage and wrath.

**Ver. 10.** *And Jethro said*, etc.] Like a truly good man, as one that knew the Lord and feared him, and was desirous of giving him the praise and glory of all the wonderful things he had done:

*blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians: and out of the hand of Pharaoh*; meaning particularly Moses and Aaron, the messengers of God, as Aben Ezra observes, who went to Pharaoh in the peril of their lives, and whom he sometimes threatened with death; but the Lord delivered them both out of his hands, and out of the hands of his ministers and people, who, doubtless, must be at times enraged at them for the plagues they brought upon them; for the persons here pointed at are manifestly distinguished from the body of the people of Israel next mentioned:

*who hath delivered the people from the hand of the Egyptians*: the people of Israel, from the hard bondage and cruel slavery they were held under by the Egyptians; which, as it was the Lord's doing, Jethro gives him the glory

of it, and blesses him for it, or ascribes to him, on account of it, blessing, honour, glory, and praise.

**Ver. 11.** *Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods,* etc.] He knew the Lord before, and that he was the only true God, and greater than all that were so called; but now he had a fresh instance of it, a clear proof and demonstration of it, and so more plainly and fully knew it, and was assured of it, that he was greater than all the idols of the Gentiles, and particularly than the gods of the Egyptians; since he had saved his people Israel out of their hands, and when they could not protect and defend the Egyptians neither from plagues nor from destruction; nay, could not secure themselves, being all destroyed by the mighty Jehovah, (see <sup><1021></sup>Exodus 12:12), as also that he is greater than all that are called gods, kings, princes, and civil magistrates, than Pharaoh and all his nobles, generals, and captains, who were destroyed by him: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly, he was above them; the idol gods, the gods of the Egyptians, the evil demons, Satan and his principalities, who influenced them, presuming and boasting by their magicians what they could do; but in those things Jehovah in the wonders he wrought appeared to be above them; they were overcome by him, and obliged to acknowledge the finger of God; and this sense stands best connected with the preceding clause: or else in those things, in which the Egyptians dealt proudly with the Israelites, pursuing after them in the pride and vanity of their minds, and giving out that they should overtake them and divide the spoil, and satisfy their lust upon them, when God blew with his wind upon them, the sea covered them, and they sunk as lead in the mighty waters, (see <sup><1159></sup>Exodus 15:9-11), and to the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red sea, the Jews commonly apply this: thus the Targum of Jonathan,

“wherein the Egyptians dealt wickedly in judging Israel, by the waters, judgment returned upon them that they might be judged by the waters;”

and to the same sense Jarchi: they suppose here was a just retaliation, that as the Egyptians drowned the Hebrew infants in the waters of the Nile, they were in righteous judgment drowned in the Red sea; this is the very thing, or is the same way they in their pride and malice dealt with the people of Israel; God dealt with them, and showed himself to be both “against them” <sup>f569</sup>, as it may be rendered, and above them.



**Ver. 12.** *And Jethro, Moses's father in law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God,* etc.] The burnt offering, which was either of the flock or of the herd, was wholly consumed by fire, from whence it had its name; the peace offering for thanksgiving, which seemed to be meant by the sacrifices here, the flesh of them were to be eaten, (<sup><875></sup>Leviticus 7:15) and now a feast was kept, as the latter part of the verse shows: whether Jethro brought cattle along with him for such a purpose, and so “gave” <sup>f570</sup> or “offered” them for a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; as the word for took may be rendered, one and the same word signifying both to give and take, (see <sup><688></sup>Psalm 68:18), compared with (<sup><408></sup>Ephesians 4:8) or whether, with the leave of Moses and the children of Israel, he took them out of their flocks and herds, it matters not, since this is only observed to show Jethro's devotion to God, and the grateful sense he had of the divine goodness to Israel; and since he was a priest of Midian, as he is generally said to be, and a priest of the most high God, as Melchizedek was, he might offer sacrifices; for it does not appear that he delivered them to others to be offered, or that these were slain by Aaron; for, though he is after mentioned, yet not as a sacrificer, but as a guest; and perhaps this might be before he and his sons were separated to the priest's office, or, at least, before they had entered upon it; nor is this mention of a burnt offering and sacrifices any proof of Jethro's meeting Moses after the giving of the law, since, before that, sacrifices were in use, and Jethro being a grandchild of Abraham, might have learnt the use of them from him:

*and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses's father in law, before God;* the tents of Moses being on the east side of the tabernacle, as Aben Ezra says, in which was the mercy seat and cherubim, between which the divine Majesty was; but there is no need to suppose that the tabernacle was now built, for this tent of Moses might be placed before or near the pillar of cloud in which Jehovah was; or the sense may only be, that they ate their food in the presence of God, in the fear of the Lord, with gladness and singleness of heart, as good men do; and especially as this was an eucharistic sacrifice unto God they partook of, Aaron and the elders came out of a civil respect to Jethro, to take a meal with him, as well as to join with him in a religious action: the bread they ate was, no doubt, the manna, which Jethro, though a Midianite, yet a descendant of Abraham, and a good man, partook of, and is put for the whole repast, the flesh of the sacrifices and what else were eaten: no mention is made of

Moses, nor was there any need of it, as Aben Ezra observes, it being his tent in which they were: the Targum of Jonathan adds,

“Moses stood and ministered before them;”

and so says Jarchi; which is not very probable, it being not agreeable to the dignity of his station and office.

**Ver. 13.** *And it came to pass on the morrow*, etc.] The above Targum paraphrases it,

“on the day after the day of atonement:”

and so Jarchi observes the same, out of a book of theirs called Siphri; but rather this was either the day after the entertainment of Jethro with Aaron and the elders in the tent of Moses, or the day after Jethro’s coming, as Aben Ezra:

*that Moses sat to judge the people*; though his father-in-law was come to visit him, yet he did not neglect the care of his people, and the business that lay upon his hands for their good, civil and religious; but, the very day following his coming, closely applied himself to hear and judge causes; and such a vast body of people must find him work enough; and especially if we consider their quarrelsome disposition, for if they were so to one another, as they were to Moses and Aaron, they must be very litigious; however Moses bore with them, and attended to their causes, to do justice and judgment among them, being now made a prince and a judge over them by divine authority, and whom they acknowledged as such:

*and the people stood by Moses, from the morning unto the evening*; not that a single cause was so long a trying, but there being so many of them in one day, that they lasted from the morning tonight; so that when one cause was dispatched and the parties dismissed, another succeeded, and so continued all the day long: Moses he sat as judge, with great majesty, gravity, and sedateness, hearkening with all attention to what was said on both sides, and the people they “stood”, both plaintiff and defendant, as became them.

**Ver. 14.** *And when Moses’s father in law saw all that he did to the people*, etc.] Or for them<sup>f571</sup>; for their information and instruction in the laws of God, and for the decision of cases brought before him, according to them;

and what a deal of business was on his hands, and he went through for the good of the people:

*he said, what is this thing that thou doest to the people?* this question he put, not as being ignorant what he did, he saw what he did, and understood it full well, but this he said to lead on to some conversation upon this head:

*why sittest thou thyself alone?* no other judge upon the bench with him to assist him, to take it by turns, and to relieve and ease him:

*and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?* not being able to get their causes heard and tried, there being so many of them; and therefore some were obliged to wait all day long, before they could have their business done, which was both fatiguing to him and them.

**Ver. 15.** *And Moses said unto his father in law,* etc.] In answer to his question; and there were two things, as Aben Ezra observes, he did to the people, and for which they came to him; the one is observed in this verse, and the other in the next:

*because the people come unto me to inquire of God;* of his mind and will in certain cases, and of his statutes and laws, as the following verse shows; what they should observe, and according to which they should conduct themselves: they came to inquire what God would have them to do; and, in doubtful cases, what was his will and pleasure, and to desire Moses to inform them; and if the things were of such a nature that he could not easily and readily do it, then to inquire of God for them, which in later times was done by Urim and Thummim.

**Ver. 16.** *When they have a matter, they come unto me,* etc.] This is the other thing he did for them, as the above writer observes; which being last mentioned, he speaks of first, as follows, meaning that when there was a matter in difference between two persons or more, and they could not agree upon it among themselves, then they brought it to him to be heard and decided:

*and I judge between one and another;* hear what they have to say on both sides, and then judge which is in the right and which is in the wrong, and determine what is to be done, according to the laws of God or according to the rules of justice and equity:

*and I do make them know the statutes of God and his laws*; this relates to the first thing, their coming to him to inquire of God, what is his mind and will, or what he would have them do; and in order to this, and in answer to their request, he instructed them in the laws of God, both civil and religious: this is made use of by some, to prove that Jethro's coming to Moses was after the law was given: but this does not necessarily follow, because Moses, by a divine impulse, might be directed immediately to make known to the people what was the will and mind of God, with respect to any particular case they inquired about; and rather this seems to furnish out an argument to the contrary, since, if the laws and statutes of God had yet been given on Mount Sinai, the people could not have been ignorant of them, and so needed not such daily information and instruction from Moses.

**Ver. 17.** *And Moses's father in law said unto him*, etc.] Having observed what he did, and heard his answer to the question he put to him:

*the thing that thou doest is not good*; not meaning that it was not morally good, or that it was morally evil; for it was certainly a good thing to inquire of the mind and will of God for the people, and to hear and decide matters in controversy between them, and do justice to both parties; but it was not good for the health of Moses; it was not commodious and convenient for him; it was not for his bodily welfare; it was too much for him, as he explains himself in the next verse.

**Ver. 18.** *Thou wilt surely wear away*, etc.] His natural strength and animal spirits, and so his flesh; he feared his constant application and attendance to business would impair his health, break his constitution, and bring him into a consumption. Moses was naturally of a strong and vigorous constitution; for, forty years after this, even to the time of his death, his natural force was not abated; or "fading thou wilt fade", or, "falling thou wilt fall"<sup>f572</sup>; in allusion to the leaves of trees in autumn, which fade, and wither, and fall:

*both thou and this people that is with thee*; it was tiresome to the people, as well as fatiguing to Moses, who, because of the multitude of cases, were obliged to wait a long time, some of them from morning to night, and yet could not get their suit to come and so were obliged to attend next day, and perhaps day after day. The Targum of Jonathan is,

"even thou also, Aaron and his sons, and the elders that are with them;"

and so Jarchi; but these do not seem to have been assisting to him at all, as appears by what follows:

*for this thing is too heavy for thee*: it was too great a burden upon his shoulders, what his strength was not equal to; for though his internal abilities were exceeding great, and he had a good will to the work, to serve God and his people, yet it was more, humanly speaking, than his bodily strength would admit of, or any mortal man could go through:

*thou art not able to perform it thyself alone*; and this Moses was sensible of himself afterwards, and says the same thing, (<sup><BOOK></sup>Deuteronomy 1:9).

**Ver. 19.** *Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel*, etc.] Jethro being the elder man, and of some character and figure, being either a priest or prince of Midian, or both, might, without incurring a censure, take upon him to give advice to Moses, a younger man, and his son-in-law, though he was superior to him in office and in parts; and especially since his advice proceeded from a sincere and cordial regard for his health and welfare:

*and God shall be with thee*: and succeed the advice he gave, which he persuaded himself would be agreeable to the will of God, and attending to it he would prosper, and find that the method taken would be blessed of God, and issue in his own good and the good of the people; or it may be taken prayerwise, as by some, “may God be with thee”<sup>f573</sup>; to direct thee to what thou shouldest do, either to take the advice, or reject it; and be it as it will, he wished him well, and that he might have his health, and that as his day was, his strength might be:

*be thou for the people to God-ward*; or on the part of God, as Aben Ezra interprets it; that part of his work he advised him to retain by all means, which lay more immediately between God and the people; to be a mediator between them; to transact affairs for them with God; to inquire his mind and will in matters difficult and doubtful; to be, as Jarchi expresses it, a messenger and interpreter between them, and an inquirer of judgments of him, or what statutes and judgments he would have observed by them: that thou mayest bring the causes unto God; concerning which, as yet, he had given no directions as a rule to go by.

**Ver. 20.** *And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws*, etc.] Both with respect to things civil and religious, which he should receive from God:

*and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk*; the path of faith and duty, the way of truth, holiness, and righteousness:

*and the work that they must do*; both with respect to God, and one another, the various duties and exercises of religion, everything relating to their moral, religious, and civil conduct.

**Ver. 21.** *Moreover, thou shalt provide out of all the people*, etc.] Or look out <sup>f574</sup> from among them; (see ~~<40B>~~ Acts 6:3),

*able men*; or “men of power” <sup>f575</sup>; meaning not so much men of strong and robust constitutions, who, as Aben Ezra says, are able to bear labour; but men that have strength of heart, as Ben Gersom expresses it, men of spirit and courage, and are not afraid to do justice, to repress vice, and countenance virtue; or, as Maimonides says <sup>f576</sup>, have a strong heart, or courage and boldness to deliver the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor. Jarchi interprets it of rich men, of men of substance, who have no need to flatter, or play the hypocrite, and to know the faces of men:

*such as fear God*; who have the fear of God before their eyes, and on their hearts, in all they do, and therefore cannot do those things that others do, who are destitute of it; cannot give a cause the wrong way wilfully, or pervert judgment, and are the reverse of the character of the unjust judge, that neither feared God nor regarded man, (~~<40B>~~ Luke 18:2):

*men of truth*; true men, sincere, upright, and faithful men, that love truth and hate lies and falsehood, and will take some pains to get at the truth of a cause, to inquire where it lies, and pursue and encourage it where it is found, and discourage to the uttermost falsehood, lies, and perjury: hating covetousness; in themselves and others, filthy lucre, dishonest gain, mammon of unrighteousness, and so not to be bribed and corrupted, and execute wrong judgment for the sake of money:

*and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens*; meaning not courts of judicature, consisting of such a number of judges, for such a court was never known to have a thousand judges upon the bench at once; the highest court of judicature that ever was among the Jews, which was long after this time, consisted but of seventy or seventy one: but the sense is, that each of these should have such a number of persons, or rather families, under their care, who, when they applied unto them for justice, should faithfully administer it to them; ((see Gill on ~~<40B>~~ Exodus 18:25’’)).

**Ver. 22.** *And let them judge the people at all times*, etc.] In their several districts, whenever a matter of difference between man and man arises, and the case is brought before them, let them judge impartially between them, and determine what is right and wrong, and execute judgment and justice truly; which would take off a great deal of business from the hands of Moses:

*and it shall be that every great matter they shall bring to thee*; any affair of great importance, and difficult of determination, and about which the judges may have some doubt in their minds, and they are not clear as to the decision of it; this, they the judges, not the people, were to bring to Moses:

*but every small matter*; which is of no great importance, or is easy of decision, where the right and the wrong clearly appear, and there is no difficulty in the determination of it:

*so shall it be easier for thyself*; to go through the business that would be necessarily devolved upon him, as the chief ruler and governor, supreme judge, lawgiver, leader, and commander:

*and they shall bear the burden with thee*; of ruling and judging the people; they taking a share of it, it would sit the lighter and easier upon him; and the whole seems to be wise and prudent counsel.

**Ver. 23.** *If thou shall do this thing*, etc.] Hearken to the advice given, and put it in execution, by choosing out of the people, and placing over them, judges qualified, as directed: and God command thee so; for he did not desire him to follow his advice any further than it appeared to be according to the will of God, which he doubted not he would inquire about; and if he found it was agreeable to it, and should pursue it:

*then thou shall be able to endure*; to continue in his office and post, and hold on for years to come, God granting him life and health; whereas otherwise, in all human probability, he must waste and wear away apace:

*and all this people shall also go to their place in peace*; having had their cases heard and tried, and their differences adjusted to satisfaction; and quick dispatch being made, they would return to their tents or places of abode in much peace of mind, and sit down contented with the determination made, and pleased that the lawsuit was not protracted to any unreasonable length of time. Jarchi interprets all this people, of Aaron,

Nadab, and Abihu, and the seventy elders that came with him, as if they by this means would be eased, and so pleased with it.

**Ver. 24.** *So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law*, etc.]

Considered what he said, weighed it well in his mind, and judged it good advice, and determined to follow it:

*and did all that he had said*; by choosing such men as he directed to, and committing the judgment of the people to them, as follows:

**Ver. 25.** *And Moses chose able men out of all Israel*, etc.] He looked among them, and selected the best of them, such as most answered to the qualifications it was requisite they should have; and though only one of them is here mentioned, which is the first Jethro gave, yet no doubt they were all attended to, though not expressed:

*and made them heads over the people*; rulers, governors, judges, and officers; this is a general word, comprehending their several particular offices they sustained; which seem to be chiefly distinguished by the different numbers of people, or families, under them, otherwise their work and office were much the same:

*rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens*; just as Jethro advised, (<sup>(1080)</sup>Exodus 18:21). According to the Targum of Jonathan, the rulers of thousands were six hundred, rulers of hundreds 6000, rulers of fifties 12,000, and the rulers of tens 60,000; and so Jarchi; and the like account is given in both the Talmuds <sup>f577</sup>, where the whole is summed up, amounting to 78,600; which account Aben Ezra disapproves of, and thinks not credible: it is built upon the number of Israel at this time, when they came out of Egypt, being 600,000 men; and so if there was a ruler to every thousand men, there must be six hundred of them, and so on; but these thousands may intend not individual persons, but families, that these were appointed over, as the families of Israel and Judah are called their thousands, (<sup>(318)</sup>Micah 5:2 <sup>(1765)</sup>Judges 6:15 \*marg) and this will serve greatly to reduce the number of these judges and officers.

**Ver. 26.** *And they judged the people at all seasons*, etc.] Any day in the week, or any time in the day, whenever there was any occasion for them, and cases were brought before them:

*the hard cases they brought unto Moses*; that is, the judges brought them to Moses when such came before them which were too hard for them, it



was difficult to them to determine rightly about them, then they brought them to be heard and decided by him; for the judges, and not the people, best knew when a case was hard or easy to determine:

*but every small matter they judged themselves*; and gave it as they saw was most agreeable to justice and equity, and did not trouble Moses with it; by which means he was eased of a great deal of business and fatigue, which was Jethro's view in giving the advice he did.

**Ver. 27.** *And Moses let his father in law depart*, etc.] After he had been with him some time, and desired leave to go into his own country, which was granted; or he “dismissed” <sup>f578</sup> him in an honourable way: and as he went out to meet him when he came, if he did not attend him, when he went, some way in person, yet sent a guard along with him, both for honour and for safety:

*and he went his way into his own land*; the land of Midian: the Targum of Jonathan,

“he went to proselyte all the children of his own country;”

or, as Jarchi expresses it, the children of his family; and it is plain that the Kenites and Rechabites descended from him, who in later times lived among the Jews, and were proselytes to their religion, (~~0016~~Judges 1:16 ~~3125~~1 Chronicles 2:55 ~~465D~~Jeremiah 35:2).