



This Sunday we looked at Exodus 18, in which we see a family reunion in the wilderness between Moses, Jethro his father-in-law, and Moses' wife Zipporah and two children.

This passage seems to perform several functions, we noticed: it shows a contrasting Gentile reception to God's salvation of Israel from the attack of the Amalekites in the previous chapter (17v8-16); and it also functions as a chance to stop and reflect - pointing back as Moses speaks of and Jethro responds to what God has done for Israel (v1-12), and pointing forward as we see the difficulty of God's people trying to discern and live God's way (v13-27).

The theme of 'knowing' – a huge theme in Exodus so far - could be argued to lie at the heart of this passage (see Jethro's statement in v11, and also the passive form "make them know" lying behind v16 and 20).

1. Know the greatness of God (v1-12)

The centre of this scene is the conversation between Moses and Jethro in v8-11. We noted how Moses speaks of "everything *the LORD* had done" (v8), focussing his testimony on God's work and not his own, and how Moses speaks "about all the hardships they had met along the way" (v8), telling Jethro about the wilderness grumbling as well as the escape from Egypt. These points are a challenge to how we think about and speak of God's work in saving us and his ongoing work of sanctification in our lives.

Jethro's response to Moses' message was exemplary. He responded in delight (v9), praised God (v10), testified that these events proved what God had set out to prove – that he alone is God (cf. 12v12, 15v11) (v11), and he worshipped by offering sacrifices and eating with God's people (v12).

We are to be encouraged for we have an even better salvation to speak of and delight in (Christ the Passover lamb, 1 Corinthians 5v7 and the waters of baptism, 1 Peter 3v21), and we are to take comfort from this Gentile confession, the first of many as God planned to bless the whole world through his people Israel.

2. Know God's ways (v13-27)

After eating with God's people, Jethro stayed to watch Moses perform his role of judging for the people (v13). However, he immediately saw that the system the Israelites had set up in the wilderness of Moses hearing and deciding upon every dispute was neither efficient nor sustainable (v17). He suggested an alternative plan, in which Moses would maintain his role teaching the people God's decrees and showing them how to live (v19), but would appoint godly men to judge the minor cases (v21). Moses followed Jethro's instructions (v24-26), and Jethro returned to his home land (v27).

This episode seems to make the point that discerning God's will is perhaps not always as straightforward as we might think it (although God of course then provided the law, and also we have God's law made flesh in Jesus and written on our hearts by the Spirit). But nevertheless, discerning God's will is not always as straightforward as we might like – cf. Romans 12v2. Like Moses, we need help! Perhaps in this season of considering what church should 'be' in particular, we should make sure we hold our views and opinions lightly and love one another.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. What was your first impression of this chapter? Why do you think it might have been included in the Exodus account?
2. What surprises you in how Moses speaks in v8 of what God has done?
3. How does Jethro's response to Moses' testimony in v9-12 encourage you?
4. How would you describe the predicament Moses and the Israelites had found themselves in in the second half of the chapter?
5. Jethro's practical wisdom was the beginning of God's answer to their struggle to work out how to live under God's will. Why are we in a much better situation than them? In what ways do we still find it challenging discerning and working out how to live under God's will (cf. Romans 12v2)?