

# **"Judges for Israel"**

## **Exodus 18**

**August 22, 2010**  
**by C.W. Powell**

We read this chapter a few moments ago. I want to make some comments concerning it for our edification and understanding in Christ.

### I. The historical details

A. Jethro: But Exodus 2 says that Reuel was Moses' father-in-law. Two explanations are possible; Perhaps Jethro is another name for Reuel, or perhaps Reuel had died between the time Moses went to the Midianites and his return to Egypt, and Jethro had succeeded to his titles and offices as priest of Midian and head of his tribe. Moses had asked and received permissions from Jethro to return to Egypt after God had spoken to him at the Burning Bush.

B. Zipporah and Moses two sons had been sent back to Jethro since Moses had departed to speak to Pharaoh, and now Jethro brings them to Moses in the wilderness. His sons were "Gershom" which means "stranger" or "alien" for Moses had been a stranger in Midian; and "Eliezer" which means "Helper" for God had been the Help of Moses. Even in his children, Moses would seek the glory of God.

C. After personal greetings were exchanged, Jethro offered a burnt offering to God and Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel came to the feast. Question: The priesthood of Aaron was not yet established, but God accepted the offering of Jethro, a Midianite. Think on that. Eventually these patriarchal religions would wither away or lapse into idolatry. This was one of the reasons God established Israel, because family worship would need the discipline of the Law of Moses in order to not be corrupt. Since Christ has risen from the dead and established the church, this discipline of families and the natural order has passed to the officers of Christ in His church.

D. Jethro gave good advice to Moses, with the proviso of verse 23, for Jethro would not usurp the place of God. But it is interesting, that God incorporated natural order and wisdom into the structure of the nation of Israel. Not all of God's order was revealed directly from Sinai; some came from Moses' father-in-law, from a distant relative and descendant of Abraham through his second wife Keturah. Midian was one of those sons to whom Abraham gave gifts and sent away, that Isaac's pre-eminence might not be jeopardized. But the memory and

worship of the true God had not vanished from among them. This was not an idolatrous worship as the sacrifice to the golden calf would soon be.

## II. I will make the following applications

### A. Jethro rejoiced with Moses over the great deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

#### 1. Jethro heard the account of God's dealing with Israel and was glad.

a) He confessed the uniqueness of the God of Israel. See verse 11

b) They dealt proudly: idolaters are moved by pride, for what arrogance is it to make your own gods, or think that your fathers could do so.

c) Jethro, as was also said of Reuel, was a priest of the true God, Jehovah, as we read in Exodus 2.

#### 2. The sacrifice of Jethro shows that the knowledge of the true God and His worship still continued among the descendants of Abraham, and true religion existed among them. This should have been considered by Israel, that God had some other purpose in giving His law than to preserve the true faith. This idea made the Jews very angry when Jesus intimated as such in such passages as Luke 4:

25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; 26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. 27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. 28 And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,

#### 3. In Israel God would nurture the seed of the woman and teach the world the vanity of the flesh until Messiah would come and pour out His Spirit. Israel was not to be a holy club, but a special reserve for a special purpose of God to teach the nations.

#### 4. Jesus also gave us good instruction, to humble us: Luke 9:49

And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. 50 And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.

B. The Advice of Jethro. We can learn from natural revelation.

1. Two great examples of natural wisdom: one from the OT and one from the NT

a) Solomon and the matter of the harlot women and the baby.  
1Kings 3. Decisions from the nature of motherhood.

b) The Lord Jesus and the ox in the ditch on the Sabbath: See Luke 14:

1 And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day, that they watched him. 2 And, behold, there was a certain man before him, which had the dropsy. 3 And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day? 4 And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; 5 And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things.

c) Several things:

(1) There are no specifics in the law as to what should be done in either of these cases.

(2) Every argument against healing on the Sabbath from the law was valid in the strict sense. In another place: there are six other days in the week; let them come and be healed on those days.

(3) What right had a harlot to receive justice from Solomon: The law said, “De 23:17 There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.” What is wrong with this picture?

(4) But the law was not any good for those who were blind. We are expected to serve God with our eyes open, a participant not a slave. If the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch.

(5) It means that we are to be glad and willing participants in the obedience of faith, not just blind members of the

chain gang, keeping orders that we have no sense of the meaning.

## 2. The establishment of the judges of Israel.

a) This was distinct from the heads of families, which order was already established, for these elders of the twelve tribes were sitting at the feast with Jethro.

b) Why weren't the heads of families instituted as judges? Because there needed to be a counter balance to the natural order.

c) See 1Sam 8:4. The elders were displeased with the order established by Moses on the advice of Jethro, and wanted a king to judge them like the other nations.

(1) See 1Sam. 12:8ff

(2) See 1Sam 22:6. Here is the reason the elders desired a king. They were discontented with the rule of the judges that seemed to them weak and ineffective, although God had delivered them many times, when they repented and turned to the Lord. They wanted control of the processes.

(3) Samuel and God outfoxed them, and established the line of prophets to serve as a counterbalance to the rule of the flesh.

## 3. The rule of the judges overlapped the tribal elders. No doubt some of the judges were heads of families. Here are the requirements: [vs. 21]

a) Able men. Men who had the ability to do the job. Not light and frivolous or double-minded men. Such should be proved. Generally the requirement would be to rule their own families, but some might not have that experience—Samson for instance. But there was not to be one judge only, but many.

b) A hierarchy: thousands, hundreds, fifties, tens. Moses would act as a supreme court.

c) Fear God. Truly religious men, who heard the word of God and did it.

d) Hating covetousness. Incorruptible by bribes and favors. Removed from political pressure, as much as possible. Has no selfish agenda for reward, tangible or intangible. Justice should be

blind. No respect of persons.

e) The judging office would be separated from the legislative office and from the tribal office. See verse 20: Moses would continue to teach the law and give the law. He would represent the people in this respect: verse 19.

f) This is essentially the order in churches in the Presbyterian tradition where there is overlapping and mutually supported authorities and submission.

g) We see here three major distinctions in office: the prophetic office represented by Moses, which includes the legislative; the judicial office of the judges who are qualified not by birth but by ability and spirit; the natural order of the tribal chiefs and families. None is to be subjected; none to usurp authority over the others

h) As we saw; the judicial office was endangered and usurped by the natural order demanding a king in the days of the last judge, Samuel. But God did not surrender the rule of His people, and created the order of prophets, of which Samuel was the first, as an order that would judge the actions of the kings in the Name of Jehovah until the Anointed One came.

C. We must understand that God has an order for His church, just as He had for Israel.

1. We must respect the history of the church, and seek to live within the order that He has provided for us. No order will be perfect because we are sinful men; but order is greatly to be desired and sought after. These are very important subjects for the peace and godliness of God's people.

2. It is a great sin to disrupt the peace of the church for selfish and self-serving agendas. Such rebellions may have long term consequences, long after the selfish reasons have been forgotten.

3. Natural wisdom may require that modifications be made within the divine principles according to the spirit and strengths/weaknesses of particular bodies of Christians. Not all families are run the same way; and neither are all churches or states. The tribal order of the Midianites would wither away, replaced by kingdoms and empires as the knowledge of God was forgotten and sins increased. When Christ came, the new wine would not be put into old bottles, but new bottles were fashioned that the Spirit of God be not bound.

Amen and Amen God bless you.