

Delegation

(some time before the third month after the Israelites left Egypt – Exodus 19:1)

Exodus 18:5-27

The Israelites had left the water at Rephadim and were [on the way to Sinai when](#) Moses hears that Jethro (& his wife and children) are coming for a visit. A careful reading of scripture suggests that other family members had also come to visit – but more on that later.

What a family reunion.

Moses spoke of what had happened and God was praised.

Jethro watched Moses the next day as sole arbiter over the disputes of 2 million people. He saw that at the end of the day he still wasn't finished. His performance was inefficient and failed to meet everybody's needs.

It takes someone looking from the outside to see the obvious. Moses was potentially heading for physical, mental or emotional breakdown.

God created man as human, including Moses, including me. We are not maintenance free machines. It was more than Moses could do. His job was to seek the mind of God and convey His will to the Hebrews, but the urgent needs of the people were preventing him doing what was really important.

Jethro begins with questions about his priorities.
Are you the leader of God's people or have you been reduced to the lesser role of judge?
Why are you doing all the work yourself?

Moses answer was almost predictable – Because. It's just the way it is. Yes it was an enormous and exhausting job. Yes it took all his time and more. But somebody had to do it and he was somebody.

Jethro's advice was carefully thought out

It was only intended for the good of those involved.
It was given privately.
It was given with the proviso that if God did not endorse it, it should not be heeded.

Jethro was not challenging Moses wisdom or leadership, and he would not have been hurt if his suggestions had been rejected because as a priest of the Lord himself he also knew that God could lead differently – in a way that was not seemingly common sense.

Jethro as management consultant maybe left him a document listing the necessary qualifications he should look for in appointing additional managers.

Ability, God-fearing, honest and trust worthy, incorruptible and free from covetousness (so they would not take bribes). Moses could trust day to day government to men who fitted that description. Deuteronomy adds that he looked for men who were wise, understanding (discerning), and respected (experienced)" (Deut. 1:13)

Verses 18-22 could be lifted straight out of a management guide

18 Recognise workload limits, effectiveness decreases as work overload increases. God was all wise and all sufficient, at the Red Sea, with manna and water, against the Amalekites. Moses wasn't!

19 Benefit from the advice of older, more experienced employees.

20 Initiate and implement training programmes. Moses primary role was to represent the people before God and teach them His will.

21 Set up standards and screening to determine qualifications for potential leaders.

21 Spread the power base by organising structured management levels. Delegate to appropriate qualified men.

22 Reserve major policy decisions for top management - yourself.

Moses was humble and able to take advice from a less prominent man – Jethro. He was not insecure and was able to release responsibility appropriately.

How wise of God to use Jethro – the same advice from another may have been disastrous.

Had it come from Moses father (if he were alive) he may have felt threatened in that he wasn't trusted to do a good job.

Had it come from a colleague or peer he may have felt there was an underlying bid for supremacy when pointing out weaknesses.

Had it come from his wife it may have felt like unwarranted domestic interference – and what does a woman know about the world of work, leadership and men? As well as the rumours asking who was the source of the real power driving Moses.

Jethro was close enough to be honest, and distant enough to be unthreatening. He spoke his mind and then left leaving Moses to do what he saw fit. That's wisdom.

How good a relationship did we have with our parents or in-laws? Why do we want to resist advice from the older and more experienced? Why is humility hard? How can humility be expressed in our lives? How do we recognise humility in others?

Moses took the advice and appointed judges with the following job description **Deuteronomy 1:16-17** (Instructions to the judges, including a warning to adjudicate the people's cases justly.)

TIME PASSED BY

Numbers chapters 10-11. Some time after the twentieth [Numbers 10:11] (**twenty-third** (Num. 10:33) day of the second month of the second year – when then had left Sinai.

Aside

In Numbers 10 we read of Hobab, son of Reuel, the Midianite, Moses father in law was with the Israelites. That means Moses brother-in-law Hobab was with them. Most likely he came with Jethro but brotherly or protective love kept him close to his sister, Moses wife. When they were going to leave the region after a year or so at Sinai, Hobab makes to go home to Jethro. He is persuaded to stay and travel with the Israelites – no doubt his local knowledge would have assisted Moses since it was some time since he was last in the region.

God has already shown his recent anger with fire in the camp at the constant complaints of the people about the hardships God had supposedly brought upon the people. (Numbers 11:1-3)

Day after day Moses heard the continuing complaints of the people about their poor, nutritionally balanced and adequate divine diet.

Numbers 11:4b-5

You can't lead a people in the things of God if they are constantly moaning. It was so spiritually wearing. Finally Moses' patience ran out and he complained to God.

Moses has become discouraged and was close to despair.

Numbers 11:11-15

In verses 13 and 14 Moses invents his own problems (as Christians often do). In verse 15a he then proceeds to treat God as the source of these problems. But Moses had never been called by God to provide the people with meat.

The burden of leadership was wearing him out. He already had the authority to delegate his administrative responsibilities to others, as occurred already with the judges appointed, following the counsel of Jethro, in Exodus 18 (verses 13-26). They heard all the run of the mill civil disagreements. (*& Military leaders?*) . But the burden of spiritually leading God's people had become too much for one man.

In response, nevertheless, God treats the prophet with paternal patience and promises to empower with special clarity seventy more assistants under his authority. He would no longer have to bear even this burden alone anymore. **Numbers 11:16-17.**

70 men already known to be mature leaders. On them God would pour out his spirit, and then they would be able to share the spiritual burdens. **Numbers 11:25**
Compare Moses to a **candle lamp** , at which seventy others were lighted, without the original losing any of its brightness.

Note his humility, and similarity to Paul

NUMBERS 11:29 1 Corinthians 14:5 “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy”

So now Moses had 70 judges and 70 spiritual leaders to help him. Everything would be so easy from now on! Promised Land here we come. Nothing could stop them now, or could it?

Conclusion

So what?

I would suggest we should all strive to become spiritually mature and be eligible to take up leadership positions if God should so ask.

Spirit filled believers, God-fearing, honest and trustworthy, incorruptible and free from covetousness. Men and women who are wise, understanding, discerning, and respected for their experience.

If you meet OT criteria – then go on and look at what the church was told to look for in leaders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Indeed one day we all will.

Judging angels (1 Corinthians 6:3)

We will be kings and priests (Rev.1:6) **1 Peter 2:9-10**

For those of us who can find faults in our leaders, may we have the wisdom and grace of Jethro as we handle such potentially painful and explosive matters.

(Self controlled, hospitable, able to teach, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, not a recent convert, of a good reputation with outsiders, not overbearing, not quick tempered, loves what is good, upright, holy, disciplined, blameless, monogamous, temperate, respectable, not a drunk, manages family well, obedient children, no pursuit of dishonest gain, keeps hold of the deep truths, sincere and tested – See Study Bible page 1803)