

## Session 1

June 4, 2023

### JETHRO AND MOSES

#### Exodus 18:9-27

A *mentor* is a wise and experienced counselor. While the word was applied to a trusted advisor in Homer's ancient Greek epic the *Odyssey* (8<sup>th</sup> century BC), the popularity of *mentoring* is a relatively recent phenomenon. In Christianity, mentoring has become a more practical (and maybe more relevant?) form of *discipleship*. Experienced mentors are able to help less experienced believers not only understand God's word but also apply it in everyday circumstances. Sometimes a mentor is a friend, or a teacher, or a coach. Sometimes a mentor is part of the family, and that's what we see in Jethro.

**Solid foundation (vv. 9-16).** Mentoring requires a qualified mentor. It's not enough to be an interested party, or a self-proclaimed "life coach." Mentoring, by its very nature, requires someone who is experienced, knowledgeable, and deeply invested in the lives of whom he leads. We first meet Jethro in the land of Midian, where Moses fled after killing an Egyptian (Ex. 2). There (as in 18:1), Jethro is called a "priest of Midian," and referred to as *Ruel*, which means "friend of God." Hence, the evidence is that Jethro was a priest of the one true God, serving in the land of Midian (see also 18:12, where Jethro offered sacrifices). The point is that Jethro was more than just a bothersome father-in-law to Moses. He was a dedicated and fully engaged servant of God. Notice that Jethro's interest in Moses' administration was one of concern. He saw Moses spending much of his time in judgment, and the people lined up waiting for him. The system was clearly strained...if not broken. But rather than criticize, Jethro inquired first. He wanted to make sure he understood exactly what he was seeing. For reflection: *Notice that Jethro was wise enough not to just "fix things" for Moses. Remember that not everyone is open to an outsider just butting in!*

**Sound counsel (vv. 17-23).** Once Jethro had a clear picture of the issues Moses was facing, he was in a position to offer some counsel. Again, Jethro's involvement was out of compassion. Poor Moses was "wearing himself out" (v. 18), and the poor people were spending too much time standing around in line. The solution was also compassionate: it's too much for you, and you need some help! His counsel was simple and effective: *divide and conquer*. By delegating responsibility to trusted, faithful, and able men (v. 21), Moses could focus on the most important things and still remain "in charge" of the entire operation (vv. 22-23). Notice the way that Jethro conveyed his counsel: he didn't just tell Moses what to do but remembered (and respected) Moses' position before God...and kept both Moses and God in mind (see vv. 19 and 23). For reflection: *Moses was certainly open to his father-in-law's suggestion. What does this say about his character? How does that correlate to what was said about him in Numbers 12:3?*

**Successful results (vv. 24-27).** The mark of a good mentor is that people actually follow his advice! Verse 24 says that Moses *listened*...and *did* everything that Jethro said. Notice how closely verses 25 and 26 mirror Jethro's suggestions back in verses 21 and 22. Why? Because Moses trusted Jethro's wisdom, respected his opinion, and foresaw the benefits to himself and to the people. There were other benefits to the nation as well. Dividing the people into smaller groups required new leaders to emerge to oversee them. That meant more involvement at the lay

level, and the development of new potential mentors. When it was all said and done, everyone came out a winner. I kind of like the implication of verse 37. Once the plan was put into place, Jethro said goodbye to his son-in-law and left! He didn't stick around to oversee the new arrangement or offer more advice...and that's a pretty good principle for both mentors and fathers-in law! For reflection: *What other benefits to the people could be derived from Jethro's counsel? What do you think might have happened if Moses had rejected Jethro's suggestion?*