

What Reuel/Jethro Can Teach Us

Exodus 2:11-22

HUMC 20 June 2021

Pastor Paul

On this Father's Day, I have chosen a man to honor from Scripture who was known by the name of Jethro or Reuel and was the father-in-law to Moses. If you were to mention the name Jethro to those who grew up in the 1960's, many would think of the unforgettable Jethro Bodine Beverly Hillbillies.

But the Jethro in the Bible was a priest of God in the desert region south of the Sinai and father to Zipporah who married Moses.

By way of background, Moses was born of Jewish parents. Due to the Egyptian extermination policy of Hebrew baby boys, Moses was hidden in a reed basket and rescued by Pharaoh's daughter where he grew up a court prince. We pick up the story in Exodus 2:11-22.

¹¹ One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. ¹² Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³ The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?"

¹⁴ The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known."

¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. ¹⁶ Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷ Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.

¹⁸ When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, "Why have you returned so early today?"

¹⁹ They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock."

²⁰ "And where is he?" Reuel asked his daughters. "Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat."

²¹ Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. ²² Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, ^[a] saying, "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land." This is the Word of God.

When Moses fled Egypt, he was a fugitive from justice. He had killed an Egyptian who was beating on an Israelite slave. With just the clothes on his back, he walked about some 360 miles in about 20 days through a harsh and uninhabitable desert. And when he arrived at Jethro's tent, he must have been a sight to behold.

Jethro a descendent of Abraham and his concubine wife Keturah was a distant cousin of the Jewish people and it was this father of seven daughters who took Moses in.

The lifestyle of Jethro and his family was like the modern-day Bedouin shepherds who lived in black tents and grew their own vegetables. Jethro's role as a priest was to build an altar of stones and to offer animal sacrifices and incense to the God of heaven.

So when Moses fled Egypt, it was divine providence that led him to Jethro and his family in the desert. And I doubt Moses would have become the great leader of Israel if he did not come under the influence of Jethro.

It was a unique opportunity where Jethro had the opportunity to pass on to Moses all that he knew about God to include the priesthood and worship. This sacred history had been passed down from men of old such as Adam, Abel, Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Melchizedek, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and many generations later to Jethro.

But it was in that black tent or watching Jethro's sheep that Moses was taught the stories of creation, the fall of Adam, the tower of Babel, the flood, the call of Abraham, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his daughters, Joseph and his brothers.

And this was enough spiritual knowledge and understanding to for Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt and to the Sinai. And it should come as no surprise that Moses wrote the first 5 books of the Bible.

On this father's day 2021, we remember a priest of God who helped shape Moses's legacy. When I got married, I didn't realize that my in-laws were to become a second set of parents. It was

more than a friendship and the relationship was based upon respect.

Here is a thought provoking quote about fathers and father-in-laws.

- Those who get two father figures in their lives are really fortunate.

My father-in-law modeled a good work ethic and was a good provider. When he gave advice, he was not overbearing, but had a nice touch, perhaps like that of Jethro. Perhaps you have had similar or wonderful relationships with your fathers and father-in-laws.

Like any family, there was some kind of conflict between Moses and Zipporah and there is a vague reference about it in Ex 4:24-26. Moses, Zipporah and their son went to Egypt to rescue the Israelites from Pharaoh. We don't know the entire story, but Zipporah and their sons returned home to Jethro. It had to do with Moses failure to circumcise his male children and apparently Zipporah was opposed to it.

About a year later, it was Jethro shows up at the camp of the Israelites with Zipporah with the children.

Exodus 19: 6-8 Jethro had sent word to him, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons."

⁷ So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent. ⁸ Moses told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them.

Later on Jethro observed how Moses was doing everything himself and was becoming worn out. So Jethro suggested that he delegate his responsibilities to others, which Moses did and life had become easier.

Today, I think parents and in-laws do the same and give needed advice. It was all based upon respect and openness. In the years I have been married, we received advice from both sets of parents, and we followed it and were better for it.

So let me encourage all of us, no matter where we are in our relationships, to build upon our communications, to do what we can to help and rely on those loved ones who can help.

When I conduct pre-marriage counseling, I advise that problems with in-laws are best taken care of by that side of the family.

This helps in avoiding many family conflicts.

I also remind couples that they are marrying the whole family, not just the person. There is one question that I always ask to the bride and then to the groom. It is how do they get along with the other side of the family. One can predict some future concerns of the marriage based on the answers to those questions.

In closing, let me review what Jethro had done:

- He took in Moses when he was a fugitive and homeless.
- He gave Moses a job.
- He became Moses' father in law.
- He instructed Moses in the things of God that pertained to the priesthood and the traditions of the patriarchs.

- Jethro served as mediator and brought Moses and his wife and the children back together as a family.
- Jethro gave Moses some excellent advice on how to govern the Jewish people.

May we be a blessing and a source of encouragement to all of our families as Jethro was to Moses.