

# Division of Labor

Exodus 18:1-27

Israel survived the attack of Amalek and is now restructured into a more mature nation, equipped to serve God and grow in grace. Division of labor is a beautiful and bountiful work of the Spirit in the church that drives the proclamation of the gospel.

**NOTES:**

## **Blessed by Gentiles**

We don't know when Moses sent Zipporah and their two sons to Midian (vv2-3), but Jethro brings them back to the camp at the mountain (v5). Jethro is a God-fearing Gentile, and this chapter compares and contrasts to the previous conflict with Amalek. Amalek comes to fight; Jethro comes for blessing and peace (17:8; 18:7, 10). Joshua chooses men for war; Moses chooses them for peace (17:9; 18:25). Moses sits on the rock during the battle; he sits to judge the people (17:12; 18:13). His hands became too heavy for the staff; the burden of judging all day wears him out (17:12; 18:18). The battle lasted until evening, as did the judging (17:12; 18:13). Conflict with Amalek would continue generation to generation, and the rulers handled cases continually, resulting in peace (17:16; 18:23, 26). The comparison being made here is between two different kinds of Gentiles: those who curse God and those who bless Him. The Lord said to Abram, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). He also promised him, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you" (Gen. 17:6). Jethro is a priest of Midian (Ex. 2:16), and the Midianites are descended from Abraham (Gen. 25:2). Moses comes out to meet Jethro who is called his father-in-law twelve times in this chapter. He is a father who comes to bless. They ask one another about one another's *shalom* (v7), and Moses relates how the Lord has delivered them from all their trouble (v8). Jethro blesses the Lord for delivering Israel from the Egyptians; now he knows He is greater than all the gods because the Lord overcame them in plague after plague (v11). Jethro is a God-fearing priest of Midian who then offers an ascension offering and sacrifices to God. This scene reminds us of when Abraham defeated the kings and Melchizedek king of Salem and priest of God Almighty came out to meet him with bread and wine and bless him (Gen. 14:18-19). Melchizedek was a priest "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually" (Heb. 7:3). Jethro is similar. He offers sacrifices in the tent, which is a place of worship before the tabernacle is built, and all the elders participate (v12). Israel has been faithful in the fight, and now the Gentiles are worshiping the Lord. Hobab, Jethro's son and Moses' brother-in-law, ends up joining the Israelites, and his people are called the Kenites, an enduring ally of Israel (Num. 10:29-32; Judg. 1:16; 1 Sam. 15:6).

## **Non Negotiables**

Moses is back at it the next day, judging disputes and teaching the law all day (vv13, 16). Jethro sees how exhausting this is and instructs him to select judges from among the people who are capable, fear God, are of the truth, and hate covetousness (v21).

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These men would judge all the time and do justice in Israel. These four characteristics are non-negotiable for the job. To be capable means competence understanding and applying the law, and hard-working because they will be doing a lot of it (v22). This generation just came out of captivity, but they need people who can think and work as free men. To fear God means to be scared of Him. It's more than this, but not less. They must know they'll give an account to Him for their judgments, and that He knows about bribes, favors, and prejudice. If you fear God, you'd rather be just and hated, than unjust and loved. Judges must be men of truth, meaning concerned with evidence and justice, and not favor the poor or the rich: "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor" (Lev. 19:15; cf. Ex. 23:3). Partiality is changing how you rule based anything other than the merits of the case. Blind, biblical justice doesn't care about gender, class, or race. Last, these men must hate covetousness. This is much stronger than not coveting, which is also required. The idea of desiring what isn't yours, what God hasn't given to you, must be totally revolting to judges and all just people. The 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment provides a long list for a reason: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Ex. 20:17). These requirements are personal virtues necessary for public office.

## **Divided by the Holy Spirit**

"Division of labor" sounds like a title from an economics or management textbook, but this is because this monumental blessing influences even our mundane practices. Israel is a representative republic. These judges rule over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (v21). More difficult and important cases make their way up eventually to Moses, and the result is effective governance and peace for everyone (vv22-23). Moses takes Jethro's advice (vv24-26). God's people are wisely and effectively ordered as justice is consistently done at every level. Division of labor and administration are personal gifts of the Holy Spirit that allow us to serve one another and flourish in the church and the world. Israel holds up the staff, relying on the Lord, beats the Amalekites and now becomes an organized nation. In Acts 6, the elders can't serve the widows, so they appoint deacons, men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, to take care of it. As a result, the world of God spreads, the disciples multiply greater, and even many priests in Jerusalem become obedient to the faith (vv1-7). The Spirit is always at work providing for what we need now and in the time to come so that God would be glorified as the gospel goes out to the world.