

Today's Sermon

Bearing Burdens as a Kingdom of Priests (Exodus 18:13-19:6)

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, May 5, 2023

Please turn in God's Word to Ex 19 and let's continue our journey with Israel in the wilderness. Before the first baptisms a voice was crying in the wilderness '*repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.*' The true King was coming so John the Baptist baptized those who confessed their sins and committed to follow King Jesus in His kingdom rule over their life. Today we see that in Christine's baptism, and today we'll also see where that kingdom theme begins. Ex 19 is the 1st time God's Word refers to God's kingdom and the call of the kingdom for God's people. OT priests washed in water to serve in His kingdom. 19:6: '*and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests...*'

We're not Israel, and our nation isn't holy or a priestly kingdom, but God's people are to be this

- God's people are to be holy as He is holy, the nation of Israel was to be priests for nations
- Not just OT Israel, NT says '*Jesus...loves us...and made us a kingdom, priests to his God*' (Rev 1)
- Rev 5 says among all peoples, nations, Jesus '*made...a kingdom and priests to serve our God*'¹

Let's hear the call of the kingdom. Ex 18 shows us what serving our God as priests looks like:

- 1. God's people share counsel**
- 2. God's people bear burdens**
- 3. Godly leaders care for all God's people**

1st God's people share counsel.

The OT priests were to share God's whole counsel with others. And right before God tells all Israel they are His '*kingdom of priests,*' He shows them in ch 18. Moses couldn't and shouldn't be The Priest for a nation, the nation could and should be priests.

In ch 18 we'll see elders and other God-fearing men share counsel, as well as a newer believer.

In Ex 18:19 in the NKJV Jethro says: Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel... The context starts in Ex 18:1 with Jethro, the priest of Midian (Saudi Arabia area). He originally led a false religion serving other gods, but Moses shared a testimony of God saving them and in 18:10 Jethro praises the true God who saves. In v. 11 this Gentile now knows Yahweh alone is supreme over all gods. In v. 12 he worships and joins in covenant fellowship with Israel's priest

And he's no longer called 'priest of Midian,' he's converted and in the family of faith

18:12 *Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God [Jew-Gentile unity]*

This seems to be a sacred meal, welcoming to kingdom covenant grace, equal seats at the table.

- It's right after a war in ch 17 and this saved priest blesses God delivering from enemies
- Moses wrote earlier of another saved Gentile priest named Melchizedek outside of Israel
- After a war Melchizedek praised the true God above all '*who has delivered from your enemies*'
- Melchizedek '*priest of God Most High*' also ate bread with Israel's father in a covenant meal

That's Gen 14, Salem's king and priest; in Ex 18 Israel is a kingdom of priests

In this kingdom even newly saved priests have a place and voice: ¹³ *The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening.* ¹⁴ *When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?"* ¹⁵ *And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God;* ¹⁶ *when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws."* [seems good, teaching and peacemaking?] ¹⁷ *Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good.* ¹⁸ *You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.*

The word order of v. 17 is strong and emphatic, starting with 'not good.'² Same Hebrew phrase from Gen 2 where God saw and said '*it is **not good for man to be alone.***' Now God's Spirit moves Jethro to see and say it's not good for Moses to be alone, as independent counsel, as solo judge and jury and referee for family feuds. It's not good to be the sole source of information, or just sit and do a job while others stand around all day. 'Line up early, take a number, and stand in the sun with the person you have a dispute with till you're called?' Good for spousal conflict?

I get annoyed sitting at home with AC on if I'm on hold with 'unusually long call wait times'! Jethro says it can't all depend on you and it's not all about you, the people will be worn out and so will you by the heavy weight (or having to wait). In v. 19 he says listen to the voice of reason

'...I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, ²⁰ *and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do.* ²¹ *Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens.* ²² *And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.* ²³ *If you*

do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.”²⁴ So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said.

Judging in this context is interpersonal mediation, conflict-resolution

God’s people shared counsel for smaller disputes, Moses helped with bigger counseling cases, but even he didn’t have all wisdom. He brought cases to God but needed counsel to correct him.

He’s 80 years old. Can’t teach an old dog new tricks? An old believer can be taught new truths.

Moses had spent 40 years as a shepherd of animals, doing it alone, working by himself till God appeared at the burning bush to call him to lead Israel. But he can’t manage people like animals, especially not millions, or he’ll be literally saying ‘if I told you once I told you a million times!’

But those people could have leaders over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens for many things.

Moses couldn’t delegate parts of his old job to furry animals, but he must to faithful godly men.

It’s not a kingdom of a Priest. It must be plural priests, God’s people with God’s Spirit, wisdom

- Col 3:16 in one translation ‘*Teach and counsel each other with all...wisdom*’ (NLT, that’s all of us)
- In Rom 15:14 right after Paul talks about the power of the Spirit, he says he’s confident believers are able to admonish/instruct each other (or ‘competent to counsel,’ Jay Adams)
- In Ex 18 not everyone could handle every matter, they brought the hardest cases to Moses
- But Jesus said for all believers ‘*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*’

We’re to ministers of reconciliation, ambassadors³ for the Prince of Peace

Even a new believer in ch 18 helps make peace (end of v. 23). How can we counsel like Jethro?

Affection – in v. 7 there’s love and vested interest in him, his welfare, daughter, grandkids

Asking questions – not assuming motives or accusing, in v. 14 he asks to draw out the why

Advice for prayer – in v. 19 his advice if God is with it, is bring the people’s cases to God

Appealing to God’s leading – in v. 23 he tempers his counsel with ‘*God will direct you...*’

We can learn from how counsel is shared here. It’s easy to complain after the fact with a jab in a way that doesn’t help. But v. 7 has affection, asking how he’s doing before he helps. You may not bow to or kiss your in-laws (like Moses), but how can you love and

honor? Are you coming down on others critically, or coming alongside with a solution you can help with? Paul often wrote with affection first and thankfulness to those with problems he's gonna help. Jesus asked questions to draw out, even though He actually knew their hearts like we can't.

It's always good advice to pray about your advice, bring the case to God, trust He will direct. Bathe counsel with prayer and care before and after. Encourage counsel of other godly believers

With a multitude of counselors there's victory and safety⁴ for Moses and us
And that takes us from #1. God's people share counsel, to

#2. God's people bear burdens

In ch 17, Moses' arms were weary, he needed support, others to hold up literally. It doesn't say he asked for it, but Aaron and Hur came alongside to uplift and help bear the weight of the staff.

That was physical, but there's also emotional weight and weariness in 18:18 *'the thing is too heavy for you...'* But there's a way, end of v. 22 *'it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you'*

It's not just about delegation, it's about mobilization of others

As I said when we were in ch 17, don't just say 'if you ever need help, let me know,' offer help specifically to bear a burden. You see a single parent or lonely person, go, call, talk, text, write, ask if there's a burden you can bear in prayer. You see a lady balancing heavy plates entering a door, and come alongside her 'can I get the door for you, can I take something off your plate?'

Like Jethro's specific help in v. 23, if you do this, God will direct you, help His people endure.

Whose burden can you bear? Think of the weak, those in grief, or burdened who you can seek.

That's not just for leaders, that's the job of believers bearing burdens. The NT tells the whole church in Gal 6 if you see someone stuck, restore them in a spirit of gentleness, Gal 6:2 sums up **'Bear one another's burdens ...⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up ... let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.'**

Paul got weary, tempted to give up: *'we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength...that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God...You must also help us by prayer...'⁵* We need God and His people.

Relying on Him in prayer is a crucial way to help bear burdens

In v. 12 it mentioned elders of Israel as part of this. Even Elder Statesman Moses needed elders.

Numbers 11:14: *"I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me..." So the LORD said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put*

the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.”⁶

In the OT God’s Spirit anointed kings and priests, but His people are to be a kingdom of priests.

Not just elders or other leaders but a priesthood of believers has always been His kingdom plan. That’s a preview of Pentecost where the Spirit of Christ is put on all His people. By His wisdom they share ministry and bear burdens. Moses later gave more details on this looking back, Dt 1:

*“I spoke to you at that time...‘I alone am not able to bear you...How can I alone bear your problems and your burdens and your complaints? Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads...leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens... **judge righteously** between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. You shall **not show partiality in judgment**; you shall hear **the small as well as the great**; you shall **not be afraid in any man’s presence** ...’⁷*

No fearing man, no favoritism, just faithful impartial judges

God’s people share counsel, bear burdens, and

#3. Godly leaders care for all God’s people

We’ll study priests more in ch 19 next time, but in ch 18 we see GODLY LEADERS: Receive correction-Moses didn’t reject constructive corrective input in v. 17-18, he received it.

Moses was a godly leader who cared enough to truly listen to all. He was humble and teachable.

Moses didn’t say ‘what do you know, you’re a new believer, you just got saved the day before! Don’t tell me this is not good. This is *my* ministry, I don’t need constructive feedback or help!’

No, Moses listened to advice! Even to in-laws! Even to one new to the faith with fresh insight.

Represent their people-v. 19 says ‘*you represent the people before God and bring their cases to God...*’

The implication is representing their cares, not your own, casting their cares on God in prayer.

Godly leaders over 10 people or 50, 100 or 1,000 would represent their people’s cares to Moses.

The way Israel formed its government influenced America’s form of representative government

- Not pure democracy, locally nominated elected representatives (county, state, national)
- Ex 18 put in local judges who could appeal to a higher court (like appeals, supreme court)

- The principle of choosing a jury that represents the people of a community is here, too
- v. 21 says *'look for able men from all the people...'* not just Moses' friends, from all the people
- NASB *'select out of all the people...'* and Moses later said he asked each tribe to choose its leaders, Dt 1

Reveal God's way-v. 20 says warn by the Word and make known the way to walk, what to do.

- Say *'this is the way.'* And show them how to walk, train others who can teach others also
- As others share counsel, bear burdens, you can devote to prayer and ministering the Word

Revere God-v. 21 goes on *...from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe*

- Or *'men of truth, hating covetousness/those who hate dishonest gain/greedy gain'* (NKJV / NASB, LSB)
- They fear God and His truth more than man and what he'll say, can't be swayed, paid off
- Many world governments, esp. in 3rd world is marked by godlessness, corruption, bribery

I read that v. 21 in American history *'was directly cited by numerous Founding Fathers and had also been the subject of many influential sermons in the founding era...Noah Webster [wrote] "voting for public officers...choose for rulers just men who will rule in the fear of God (Ex 18:21)...If the citizens neglect their duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made not for the public good so much as for selfish... purposes; corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute laws; public revenues will be squandered by unworthy men; and the rights of citizens will be violated or disregarded.'*⁸

Really care for all-this chapter ends with all the people cared for at all times by godly leaders

- This isn't just for Israel's judicial system or civil government, it's for spiritual care, too
- It's for all, women showing women God's way, kids, caring, bearing burdens, WHW, etc
- Acts 20 says esp. church elders are to declare the whole counsel of God to all His blood bought people *'Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock...care for the church of God'*⁹
- 1 Tim 3 extends that to an elder's care for his own family, or *'how will he care for the church of God?'*

- 1 Pet 5 'shepherd the flock of God among you...those allotted to your charge...not for sordid gain'¹⁰ Sounds like Ex 18, elders shepherding an allotment of the flock, a number under their charge, and he says clothe yourself with humility toward all believers, for God gives grace to the humble [like Moses]
- Peter received correction from Paul, Apollos received correction from Priscilla, etc.
- In Acts 6 complaints arose with widows of Hebrew vs Greek background, so the apostles called the thousands to choose from among the people godly capable men to represent the ladies and their needs, so the apostles could devote to prayer and ministry of the Word
- NT elders/deacons are also called to be reverent, trustworthy men of truth who fear God
- In the NT it's always a plurality, never a solo pastor/elder (we have 4 but need more so pray for our elders in training, and others to help Pastor Mark, Pastor Corey, Steve, me)
- Our elder study Tuesday was 2 Tim 2: entrust truth to faithful men who can teach others

This Friday morning at 6 AM I'll be starting a new leadership study in the lobby. I'd invite any guys aspiring to be faithful men entrusted with truth so you can teach others also, Friday@6am.

We need help and we need training to reveal God's way to others, really care for those we teach

Any men who want to teach or lead studies on any level are welcome to join us

Last week you heard new members publically ask for care and corrective accountability in their lives, and the elders committed to them those scriptures I just read. No 1 man can do that alone for hundreds, but with our member list we divide it into 10s and 50s who can share their cares or prayer requests with an elder. And with difficult cases that elder can bring to the others. Each elder has a shepherding list 'allotted to their charge' for shepherding contacts, care, and prayer. If you don't get that yet and want member care in your life, just ask me or Mark, Corey, Steve.

I'm not Moses. We don't have Moses today. We have better: Jesus

In Dt 18 God promised another like Moses, not me, Messiah. He says '*come to me, all you who are weary and burdened...learn from me...my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*'¹¹ Jesus yokes up with us through His people so it's easier, the burden is lighter, and His commands aren't burdensome.

In every part of Exodus, we need to turn our eyes on Jesus. He never gets tired or worn out or burn out. He bears our burdens. He's the Wonderful Counselor and the Prince of Peace. Jesus shares ministry with His people, and is never too busy for us to bring big or small cases to Him and He brings us to God. He represents His people before the throne of God and cares for all His people at all times. He not only shows us the way, He is The Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one gets to the Father but thru Him. GOSPEL INVITATION, CLOSING THOUGHT

¹ Revelation 5:9-10 NIV84.

² “When *lō*’ precedes any part of the sentence other than the verb, it means the word or expression thus singled out is being ‘strongly emphasized’” - John D. Currid, *Exodus 1–18* (Carlisle, PA: Evangelical Press, 2000), 1:384.

³ 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

⁴ Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:6, etc.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.

⁶ Numbers 11:14-17 NKJV.

⁷ Deuteronomy 1:9-17 NKJV.

⁸ *The Founders Bible*, p. 149; Noah Webster, *History of the United States* (New Haven, CT: Durrie & Peck, 1832), p. 336-37.

⁹ Acts 20:27-28 ESV.

¹⁰ 1 Peter 5:2-3 NASB95.

¹¹ Matthew 11:28-30 NIV84.