



BURNOUT

Exodus 17:8–18:27

The mark of a great leader is having the humility to listen to good advice. Indeed, that's the mark of a wise person. Moses' example as both a great leader and wise person reminds us to appreciate those people God brings our way with godly counsel.

In this Wisdom Journey, we're going to see the Lord take Moses to school and teach him how to lead the Israelite nation more effectively. And as you probably know from experience, school isn't necessarily an easy time. Moses here is going to be enrolled by God in two challenging courses that will teach him some valuable lessons in leadership.

The first course involves conflict. It's recorded here in chapter 17 of Exodus. Now apparently, word gets out that the Israelites are encamped at Rephidim, where they have plenty of water, thanks to the Lord bringing water from the rock when Moses struck it.

The Amalekites were cousins of the Israelites. They had descended from Esau, Jacob's brother; and just as God prophesied, they were nomads who roamed the desert. They are probably eager to defeat and plunder the Israelites, and they no doubt want this supply of fresh water; so, they initiate an attack.

Moses tells Joshua to form an army, and the next day Moses goes to the top of a hill with his staff. Aaron and Hur join Moses. It's possible that Hur is the husband of Miriam, Moses and Aaron's sister.¹

Verse 11 describes the battle as Moses watches from the hilltop. We read here: "Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered

his hand, Amalek prevailed."

The raising of the staff represents the miraculous work of God. The problem is, Moses can't hold his hands up continuously without getting tired.

Now remember, since leaving Egypt, Moses has been pretty much a one-man band. He has led the people all by himself by God's power. But now Aaron *and* Hur have to support Moses' arms and hold them up until, as verse 13 tells us, "Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword."

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It took all three of these men, praying as it were, for God’s power to be revealed on that battlefield. So, think about this: “Joshua couldn’t have succeeded down there without Moses, but Moses couldn’t have succeeded without Aaron and Hur.”² This same lesson—that leaders need the help and support of others—is about to be expanded even more as we sail into chapter 18.

So, the first course God puts Moses through in school could be called “Conflict.” The second course here in chapter 18 of Exodus can be called “Change.” Conflict and change are difficult courses of instruction, aren’t they?

Well, to bring change, the Lord chooses a man Moses greatly respects. His name is Jethro; he’s a priest of Midian, and he happens to be Moses’ father-in-law. Moses’ wife and two boys have been staying with him back at the family farm in Midian. But now Jethro sends word to Moses:

“I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her.” Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. (verses 6-7)

That night over a long dinnertime, Moses tells Jethro all the Lord has done—and does he ever have some stories to tell!

We’re told here in verse 9, “Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians.”

The next day, Moses is back to work, and Jethro observes a long line of people coming to Moses all day long with disputes they want him to resolve. Jethro finally asks Moses in verse 14:

“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?”

He can see very clearly that if this continues Moses is going to burn out from exhaustion.

Moses explains in the next verse:

“The people come to me to inquire of God; 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.”

In other words, he’s saying, “I’m the only guy who can handle this responsibility. I’m the one representing God and bringing their cases to God. That’s the way I’ve been doing it since we left Egypt.”

Jethro is quick to respond, saying, “What you are doing is not good . . . You are not able to do it alone” (verses 17-18). He then offers wise counsel in verses 21-22:

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. And let them judge the people at all times.



Sphinx with proto-Sinaitic inscriptions, from Serabit el-Khadim



In other words, delegate and organize. “Moses, you need to delegate leadership to other men.”

And by the way, Moses is not to look for men who have leadership experience or know all the programs or are successful in business, but for those who *know and fear* God. Obeying God is *already* their highest priority.

And notice, Moses is to make sure these men love the truth. They are to be men of integrity, men who say no to what’s wrong and yes to what’s right.

Jethro emphasizes that they must be men who hate taking a bribe. In other words, Moses is to find men who cannot be bought—their character doesn’t have a price tag.

What will result from the selection of such men? Jethro tells Moses in verses 22-23, “It will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure.”

Burnout is not part of God’s plan for Moses, or any other leader for that matter. In fact, Jethro’s solution here implies that new leaders are going to be developed when this model of organization and delegation is implemented. Moses will actually bring onto his leadership team several thousand godly men. Imagine that potential.

Finally, the people are going to be well led. In verse 23 Jethro says, “All this people also will go to their place in peace.”

That word “also”—“all this people *also*”—means that not only are the people going to be satisfied, but “Moses, you will have some peace in your life as well.”

Share leadership, develop godly leaders, develop a team of committed believers to share the load—this is great advice to this very day.

Now, Moses could have said, “No! I’m the leader here. This is my ministry; it’s what God called me to, so

I’m going to make all the decisions around here.” That might sound like commitment, but Moses would have failed his schooling; he would have flunked these two courses had he tried to do it all alone. Instead of digging in his heels, verse 24 reveals a great character trait of Moses—humility: “So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said.”

Are you willing to share your authority? Are you willing to change the way you do things? Are you willing to listen to someone God has brought into your life to show where you can lead and live more effectively for Christ?

Whatever your leadership style might be, make sure you listen to the Jethro’s God brings into your life at just the right time; and respond in humility so that you can ultimately lead and serve more effectively for God’s glory—not yours, not mine, but God’s.

What did the victory over the Amalekites teach Israel and Israel’s leaders, including Moses? What does it say to you about how God works?

Why do you think some people are willing to risk burnout by refusing to delegate some of their responsibilities to others?

What are the primary qualities we should look for in those we choose to lead us in the church? Are you personally striving to develop these characteristics in your life?

¹ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Men of the Bible* (Zondervan, 1958), 151.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Delivered* (Chariot Victor, 1998), 92.

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