

APOSTOLIC SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

for *Yitro*

by Mark Huey posted 06 February, 2010 www.outreachisrael.net

Matthew 5:21-30; 15:1-11; 19:16-30

Mark 7:5-15; 10:17-31

Luke 18:18-30

Acts 6:1-7

Romans 2:17-29; 7:7-12; 13:8-10

Ephesians 6:1-3

1 Timothy 3:1-14

2 Timothy 2:2

Titus 1:5-9

Hebrews 12:18-29

James 2:8-13

1 Peter 2:9-10

“Leadership Matters”

The Torah portion we are considering this week, *Yitro* (Exodus 18:1-20:23), is perhaps best known for including the Ten Commandments that Moses received from the Holy One on Mount Sinai. After a few months (Exodus 19:1) of recovering from the whirlwind of activity around their escape from Egypt, and some initial challenges with water and food needs—plus a serious skirmish with the dreaded Amalekites—the fleeing Israelites finally settle down at the foot of what becomes known as the “mount of God” (Exodus 18:5). It is here at Mount Sinai that Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law for whom our reading is titled, arrives with Moses’ wife Zipporah and their two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. It is apparent from the narrative that Moses respects the wisdom of Jethro, as he honors him with a sacrificial meal and an audience of Aaron and the elders of Israel (Exodus 18:12). Eventually, when Jethro witnesses what appears to be the day-to-day workings of the fledgling nation that Moses leads, he voices some serious concerns about a need to alter the workload—in order to delegate some of the overwhelming leadership tasks to qualified candidates (Exodus 18:17-18).

While the Apostolic Writings naturally, and for obvious reasons, have a number of references to the Ten Commandments—primarily because of the foundational nature of them to Biblical instruction—there are also a significant number of references to how Messiah followers should choose or recognize leaders in their respective assemblies or groups. Today, with all of the mixed messages being promulgated in the broad Messianic community of faith, it is critical that the Body of Messiah know what the Apostolic Writings inform us about finding appropriate leaders. In this time, as we steadily approach the End of the Age, proper leadership really does matter. I would submit that the wise counsel, established by Jethro to Moses, has been expanded by further qualifications and more specific qualifications seen in the Apostles’ instruction. A review of some of the relevant verses can help people ascertain whether proper godly leaders are in positions of authority and responsibility in their respective groups or assemblies.

First, let us read the counsel of Jethro, and how Moses responded affirmatively to his recommendations:

“Moses’ father-in-law said to him, ‘The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people’s representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. **Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them *as* leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.** Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you. If you do this thing and

God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace.’ So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. They judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge. Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land” (Exodus 18:17-27).

Obviously, Jethro observed that Moses was going to exhaust himself with all of the work, so he recommended choosing leaders who were capable of handling different size responsibilities. Hence, Jethro recommended individual leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens—but the qualifications for each of these positions were identical. The four common denominators were (1) the ability to lead, (2) the necessity to fear God, (3) individuals guided by truth, and (4) who would hate dishonest gain.

Able, capable, or accomplished persons who have already proven their ability—in whatever their chosen field is—means that they are proficient in whatever they have chosen to do. Additionally, a genuine fear of the Lord was critical. Remember how Proverbs 9:10 so eloquently states, “**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.**” Consequently, if one truly feared the Lord more than self ability or self worth, then the wisdom and understanding needed to deal with judging controversies would be present. Thirdly, the requirement for truth to be demonstrated, as leaders maintained their word and displayed trustworthiness in their dealings with others, was essential. I cannot help but be reminded by a Psalm composed several centuries later, appropriately summarizing what a person of truth entails:

“A Psalm of David. O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; he swears to his own hurt and does not change; he does not put out his money at interest, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken” (Psalm 15:1-5).

Finally, hating dishonest gain reveals how leaders must be above the love of money—something which is the cause of much evil in the world:

“For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:10).

It is upon these foundational building blocks for leadership, as stated by Jethro, that we have to consider the kind of people our leaders are. Without these critical components able to be seen, those in positions of leadership are often liable to fail in their judgment—and misuse, if not abuse their authority as designated leaders—of whatever size religious group, organization, or assembly they have responsibility for. Leaders are there to serve the people, and while they deserve appropriate respect and support, they are by no means there to serve their own self interests!

After the resurrection of Messiah Yeshua, and the expansion of the good news as seen in the Book of Acts, we can see how the Apostles followed the Torah’s instructions in the choosing of leaders. The leaders of the First Century Messianic movement were filled with the Holy Spirit, and possessed significant discernment in being able to determine who could serve the people the best. One person who was full of faith and the Spirit was Stephen, who was chosen to lead in administrating the needs of the broad groups of Jewish Believers:

“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. **Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.** But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose

Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:1-6).

Obviously, without the supernatural enablement of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, leaders or teachers would not have the spiritual enlightenment to properly discern how or what to teach. As the Apostle Paul further relates to the Believers in Corinth, the mind of Messiah is critical for walking in the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:16) and being led by the Spirit (cf. Romans 8:14):

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. **But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.** But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM [Isaiah 40:13]? **But we have the mind of Messiah**” (1 Corinthians 2:12-16).

Within the Pauline letters, we see that the good news continued to spread and new Believers in Yeshua formed various assemblies and fellowship groups. Part of Paul’s responsibility was to convey further delineation about what was required for leadership positions among the brothers and sisters, something most clearly seen in the Pastoral Epistles. In both 1&2 Timothy and Titus, Paul enhances what is expected of those who lead the sheepfold of Messiah Yeshua. In his instruction to Timothy in Ephesus, and Titus in Crete, he summarizes a number of things that have informed various leadership structures in the Body of Messiah up until today:

“It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a work he desires *to do*. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the [assembly] of God?), *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the [assembly]*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women *must likewise be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Messiah Yeshua” (1 Timothy 3:1-13).

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:5-9).

The critical thing for the Body of Messiah *especially today* is to be consciously informed by these specific guidelines, so that capable godly leaders are present, who are able to handle the responsibilities of serving the sheepfold of the faithful. Being acquainted with the First Century recommendations, and implementing them properly in a Twenty-First Century setting, is certainly something that is a challenge for many denominations and groups. Most especially to be looked out for, is how seemingly-talented people are able to outwardly display some leadership

abilities—but mostly because of their skills in entertaining or mesmerizing people with slippery words or musical shows, they really are unable to truly lead or teach. Yeshua warned His ancient followers about false prophets who are really wolves in sheep's clothing:

“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’ [Psalm 6:8]” (Matthew 7:15-23).

Even though some of these false prophets might accomplish some works in the name of Yeshua, the sad testimony is that the Lord never knew them. The admonition is to beware of such people and others (cf. Philippians 3:2).

Lamentably, far too many, who should know better, do not consult the Scriptures when selecting their leaders, or when determining where they should receive their spiritual nourishment. This leads often to grave problems in the assembly—because leadership matters on so many levels! Of course some things like a love for money or drunkenness might be hidden by a person. But one of the most obvious and blatant signs that someone is not equipped for leadership would be leadership and child-rearing within the home. It is difficult to conceal ungodly or hypocritical actions from children, who could very well be manifesting their parents' actions. Sadly, too many times people overlook home lives of their spiritual leaders.

For someone such as myself, who has been a Believer in Yeshua for over thirty years, I find it quite useful to reflect back on some of the teachers or leaders who have influenced my walk of some. *I know of those in spiritual leadership who have done this both positively and negatively—and you probably do as well.* If you go back and read the guidelines of Jethro's and the Apostles', you might note that if you had been more careful in making sure that the main characteristics of service were present in your leaders or teachers—you could have perhaps minimized past disappointments. On the other hand, you should also note that when the same service characteristics are a part of your leaders' or teachers' character traits, you were not discouraged but inspired to grow spiritually into God's plan for your life.

Today, with many spiritual and secular distractions vying for our time and attention, it is critical to heed the instructions found in the Holy Writ—when it comes to either following leaders, or letting various teachers fill our hearts and minds with instruction. If the Messianic community of faith is going to reach the maturity level it should have, and possess the long lasting influence on society that it is capable of, **then its leadership matters.**

Until the restoration of all things...

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