

Bible Background

We learned in Session 2 that the Book of Exodus tells the story of God delivering God's people from slavery in Egypt. What began with several women working together to save boys born to Hebrew women continued with Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. Before arriving in the land God would provide for them, the Israelites spent a considerable amount of time in the desert—particularly at a place called God's mountain (also called Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb), where our story takes place.

Between the time he was adopted into the pharaoh's household as a young child and when he led the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses spent time in a place called Midian, where he had married a woman named Zipporah. Zipporah was the daughter of Jethro, who was a Midianite priest. Zipporah and Moses had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. As the events of the Israelites' departure from Egypt unfolded, however, Moses sent his family to live with Jethro. Now Jethro has brought Moses' family back to him at this camp on God's mountain.

Moses was charged as the leader of the Israelite people and had been leading them single-handedly. Jethro witnessed Moses presiding over the people on his own and advised Moses against doing it all on his own. "What you are doing isn't good. You will end up totally wearing yourself out, both you and these people who are with you" (Exodus 18:17-18). The Hebrew word for "wearing yourself out" literally means "to wither." This idea of "withering" would be immediately understood by agricultural societies who heard it. In today's more technological societies, a different word is more widely understood: "burnout." Jethro is hoping to spare Moses from burning out.

Jethro gives Moses advice: Bring the people's disputes before God, explain God's regulations and instructions to the people, and seek out capable helpers to lead the Israelites. Invite those leaders to judge minor disputes so that Moses can be free to judge the more difficult ones. Jethro also tells Moses to make sure that the advice he gives the Israelites matches up with what God commands. He reminds Moses that God's acts in Egypt demonstrate God's supremacy over any other gods, and that the ultimate source for judicial insight is God. But Jethro also understands Moses' call to be God's intercessor for the Israelites, and this lays the foundation for Moses to be the one who gives God's law to the Israelites later in the Book of Exodus.

God doesn't want us to wither or burn out. God knows we can accomplish great things when we team up! Heroes respond to God's call to work together. Jethro taught Moses this important lesson, and the Israelites move forward with their new method of governance. Through the encounter, we are given a great example of how being a hero means working together. At Hero Hotline VBS, we learn how much good we can do when we work as a team!



Bible Story

Jethro Mentors Moses
Exodus 18

Hotline Verse

So let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.
(Romans 14:19)

Hotline Tip

Heroes are called to...
Work Together!

Teacher Tip

This Bible Background feature is a supplemental aid provided for you, the Storyteller, to give context for each session's story before you teach on it. You may share this information with your Heroes, if desired, but it is not a recommended portion of the intended lesson.