

Exodus 18:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.

Analysis

And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge—Jethro's organizational plan establishes distributed justice: routine cases handled locally, exceptional cases escalated to Moses. The phrase 'at all seasons' (בְּכָל־עֵת, b'khol-et) means continuous availability—justice isn't occasional but constant. The distinction between 'great matter' (דָּבָר הַגָּדוֹל, davar hagadol) and 'small matter' (דָּבָר־קָטָן, davar-qaton) requires wisdom to discern what requires higher authority. The benefit 'so shall it be easier for thyself' addresses Moses' burden, while 'they shall bear the burden with thee' implements burden-sharing. This delegation doesn't diminish Moses' authority but extends it through subordinates, modeling Christ's distribution of ministry through the church (Eph 4:11-12).

Historical Context

This judicial hierarchy became the pattern for Israel's governance throughout their history. Local judges handled routine matters; exceptional cases reached national leaders (cf. Deut 1:9-18).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does delegation that retains final authority differ from abdication?
2. What does 'bearing burden with thee' teach about shared ministry versus solitary hero leadership?

Interlinear Text

וְשִׁפְטוּ And let them judge H8199	אֶת H853	הָעָם the people H5971	בְּכָל H3605	עֵת at all seasons H6256	וְהָיָה H1961	כָּל H3605
הַדָּבָר matter H1697	וְהָיָה and it shall be that every great H1419	יָבִיאוּ they shall bring H935	אֵלַי H413	וְכָל H3605	הַדָּבָר matter H1697	
הַקָּטָן unto thee but every small H6996	וְשִׁפְטוּ And let them judge H8199	הֵם H1992	וְהָיָה so shall it be easier H7043	מֵעַל יָדְךָ H5921		
וְנָשָׂא for thyself and they shall bear H5375	אֹתָם H854					

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 11:17 (Parallel theme): And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.

Exodus 18:26 (Judgment): And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves.

Leviticus 24:11 (Parallel theme): And the Israelitish woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD, and cursed. And they brought him unto Moses: (and his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan:)

Numbers 15:33 (Parallel theme): And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.

Numbers 36:1 (Parallel theme): And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near, and spake before Moses, and before the princes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel:

Numbers 27:2 (Parallel theme): And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying,