

1. Exodus 18:27

(כז) וישלח משה את יתרו וילך לו אל ארצו: (פ)

(27) Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way to his own land.

2. Numbers 10

(א) וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר: (ב) עשה לך שתי חצוצרות כסף מקשה תעשה אתם והיו לך למקרא העדה ולמסע את המחנות: ... (יב) ויסעו בני ישראל למסעיהם ממדבר סיני וישכן הענן במדבר פארן: (יג) ויסעו בראשונה עלפי ה' ביד משה: ... (כט) ויאמר משה לחבב בן רעועאל המדיני חתן משה נסעים! אנחנו אלהימקום אשר אמר ה' אתו אתן לכם לכה אתנו והטבנו לך כיה' דבר טוב עלי ישראל: (ל) ויאמר אליו לא אלהי אלהי ארצי ואל מולדתי אלהי: (לא) ויאמר אלינא תעזב אתנו כי! עלפן ידעת חנתנו במדבר והיית לנו לעינים: (לב) והיה כיתלך עמנו והיה! הטוב ההוא אשר יטיב ה' עמנו והטבנו לך: (לג) ויסעו מהר ה' דרך שלשת ימים וארון בריתה' נסע לפניהם דרך שלשת ימים לתור להם מנוחה: (לד) וענו ה' עליהם יומם בנסעים מן המחנה: (ו) (ס) (לה) והי בנסע הארון ויאמר משה קומה! ה' ופצו איבדי וינסו משנאיך מפניך: (לו) ובנהה יאמר שובה ה' רבבות אלפי ישראל: (ט) (ס)

(1) The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: (2) Have two silver trumpets made; make them of hammered work. They shall serve you to summon the community and to set the divisions in motion.... (12) and the Israelites set out on their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai. The cloud came to rest in the wilderness of Paran. (13) When the march was to begin, at the LORD's command through Moses,... (29) Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which the LORD has said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will be generous with you; for the LORD has promised to be generous to Israel." (30) "I will not go," he replied to him, "but will return to my native land." (31) He said, "Please do not leave us, inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness and can be our guide. (32) So if you come with us, we will extend to you the same bounty that the LORD grants us." (33) They marched from the mountain of the LORD a distance of three days. The Ark of the Covenant of the LORD traveled in front of them on that three days' journey to seek out a resting place for them; (34) and the LORD's cloud kept above them by day, as they moved on from camp. (35) When the Ark was to set out, Moses would say: Advance, O LORD! May Your enemies be scattered, And may Your foes flee before You! (36) And when it halted, he would say: Return, O LORD, You who are Israel's myriads of thousands!

Question 1: Is this a different story from Shemot 18? Is Yitro = Chovev?

3. Exodus 2:18-21

(יח) ותבאנה אל רעועאל אביהן ויאמר מדוע מהרתן בא היום: (יט) ותאמרן איש מצרי הצילנו מיד הרעים וגם דלה דלה לנו וישק אתה הצאן: (כ) ויאמר אל בנותיו ואני למה זה עזבתן אתהאיש קראן לו ויאכל לחם: (כא) ויואל משה לשבת אתהאיש ויתן את צפרה בתו למשה: (18) When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" (19) They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." (20) He said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to break bread." (21) Moses consented to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as wife.

4. Rashi on Exodus 18:1-2

(ב) יתרו. שבע שמות נקראו לו: רעועאל, יתרו, יתרו, חובב, חפר, קני, פוטיאל

JETHRO — He was called by seven names: Reuel, Jether, Jethro, Hobab, Heber, Keni and Putiel.

5. Al Hatorah

"Chovav *ben* Reuel" – Identifying both Chovav and Reuel with Yitro creates an almost insurmountable difficulty in understanding the words "Chovav *ben* Reuel" in Bemidbar 10:29.⁴ ...

Choten – This position solves all of the Yitro/Reuel/Chovav problems by employing just the single method of giving multiple names for the same person, and does not need to resort to expanding the semantic field of the term *choten* beyond its basic meaning of father-in-law.

Shemot 18 and Bemidbar 10 – Identifying Chovav with Yitro necessitates an examination of the relationship between the stories of Yitro's departure in Shemot 18:27 and Moshe asking Chovav to remain with the nation in Bemidbar 10. Why would Moshe send Yitro away in Shemot 18 but beg him to stay in Bemidbar 10? R"E HaModai in Mekhilta Yitro Amalek 2 conflates the two stories... To facilitate this position, R"E HaModai reinterprets *vayshalach* as the giving of gifts.... In contrast, according to R. Yehoshua in the Mekhilta as developed by Peirush HaRosh Shemot 18:4, Moshe actively sent Yitro away in the first year so that he would not be present for the Decalogue – see Chronology of Shemot 18. Later, though, when Yitro came back after the revelation, Moshe requested that he remain with the people and Yitro assented.

6. Mechilta D' Rabbi Yishamel 18

וישלח משה את חותנו, ר' יהושע אומר, שלחו בכבודו של עולם; ר' אלעזר המודעי אומר, נתן לו מתנות רבות; שמתוך תשובה שנתן לו אתה למד, (שנא) **במדבר י'** (אל נא תעזבו אותנו. אמר לו, אתה נתת לנו עצה טובה ועצה יפה והמקום הודה לדברך, אל נא תעזבו אותנו. אמר לו, כלום הנר מהנה אלא במקום החושך, וכי מה הנר מהנה בין חמה ולבנה, אתה חמה, ואהרן אחיך לבנה, מה יעשה הנר ביניכם; אלא הרני הולך לארצי ואגיר לכל בני מדינתי ואביאם לתלמוד תורה ואקרבם תחת כנפי השכינה. יכול שהלך ולא עשה, ת"ל) **שופטים א** (ובני קני חותן משה עלו מעיר

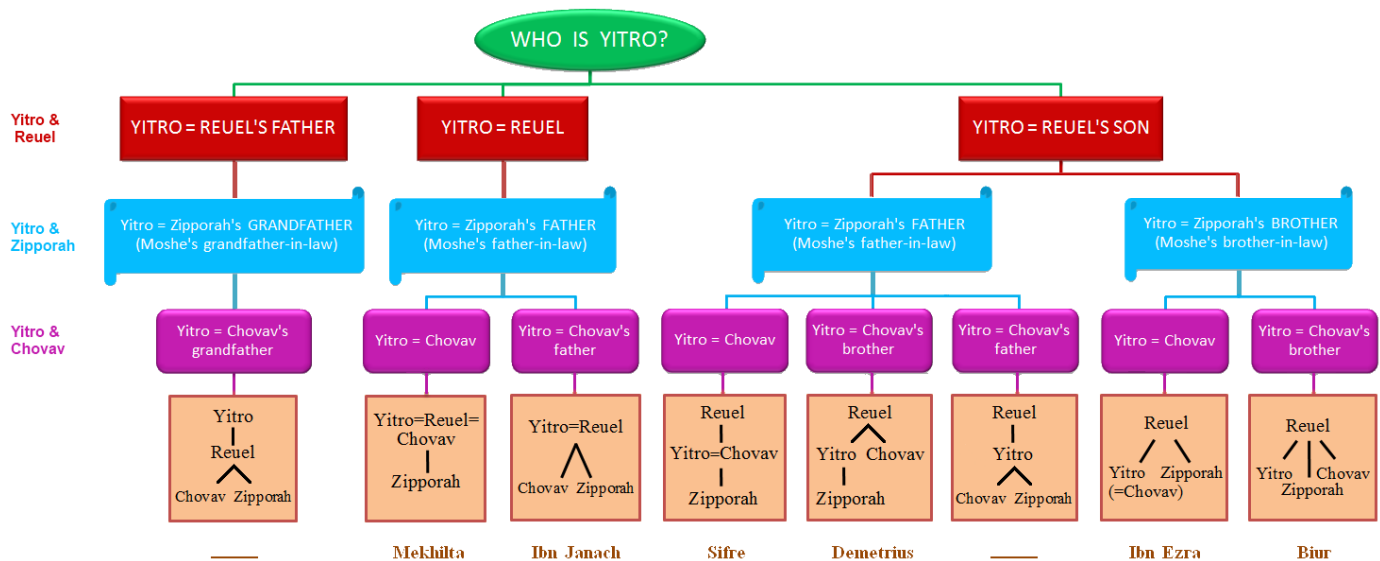
התמרים. ואומר וילך וישב את העם

R. Elazar Hamodai says: He sent him with all the honor in the world, as is seen in his (Moses') response to him, as it is written ([Numbers 10:30](#)) "I pray you, do not leave us," telling him: You gave us good and beautiful counsel, and the Lord consented to your words. "I pray you, do not leave us." Yithro replied: Is a candle of benefit other than in a place of darkness? Can sun and moon benefit from a candle? You are the sun and Aaron your brother is the moon. What can a candle do between you? Let me go to my land and I will convert all of my countrymen and bring them to the study of Torah and under the wings of the Shechinah. One might think that he went but did not do so. It is, therefore, written ([Judges 1:16](#)) "And the children of Keni, the father-in-law of Moses, went up from the city of date-palms," and (Ibid.) "and they went and settled with the people," ...

7. Al HaTorah

Chovav in Bemidbar 10 – Ramban and Shadal both agree that Yitro and Chovav are the same person, but they disagree as to how many visits he made and what ultimately became of him. Ramban thinks that Yitro converted,²⁸ and he consequently assumes²⁹ that Yitro/Chovav acceded to Moshe's request to remain with the Children of Israel (see Did Yitro Ever Return). Therefore, Ramban says that Yitro traveled back and forth,³⁰ going home in the first year to convert his family,³¹ but returning in the second year and ultimately remaining with the nation. According to Shadal, however, Yitro/Chovav arrived in the first year, remained until the second year but did not convert (see here), and left when the Children of Israel left the area of Mount Sinai³² to begin their journey to the land of Israel. According to him, Shemot 18:27 describes the same departure of Yitro which happened only in Bemidbar 10:29, in the second year.

Chovav in Bemidbar 10 – Mendelssohn posits that Yitro and Chovav were not the same person, but rather brothers (see Yitro's Names), and thus there is no contradiction between Yitro's departure in Shemot 18 and Chovav's presence in Bemidbar 10. However, Ibn Kaspi⁶ assumes that Yitro is Chovav, and therefore, he needs to say that Yitro traveled back and forth,⁷ going home in the first year but returning in the second year. Chizkuni^{18:13} and Peirush HaRosh Shemot 18:4 also assume that Chovav and Yitro are the same person, but they offer a Pesikta based alternative that Moshe sent Yitro away only temporarily so that he would not be present for the revelation at Sinai, and that Yitro returned to the Israelite camp immediately after the Decalogue.



8. Pesikta D.Rav Kahana

אילו ישראל' ובשמחתו לא יתערב זר (משלי שם) זה יתרו וישלח משה את חתנו וילך לו אל ארצו (שמות יח כז) מה כת' בתריה בחדש

9. Ibn Ezra Shemot 18:1

ולפי דעתי, שלא בא רק בשנה השנית אחר שהוקם המשכן, ... ועתה אפשר למה נכנסה פרשת יתרו במקום הזה, בעבור שהזכיר למעלה הרעה שעשה עמלק לישראל, הזכיר כנגדו הטובה שעשה יתרו לישראל. וכתוב ויחד יתרו על כל הטובה (שמות יח ט), ונתן להם עצה טובה ונכונה למשה ולישראל, ומשה אמר לו, והיית לנו לעינים (במד' י, לא), והטעם שהאיר עיניהם. ...

10. Ramban to Shemot 18:1

וכן נראה לי שאמר כאן (בפסוק כז) וישלח משה את חתנו וילך לו אל ארצו, שהיה זה בשנה הראשונה, והלך לו אל ארצו וחזר אליו. ויתכן שהלך שם לגייר את משפחתו וחזר למשה ועודנו בהר סיני כי קרוב הוא למדין, כמו שהזכרתי, שהרי בנסוע המחנה באייר בשנה שנייה כשאמר לו משה נוסעים אנחנו לכה אתנו (במדבר י כט), וענה אותו לא אלק כי אם אל ארצי ואל מולדתי אלק (שם ל), התחנן לו משה מאד ואמר לו אל נא תעזוב אותנו וגו' והיית לנו לעינים, והיה כי תלך עמנו והיה הטוב ההוא אשר ייטיב ה' עמנו והטבנו לך (שם לא לב), ולא השיב אותו דבר, ונראה שקבל דבריו ועשה כרצונו ולא עזבם:

אבל בימי שאול היו בניו עם עמלק ובאו והתחברו עוד אל ישראל...

And so [too] does it appear [correct] to me that [that which] it stated here (Exodus 18:27), "And Moshe sent away his father-in-law and he went his way to his land," was in the first year, and he went to his land and returned to [Moshe afterwards] - and it is likely that he went to convert his family, and he returned to Moshe while he was still at Mount Sinai, since it is close to Midian, as I have mentioned. As behold, when the camp traveled in Iyar of the second year, when Moshe said to him, "We are traveling [...] Come with us," and Yitro answered him, "I will not go, but will return to my native land," and Moshe supplicated him greatly and said to him, "Please do not leave us, etc. and you will be to us like eyes. So if you come with us, we will extend to you the same good that the Lord grants us" (Numbers 10:29:32), he did not respond at all, and [so] it appears that [Yitro] accepted [Moshe's] words and did according to his will and did not leave them. **However** [we find that] in the days of Shaul, his children were with Amalek and they came and reconnected with Israel ...

Question 2 : Did Yitro Agree to Stay?

11. Judges 1:16

(טז) וּבְנֵי קִינִי חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה עָלוּ מֵעִיר הַתְּמָרִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יְהוֹדָה מִדְּבַר יְהוֹדָה אֲשֶׁר בְּנֶגֶב עֲרָד וַיָּלֶךְ וַיָּשֶׁב אֶת־הָעָם:

(16) The descendants of the Kenite, the father-in-law of Moses, went up with the Judites from the City of Palms to the wilderness of Judah; and they went and settled among the people in the Negeb of Arad.

12. Judges 4:11

(יא) וַחֲבֵר הַקִּינִי נִפְרָד מִקְלִין מִבְּנֵי חֲבֵב חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּט אֶהָלֹן עֲדָאֵלֹן בְּצַעֲנִים] אֲשֶׁר אֶת־קֶדֶשׁ:

(11) Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, descendants of Hobab, father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent at Elon-bezaananim, which is near Kedesh.

13. I Samuel 15:6

(ו) וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל־הַקִּינִי לְכוּ סֹרוּ רְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּלִּי פֶּן־אֶסְפְּדָם עִמּוֹ וְאַתָּה עֲשִׂיתָה חֶסֶד עִם־כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵלְוֹתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּסֹּר קִינִי מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּלִּי:

(6) Saul said to the Kenites, "Come, withdraw at once from among the Amalekites, that I may not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they left Egypt." So the Kenites withdrew from among the Amalekites.

14. Sefornio Shemot 18:1

(כז) וישלח משה את חותנו. כי לא רצה ללכת עם ישראל לארץ, כאמרו לא אלך כי אם אל ארצי ואל מולדתי אלך (במדבר י, ל). וזה אולי מצד זקנתו כענין ברזלי באמרו ישוב נא עבדך ואמות בעירי, עם קבר אבי ואמי (ש"ב יט, לח) אבל בני יתרו הלכו עם ישראל לארץ בלי ספק, כאמרו ובני קיני חותן משה עלו מעיר התמרים וכו' (שופטים א, טז) ועליהם אמר בלעם איתן מושבך כו' (במדבר כד, כא):

15. Al Hatorah

Nobody Returned: Yitro never returned, and neither he nor his descendants ever joined Israel.

[Chronology](#) – According to Malbim and Shadal, Yitro came in the first year and stayed until the second year when he went home. Cassuto, on the other hand, holds that Yitro first arrived only in the second year, after the building of the tabernacle, and left as the nation was about to leave Sinai in the second year.

[Yitro \(Shemot 18\) and Chovav \(Bemidbar 10\)](#) – According to these commentators, Yitro and Chovav are the same person and the departure described in Shemot is equivalent to the story in Bemidbar. Yitro's leaving is mentioned in Shemot only to complete the pericope (להשלים את הענין), but the event actually took place only in the second year, as described in Bemidbar where the full parting conversation is recorded.²

[Conversion](#) and Yitro's decision to leave – According to Shadal and Cassuto, Yitro does not convert. Shadal points out that had Yitro converted, it would not make sense that he would insist on returning to Midyan when Moshe asks him to join the nation. Malbim, however, thinks Yitro did convert. He explains that Yitro thought he could contribute more by returning to his land and teaching others to believe in Hashem.

Keinites and Reikhavites:

Shadal attempts to show that there is no evidence of any of Yitro's descendants being a part of the Children of Israel.³ If they had, it would be implausible that they would be on good terms with or living amongst enemies such as the Canaanites, Sisera, and the Amalekites.⁴ ...

Only Yitro's Family Joined: Yitro did not return, but his relatives either stayed or later joined the nation. This position subdivides regarding the identity of these relatives:

- ☐ Yitro never returned, but Chovav remained

[Chronology](#) – According to the Biur, Yitro arrived before the Decalogue and returned to Midyan the day after arriving and advising. In contrast, Hoil Moshe holds that Yitro came only after the receipt of the Decalogue. It is unclear when Chovav arrived. The Hoil Moshe in Bemidbar 10 says that the Israelites bumped into Chovav on the way from Mt. Sinai to Midbar Paran, and he joined

them.⁸

Does Chovav stay – While it is clear from Shemot 18:27 that Yitro departs, the verses in Bemidbar 10 are silent regarding Chovav's final decision.⁹ Shadal and the Hoil Moshe both suggest that he remained.¹⁰ Hoil Moshe adduces proof for this position from Chovav's silence in response to Moshe's plea and from the fact that his descendants can later be found among the Israelites in Shofetim 1,4... **Keinites** – According to Shadal and the Hoil Moshe, these are Chovav's descendants who continued to live among the nation after their ancestor joined.

וישלח – As the leave-takings in Shemot 18 and Bemidbar 10 are happening at different times and involving distinct individuals, it would not be contradictory to say that Moshe sent Yitro away while later asking Chovav to stay. Nonetheless, it is surprising why Moshe would do so. Thus, the Biur explains that "וישלח" is not an active sending away but rather an honorary escort.

– **Yitro=Chovav never returned, but his descendants joined the Children of Israel**

SOURCES: [R"E HaModai in Mekhilta DeRabbi Yishmael](#),¹³ [Rashi](#), [Ibn Ezra](#), [Radak](#), [Ralbag](#), [Abarbanel](#), [Seforno](#).

Chronology – R"E HaModai, Rashi and Abarbanel suggest that Yitro came in the first year, remained until the second, and then left. Ibn Ezra and Ralbag hold that he first arrived only after the building of the Tabernacle in the second year and left shortly thereafter.

Yitro (Shemot 18) and Chovav (Bemidbar 10) – This position identifies Yitro with Chovav and the leave-taking described in Shemot 18 with that detailed in Bemidbar 10.

Conversion – Ibn Ezra holds that Yitro was always a monotheist while the other commentators suggest that he converted.¹⁴

Why does Yitro leave?

- Spiritual calling – To explain why a newly converted Yitro would desire to leave the nation, R"E HaModai, Rashi and Ralbag suggest that Yitro returned to Midyan to convert either his family (who later do join the nation) or his fellow Midianites.
- Physical infirmity – Seforno posits that Yitro, being elderly, did not feel up to the journey and that is why he sent his children in his place.¹⁵
- Abarbanel holds that Yitro simply was not convinced by Moshe's arguments to stay. He doesn't explain, though, why his descendants are later found in the midst of the Children of Israel.

– **Yitro himself returned to join the Children of Israel**

Chronology – Ramban, Chizkuni, and Peirush HaRosh hold that all of chapter 18 is in chronological order and that Yitro arrived, advised, and went home in the first year before the Decalogue. According to Ramban, Yitro returned in the second year and then remained. However, according to Chizkuni and Peirush HaRosh, Moshe sent Yitro away only temporarily so that he would not be present for the revelation at Sinai, and Yitro returned to the Israelite camp immediately following the Decalogue.¹⁹ A third possibility is adopted by the Akeidat Yitzchak who maintains that Yitro arrived in the first year, stayed until his advice was implemented in the second year, went home to convert others and bid farewell, and then returned soon after.

Yitro (Shemot 18) and Chovav (Bemidbar 10) – These approaches identify Yitro with Chovav, but they disagree about the relationship between the stories. Ramban, Chizkuni, and Peirush HaRosh say that the departures in Shemot and Bemidbar are two distinct stories happening at different times, while Akeidat Yitzchak posits that they tell of the same event.

Why does Yitro initially depart? – According to Ramban and Akeidat Yitzchak, Yitro goes home to convert his family and say his goodbyes.²⁰ Peirush HaRosh says that it wasn't Yitro's decision to leave; rather, Moshe actively sent him away so that he would not participate in Matan Torah, an event intended only for those who had been part of the nation's suffering in Egypt.²¹

Keinites – If Yitro remained with the Children of Israel, why would his descendants be living amidst the Amalekites in Shemuel I 15? Ramban suggests either that Yitro or his sons returned to their own homeland after Moshe's death, or that the Keinites in Shemuel I 15 are relatives but not direct descendants of Yitro.

וישלח – Peirush HaRosh says that Moshe actively sent Yitro away so that he would not be present for the Decalogue.²²

Question 3: Why Does Moshe Want Him to Stay? Why Does the Torah Make it Unclear Whether He Stayed?

16. Professor Yoni Grossman

Here we should make mention of the "chain of parashot" that we discussed above (those units containing the root "n-s-"). This chain has clear boundaries. In the beginning we are told that it is the cloud that leads Israel on their journey ("by the word of God they would journey"), and at the end, the text emphasizes once again: "And God's cloud was upon them by day when they journeyed from the encampment." Since the framework of these literary units emphasizes God's leadership of His people in the desert and the fact that He shows them the way, Moshe's words to Chovav deviate from this general message.

The irony of Moshe's invitation to Chovav arises from Moshe's own formulation of it. As mentioned, his first attempt emphasizes God's kindness to His nation, with more attention devoted to that than to the invitation itself. Thus we do actually detect the general message of this unit: God has promised good to His people, and it is He Who will lead them on the way!

Chovav's reaction is omitted from the text because, in a profound sense, it is not significant. It is not he who is destined to lead the nation on their long journeys through the desert, but rather God. The nation must internalize the message that it is not Chovav's eyes that they need, but rather, "God's eyes that wander throughout the earth" ([Zekharia 4:10](#)). It is not this mortal who will protect them on the way, but rather God's direct Providence: