

Ex. 18:1

Jethro priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the Lord had brought Israel out from Egypt. 2 So ... 5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' sons and wife to him in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God.

**JETHRO** (PERSON) [Heb *yitrô* יִתְרוֹ]. Priest of Midian and father of Zipporah, Moses' wife.

One difficulty surrounding Jethro is the names that are given to him. He is called Reuel in 2 instances (Exod 2:18; Num 10:29). Apparently Jethro is called Hobab in Judg 4:11, although Num 10:29 indicates that Hobab is actually Jethro's son. The confusion of the names is not explained in Scripture. – Joel C. Slayton, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*

William Propp, Exodus 1-18 (Anchor Bible), 632

[Benno] Jacob observes how much of Jethro's vocabulary is *recherché* ... The effect, he suggests, may be ceremonious or dialectal.

Edward Greenstein, "Jethro's Wit: An Interpretation of Wordplay in Exodus 18," Landes FS  
[T]he language of Jethro's discourse is peppered with wordplay, and ... the wit that his paronomasia may be taken to bespeak may be understood to shore up his image as a sage. The fact that Jethro is characterized as wise is ... crucial to his major role in the episode at hand and in the story at large.

HALOT – from יתר "gave prosperity"

DCH – → יתר *exceed*

Greenstein: "The name Jethro, from the root *y-t-r*, is most readily explained to mean 'one who is preeminent.' The Akkadian cognate, (*w*)*atru(m)*, is used especially in the phrase *atra-hasisa*, 'exceedingly wise,' which is also the name given to the Old Babylonian Noah, Atra-hasis."

Ex. 18:18      the task is too heavy for you      כָּבֵד מְמִיקָה הַדָּבָר

Ex. 9:3          a very severe pestilence      דָּבַר כָּבֵד מְאֹד

"What sense might we make of the fact that Jethro is depicted as an extraordinarily knowing person? ... Jethro is one of a number of non-Israelites who are said to recognize the greatness of God and appreciate the power in the mighty acts of God:" Balaam (Numbers 22-24); Rahab (Joshua 2), the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10); Naaman (2 Kings 5); Ruth; and the sailors taking Jonah to Tarshish.

"In the context of the Exodus narrative, Jethro forms an ideal contrast to the arch-enemy of both Israel and God—Pharaoh, king of Egypt.... Jethro, a gentile, can see the power and grandeur of Israel's God. Such recognition carries special weight precisely because Jethro is a distinctively wise man. Acknowledging the supremacy of God, we may infer from this and from so many biblical texts, would be a wise move for Israel as well. How does the wise man put it? 'Reverence of the Lord is the beginning of knowing' (Prov 1:7a)."

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Ex. 18:8

Moses then recounted to his father-in-law everything that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardships that had befallen them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. 9 And Jethro rejoiced over all the kindness that the Lord had shown Israel when He delivered them from the Egyptians. 10 "Blessed be the Lord," Jethro said, "who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, 'yes, by the [result](#) of their very schemes against [the people].'" 12 And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law.

Ex. 18:13

Next day, Moses sat as magistrate among the people, while the people stood about Moses from morning until evening. 14 But when Moses' father-in-law saw how much he had to do for the people, he said, "What is this [thing](#) that you are doing to the people? Why do you act<sup>d</sup> alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" 15 Moses replied to his father-in-law, "It is because the people come to me to inquire of God. 16 When they have a [dispute](#), it comes before me, and I decide between one person and another, and I make known the laws and teachings of God."

Ex. 18:17

But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right; 18 you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the [task](#) is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. 19 Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You represent the people before God: you bring the [disputes](#) before God, 20 and enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow. 21 You shall also seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain. Set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and 22 let them judge the people at all times. Have them bring every major [dispute](#) to you, but let them decide every minor [dispute](#) themselves. Make it easier for yourself by letting them share the burden with you. 23 If you do [this](#)—and God so commands you—you will be able to bear up; and all these people too will go home unwearied."

Ex. 18:24

Moses heeded his father-in-law and did just as he had said. 25 Moses chose capable men out of all Israel, and appointed them heads over the people—chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens; 26 and they judged the people at all times: the difficult [matters](#) they would bring to Moses, and all the minor [matters](#) they would decide themselves. 27 Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way to his own land.