

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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<sup>17</sup>Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, “The people may have a change of heart

וַיְהִי בְשַׁלַּח פְּרַעֲהוֹ אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־נָחַם  
אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא  
כִּי | אָמַר אֱלֹהִים פְּנִינָחֵם הָעַם בְּרֵאתָם

## THE EXODUS (13:17–14:31)

## INTO THE WILDERNESS (13:17–22)

The narrative, interrupted at 12:42 by laws related to *Pesah*, now continues.

**17. God . . . lead them** God, not Moses, is the protagonist here.

**by way of the land of the Philistines** The shortest land route from the Nile delta to Canaan. It was the southern segment of the 1000-mile international artery of transportation that led from the Egyptian fortress city of Tjaru (Sile) to the Canaanite city of Megiddo, and from there into Asia Minor and on to Mesopotamia. The “land of the Philistines” is the name given here to the stretch

of territory in Canaan alongside the highway. The “Sea of Philistia” in 23:31 is the section of the Mediterranean adjacent to it. These apparently anachronistic names attest to the dominant role played in later centuries by the Philistines in that part of the country. They were part of a vast confederacy of “sea peoples”—so named by the Egyptians—and were first mentioned in historical records that date from the time of Ramses III (1183–1152 B.C.E.). They invaded Egypt from the region of Crete in the eighth year of that king’s reign.

**a change of heart** Preferring Egyptian slavery to war.

**17. God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer**

The Hebrew word translated here as “although” (*ki*) has several different meanings. The commentators differ in their understanding of the word and of God’s purpose in leading Israel by a longer, less direct route. Some see it as an act of kindness and consideration on God’s part. One commentator translates *ki karov hu* as “because God was near to them” and loved them and, therefore, did not want to risk having some of them killed in a battle with the Philistines (*Minḥah B’lulah*). Others give it a psychological interpretation. Thus Rashi: God did not lead Israel through Philistine territory precisely because it was close, and it would have been too tempting to become discouraged and return to Egypt. Ramban: Although the way through the Philistine territory was more direct, God was afraid that the people would be discouraged if they had to fight their way through.

Finally, some see the long route as necessary for the Israelites to develop the qualities they

would need to conquer and settle the Promised Land. Ibn Ezra: God did not want them to arrive at the Promised Land too soon. Having been slaves all their lives, they would not have been prepared to conquer Canaan until they had a lengthy experience of freedom. Maimonides: God wanted to accustom them to hardship, to prepare them for the task of conquering and settling Canaan. Some commentators specifically spell out the implication that sometimes the harder way of doing something turns out to be the better way. “There is a long way which is short and a short way which is long” (BT Er. 53b). When something comes to us too easily instead of being hard earned, we don’t always appreciate it.

The Midrash understands the phrase “God did not lead them” as “God was not comforted,” taking the word *naḥam* not as “lead” but as “was comforted” (Exod. R. 20:13). Although God rejoiced over the Israelites who were redeemed from Egypt, God was not comforted for those who died without seeing the deliverance.

when they see war, and return to Egypt.”<sup>18</sup> So God led the people round about, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds.

Now the Israelites went up armed out of the land of Egypt.<sup>19</sup> And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph, who had exacted an oath from the children of Israel, saying, “God will be sure to take notice of you: then you shall carry up my bones from here with you.”

<sup>20</sup>They set out from Succoth, and encamped at Etham, at the edge of the wilderness.<sup>21</sup> The LORD went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, that they

מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרַיִם: <sup>18</sup> וַיִּסֹּב אֱלֹהִים |  
 אֶת־הָעָם דְּרֹךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף  
 וְחָמְשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:  
<sup>19</sup> וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ כִּי  
 הִשְׁבַּע הַשְּׂבִיעַ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר  
 פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֵעֲלִיתֶם  
 אֶת־עֲצָמֹתַי מִזֶּה אִתְּכֶם:  
<sup>20</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מִסּוּכּוֹת וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּאֶתְמֹת בְּקִצְהַ  
 הַמִּדְבָּר: <sup>21</sup> וַיְהִי הוּא הַלֶּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם  
 בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וְלַיְלָה בְּעַמּוּד  
 אֵשׁ לְהַאֲרִיר לָהֶם לְלַכֵּת יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה:

**when they see war** Since the days of Pharaoh Seti I (ca. 1305–1290 B.C.E.), the coastal road to Canaan had been heavily fortified by the Egyptians. A chain of strongholds, way stations, reservoirs, and wells dotted the area as far as Gaza, the provincial capital.

**18. by way of the wilderness** This must refer to one of the ancient, natural tracks that cross the Sinai peninsula. The vagueness of the designation and the inability to identify and locate most of the many wilderness stations recorded in the Torah make it impossible to chart the route followed by the departing Israelites.

**Sea of Reeds** Literal translation of *yam suf*. The Red Sea, its usual but incorrect translation, is more than 120 miles from the probable site of Goshen, where the Israelites lived in Egypt—too great a distance to cover even in one week in those days. The Hebrew word *suf* is derived from the Egyptian word for the papyrus reed, which grows in fresh water; therefore, *yam suf* would not be

an appropriate designation for the present Red Sea, because its water is saline and does not favor the growth of that plant. This stage of the march probably took the Israelites to the far northeastern corner of Egypt, to one of the lagoons near the shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

**19.** Joseph’s dying request is fulfilled. His words here are almost precisely those given in Gen. 50:25.

**20. Succoth** See Comment to Exod. 12:37. **Etham** The site, mentioned again in Num. 33:6–8, has not been identified; nor are we given the distance between it and Succoth.

**21–22.** The dynamic presence of God is a recurring theme throughout the narratives of the wilderness wanderings. It is symbolized by the mysterious, intangible elements of fire and cloud—a storm cloud shot through with flashes of lightning (see Ezek. 1:4). During the day, the dark cloud was most visible; at night, the fiery flashes were (see Exod. 40:38). The cloud escorts

**19. Moses took with him the bones of Joseph** While the others were busy packing their belongings in preparation for the journey, Moses was busy keeping a promise. Gen. 50:25 expresses Joseph’s dying wish: “When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones

from here” (Mekh.). A later comment understands the passage symbolically: To be a proper leader of Israel, Moses acquired the strengths of Joseph, his ability to provide people with food as well as with spiritual guidance and his capacity to forgive people who had wronged him.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**13:19. Moses took with him the bones of Joseph** Some Jews who do not live in Israel arrange to be buried there. Some Jews who are buried outside of Israel arrange that some earth from Israel be buried with them. These customs express the Jewish commitment to the land of Israel. They also reflect the *midrash* that Israel will be the site of resurrection, even for those who died in the Diaspora (JT Ket. 35b).

might travel day and night. <sup>22</sup>The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

**14** The LORD said to Moses: <sup>2</sup>Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. <sup>3</sup>Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, “They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.” <sup>4</sup>Then I will stiffen Pharaoh’s heart and he will pursue them, that I may gain glory through Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.

And they did so.

<sup>5</sup>When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his courtiers had

לֹא־יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הָעָנָן יוֹמָם וְעַמּוּד  
הָאֵשׁ לַיְלָה לִפְנֵי הָעָם: פ

**יד** וַיֹּדְבֵר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:  
דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּשׁוּבוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ לִפְנֵי  
פִי הַחִירֹת בֵּין מִגְדֹל וּבֵין הַיָּם לִפְנֵי בַעַל  
צֶפֶן נִכְחוּ תַחְנוּ עַל־הַיָּם: <sup>3</sup> וְאָמַר פַּרְעֹה  
לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִבְכִּים הֵם בְּאֶרֶץ סֹגֵר  
עֲלֵיהֶם הַמִּדְבָּר: <sup>4</sup> וְחִזַּקְתִּי אֶת־לֵב־פַּרְעֹה  
וְרָדְף אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאֶכְפְּדֵה בְּפַרְעֹה וּבְכָל־  
חֵילוֹ וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה  
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן:

<sup>5</sup> וַיִּגְדַּל לְמַלְכָּהּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי בָרַח הָעָם וַיִּהְיֶה־פֶן

and guides the people through the untamed wilderness, signals the beginning and end of each day’s journey, and provides a protective screen in times of peril. Although God is portrayed as speaking “from the midst of the cloud,” as in Exod. 24:16, this should always be understood as figurative language. There never is a question of His actually residing inside the cloud or being identified with it. This is clear from 19:20, when God “came down” on Mount Sinai only after it had been enveloped in cloud (19:16).

#### THE MIRACLE AT THE SEA (14:1–31)

The liberated Israelites, having reached the edge of the wilderness, suddenly were ordered to change course. This new direction, fraught with great danger, was actually a tactic to mislead the Egyptians and lure them to their doom, the culminating defeat of Pharaoh. Egypt does not appear in Israelite history again for three centuries, in the time of King Solomon. The miracle of the parting, or splitting, of the sea (*k’ri-at yam suf*) left a profound impression on all subsequent Hebrew literature and became the paradigm for Israel’s future redemption from exile. Most of the biblical passages that celebrate the crossing of the sea relate solely to God’s sovereign control over nature and history and do not mention the drowning of the Egyptians.

#### REASON TO CHANGE COURSE (vv. 1–4)

**2.** Some of the place-names mentioned here, and repeated in Num. 33:7–8, cannot be identified with certainty. Baal-zephon was a port on the Mediterranean coast, suggesting a northern route from Succot for the Exodus.

**3. astray** The word translated as “astray” (*n’vukhim*) here has the sense of “disoriented” or “hopelessly confused.” The Israelites, at God’s behest (v. 2), have taken up a position where they are hemmed in on all sides—by Egyptian border fortresses, by the wilderness, and by the sea.

**4.** Pharaoh will be irresistibly drawn to give chase.

**stiffen Pharaoh’s heart** See Comment to 4:21.

**that I may gain glory** Or “and I will . . .”

The Hebrew is unclear whether this is the purpose of the tactic or its consequence. Destruction of the wicked reaffirms the fundamental biblical principle that the world is governed by a divinely ordained moral order that ultimately must prevail. God is thereby glorified. (For a similar notion that God takes “glory” by humbling a foe, see Ezekiel’s war of Gog, Ezek. 38–39.)

#### THE EGYPTIANS HAVE A CHANGE OF HEART AND GIVE CHASE (vv. 5–9)

**5. the people had fled** It is clear that the Israelites are not coming back, for the “three-day

a change of heart about the people and said, “What is this we have done, releasing Israel from our service?” <sup>6</sup>He ordered his chariot and took his men with him; <sup>7</sup>he took six hundred of his picked chariots, and the rest of the chariots of Egypt, with officers in all of them. <sup>8</sup>The LORD stiffened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he gave chase to the Israelites. As the Israelites were departing defiantly, <sup>9</sup>the Egyptians gave chase to them, and all the chariot horses of Pharaoh, his horsemen, and his warriors overtook them encamped by the sea, near Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon.

<sup>10</sup>As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the LORD. <sup>11</sup>And they said to Moses, “Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to

journey” that Moses repeatedly requested has come and gone, and they have not returned.

**6. took his men** The word translated here as “men” (*am*) usually means “people.” It can also mean an “armed force.”

**7.** Pharaoh himself leads an elite corps of 600 chariots, apparently the standard military unit.

**and the rest of the chariots** The Hebrew reads, literally, “every chariot/all the chariots/all the chariotry of Egypt”—i.e., in addition to the elite corps. The chariot, a powerful and revolutionary innovation in the art of warfare, was introduced into Egypt from Canaan. Among the Hittites and Assyrians, the chariot crew was composed of a driver, a warrior, and a shieldbearer; but Egyptian chariots generally had only a two-man team. Drawn by two horses, it was used for massed charges. The charioteers, well trained and highly skilled, enjoyed high social standing and became a military aristocracy.

**8. departing defiantly** Literally, “with up-

לִבָּב פִּרְעָה וְעַבְדָּיו אֶל-הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ  
מֵה-זֹאת עָשִׂינוּ כִּי-שַׁלַּחְנוּ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל  
מֵעַבְדָּנוּ: <sup>6</sup>וַיֹּאסֹר אֶת-רֶכְבוֹ וְאֶת-עַמּוֹ  
לָקַח עִמּוֹ: <sup>7</sup>וַיִּקַּח שֵׁשׁ-מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב בָּחוּר  
וְכָל רֶכֶב מִצְרַיִם וְשָׁלֹשׁ עַל-כִּלּוֹ:  
<sup>8</sup>וַיִּחְזַק יְהוָה אֶת-לֵב פִּרְעָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם  
וַיִּרְדֹּף אַחֲרָיו בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
שָׁנִי יֵצְאִים בְּיַד רַמְהָ: <sup>9</sup>וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם  
אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁיגוּ אוֹתָם חֲנִיִּים עַל-הַיָּם  
כָּל-סוֹס רֶכֶב פִּרְעָה וּפָרָשָׁיו וְחִילוֹ עַל-פִּי  
הַחַיִּילָת לִפְנֵי בַעַל צַפּוֹן:  
<sup>10</sup>וּפִרְעָה הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-  
עֵינֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּה מִצְרַיִם | נֹסַע אַחֲרֵיהֶם  
וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-  
יְהוָה: <sup>11</sup>וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הַמַּבְלִי אֵינֶ-  
קָבְרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר

raised hand,” a metaphor drawn from the depiction of ancient Near Eastern gods menacingly brandishing a weapon in the upraised right hand. The confident Israelites are oblivious of the renewed Egyptian threat.

**9. his horsemen** Horseback riding was introduced into Egypt only in the 14th century B.C.E., and the use of mounted cavalry in warfare was unknown before the end of the 11th century B.C.E. Hence, the word understood here as “horseman” (*parash*) probably means “steed,” as in other biblical texts. It also could be a term for “charioteer,” one skilled at handling a horse.

THE PEOPLE'S REACTION; MOSES' RESPONSE  
(vv. 10–14)

**10. cried out to the LORD** The self-assurance mentioned in verse 8 suddenly vanishes. Now only God can save them.

**11.** This rebuke is uttered with bitter irony, for Egypt was the classic land of tombs.

## CHAPTER 14

**10. the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing** Often in life, we think we can escape our problems by running away, only to find our problems running after us (Baal Shem Tov).

**Greatly frightened** The Israelites still have a slave mentality, despite their having experienced God's redemptive power during the Ten Plagues (Ibn Ezra). No matter how much God has done for them, they still lack confidence in God's saving power.

die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup>Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?' <sup>13</sup>But Moses said to the people, "Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the LORD will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. <sup>14</sup>The LORD will battle for you; you hold your peace!"

<sup>15</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. <sup>16</sup>And you lift up your rod and hold out your arm over the sea and split it, so that the Israelites may march into the sea on dry ground. <sup>17</sup>And I will stiffen the hearts of the Egyptians so that they go in after them; and I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his warriors, his chariots and his horsemen. <sup>18</sup>Let the Egyptians know that I am LORD, when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

<sup>19</sup>The angel of God, who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, now moved and followed behind them; and the pillar of cloud shifted from in front of them and took up a place

מִה־זֹאת עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם :  
<sup>12</sup> הֲלֹא־זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ  
 בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר חֲדַל מִמֶּנּוּ וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֶת־  
 מִצְרַיִם כִּי טוֹב לָנוּ עֲבֹד אֶת־מִצְרַיִם  
 מִמָּוְתוֹנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר : <sup>13</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם  
 אַל־תִּירְאוּ הִתְיַצְבוּ וּרְאוּ אֶת־יְשׁוּעַת  
 יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשֶׁר  
 רְאִיתֶם אֶת־מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם לֹא תִסִּיפוּ  
 לִרְאֹתָם עוֹד עַד־עוֹלָם : <sup>14</sup> יְהוָה יִלְחֶם  
 לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּחְרְשׁוּן : פ

<sup>15</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִה־תִּצַּעַק אֵלַי  
 שְׁלִישִׁי דַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ : <sup>16</sup> וְאַתָּה  
 הֲרֵם אֶת־מִטְּףְךָ וּנְטֵה אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־הַיָּם  
 וּבִקַּעְהוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹף הַיָּם  
 בַּיַּבֵּשָׁה : <sup>17</sup> וְאַנִּי הֲנִי מְחֹזֵק אֶת־לֵב  
 מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאֶכְבְּדָה בַּפְּרֹעָה  
 וּבְכָל־חֵילוֹ בְּרַכְּבוֹ וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו : <sup>18</sup> וַיִּדְעוּ  
 מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּהַכְּבֹדִי בַּפְּרֹעָה  
 בְּרַכְּבוֹ וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו :

<sup>19</sup> וַיִּסַּע מִלְּאֲךָ הָאֱלֹהִים הַהֵלֶךְ לִפְנֵי  
 מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּלָּךְ מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּסַּע  
 עִמּוֹד הָעָנָן מִפְּנֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲמֵד מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם :

**12.** This statement is not found in the two previous repudiations of Moses by the Israelites (in 5:21 and 6:9). Therefore, it must reflect some incident not otherwise recorded in the Torah. A rebellion by the Israelites at the Sea of Reeds is reported in Ps. 106:7.

**13–14.** Moses ignores their rebuke; he attempts to calm them and allay their fears.

GOD'S RESPONSE (vv. 15–20)

**15. Why do you cry out to Me** This was the

first of many times that Moses interceded for the people. Here he is told by God: It is time for action, not for prayer.

**16.** Moses is not instructed to strike the sea. In verse 21 the action of Moses with his rod is the signal for the strong wind to blow back the waters. It is God who splits the sea.

**19.** The symbol of God's indwelling Presence, the luminous pillar of cloud mentioned in 13:21 as leading and guiding the people, now serves as a protective screen separating the Egyptians and the Israelites.

**14. The Lord will battle for you; you hold your peace!** Sometimes quiet confidence can be a form of prayer. Another interpretation:

God will support and defend you—but only when you stop quarreling among yourselves. A united people merits God's intervention.

behind them,<sup>20</sup> and it came between the army of the Egyptians and the army of Israel. Thus there was the cloud with the darkness, and it cast a spell upon the night, so that the one could not come near the other all through the night.

<sup>21</sup>Then Moses held out his arm over the sea and the LORD drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split,<sup>22</sup> and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.<sup>23</sup> The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen.<sup>24</sup> At the morning watch, the LORD looked down upon the Egyptian army from a pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian army into panic.<sup>25</sup> He locked the wheels of their chariots so that they

20 וַיָּבֵא בֵּין | מַחְנֵה מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין מַחְנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהִי הָעָנָן וְהַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיָּאָר אֶת-הַלַּיְלָה וְלֹא-קָרַב זֶה אֶל-זֶה כָּל-הַלַּיְלָה | 21 וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדוֹ עַל-הַיָּם וַיּוֹלֶךְ יְהוָה | אֶת-הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קָדִים עֲזָה כָּל-הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּשֶׁם אֶת-הַיָּם לַחֲרָבָה וַיִּבְקְעוּ הַמַּיִם | 22 וַיָּבֵאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹף הַיָּם בַּיַּבֵּשׁה וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חֹמָה מִימִינֵם וּמִשְׂמָאלֵם | 23 וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֵאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם כָּל סוּס פָּרְעֹה רָכְבוֹ וּפָרָשָׁיו אֶל-תּוֹף הַיָּם | 24 וַיְהִי בְּאִשְׁמֹרֶת הַבֶּקֶר וַיִּשְׁקֹף יְהוָה אֶל-מַחְנֵה מִצְרַיִם בְּעָמוּד אֵשׁ וְעָנָן וַיִּהָם אֶת מַחְנֵה מִצְרַיִם | 25 וַיִּסַּר אֶת אַפָּן מִרַכְבֹּתָיו

#### THE PARTING OF THE SEA

(vv. 21–29)

**21.** Moses fulfills the instructions detailed in verse 16. But God is the immediate cause of what is about to take place.

**a strong east wind** See Comment to 10:13.

**23.** Pressing forward in an uncontrollable frenzy, the Egyptian forces plunge into the turbulent waters.

**24. morning watch** In ancient Israel, the night was divided into three watches: 6 to 10 P.M., 10 P.M. to 2 A.M., and the morning watch between the hours of 2 and 6 A.M. These hours would vary, according to the season.

**25. He locked** The wheels became bogged down in the mud.

**21.** Like many of us, the rabbis of old had difficulty accepting the literal veracity of the splitting of the sea, the classic example of God working a miracle for Israel's sake. They believed in the divine miracle but were reluctant to accept the suspension of natural law. They fasten on the apparently superfluous words "a strong east wind" as a hint that the splitting of the sea was accomplished through natural, rather than supernatural, means. Similarly, in the 19th century, Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev translated the words *ru-ah kadim* not as "east wind" but as "an ancient wind," explaining, "God does not change or suspend the laws of nature in order to work miracles. The wind that divided the sea had been created for that purpose at the time of the creation of the world."

According to one *midrash*, the sea would not

part until the Israelites showed enough faith to march into the waters. They were reluctant to do so, waiting for God to work a miracle first. Finally, Nahshon son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah, was bold enough to march into the sea. Only at that point did the sea respond to his act of faith by separating, allowing the Israelites to cross on dry land (BT Sot. 37a). Another legend would have it that Pharaoh alone, of all the Egyptians, survived. Because he had learned his lesson, he was appointed king of Nineveh. In that capacity, he led his people in penitential prayer and fasting to avert the decree of the prophet Jonah. When he died, he was stationed at the gates of the underworld, where he would greet tyrants of a later generation with the words "Why did you not learn from my example?" (Mekh.).



moved forward with difficulty. And the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”

<sup>26</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Hold out your arm over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians and upon their chariots and upon their horsemen.” <sup>27</sup>Moses held out his arm over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state, and the Egyptians fled at its approach. But the LORD hurled the Egyptians into the sea. <sup>28</sup>The waters turned back and covered the chariots and the horsemen—Pharaoh’s entire army that followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. <sup>29</sup>But the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

<sup>30</sup>Thus the LORD delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea. <sup>31</sup>And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the LORD had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD; they had faith in the LORD and His servant Moses.

וַיִּנְהַגְהוּ בַכַּבֵּדָת וַיֹּאמְרוּ \*מִצְרַיִם אֲנֹסָהּ  
מִפְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי יְהוָה נֹלָחֵם לָהֶם  
בְּמִצְרַיִם: פ

רביעי: <sup>26</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נִטֵּה אֶת־יָדְךָ  
עַל־הַיָּם וַיָּשָׁבוּ הַיָּמִים עַל־מִצְרַיִם עַל־  
רֶכֶבָּו וְעַל־פָּרָשָׁיו: <sup>27</sup> וַיִּטֵּ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ  
עַל־הַיָּם וַיָּשָׁב הַיָּם לַפְּנוֹת בְּקֶרֶ לְאִיתָנוּ  
וּמִצְרַיִם נָסִים לִקְרֹאתוֹ וַיִּנְעַר יְהוָה אֶת־  
מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹף הַיָּם: <sup>28</sup> וַיָּשָׁבוּ הַיָּמִים וַיִּכְסּוּ  
אֶת־הָרֶכֶב וְאֶת־הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכָל חַיִּל  
פָּרָעָה הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם לֹא־נִשְׁאַר  
בָּהֶם עַד־אֶחָד: <sup>29</sup> וּבִגְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ  
בַיַּבֶּשֶׁה בְּתוֹף הַיָּם וְהַיָּם לָהֶם חֲמָה  
מִימִינֵם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם:

<sup>30</sup> וַיֹּשַׁע יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל  
מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מֵת  
עַל־שַׁפַּת הַיָּם: <sup>31</sup> וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד  
הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֵּירָאוּ  
הָעָם אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ בִּיהוָה וּבַמֹּשֶׁה  
עַבְדּוֹ: פ

v. 25. סבירין ומטעין לשון רבים

*the LORD is fighting for them* The fulfillment of the prediction in verse 14.

*27. hurled . . . into the sea* They were buffeted about in the sea.

#### RECAPITULATION (vv. 30–31)

These two verses round out the preceding narrative and preface the following “Song at the Sea.”

**31. wondrous power** Literally, the “great hand” of God that cut off the tyrannous “hand of Egypt.” The word for “hand” (*yad*) is a key

word in this chapter, occurring seven times.

*they had faith* In the Hebrew Bible, “faith” does not mean belief in a doctrine or a creed. It refers to trust and loyalty expressed through commitment and obedience.

*His servant Moses* As the faithful instrument of God’s will, it is fitting that Moses receives the title “servant of the LORD/of God.” He is referred to by this title more than 30 times in the Hebrew Bible and is unquestionably Israel’s greatest leader.

This book reproduces the special traditional layout of *Shirat ha-Yam* (Song of the Sea) as it is inscribed in a *seifer Torah* (Torah scroll). To fit the unusually wide Hebrew column, pages 406-11 are designed to be read across the page spread. Thus, the Hebrew text and its translation appear on facing pages; the commentary runs across each spread from left to right.

טו

אז ישיר־מִשָּׁהּ וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ  
 לֵאמֹר\* אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאָה גָאָה סוֹס  
 וּרְכָבוֹ רָמָה בָּיִם: עֵינַי וּזְמֶרְתָּ יְהוָה וַיְהִי־לִי  
 לִישׁוּעָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֲנֹהוּ אֱלֹהֵי

צורת השירה לפי כתב היד שלנו, והיא כהלכה v. 1.

THE DEFEAT OF THE EGYPTIANS (vv. 1–10)

**1. I will sing** The “I” here can refer only to Moses.

**for** This gives the occasion of the song.

**driver** The word translated as “driver” (*rokhev*) here means the rider in the chariot, not one on horseback. See Comment to 14:9.

**2. The LORD** The Hebrew word *yah* is an ab-

breivation of the divine name *YHVH*. This form of the name is used exclusively in poetry. It also appears as an element in proper names such as Jeremiah (*yirmi-yahu*) and has survived in English in “hallelujah” (*hall’lu-yah*, “praise the LORD”).

**my strength and might** The source of my survival.

**will enshrine Him** Build Him a shrine or temple. Psalms 118:28, which seems to quote this verse, reads “I will praise You” (*odeka*).

the other hand, maintained the position that people who want to connect with God in the good or the bad moments of their lives but don’t know how, can be given the words to recite along with those who know.

**Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea** The driver says, “Why punish me? I could not have pursued the Israelites if the horse had not carried me so swiftly.” The horse says, “Why punish me? I only did the driver’s bidding.” What does God do? God judges the driver and the horse together. Similarly, in the world to come the soul will plead, “Why punish me? It was the body that sinned.” And the body will say, “I would have done nothing, but the soul directed me to act.” What will God do? God will reject the duality that separates body from soul and judge both together (Mekh.). Another rabbinic tradition describes the angels as wishing to chant their hymns while the Egyptian pursuers were drowning. God silenced them, asking, “How can you sing hymns when My creatures are perishing?” (BT Meg. 10b). This is like our custom to spill drops of wine from our cups at the *Pesah Seider* (see Prov. 24:17). Our cup of deliverance and rejoicing cannot be full when we recall that innocent Egyptians had to suffer because of their ruler’s stubbornness. A similar outlook is behind the custom of breaking a glass at the conclusion of

a wedding, to remind us of the destruction of the Temple and other mournful events of Jewish history. Our personal happiness should never leave us unmindful of the sorrows and misfortunes afflicting others (BT Ber. 31a).

**2. This is my God** “A common woman at the Sea saw God more clearly than any of the prophets did.” This is why she could proclaim, “This is my God!” (Mekh.). For those who experienced God’s saving power as they left Egypt, God was unmistakably real, not the subject of abstract speculation.

**I will enshrine Him** Hebrew: *anveihu*; “I will build Him a permanent sanctuary.” The moments in our lives when God seems so real to us are overpowering but fleeting. To keep those memories accessible, we need to establish places where we can reconnect with those feelings of being in God’s presence. *Anveihu* can also be translated as “I will glorify Him.” “God has made us known among the nations, and we will make God known among the nations.” How can a human being glorify God when all glory is already God’s? Ishmael says, by performing religious acts in a particularly glorious manner, with an especially beautiful *sukkah* or an especially handsome *tallit*. Abba Saul says, by imitating God. Even as God is gracious and compassionate, so we should be gracious and compassionate (BT Shab. 133b).

# 15

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD. They said:

I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously;

Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.

<sup>2</sup>The LORD is my strength and might;

He is become my deliverance.

This is my God and I will enshrine Him;

## THE SONG AT THE SEA (*Shirat ha-Yam*) (15:1–21)

After the narrative account of the extraordinary events at the Sea of Reeds, there follows one of the two oldest extended poems in the Hebrew Bible. (The other poem is the Song of Deborah in Judg. 5, designated as the *hafiarah* for this *parashah*.) Its date is debated. Exod. 15:21 links it to Miriam's song, which may have predated it. It is a lyrical outpouring of emotion on the part of the people who experienced the great events of the Exodus. Carefully crafted, the song celebrates the mighty acts of God as He intervenes in human affairs. It uses strong poetic metaphor. Thus in

place of the naturalistic "strong east wind" that blew through the night (14:21), there is the poetic "blast of [God's] nostrils" (15:8)—a sudden, brief, yet devastatingly effective breath that humbles human arrogance. Moses plays no active role, for he does not hold out his arm over the sea, as in 14:16,21. Rather, it is the "right hand" of God that is extended (15:12). Nor is there any mention of the angel, the cloud, or the darkness, all so prominent in 14:19–20 and all serving as intermediaries that mark the distance between God and Israel.

### CHAPTER 15

**14:31–15:1. They had faith in the LORD. . . . Then Moses . . . sang** Moses' song does not celebrate the splitting of the sea. It celebrates the Israelites' commitment to faith in God after experiencing the splitting of the sea. The crossing of the sea is the prototype of the biblical miracle, the one to which Jews have always looked to recall God's intervention on our people's behalf. We can scarcely imagine what is must have felt like for the Israelites, whose lives to this point had been a tale of unrelieved misery, to have events conspire to favor them so spectacularly. Moses' song of triumph is traditionally read in the Torah service with a special chant, both in sequence as part of the Book of Exodus and on the seventh day of *Pesah*, the day on which tradition maintains that it was sung. The miracle of crossing the sea is recalled in the prayer book just before the *Amidah* prayer on weekdays and on *Shabbat* and festivals. Its placement in the prayer service suggests to the worshiper that prayers may well be answered, as they were for our ancestors at the shores of the sea. It is referred to in the Book of Psalms as proof of God's caring for the people Israel.

**Then Moses and the Israelites sang** From

the day that God created the world until this moment, no one had sung praises to God—not Adam after having been created, not Abraham after being delivered from the fiery furnace, not Isaac when he was spared the knife, or Jacob when he escaped from wrestling with an angel and from Esau. But when Israel came to the sea and it parted for them, "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD." And God said, "for this I have been waiting" (Exod. R. 23:4).

Legend has it that the angels wanted to sing songs of praise, but God told them, "Wait, and let Israel sing first. Humans are able to praise only when they are inspired. If we do not give them the opportunity, the desire will pass" (David of Kotzk). "Sometimes 'then' (as in 'then Moses sang') refers to the past, and sometimes to the future" (Mekh.). We believe that times will come when Israel will once again have cause to break into a grateful song of praise to God.

In the Mishnah (Sot. 5:4), Nehemiah suggests that Moses and the Israelites all sang the song together. Akiva suggests that Moses sang it line by line, with the people repeating each line. Their disagreement might be understood as follows: Nehemiah would welcome only those who know the words of prayer. Akiva, on

אָבִי וְאַרְמְמָנָהוּ: <sup>3</sup> יְהוָה אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה יְהוָה  
 שְׁמוֹ: <sup>4</sup> מִרְכַּבַּת פְּרִעָה וְחִילוֹ יֵרָה בָיִם וּמִבְחָר  
 שְׁלֹשֵׁיו טִבְעוּ בַיַּם-סוּף: <sup>5</sup> תְּהִמּוֹת יִכְסִימוּ יִרְדּוּ בַמִּצּוֹלֹת כְּמוֹ-  
 אֶבֶן: <sup>6</sup> יִמְיִנָּה יְהוָה נֶאֱדָרִי בַבַּח יִמְיִנָּה  
 יְהוָה תִּרְעֵץ אוֹיֵב: <sup>7</sup> וּבְרַב גְּאוּנָה תִהְרַס  
 קִמְיָה תִשְׁלַח חֲרֹנָה יֵאכְלֵמוּ כִקֵּשׁ: <sup>8</sup> וּבְרוּחַ  
 אֶפְיָה נִעְרְמוּ מַיִם נִצְבּוּ כְמוֹ-גֵד  
 נְזִלִים קִפְאוּ תְהִמּוֹת בְּלִבֵּיהֶם: <sup>9</sup> אָמַר  
 אוֹיֵב אֶרְדֶּף אֲשִׁיג אַחְלַק שָׁלַל תִּמְלֹאמוּ  
 נִפְשָׁיו אֲרִיק חֲרָבִי תוֹרִישְׁמוּ יָדַי: <sup>10</sup> נִשְׁפָּת  
 בְּרוּחָהּ כִּסְמוּ יָם צָלְלוּ כְּעוֹפְרֹת בְּמַיִם  
 אֲדִירִים: <sup>11</sup> מִי־כִמְכָה \* בְּאֵלִם יְהוָה מִי

v. 11. יתיר ה'

the enemies of Israel are the enemies of God, so that Israel’s wars for survival are portrayed as the battles of the Lord.

**LORD is His name!** The statement evokes the power of God with which the name is associated (see Comment to 6:3). This divine name is the one that is repeated in the liturgical recitation of the *Sh’ma*.

**5. deeps** The Hebrew word *t’homot* is the term for the vast ocean of waters, which was believed to lie beneath the earth, as mentioned in Gen. 1:2.

**7. fury** The word translated as “fury” (*haron*) is a term used only of divine anger. Here the word carries its original sense of “burning.”

**8. blast of Your nostrils** Poetic imagery for the wind.

**froze** They formed a solid mass.

**9.** The poet mimics the arrogant self-confidence of the foe.

**I will divide the spoil** This promise is an inducement for reluctant soldiers to give chase.

**shall subdue** Literally, “my hand shall dispossess them,” here meaning “I shall force them into slavery once again.” Note the staccato effect of the Hebrew verbs, implying the overconfident pride of the Egyptians.

**10.** The first section of the Song at the Sea closes with a recital of God’s effortless act that exposes the empty rhetoric of the enemy. The waters do not act on their own accord but only when God energizes them.

**wind blow** One brief, light puff, and the sea engulfs the Egyptians.

THE INCOMPARABILITY OF YHVH

(vv. 11–13)

**11.** The song and its theme of God’s sovereign control over nature ends with an affirmation of His uniqueness through a rhetorical question: “Who is like You, O LORD?”

**celestials** These are the hosts of ministering angels imagined as surrounding God’s throne, waiting to be of service.

4. God’s justice is meted out measure for measure. As the Egyptians drowned Israelite babies, so they themselves were drowned. As they

immersed the Israelites in mud-like mortar, so they now sank in the mud. In short, all of us eventually pay for what we have done wrong.

The God of my father, and I will exalt Him.

<sup>3</sup>The LORD, the Warrior—

LORD is His name!

<sup>4</sup>Pharaoh's chariots and his army

He has cast into the sea;

And the pick of his officers

Are drowned in the Sea of Reeds.

<sup>5</sup>The deeps covered them;

They went down into the depths like a stone.

<sup>6</sup>Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power,

Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the foe!

<sup>7</sup>In Your great triumph You break Your opponents;

You send forth Your fury, it consumes them like straw.

<sup>8</sup>At the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up,

The floods stood straight like a wall;

The deeps froze in the heart of the sea.

<sup>9</sup>The foe said,

“I will pursue, I will overtake,

I will divide the spoil;

My desire shall have its fill of them.

I will bare my sword—

My hand shall subdue them.”

<sup>10</sup>You made Your wind blow, the sea covered them;

They sank like lead in the majestic waters.

<sup>11</sup>Who is like You, O LORD, among the celestials;

***God of my father*** See Comment to Exod. 3:6.

**3. Warrior** This description of God reflects 14:14, “The LORD will battle for you” and verse 25, “the Egyptians said . . . the LORD is fighting

for them against Egypt.” Because the Egyptians came against Israel as an armed force, the Lord—to whom alone victory is attributed—metaphorically is described as a warrior. In the biblical view,

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***God of my father, and I will exalt Him*** It is as great a spiritual commitment to honor God because your ancestors did as it as to do so because you have experienced God in your

own life (Aaron of Belz). Others, however, taught that it is not enough to inherit a faith. One must discover and experience the reality of God in one's own life.

פְּמֹכָה \* נְאֻדָּר בַּקֹּדֶשׁ      נוֹרָא תְהִלַּת עֲשֵׂה  
 פְּלֹא :      12 נְטִיתַי יְמִינֶךָ תִּבְלַעְמוּ אֶרֶץ :      13 נְחִיתַי  
 בַּחֲסֻדְךָ עַם-יְוָנוּ גְאֻלַּת      נְהִלַּת בְּעֵזְבֶךָ אֶל-נְהוּ  
 קְדֻשָּׁךָ :      14 שְׁמַעוּ עַמִּים יְרַגְזוּן      חֵיל  
 אַחֲזוּ יִשְׁבֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים :      15 אֲזוּ נִבְהִלּוּ אֱלוֹפָי  
 אֲדוּם      אֵילֵי מוֹאָב יֶאֱחֲזוּמוּ רַעַד      נִמְגּוּ  
 כָּל יִשְׁבֵי כְנָעַן :      16 תִּפְּל עֲלֵיהֶם אֵימַתָּה  
 וּפְחָד      בְּגִדְל זְרוּעֶךָ יִדְמּוּ כְּאֲבָן      עַד-  
 יַעֲבֵר עִמָּךָ יְהוָה      עַד-יַעֲבֵר עַם-יְוָנוּ  
 קְנִיַת :      17 תִּבְאָמוּ וְתִטְעֲמוּ בְהֵר נְחֻלַּתְךָ      מְכוֹן  
 לְשִׁבְתְּךָ פַעֲלַת יְהוָה      מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדָנִי כוֹנְנִי  
 יְדִירָךְ :      18 יְהוָה | יִמְלֶךְ לְעֵלָם וָעַד :

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the Israelites: from south to north and then westward across the Jordan.

**15. Edom** The Edomites were descendants of Esau, brother of Jacob, also known as Edom. They occupied the southernmost part of Transjordan and later became perpetual enemies of the Israelites.

**Moab** The plateau east of the Dead Sea between the wadis Arnon and Zered. It was occupied by the Moabites, who are traced back to Abraham's nephew Lot. The alarm felt by the Moabites at the appearance of the Israelites close to their border is described in Num. 22:1–7.

**are aghast** Literally, “melt away.” They are demoralized.

**16.** The Israelites are perceived as a threat by the peoples who dwell in the vicinity of the wilderness route and who fear that they may be struck by God who accompanies and protects Israel.

**Your people** The one whom You selected for a unique relationship and destiny.

#### THE GRAND FINALE (vv. 17–18)

The Song at the Sea closes with an affirmation of confidence in the promise that God's redemption of Israel from Egypt will culminate in the building of a Temple. The theme parallels the traditional Canaanite theme that Baal will build a palace after defeating his foes.

**17. place** The dais on which the divine throne rests.

**18.** The song closes, as it opens, with the exaltation of God, now expressed in terms of sovereignty. This is the earliest biblical use of this metaphor of God as King, found elsewhere in the Torah in Num. 23:21, another poetic passage. This finale is the climax of the basic themes of the poem: God's absolute sovereignty over nature and history.

Who is like You, majestic in holiness,  
 Awesome in splendor, working wonders!  
<sup>12</sup>You put out Your right hand,  
 The earth swallowed them.  
<sup>13</sup>In Your love You lead the people You redeemed;  
 In Your strength You guide them to Your holy abode.  
<sup>14</sup>The peoples hear, they tremble;  
 Agony grips the dwellers in Philistia.  
<sup>15</sup>Now are the clans of Edom dismayed;  
 The tribes of Moab—trembling grips them;  
 All the dwellers in Canaan are aghast.  
<sup>16</sup>Terror and dread descend upon them;  
 Through the might of Your arm they are still as stone—  
 Till Your people cross over, O LORD,  
 Till Your people cross whom You have ransomed.  
<sup>17</sup>You will bring them and plant them in Your own mountain,  
 The place You made to dwell in, O LORD,  
 The sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands established.  
<sup>18</sup>The LORD will reign for ever and ever!

**12. earth swallowed them** This is poetic language for “They met their death.” “The earth” here refers to the underworld, as in the story of Korah (Num. 16:32).

**13.** With the Egyptian menace finally eliminated, the poem moves away from the events that occurred at the sea to focus on the march to the Promised Land.

**In Your love** The word translated as “love” (*hesed*) means “loyalty.” A crucial term in the Bible, it can express intimate relationship, covenantal obligation, or even undeserved benevolence. It is one of God’s supreme attributes.

**Your holy abode** This phrase refers either to

the entire Land of Israel or to the Temple on Mount Zion.

#### THE EFFECT ON NEIGHBORING PEOPLES (vv. 14–16)

God’s mighty deeds on Israel’s behalf strike terror in the hearts of Israel’s neighbors, their potential enemies. These are listed in the order that Israel would have encountered them. The Philistines are mentioned first because they were closest to the northeastern border of Egypt and because they were the most formidable. The other three appear in proper geographic and chronologic order, according to the circuitous route followed by

<sup>19</sup>For the horses of Pharaoh, with his chariots and horsemen, went into the sea; and the LORD turned back on them the waters of the sea; but the Israelites marched on dry ground in the midst of the sea.

<sup>20</sup>Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels. <sup>21</sup>And Miriam chanted for them:

Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously;  
Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.

<sup>22</sup>Then Moses caused Israel to set out from

כִּי בָא טוֹס פְּרָעָה בְּרִכְבּוֹ וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו בַּיָּם  
וַיִּשָׁב יְהוָה עֲלֵהֶם אֶת־מֵי הַיָּם וּבִנְיֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ בִיבְשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם: פ

וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אַחֹת אֶהֱרֹן  
אֶת־הַתִּמְבֵּל בְּיָדָהּ וַתִּצְאֵן כָּל־הַנְּשִׂימ  
אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתַפִּים וּבַמְּחֹלֹת: <sup>21</sup> וַתַּעַן לָהֶם  
מִרְיָם

שִׁירוֹ לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאָה גָּאָה  
טוֹס וּרְכָבוֹ רָמָה בַּיָּם: ס

וַיִּסַּע מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּם־סוּף <sup>22</sup>

A CODA (v. 19)

A brief prose summary of the occasion for celebration closes the composition and reconnects it with verse 1.

THE SONG OF MIRIAM (vv. 20–21)

These verses affirm the custom (chronicled in Judg. 11:34 and 1 Sam. 18:6) of women going forth with music and dance to hail a returning victorious hero, although here God and not man is the victor.

**20. Miriam** No longer anonymous as in Exod. 2:4,7–8; she is here given two titles.

**prophetess** Miriam shares this designation with Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), the unnamed woman married to Isaiah (Isa. 8:3), and the false prophet Noadiah (Neh. 6:14). The Talmud counts seven true female prophets in ancient Israel (see p. 424).

**timbrel** Most likely a portable percussion instrument constructed of two parallel membranes stretched over a loop or frame.

CRISES IN THE WILDERNESS (15:22–17:16)

Freed from the Egyptian threat, the people begin the long trek through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. The rest of the Book of Exodus relates some major events of the first year of these

**20ff.** After crossing the sea, the Israelites promised to be faithful to God forever. A mere three days later, however, they were complaining, yearning to be back in Egypt. Although they had been slaves in Egypt, they had been free of the responsibilities of making choices, ordering their lives, and providing food for their families. While life now offered more possibilities, it made new demands.

It may be that it is hard to sustain one's faith without enough food to eat. Or it may be that it is hard to nourish one's faith today on the basis of yesterday's miracle. Yesterday's miracle, however spectacular it may have been, grows stale overnight. The miracle does not last; only the daily triumph over adversity endures. Jew-

ish faith is not rooted in miracles; the generation that crossed the sea did not maintain their faith for more than three days after that event. Jewish faith is rooted in the daily experience of God's reality and God's goodness. Thus God changes tactics here. Instead of a spectacular miracle once in a generation, God works a small miracle, the manna, every day. The Talmud equates the two: "Providing everyone with enough to eat is as great a miracle as splitting the Sea" (BT Pes. 118a).

**20–21.** Where did Miriam and the other women obtain timbrels in the wilderness? These righteous women were so confident that God would work miracles for them that they had brought timbrels along from Egypt, antic-



the Sea of Reeds. They went on into the wilderness of Shur; they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water. <sup>23</sup>They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; that is why it was named Marah. <sup>24</sup>And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" <sup>25</sup>So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet.

There He made for them a fixed rule, and there He put them to the test. <sup>26</sup>He said, "If you will heed the LORD your God diligently, doing what is upright in His sight, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases

וַיֵּצְאוּ אֶל-מִדְבַּר-שׁוּר וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת-יָמִים  
בַּמִּדְבָּר וְלֹא-מָצְאוּ מַיִם: <sup>23</sup> וַיָּבֹאוּ מַרְתָּה  
וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשָׁתוֹת מֵימָם מִמַּרְה כִּי מָרִים  
הֵם עַל-יָפֶן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ מַרְה: <sup>24</sup> וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם  
עַל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַה-נִּשְׁתָּה: <sup>25</sup> וַיִּצְעַק  
אֶל-יְהוָה וַיֹּרְהוּ יְהוָה עֵץ וַיִּשְׁלַךְ אֶל-  
הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם

שָׁם שָׁם לֹו חֹק וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשָׁם נִסָּהוּ:  
<sup>26</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱ-שְׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָע לְקוֹל | יְהוָה  
אֶלְהֵיךָ וְהִיָּשֵׁר בְּעֵינֶיךָ תַעֲשֶׂה וְהֶאֱזַנְתָּ  
לְמִצְוֹתָיו וְשָׁמַרְתָּ כָּל-חֻקָּיו כָּל-הַמִּחְלָה

wanderings, the central event being the experience at Sinai. On the way to that mountain, four crises occur, which reflect the harsh realities of life in the wilderness brought on by nature's cruelties and human brutality.

#### BITTER WATERS AT MARAH (15:22–27)

This section resumes the narrative interrupted at 14:29.

**22.** A location called Shur, the site of an oasis between the Negeb and Egypt, is mentioned several times in biblical texts. The name means "a wall" and probably refers to the wall of fortifications built by the pharaohs in the eastern delta of the Nile along the line of the present-day isthmus of Suez.

**three days** If intended literally, this implies

a distance of 45 miles at most. Often "three days" is a literary convention (see Comment to 3:18).

**24. the people grumbled** Their seemingly innocent and justifiable question was accusatory and confrontational.

**25.** Moses is not a wonder worker; he can do nothing except by divine instruction.

**a fixed rule** Apparently the verse is a parenthetical note that reflects a now-lost tradition about some law(s) given to Israel at this site.

**He put them to the test** Rashbam explains that the lack of drinking water was a test of Israel's faith in God.

**26. diseases** Not the plagues, but maladies endemic in Egypt, referred to elsewhere in Torah as "the dreadful diseases of Egypt," "Egyptian inflammation," and "the sicknesses of Egypt."

ipating that God would give them cause to celebrate (Mekh.).

**22. they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water** Later Sages took water to be a symbol of Torah and taught that just as the body cannot go three days without water, the soul cannot go three days without the refreshing, life-sustaining contact with Torah. Thus they instituted the practice of several public readings from the Torah each week—on *Shabbat*, Monday, and Thursday.

**23. they could not drink the water . . . because it was bitter** Literally, "they could not drink the waters . . . because they were bitter" ("water" is plural in Hebrew). Were the waters

bitter? Or was it the people who were bitter, full of self-pity at having to travel through a wilderness (Exod. R. 50:3)? One of the Sages interprets the words "found no water" (v. 22) to mean that water was there (see the oasis nearby in Elim, v. 27) but the people did not notice it because they were so busy complaining.

**25. the water became sweet** The purpose of religion is not to explain life's bitterness but to sweeten it, to make it more palatable. The Midrash envisions Moses asking God, "Why did You create brackish water in Your world, a liquid that serves no purpose?" God replies, "Instead of asking philosophical questions, do something to make the bitter waters sweet."

that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I the LORD am your healer.”

<sup>27</sup>And they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they encamped there beside the water.

**16** Setting out from Elim, the whole Israelite community came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. <sup>2</sup>In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup>The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death.”

<sup>4</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day’s

*your healer* God is the ultimate source of all healing. Just as He cured the waters at Marah, so will He heal the ills of obedient Israelites. Here, a great deed of God is cited to support an injunction to the Israelites. Until now, God’s miracles were directed to convincing Pharaoh to let Israel go.

**27. Elim** A wooded, freshwater oasis.

#### SHORTAGE OF FOOD—MANNA AND QUAIL (16:1–20)

It is now six weeks after the Exodus. With the oasis at Elim behind them and the provisions brought from Egypt exhausted, the people face a severe food shortage. Conditions in the wilderness make it impossible to secure fresh supplies. Popular discontent flares, and harsh accusations are hurled against Moses and Aaron.

THE COMPLAINT (vv. 1–3)

The hardships of wilderness life arouse nostalgia for life in Egypt.

**2. whole Israelite community** The suffering is more severe and widespread than in the previ-

אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמְתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם לֹא־אֲשִׁים עָלֶיךָ  
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה רֹפֵאֶךָ: ס  
חמישי <sup>27</sup> וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵילִמָּה וְשֵׁם שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה עֵינֹת  
מַיִם וְשִׁבְעִים תְּמָרִים וַיַּחְנוּ־שָׁם עַל־  
הַמַּיִם:

**טז** וַיִּסְעוּ מֵאֵילִם וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל־עַדְת  
בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מִדְבַר־סִין אֲשֶׁר בֵּין־  
אֵילִם וּבֵין סִינַי בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ  
הַשְּׁנִי לְיִצְאֲתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: <sup>2</sup> וַיִּלִּינוּ  
וַיִּלּוּנוּ כָּל־עַדְת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־מֹשֶׁה  
וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן בַּמִּדְבָּר: <sup>3</sup> וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי־יָתֵן מוֹתָנוּ בְּיַד־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבְתָּנוּ עַל־סִיר הַבָּשָׂר בְּאֲכֻלָּנוּ  
לֶחֶם לְשִׁבְעַת כִּי־הוּצַאתֶם אֶתְנוּ אֶל־  
הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לְהַמִּית אֶת־כָּל־הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה  
בְּרָעַב: ס  
<sup>4</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֲנִי מְמַטֵּיר לָכֶם  
לֶחֶם מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֵּצֵא הָעָם וּלְקַטְוֵי דְבַר־

ous crisis, for there the grumblers were described simply as “the people” (15:24).

**3. died by the hand of the LORD** That is, from natural causes. Death in old age in slavery is preferable to early death by starvation in freedom.

*fleshpots . . . bread* Because the people left Egypt with their flocks and herds, they could not have been in danger of starvation. Livestock, however, is the most valuable possession of the pastoralist, and the people would not have wanted to slaughter their cattle for food. Also, the lack of adequate pasturage no doubt had caused considerable losses among the flocks, adding to the people’s hardships.

THE DIVINE RESPONSE (vv. 4–5)

Even before Moses can “cry out to the LORD,” as in the preceding crisis (15:25), God responds to Israel’s needs.

**4. the LORD said to Moses** God reveals His intentions to Moses but does not instruct him to divulge the information to the people.

*each day* The fixed daily allotment of manna to each individual ensured fair and equal distri-

to the LORD, <sup>17</sup>and on the fifteenth day of that month a festival. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. <sup>18</sup>The first day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. <sup>19</sup>You shall present a gift, a burnt offering, to the LORD: two bulls of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs—see that they are without blemish. <sup>20</sup>The grain offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed in: prepare three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram; <sup>21</sup>and for each of the seven lambs prepare one-tenth of a measure. <sup>22</sup>And there shall be one goat for a purification offering, to make expiation in your behalf. <sup>23</sup>You shall present these in addition to the morning portion of the regular burnt offering. <sup>24</sup>You shall offer the like daily for seven days as food, a gift of pleasing odor to the LORD; they shall be offered, with their libations, in addition to the regular burnt offering. <sup>25</sup>And the seventh day shall be a sacred occasion for you: you shall not work at your occupations.

<sup>26</sup>On the day of the first fruits, your Feast of Weeks, when you bring an offering of new grain to the LORD, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. <sup>27</sup>You shall present a burnt offering of pleasing odor to the LORD: two bulls of the herd, one ram, seven yearling lambs. <sup>28</sup>The grain offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed

לְחֹדֶשׁ פֶּסַח לַיהוָה: <sup>17</sup>וּבַחֲמִישֵׁה עֶשֶׂר יוֹם לְחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה חַג שִׁבְעַת יָמִים מִצּוֹת יֵאָכֵל: <sup>18</sup>בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרֵא־קֹדֶשׁ כָּל־מִלְאֲכַת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: <sup>19</sup>וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אִשָּׁה עֹלָה לַיהוָה פָּרִים בְּנֵי־בָקָר שְׁנַיִם וְאֵיל אֶחָד וְשִׁבְעָה כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה תְּמִימִם יִהְיוּ לָכֶם: <sup>20</sup>וּמִנְחָתָם סֵלֶת בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן שְׁלֹשָׁה עֶשְׂרִינִים לְפָר וּשְׁנַי עֶשְׂרִינִים לְאֵיל תַּעֲשׂוּ: <sup>21</sup>עֶשְׂרוֹן עֶשְׂרוֹן תַּעֲשֶׂה לַכֹּפֶשׁ הָאֶחָד לְשִׁבְעַת הַכִּבְשִׂים: <sup>22</sup>וְשַׁעִיר חֲטָאת אֶחָד לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם: <sup>23</sup>מִלֶּבֶד עֹלֹת הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר לְעֹלֹת הַתָּמִיד תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־אֵלֶּה: <sup>24</sup>כֹּאֵלֶּה תַעֲשׂוּ לַיּוֹם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לֶחֶם אִשָּׁה רִיח־נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה עַל־עֹלֹת הַתָּמִיד יַעֲשֶׂה וְנִסְכּוֹ: <sup>25</sup>וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִקְרֵא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מִלְאֲכַת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: <sup>26</sup>וּבַיּוֹם הַפְּכוּרִים בְּהִקְרִיבְכֶם מִנְחָה חֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה בְּשִׁבְעַת־יָמֵיכֶם מִקְרֵא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מִלְאֲכַת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: <sup>27</sup>וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם עֹלָה לְרִיח־נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה פָּרִים בְּנֵי־בָקָר שְׁנַיִם אֵיל אֶחָד שִׁבְעָה כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה: <sup>28</sup>וּמִנְחָתָם סֵלֶת בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן שְׁלֹשָׁה עֶשְׂרִינִים

even though it is a private sacrifice (see Exod. 12:1–11) indicates that by this time the two festivals had become fused.

**17. festival** Both the paschal sacrifice and the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread are observed at the sanctuary, precisely as instituted by Deut. 16:1–6.

**18. occupations** Hebrew: *m'lekhet avodah*; literally, “laborious work,” of the sort that is forbidden on the festivals. This is in contrast to “any work” (*kol m'lakhal*), which is forbidden on *Shabbat* and *Yom Kippur* (Num. 29:7; Lev. 23:3,28). The nonlaborious work permitted (by implication) on the festivals is not defined, except for the explicit permission to pre-

pare food on the first and last days of *Pesah* (Exod. 12:16).

#### FEAST OF WEEKS (vv. 26–31)

This festival, which marks the start of the wheat harvest, does not depend on the lunar calendar. It occurs seven weeks after the beginning of the barley harvest (Lev. 23:15–16). In this regard it is like *Shabbat*, which is also independent of the lunar calendar.

**26. day of the first fruits** This day is also called “the Feast of the Harvest” (*Hag ha-Katzir*) in Exod. 23:16, and “the Feast of Weeks” (*Hag [ha-]Shavu-ot*) in Exod. 34:22, Deut. 16:10,16, and 2 Chron. 8:13.

# הַפְּטָרָה לַפֶּסַח (יוֹם שְׁבִיעִי)

## HAFTARAH FOR PESAH, SEVENTH DAY

2 SAMUEL 22:1–51

This *haftarah* presents David's great hymn of victory and thanksgiving, sung to God "after the LORD had saved him from the hands of all his enemies and from the hands of Saul" (2 Sam. 22:1). The designation "after" also connotes "after living a full life," for the hymn appears in Samuel just before David's "last words." In the hymn, in a grand and celebratory manner, a military hero thanks God for the lifetime of protection and favor he has received. Not surprisingly, God is portrayed here as a Lord of battles—storming down with heavenly arrows, to the aid of human armies. Meanwhile, the hymn expresses a deeper religious spirit, with theological features found in other biblical prayers. (With minor textual variations, it also appears in Ps. 18.)

Of the terms used in the *haftarah* for God's invincible protection, none stands out as much as *tzur* (rock). It recurs in neutral designations of God as a sheltering rock (v. 3) and source of personal safety (v. 47). Even more striking are uses of the term as an epithet for God. "Who is a rock except God?" asks David (v. 32), and he offers praise with the words, "Exalted be God, the rock" (v. 47). Steadfast mountain rocks offered a metaphor for inviolable stability, eternity, and great geologic forces erupting heavenward. (In the shadow of great rocks, who cannot feel something of God's everlasting power?)

The image of God as an earthly *tzur* stands at one pole of the hymn, tracing a line that rises toward the heights. At the other pole is the image of God's descent on the wings of storm clouds to save His people on earth. This figure is atmospheric, derived from ancient Near Eastern depictions of storm gods riding to battle in heavenly chariots. The cosmic arsenal includes swirling blasts of wind that stir the depths and "expose" the "bed of the sea" (v. 16), fiery bolts that furiously fly like arrows out of dark thunderheads (vv. 10–12,15), and awesome peals of thunder that

bark out in an earth-shattering divine voice (v. 14). Just so, the Lord had rescued His people at the Sea of Reeds (Exod. 15:8,19); and David's hymn excels in these depictions. Their dramatic vitality contrasts sharply with the scene of stability established by the mountain rocks at the beginning of the hymn. These images derive from different poles of the religious imagination. Their fusion in this song induces visceral tension in response to the vastness of God's celebrated power.

Meanwhile, in verses 22–28, the language of theological confession is featured. It reinforces the connection between a general theology of reward and punishment and its specific manifestation in David's life, in accordance with his merit (v. 25). Echoing this passage, David concludes his thanksgiving with the overall statement that "The way of God is perfect [*tamim*]" and then declares, more personally, that God has "kept my path secure [*tamim*]" (vv. 31,33).

The concluding verse of the *haftarah* (22:51) looks to the future, hoping for the beneficence of God on all of David's heirs. With the passage of time, the term for God's "anointed one" (*m'shiho*), once reserved for David's offspring who would restore the royal line, came to connote the messiah figure (*mashi-ah*) expected in the end of days. Presumably the rabbinic circles who selected this hymn as a *haftarah* had this hope in mind.

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

The song of Moses in the Torah reading (Exod. 15) and David's song of thanksgiving in the *haftarah* are both dramatic accounts of God's saving providence in history. Reciting the Song of the Sea on the seventh day of *Pesah* is based on the tradition that the miracle of the waters occurred on that day. The songs of Moses and of David represent two classic moments in the sacred his-

tory of the people Israel that serve as models for the future. From this perspective, it was only natural to expect that succeeding layers of that history would include references to earlier acts of divine redemption. This layering of memory is an es-

sential feature of Jewish cultural consciousness and its ongoing self-identity. Recitation of these events in the synagogue transfers them to new generations, deepening the shared past and its central images.

**22** David addressed the words of this song to the LORD, after the LORD had saved him from the hands of all his enemies and from the hands of Saul. <sup>2</sup>He said:

O LORD, my crag, my fastness, my deliverer!

<sup>3</sup>O God, the rock wherein I take shelter:

My shield, my mighty champion, my fortress and refuge!

My savior, You who rescue me from violence!

<sup>4</sup>All praise! I called on the LORD,  
And I was delivered from my enemies.

<sup>5</sup>For the breakers of Death encompassed me,  
The torrents of Belial terrified me;

<sup>6</sup>The snares of Sheol encircled me,  
The coils of Death engulfed me.

<sup>7</sup>In my anguish I called on the LORD,  
Cried out to my God;  
In His Abode He heard my voice,  
My cry entered His ears.

<sup>8</sup>Then the earth rocked and quaked,  
The foundations of heaven shook—  
Rocked by His indignation.

<sup>9</sup>Smoke went up from His nostrils,  
From His mouth came devouring fire;  
Live coals blazed forth from Him.

**כב** \*וַיִּדְבֹּר דָּוִד לַיהוָה אֶת־דִּבְרֵי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת בַּיּוֹם הַצֵּיל יְהוָה אֶת־וּמִכָּף כָּל־אֹיְבָיו וּמִכָּף שָׂאוּל: <sup>2</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר

יְהוָה סִלְעִי וּמִצְדָּתִי וּמִפְּלִטֵי־לִי:

<sup>3</sup> אֱלֹהֵי צוּרֵי אַחְסֵה־בּוֹ

מִגְּנֵי וְקַרְןִּי יִשְׁעֵי מִשְׁגָּבִי וּמִנוֹטֵי

מִשְׁעֵי מִחַמַּס תִּשְׁעֵנִי:

<sup>4</sup> מִהֲלֵל אֶקְרָא יְהוָה

וּמֵאֵיבֵי אוֹשַׁע:

<sup>5</sup> כִּי אֶפְפְּנִי מִשִּׁבְרֵי־מוֹת

נִחְלִי בַלְיַעַל יִבְעַתְּנִי:

<sup>6</sup> חֶבְלֵי שָׂאוּל סָבְנִי

קִדְמָנִי מִקְשֵׁי־מוֹת:

<sup>7</sup> בַּצַּר־לִי אֶקְרָא יְהוָה

וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֵי אֶקְרָא

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֵהִיכָלוֹ קוֹלִי

וַיִּשְׁוַעַתִּי בְּאָזְנוֹ:

<sup>8</sup> וַתִּגַּעַשׁ וַיִּתְגַּעַשׁ וַתִּרְעַשׁ הָאָרֶץ

מוֹסְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם יִרְגְּזוּ

וַיִּתְגַּעַשׁוּ כִּי־חָרָה לוֹ:

<sup>9</sup> עָלָה עָשָׁן בְּאָפוֹ

וְאֵשׁ מִפִּי הִתְאַכַּל

גִּחְלִים בְּעֵרוֹ מִמְּנוֹ:

v. 1. בכתב היד שלנו כתוב בצורת שירה

**2 Samuel 22:5–6.** Flood imagery (“breakers,” “torrents”) combines with figures of hunting (“snares,” “coils”—that is, traps) to express the speaker’s sense of overpowering and hidden dangers. The figure of Death (*mavet*) in verses 5 and

6 retains a personified quality, echoing the ancient Canaanite god Mot (death).

**Death . . . Belial . . . Sheol** Three names for the netherworld.

10He bent the sky and came down,  
 Thick cloud beneath His feet.  
 11He mounted a cherub and flew;  
 He was seen on the wings of the wind.  
 12He made pavilions of darkness about Him,  
 Dripping clouds, huge thunderheads;  
 13In the brilliance before Him  
 Blazed fiery coals.  
 14The LORD thundered forth from heaven,  
 The Most High sent forth His voice;  
 15He let loose bolts, and scattered them;  
 Lightning, and put them to rout.  
 16The bed of the sea was exposed,  
 The foundations of the world were laid bare  
 By the mighty roaring of the LORD,  
 At the blast of the breath of His nostrils.  
 17He reached down from on high, He took  
 me,  
 Drew me out of the mighty waters;  
 18He rescued me from my enemy so strong,  
 From foes too mighty for me.  
 19They attacked me on my day of calamity,  
 But the LORD was my stay.  
 20He brought me out to freedom,  
 He rescued me because He was pleased with  
 me.  
 21The LORD rewarded me according to my  
 merit,  
 He requited the cleanness of my hands.  
 22For I have kept the ways of the LORD  
 And have not been guilty before my God;  
 23I am mindful of all His rules  
 And have not departed from His laws.  
 24I have been blameless before Him,  
 And have guarded myself against sinning—  
 25And the LORD has requited my merit,  
 According to my purity in His sight.

10 וַיִּט שָׁמַיִם וַיֵּרֵד  
 וַעֲרַפֵּל תַּחַת רַגְלָיו:  
 11 וַיִּרְכַּב עַל־כְּרוּב וַיֵּעֵף  
 וַיֵּרָא עַל־כַּנְפֵי־רוּחַ:  
 12 וַיֵּשֶׁת חֹשֶׁךְ סְבִיבֹתָיו סִפּוֹת  
 חֲשֻׁר־תַּיִם עָבֵי שְׁחָקִים:  
 13 מִנְּגֵה נֹגֵד  
 בָּעָרוֹ גַּחֲלֵי־אֵשׁ:  
 14 יִרְעַם מִן־שָׁמַיִם יְהוָה  
 וַעֲלִיּוֹן יִתֵּן קוֹלוֹ:  
 15 וַיִּשְׁלַח חֲצִיִּים וַיִּפְיֵצֵם  
 בָּרָק וַיהִמֵּם וַיִּדְהֵם:  
 16 וַיִּרְאוּ אַפְקֵי יָם  
 יִגְלוּ מַסְדּוֹת תֵּבֵל  
 בְּגַעַרַת יְהוָה  
 מִנִּשְׁמַת רוּחַ אָפוֹ:  
 17 יִשְׁלַח מִמְרוֹם יַקְחֵנִי  
 יִמְשֹׁנִי מִמַּיִם רַבִּים:  
 18 וַיִּצִילֵנִי מֵאֵיבֵי עֵז  
 מִשׁוֹנְאֵי כִּי אִמְצֹו מִמֶּנִּי:  
 19 יִקְדֵּמֵנִי בַיּוֹם אֵינִי  
 וַיְהִי יְהוָה מִשְׁעֵן לִי:  
 20 וַיִּצַּא לְמַרְחָב אֶתִּי  
 יַחֲלִצֵנִי כִּי־חָפֵץ בִּי:  
 21 וַיִּגְמְלֵנִי יְהוָה כְּצַדִּיקְתִּי  
 כְּכֹר יָדַי יִשִּׁיב לִי:  
 22 כִּי שָׁמַרְתִּי דַרְכֵי יְהוָה  
 וְלֹא רָשַׁעְתִּי מֵאַלְהֵי:  
 23 כִּי כָל־מִשְׁפָּטוֹ מִשְׁפָּטָיו לִנְגִדִי  
 וְחֻקְתָּיו לֹא־אֶסּוּר מִמֶּנֶּה:  
 24 וְאֶהְיֶה תָמִים לוֹ  
 וְאֶשְׁתַּמְרָה מֵעוֹנֵי:  
 25 וַיִּשָּׁב יְהוָה לִי כְּצַדִּיקְתִּי  
 כְּבָרִי לִנְגַד עֵינָיו:

**11. He was seen** Hebrew: *va-yera*. The version in Ps. 18:11 has the similar-looking word *va-yeide* (He was gliding /swooping)—more appropriate to the atmospheric figures used here.

26 With the loyal You deal loyally;  
With the blameless hero, blamelessly.  
27 With the pure You act in purity,  
And with the perverse You are wily.  
28 To humble folk You give victory,  
And You look with scorn on the haughty.  
29 You, O LORD, are my lamp;  
The LORD lights up my darkness.  
30 With You, I can rush a barrier,  
With my God, I can scale a wall.  
31 The way of God is perfect,  
The word of the LORD is pure.  
He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.  
32 Yea, who is a god except the LORD,  
Who is a rock except God?—  
33 The God, my mighty stronghold,  
Who kept my path secure;  
34 Who made my legs like a deer's,  
And set me firm on the heights;  
35 Who trained my hands for battle,  
So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze!  
36 You have granted me the shield of Your  
protection  
And Your providence has made me great.  
37 You have let me stride on freely,  
And my feet have not slipped.  
38 I pursued my enemies and wiped them out,  
I did not turn back till I destroyed them.  
39 I destroyed them, I struck them down;  
They rose no more, they lay at my feet.  
40 You have girt me with strength for battle,

עַם־חָסִיד תִּתְחַסֵּד 26  
עַם־גִּבּוֹר תִּתְמִים תִּתַּמֶּם:  
עַם־נָבֵר תִּתָּבֵר 27  
וְעַם־עֵקֶשׁ תִּתְפַּל:  
וְאֶת־עַם עֲנִי תוֹשִׁיעַ 28  
וְעֵינֶיךָ עַל־רָמִים תִּשְׁפִּיל:  
כִּי־אֲתָה נִירִי יְהוָה 29  
וַיהוָה יַגִּיד חֲשָׁבִי:  
כִּי בִכָּה \* אָרוּץ גְּדוּד 30  
בְּאֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹלְגַשׁוּר:  
הָאֵל תִּמְיִם דִּרְבּוֹ 31  
אֲמַרְתָּ יְהוָה צְרוּפָה  
מִגֵּן הוּא לְכָל הַחַסִּים בּוֹ:  
כִּי מִי־אֵל מִבְּלַעְדֵי יְהוָה 32  
וּמִי צוּר מִבְּלַעְדֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ:  
הָאֵל מְעוּזֵי חַיִל 33  
וַיִּתֵּר תִּמְיִם דְּרוֹבֵי דִרְכָי:  
מִשׁוּנָה רִגְלֵי וְרִגְלֵי כְּאֵילוֹת 34  
וְעַל בַּמּוֹתֵי יַעֲמִדְנִי:  
מִלְמַד יָדַי לְמַלְחָמָה 35  
וּנְחַת קֶשֶׁת־נְחוּשָׁה זִרְעִתִּי:  
וַתִּתֵּן־לִי מִגֵּן יִשְׁעָךְ 36  
וַעֲנִתָךְ תִּרְבַּנִּי:  
תִּרְחִיב צַעְדֵי תַחְתָּנִי 37  
וְלֹא מְעַדוּ קַרְסָלָי:  
אֲרֹדְפָה אִיבֵי וְאֲשְׁמִידֵם 38  
וְלֹא אָשׁוּב עַד־כְּלוֹתָם:  
וְאֶכְלֵם וְאֶמְחָצֵם 39  
וְלֹא יִקּוּמוּן וַיִּפְּלוּ תַחַת רִגְלֵי:  
וַתִּזְרַנֵּי \* חַיִל לְמַלְחָמָה 40

י תיר ה' v. 30.

א חסר v. 40.

**36. And Your providence has made me great** (*v'anvatkha tarbeini*). The problem is resolved by a preferred reading (*ezrat'kha tarbeini*), which means "Your help [or: valor]" has raised me, found in the Qumran ("Dead Sea") scrolls. The Hebrew (*va-anot'kha tarbeini*) is difficult, literally yielding something like "and Your answer [to my prayer] has raised me." Psalms 18:36 reads here "and Your humility has raised me"

Brought low my foes before me,  
 41Made my enemies turn tail before me,  
 My foes—and I wiped them out.  
 42They looked, but there was none to deliver;  
 To the LORD, but He answered them not.  
 43I pounded them like dust of the earth,  
 Stamped, crushed them like dirt of the streets.  
 44You have rescued me from the strife of  
 peoples,  
 Kept me to be a ruler of nations;  
 Peoples I knew not must serve me.  
 45Aliens have cringed before me,  
 Paid me homage at the mere report of me.  
 46Aliens have lost courage  
 And come trembling out of their fastnesses.  
 47The LORD lives! Blessed is my rock!  
 Exalted be God, the rock  
 Who gives me victory;  
 48The God who has vindicated me  
 And made peoples subject to me,  
 49Rescued me from my enemies,  
 Raised me clear of my foes,  
 Saved me from lawless men!  
 50For this I sing Your praise among the na-  
 tions  
 And hymn Your name:  
 51Tower of victory to His king,  
 Who deals graciously with His anointed,  
 With David and his offspring evermore.

תְּכַרִּיעַ קָמִי תַחְתָּנִי :  
 41 וְאֵיבֵי תַתָּה לִי עָרַף  
 מְשֻׁנְאֵי וְאֶצְמִיתֶם :  
 42 יִשְׁעוּ וְאִין מְשִׁיעַ  
 אֶל־יְהוָה וְלֹא עָנָם :  
 43 וְאֶשְׁחָקֶם כַּעֲפַר־אָרֶץ  
 כְּטִיט־חוֹצוֹת אֲדָקֶם אֲרַקֶּם :  
 44 וְתַפְלִיטֵנִי מִרִיבֵי עַמִּי\*  
 תִּשְׁמְרֵנִי לְרֹאשׁ גּוֹיִם  
 עַם לֹא־יִדְעֵתִי יַעֲבֹדֵנִי :  
 45 בְּנֵי נֶכֶר יִתְכַחֲשׁוּ־לִי  
 לְשִׁמוֹעַ אֲנִין יִשְׁמְעוּ לִי :  
 46 בְּנֵי נֶכֶר יִבְלוּ  
 וַיִּחְגְּרוּ מִמִּסְגְּרוֹתֶם :  
 47 חַי־יְהוָה וּבְרוּךְ צוּרִי  
 וַיִּרֶם אֱלֹהֵי צוּר  
 יִשְׁעֵי :  
 48 הָאֵל הַנִּתֵּן נְקָמָת לִי  
 וּמוֹרִיד עַמִּים תַּחְתָּנִי :  
 49 וּמוֹצִיאֵי מֵאֵיבֵי  
 וּמִקְמֵי תִרְוּמֹתַי  
 מֵאִישׁ חֲמָסִים תַּצִּילֵנִי :  
 50 עַל־כֵּן אוֹדֶךָ יְהוָה בְּגוֹיִם  
 וְלִשְׁמֹךָ אֲזַמֵּר :  
 51 מַגְדִּיל מַגְדּוֹל יִשׁוּעוֹת מְלִכּוֹ  
 וְעֹשֶׂה־חֶסֶד לְמַשִּׁיחוֹ  
 לְדָוִד וּלְזֶרְעוֹ עַד־עוֹלָם : פ

v. 44. סבירין ומטעין "עמים", ובנוסח אחר "עם" וגם בנוסח אחר "עמים"

44. *peoples* Translated per the reading in some manuscripts and in the Septuagint. The Hebrew text above, like most manuscripts and the printed editions, reads "my people" [Transl.].

51. *Tower of victory* Hebrew: *magdoly'shu-ot*. As usual, this translation follows the text as read (*k'rei*). Meanwhile, the text as written (*k'tiv*) preserves the first word as a verb, *magdil*, yielding

"He accords wondrous victories" (as in Ps. 18:51). The image of God as a tower is not out of keeping with the song, yet here a verb better matches the next part of the verse.

Both the *k'rei* and the *k'tiv* versions are preserved liturgically, at the close of the full grace after meals. The *k'tiv* is recited on weekdays; the *k'rei*, on *Shabbat* and festivals.