

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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¹⁷Now 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 פְּרָעָה אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־נָחַם
אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא
כִּי | אָמַר אֱלֹהִים פְּוִיֵּנָחַם הָעָם 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.”¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.”

²⁰They set out from Succoth, and encamped at Etham, at the edge of the wilderness.²¹ 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: ¹⁸ וַיִּסֹּב אֱלֹהִים |
 אֶת־הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף
 וְחֹמְשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
¹⁹ וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ כִּי
 הִשְׁבַּע הַשְּׂבִיעַ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר
 פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֵעֲלִיתֶם
 אֶת־עֲצָמֹתַי מִזֶּה אִתְּכֶם:
²⁰ וַיִּסְעוּ מִסּוּכּוֹת וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּאֶתְמֹת בְּקֶצֶה
 הַמִּדְבָּר: ²¹ וַיְהִי הוּא הַלֶּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם
 בַּעֲמֹוד עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וְלַיְלָה בַּעֲמֹוד
 אֵשׁ לְהָאִיר לָהֶם לְלַכֹּת 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. ²²The 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: ²Tell 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. ³Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, “They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.” ⁴Then 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.

⁵When 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 בַּעַל
צֶפֶן נִכְחוּ תַחְנוּ עַל־הַיָּם: ³ וְאָמַר פַּרְעֹה
לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִבְכִּים הֵם בְּאֶרֶץ סֹגֵר
עֲלֵיהֶם הַמִּדְבָּר: ⁴ וְחִזַּקְתִּי אֶת־לֵב־פַּרְעֹה
וְרָדְף אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאֶכְפְּדָה בְּפַרְעֹה וּבְכָל־
חֵילוֹ וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן:

⁵ וַיִּגְדַּל לְמַלְכֵּן 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?” ⁶He ordered his chariot and took his men with him; ⁷he took six hundred of his picked chariots, and the rest of the chariots of Egypt, with officers in all of them. ⁸The LORD stiffened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he gave chase to the Israelites. As the Israelites were departing defiantly, ⁹the 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.

¹⁰As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the LORD. ¹¹And 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: ⁶וַיֹּאסֹר אֶת-רֶכְבוֹ וְאֶת-עַמּוֹ
לָקַח עִמּוֹ: ⁷וַיִּקַּח שֵׁשׁ-מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב בָּחוּר
וְכָל רֶכֶב מִצְרַיִם וְשָׁלֹשׁ עַל-כִּלּוֹ:
⁸וַיִּחְזַק יְהוָה אֶת-לֵב פִּרְעָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
וַיִּרְדֹּף אַחֲרָיו בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
שָׁנִי יֵצְאִים בְּיַד רַמָּה: ⁹וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם
אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁיגוּ אוֹתָם חֲנִיִּים עַל-הֵימָם
כָּל-סוּס רֶכֶב פִּרְעָה וּפָרָשָׁיו וַחִילוֹ עַל-פִּי
הַחַיִּילָת לִפְנֵי בַעַל צַפּוֹן:
¹⁰וּפִרְעָה הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-
עֵינֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּה מִצְרַיִם | נֹסַע אַחֲרֵיהֶם
וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-
יְהוָה: ¹¹וַיֹּאמְרוּ 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? ¹²Is 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?'" ¹³But 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. ¹⁴The LORD will battle for you; you hold your peace!"

¹⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷And 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. ¹⁸Let the Egyptians know that I am LORD, when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

¹⁹The 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: ¹² הֲלֹא־זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר חֲדַל מִמֶּנּוּ וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֶת־מִצְרַיִם כִּי טוֹב לָנוּ עֲבֹד אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מִמָּוְתוֹ בַּמִּדְבָּר: ¹³ 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: ¹⁴ יְהוָה יִלְחָם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּחְרְשׁוּן: פ

¹⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִה־תִּצַּעַק אֵלַי דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ: ¹⁶ וְאַתָּה הֲרֵם אֶת־מִטְּףְךָ וּנְטֵה אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־הַיָּם וּבִקְעָהוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹף הַיָּם בַּיַּבֵּשׁה: ¹⁷ וְאַנִּי הִנְנִי מַחֲזֵק אֶת־לֵב מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאֶכְפְּדָה בַּפָּרְעֹה וּבְכָל־חֵילוֹ בְּרַכְבּוֹ וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו: ¹⁸ וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּהַכְּבֹדִי בַּפָּרְעֹה בְּרַכְבּוֹ וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו:

¹⁹ וַיִּסַּע מִלְּאֲךָ הָאֱלֹהִים הַהֲלֹךְ 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,²⁰ 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.

²¹Then 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,²² and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.²³ The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen.²⁴ 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.²⁵ He locked the wheels of their chariots so that they

וַיִּבֹא בֵּין | מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין מַחֲנֵה
יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהִי הָעָנָן וְהַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיִּקָּר אֶת-
הַלַּיְלָה וְלֹא-קָרַב זֶה אֶל-זֶה כָּל-הַלַּיְלָה :
וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדוֹ עַל-הַיָּם וַיּוֹלֶךְ יְהוָה |
אֶת-הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קְדָיִם עֶזְרָה כָּל-הַלַּיְלָה
וַיִּשֶׁם אֶת-הַיָּם לַחֲרָבָה וַיִּבְקְעוּ הַמַּיִם :
וַיִּבְּאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבֵּשׁה
וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חֹמָה מִיְמִינֵם וּמִשְׂמָאלֵם :
וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּבְּאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם כָּל סוּס
פָּרְעֹה רָכְבוּ וּפָרְשָׁיו אֶל-תּוֹךְ הַיָּם :²⁴ וַיְהִי
בְּאִשְׁמֹרֶת הַבֶּקֶר וַיִּשְׁקֹף יְהוָה אֶל-מַחֲנֵה
מִצְרַיִם בְּעָמוּד אֵשׁ וְעָנָן וַיִּהְיֶה אֶת
מַחֲנֵה 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.”

²⁶Then 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.” ²⁷Moses 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. ²⁸The 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. ²⁹But the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

³⁰Thus the LORD delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea. ³¹And 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: ²⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נִטֵּה אֶת־יָדְךָ
עַל־הַיָּם וַיָּשׁוּבוּ הַמַּיִם עַל־מִצְרַיִם עַל־
רֶכֶבָּו וְעַל־פָּרָשָׁיו: ²⁷ וַיִּטֵּ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ
עַל־הַיָּם וַיָּשָׁב הַיָּם לַפְּנוֹת בְּקֶרֶן לְאִיתָנוּ
וּמִצְרַיִם נָסִים לִקְרֹאתוֹ וַיִּנְעַר יְהוָה אֶת־
מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם: ²⁸ וַיָּשׁוּבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ
אֶת־הָרֶכֶב וְאֶת־הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכָל חַיִּל
פָּרָעָה הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם לֹא־נִשְׁאַר
בָּהֶם עַד־אֶחָד: ²⁹ וּבִגְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ
בַּיַבֶּשֶׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חֲמָה
מִימִינֵם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם:

³⁰ וַיֹּשַׁע יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מֵת
עַל־שַׁפַּת הַיָּם: ³¹ וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד
הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֵּירָאוּ
הָעָם אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְיִנוּ בַּיהוָה 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.

²The 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: ³ יְהוָה אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה יְהוָה
 שְׁמוֹ: ⁴ מִרְכַּבַּת פְּרִיעָה וְחִילוֹ יֵרָה בָיִם וּמִבְחָר
 שְׁלֹשֵׁיו טַבְעוּ בַיַּם-סוּף: ⁵ תְּהַמֹּת יִכְסִימוּ יִרְדּוּ בְּמִצּוֹלַת כְּמוֹ-
 אֶבֶן: ⁶ יִמְיִנָּה יְהוָה נֶאֱדָרִי בַּבַּח יִמְיִנָּה
 יְהוָה תִּרְעַץ אוֹיֵב: ⁷ וּבְרַב גְּאוּנָה תִהְרָס
 קִמְיָה תִשְׁלַח חֲרֹנָה יֵאכְלֵמוּ כֶּקֶשׁ: ⁸ וּבְרוּחַ
 אֶפֶיף נַעְרָמוּ מַיִם נִצְבּוּ כְמוֹ-גֵד
 נְזִלִים קִפְאוּ תְהַמֹּת בְּלִבֵּיהֶם: ⁹ אָמַר
 אוֹיֵב אֶרְדֶּף אֲשִׁיג אַחְלַק שָׁלַל תִּמְלֵאמוּ
 נִפְשָׁיו אֲרִיק חֲרָבִי תוֹרִישְׁמוּ יָדַי: ¹⁰ נִשְׁפָּת
 בְּרוּחָהּ כִּסְמוּ יָם צָלְלוּ כְּעוֹפְרַת בְּמַיִם
 אֲדִירִים: ¹¹ מִי־כִמְכָה * בְּאֵלֶם 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.

³The LORD, the Warrior—

LORD is His name!

⁴Pharaoh's chariots and his army

He has cast into the sea;

And the pick of his officers

Are drowned in the Sea of Reeds.

⁵The deeps covered them;

They went down into the depths like a stone.

⁶Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power,

Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the foe!

⁷In Your great triumph You break Your opponents;

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

⁸At 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.

⁹The 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.”

¹⁰You made Your wind blow, the sea covered them;

They sank like lead in the majestic waters.

¹¹Who 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,

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 יְמִינְךָ תִּבְלַעְמוּ אֶרֶץ : 13 נְחִיתַי
 בַּחֲסִדְךָ עַם-יְהוָה גְּאֻלַּת נְהִלַּת בְּעֵזְבְךָ אֶל-נְהוּ
 קְדֻשָּׁךְ : 14 שְׁמַעוּ עַמִּים יְרַגְזוּן חֵיל
 אַחֲזוּ יִשְׁבֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים : 15 אֲזוּ נִבְהִלּוּ אֱלוֹפָי
 אָדוּם אֵילֵי מוֹאָב יֵאֱחָזְמוּ רַעַד נִמְגּוּ
 כָּל יִשְׁבֵי כְנָעַן : 16 תִּפְּל עֲלֵיהֶם אֵימַתָּה
 וְפָחַד בַּגְּדֵל זְרוּעֶךָ יִדְמּוּ כְּאֶבֶן עַד-
 יַעֲבֹר עִמָּךְ יְהוָה עַד-יַעֲבֹר עַם-יְהוָה
 קְנִיתַי : 17 תִּבְאָמוּ וְתִטְעֲמוּ בְהֵר נִחַלְתְּךָ מְכוֹן
 לְשִׁבְתְּךָ פַעֲלַת יְהוָה מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדָנִי כוֹנְנִי
 יְדִירָךְ : 18 יְהוָה | יִמְלֶךְ לְעֵלָם וְעַד :

v. 11. יתיר ה'

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!
¹²You put out Your right hand,
 The earth swallowed them.
¹³In Your love You lead the people You redeemed;
 In Your strength You guide them to Your holy abode.
¹⁴The peoples hear, they tremble;
 Agony grips the dwellers in Philistia.
¹⁵Now are the clans of Edom dismayed;
 The tribes of Moab—trembling grips them;
 All the dwellers in Canaan are aghast.
¹⁶Terror 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.
¹⁷You 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.
¹⁸The 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

¹⁹For 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.

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

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

²²Then Moses caused Israel to set out from

כִּי בָּא טֹס פְּרָעָה בְּרִכְבּוֹ וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו בַּיָּם
וַיִּשָׁב יְהוָה עֲלֵהֶם אֶת־מֵי הַיָּם וּבִנְי
יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ בִיבְשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם: פ

וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אַחֹת אֶהֱרֹן
אֶת־הַתִּמְבֵּל בְּיָדָהּ וַתִּצְאֵן כָּל־הַנְּשִׂיִם
אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתַפִּים וּבַמְּחֹלֹת: ²¹ וַתַּעַן לָהֶם
מִרְיָם

שִׁירוֹ לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאָה גָּאָה
טֹס וּרְכָבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם: ס

וַיִּסַּע מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּם־סוּף ²²

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. ²³They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; that is why it was named Marah. ²⁴And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" ²⁵So 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. ²⁶He 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: ²³ וַיָּבֹאוּ מַרְתָּה
וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשָׁתוֹת מֵימָם מִמַּרְה כִּי מָרִים
הֵם עַל-יָפֶן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ מַרְה: ²⁴ וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם
עַל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַה-נִּשְׁתָּה: ²⁵ וַיִּצְעַק
אֶל-יְהוָה וַיֹּרְהוּ יְהוָה עֵץ וַיִּשְׁלַךְ אֶל-
הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם

שָׁם שָׁם לֹו חֹק וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשָׁם נִסָּהוּ:
²⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱ-שְׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע 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.”

²⁷And 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. ²In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³The 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.”

⁴And 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 ²⁷ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵילִמָּה וְשֵׁם שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה עֵינֹת
מַיִם וְשִׁבְעִים תְּמָרִים וַיַּחְנוּ־שָׁם עַל־
הַמַּיִם:

טז וַיִּסְעוּ מֵאֵילִם וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל־עֵדַת
בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מִדְבַר־סִין אֲשֶׁר בֵּין־
אֵילִם וּבֵין סִינַי בְּחַמְשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ
הַשְּׁנִי לְיִצְאֲתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ² וַיִּלִּינוּ
וַיִּלּוּנוּ כָּל־עֵדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־מֹשֶׁה
וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן בַּמִּדְבָּר: ³ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי־יָתֵן מוֹתָנוּ בְּיַד־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבְתָּנוּ עַל־סִיר הַבָּשָׂר בְּאֲכֻלָּנוּ
לֶחֶם לְשִׁבְעַת כִּי־הוּצֵאתָם אֶתְנוּ אֶל־
הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לְהַמִּית אֶת־כָּל־הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה
בָּרָעַב: ס
⁴ 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-

portion—that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not. ⁵But on the sixth day, when they apportion what they have brought in, it shall prove to be double the amount they gather each day.” ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “By evening you shall know it was the LORD who brought you out from the land of Egypt; ⁷and in the morning you shall behold the Presence of the LORD, because He has heard your grumblings against the LORD. For who are we that you should grumble against us? ⁸Since it is the LORD,” Moses continued, “who will give you flesh to eat in the evening and bread in the morning to the full, because the LORD has heard the grumblings you utter against Him, what is our part? Your grumbling is not against us, but against the LORD!”

bution of this scarce commodity. The insecurity of the people’s day-to-day existence, wholly dependent on this unfamiliar substance, heightens their absolute reliance on God’s beneficence.

that I may thus test them There are two interpretations of this phrase: (a) The gift of manna is itself to be subject to restrictions that will test Israel’s obedience and trust, and (b) God deliberately subjects the Israelites to hunger to demonstrate their absolute dependence on Him for sustenance.

5. sixth day Of the week.

THE PEOPLE ARE INFORMED (vv. 6–10)

Even though Moses and Aaron are not commanded to transmit God’s message, they do so anyway to pacify the populace. But they speak in generalities and say nothing about the sixth day. That is why, according to verse 22, the chieftains are later puzzled about the purpose of the double portion of manna.

יום בְּיוֹמוֹ לְמַעַן אֲנַסְנוּ הַיִּלְךָ בְּתוֹרַתִּי אִם-לֹא: ⁵ וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי וְהָכִינוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-יָבִיאוּ וְהָיָה מִשְׁנָה עַל אֲשֶׁר-יִלְקְטוּ יוֹם אֶחָד יוֹם: ⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרֹב וַיִּדְעֶתֶם כִּי יְהוָה הוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ⁷ וּבֹקֵר וּרְאִיתֶם אֶת-כְּבוֹד יְהוָה בְּשָׁמְעוֹ אֶת-תְּלַנְתִּיכֶם עַל-יְהוָה וְנַחֲנוּ מָה כִּי תִּלְוּנוּ תִּלְוֵנוּ עֲלֵינוּ: ⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּתַת יְהוָה לָכֶם בְּעֶרֶב בָּשָׂר לְאֹכֵל וּלְחֶם בַּבֹּקֵר לְשַׁבַּע בְּשָׁמַע יְהוָה אֶת-תְּלַנְתִּיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-אַתֶּם מַלְיָנִים עָלָיו וְנַחֲנוּ מָה לֹא-עָלֵינוּ תְּלַנְתִּיכֶם כִּי עַל-יְהוָה:

6. Aaron He is included here because the people directed their complaint against both Moses and Aaron.

it was the LORD And not we, who took you out of Egypt.

7. Presence of the LORD This is the first biblical usage of the crucial Hebrew phrase “*k’vod YHVH*.” It refers to a fiery phenomenon radiating a bright light (see Ezek. 1:28; and cf. Exod. 3:2, 19:18).

against the LORD The grumbling against Moses and Aaron is really a grievance against God, from whom their mission and authority derived.

For who are we . . . This self-deprecating question is intensified by the Hebrew word *mah*, literally, “what”—used of things rather than persons.

8. Moses repeats the sentiment he has just voiced and expands it to emphasize that the people’s complaint is in fact a challenge to God.

to eat . . . to the full The varying expres-

CHAPTER 16

4. that I may thus test them In what way is the manna a test? Some commentators see it as a deprivation, being confined to the same limited menu day after day. Others interpret it differently: If people are assured of food to eat without any effort on their part, will they remember to be grateful to God (Dov Ber of

Mezeritch)? Are wealthy people more likely to follow God’s ways, out of gratitude? Or are poor people more likely to do so, because their awareness of their dependence on God is greater? Perhaps the test was to see whether people would content themselves with one day’s supply, truly believing that God could be counted on to renew their food supply on the morrow.

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole Israelite community: Advance toward the LORD, for He has heard your grumbling.” ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole Israelite community, they turned toward the wilderness, and there, in a cloud, appeared the Presence of the LORD.

¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses: ¹²“I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Speak to them and say: By evening you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; and you shall know that I the LORD am your God.”

¹³In the evening quail appeared and covered the camp; in the morning there was a fall of dew about the camp. ¹⁴When the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, lay a fine and flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?”—for they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “That is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what the LORD has commanded: Gather as much of it as each of you requires to

9 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אָמַר אֶל־כָּל־עַדְתְּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל קִרְבוּ לַפְּנֵי יְהוָה כִּי שָׁמַע אֶת תְּלַנְתֵיכֶם: 10 וַיְהִי כַדְבָּר אַהֲרֹן אֶל־כָּל־עַדְתְּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּפְּנוּ אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר וַהֲיָה כְבוֹד יְהוָה נִרְאָה בַעֲנָן: פ

ששי 11 וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: 12 שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־תְּלֹנֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דְּבַר אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר בֵּין הָעֲרִפִּים תֹּאכְלוּ בָשָׂר וּבִבְקָר תִּשְׁבְּעוּ־לֶחֶם וַיְדַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

13 וַיְהִי בָעֶרֶב וַתַּעַל הַשָּׁלוּ וַתִּכַּס אֶת־הַמַּחֲנֶה וּבִבְקָר הִיְתָה שְׂכַבַת הַטֵּל סָבִיב לַמַּחֲנֶה: 14 וַתַּעַל שְׂכַבַת הַטֵּל וַהֲיָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמִּדְבָּר דֶּק מִחֲסָפָס דֶּק כַּכֹּפֶר עַל־הָאָרֶץ: 15 וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו מִן הוּא כִּי לֹא יָדְעוּ מִה־הוּא וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵיהֶם הוּא הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה לָכֶם לֶאֱכֹלָה: 16 זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה לְקַטֹּוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִישׁ לְפִי

sions—“flesh to eat,” and “bread . . . to the full”—seem to indicate that God will satisfy the cravings for both flesh and bread.

9. Aaron again acts as Moses’ spokesman, this time to the Israelites rather than to Pharaoh. *toward the LORD* Literally, “before the LORD.” Here, as Rashi notes, it must refer to the direction of the cloud.

10. in a cloud That is, in the luminous cloud that symbolizes God’s active, dynamic, indwelling Presence in Israel during the wilderness period. The sudden appearance of the cloud affirms the announcement just made by Aaron. See Comment to 13:21–22.

THE QUAIL AND MANNA ARRIVE (vv. 11–20)

God fulfills His promise. The narrative offers a detailed description of the manna, but says little about the quail. Perhaps this is because the cry for bread was considered reasonable and the craving for meat was not. The Torah describes the

provision of manna as a supernatural phenomenon; the quail, except for its timing, was entirely natural (see Num. 11:31–32). The manna was supplied continually for 40 years, whereas the quail appeared only occasionally.

12. I have heard The repetition of the complaint serves to introduce the account of the actual arrival of the quail and manna. They appear not by chance but as the result of divine deliberation. *you shall know* Israel “knows” God by experiencing His actions on their behalf.

13. quail These small birds of the pheasant family migrate in vast flocks from central Europe to Africa in the autumn. To this day they are caught in large numbers in northern Sinai and Egypt.

a fall of dew Two layers of dew enveloped the manna, so that it remained clean until it was collected in the early morning. In biblical times, dew was thought to descend like rain from the sky; thus the manna could be called “bread from Heaven.”

eat, an *omer* to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent.”

¹⁷The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little. ¹⁸But when they measured it by the *omer*, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency: they had gathered as much as they needed to eat. ¹⁹And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.” ²⁰But they paid no attention to Moses; some of them left of it until morning, and it became infested with maggots and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

²¹So they gathered it every morning, each as much as he needed to eat; for when the sun grew hot, it would melt. ²²On the sixth day they gathered double the amount of food, two *omers* for each; and when all the chieftains of the community came and told Moses, ²³he said to them, “This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy sabbath of the LORD. Bake what you would bake and boil what you would

אָכְלוּ עֹמֶר לְגִלְגֶּלֶת מִסֹּפֶר נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם
אִישׁ לְאִשֶּׁר בְּאֹהֶלוֹ תִקְחוּ:

וַיַּעֲשׂוּכֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּלְקְטוּ הַמִּרְבָּה
וְהַמִּמְעִיט: ¹⁸ וַיִּמְדוּ בְעֹמֶר וְלֹא הָעֲדִיף
הַמִּרְבָּה וְהַמִּמְעִיט לֹא הִחְסִיר אִישׁ לְפִי-
אָכְלוֹ לְקֹטוֹ: ¹⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ
אֲלֵיוֹתָּר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר: ²⁰ וְלֹא-שָׁמְעוּ
אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּתְרוּ אַנְשִׁים מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר
וַיֵּרָם תּוֹלְעִים וַיִּבְאֵשׁ וַיִּקְצַף עֲלֵהֶם
מֹשֶׁה:

וַיִּלְקְטוּ אֹתוֹ בַּבֹּקֶר בְּבֹקֶר אִישׁ כֶּפֶי
אָכְלוּ וְחֵם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְנִמַּס: ²² וַיְהִי אַ בַּיּוֹם
הַשְּׁשִׁי לְקֹטוֹ לֶחֶם מִשְׁנֵה שְׁנֵי הָעֹמֶר
לְאֶחָד וַיִּבְאוּ כָּל-נְשֵׂאֵי הָעֵדָה וַיִּגִּדּוּ
לְמֹשֶׁה: ²³ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר
יְהוָה שְׁבֹתוֹן שְׁבֹת-קֹדֶשׁ לִיהוָה מָחָר אֵת
אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאפּוּ אַפּוֹ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר-תִּבְשֹׁלוּ

16. omer In this chapter, a dry measure of volume; elsewhere it means “a sheaf of grain.”

19. Ibn Ezra understood this restriction as a test of faith that the manna would appear again the next day.

THE LAW OF SHABBAT (vv. 21–30)

God’s abstention from creativity on the seventh day is the climax of the Creation, as narrated in Gen. 2:1–3. In describing that, the Hebrew stem שבת is used as a verb, with God as the subject. Now, for the first time, “*shabbat*” appears as a noun, to designate a fixed day that recurs regularly. Note that the Israelites are expected to observe *Shabbat* even before it has been commanded of them at Mount Sinai.

22. Presumably, the people had been told to collect double the usual daily amount on Fridays,

but had not been told why. The tribal chiefs report to Moses that the order was followed, and they await clarification.

23. a day of rest Hebrew: *shabbaton*, an abstract term meaning “restfulness.”

a holy sabbath The holiness of the day flows from God’s blessing and sanctity, as related in Gen. 2:3. It is an integral part of the divinely ordained cosmic order. Its blessed and sacred character is independent of human initiative. Hence it is frequently referred to as “a sabbath of the LORD.” See Comments to Exod. 20:8–11.

bake . . . boil The people would grind the manna between millstones or pound it in a mortar, boil it in a pot, and make it into cakes.

all that is left That is, what was neither baked nor boiled on Friday but remained in its original raw and still edible state.

17. some gathering much It was a violation of God’s plan for the people that some should grab more of the good things of life than their neighbors, ostentatiously gorging themselves while others went hungry. God provides

food for everyone, but some people insist on taking more than their share. For them, it is not sufficient to have plenty. To feel prosperous, they must have more than their neighbors.

22. double the amount of food The He-

boil; and all that is left put aside to be kept until morning.”²⁴ So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered; and it did not turn foul, and there were no maggots in it.²⁵ Then Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath of the LORD; you will not find it today on the plain.²⁶ Six days you shall gather it; on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none.”

²⁷ Yet some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found nothing.²⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you men refuse to obey My commandments and My teachings? ²⁹ Mark that the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you two days’ food on the sixth day. Let everyone remain where he is: let no one leave his place on the seventh day.”³⁰ So the people remained inactive on the seventh day.

³¹ The house of Israel named it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and it tasted like

בשלו ואת כל-העֹף הניחו לכם למשמרת עד-הבקר: ²⁴ ויניחו אתו עד-הבקר כאשר צוה משה ולא הבאיש ורמה לא-היתה בו: ²⁵ ויאמר משה אכלהו היום כִּי-שַׁבַּת הַיּוֹם לִיהוּה הַיּוֹם לֹא תִמְצְאֶהוּ בַשָּׂדֶה: ²⁶ שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תִּלְקְטֶהוּ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת לֹא יִהְיֶה-בוּ:

²⁷ ויהי ביום השביעי יצאו מן-העם ללקט ולא מצאו: ²⁸ ויאמר יהוה אל-משה עד-אנה מאנתם לשמר מצותי ותורתֵי: ²⁹ ראו כִּי-יהוה נתן לכם השבת על-כֵּן הוא נתן לכם ביום הששי לחם יומים שבו | איש תחתיו אל-יצא איש ממקומו ביום השביעי: ³⁰ וישבתו העם ביום השביעי:

³¹ ויקראו בית-ישראל את-שמו מן והוא בזרע גד לכן וטעמו כצפוחת בדבש:

27. Some people were skeptical of Moses’ prediction that no manna would fall on *Shabbat*, and they went out to test it.

29. has given you the sabbath The day is God’s gift to Israel.

Let everyone remain where he is . . . his place And not go out to collect manna.

AN APPENDIX ON MANNA (vv. 31–36)

This appendix apparently was written at a time later than the events just narrated. It presupposes the erection of the tabernacle, the appointment of a priesthood, the cessation of the manna, the settlement in the Land, and the fact that the *omer* measure was no longer in use.

31. The manna has been identified with the sap of the tamarisk tree in the wilderness of northern Arabia. From the sap, a type of plant lice pro-

duces a yellowish white flake or ball, which melts during the warmth of the day but congeals when cold. It has a desirable sweet taste; is often gathered by the natives in the early morning; and when cooked, becomes a kind of bread. It decays rapidly. Its ephemeral nature and its undependability—appearing irregularly and only for several hours each day—would have stamped it as supernatural, originating in heaven.

coriander An herb; its seeds are used in flavoring.

wafers The word “*tzapihit*” appears nowhere else in the Bible. In Num. 11:8 the taste is compared to “cream of oil,” i.e., rich cream. Perhaps the verse here describes the taste of the manna in its raw state and the passage in Numbers characterizes its flavor when cooked.

32. A sample of the manna—an amount

of having two loaves of bread on the table when reciting *Kiddush* to inaugurate the main meals on *Shabbat* and festivals.

of having two loaves of bread on the table when reciting *Kiddush* to inaugurate the main meals on *Shabbat* and festivals.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

16:23. put aside Cooking is one of the major categories of prohibited activity on *Shabbat*. Therefore, all cooked food for *Shabbat* meals must be prepared before *Shabbat* begins. Food already prepared may be kept warm in the oven or on a covered burner or hot plate kept on for that purpose throughout *Shabbat*.

wafers in honey. ³²Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded: Let one *omer* of it be kept throughout the ages, in order that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out from the land of Egypt.” ³³And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, put one *omer* of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout the ages.” ³⁴As the LORD had commanded Moses, Aaron placed it before the Pact, to be kept. ³⁵And the Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a settled land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. ³⁶The *omer* is a tenth of an *ephah*.

17 From the wilderness of Sin the whole Israelite community continued by stages as the LORD would command. They encamped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people quarreled with Moses.

equal to an individual’s daily ration—is to be preserved as a kind of cultural relic and serve future generations as a reminder of God’s providential care of Israel throughout the wilderness period.

33. before the LORD That is, in front of the Ark in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle, which was not erected until the first anniversary of the Exodus. Because the priesthood in Israel has not yet been established, the instruction to place the *omer* of manna “before the LORD” cannot be contemporaneous with the events described earlier.

34. the Pact That is, “the Ark of the Pact.” The Ark housed the two tablets of stone on which the Decalogue was inscribed.

35. After the Israelites crossed the Jordan and celebrated the Passover in the land of Israel for the first time (Josh. 5:11–12), the manna ceased.

to the border of the land of Canaan This additional note is not consistent with the tradition that was just cited. Ibn Ezra thought “the border of the land” might refer to Gilgal, the first Israelite encampment west of the Jordan.

36. The note is needed here because the *omer*, which never recurs in the Bible as a measure, became obsolete and unintelligible to later generations. The *ephah* (*eifah*), a dry measure of Egyptian

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה ³²
מִלֵּא הָעֶמֶר מִמֶּנּוּ לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם
לְמַעַן יִרְאוּ אֶת־הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר הֵאֲכִילָתִי
אֶתְכֶם בְּמִדְבָּר בְּהוֹצִיאִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרָיִם: ³³ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן קַח
צִנְצֻנֹת אַחַת וְתֵן־שָׁמָּה מִלֵּא־הָעֶמֶר מִן
וְהִנֵּחַ אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: ³⁴ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
וַיַּיַּחֲהוּ אַהֲרֹן לִפְנֵי הָעֵדֻת לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת:
³⁵ וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָכְלוּ אֶת־הַמָּן אַרְבַּעִים
שָׁנָה עַד־בָּאֵם אֶל־אֶרֶץ נוֹשְׁבֵת אֶת־הַמָּן
אָכְלוּ עַד־בָּאֵם אֶל־קִצְהָ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:
³⁶ וְהָעֶמֶר עֲשֵׂרִית הָאִיפָה הוּא: פ

17 וַיִּסְעוּ כָּל־עֵדֻת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל ¹
מִמִּדְבַּר־סִין לְמִסְעֵיהֶם עַל־פִּי יְהוָה
וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּרִפְדִּים וְאֵין מַיִם לְשִׁתּוֹת הָעָם:
² וַיָּרֹב הָעָם עִם־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ תַּנּוּ־לָנוּ

origin that approximately equals 1 bushel (35 L), is frequently mentioned in the Bible.

MASSAH AND MERIBAH (17:1–7)

For the third time the people grumble against Moses. This time they even question God’s providence. The incident made a profound impression on Israel’s historical memory. Its locale was called by a derogatory symbolic name: *Massah-M’rivah*, literally, “trial-quarrel.” The frequent reference to this narrative in the Bible indicates that it was much talked about in ancient Israel.

1. Rephidim The last station on the journey from the Sea of Reeds to Sinai, according to Exod. 19:2 and Num. 33:14–15. Although its precise location is still uncertain, Exod. 17:6 shows that it was situated close to Horeb/Mount Sinai. A wilderness station would have water. Why, then, was there no water for the Israelites when they arrived at Rephidim? Either the area was affected by a severe drought or the Amalekites were in control of this region and blocked the approaches to the sources of water.

2. quarreled The narrative uses the Hebrew verb ריב, “fight,” a term that conjures up a picture of an angry, hostile confrontation.

“Give us water to drink,” they said; and Moses replied to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you try the LORD?”³ But the people thirsted there for water; and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?”⁴ Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, “What shall I do with this people? Before long they will be stoning me!”⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pass before the people; take with you some of the elders of Israel, and take along the rod with which you struck the Nile, and set out.⁶ I will be standing there before you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock and water will issue from it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.⁷ The place was named Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and because they tried the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD present among us or not?”

מים וְנִשְׁתָּה וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה מַה-
 תְּרִיבוּן עִמָּדִי מִה־תִּנְסוּן אֶת־יְהוָה:
³ וַיִּצְמָא שָׁם הָעָם לַמַּיִם וַיִּלֶן הָעָם
 עַל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה הָעֲלִיתָנוּ
 מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהָמִית אֹתִי וְאֶת־בְּנֵי וְאֶת־
 מִקְנֵי בְצִמָּא:⁴ וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה
 לֵאמֹר מַה אֶעֱשֶׂה לָּעָם הַזֶּה עוֹד מֵעַט
 וְסָקְלֵנִי:⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲבֹר
 לִפְנֵי הָעָם וְקַח אִתָּךְ מִזְקָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִטֶּרֶךְ
 אֲשֶׁר הִכִּיתָ בּוֹ אֶת־הַיָּאֵר קַח בְּיָדְךָ
 וְהִלַּכְתָּ:⁶ הִנְנִי עִמָּד לִפְנֵיךְ שָׁם | עַל־
 הַצּוּר בְּחֶרֶב וְהִפִּיתָ בַּצּוּר וַיִּצְאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ
 מַיִם וְשָׁתָה הָעָם וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי
 זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:⁷ וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם מַסָּה
 וּמְרִיבָה עַל־רִיב | בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל נִסְתָּם
 אֶת־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר הֲיֵשׁ יְהוָה בְּקִרְבָּנוּ
 אִם־אֵין: פ

⁸Amalek came and fought with Israel at

וַיָּבֵא עִמְלֵק וּלְחָם עַם־יִשְׂרָאֵל⁸

Give us water The demand, in effect, is both a denunciation and an accusation.

3-4. The situation has deteriorated. The language of the people is unrestrained; their mood, explosive. A riot may break out any moment.

6. at Horeb At this site—known as “the mountain of God,” another name for Mount Sinai—Moses first received the call to leadership and the promise of Israel’s redemption.

Strike the rock Most likely, soft porous limestone, which can retain water. A sharp blow to such rock can crack its crust and release a flow of groundwater. The miracle is credited to God

and not to Moses, a point emphasized several times in the Bible. Moses acts only as the agent of God’s will, not on his own initiative.

THE BATTLE WITH AMALEK
 (vv. 8-16)

According to the more detailed account given in Deut. 25:17-19, the Amalekites made a surprise rear attack on the famished and exhausted Israelites not long after the escape from Egypt. They cut down the stragglers—the elderly, the weak, and the infirm. Israel was forced to fight its first war of survival. The Amalekites were a tribe of

CHAPTER 17

3. The text reads literally, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill me and my children?” When the Israelites were leaving Egypt in triumph and the future looked glorious, they thought in terms of “us,” all of us together. But when times became hard and there was not enough to eat and drink, they stopped saying “us” and began to speak of “me and my children.”

5. take along the rod with which you struck the Nile Thus the people might know that the rod that had been used to start a plague, to make the waters of the Nile undrinkable, could also be used to produce a blessing, to call forth water in the wilderness.

8. Amalek is the Torah’s symbol of pure malice, attacking without cause. Some people commit crimes for profit or revenge, but Amalek acts that way for the sheer joy of hurting people. God’s “war from generation to gener-

Rephidim. ⁹Moses said to Joshua, “Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in my hand.” ¹⁰Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. ¹²But Moses’ hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands; thus his hands remained steady until the sun set. ¹³And Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword.

¹⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Inscribe this in a document as a reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!” ¹⁵And Moses

בְּרִפְדִּים: ⁹וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּחַר־
לָנוּ אַנְשִׁים וְצֵא הִלָּחֵם בְּעַמְלֵק מִחֵר
אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל־רֹאשׁ הַגְּבֻעָה וּמִטָּה
הָאֱלֹהִים בְּיָדִי: ¹⁰וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כַּאֲשֶׁר
אָמַר־לוֹ מֹשֶׁה לְהִלָּחֵם בְּעַמְלֵק וּמִטָּה
אֶהְרֵן וְחֹר וְעָלוּ רֹאשׁ הַגְּבֻעָה: ¹¹וְהָיָה
כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וַגְּבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל
וּכַאֲשֶׁר יִנְיַח יָדוֹ וַגְּבַר עַמְלֵק: ¹²וַיְדִי מִטָּה
כְּבָדִים וַיִּקְחוּ־אֲבָן וַיִּשְׂימוּ תַּחְתּוֹ וַיִּשָּׁב
עָלֶיהָ וְאֶהְרֵן וְחֹר תָּמְכוּ בְיָדָיו מִזֶּה אַחַד
וּמִזֶּה אַחַד וַיְהִי יָדָיו אֲמוּנָה עַד־בֹּא
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: ¹³וַיַּחֲלֵשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת־עַמְלֵק
וְאֶת־עַמּוֹ לְפִי־חֶרֶב: פ

¹⁴וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב זֹאת זְכוֹרֹן
בְּסֵפֶר וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנִי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי־מָחָה
אֶמְחָה אֶת־זְכוֹר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

Edomite nomads whose home was the Negeb and the Sinai Peninsula. Interpreting the appearance of the Israelites in this region as a menacing encroachment on their territory and as a threat to their control of the oases and trading routes, the Amalekites savagely attacked them.

9. Joshua Although previously unmentioned, he is not identified here, which suggests that he was well known. He was Moses’ faithful attendant and his designated successor. This incident is the only account in the Torah of Joshua’s military skill.

rod of God See Comment to 4:20.

10. Hur Like Joshua, he too must have been an important public figure at this time. A later tradition identifies him as the husband of Moses’ sister, Miriam.

11. held up his hand The hand is viewed by the Sages as a symbol of action and power, not as a mysterious focusing of supernatural power on Israel.

12. remained steady The Hebrew root *אמן* means “to be firm,” “to be established” (see 2 Sam. 7:16). The verse makes the point that Moses’ steady arms and hands, which gave confidence to the people, had to be propped up. The power was God’s, not his.

13. overwhelmed The use of the Hebrew *שחלש*, “to be weak,” seems to convey the notion of inflicting heavy casualties, rather than total victory. The Amalekites were forced to withdraw.

14. Inscribe This is the first reference in the Bible to the act of writing.

a reminder See Comment to 2:24.

ation” is not only with the tribe of Amalek (which disappears early in the biblical period) but with those people in every generation who revel in cruelty and hatred.

11. When Moses raises his hands, Israel prevails because the victory is not the result of their prowess but of their faith in God, their thoughts being directed to heaven. Repeatedly in the first half of the Book of Exodus, God’s “outstretched arm” smites the Egyptians in Egypt and at the sea. Similarly, Israel is de-

scribed as leaving Egypt *b’yad ramah* (boldly), literally “with arms raised high,” and Moses commands the sea to split by lifting his arm and rod over it. The upraised arm, representing both God’s power and Israel’s attention directed heavenward, is a central image in the narrative.

14. I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek A homiletic comment suggests that sometimes Amalek is like a mad dog, attacking without provocation. In those cases, God says

built an altar and named it Adonai-nissi. ¹⁶He said, "It means, 'Hand upon the throne of the LORD!' The LORD will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages."

15. built an altar As an expression of gratitude to God and as a memorial and witness to the battle.

Adonai-nissi Literally, "The LORD is my standard."

16. This verse appears to be a citation from some ancient poetic text, now lost—perhaps the Book of the Wars of the Lord, mentioned in Num. 21:14, or the Book of Jashar, cited in Josh. 10:13 and 2 Sam. 1:18. These works apparently contained war songs and poetic accounts of battles. The verse may be an excerpt from a poetic

15 וַיִּבֶן מֹשֶׁה מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יְהוָה |
 16 וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יָד עַל־כַּס יְהוָה מִלְחָמָה
 לַיהוָה בְּעַמְלֵק מִדֹּר דָּר : פ

version of the battle against Amalek.

He said, "It means, . . ." The passage is intended to be an explanation of the altar's name, but the relationship between the two is difficult to discern.

Hand upon the throne Some ancient and medieval Jewish commentators understood the unusual word "*kes*," which appears only here, as *kissei*, "throne," and interpreted the phrase to be an oath uttered either by Moses or by God, reinforcing the promise of verse 14.

the LORD Hebrew: *yah*. See Comment to 15:2.

"I will deal with him." At times, however, Amalek is like a fly, appearing only where dirt and filth are. In those cases, the Torah says "you blot out his memory" (Deut. 25:19) by cleaning up the corruption that attracts him. We are commanded to combat Amalek in every generation, even as we wait for God to eradicate Amalek entirely. On Purim, when we make noise to blot out the name of Haman, consid-

ered a descendant of Amalek both biologically and spiritually, we are fulfilling this commandment.

16. The words translated as "throne of the LORD" (*kes Yah*) in the last verse of the *parashah*, are written "defective," with letters missing, as if to imply that God's sovereignty is incomplete as long as Amalek is at work in this world (Tanḥ. Ki Tetzei).

הַפְּטָרָה בְּשַׁלַּח

HAFTARAH FOR B'SHALLAH

JUDGES 4:4–5:31 (*Ashk'nazim*)

JUDGES 5:1–31 (*S'fardim*)

The battle between a coalition of northern Israelite tribes and the Canaanite armies is recounted in prose and in poetry in this *haftarah*. It was part of the wars that completed the conquest of the land begun by Joshua in the mid-12th century B.C.E. Both accounts praise the prowess and the initiative of two women: Deborah, a prophetess and judge in the region of Ephraim, and Jael, a tent dweller of the Kenite tribe.

Ashk'nazim recite both the prose and the poetic accounts. *S'fardim* recite only the poetic version, the focus of which is the praise of God, the participating tribes, and the individual heroes. As in military epics of other cultures, this song of glory is addressed to both contemporary and future generations.

Both versions of the victory over the Canaanites portray God's power on behalf of His people. Both versions omit the historical prologue (Judg. 4:1–3) that presents the Canaanite menace as divine punishment for Israelite offenses against God, and presents the divinely aided victory as a result of the people's return to Him in supplication.

Each version is distinctive in content, voice, style, and theological emphasis. The prose account uses the narrative voice, portraying Deborah as both charismatic leader—able to rouse the troops to battle—and prophetess. The events unfold within the framework of her prophecies, which charge the narrative with expectation. Details of the battle are meager, save for the concluding encounter between Jael and Sisera. The death of the Canaanite commander at the hands of the Kenite woman is a memorable moment of great glory. Jael's use of a ruse, by which military victory is ensured, is a characteristic feature of other narratives in the Book of Judges.

In the poetic version of these events, the hymn

of praise in Judg. 5 is sung by the heroine ("I will sing," v. 3) with interjections by a song leader or chorus ("Awake, awake, O Deborah! / . . . strike up the chant! / . . . Take your captives, O son of Abinoam," v. 12). This poetic version, placed after the historical narrative, functions as a supplementary song of victory, although it must have been formulated originally as an independent epic. This is suggested by the fact that in this version seven tribal units answered the call to battle (not just Zebulun and Naphtali, as in Judg. 4). Also, other tribes are chided or cursed for not participating in the national call to arms (5:14–18,23).

Repetitions and puns give the song a structure as well as the tempo and tone of a living epic. For example, the adverb *az* (then) provides a recurrent punctuation of details and events (vv. 8,11,13,19,22). The word *az* spelled with an *alef* also evokes a military term spelled with an *ayin*, namely: *oz* (courage, v. 21).

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

The Song of Deborah and Barak (Judg. 5) is read along with the Songs of Moses and Israel and of Miriam (Exod. 15) as two celebrations of divine salvation in history. Moses' Song of the Sea, which celebrates how the Lord "threw the Egyptian army into a panic" (*va-yahom*, Exod. 14:24), occurs at the beginning of national liberation and anticipates settlement in the Land and the building of the Temple (Exod. 15:15–17). It concludes with the climactic hope in God's enduring kingship (v. 18). Deborah's song, which celebrates how "the LORD threw Sisera and all his chariots and army into a panic" (*va-yahom*, Judg. 4:15), occurs within the period of settling the Land. It, too, concludes on a hopeful note (Judg. 5:31).

4 ⁴Deborah, wife of Lappidoth, was a prophetess; she led Israel at that time. ⁵She used to sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would come to her for decisions.

⁶She summoned Barak son of Abinoam, of Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded: Go, march up to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun. ⁷And I will draw Sisera, Jabin’s army commander, with his chariots and his troops, toward you up to the Wadi Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hands.” ⁸But Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go; if not, I will not go.” ⁹“Very well, I will go with you,” she answered. “However, there will be no glory for you in the course you are taking, for then the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰Barak then mustered Zebulun and Naphtali at Kedesh; ten thousand men marched up after him; and Deborah also went up with him.

¹¹Now 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.

¹²Sisera was informed that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. ¹³So Sisera ordered all his chariots—nine hundred iron chariots—and all the troops he had to move from Harosheth-goiim to the Wadi Kishon.

Judges 4:4. Deborah . . . a prophetess Deborah is portrayed with seerlike qualities and as a judge (v. 5). Rabbinic tradition lists her among seven female prophets in the Hebrew Bible, along with Sarah, Miriam, Hannah, Abigail, Hulda, and Esther (BT Meg. 14a).

7. Jabin A king of Canaan, with a large military force of 900 iron chariots (v. 13). See Comment on 4:23–4.

11. Kenites A nomadic tribe that associated with Israel (see Num. 24:22).

Hobab, father-in-law of Moses Here he is

ד ⁴ וְדִבּוֹרָה אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה אֲשֶׁת לַפִּידוֹת הִיא שֹׁפֵטָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּעֵת הַהִיא : ⁵ וְהִיא יוֹשֶׁבֶת תַּחַת־תְּמָר דְּבוֹרָה בֵּין הָרְמָה וּבֵין בֵּית־אֵל בְּהַר אֶפְרַיִם וַיַּעֲלוּ אֵלֶיהָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִמְשַׁפֵּט :

⁶ וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתִּקְרָא לְבָרַק בֶּן־אֲבִינוֹעַם מִקְדֵּשׁ נַפְתָּלִי וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲלֹא צִנְהָ | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לָךְ וּמִשְׁכַּתְּ בְּהַר תַּבּוֹר וְלִקַּחְתָּ עִמָּךְ עֶשְׂרֵת אֲלָפִים אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי נַפְתָּלִי וּמִבְּנֵי זְבֻלוֹן : ⁷ וּמִשְׁכַּתִּי אֵלֶיךָ אֶל־נַחַל קִישׁוֹן אֶת־סִיסְרָא שֶׁר־צָבָא יָבִין וְאֶת־רִכְבּוֹ וְאֶת־הַמוֹנֹ וַנְּתַתִּיהוּ בַיַּדְךָ : ⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ בָּרַק אִם־תִּלְכִי עִמִּי וְהִלַּכְתִּי וְאִם־לֹא תִלְכִי עִמִּי לֹא אֵלֶיךָ : ⁹ וַתֹּאמֶר הֲלֹךְ אִלָּךְ עִמָּךְ אֶפְסָ כִּי לֹא תִהְיֶה תַפְאֲרֹתְךָ עַל־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ כִּי בְיַד־אִשָּׁה יִמְכַר יְהוָה אֶת־סִיסְרָא וַתִּקֶּם דְּבוֹרָה וַתִּלְחַם עִם־בָּרַק קְדָשָׁה : ¹⁰ וַיִּזְעַק בָּרַק אֶת־זְבוּלוֹן וְאֶת־נַפְתָּלִי קְדָשָׁה וַיַּעַל בְּרַגְלָיו עֶשְׂרֵת אֲלָפֵי אִישׁ וַתַּעַל עִמּוֹ דְּבוֹרָה :

¹¹ וְחֵבֶר הַקֵּינִי נִפְרָד מִקֵּינֵי מִבְּנֵי חֶבֶב חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּט אֶהְלוֹ עַד־אֵלוֹן בַּצְעָנִים בַּצְעָנִים אֲשֶׁר אֶת־קְדָשׁ :

¹² וַיִּגְדוּ לְסִיסְרָא כִּי עָלָה בָרַק בֶּן־אֲבִינוֹעַם הַר־תַּבּוֹר : ¹³ וַיִּזְעַק סִיסְרָא אֶת־כָּל־רִכְבּוֹ תִשַׁע מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב בְּרֹזַל וְאֶת־כָּל־

a Kenite, the ancestor of Heber (v. 11), but in Num. 10:29, Hobab is son of Reuel the Midianite. Exodus 2:18 speaks of Reuel as Moses’ father-in-law, and Exod. 18:1 identifies him as Jethro, priest of Midian. Rabbinic tradition tried to resolve these variations by assuming that Jethro had seven names.

13–14. The battle took place in the Galilee, in the Valley of Jezreel. Harosheth-goiim was near Megiddo. The Wadi Kishon rises in the southeast of the valley and flows into the Mediterranean. Mount Tabor is also located there.

¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak, “Up! This is the day on which the LORD will deliver Sisera into your hands: the LORD is marching before you.” Barak charged down Mount Tabor, followed by the ten thousand men, ¹⁵and the LORD threw Sisera and all his chariots and army into a panic before the onslaught of Barak. Sisera leaped from his chariot and fled on foot ¹⁶as Barak pursued the chariots and the soldiers as far as Harosheth-goiim. All of Sisera’s soldiers fell by the sword; not a man was left.

¹⁷Sisera, meanwhile, had fled on foot to the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was friendship between King Jabin of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite. ¹⁸Jael came out to greet Sisera and said to him, “Come in, my lord, come in here, do not be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. ¹⁹He said to her, “Please let me have some water; I am thirsty.” She opened a skin of milk and gave him some to drink; and she covered him again. ²⁰He said to her, “Stand at the entrance of the tent. If anybody comes and asks you if there is anybody here, say ‘No.’” ²¹Then Jael wife of Heber took a tent pin and grasped the mallet. When he was fast asleep from exhaustion, she approached him stealthily and drove the pin through his temple till it went down to the ground. Thus he died.

²²Now Barak appeared in pursuit of Sisera. Jael went out to greet him and said, “Come, I will show you the man you are looking for.” He went inside with her, and there Sisera was lying dead, with the pin in his temple.

²³On that day God subdued King Jabin of Canaan before the Israelites. ²⁴The hand of the Israelites bore harder and harder on King Jabin of Canaan, until they destroyed King Jabin of Canaan.

23–4. King Jabin of Canaan He is also called “King Jabin of Hazor” (v. 17, Josh. 11:1,

הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ מִחֲרֹשֶׁת הַגּוֹיִם אֶל-נַחַל קִישׁוֹן: ¹⁴ וַתֹּאמֶר דְּבֹרָה אֶל-בָּרַק קוּם כִּי זֶה הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה אֶת-סִיסְרָא בְיַדְךָ הֲלֹא יְהוָה יֵצֵא לְפָנֶיךָ וַיִּרְדּוּ בָרַק מִהַר תְּבוֹר וְעִשְׂרֹת אֲלָפִים אִישׁ אַחֲרָיו: ¹⁵ וַיִּהְיֶה יְהוָה אֶת-סִיסְרָא וְאֶת-כָּל-הָרֶכֶב וְאֶת-כָּל-הַמַּחֲנֶה לְפִי-חֶרֶב לְפָנֶיךָ בָרַק וַיִּרְדּוּ סִיסְרָא מֵעַל הַמְרֻכָּבָה וַיִּנְס בְּרַגְלָיו: ¹⁶ וּבָרַק רָדַף אַחֲרֵי הָרֶכֶב וְאַחֲרֵי הַמַּחֲנֶה עַד חֲרֹשֶׁת הַגּוֹיִם וַיִּפֹּל כָּל-מַחֲנֶה סִיסְרָא לְפִי-חֶרֶב לֹא נִשְׁאַר עַד-אֶחָד: ¹⁷ וַסִּיסְרָא נָס בְּרַגְלָיו אֶל-אֵהָל יַעֲלֵ אֵשֶׁת חֶבֶר הַקֵּינִי כִּי שָׁלוֹם בֵּין יַבִּין מֶלֶךְ-חֲצוֹר וּבֵין בֵּית חֶבֶר הַקֵּינִי: ¹⁸ וַתֵּצֵא יַעֲלֵ לְקִרְאֵת סִיסְרָא וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו סוּרָה אֲדוֹנָי סוּרָה אֵלַי אֶל-תִּירָא וַיִּסֵּר אֵלֶיהָ הָאֵהָלָה וַתִּכְסְהוּ בְשֹׁמֵיכָה: ¹⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ הַשְׁקִינִי-נָא מִעֵט-מַיִם כִּי צָמְאֵתִי וַתִּפְתַּח אֶת-נְאוֹד הַחֲלָב וַתִּשְׁקְהוּ וַתִּכְסְהוּ: ²⁰ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ עֲמֹד פְּתַח הָאֵהָל וְהָיָה אִם-אִישׁ יָבוֹא וְשָׁאַלְךָ וַאֲמַר הִישָׁפְדָה אִישׁ וַאֲמַרְתְּ אֵין: ²¹ וַתִּקַּח יַעֲלֵ אֵשֶׁת-חֶבֶר אֶת-יָתֵד הָאֵהָל וַתִּשֶׂם אֶת-הַמַּקְבֵּת בְּיָדָהּ וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו בְּלָטָא* וַתִּתְקַע אֶת-הַיָּתֵד בְּרִקְתּוֹ וַתַּצְנַח בְּאַרְץ וְהוּא-נֹרֵדִים וַיַּעַף וַיָּמָת:

²² וַהֲנִיָּה בָרַק רָדַף אֶת-סִיסְרָא וַתֵּצֵא יַעֲלֵ לְקִרְאֵתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ לָךְ וְאַרְאֶךָ אֶת-הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה מִבְּקֵשׁ וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ וַהֲנִיָּה סִיסְרָא נָפַל מִתּוֹ וְהַיָּתֵד בְּרִקְתּוֹ: ²³ וַיִּכְנַע אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת יַבִּין מֶלֶךְ-כְּנָעַן לְפָנֶיךָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ²⁴ וַתִּלְךָ יָד בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל הַלּוֹךְ וְקִשְׁהָ עַל יַבִּין מֶלֶךְ-כְּנָעַן עַד אֲשֶׁר הִכְרִיתוּ אֶת יַבִּין מֶלֶךְ-כְּנָעַן: פ

ה

*וַתִּשֶׁר דְּבוּרָה וַבָּרַק בֶּן-אֲבִינֵעַם בְּיוֹם הַהוּא
 לֵאמֹר: ² בַּפְּרָע פָּרְעוֹת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַתְּנֵדָב
 עִם בָּרַכּוּ יְהוָה: ³ שָׁמְעוּ מְלָכִים הָאֲזִינוּ
 רֹזְנִים אֲנֹכִי לַיהוָה אֲנֹכִי אֲשִׁירָה אֲזַמֵּר
 לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ⁴ יְהוָה בְּצִאתָךְ
 מִשְׁעִיר בְּצַעֲדֶךָ מִשְׁדָּה אָדוּם אָרָץ
 רָעָשָׁה גַם-שָׁמַיִם נָטְפוּ גַם-עֵבִים נָטְפוּ
 מַיִם: ⁵ הָרִים נָזְלוּ מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה זֶה
 סִינֵי מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ⁶ בִּימֵי שִׁמְגָר בֶּן-
 עֲנַת בִּימֵי יַעַל חֲדָלוּ אַרְחֹת וְהִלְכִי
 נְתִיבוֹת יִלְכוּ אַרְחֹת עַקְלָקְלוֹת: ⁷ חֲדָלוּ פְרוּזוֹן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
 חֲדָלוּ עַד שִׁקְמַתִּי דְבוּרָה שִׁקְמַתִּי אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: ⁸ יִבְחַר
 אֱלֹהִים חֲדָשִׁים אִזּוּ לָחֵם שְׁעָרִים מִגֵּן אִם-יִרְאֶה
 וְרָמַח בְּאַרְבָּעִים אֶלֶף בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: ⁹ לְבִי
 לְחֹקְקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִמְתַּנְּדְּבִים בָּעַם בָּרַכּוּ
 יְהוָה: ¹⁰ רִכְבֵּי אֲתַנּוֹת צְחֹרוֹת יִשְׁבִּי
 עַל-מִדִּין וְהִלְכִי עַל-דֶּרֶךְ שִׁיחוֹ: ¹¹ מִקּוֹל מְחַצְצִים בֵּין
 מִשְׁאֲפִים שָׁם יִתְנֹוּ צְדָקוֹת יְהוָה צְדָקוֹת
 פְּרוּזוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אִזּוּ יִרְדּוּ לְשְׁעָרִים עִם-

v. 1. צורת השירה לפי כתר ארם צובה, כדי שחלוקת השירה כחלוקיה, והיא כהלכה

cf. Judg. 4:2). According to Judg. 5:19, Jabin was only one member of a coalition of kings of Canaan led by Sisera. The title “king of Canaan” is attested centuries earlier in the Mari tablets of northern Mesopotamia.

Judges 5:1. On that day Deborah and Barak . . . sang The victors sing a song of praise to God and the people. Rabbinic tradition records “Ten Songs” that span the sacred history of Israel. The 1st is sung during the Passover feast (Isa. 30:29), and the 2nd is the “Song of the Sea” in

the *parashah* (Exod. 15). This song of Deborah and Barak is the 6th song. The 10th song will be the messianic song of the future (see Isa. 42:10; Mekh. B’sallah 1).

2. When locks go untrimmed Apparently as an act of dedication (see Num. 6:5) [Transl.].

3-5. The Targum saw here an allusion to Mount Sinai and the giving of the Torah (see Rashi and Ps. 68).

6. Shamgar The previous chieftain to lead the people of Israel (see Judg. 3:31).

5 On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang:

²When locks go untrimmed in Israel,
When people dedicate themselves—
Bless the LORD!

³Hear, O kings! Give ear, O potentates!
I will sing, will sing to the LORD,
Will hymn the LORD, the God of Israel.

⁴O LORD, when You came forth from Seir,
Advanced from the country of Edom,
The earth trembled;
The heavens dripped,
Yea, the clouds dripped water,
⁵The mountains quaked—
Before the LORD, Him of Sinai,
Before the LORD, God of Israel.

⁶In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,
In the days of Jael, caravans ceased,
And wayfarers went
By roundabout paths.

⁷Deliverance ceased,
Ceased in Israel,

Till you arose, O Deborah,
Arose, O mother, in Israel!

⁸When they chose new gods,
Was there a fighter then in the gates?
No shield or spear was seen
Among forty thousand in Israel!

⁹My heart is with Israel's leaders,
With the dedicated of the people—
Bless the LORD!

¹⁰You riders on tawny she-asses,
You who sit on saddle rugs,
And you wayfarers, declare it!

¹¹Louder than the sound of archers,
There among the watering places
Let them chant the gracious acts of the LORD,
His gracious deliverance of Israel.
Then did the people of the LORD
March down to the gates!

יְהוָה: ¹² עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי דְבוּרָה
 עוֹרֵי דְבוּרֵי־שִׁיר
 אֲבִינָעַם: ¹³ אֵז יֵרֵד שְׂרִיד לְאֲדִירִים עִם* יְהוָה
 יֵרֵד־לִי בַגְבוּרִים: ¹⁴ מִנֵּי אֶפְרַיִם שְׂרָשֶׁם
 בַּעַמְלָק אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּנִימִין בַּעַמְמִיף מִנֵּי
 מָכִיר יֵרְדוּ מִחֻקִּים וּמִזְבוּלָן מְשָׁכִים בְּשֶׁבֶט
 סַפָּר: ¹⁵ וְשָׂרֵי בִישָׁשְׁכָר עִם־דְּבָרָה וַיִּשְׁשָׁכֶר
 בֶּן בָּרֶק בַּעַמְק שְׁלַח בְּרַגְלָיו בַּפְּלָגוֹת רְאוּבֵן גְּדוּלִים חֻקֵּי־
 לֵב: ¹⁶ לָמָּה יִשְׁבֹּת בֵּין הַמְּשֻׁפְּתִים לְשִׁמְעַ
 שְׂרוֹקוֹת עֲדָרִים לַפְּלָגוֹת רְאוּבֵן גְּדוּלִים חֻקֵּי־
 לֵב: ¹⁷ גִּלְעָד בַּעֲבַר הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁכֵן וְדָן
 לָמָּה יִגּוֹר אֲנִיּוֹת אֲשֶׁר יָשַׁב לְחוּף
 יַמִּים וְעַל מִפְרָצָיו יִשְׁכּוֹן: ¹⁸ זְבֻלוֹן
 עִם חֶרֶף נִפְשׁוּ לְמוֹת וּנְפַתְלִי עַל מְרוֹמֵי
 שָׂדֶה: ¹⁹ בָּאוּ מְלָכִים נִלְחָמוּ אֵז
 נִלְחָמוּ מְלָכֵי כְנָעַן בַּתְּעַנָּף עַל־מֵי
 מְגִדוֹ בַּצַּע בְּסָף לֹא לָקְחוּ: ²⁰ מִן־
 שְׁמִים נִלְחָמוּ הַכּוֹכְבִים מִמְּסֻלוֹתָם נִלְחָמוּ עִם־
 סִיסְרָא: ²¹ נָחַל קִישׁוֹן גְּרָפָם נָחַל
 קְדוּמִים נָחַל קִישׁוֹן תִּדְרָכֵי נִפְשֵׁי
 עֵז: ²² אֵז הִלְמוּ עַקְבֵי־סוּס מִדְּהָרוֹת
 יְדִהְרוּת אֲבִירָיו: ²³ אֲזָרוּ מְרוֹז אָמַר מִלְּאָף יְהוָה אֲרוּ אֲרוּר

v. 13. בנוסח אחר "עם" כלומר שנוי תנועה

13. The LORD's people Reading "am [with a *patah* vowel] *Adonai*," as in many Hebrew manuscripts [Transl.].

14. whose roots are in Amalek This is a puzzling comment about the origins of citizens of Ephraim. An old solution that continued into the Middle Ages interprets the passage as referring to

heroes who stemmed from Ephraim and fought against Amalek; for example, Joshua (Exod. 17:8–13) and Saul (1 Sam. 15) (see Targ. Jon., Rashi, and Radak).

19. At Taanach, by Megiddo's waters In the Valley of Jezreel. The Canaanite kings came to this broad plain to stage the battle.

¹²Awake, awake, O Deborah!
 Awake, awake, strike up the chant!
 Arise, O Barak;
 Take your captives, O son of Abinoam!

¹³Then was the remnant made victor over the mighty,
 The LORD's people won my victory over the warriors.

¹⁴From Ephraim came they whose roots are in Amalek;
 After you, your kin Benjamin;
 From Machir came down leaders,
 From Zebulun such as hold the marshal's staff.

¹⁵And Issachar's chiefs were with Deborah;
 As Barak, so was Issachar—
 Rushing after him into the valley.

Among the clans of Reuben
 Were great decisions of heart.

¹⁶Why then did you stay among the sheepfolds
 And listen as they pipe for the flocks?
 Among the clans of Reuben
 Were great searchings of heart!

¹⁷Gilead tarried beyond the Jordan;
 And Dan—why did he linger by the ships?
 Asher remained at the seacoast
 And tarried at his landings.

¹⁸Zebulun is a people that mocked at death,
 Naphtali—on the open heights.

¹⁹Then the kings came, they fought:
 The kings of Canaan fought
 At Taanach, by Megiddo's waters—
 They got no spoil of silver.

²⁰The stars fought from heaven,
 From their courses they fought against Sisera.

²¹The torrent Kishon swept them away,
 The raging torrent, the torrent Kishon.

March on, my soul, with courage!

²²Then the horses' hoofs pounded
 As headlong galloped the steeds.

²³“Curse Meroz!” said the angel of the LORD.
 “Bitterly curse its inhabitants,

יִשְׁבִּיחַ כִּי לֹא-בָאוּ לְעִזְרַת יְהוָה לְעִזְרַת
 יְהוָה בְּגִבּוֹרִים: ²⁴ תִּבְרַךְ מְנַשִּׁים יַעַל אֶשֶׁת חֶבֶר
 חֲקִינִי מְנַשִּׁים בְּאֶהֱל תִּבְרַךְ: ²⁵ מִיָּמִים
 שָׁאֵל חֶלֶב נְתָנָה בְּסִפֵּל אֲדִירִים הִקְרִיבָה
 חֲמָאָה: ²⁶ יָדָה לִיְתֵד תִּשְׁלַחָנָה וַיִּמְיָנָה
 לְהַלְמוֹת עַמְלִים וְהַלְמָה סִיסְרָא מְחַקָּה
 רֹאשׁוֹ וּמְחַצָּה וְחִלְפָה רִקְתּוֹ: ²⁷ בֵּין
 רִגְלֶיהָ כָּרַע נָפֶל שָׁכַב בֵּין רִגְלֶיהָ כָּרַע
 נָפֶל בְּאַשֶׁר כָּרַע שָׁם נָפֶל שְׂדוּד: ²⁸ בְּעַד
 הַחֲלוֹן נִשְׁקָפָה וַתִּיבֵב אִם סִיסְרָא בְּעַד הָאֲשַׁנָּב מְדוּעַ בִּשְׁשׁ רָכְבוֹ
 לָבוֹא מְדוּעַ אַחֲרוֹ פְּעַמֵי מְרַכְבוֹתָיו: ²⁹ חֲכָמוֹת
 שְׂרוֹתֶיהָ תִּעֲנִינָה אִף-הִיא תִּשְׁיֵב אֲמָרֶיהָ
 לָהּ: ³⁰ הֲלֹא יִמְצְאוּ יַחֲלָקוּ שָׁלָל
 רַחֲמַתִּים לְרֹאשׁ גִּבּוֹר שָׁלָל צְבָעִים
 לְסִיסְרָא שָׁלָל צְבָעִים רִקְמָה צְבַע
 רַקְמַתִּים לְצוּאֵרֵי שָׁלָל: ³¹ כִּן יֵאבְדוּ כָּל-אוֹיְבֵיהֶּ יְהוָה
 וְאֶהְיוּ כְּצֵאת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּגִבְרַתּוֹ וַתִּשְׁקֹט הָאָרֶץ אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה: פ

27. At her feet he sank The phrases here have an intensifying redundancy, rhythmically echoing the violent hammering of the murder (Radak).

28. Through the window peered Sisera's mother The image of Sisera's mother on the rampart, peering through the window, is a conventional scene. Thus Michal, daughter of Saul, looks from her royal window at the processional bearing the Ark to Jerusalem. The particular phrase used with Michal (*nishk'fah b'ad ha-hallon*, 2 Sam. 6:16) is almost identical with that used

of Sisera's mother. The portrait of (royal) women at the window is also represented in 8th-century-B.C.E. Phoenician ivories.

31. all Your enemies In the context of the *haftarah*, the refrain calling for the defeat of "all" God's enemies has an eschatologic ring, looking to "the end of days" (see Rashi and Kara, following Targ.).

His friends Hebrew: *ohavav*, literally "His loved ones." In Hebrew and its cognate equivalent in Akkadian, this is a standard designation for treaty partners.

Because they came not to the aid of the LORD,
To the aid of the LORD among the warriors.”

²⁴Most blessed of women be Jael,
Wife of Heber the Kenite,
Most blessed of women in tents.

²⁵He asked for water, she offered milk;
In a princely bowl she brought him curds.

²⁶Her [left] hand reached for the tent pin,
Her right for the workmen’s hammer.
She struck Sisera, crushed his head,
Smashed and pierced his temple.

²⁷At her feet he sank, lay outstretched,
At her feet he sank, lay still;
Where he sank, there he lay—destroyed.

²⁸Through the window peered Sisera’s mother,
Behind the lattice she whined:

“Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why so late the clatter of his wheels?”

²⁹The wisest of her ladies give answer;
She, too, replies to herself:

³⁰“They must be dividing the spoil they have found:
A damsel or two for each man,
Spoil of dyed cloths for Sisera,
Spoil of embroidered cloths,
A couple of embroidered cloths
Round every neck as spoil.”

³¹So may all Your enemies perish, O LORD!
But may His friends be as the sun rising in might!

And the land was tranquil forty years.