

Parashah 16

B'shallach

בשלה

“After he had let go”

Exodus 13:17 – 17:16

Torah Together



After Pharaoh finally relented and let the Israelites go, Moses probably assumed that the worst was behind them. But we know from past events that Pharaoh had little regard for keeping his word. So yet again, God hardens Pharaoh's heart so that He can show His obvious superiority over Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt by saving the Israelites with His “mighty outstretched arm.”

1. Crossing the Sea - 13:17 - 14:31

a) To travel from Goshen to Canaan, what would have been the most direct route? Why didn't the Israelites go this way? Which way did they go? (See map on page 25 for reference.)

The direct route is the 'Via Maris', following the coast east and then north through Philistia. God led the Israelites southeast, toward the Sinai because they weren't prepared to fight the Philistines. He knew that they would return to Egypt if they faced a battle with the Philistines.

b) How was Genesis 50:25 fulfilled when the Israelites left Egypt?
Joseph requested that his body be brought with them when they left Egypt.

c) How were the Israelites guided on their travels from Egypt?
God led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The same method continued for their entire journey to Canaan.

d) What reason did God give for hardening Pharaoh's heart yet again? Why do you think this was important to God?
God wanted Pharaoh to pursue the Israelites so that He might again show His miraculous nature and “the Egyptians will know that I am YHWH.” God was concerned with each individual Egyptian as well as with the Hebrews. This also meant that we would study these events some 3500 years later.

The Way of the Sea

The Latin phrase, *Via Maris*, translates “by way of the sea.” It was the name for the easy route from Egypt to Canaan along the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. However, this route also ran through the land of the Philistines, a people known for their fierce and war-like nature.

Scripture Link:

Genesis 50:25 records Joseph's wishes just before he died. Also, **Joshua 24:32** tells of the burial of Joseph's bones in Israel. The tomb of Joseph is located in Shechem (Nablus today). The existence of this site is astounding confirmation of the truth of Scripture.

Pillars of Cloud and Fire

This is our first encounter with God's guideposts. God continues to use the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night to guide the Israelites for the remainder of the Torah.

“ . . . and the Egyptians will know that I am YHWH.”

Exodus 14:4

Always Complaining

This is the first time we encounter the Israelites complaining, "It would have been better if we had stayed in Egypt." But it won't be the last! It seems the Israelites are fearful and lack trust in God. If you had seen the miracles that the Israelites had recently witnessed, do you think you would have been fearful in these circumstances?

Parting the Red Sea

The miracle described in this passage has been debated (and doubted) for centuries. It is not unusual that there is no other written verification that this event actually occurred. First, there are simply not very many documents dating this far back in history. Second, many cultures of this period (notably the Egyptian) often rewrote the record of historical events in which they suffered defeat.

Songs in Scripture

Although it is appropriate to sing praises to God for His blessings, the songs in Scripture serve another purpose. Because they could be easily memorized, the songs would be passed down from generation to generation and keep their history alive. Other songs of Moses are recorded in **Deuteronomy 32** and **Psalm 90**.

e) What reason did Pharaoh give for pursuing the Israelites? What did the Israelites do when they saw the Egyptians coming? What was Moses' response?

Pharaoh regretted losing "their services", i.e., slave labor. When the Israelites saw the Egyptians coming, they were terrified and cried out to God. They accused Moses of bringing them to the desert to die. Moses said, "Be still and watch God fight for you" (Exodus 14:13-14).

f) Analyze verses 14:15-18. Do you think Moses knew before this exactly how God intended to rescue the Israelites? What lessons can we learn from this?

It would appear that Moses didn't know how God intended to rescue the Israelites until this time. God often reveals himself seemingly "at the last minute" to strengthen our faith. It's hard to learn to depend on God.

g) How long did it take for the sea to be divided? How were the Egyptians kept at bay during this period?

It took most of the night for the waters to part and the ground to dry out. God's pillar of cloud moved between the Israelites and Pharaoh's army to block their way.

h) How many of Pharaoh's army survived? Do you think Pharaoh survived? What was the Israelites' response to their miraculous delivery?

None of Pharaoh's army survived. It seems that Pharaoh himself survived although this is not verifiable. The Israelites "feared YHWH and put their trust in Him and Moses."

2. The Song of Moses & Miriam - 15:1-21

a) This is the first "song" recorded in the Bible. Who sang this song? What role did Moses' sister Miriam play? What do you find interesting about the song?

Moses and the Israelites sang this song with Miriam leading the women in singing and dancing with tambourines. The song focuses completely on the greatness of our God and his mighty deeds.

b) Do you know of any other "songs" written by Moses? When will we hear this song again? (See Revelation 15:2-3)

Moses is also credited with the song in Deuteronomy 32 and with Psalm 90. In Revelation 15:2-3, we see this song will be sung again at the end of this age.

3. The Waters of Marah and Elim - 15:22-27

a) How long had the Israelites been traveling when they reached Marah? What did they do when they found the water bitter? What did Moses do?

The Israelites had been traveling for three days. "The people grumbled against Moses" (verse 24). Moses prayed and God showed him a piece of wood that sweetened the water when it was thrown into it.

b) Here God reveals himself to the Israelites as YHWH Rophek (15:26). What does this mean and what was God's promise to the people?

YHWH Rophek means "God who heals you." God states very clearly that if the Israelites will listen to Him and follow his commands, that He will keep them from the diseases He brought on the Egyptians.

c) Where did the Israelites go after Marah? What was this place like? Can you draw any parallels with your own "wilderness experiences" from this?

After Marah, the Israelites went to Elim, an oasis of safety and comfort. God often tests us and then leads us to places of safety and comfort afterward.

4. Manna and Quail - 16:1-36

a) When the Israelites arrived at the Wilderness of Sin, how long had it been since they left Egypt? What was their complaint and to whom did they complain?

It took the Israelites one month exactly to arrive at the Wilderness of Sin. They complained to Moses and Aaron that they didn't have enough food to eat. "If only we had stayed in Egypt" becomes their common complaint.

b) What did Moses say about their "grumbings"? What did God say He would do? What were his reasons for providing the Israelites bread in this manner? (verse 4)

Moses pointed out that the people weren't grumbling against Moses, but against God. God told them (through Moses) that they would have meat to eat that night and that they would be "filled with bread" in the morning. God says that "in this way, I will test them and see if they will follow my instructions."

c) God provided both meat and bread for the people. How did he do it?

God provided meat by bringing quail (a delicacy in Egypt) and bread by leaving manna on the ground after the dew evaporated in the morning.

d) What does "manna" mean? What were its properties? How did these properties help God accomplish his purposes given in verse 4? What important "mitzvah" (commandment) is reinforced by the properties of manna?

Manna comes from "man hu", which means "what is it?" (verse 15). It appeared on the ground in the morning, and everyone could collect enough for that day. If they tried to collect more, it went bad overnight. The idea was to learn to trust God for their sustenance each day. On the sixth day, they could collect enough for two days, and it would last through the Sabbath.

Manna

Some believe that manna occurs naturally in the Arabian desert, perhaps as a secretion from the tamarisk or acacia tree. However, the fact that it appeared on a certain day, ended on a particular day (see **Joshua 5:12**) and that it had very special spoilage properties all point to a supernatural origin. In any case, there are many lessons to be learned from this miraculous food.

Testing in Scripture

There are two sides to testing. When the Israelites complain and grumble, they are testing God's patience. (Would He have performed all the previous miracles just to let the people die in the desert?) But when God doesn't provide for their needs exactly when they expect it, He is testing their faith. **James 1:2-4** explains that the testing of our faith is necessary to become mature believers.

The Amalekites

Genesis 36:12 shows the lineage of Amalek, the father of these fierce nomads who lived by raiding other tribes. Of the two people who held up Moses' hands when his arms became tired, one was Aaron, his brother. According to the historian Josephus, the other man, Hur, was Moses' brother-in-law, Miriam's husband.

e) The book of Deuteronomy is Moses final word to the Israelites before they cross into the promised land. According to **Deuteronomy 8:2-3**, what was the ultimate purpose of the manna? Where else in the Bible was this truth revealed?

The well-known phrase "man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of YHWH" was quoted by Yeshua to satan during his temptation (Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4). A very important principle!

5. Water from the Rock - 17:1-7

a) At Rephidim, to whom did the people complain? What was their complaint? In what way was their complaint 'wrong'? How did Moses respond?

The people complained to Moses saying, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to make us die of thirst?" Although they certainly had the right to request water, their complaint showed impatience and a lack of faith in God. Moses cried out to God in apparent frustration.

b) How did God answer their complaint? What was the significance of the names given to that place? Can you identify any types and shadows in this passage?

God instructed Moses to walk before the people, along with some of the elders, and strike a certain rock with his staff. Massah and Meribah mean 'testing' and 'quarreling.' Yeshua is often identified as our Rock from which flows Living Waters. Also see 1 Corinthians 10:3-4.

6. The Amalekites Defeated - 17:8-16

a) Who were the Amalekites and where did they come from? What do you know about the man Moses chose to lead the Israelite warriors?

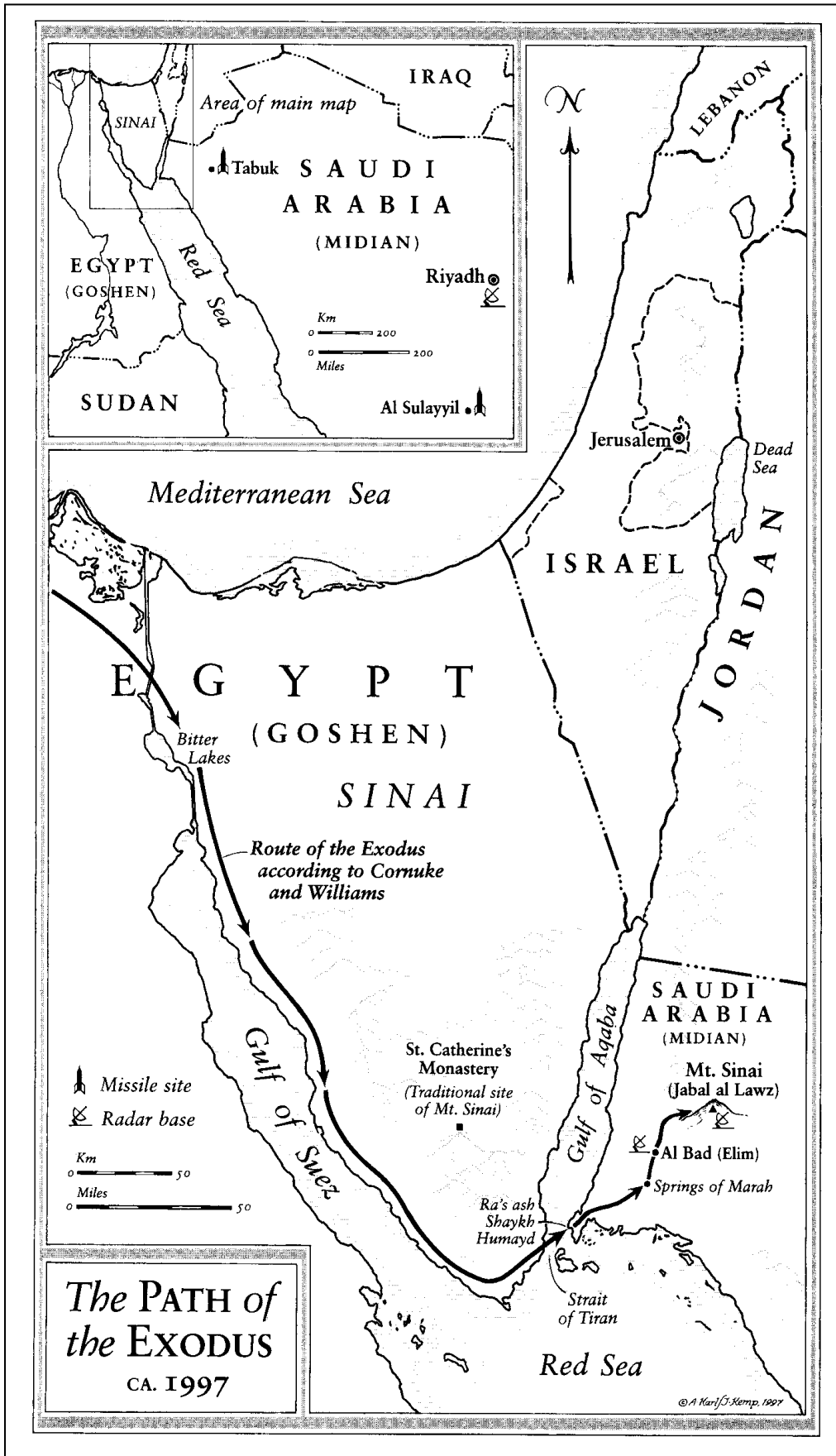
The Amalekites were warriors /raiders who descended from Esau's grandson Amalek (Genesis 36:12). This is the first mention of Joshua, who later becomes Moses' personal assistant and also leads the people into Canaan.

b) What part did Moses play in the battle? Do you know who Hur was? Can you identify any types and shadows in this passage?

Moses interceded with God for the Israelites with hands upraised in prayer from a nearby mountaintop. Josephus says Hur was Miriam's husband.

c) What does God instruct Moses to do in verse 14? Who specifically did God want to hear it? What is the significance of God's revealing himself as "YHWH Nissi"?

God instructs Moses to "write this on a scroll," the first time Moses is told to write God's words. "YHWH is my banner" refers to God's presence with the people in battle.



This map is reprinted from the book *The Gold of Exodus*, by Howard Blum. It shows a possible route of the exodus taken by Moses and the Israelites and indicates that Mount Sinai is in Arabia, not the Sinai Peninsula. Locating Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula is based on tradition, dating from the foundation of the Monastery of St. Catherine in the 1400's. However, there is significant justification for locating Mount Sinai in Arabia.

1. Midian is known to be in this part of Arabia and that is where Moses first met his wife, Ziporrah, and her father, Jethro, and where he lived for 40 years.

Furthermore, Midian is where he met God in the burning bush Who told him that he would return to "this very mountain" to worship him.

2. There is a natural land bridge about a mile wide just under the surface of the water at the Strait of Tiran. This would have made a natural crossing point for the Israelites, had the water level been lowered by just a few feet.

3. Locating Mount Sinai in Arabia makes the subsequent migrations of the Israelites much more reasonable with respect to Edom, Moab, and the Sons of Ammon.

4. There is a New Testament reference which indicates that Mount Sinai is in Arabia. In **Galatians 4:25**, Paul refers to Mount Sinai in Arabia.

The exact location of Mount Sinai and the route of the Exodus is still a matter of some debate and controversy.

Digging deeper

1. Manna is often considered as a metaphor for the Word of God. See how many parallels you can draw between the properties of God's Word and the properties of Manna.

Possible parallels: Both manna and the Word of God were 1) a gift from God, 2) supernaturally provided, 3) had to be gathered (studied) daily, 4) could not be stored up (used for non-godly purposes) but under His care would last 40 years (a lifetime). Many others are possible.

Scripture Link:

In **Deuteronomy 8:3**, God tells His people that man "does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." Thus God compares His Word (*Torah*) to bread. In **John 6:35 & 48**, *Yeshua* calls himself "the bread of life." So *Yeshua* equates himself with the *Torah* – He is the living *Torah*! As believers, if we study God's Word, take it in, absorb it, digest it, and make it a part of our life, then in a sense we are eating and drinking the flesh and blood of *Yeshua*.

2. Read **John 6:30-59**. This is a difficult passage for us to understand just as it was for *Yeshua*'s audience. What new insights do you gain into this passage from your discussion of this week's *Torah* portion?

In this passage, Yeshua says quite clearly, "I am the bread of life." He contrasts himself to manna by saying that those who ate manna died but that those who "eat of this bread (his flesh), he will live forever" (verse 51). Thus, Yeshua is saying he is even more miraculous than manna. By equating himself with manna, he equates himself with the Word, which is indeed correct. Yeshua is the Torah incarnate and eating his flesh implies consuming God's word, which is also the "bread of life." Clearly other insights are possible.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Judges 4:4 – 5:31

Brit Hadashah : Luke 2:22-24; John 6:25-35; 19:31-37;
1 Corinthians 10:1-13; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15;
Revelation 15:1-4