



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Beshalach** (בְּשַׁלַּח, “when he sent off”)
- **Chapters: Exod. 13:17-17:16**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

Last week’s Torah portion (parashat Bo) described how the children of Israel were finally delivered from Egypt after God delivered the tenth and final plague during the time of Passover. In this week’s portion, the Israelites began their journey home, after 430 years of exile. Instead of leading Israel along a direct route to the Promised Land, however, God directed them south, into the desert, in order to avoid war with the Philistines. The Israelites first traveled from Raamses (near the Nile Delta) to the city of Sukkot, an Egyptian city on the eastern border. After this they went south to Etham, at the “edge of the desert,” where the Shekhinah Glory appeared as a Pillar of Cloud by day and as a Pillar of Fire by night to lead them on their way. When Pharaoh heard that the Israelites were camped at Etham, however, he thought they were lost and hemmed in by the desert. The LORD then “hardened Pharaoh’s heart” one final time so that he would pursue the Jews and attempt to bring them back to Egypt. God then redirected the Israelites to camp by a pagan sacred place (Baal-Zephon) near the edge of the sea, where the Egyptian army finally caught up with them. Dramatically, the Israelites were caught between a rock and a hard place, with the sea on one side, and Pharaoh’s army on the other...

The people were terrified and began to blame Moses for their predicament. Moses reassured them of God’s deliverance and raised his staff to divide the waters of the sea. All that night the Shekhinah Glory enshrouded the Egyptian army but gave light to Israel as the people crossed through the sea on dry ground. Just before dawn, the dark pillar of cloud that veiled the Egyptian army lifted, and the soldiers immediately rushed after the Israelites into pathway of the sea. God then told Moses to lift his staff again so that the waters would overwhelm the Egyptians with their chariots and horsemen. By the time dawn arrived, the Israelites saw the dead bodies of Pharaoh’s army lining the seashore. Moses and Miriam then led the people in the “Song of the Sea” (i.e., shirah hayam) a spontaneous hymn of exaltation and thanksgiving.

The LORD then led the people away from the sea, into the desert of Sin, a desolate region about midway to Mount Sinai. After traveling three days without finding any water, the people complained and God provided them with fresh water at Marah. Awhile later, the matzah the people had brought with them ran out and God tested their obedience by giving them “bread from heaven” (i.e., manna). The portion ends with the Amalekites’ surprise attack of Israel at Rephidim, near Mount Sinai, and the introduction of Joshua as the leader of the army of Israel.



Parashah Questions

1. What does the word “beshalach” (בְּשַׁלַּח) mean? (13:17) ¹
2. Why didn't God lead the Israelites directly back to their homeland but instead led them the long way through the desert? ²
3. Why were the people “armed for battle” (13:18b) ³
4. Is the Red Sea the place where God split the sea? ⁴
5. Who took the bones of Joseph when Israel left Egypt? (13:19) ⁵
6. What was the first leg of the Exodus journey? (12:37) ⁶
7. What was the second leg of the Exodus journey? (13:20) ⁷
8. How did God show the Israelites which way to travel? (13:21-22) ⁸
9. Why didn't the people get exhausted traveling “by day and by night”? ⁹



¹ The word “beshalach” (בְּשַׁלַּח) is the *piel* infinitive construction of the verb *shalach* (שָׁלַח) meaning “to send away,” “dispatch,” and so on. “When he (Pharaoh) sent away the people...” A *shaliach* (שָׁלִיחַ) is an emissary. The midrash says that Pharaoh had escorted the people out of the land (as far as Etham, 13:20), with the hope that they would pray for him during their worship of the LORD in the desert.

² The logical (and shortest) route would be to take the Israelites along the Mediterranean coast through the Philistine territory. God did not take them this way because it was a short distance from Egypt, and if the people encountered war with the Philistines, they would be tempted to return to Egypt. Instead, God led them south toward the land of Midian (a way Moses already knew), toward the “Sea of Reeds” (i.e., Yam Suf). This was undoubtedly so that God could split the sea and destroy the pursuing Egyptian army. Spiritually speaking, the sages say that God chose *derekh ha-bamidbar* (“the way of the desert”) so that the people would learn to depend on Him alone to meet their needs (Deut. 8:3).

³ The Torah says “chamushim alu” (חֲמִשִּׁים אָלוּ), which may allude that only one *fifth* of the people were armed (i.e., the males), or that only one fifth of the people left Egypt (the others died in the plagues), or that the Israelites outnumbered the “erev rav” (mixed multitude) by a factor of five to one.

⁴ The “Red Sea” might better be translated as “The Sea of Reeds” (יַם־סוּף), though perhaps it refers to a northern arm (or lakeland region) of the sea called the Gulf of Suez, or perhaps to a northeastern arm called the Gulf of Aqaba (near the straights of Tiran).

⁵ Moses, in fulfillment of the oath given to Joseph earlier (Gen. 50:25).

⁶ The first leg of the journey was from Rameses to Sukkot (see Exod. 12:37; parashat Bo).

⁷ The Israelites moved from Sukkot (סֻכּוֹת) and camped at Etham (אֶתְמֹן) at the edge of the desert.

⁸ The LORD went before them manifested as a “Pillar of Cloud” (*amud anan* - עַמֻּד עָנָן) by day and as a “Pillar of Fire” (*amud esh* - עַמֻּד אֵשׁ) by night – so that they could travel by day and by night... The Pillar of Fire was extraordinarily bright, providing illumination that was as bright as sunlight. This is likened to a king who carried a torch for the benefit and honor of his beloved sons...

⁹ Midrash: The people were surrounded by clouds of Glory that carried them “like passengers on an ocean liner.”



10. What happened to the Pillar of Cloud during the night? ¹⁰
11. Why did God tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in “Freedom Valley” (i.e., הַחִירֹת, פִּי הַחִירֹת) before the “lord of the north” (בַּעַל זַפְּוֹן)? (14:1-2) ¹¹
12. What was “Baal Zephon”? ¹²
13. Why did the Pharaoh chase after the Israelites in the desert? ¹³
14. How did God harden Pharaoh’s heart to pursue Israel? (14:4) ¹⁴
15. How large was Pharaoh’s pursuing army? (14:6-7) ¹⁵



¹⁰ Each night the Pillar of Cloud would move to the rear of the camp, darkening the way of approach, while the Pillar of Fire appeared before the front of the camp. Note that the Pillar of Cloud effectively blocked the illumination of the Pillar of Fire, so that Israel’s enemies could not benefit from that light.

¹¹ On the third day of the Exodus, God told the people to turn back toward Egypt and to camp at the coastal city of Pithom, where they once served as slaves. Pithom was renamed “Pi ha-Chirot,” or the “Mouth of Freedom” because this would mark the location of Israel’s final deliverance from Pharaoh. The movement of the camp was meant to trick Pharaoh, whose spies had told him that Israel was lost in the desert (14:3). Pharaoh would think that the idol had Israel under its power and had confused the camp so that they were lost... Just before their “baptism,” then, God entirely destroyed the powers of darkness arrayed against His people...

¹² Baal Zephon means “lord of the north” and may refer to a “god” the Hellenes knew as Zeus who abode atop Mount Aqraa (in Syria) on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. According to Ugaritic texts Baal-Tzephon was the sacred mountain of the storm god Baal (Baal-Hadad in ancient Canaanite mythology), located on the Syrian coast. The cult of the god of the mountain was “transferred” or reinterpreted to be Zeus Kasios, the “Zeus of Mount Kasios.” According to Isaiah 14:13, Mount Zaphon is associated with the palace of Satan, the devil. It is unclear if there is any connection between the Canaanite god and the location of the crossing of the sea, though Jewish tradition says that the idol of Baal Tzephon had the form of a gigantic snarling dog, and that the LORD allowed this idol to remain after he destroyed all the others in Egypt to fool the Egyptians one last time.

¹³ Because he wanted to make them slaves again and God hardened his heart to pursue them. He may also have wanted to retain control over the “mixed multitude” of Egyptians who fled along with the Israelites. Midrash: Certain Egyptian officers accompanied the Israelites, but after the third day, told them they must return to Egypt. The Israelites told them that Pharaoh had begged them to go and they now regarded themselves as free. When the officers protested, most of them were killed but a few fled and informed the matter to Pharaoh. At this time God told Moses to turn back toward Egypt as a feint to fool the king of Egypt. The tribes of Amalek also sent messages to Pharaoh saying the Israelites were fleeing but appeared to be confused in the desert.

¹⁴ God gave Pharaoh a pretext of rationality, a logical argument, for going after the Israelites. When he learned that the people were trapped on the narrow peninsula, he realized that they could neither flee nor fight. Besides, Moses had told Pharaoh they would go on a three day journey into the desert, and the time was now up. His advisors then asked why they had let the people go in the first place (14:5). Perhaps the king also thought the people were no longer under the LORD’s guidance at this point and therefore he could go after them to force their return to Egypt. In this way, the unrepentant Pharaoh’s heart was hardened (קָטַף), since God strengthened his resolve to do evil, thereby preserving his will. The destruction of the Egyptian army would glorify God, since it would provide the occasion for demonstrating God’s strength to the entire world.

¹⁵ Pharaoh took his best chariot crew of 600 chariots driven by generals and royal princes. According to Rashi, he also had over 200,000 infantry and other calvary troops. Where did the horses come from? Some of the Egyptians feared God’s message during the plague of the hail and the horses were brought in and spared. Each soldier was said to have been armed with several weapons, so it is clear the intent was to kill the people (15:9).



16. What is meant when the Torah says the Israelites were leaving the land “with a high hand (בְּיַד רַמָּה)”? (14:8) ¹⁶
17. When the army caught up to Israel they found them camped before “Baal Zephon” by the sea. What did the Israelites do? (14:9-12) ¹⁷
18. What did Moses say to the people? (14:13-14) ¹⁸
19. What did the LORD then say to Moses? (14:15) ¹⁹
20. When the Egyptians attempted to enter the sea, what did God do? (14:19-20) ²⁰
21. According to Jewish tradition, who entered the sea first, and why? ²¹
22. How were the waters separated by God? (14:21) ²²
23. How does the Torah describe the waters that were split? (14:22) ²³



¹⁶ The expression b’yad ramah (בְּיַד רַמָּה) means that the people were marching boldly, not as slaves. They were marching in triumph, like conquerors in battle. The pursuing Egyptians regarded this as an affront.

¹⁷ At first the Israelites had been searching the region for treasure, since this location was a treasure house for Egypt, and here the people acquired more jewels and wealth. When they saw “Egypt approaching” (the Hebrew is singular here) however, the Israelites at first cried out in fear and then blamed Moses for their predicament. Then they broke into several groups, each with a different plan. One group wanted to suicidally jump into the sea (2 Sam. 24:12); another wanted to surrender and return to Egypt; a third group want to fight back, and a fourth group wanted to frighten Pharaoh’s army with war cries...A large group kept shouting at Moses and blaming him for their troubles.

¹⁸ Moses assured the people and told them to stand ready to see God’s deliverance. He further told the people to “be quiet” or “be speechless” (חָרַשׁ) because God would again fight on their behalf. He then began to pray....

¹⁹ He told Moses to quit praying to Him and to mobilize the people for action. God then told Moses to lift his staff and split the sea so the people could walk through on dry ground. Note that the Hebrew reads, “Raise your staff, stretch out your hand, and divide the sea,” which some say suggests that Moses raised up the staff and then cast it aside before the sea split. This was intended to remove the idea that mystical powers were attached to the staff, and not to Moses’ faith that the LORD would deliver His people. In this way the Egyptians would see that their judgment was coming from the very person they wanted to drown in the Nile river as a baby.

²⁰ The Angel of God (מַלְאֲכַי הָאֱלֹהִים) which had traveled at the front of the camp moved to the rear to block the approach of the Egyptians (note the name *Elohim*, which points to God’s judgment). The Pillar of Cloud moved between the camp of Israel and the approaching army and remained there all night. This enabled the Israelites to cross the sea while the Egyptians were in darkness. When the text says they did not come near to one another all night, this refers to the Egyptians, who were so enshrouded in darkness that they could not move.

²¹ When Moses first lifted his staff, nothing happened until Nachshon ben Aminadav of Judah, the father in law of Aaron (Exod. 6:23; Num. 1:7), boldly stepped into the water.... Then the east wind began to blow. Nachson is thought to be a direct descendant of David, and also of the Messiah Yeshua. He sanctified God’s Name by literally jumping into sea by faith, before the waters had parted. Note that Moses was the last to enter the sea...

²² God drove back the sea with a powerful east wind all that night and the waters were divided. God used the natural forces of the wind to harden the hearts of the Egyptians so they would discount the miracle...

²³ The waters were described as being a “wall to them to their right and to their left.” Moses was last to cross.



24. What time of day was it when the waters of the sea were divided? ²⁴
25. What time of day was it when the Egyptians finally entered the split sea? ²⁵
26. How can we explain the *madness* of the Egyptian army? (14:23) ²⁶
27. What happened to the chariots of Egypt as they chased after the Israelites? (14:25) ²⁷
28. After all the Israelites crossed the sea, what happened? (14:27-28) ²⁸
29. What time of day was it when the waters were returned? (14:30) ²⁹
30. How was the death of the Egyptians in the sea “like-for-like” judgment? ³⁰
31. Why does the Torah say, “On that day God delivered Israel from the hand of Egypt,” even though they had been freed a week earlier during the Passover? (14:30-31) ³¹
32. Why does the Torah say when the Israelites saw the miracle at the sea, they “believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses”? (14:31) ³²
33. Why does the Torah say that Israel saw *Egypt* “dead” on the seashore? (14:30) ³³

²⁴ It was night. They marched across the sea all that night under the light of the Shekhinah Glory... This took place on the seventh day of Passover, i.e., Nisan 21.

²⁵ It was during the time of the last watch of the night, perhaps just before dawn. Because of the death of the Egyptians, it is customary not to recite Hallel (Psalms 113-118) on the seventh day of Passover.

²⁶ It is a mystery that God so hardened their hearts that they followed the Israelites into the sea, apparently possessed with the blinding lust to murder them... They seemed oblivious to the miraculous event before them.

²⁷ The wheels broke off and they began to get stuck in the mire (a fitting punishment for forcing the Israelites to stamp clay). They were swallowed up with the army when Moses raised his staff at dawn that day (Nisan 21).

²⁸ The LORD told Moses to raise his staff and the sea closed over the Egyptian army. “The LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea.” Note that the midrash states that Moses was the last person to cross the sea.

²⁹ It was just before daybreak on Nisan 21, the 7th day of Passover, when Moses raised his staff and the waters began to close. Logically, the Egyptians should have continued toward the Israelites on the path, but instead they turned around and ran directly into the closing waters. The waters finally covered the cavalry and chariots, including Pharaoh’s army: not one of them remained. (except for the Pharaoh).

³⁰ It was fitting judgment because the Egyptians had willingly committed genocide by drowning Hebrew babies.

³¹ When a slave escapes his master, he is not at ease as long as his master lives, but when he learns that his master has died, he experiences liberation and security. This may be understood analogically in light of the “baptism” of Israel in the sea, which represented the death of their former identities and their rebirth as a free people.

³² The sages say this means that they had faith even before the sea split, as they went into the sea and kept marching until the water came up to their mouths and noses. It was because they willingly marched before the waters split that God performed the miracle...

³³ The word “Egyptians” is used with a *singular* verb “dead” (מָת). The power, the allure, the mystique, etc. of Egypt was dead; the Egypt-principle was destroyed before the eyes of Israel; the power of the flesh....



34. Why is the Sabbath of Beshalach also called “Shabbat Shirah?”³⁴
35. The sages count 50 miracles that occurred between the time of the Exodus and the drowning of the Egyptians in the sea. Can you name some of these?³⁵
36. What is unusual about how the Song of the Sea is introduced? (15:1)³⁶
37. What is the Hebrew word for “salvation”? (15:2)³⁷
38. How are we to understand the phrase, “the LORD is a man of war”? (15:3)³⁸
39. What does the “right hand of the LORD” mean? (15: 6)³⁹
40. What does *Mi Chamokha* (מִי־כַמוֹכָה) mean?⁴⁰

³⁴ It is called the “Sabbath of the Song” because of the great “Song of the Sea” praising God for His deliverance (Exod. 15:1-21). Because this is so important for the Jewish people, the Sabbath on which this song is chanted is called Shabbat Shirah (“Sabbath of the Song”), and the custom is for all the congregation to rise while it is recited. Note the word “shirah” (שִׁירָה) is thought to be related to the word *hashreh* (הַשְׁרֵה), “rest.”

³⁵ The Pillar or Cloud and Pillar of Fire were sent (i.e., the Shekinah Glory); God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he would pursue the Israelites – as crazy as that seems after the ten plagues; when the people went into the midst of the sea (14:22), they were within a tunnel of protection; the sea bed was completely dry (not muddy at all, despite the short period of time when the wind was blowing); the walls of the water were said to yield fresh water when they were touched so the people could eat; the Israelites saw the “great hand” (הַיָּד הַגְּדוֹלָה) of the LORD as He fought against the Egyptians (14:31); not a single Egyptian survived - except Pharaoh – who at first had said, “Who is the LORD that I should listen to Him (5:2), but now said, “Who is like You among the gods, O LORD?” (15:11); when the sea washed up the Egyptians, it also washed up their weapons and treasures; and finally, after the Israelites realized their deliverance, they all prophetically sang the Song of the Sea word for word, letter by letter, after Moses began with, “I will sing to God for He is high...”

³⁶ Where the Torah introduces the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15:1a), it is written, “Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang...,” using a singular verb (i.e., *yashir*: יָשִׁיר) to say that they prophetically sang as “one new man” (אֶחָד הָדָשׁ לְאִישׁ). After they left their old life in Egypt behind them in the waters, God made them into “new creations,” given new life by the grace and power of God... Another grammatical insight: The Hebrew says “I will sing to the LORD, for He is high, high,” which is thought to refer to God’s rightful place before all people. All boasting and pride belongs to God alone, and Pharaoh was judged because he refused to humble himself.

³⁷ The Hebrew word for salvation (or deliverance) is “*yeshuah*” (יְשׁוּעָה), from the verb *yasha* (יָשַׁע) meaning to “make wide” or to “set free” (see 14:13). The Hebrew name for “Joshua” is *Yehoshua* (יְהוֹשׁוּעַ), meaning “The LORD [Yah] is salvation.” During the Second Temple period, *Yehoshua* was shortened to *Yeshua* (יֵשׁוּעַ), the Hebrew name for Jesus. According to the late Dr. David Flusser, Professor of the Second Temple Period at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, “*Yeshua*” was the third most popular male name during the Second Temple period.

³⁸ The metaphor suggests the LORD is a mighty warrior in relation to the power of Egypt and its gods. The kabbalists say that the “weapon” God uses is the power of His great Name: *Adonai ish milchamah*, *Adonai Shemo* (יְהוָה אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ): “... the LORD is His Name.”

³⁹ This phrase (יְמִין יְהוָה) is a metaphor of God’s power and strength that gives the victory. The sages say that when Israel does God’s will, His “left hand” (attribute of justice/Elohim) becomes His “right hand” (attribute of mercy/YHVH). Matt. 25:31-46. The statement that *Yeshua* is ascended to the “Right Hand of God” therefore means He is the center of God’s authority as YHVH. It is a statement of His glorification and exaltation. The “right hand of God” refers to YHVH’s Throne, Power, and authority... Psalm 118:15 - יְמִין יְהוָה עֲשָׂה תִּיל -

⁴⁰ “Who is like you?” – a phrase from the Song of the Sea that celebrated God’s victory over the Egyptian army.



41. How did the LORD lead His people? (15:12)⁴¹
42. Why did the LORD cause His people to “cross over”? (15:16-17)⁴²
43. Who danced and drummed while the people sang? (15:20-21)⁴³
44. Can you list twelve great songs of Scripture?⁴⁴
45. Three days after they crossed the sea, the Israelites entered the desert of Shur (מִדְבַּר-שׁוּר). What happened then? (15:22)⁴⁵
46. What happened at Marah? (15:23-25)⁴⁶
47. Besides giving them fresh water, what else did God give at Marah? (15:25-26)⁴⁷



⁴¹ The LORD led His people in love (חֶסֶד) and guided them to his “holy abode.”

⁴² Note that the “crossing over” (עָבַר) made the people Hebrew (עִבְרִי). The nations would be silent, still as a stone, “until your people, O LORD, pass by, till the people pass by whom you have purchased.” The goal here seems to be that God would bring them and plant them on the mount of His inheritance (Jerusalem/Zion), “a fixed place prepared for Your habitation, a Sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ) Your Hands have provided.” Also from this passage comes a statement of praise frequently used in the siddur: *Adonai Melekh, Adonai Malakh, Adonai Yimlokh le'olam va'ed* (יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ, יְהוָה מַלְאךְ, יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד) - “The LORD reigns; the LORD has always reigned; the LORD will reign forever and ever.”

⁴³ Miriam (מִרְיָם), the sister of Aaron and Moses, who is first identified as a prophetess (נְבִיאָה) in this verse (Jewish tradition says she had first prophesied about the coming of her baby brother as the deliverer of the Jewish people when she was a young girl). Note that the word for “timbrel” (תִּמְבֵּל) is a tambourine-like drum. It is interesting, isn't it, that the women rushed without being able to bake bread during the exodus – but they brought along musical instruments for the trip!

⁴⁴ 1) The song of the Sabbath (Psalm 92), said to have been sung by Adam after God forgave him for the sin in the Garden; 2) The Song of the Sea (Exod. 15); 3) The song for the well in the desert (Num. 21:17-20); 4) The Song of Moses (i.e., Ha'azinu in Deut. 32); 5) the song of Joshua (Josh. 10:12-14); 6) the song of Barak and Deborah (Judges 5); 7) the Song of David (2 Sam. 22); 8) the Song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10); 9) the Song of Songs; 10) the song of the 24 elders (Rev. 5:9); 11) the new song of the 144,000 (Rev. 14:3; Psalm 98:1); 12) the Song of the Lamb (Rev. 15:3), and so on.

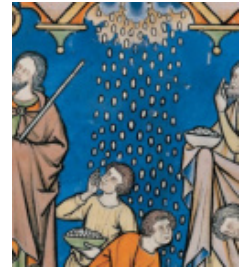
⁴⁵ They traveled three days but found no water. The sages say that Moses led the people away against their will, since they were still ecstatic over the divine vision (15:2) and wanted to linger. Also, the people were still scavenging for treasures that washed up from the sea. Still, the people gladly went as is proven by the lament of Jeremiah where God said that the people were like a young bride who followed Him into the desert (see Jer. 2:2).

⁴⁶ There was only bitter water to drink (note that the grammar could support the reading that it was the Israelites themselves who were bitter and that's what made the water seem to be so). When the people complained, God showed Moses a tree (upon which he engraved the divine Name) and threw it into the water, making it drinkable. Note that the Hebrew says “the LORD taught him a tree” (וַיִּוְרְהוּ יְהוָה עֵץ), suggesting the “teaching tree of Abraham” (Gen. 12:6). What was Moses taught? That the fallen tree would ultimately yield mayim chayim – living waters?

⁴⁷ God gave them a “decree and a rule” (חֹק וּמִשְׁפָּט) and tested them. The sages say this meant God explained the commandments of Sabbath and the duty to honor parents at this time. God promised that if the people would 1) *diligently listen* (שָׁמְעוּ תְשָׁמְעוּ) to the voice of the LORD; 2) *do what is upright* in His eyes (הִישָׁר בְּעֵינָיו תַּעֲשֶׂה); 3) *listen carefully* (אָזַן) to His commandments; and 4) *keep all His decrees* (וּשְׁמַרְתָּ כָּל-חֻקָּיו), then none of the diseases God brought upon Egypt would be visited upon them and God would be their Healer (יְהוָה רֹפְאֶךָ).



48. How was Marah a place of *testing* for Israel? (15:25) ⁴⁸
49. What was special about the oasis called Elim? (15:27) ⁴⁹
50. On what date did the people reach the Sin Desert, and what happened at this time? (16:1-3) ⁵⁰
51. God gave the people “bread from heaven” (לֶחֶם מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם). What was it called and what did it taste like? (16:4-ff) ⁵¹
52. How was the giving of manna a test (*nisayon*) for the people? ⁵²
53. What else did God give besides the manna for food? ⁵³
54. What is an *omer* (עֹמֶר)? ⁵⁴
55. What happened to the manna if it was *unconsumed* and left overnight? ⁵⁵



⁴⁸ God tested them with thirst because they had wanted to remain at the shore of the sea to collect treasure more than they wanted to go to Sinai to receive the Torah. The lack of water forced them to pray and ask God for help. God tested them with the “bitter waters” in a way similar to that of the sotah – the suspected adulteress (Num. 5:23-28).

⁴⁹ At Elim (אֵילִם) there were “twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees.” Perhaps Elim was a foretaste of olam haba, the world to come, when healing will be for all Israel as well as for the 70 nations of the earth (Rev. 22:2).

⁵⁰ They reached the Sin Desert (מִדְבַּר־סִינַי) which lay between Elim and Sinai, on Iyar 15 (i.e., the 15th day of the second month), 30 days after the Passover. It was on this date that the Israelites used up all the matzah that they had brought with them from Egypt. Since there was no food left the people “murmured” and grumbled (לִיָּז) and this led to God sending the manna.

⁵¹ It was called *manna* (i.e., *man*, from הוּיָא *הוּיָא*). It tasted like “honey cake” (Exod. 16:31). The midrash says that the taste of manna was a function of a person’s sense of gratitude. For the thankful, manna tasted delicious (like a good cookie?), but to those who murmured, it tasted bland and unsatisfying (like stale matzah?) “According to your faith” (Matt. 9:29). The people were to go out and gather some every morning. Note that the section from Exod. 16:4-26 is called *Parashat HaManna* (פְּרָשַׁת הַמָּן), “the portion of the Manna,” which is traditionally read after the morning service.

⁵² The test centered primarily on whether the people would 1) try to *hoard* the manna, and 2) whether they would properly prepare for and observe the Sabbath day or not. All this was done in anticipation of the coming revelation to be given 20 days later at Sinai. We must trust God for his “daily bread” and his “double portion” for Shabbat.

⁵³ God gave meat (בֶּשָׂר) in the form of quail (i.e., slav: שְׂלִי) which would come at twilight (the manna fell during the night and was present in the morning). There is some question as to whether the quail were given for 40 years like the manna or whether it was just during this episode, since later the people complained about the lack of meat and were judged at the “Graves of Lust” (i.e., *kivrot ha-ta'avah*: קִבְרוֹת הַתַּאֲוָה; see Num. 11:4,34).

⁵⁴ The word “omer” (עֹמֶר) refers to a unit of measure of approx. 2.4 quarts (Exod. 16:36) though later it was used as a sheaf to be waved before Shavuot (Lev. 23:10-15). Every year we “count the omer” from the second day after Passover 49 days until the holiday of Shavuot (“weeks”). What is the connection between the manna and the festival Shavuot, the giving of the law, etc.? Note that Exod. 16:16 contains all the letters of the aleph-bet!

⁵⁵ It became rotten and wormy. It is “daily bread...” – except for erev Shabbat (Friday), when a double portion could be kept in store for the following day’s meals. This teaches us that we should not waste our food, too.



- 56. How much manna fell on Friday – and why? ⁵⁶
- 57. Describe how the manna was given by God. ⁵⁷
- 58. Why do Jews enjoy three meals during Sabbath? (16:25-26) ⁵⁸
- 59. What is the primary responsibility for Sabbath meals? ⁵⁹
- 60. Why did the LORD rebuke Moses for the sin of those who gathered manna on the Sabbath day? (16:27-28) ⁶⁰
- 61. Is travel on the Sabbath day *forbidden*? (16:29) ⁶¹
- 62. What is an *eruv* (עֶרֶב)? ⁶²
- 63. What happened to the jar of manna? (16:32-35) ⁶³



⁵⁶ On Fridays a double amount of manna was provided so that it could be enjoyed on Shabbat. Unlike the manna on weekdays, this manna didn't rot when kept overnight. It also smelled and tasted better than "regular" manna.

⁵⁷ 1) It fell at night - unobserved - while the Israelites slept. 2) It appeared "in the morning" but would melt away as the day wore on (Exod. 16:21). 3) It was ready for use and entirely sufficient for the day's needs. 4) The manna was to be shared with family. The phrase "each man for those in his tent" (Exod. 16:16) meant that the head of each household would be responsible for obtaining the manna for his family. 5) It revealed the heart's condition. Although the Torah describes its taste as like "honey cakes" (Exod. 16:31), the midrash says that the taste of manna was a function of a person's sense of gratitude. 6) It was given as a gift. The manna teaches us to bless God for our food. The sages infer that from the verse, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread" (Exod. 16:12) comes the obligation to recite birkat ha-mazon, i.e., offering a blessing to God after eating. 7) It was intended for communion. The manna teaches us to enjoy Sabbath meals: "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field" (Exod. 16:25). 8) It was for our healing. Manna teaches us to trust in God's provision and care. God gave the manna as a *test* -- to see whether the people would walk in the Torah or not. Moses later wrote that the LORD "fed you with manna so that you would know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by all that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3).

⁵⁸ Moses said, "Eat it today (ha-yom), for today (ha-yom) is God's Sabbath; today (ha-yom) you will not find any in the field." The three appearances of ha-yom (הַיּוֹם) correspond to Shelosh Seudos, three Sabbath meals.

⁵⁹ The main thing is to be happy and satisfied – not to worry about money, business, etc. Torah study gives love, joy, and peace, to enhance the soul (i.e., neshamah yeterah: נְשָׁמָה יְתֵרָה)

⁶⁰ God asked Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments?" even though he was not at fault. God did this to avoid embarrassing the sinners (thought to be Dathan and Aviram, his old nemeses from Egypt). There is a tradition that if a person loses his temper, if he is wise, he loses his wisdom, and if he is a prophet, he loses his prophetic power. Moses was said to have been angry at Dathan and Aviram regarding the manna, and so God had to retell Moses the commandment to restore his wisdom, etc.

⁶¹ No. Contrary to the Karaites' interpretation that we must stay in our house on Sabbath, the prophets clearly talk about going to the Temple during the new moon and Sabbath days (Isa. 66:23; Ezek. 46:3). It is acceptable, then, to go to worship, study, etc. , on the Sabbath day, since the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath...

⁶² An eruv is a symbolic line or "fence" around an area so that the area may be considered as one's "own yard," thus permitting the carrying of things within it without fear of desecrating the Sabbath. In the Book of Joshua, the people were further instructed to keep 3,000 feet away from the Ark of the Covenant (Josh. 3:4), which the rabbis later interpreted to mean that there should a "walking limit" of no more than 3,000 feet on the Sabbath.

⁶³ It was placed next to Ark of the Covenant in the Mishkan and later at the First Temple. It miraculously was preserved (didn't melt). It disappeared after the Babylonian captivity (but perhaps King Josiah knows where it is!)



64. How long did the Israelites eat the manna? ⁶⁴
65. What happened at the camp of Rephidim? (17:1) ⁶⁵
66. After the people complained there was no water, what did God tell Moses to do? ⁶⁶
67. Why did God call this place “Massah” and “Meribah”? (17:7) ⁶⁷
68. Who were the Amalekites? ⁶⁸
69. Whom did Moses appoint to fight the Amalekites? (17:9) ⁶⁹
70. What did Moses do when the battle with Amalek began? (17:10-11) ⁷⁰
71. What does *Adonai Nissi* (אֲדֹנָי נִסִּי) mean? ⁷¹
72. Why did God want to (both) erase the memory of Amalek *and* wage war against Amalek for all generations? (17:14-15) ⁷²

⁶⁴ They ate the manna for 40 years, until the death of Moses in Adar 7. This is unusual because all the other miracles lasted only for a short time.

⁶⁵ Rephidim (רֶפְדִּיִּם) was a campsite near Sinai. The sages say that “rephadim” is related to the word *rapha*, meaning “lax” or “lazy,” and is therefore “code” for a sense of disregard for the laws of the Torah. Because of this, God made the people thirst again, and the people found no water there.

⁶⁶ God told Moses to take the elders and go up to Sinai to strike the Rock of Horeb (הַצֹּרֶן בְּהַר־רֹב) with his staff. Moses did so in the presence of the 70 elders and water flowed from the rock (in Jewish tradition this is called “the well of Miriam” but really it was a symbolic presence of Yeshua: “The Rock was Messiah” (1 Cor. 10:4). Note that the word Horeb (הַר־רֹב) means “desolate.”

⁶⁷ He called it massah (מַסָּה), “testing” and meribah (מִרְיָבָה), “argument” because the people engaged in both when they questioned God’s care for them by saying, “Is God in our midst or not?” After all that the LORD had done for the Israelites, they had the nerve to ask, “Is God in our midst or not?”

⁶⁸ Amalek was a grandson of Esau who fathered an evil tribe of nomadic warriors (though see Gen. 14:7). The Amalekites spitefully attacked Israel while they were camping at Rephidim (i.e., camp “lazy days”), and this is considered a consequence of the Israelites testing God by saying, “Is God in our midst or not?” Amalek is associated with the “evil eye” since the name means “chopped off (malak) eye (Ayin).” See more later.

⁶⁹ Moses appointed Joshua (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ) the Ephraimite to fight Amalek. Note that the first mention of Joshua is here in the Torah, as the captain of the hosts of Israel. Perhaps Moses chose him because of the tradition that only a descendant of Joseph could overthrow Esau.

⁷⁰ Moses went with his brother Aaron and his nephew Hur (i.e., the son of Miriam) to the top of Sinai where the miracle of the water from the Rock occurred. Only when Moses’ arms were lifted could Israel defeat them.

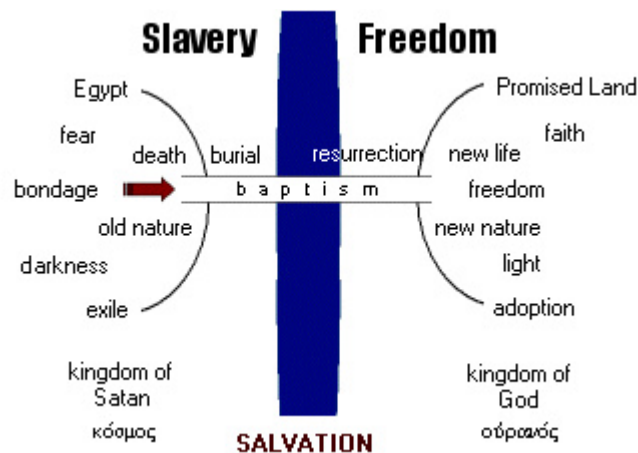
⁷¹ Adonai Nissi (“God is my *nes* - Miracle”) is the name of the altar that commemorates the victory of faith over the dark powers of Amalek.

⁷² Amalek represents Satan’s attempt to destroy Israel (and therefore to prevent the advent of the Savior). Here are some reasons God wanted to blot out the memory of this evil people: 1) Amalek attacked Israel out of sheer spite, without warning and without having a political reason to do so; 2) Amalek attacked the weakest members of Israel out of pure malice [Deut. 25:18]; 3) Amalek continued Pharaoh’s sin of denying the LORD’s power; 4) Amalek taught the nations not to fear the LORD or to regard the Exodus as special; 5) the “sar” of Amalek (angel) is called Sama’el, or the Satan; and so on. In every generation there is a battle against Amalek, and that battle will not be over until God’s Throne is established forever over all (may that day come).



Discussion Topics

1. The Apostle Paul likened the crossing of the sea as a *metaphor* of baptism: “All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:1-2,11). In the New Testament, baptism symbolizes our identification with Yeshua’s death, burial, and resurrection (Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:3-5). Some Christian commentators make a strong distinction between these two baptisms (i.e., baptism into Moses and baptism into Messiah), though there are many profound correspondences. For instance, the Israelites were facing death and were therefore at the “end of themselves.” They had no other appeal or hope than God’s gracious intervention on their behalf (i.e., salvation). Still, they needed to act and move forward. After they took the step of faith, they could see the Shekhinah Glory lighting up the way of deliverance, though this meant being “buried” within the midst of the sea. Their earlier fear of death was replaced with a song of God’s great deliverance. The other side of the sea represented new life, the life that comes from above, by the power and agency of the Holy Spirit... The Israelites died to their old life, were symbolically buried in the waters, but rose to new freedom by the grace and power of God... Shifting the analogy somewhat, the crossing of the sea represented a sort of “birth canal” into the realm of true freedom as God’s redeemed children.



In Jewish tradition, “baptism” (*tevillah*) was performed through immersion in *mayim chayim*, “running water,” though it was also performed using a *mikveh* pool. In either case it was performed to restore ritual purity or to demonstrate *teshuvah*. The Apostle Paul likens baptism as a process of death and rebirth. Discuss your ideas of baptism and what it represents.

2. The Talmud says it is more difficult for God to create a *marriage* than to split the sea. Why do you think the sages said this? Do you see an analogy here with God’s relationship to us? How is the community of faith like a “bride” to God? How is God like a Groom?
3. Yeshua called Himself the “Bread of Life” (*lechem ha-chayim*) that came down from heaven. What does this mean? In what ways does the life of Yeshua resemble the original manna that God sent from heaven? How are you “fed” every day by Yeshua?



- The Torah states that when the Israelites entered the sea, it became dry land, with the water as “a wall to their right and to their left” (Exod. 14:29). To commemorate this miracle, the Hebrew text of the "Song of the Sea" is stylized to resemble a "wavy wall," with the lines written in alternating "blocks" that suggest a wave of water:

מי	מי כמנכה באלה יהוה	אירם
נראה תהלת עליה	נאדר בקרע	כמנכה נאדר בקרע
נחית	נחית ימתי תבלעמו ארץ	כלא
נהל	נהלת בערך אל נה	בזסדך עם זו נאלת
היל	עלמלו עמנים ירגזו	קדשך
אנ נבדכו אכופו	אנ נבדכו אכופו	עלבי פלעות
נמו	אולי בואב יאחמו רעו	אדום
תעל עליהם אימיה	תעל עליהם אימיה	ככל ישלבי כנעך
על	בגיל ורועך יחסו כאן	ופזר
על יעבר עם זו	על יעבר עם זו	יעבר עבך יהוה
מסן	תאמו ותלעמו סודי לחותך	קצית
מקדע ארעו כנע	מקדע ארעו כנע	פלעת יהוה

According to Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez, the blank spaces separating the “bricks” (i.e., text blocks) suggest “blank spaces in our knowledge and praise of God” which we are encouraged to add to the “building.” The alternating “bricks” also resemble waves of water. Discuss the idea that our praises “build a habitation” for God in our hearts....

- The name “Amalek” begins with the letter *Ayin* (symbolizing the eye) and equals 240 in gematria -- the same value for *safek*, the Hebrew word for doubt. Amalek therefore suggests “the eye of doubt,” or even “the severed eye” (the verb *malak* means “to chop” or “sever” in reference to the “eye” of *Ayin*). Amalek therefore represents spiritual blindness as it acts in the world. Discuss the idea of spiritual warfare in the Bible.
- This week’s Torah refers to God as our Healer, *Adonai Rophekha* (יהוה רפֵאֵךְ). The same verb *rophe* (“to heal”) also occurs in Isa. 53:5 where it is written, “with his stripes we are *healed*.” Notice that the word translated “stripe” (i.e., *chaburah*) comes from the same root as the word “friend” (i.e., *chaver*), and therefore we can read this as “in His *friendship* we are healed.” Discuss how Yeshua is your friend....
- The story of the disgruntled Israelites teaches us that miracles are never enough to sustain our faith. Discuss the role of *miracles* in the Bible. What was Yeshua’s attitude toward the demand to give a “sign” to validate his claims?
- Some of the Jewish sages have gone so far as to say that the entire Bible may be read as a book about God’s apparent *inability* to teach the Jewish people how to be grateful. Discuss the merit of this perspective. What is the connection between spirituality and gratitude?

For Next Week

- Read parashat **Yitro** (Exodus 18:1-20:23)
- Read Haftara (Isa. 6:1-7:6; 9:5-6)
- Read New Testament (Matt. 8:5-20)

