

December 17, 2017 - Ex. 14:15 – 16:3 - The sea parts, Israelites murmur
Torah Reading: *Hanukkah!* Exodus 14:15 – 16:3 - The sea parts, Israelites murmur
Psalm 52
Haftarah: Isaiah 65:24 – 66:2,5

First, what is the connection of this passage with Hanukkah?

The Maccabees, who fought against the Syrians in the Hanukkah story, are so called because their name is an acronym of a verse in the song the Israelites sang at the sea: *mi kamocho b'elim Hashem*, "who is like you, God?"

The Pillar of Fire gave light to Israel - just as the Hanukkah Menorah does, representing a "great miracle."

The hope of redemption displayed in the destruction of the Egyptians and the salvation of Israel through the Red Sea is contained in the promise to Mary and the conception of Christ. The passage ends in **Exodus 16:3** with Israel running out of bread, and the next week we will see God bringing manna for Israel. The "bread that comes down from heaven" initially entered our world at the conception of Jesus, which very likely occurred on Hanukkah.

John 6:51 - "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

This was one of the things which the Jews expected from the Messiah. In Midrash Koheleth, Rabbi Berechiah, in the name of Rabbi Issac, said, "As was the first Redeemer, so also shall be the latter. The first Redeemer made manna descend from heaven, as it is said in Exodus."

Deliverance at the Red Sea

Exodus 14:15 - "And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea."

Rashi - Why do you cry out to Me: [This verse] teaches us that Moses was standing and praying. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "This is no time to pray at length, when Israel is in distress." Another explanation [of God's question (Why do you cry out to me?) implies]: "The matter depends on Me and not on you," as it is said further [in Scripture]: "Concerning My children and the work of My hands do you command Me?" (Isa. 45:11). — [from Mechilta, Exod. Rabbah 21:8]

Exodus 14:19 - "And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed

and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them:"

Rashi - "and went behind them": to separate between the Egyptians' camp and the Israelites' camp and to catch the arrows and the catapult stones of the Egyptians. Everywhere it says: "the angel of the Lord (ה)," but here [it says]: "the angel of God (אֱלֹהִים)." Everywhere [in Scripture] אֱלֹהִים denotes [God's attribute of] judgment. This teaches that at that moment, the Israelites were being judged whether to be saved or to perish with the Egyptians. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.

Exodus 14:20 - "And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night."

Compare this to:

2 Corinthians 2:16 - "To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?"

Exodus 14:21 - "And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided."

Rashi - "with the strong east wind": [I.e.,] with the east wind, which is the strongest of the winds. That is the wind with which the Holy One, blessed be He, visits retribution upon the wicked, as it is said [in the following verses]: "With an east wind I will scatter them" (Jer. 18:17); "an east wind shall come, a wind of the Lord" (Hos. 13:15); "the east wind broke you in the heart of the seas" (Ezek. 27:26); "He spoke with His harsh wind on the day of the east wind" (Isa. 27:8). — [from Mechilta]

Exodus 14:25 - "And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians."

Rashi - The pillar of cloud descends and makes it [the earth] like mud, and the pillar of fire boils it [the earth], and the hoofs of their horses slip. — [from Mechilta] With the fire the wheels were burned, and the chariots dragged, and those sitting in them were moved to and fro, and their limbs were wrenched apart.

"they drave them heavily" - In a manner that was heavy and difficult for them. [This punishment was] in the measure that they [the Egyptians had] measured [to the Israelites], namely "and he made his heart heavy, he and his servants" (Exod. 9:34). Here too, "He led them with heaviness."

Exodus 14:27 - "And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned

to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea."

Rashi - or "the Lord stirred the Egyptians into the sea" - As a person stirs (מְנַעֵר) a pot [of food] and turns what is on the top to the bottom and what is on the bottom to the top, so were they [the Egyptians] bobbing up and down and being smashed in the sea, and the Holy One, blessed be He, kept them alive to bear their tortures. — [from Mechilta]

Baptism

The Egyptians' perishing in the Red Sea is a picture of baptism. It shows that our "old man" has always been persecuting Christ within us, right up until the time that he perishes, at our redemption.

I Corinthians 10:1-2 - "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

The cross (indicated publicly by our baptism) is the counterpart of this in the New Testament:

Galatians 3:27 - "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ."

Remember **Exodus 14:13-14** - "for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever." We do not need to look back, like Lot's wife. Once we've put the hand to the plow, we never need to focus on or regret our old identity.

Luke 9:62 - "No one who puts his hand to the plow and then looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Exodus 14:30 - "Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore."

Rashi - "and Israel saw the Egyptians dying on the seashore": For the sea spewed them out on its shore, so that the Israelites would not say, "Just as we are coming up on this side [of the sea], so are they coming up on another side, far from us, and they will pursue us."-[from Mechilta and Pes. 118b]

To see the Egyptians dead results in us "reckoning ourselves dead."

Exodus 14:31 - "And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses."

Israel "believes" only after the redemption has been accomplished. It's God doing everything.

What is said of the Egyptians must be seen as applying to our old identity: Cast into the sea, the depths covered them; they descended into the depths like a stone, God's wrath devoured them like straw, they sank like lead, the earth swallowed them up. (i.e. the old you is gone!)

The Song of Triumph

After centuries of bondage in Egypt, Israel releases their joy in this song. Composed by Moses on the spur of the moment, it is sung by the men, with Miriam leading the women in call-and-response, beating on timbrels.

The first part is about what God has done, the second about what he will do when he brings them into the Promised Land.

The song is mirrored in Revelation after "victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name":

Revelation 15:1-4 (3) - "And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

Murmuring at Marah

Three days later, finding no water at Marah, the people began to grumble.

Exodus 15:24 - "So the people murmured against Moses, saying, 'What can we drink?'"

The tree that made the bitter waters sweet

Exodus 15:25 - "He cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When Moses threw it into the water, the water became safe to drink. There the Lord made for them a binding ordinance, and there he tested them."

Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai explains the phrase "Vayorehu Hashem etz" ("the LORD showed him a tree") as "God taught Moses Torah." According to this interpretation, the "etz" in the verse refers to "etz hayim hee," meaning "it (the Torah) is a tree of life."

"It [the Torah] is a Tree of Life for those who grasp onto it" (**Proverbs 3:18**).

The rabbis agree that the branch of the tree itself was bitter, although it transformed the bitter waters into sweet. A beautiful literal reading from the Zohar suggesting that it was a piece of wood from the Etz Hayim – the original Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden.

Also, the passage doesn't exactly say that the waters were bitter, it only states, "they were bitter." Some rabbis said it was the Israelites who were bitter, which made the waters taste bitter to them. The Midrash adds that the bark of the tree that G-d showed

Moshe was itself extremely bitter (Midrash Shemot Rabbah 23:3). The cross, a bitter tree indeed, is what sweetens life, as Christ is the fulfillment and completion of Torah.

“A stature and an ordinance” - At Marah, He gave them some sections of the Torah so that they would busy themselves with them, including the laws governing the Sabbath and the red cow — [from Mechilta and Sanh. 56b]

The Red Cow is the Red Heifer, out of whose ashes the waters of cleansing were made (**Numbers 19:1-22**). Like the tree thrown into the bitter waters, the ashes thrown into the waters of cleansing were transformative. These waters were to cleanse someone who had touched a dead body.

Thus, Christ can transform our spiritual “bitterness.”

Ezekiel 36:25,26 - “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your fetishes [idolatrous practices]. And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you.”

The Tree of Life reappears in Revelation:

Revelation 22:2 - "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

The "healing of the nations" in an expanded reference to the Lord as "healer" here:

Exodus 15:26 - "He said, "If you will diligently obey the LORD your God, and do what is right in his sight, and pay attention to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, then all the diseases that I brought on the Egyptians I will not bring on you, for I, the LORD, am your healer."

How was Israel "proved" or tested at Marah?

The incident at Marah also reminded the rabbis of the *Sotah* ritual, which was to determine if a wife had been unfaithful (**Numbers 5:11–31**).

A suspected wife would drink "bitter water that causes a curse" - holy water mixed with the dust from the floor of the Tabernacle. A curse was written on a scroll and then blotted out or washed off with the bitter water, so that the curse was now "in" the water itself.

Then the wife drank the water. If she was guilty, her abdomen would swell into a sort of simulated "pregnancy," her "thigh would rot" and she would become unable to bear children. If she was proved innocent, the tradition states she would become even more fertile than before.

At Marah, Israel had been sojourning among the idolatrous Egyptians, and she had now returned to God, but he tested her to see if she was guilty of idolatry.

A similar experience took place after Israel worshipped the golden calf (**Exodus 32**). Moses ground up the tablets of the Law, scattered it on the water and forced them drink of it.

All of us would be proved guilty taking this test. But the cross thrown into the waters, when mixed with faith, turns the waters sweet.

Journey to Elim

Exodus 15:27 - "Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there by the water."

Rashi - the 12 wells correspond to the 12 tribes; the 70 palms correspond to the 70 elders. [from Mechilta, Jonathan]

The seventy date palm trees also symbolize the seventy "faces" or perspectives of Torah that are revealed to those who eat of its fruit. Seventy is also the numerical value of the word סוד/sod – secret, the inner Kabbalistic dimension of Torah.

From Elim to the Wilderness of Sin & more murmuring

Exodus 16:2-3 - "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Rashi - Because the bread [they had taken out of Egypt] was depleted.