

## 5783 – Exodus 13-17 - Beshalach (When he let them go)

<sup>14:21</sup>Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind **and turned it into dry land**. The waters were divided, <sup>22</sup>and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. <sup>23</sup>The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. <sup>24</sup>During the last watch of the night the LORD ... threw (the Egyptia army) into confusion. <sup>25</sup>He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving ...

<sup>26</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." <sup>27</sup>Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. <sup>28</sup>The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. <sup>29</sup>But **the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground**, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

1. (v. 21) מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיִּזְלַךְ הִי אֶת־הַיָּם—Moses stretched out his hand ... and HASHEM moved the sea. God's name was engraved on Moses' staff, yet the staff alone could not cause the sea to recede. God Himself had to intervene. The Midrash compares this to a king who had two gardens, one within the other. He sold the inner garden, but when the buyer came to claim his land, the watchman refused to let him enter. The watchman was stubborn and continued to resist, even when the buyer produced his deed, signed with the royal seals. Finally, the buyer asked the king himself to come in person. When the watchman saw the king approaching, he ran away. The purchaser called after him, "Why are you fleeing? Did I not tell you that I came in the name of the king?" Replied the watchman, "I am not fleeing from you, but from the king."<sup>1</sup>

Thus it was with the sea. Moses demanded in God's name that the sea recede, and he even used the staff with God's Name engraved upon it, but neither was effective until God caused the sea to return. This is what King David meant when he wrote: הַיָּם רָאָה וַיָּנָס, *the sea saw and fled* (Psalms 114:3). It was before Hashem that the sea fled and not before man, as King David continued (114:7); מִלִּפְנֵי אֲדֹנָי חוּלֵי אֶרֶץ, *at the presence of the Lord, you tremble, O earth* (Mekhilta).

Maharal (1520-1609) explains that although Hashem had given great powers to Moses to perform certain supernatural miracles, **nature refuses to allow any mortal to enter its inner gardens. Nature obeys only the commands of God.**

### a. Matthew 17:15-21

<sup>15</sup>"Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. <sup>16</sup>I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him." <sup>17</sup>"You unbelieving and perverse generation," Yeshua replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." <sup>18</sup>Yeshua rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment. <sup>19</sup>Then the disciples came to Yeshua in private and asked, "**Why couldn't we drive it out?**" <sup>20</sup>He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

b. <sup>21</sup>*the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land ...* <sup>29</sup>*But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground ...*

<sup>21</sup>וַיָּשֶׁם אֶת־הַיָּם לְחֶרֶב

*va-ya-sem et ha-yam le-hara-vah*

*and turned the sea into **dry ground***

1) The word חֶרֶב (*ha-ravah*) is usually translated “dry land” but it actually means the “**opposite of the sea**”—the word אֶרֶץ, *eret* (land) does not appear in the verse.

<sup>29</sup>וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָלְכוּ בִּיבֶשֶׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם

*oov-nei Yisrael hal-chu vai-ya-ba-shah b'toch ha-yam*  
*and the sons of Israel have gone **on the dryness** in the midst of the sea.*

2) The wordd יבֶשֶׁה (*ya-basha*) is typically translated “dry land” but it actually refers to something that has been “dried out” or “conjealed”—the word אֶרֶץ, *eret* (land) does not appear in the verse.

3) (v. 29) הָלְכוּ בִּיבֶשֶׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם—*Went on dry land in the midst of the sea*. According to the opinion of *Rashbam* that the Egyptians drowned after the Jews left the sea, it would have been more appropriate to write: had gone on dry land. However, according to the Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah*) and Ibn Ezra, both events oc-

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Shemos*, (Mesorah Publishing, Ltd.), pp. 167-177.

curred simultaneously. The waters returned to their place after the Jews passed by, and **the last of the Egyptians drowned just as the last Israelite reached the shore.**

Several commentaries address why in v. 22 this phrase appears in reverse order בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בִּיבֹשָׁה, *came within the sea on dry land*. R' Elimelech explains that generally, men are conscious of God's supreme power only when witnessing a supernatural event. The Torah therefore informs us that **walking on dry land under normal circumstances is no less a miracle than walking in the middle of the sea; the two are interchangeable.**

4) Matthew 14:22-27

<sup>22</sup>Immediately Yeshua made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup>After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountain inside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup>and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. <sup>25</sup>Shortly before dawn **Yeshua went out to them, walking on the lake.** <sup>26</sup>When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup>But Yeshua immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

c. *Nature obeys only the commands of God.*

1) Mark 4:35-41

<sup>35</sup>That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." <sup>36</sup>Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. <sup>37</sup>A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup>Yeshua was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" <sup>39</sup>He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "**Quiet! Be still!**" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. <sup>40</sup>He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" <sup>41</sup>They were terrified and asked each other, "**Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!**"

2. (v. 26) וַיָּשׁוּבוּ הַמַּיִם—*And the water will go back*. The Egyptians attempted to destroy the Jewish people by casting their newborns into the waters of the Nile. But ultimately *the water [was to] go back*, by virtue of the principle of מִדָּה כִּנְגֵד מִדָּה, **measure for measure** (*Mechilta*). As King David puts it, *He digs a pit, digs it deep, only to fall into his own trap* (*Psalms 7:16*). The Israelites witnessed Moses stretching forth the

hand of justice, and they saw that God was prepared to overturn the conditions of His Creation to ensure its triumph. At the same time, they became aware of their special mission to establish justice on earth. The Messianic deliverance and the return to Zion will occur only through justice.

a. Matthew 7:1-5

<sup>1</sup>"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup>For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and **with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.** <sup>3</sup>"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

3. (v. 27) וַיָּשׁוּב הַיָּם ... לְאַיְתָּנוּ—The water went back to its power. *Rashi* interprets לְאַיְתָּנוּ *to its power, as to its former strength*.

The *Zohar* and numerous *Midrashim* compare the word אַיְתָּנוּ, *its power*, with אֶנְאָה, *its precondition*. During Creation, Hashem had imposed a precondition on the sea, that when the time came for Israel to cross into the Sea of Reeds, it was to overcome its normal rules of behavior and its waters were to split. It was to this precondition that the sea now returned. *R Yirmiyahu ben Elazar* adds that God set conditions not only upon the sea, but upon all that He created during the six days of Creation so that miracles could occur when required. This is the underlying meaning of the words: *I, even My hands, have spread out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded* (*Isaiah 45:12*). As the *Midrash* puts it: *I commanded the sea to split ... I commanded the fire not to incinerate Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; the lions not to devour Daniel; the whale to spew Jonah forth* (*Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 5).

*Rambam* relates this to the words of Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun (1:9), implying that there are no innovations since Creation. Thus, when God created this universe with its physical properties, He also made it possible that all the miracles should happen when they would be required. Thus, a prophet might be informed by God when and how a certain miraculous event would take place, but the thing itself occurs in accordance with the laws of nature as established at Creation (*Guide to the Perplexed* 2:29).

Some historical accounts of the Chassidic movement in the 18th century make reference to a similar statement made to a Jewish apostate by the *Baal Shem Tov* (1698-1760). The apostate argued that the splitting of the Sea of Reeds was merely a coincidence of unique natu-

ral circumstances such as special atmospheric conditions. He suggested that these were rare but not miraculous occurrences. *Baal Shem Tov* replied that the fact that these phenomena occurred just as the Jews were about to brave the waters is the greatest of miracles.

a. Psalm 14:1-2

<sup>1</sup>For the director of music. Of David. **The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."** They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. <sup>2</sup>The LORD looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.

b. John 10:31-33

<sup>31</sup>Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, <sup>32</sup>but Yeshua said to them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" <sup>33</sup>**"We are not stoning you for any good work,"** they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

<sup>14:30</sup>That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. <sup>31</sup>And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

1. (v. 31) וַיִּירָאוּ הָעָם אֶת־יְהוָה—*And the people revered HASHEM*. The two principal attitudes which Israel must use in serving God are יִרְאָה, *reverence*, and אֱמוּנָה, *faith and trust based on love*. We must be in awe of God, but still place all our trust in Him. **The One God radiates both love and justice**. The salvation that laid the Egyptian colossus at the feet of their former slaves revealed God's active justice joined together with His power of love, fostering trust in Him. In one great historical moment, a synthesis of these qualities was achieved and so the people revered Hashem (*Rabbi S. R. Hirsch*).

The present text also alludes to this idea. As noted above, *Israel saw the great hand* is understood by Rashi to mean the *great power*. In Jewish philosophical terminology, Hashem's גְּבוּרָה, *might*, generally designates His מִדַּת הַדִּין, *rule of justice and strict law*. Yet, **Hashem reveals His true greatness when He causes love to prevail over justice, granting mercy and forgiveness whereas justice demands severe punishment**. Thus, גְּדוּלָּה, *greatness*, is identified with מִדַּת הַחֶסֶד, *Hashem's rule of love*. Hence, on the banks of the Sea of Reeds, the Israelites witnessed the dual revelation of Divine power and love, and it

inspired them to revere God and place their trust in Him (*R Bachya; Maharsha, Berachos 58a*).

- a. "Is God Different in the Old and the New Testament?"<sup>2</sup>

**"In the Old Testament, God is all about law and judgment. Thankfully, in the New Testament He is all about love and grace."**

Let's be honest, either you or someone you know has believed that at some point. Or they still do.

Yet if the Scriptures tell us that "God is love" and that He never changes, how could this be true? Could we have perhaps misunderstood one of the primary foundations of the Scriptures, the Torah or the Law of Moses?

**What is the Torah?**

The confusion begins with our Western understanding of the word "law." For many, simply mentioning biblical law conjures up thoughts of harsh, unbendable regulations that invite swift punishment when broken. But that is not how the Bible communicates it. In Proverbs 1:8 we find something interesting:

*"My son, hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the law (torah) of your mother."*

The word translated as **law** is the Hebrew word *torah*—the same word used to describe the "law" of Moses. Do we think of the Law of Moses in the same way as we do our mother's loving instructions? The Lord does and we should too.

In Hebrew thought, the word *torah* that is often translated "law" also refers to instructions from a parent or teacher. The implication is that Torah was intended to be God's caring instructions for every aspect of life and showed Israel the very best way to live.

- b. **The very essence of Torah**, the Sages thus insist, **is a God of love and kindness who calls Israel to love and kindness**.<sup>3</sup>
- c. Grace seems to be plentiful in the (Apostolic Writings) but rare in the Hebrew Scriptures. Many Christians have gained the false impression that the God of the Jewish Bible is typically a God of wrath, while the God of the (Apostolic Writings)—almost a different God—is a God of love. This impression is strengthened by such ... statements as "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through (Yeshua the Messiah)" (John 1:17; RSV). **Is God's grace more prevalent in the New Testament than in the**

<sup>2</sup> By Doug Hershey—<https://firmisrael.org/learn/god-in-old-testament-vs-new-testament-is-he-a-god-of-love/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/beginning-and-end-torah>

**Jewish Scriptures? The answer is no, but the explanation of how this misperception gained acceptance among Christians is complicated.**<sup>4</sup>

*Chesed* (“goodness,” “kindness,” “**grace**”) appears 247 times in the Bible. The Septuagint, the second-century (BCE) Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, nearly always rendered *chesed* as ἔλεος (*eleos*, “mercy”). English versions of the Bible have followed the Septuagint’s lead and rendered *chesed* as “mercy” (“compassion,” “forgiveness”).

1) חֶסֶד (*chesed*)—*grace, kindness, loving kindness, steadfast love, unfailing love, mercy.*

a) חֶסֶד (*chesed*) *kindness, lovingkindness, mercy* and similar words (KJV). (RSV usually has *steadfast love* occasionally *loyalty*, NASB *loving kindness, kindness, love*, NIV *unfailing love*) (TWOT).

b) Psalm 86:5

You, Lord, are forgiving and good, **abounding in love** to all who call to you.

CJB—**full of grace** toward all who call on you.

KJV—and **plenteous in mercy** unto all them that call upon thee.

NAS—and **abundant in lovingkindness** to all who call upon Thee.

PST—and **multiplying favor** to all who *pray in your presence.*

DSS—*abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.*

d. John 7:37-39

<sup>37</sup>On the last and greatest day of the festival (of Sukkot), Yeshua stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup>Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." <sup>39</sup>**By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Yeshua had not yet been glorified.**

1) 7:39 John’s statement shows that the passion of (Messiah) was the important aspect of (Yeshua’s) revelation about the Holy Spirit, for **it divided the era of law from that of the Spirit** (John 1:17). The prophecy of Ezekiel concurs with this: “I will give **you** a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And **I will put**

**my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws**” (Ezek 36:26-27).<sup>5</sup>

a) Who is Ezekiel talking to? Gentiles who would come to make up a future “Church” or the people of Israel?

b) Ezekiel 36:22-25

<sup>22</sup>“Therefore **say to the Israelites**, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, **which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.**’ <sup>23</sup>I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, **the name you have profaned among them.** Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes. <sup>24</sup>“For **I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.**’ <sup>25</sup>I will sprinkle clean water on you, and **you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.**

e. The Law and (Yeshua)<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between the Law (i.e., Torah—the Instruction, the Guidance) and (Yeshua) in John 1:16-17 has often been viewed as an antithesis, as though the Law were something bad. *The Living Bible*, often a helpful translation in other contexts, provides an example of this approach:

We have all benefited from the rich blessings he brought to us—blessing upon blessing heaped upon us! **For Moses gave us only the Law with its rigid demands and merciless justice, while (Yeshua the Messiah) brought us loving forgiveness** as well.

That is an unfortunate<sup>[5]</sup> translation because it misses the fact that John portrays the grace of (Yeshua) as built on top of a blessing—the Law. The Law is a blessing and (Yeshua) came and added a blessing on top of it.

**The grammar here is not contrastive.**<sup>[6]</sup> The statements of verse 17 elaborate what was meant in verse 16; these statements are simply a listing of the points of elaboration, and are without explicit connective.<sup>[7]</sup> Barnabas Lindars brings this out in his commentary by using comparison: “Just as the law was given through Moses, so grace and truth ... came into being ... through (Yeshua the Messiah).”<sup>[8]</sup>

4 David N. Bivin, “Hebrew Nuggets, Lesson 29: Grace Compared”—[www.jerusalemerspective.com/2636](http://www.jerusalemerspective.com/2636)

5 Frank E. Gæbelein, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol 9, (Regency Reference Library), p. 87

6 <https://www.jerusalemerspective.com/2678/>

This is a better translation, but leaves out the sense of development and culmination that John means to give us. The *Jerusalem Bible* and *New International Version* avoid this pitfall by mimicking the terse quality of the Greek: “For the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through (Yeshua the Messiah).”<sup>[9]</sup>

However one translates John 1:17, **both clauses should be positively portrayed**. After all, it is John himself who states that “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22) and that “the Hebrew Scriptures testify about (Yeshua)” (John 5:39).

[5] **“Unfortunate” is euphemistically mild. Such mistakes can provide the seeds for Christian anti-Semitism.** Much depends on one’s starting point. In order to correctly read the New Testament, one must start from within a Jewish context and look out inclusively to the Gentile world.

[6] Leon Morris made a correct grammatical observation even though he ended up interpreting the verse antithetically: “We should have expected the contrasting *men* and *de*. But John simply puts the two statements side by side” (*The Gospel According to John, The New International Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 111).

[7] Randall Buth, “Oun, De, Kai and Asyndeton (Null) in the Gospel of John,” in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. David Alan Black with Katherine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn; Nashville: Broadman, 1993).

[8] Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John, New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 98.

[9] Peter Renju, a United Bible Societies translation consultant in Africa, has suggested (oral communication) another model for translation: **“For the divine blessing started with Moses, who has given us the Law, and has reached its fullness in (Yeshua the Messiah), who has given us grace and truth.”** This kind of restructuring may be necessary for many translation audiences. Putting short clauses together like the *Jerusalem Bible* and *New International Version* may not make for clear, smooth communication.