



*Parasha Beshalach*

January 27, 2024

*Parasha:* Exodus 13:17-17:16

*Haftarah:* Judges 4:4-5:31

*Ketwim Shlichim:* John 6:25-35

*yShabbat shalom Mishpacha!* Our *parasha* this week is *Beshalach*. It begins: *17 After Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them along the road to the land of the Philistines.* (Exodus 13:17a TLV). *Torah* goes on to say that ADONAI did this because Israel would lose heart if they saw armed Philistines and would return to Egypt. ADONAI knew their hearts, their fears, their strengths and their weaknesses.

When Pharaoh realized that he was letting all that free labor escape, he changed his mind and set out to recapture Israel. According to tradition, it was seven days later when he arrived at the Red Sea. If this was true, it means that the sea split on the seventh day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The picture of this is amazing. ADONAI passed over the houses in Egypt on the first day, killing those without lamb's blood on their doorposts, and then split the sea on the seventh day, providing another miraculous escape for Israel. According to the tradition, it wasn't until the next day that the sea closed, killing Pharaoh's army. It's a tradition. It may have happened that way or it may not have. We really don't know. But, it is amazing that after seeing all the destruction of the plagues and the land of Egypt in a shambles, Pharaoh now believed that he could bring Israel back.

We have seen Pharaoh's spirit in the past when we were told that ADONAI "hardened" his heart. But, did ADONAI really do that? If He has given us, the people of His creation, Pharaoh included, free will, why would ADONAI control his heart? But, translators make it seem that way: 3 *"Yet I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. 4 But Pharaoh will not listen to you, ..."* (Exodus 7:3-4a TLV). However, the Hebrew word used, *כִּזְזַק*, *va'chazek*, with *va'* meaning but, doesn't seem to mean "but hardened" at all. *Chazek* comes from *כִּזְזַק*, *chazak*, which according to *Strong's Online Concordance* means, "to be or grow firm or strong, strengthen." It is the same word which ADONAI spoke to Joshua as he was about to enter the Land of Promise: 9 *"Have I not commanded you? Chazak! Be strong!"* (Joshua 1:9a TLV). And, it is in that same sense that we declare: *"Chazak, chazak, v'nitchazek!"* after completing each book of *Torah*, words translated as "Be strong, be strong, and let us be strengthened!" So, why is it translated as "hardened" when referring to Pharaoh? Strengthened would be better, meaning that ADONAI strengthened the evil sense of will which was already in Pharaoh's heart, strengthened what he had already planned to do. With this understanding, ADONAI did not cause Pharaoh to do these things, but encouraged him to do what he was already planning and determined to do. So now, Israel has escaped and Pharaoh's strong will to do what he wants is displayed once more as he chases after Israel and then meets his own fate in the sea.

After we are told that ADONAI chose not to send Israel by the way of the Philistines, we are told: *18 So God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Sea of Reeds, ...* (Exodus 13:18a TLV). Now, we have another problem. How can a whole army drown in a

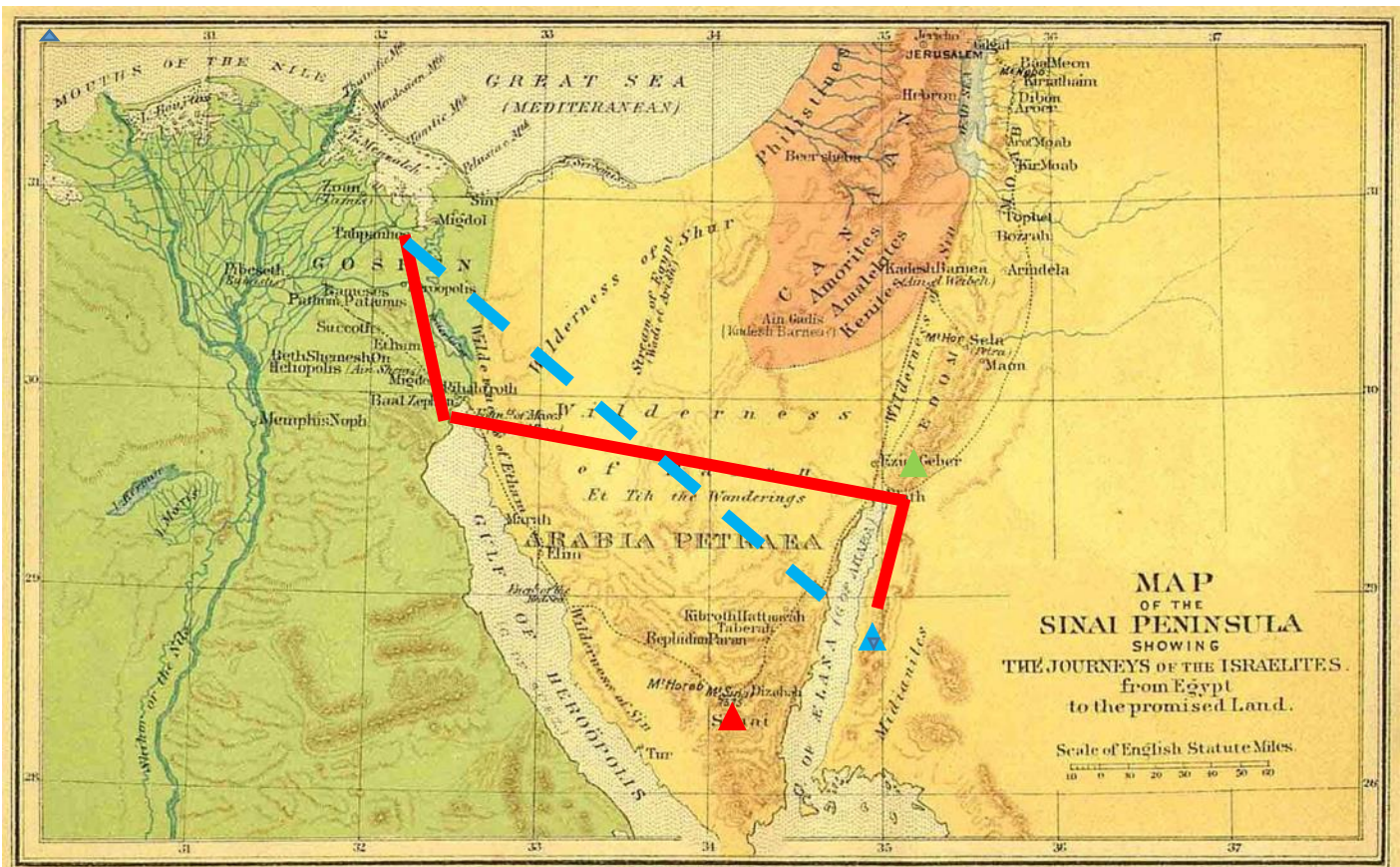
shallow body of water in which reeds can grow? A young boy returned home from Hebrew school and his father asked, "What did you learn today?" The boy said, "The Rabbi told us how Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses was a big strong man and he beat Pharaoh up. Then, while he was down, he got all the people together and ran towards the sea. When he got there, he has his engineers build a huge pontoon bridge. Once they got on the other side, they blew up the bridge while the Egyptians were trying to cross." The father was shocked. "Is that what the Rabbi taught you?" "No," the boy replied, "but you'd never believe the story he DID tell us!" Many people today don't believe this Bible story and many of the others. Could Pharaoh and his army have drowned in shallow water? The answer is, not likely, but ADONAI can do whatever He wants and He could have drowned them in a teacup if He had wished. But, in the natural world, water shallow enough for reeds to grow cannot submerge a whole army, men, chariots and all. But, for whatever His reasons, ADONAI caused Moses who wrote Exodus, to write *yam suph*, words usually translated "sea of reeds." *Yam* is Hebrew for "sea." *Suph* is thought to be an Egyptian word meaning "reeds" or "rushes." The TLV has consistently translated *suph* as reeds in the *Tanakh*. However, *Strong's Online Concordance* translates *suph* as "red" in Exodus 13:18, as did most all of the Christian Bible versions as well as the Jewish Publication Society, 1917 version of the *Tanakh*. I understand the desire of the TLV translators to be accurate, but usage is also important. There is more evidence. The writer of the Book of Hebrews also calls it the Red Sea: *29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as if on dry ground. When the Egyptians tried it, they were swallowed up.* (Hebrews 11:29 TLV). *Erythran* (er-ith-ran), the Greek word used is from *eruthros* (er-oo-thros') meaning "red." There's no question about it; it really means red. Perhaps ADONAI caused Moses to write *suph* so that these words would be read in faith, and those with faith would believe that the account of the sea splitting and then coming back together and drowning the Egyptians actually happened. More and more people in today's world believe this story to be a myth. I believe it is true and believe that the place where it happened was some part of the Red Sea and not a shallow, reedy body of water. Today, with the internet, there is no shortage of theories about the route which Israel took. To enhance some of these theories, there have been books written with pictures purportedly showing chariot wheels and even bones in the Red Sea. As far as I can tell, these pictures in books and on the internet are all fake and there is no solid archeological evidence that there are any chariot wheels in the sea.

Today is traditionally known as *Shabbat shira*, the Sabbath of the Song. Now, Moses and Israel were safely on the eastern bank of the sea. *1 Then Moses and Bnei-Yisrael sang this song to Adonai: I will sing to Adonai, for He is highly exalted! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea. 2 Adonai is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will glorify Him, my father's God, and I will exalt Him* (Exodus 15:1-2 TLV). This song, *Shirat HaYam*, The Song of the Sea, of which these words are only a part, was the beginning of a forty year journey for Israel. *Mi Khamoka*, which we sing each *Shabbat* is also found in *Shirat HaYam: 11 Who is like You, Adonai, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, awesome in praises, doing wonders?* (Exodus 15:11 TLV).

Where was Israel when they sang this song? They were on the eastern shore of the sea, but where was that? We want to know. Human beings that we are, we have to know the answer to everything. After they finished their celebration, Moses led Israel from where they were for three days into the Wilderness of Shur. (Exodus 15:22 TLV). Being a non-archeologist/non-theologian, I cannot speak authoritatively to where they were, but I have some thoughts about portions of their travel just as we all have our opinions. Next, they came to Marah, but the water was bitter and undrinkable. (Exodus 15:22-25 TLV). Where

was Marah? It may have been in the Wilderness of Shur where Israel made their first complaint. ADONAI sweetened the bitter water by showing Moses a tree to throw into it. From there, they continued to travel and arrived at Elim, a place with springs of water and palm trees. (Exodus 15:27 TLV). We are not told how long they traveled to get to Elim, but it could have also been in the Wilderness of Shur. Then, they came to the Wilderness of Sin, a place described as being between Elim and Sinai. (Exodus 16:1a TLV). Sinai in this verse is not a reference to the peninsula, but to Mount Sinai. There are maps which picture the Wilderness of Sin being northeast and adjacent to the Gulf of Aqaba. Some say that the Wilderness of Zin is the same place, but there are also maps which place the Wilderness of Sin in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula and the Wilderness of Zin northeast adjacent to Edom. Here is our question once again. How can non-archeologists/non-theologians even decide which map to use, let alone understand the finer details of Israel's travel? But, the truth is that no one understands all of the details. There are so many unanswered questions about all this and so many varying opinions about it. But, if the Wilderness of Sin is the same place as the Wilderness of Zin and lies adjacent to Edom, that would place Mount Sinai still further to the east beyond the Sinai Peninsula. It was in the Wilderness of Sin that Israel complained again and ADONAI gave them manna and quail and taught them about the *Shabbat*. (Exodus 16:2-36).

This is a map of the region.



The lines and triangles on the screen were placed by me. The almost vertical line is a generalized picture of Israel's travel as they departed from Goshen and arrived at the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez, the left arm of the Red Sea. This is one possibility. Formerly called

the Heroopolite Gulf, the Gulf of Suez has much deeper water than a reed sea. According to Wikipedia, the average depth of the Gulf of Suez is 130 feet with a maximum depth of 230 feet. It is possible that Israel crossed the northern tip of this part of the sea.

We are told next that Israel left the Wilderness of Sin and camped in Rephidim, a place without water. (Exodus 17:1 TLV). Rephidim seems to have been on the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba, the other arm of the Red Sea. If that is where they were, they were in the land of Midian, Moses' father in law Jethro's home country, which is Saudi Arabia today. At Rephidim, the people quarreled with Moses and ADONAI told him to stand on a rock and strike it with his staff. When he did, water flowed out. Where were they when the rock provided water? ADONAI told us exactly where they were: 6 "*Behold, I will stand before you, there upon the rock in Horeb.*" (Exodus 17:6a TLV). This means that they were either in or very near Horeb. The name of the rock was called Massa (testing) and Meriba (strife) (Exodus 17:7). What this means is that being in Rephidim, they were also near Mount Sinai. A majority of scholars believe that Horeb and Sinai are interchangeable names for the same place, the mountain on which ADONAI would give *Torah* to Israel. This verse suggests that at this point in time, Israel has arrived in the vicinity of Mount Horeb/Sinai. In my understanding of their travel, this would mean that they travelled east crossing just north of the Gulf of Aqaba as shown by my almost horizontal line. Some maps also show Israel crossing the Gulf of Aqaba near where my dashed line touches it. My choice for the most likely place that Israel crossed the sea is the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez. This would have allowed Israel to stop at all the other locations before reaching Mount Sinai.

Our major question is "where is Mount Sinai?" Elijah was once there. After ADONAI's great victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Elijah ran from Jezebel. After being fed by the angel of ADONAI, he had the strength of that meal to travel: 8 ... *forty days and forty nights went to Horeb, the mountain of God.* (1Kings 19:8b TLV). Elijah was at Horeb/Sinai, but 1Kings does not tell us where it is. *Sha'ul* wrote that this mountain is in Arabia. In making his Galatian *midrash*, he said: 25 *But this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia.....* (Galatians 4:25a TLV). The land to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba which *Sha'ul* called Arabia is today the nation of Saudi Arabia.

Traditional scholarship believes that Jebel Musa, the Mountain of Moses in Arabic, a mountain in the Sinai Peninsula, is Mount Sinai. The triangle in the center of the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula shows where it is located. A major criticism of this location is that the mountain is situated in a small area with not enough room for a large crowd of two million or more Israelites. Also, the water resources are said to be poor. Another problem for this location is the lack of the cave in which Elijah took shelter.

The next thing we are told is that Israel was attacked by the Amalekites, people who were descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, who founded the nation of Edom. (Exodus 17:8-16). Being attacked by this group would seem to place Israel at the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba near the nation of Edom, marked on the map by a triangle. This would mean that Rephidim was in Midian. Wikipedia states: "Another proposed location for Rephidim is in northwestern Saudi Arabia north of the town of al-Bad, the ancient city of Midian. Some researchers suggest that Mount Sinai was not in the Sinai Peninsula, but in Midian, which is modern-day Saudi Arabia, and subsequently place Rephidim here as well." This is the end of our *parasha*. My triangle east of the Gulf of Aqaba suggests the location of Mount Sinai, a place which we have not yet reached in our Scripture reading. We will continue with Israel's journey next *Shabbat*.



The actual location of Mount Sinai is just one of the many unanswered questions in ADONAI's Word. We believe by faith in the Exodus from Egypt just as we believe many other Bible mysteries. But, there are plenty of atheists and other kinds of naysayers out there who don't believe. They attack the faith of those in Yeshua's body by frequently questioning the truth of His Word. But, just as many other Bible mysteries have been cleared up, so will this one eventually be revealed to be true. In the meantime, we must stand firm, resisting those who seek to change the meaning of the Holy Scriptures in order to cause it to agree with their chosen life-style. We believe by faith that the entire Bible which ADONAI has allowed to be approved, is His Word which He wants us to have. But still, there are many mysteries within the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible and the *Ketuvim Shlichim*, the writings of Yeshua's emissaries, things which we don't understand, but receive by faith.

Here is one: *12 Then Joshua spoke to Adonai, on the day Adonai gave the Amorites over to Bnei-Yisrael, and said in the eyes of Israel: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon, Moon, over the Aijalon Valley!" 13 So the sun stood still and the moon stopped until the nation took vengeance on its enemies.* (Joshua 10:12-13a TLV). The Smithsonian Institute reported that 100 years ago, a linguist thought he had the answer. He said that the Hebrew word דָּם, *dom*, usually translated as "stopped moving," should really be interpreted as "stopped shining." This could indicate that an eclipse occurred during the battle. But for the next one hundred years after this theory emerged, a total solar eclipse could not be found at a time and place that fit. That is, until 2017. Then, some researchers decided to look for an annular eclipse, one where the sun isn't completely covered. To make a long story short, they found an annular eclipse which occurred in the right area on October 30, 1207 B.C.E. This is a possible answer, but ADONAI also could have caused the sun to actually stand still.

Was David a real person? In the past, King David was considered by some liberal scholars to be a myth because there was no reference to him outside of the Bible. Then, the *Tel Dan* stele was found. It consists of several fragments of stone inscribed by an unnamed Canaanite king in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This king boasts of his victories over the king of Israel and his ally, the king of the "House of David." We, ourselves, know David is real because we walk by faith. But, for those who require proof, it has been provided.

The High Priest Caiaphas who presided over the *Sanhedrin* when it condemned Yeshua to death was once a man only known from the Scriptures. But, in November 1990, a bulldozer excavating for new construction near *Talpiot* in southeastern Jerusalem, broke through the roof of an ancient tomb, exposing the contents. It was typical of the way that burial was done during the Second Temple Period (516 BCE-70 CE), a time when they used ossuaries, small limestone boxes, to contain a person's bones. The body was initially placed in the tomb whole, as we told in the Gospels about Yeshua, and was allowed to decompose for about a year. Yeshua didn't decompose because He rose to His Father after three days and nights, but regular human beings did, and after complete decomposition of their flesh, their bones were collected and placed in an ossuary. The longest bone in the body is the femur, the thigh bone which is about 18 inches long and ossuaries would have been long enough to contain them, probably 24 inches long on the average. There were four niches in this tomb containing twelve ossuaries. One was an ornate ossuary containing the bones of two infants, two teenage boys, an adult woman and a man of about 60. There was detailed etching on the box and traces of bright orange paint. The writing was scratched on the soft limestone with a sharp tool and inscribed on the long side in Aramaic, "*Yehosef bar Qayafa*," translated Joseph Caiaphas, the Greek spelling of his name. On the narrow end was inscribed, "*Yehosef bar Qafa*," translated *Yosef Qafa*, the Aramaic/Hebrew spelling. *Bar* did

not necessarily mean “son of,” but was a nickname for the “House of Caiaphas.” There is also irony in something else which was found in the midst of the rubble. It was a coin, one minted by Herod Agrippa during his reign, sometime between 37 and 44 CE. Caiaphas may have died within this period of time, but the irony may have been something else. As a Sadducee, Caiaphas did not believe in life after death. The presence of the coin may have indicated that he wasn’t really sure about it. In Greek mythology, Charon, the ferryman of the underworld, was paid a coin, called Charon’s obol, to transport the dead across the River Styx. The coin was placed in the mouth of the deceased at the time of burial. Whether that was true for Caiaphas, we don’t know, but he may have instructed his family to do this to hedge his bet about a life after death. All of the bones from this tomb were eventually reburied on the Mount of Olives and Caiaphas’s name is no longer only found in the Scriptures, it is now also on his new grave.

It’s surprising how easily we forget that with ADONAI, we’re dealing with One whose intelligence, power, and complexity so far exceed our human comprehension that we have no description that can even remotely do him justice. In trying to understand ADONAI and the Holy Scriptures, we should expect there to be perplexing mysteries, ones which are revealing of His complete power and divine nature. *Sha’ul* wrote of this: *20 His invisible attributes—His eternal power and His divine nature—have been clearly seen ever since the creation of the world, being understood through the things that have been made. So people are without excuse— 21 for even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give Him thanks. Instead, their thinking became futile, and their senseless hearts were made dark. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools. 23 They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image in the form of mortal man and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the evil desires of their hearts to impurity, to dishonor their bodies with one another. 25 They traded the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to shameful passions. Even their women exchanged natural relations for what is against nature. 27 Likewise the men abandoned natural relations with women and were burning with passion toward one another—men committing shameful acts with other men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to recognize God, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what is not fitting. 29 They became filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents. 31 They are foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God’s righteous decree—that those who practice such things deserve death—they not only do them but also approve of others who practice the same.* (Romans 1:20-32 TLV).

In this country, those who worshipped ADONAI and His Son were once a majority, but not so any more. Those described by *Sha’ul* in these verses are now in the majority and they have turned things around so that those who worship ADONAI and hold to the truth of His Scriptures are now increasingly in the minority and are being called “haters.” Their rhetoric now calls some of ADONAI’s words in Scripture, when spoken, as “hate speech.” Just recently, the federal government has begun to place people’s names on a list if they detect the words “Trump,” “MAGA,” or even when Bibles are bought. What are they going to do with this list? The answer seems to be, to identify those whom our government now deem out of step with their plans. This is the world in which we live today and it is increasingly being dominated by those who do not worship ADONAI. Yeshua has instructed us to “love our neighbor as ourselves,” and we do. Disagreeing with someone’s lifestyle, a lifestyle which

contradicts the traditional understanding of the Bible, does not constitute hate. It is our duty to stand for that which ADONAI has told us to stand for and doing so does not mean that we do not love our neighbors who don't worship Him in the same way, those who have made their own self-serving translations of His Word and live according to their own interpretation. We love them because they are ADONAI's holy creations, not because of what they do or don't do.

Yeshua said: 18 *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before you."* (John 15:18 TLV). In saying "world," He is referring to the world system created by people who live contrary to his teachings. He continues: 19 *"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But you are not of the world, since I have chosen you out of the world; therefore the world hates you."* (John 15:19 TLV). The truth of this is that the world hates us because of Yeshua. Many pay Him lip service while at the same time changing His words to suit their desires. John wrote: 15 *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the boasting of life—is not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world is passing away along with its desire, but the one who does the will of God abides forever.* (1John 2:15-17 TLV). This world and all its fleshly desires is in the process of passing away. We pray for those who do not know Yeshua, that they will trust in Him before He returns and become His followers who will abide forever. Trust in ADONAI's Word even if you don't completely understand it. It is true! Don't love the world system, but love those in it and pray for them! *Shabbat shalom!*