

מקראות גדולות

The
COMMENTATORS'
BIBLE

THE JPS MIQRA'OT GEDOLOT

EXODUS שְׁמוֹת

*With the 1917 and 1985 English translations of
The Jewish Publication Society TANAKH, the questions of Abarbanel,
the commentaries of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Nahmanides,
and selections from the Masorah and from the commentaries of
Bekhor Shor, Kimhi, Hizkuni, Gersonides, Abarbanel, and Sforno*

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NJPS ³⁷The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. ³⁸Moreover, a mixed multitude went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. ³⁹And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

⁴⁰The length of time that the Israelites lived in Egypt was four hundred and

RASHI 37 From Rameses to Succoth. It was 120 miles, and they got there in no time. This is what is meant by "I bore you on eagles' wings" (19:4). **Men.** Aged 20 and up.

38 A mixed multitude. An ethnically mixed group of converts.

39 Nor had they prepared any provisions. For the journey. This tells us how praiseworthy Israel was. They did not say, "How can we go out into the wilderness without provisions?" They had faith and went. This is made explicit in the Prophets:

"I accounted to your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride—how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (Jer. 2:2). And what reward is immediately specified for them? "Israel was holy to the LORD" (Jer. 2:3).

40 The length of time that the Israelites lived in Egypt, on top of all the time that they had lived as strangers in other "lands not theirs," was **four hundred and thirty years.** Altogether, from Isaac's birth until now was 400 years. God had said to Abraham, "your offspring shall be strangers ... four hundred years" (Gen. 15:13), a period that began as soon as Abraham had offspring. But it was 30 years after that decree before Isaac was born and the 400 years began. The 430 years cannot possibly refer to Egypt alone. For

NAHMANIDES 39 They baked unleavened cakes of the dough. They baked them unleavened to fulfill "No leaven shall be found in your houses for seven days. For whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the community of Israel" (v. 19). **They had been driven out of Egypt.** So they baked it on the journey. **They ... could not delay** to bake it at home and take it along as unleavened cakes. "So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders" (v. 34) and hurried and baked it before it could rise, either on the journey or once they got to Succoth, which—according to our Sages—they reached in next to no time.

40 Four hundred and thirty years. Rashi's explanation follows that of our Sages, though he is not quite as precise as he needs to be. For "Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran" (Gen. 12:4), and the covenant between the pieces of Genesis 15 took place long after that. So there could not have been 30 years between God's saying that Abraham's descendants would be oppressed "four hundred years" (Gen. 15:13) and Isaac's birth, when Abraham was 100. Rather, we must follow the opinion of Seder Olam that Abraham was 70 years old at the time of the covenant between the pieces, after which he went back to Haran and spent five more years. Gen. 12:4 means that "when he

one of those who went down to Egypt. Assume that he was a month old, and that his brother Merari was the son of a different mother, [B] and that Kohath sired Amram on his deathbed, and that Amram sired Moses the same way. Kohath lived 133 years (6:18) and Amram 137 (6:20). Moses was 80 when they left Egypt. Add them all up and you are still 80 short of 430. When we look through the Bible we find many such cases. For example, Isa. 7:8 predicts the fall of the northern kingdom in 65 years, when it could really have taken place no [Z] Apparently Ibn Ezra believes that rushing the dough along with them had prevented it from rising. [A] This follows B. Meg. 9a, not our text of the Septuagint, which has "in Egypt and in Canaan." [B] Since he is listed after Kohath, he is assumed to be younger; but he too was one of those who went down to Egypt.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 37 Succoth. Succoth was outside the borders of Egypt (Sforno). **Six hundred thousand men.** Showing that God had fulfilled the promise he made to Jacob when he went down to Egypt (Gen. 46:3), "I will make you there into a great nation" (Gersonides). The text focuses on those who were fit for war (Abarbanel).

38 Flocks and herds. Belonging to the "mixed multitude" (Sforno).

39 Nor had they prepared any provisions. They had expected to be released but not to be expelled (Bekhor Shor).

40 Four hundred and thirty years. Starting from the covenant between the pieces. The "four hundred years" told to Abraham in Gen. 15:13 began with the birth of Jacob, the first to live in "a land not his," meaning that the Israelites left Egypt about 45 years before

OJPS ³⁷And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, beside children. ³⁸And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle. ³⁹And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual.

⁴⁰Now the time that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and

RASHBAM 38 A mixed multitude. "Mixed" implies intermingling, as in Ps. 106:35, where the Israelites "mingled with the nations."

39 Cakes. For it is not called "bread" unless it is baked in an oven. **Nor had they prepared any provisions.** Which is why they ended up having to grumble about the lack of food and water. [J]

40 Four hundred and thirty years. Four hundred thirty years since it was told [J] E.g. 15:24; 16:8.

IBN EZRA 37 Rameses. As shown by the vowel points, this is "Rameses," the region mentioned in Gen. 47:11, not "Raamses," the city built by the Israelites in 1:11. **Men.** Males. There was no need to enumerate the women, as there would have been a like number, or perhaps more. **Children.** Under 20 years old.

38 A mixed multitude. Of Egyptians who mingled with them; this is the "riffraff" of Num. 11:4.

39 They baked. The dough that they brought from Egypt had leaven in it, but they did not bake it until they camped at Succoth. [Z]

40 Four hundred and thirty years. The elders who translated the Septuagint translated the beginning of this verse "The length of time that the Israelites lived in Egypt and in other lands." [A] Some say that Canaan was under Egyptian rule in those days, but they need to present proof. Saadia explains that the 430 years dates from the day of Abraham's departure from Ur. We know for certain Israel did not spend 430 years in Egypt from the time of Jacob's descent there, and here is how. Kohath was

וַיֵּסְעוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִרַעְמֶסֶס סֹבְתָהּ
 כְּשֶׁשְׁמֵאֹת אֶלֶף רִגְלֵי הַגְּבֻרִים לְבָד
 מִטֶּף: 38 וְגַם-עָרַב רַב עִלָּה אֲתָם וְצֹאן
 וּבְקָר מְקֻנָּה כְּבֵד מְאֹד: 39 וַיֵּאֲפוּ אֶת-
 הַבֶּצֶק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם עִגְת מִצּוֹת
 כִּי לֹא הָמֵץ בֵּי-גִרְשׁוֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא יִכְלֹ
 לְהִתְמַהֵמָה וְגַם-צָדָה לֹא-עָשׂוּ לָהֶם:
 40 וּמוֹשֵׁב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + Doesn't the 430-year length of the Israelite stay in Egypt mentioned in v. 40 contradict what God told Abram in Gen. 15:13, that the Israelites would be "enslaved and oppressed four hundred years"—not to mention the actual figure (see Rashi's comment) of 210 years?

BE-SHALLAH

NJPS ¹⁷Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Phillistines, although it was nearer; for God said, "The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt." ¹⁸So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds.

OJPS ¹⁷And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not by the way of the land of the Phillistines, although that was near; for God said: "Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt." ¹⁸But God led the people about, by the way of the wilderness by the Red Sea;

וַיְהִי בְשַׁלַּח פְּרַעֲוֹה אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־נָתַן אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹהִים פְּרִינָחֻם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרַיִמָּה: ¹⁸ וַיִּשָּׁב אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף

RASHI ¹⁷ Although it was nearer. The Hebrew says, "For it was nearer"—and easy to return by that road to Egypt. There are many midrashim based on this expression. [A] The people may have a change of heart about having left, and decide to return. When they see war. E.g., the opposition of the Amalekites and Canaanites in Num. 14:43. If they tried to go directly to Canaan, they would simply turn back. Given that when God took them roundabout they said, "Let us head back for Egypt" (Num. 14:4), how much more likely they would have been to do so if he had led them directly to Canaan!

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + Why does the text say (v. 17) "when Pharaoh let the people go" rather than "when Israel left"? + Why does the text not give the true reason God did not lead them by the way of the Phillistines, which was so that He could split the sea and drown the Egyptians?

¹⁸ God led the people roundabout. Off the straight road, and by a more circuitous one. By way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds. Rather, "to the Sea." But *suf* means [A] The comment suggests that Rashi doesn't think any of the midrashim fit the context.

RASHBAM ¹⁷⁻¹⁸ When Pharaoh let the people go. The Holy One intended to bring them to the land of Canaan, but He did not wish to lead them by way of the land of the Phillistines, for it was nearer. It was the way to enter Canaan immediately. When they would encounter the difficulty of the Canaanite wars; they would head back for Egypt, as in fact they wanted to do several times—"It would be better for us to go back to Egypt!" (Num. 14:3); "Let us head back for Egypt" (Num. 14:4); "We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt" (Num. 11:5). So He led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness, a more distant region: "it is eleven days from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the Mount Seir route" (Deut. 1:2). But only the Phillistines separated Egypt and Canaan, as is proved by the story of Isaac. Because of a famine, Isaac was on his way from Canaan to Egypt. When the Holy One told him, "Stay in the land which I point out to you" (Gen. 26:3), Isaac stayed in Gerar, with Abimelech, king of the Phillistines. Armed. For they were going to take possession of the land of Canaan: "I will take you out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites" (3:17). The word is used with the same meaning in Josh. 1:14.

NAHMANIDES ¹⁷ Although it was nearer. See the comments of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. In my opinion, for them to be correct "it is nearer" would have to come after "God said": "God did not lead them by way of the land of the Phillistines, for God said, 'It is nearer, and the people may have a change of heart.'" In fact, the JPS translations have it right. When they see war. For the Phillistines will not let them cross peacefully, and they will return to Egypt. But by the wilderness route they will not see war until they reach the land that has been given to them, starting with that of Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites. By that time they will be far from Egypt. There was no expectation that they would go back to Egypt on account of the war with Amalek at Rephidim (17:8-13), for they did not have to pass through that country; Amalek came out deliberately to make war against them out of hatred for them. If they had tried to head back to Egypt at that point, it wouldn't have done any good, for Amalek would have chased them all the way. Moreover; they were far from Egypt by then, on the circuitous route they had followed, and would not have known the short way back. Rashi's comment on "when they see war" is taken from the Mekilta.

IBN EZRA ¹⁷ Although it was nearer. Literally, "because it was nearer." It was Moses Gikatilla who said that it means "although," as in 34:9 and several other places. But there is no need to read it that way here.

¹⁸ God led the people. Once they left Succoth (v. 20), the pillar of cloud began to lead them. It was this that led them roundabout, by way of the wilderness. The

The reason God did not lead them "by way of the land of the Phillistines" was because it was nearer. It is known that from Egypt to Canaan [A] by the direct route is a journey of 10 days. If it were longer, how could Jacob's sons have made it to Egypt by donkey in a time of famine? But the Israelites had never seen war, and had been other men's slaves. When Pharaoh came after them, not one of them lifted his hand against him. Amalek, too, came after Israel with "meager numbers" (Deut. 26:5) and managed to cut down the stragglers. They would have been overwhelmed by the Amalekites had it not been for "Moses His chosen one" (Ps. 106:23). The people may have a change of heart. This is the Torah speaking human language; God knew they would have a change of heart.

¹⁸ Roundabout. By a longer route. The root of the verb is סבב; pay no attention to those who claim it is נסב. By way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds. That is, the wilderness of the Sea of Reeds. But the word *suf* is not to be translated "reeds" here; it is a place-name, the Suf Sea. Some say it was so named because of the reeds all around it, but others think the name is derived from *sof* ("end")—for it was the sea at the end of the world, the ocean. But that is a major mistake. It is a sea east of Egypt. Even the Mediterranean

[A] In the long commentary: "to Jerusalem."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ¹⁷ The people. Not just "the Israelites," but also the mixed multitude and the spies he sent along with them (Hizkuni). Although it was nearer. Literally, "for it was near"—to Egypt (Gersonides). From Egypt to Jerusalem by way of Ashkelon is no more than an eight-day journey (Abarbanel). Being the direct route, it was full of travelers who could inform the Egyptians of where they were or inform them of the Egyptians' coming, which would frighten them into returning (Sforno). When they see war. With Pharaoh. For if God had led them by way of the land of the Phillistines, there would have been no sea to drown Pharaoh's army in (Bekhor Shor).

¹⁸ Roundabout. On a route with no travelers to tell them that Pharaoh was pursuing them (Sforno). Armed. Rashi's point is that since the people were armed, leading them "roundabout" was not because they were afraid of the Egyptians (Hizkuni). "Fully

NJPS and all the chariot horses of Pharaoh, his horsemen, and his warriors overtook them encamped by the sea, near Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon.

¹⁰As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the LORD. ¹¹And they said to Moses, "Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt?" ¹²Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better

RASHI 10 Pharaoh drew near. The verb is really in the causative: He brought himself near, making every effort to precede his troops, as he had promised them he would. **The Egyptians advancing upon them.** The verb is singular. They were advancing with one heart, as one man. Another reading, from the Tanhuma: They saw the angel of Egypt approaching them from heaven to aid the Egyptians. **The Israelites cried out.** That is, they fell back on the ways of the Patriarchs and prayed, as did Abraham at "the place where he had stood before the LORD" (Gen. 19:27), Isaac when he "went out walking in the field toward evening" (Gen. 24:63), and Jacob, who "came upon a certain place" (Gen. 28:11). [D]

12 We told you in Egypt. Where did they say this? "May the LORD look upon you and punish you" (5:21).

[D] These three verses are traditionally considered to mark the moments when the Patriarchs created the morning, afternoon, and evening prayers respectively; see B. Ber. 26b.

NAHMANIDES 10 **The Israelites cried out to the LORD.** Onkelos translates "cried out" to mean not prayer but complaint, as when the foremen "cried out" to Pharaoh, "Why do you deal thus with your servants?" (5:15). They would be complaining to God that He had brought them out of Egypt. But the Mekilta has it that they adopted the practices of their ancestors, that is, that they prayed, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had done. As our Sages have pointed out, "the people" is used with negative comments and "the Israelites" with positive ones. And see the following comment.

11 Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? It is not right that people who have been crying out to God to save them should kick at the way He saves them and say that they would have been better off if He had not rescued them. Rather, it is correct to explain the text to mean that there were conflicting groups, and the text tells what each of them did. One group cried out in prayer to God, and another denied His prophet and would not admit to having been saved, saying they would have been better off not being rescued. It is this latter group who "rebelled at the sea, at the Sea of Reeds" (Ps. 106:7), and the former group, the good Israelites, who "cried out to the LORD" (v. 10). **To die in the wilderness.** Not "to die in war." Even before seeing war, they were afraid to go into the wilderness lest they die of hunger and thirst. They may have told Moses this while still in Egypt, when "God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds" (13:18). Or they may have asked right at the start, "Where are we going? If by way of the Philistines, they will fight us. If by way of the wilderness, 'it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness' [v. 12]." It might also be explained that the people believed in God and prayed to Him to save them, but that they had some doubts about Moses—perhaps he was leading them out only to rule over them. Even though they saw the signs and wonders, they thought that Moses had performed them by his own skill; or perhaps that God had brought them upon the Egyptians simply on account of the wickedness of the gentiles. For if what He wanted to do was to save them, Pharaoh would not be chasing them.

12 Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt? The Mekilta continues: "Having put 'leaven in the dough,' they came to Moses and said, 'Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt?'" "Leaven in the dough" is the evil inclination. What the Mekilta means is that

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 10 **Greatly frightened.** Knowing that many of them were embittered at having lost their first-born and having been robbed of the things the Israelites took from their houses (Abarbanel). **The Israelites cried out to the LORD.** Not in prayer, but in complaint (Abarbanel).

11 You brought us to die in the wilderness. Pharaoh's army cannot defeat us, but they can block our access to food and water (Sforno).

12 It is better for us to serve the Egyptians. They may have thought, as Pharaoh did, that it was the God of Israel who was causing the evils that were afflicting them in the desert; this would account for Moses' reply (Gersonides).

OJPS after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

¹⁰And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were sore afraid; and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. ¹¹And they said unto Moses: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to bring us forth out of Egypt?" ¹²Is not this the word that we spoke unto thee in Egypt, saying: Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it

אֲחֵרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁגּוּ אוֹתָם חֲנִים עַל-הַיָּם
בְּלִי-סוֹס רֶכֶב פָּרָעָה וּפָרָשָׁיו וַחֲיָלוֹ עַל-פִּי
הַחֵירוֹת לִפְנֵי בַעַל צִפּוֹן:
10 וּפָרָעָה הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-
עֵינֵיהֶם וַהֲגָה מִצְרַיִם | נִסַּע אַחֲרֵיהֶם
וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-
יְהוָה: 11 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הַמְבַלֵּי אִי-
נֶחְמָד בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר
מִהַזְזֹאת עֲשִׂיתָ לָנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם:
12 הֲלֹא-זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ
בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר חַדַּל מִמֶּנּוּ וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֶת-

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS † Why did the Israelites not trust God enough not to be frightened (v. 10)? † How is it possible that the Israelites simultaneously "cried out to the LORD" in frightened prayer (v. 10) and asked Moses sarcastically whether there weren't enough graves in Egypt (v. 11)? † Why did the Israelites ask Moses, "What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt?" Had they forgotten it was God who did so? † When had the Israelites said (as they claim in v. 12), "Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians"?

RASHBAM 11 Was it for want of graves? The Hebrew uses a double negative. **To die in the wilderness.** Where "there is no food and no water" (Num. 21:5). Even if no one were chasing us, we would die of starvation.

IBN EZRA 1 Kings 10:29 that four horses pulled each chariot. **His horsemen and his warriors.** The "warriors" are the infantry.

10 Pharaoh drew near. This form of the verb is always transitive. He drew his troops near. [E]

11 Was it for want of graves? The Hebrew is a double negative, when one would be sufficient. (See Num. 12:2 for a similar example.) It is a phenomenon of Hebrew style.

12 The very thing we told you in Egypt. Even though we do not find it written that they had told him this, we know that they did, for they could not have told him that they had said something they did

[E] The verb is not reflexive, so it cannot mean that he moved himself near.

NJPS for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?"¹³ But Moses said to the people, "Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the LORD will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴The LORD will battle for you; you hold your peace!"

¹⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. ¹⁶And you lift up your rod and

RASHI **13 The Egyptians whom you see today.** The OJPS translation is more accurate.

15 Why do you cry out to Me? We learn that Moses was lingering over his prayer. The Holy One said to him, "This is not the time to pray at length, for Israel is in trouble!" Another reading: "Why do you cry out? (This belongs) to Me!—it is My business, not yours." As it says later, "Will you question Me on the destiny of My children, will you instruct Me about the work of My hands?" (Isa. 45:11). **Tell the Israelites to go forward.** All they have to do is go forward. The sea will not stand firm before them. The merit of the Patriarchs, and the faith the Israelites showed in Me by leaving Egypt, will be enough to split the sea for them.

NAHMANIDES originally they had prayed to God to put into Pharaoh's heart that he should turn back. Once they saw that he was not leaving, but was drawing nearer to them, then they thought, "Our prayer has not been accepted," and the evil notion of questioning Moses' actions reentered their hearts.

13 The Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. In the opinion of our Sages, "ye shall see them again no more forever" (OJPS) is not a statement of fact, but a commandment. But if it were so, the language of the verse would have made this explicit. Moreover, it would have been a commandment given to the Israelites by Moses, for it is not mentioned in what God says to Moses in vv. 1–4. Contrast the Law of the King, which says, "Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the LORD has warned you, 'You must not go back that way again'" (Deut. 17:16). It is clear from the language that this really is a commandment, not a mere statement.

15 Why do you cry out to Me? Ibn Ezra thinks the reference is to Moses as Israel's emissary. But if so, why would God ask this? Israel *should* be crying out to God! Perhaps it means, Why are you letting them cry out to Me? **Tell the Israelites to go forward!** I have already told you that I intend to "gain glory through Pharaoh" (v. 4). Our Sages have explained that it was, indeed, Moses who was "crying out" and praying to God, and this is correct. For he did not know what to do. Despite the fact that God had told him He would "gain glory through Pharaoh," he did not know how to proceed. For he was on the shore of the sea with the enemy gaining in pursuit. He prayed that God show him "what path to choose" (Ps. 25:12). So the point of "Why do you cry out to Me?" is this: "You should have just asked Me what to do. There is no need for you to 'cry out.' I have already informed you that I will 'gain glory through Pharaoh.'" The text does not tell us specifically that Moses cried out to God, because he was among the Israelites who "cried out to the LORD" in v. 10.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 You hold your peace.** And stop grumbling (Hizkuni). Perhaps he told them this to keep the noise from revealing their location to the Egyptians (Gersonides). After you see "the deliverance which the LORD will work for you today," you will hold your peace (Abarbanel).

15 Why do you cry out to Me? The mere fact that Moses was sure of God's deliverance would not necessarily have stopped him from praying; he might have thought that the miracle needed to be instigated by prayer. But apparently Moses was already so constantly attached to God that this was unnecessary (Gersonides). "Moses, we have no time right now to listen to the complaints of the Israelites" (Abarbanel). Moses was worried that the rebellious Israelites would refuse to follow him into the sea; God reassured him, "Speak to the Israelites and they will go forward" (Sforno).

OJPS were better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." ¹³And Moses said unto the people: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you to-day; for whereas ye have seen the Egyptians to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. ¹⁴The LORD will fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

¹⁵And the LORD said unto Moses: "Wherefore criest thou unto Me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward. ¹⁶And lift thou up thy rod, and

IBN EZRA not in fact say. It is referred to in the text in the general statement "They would not listen to Moses" (6:9). In any case, there are many things in the Bible that we learn about like this, only secondarily.

13 Stand by, and witness. For you will not be making war; you will merely see **the deliverance which the LORD will work for you today.** It is surprising that a camp of 600,000 armed men were afraid of their pursuers and would not fight for their lives and those of their children. The answer, of course, is that the Egyptians had been the Israelites' masters. The generation of the exodus had learned from their youth to bear the yoke of the Egyptians, and they were submissive by nature. How could they suddenly fight their masters? In any case, the Israelites were malingerers and not trained in war. Look, when Amalek came upon them with a scant few men, had it not been for Moses' prayer they would have overwhelmed the Israelites. God, who "performs great deeds" (Job 5:9) and by whom "actions are measured" (1 Sam. 2:3), arranged for that whole generation of males to die in the wilderness—for they would not have had the gumption to fight the Canaanites—to be replaced by a generation that had not known exile, and whose character was noble. And see my comment to 2:3, about Moses.

14 You hold your peace! According to v. 10, they had been crying out to God.

15 Why do you cry out to Me? Perhaps Moses too had been crying out, [F] or perhaps the reference is to Israel, for Moses was their emissary and their king. **Go forward.** Little by little until you reach the shore of the sea.

16 Lift up your rod. God tells Moses to split the sea before they begin to move

[F] In the long commentary, Ibn Ezra flatly rejects this possibility, since God had already explained to Moses (in v. 4) what would happen.

מִצְרַיִם בְּיָמֵינוּ כִּי טוֹב לָנוּ עֲבַד אֶת־מִצְרַיִם
מִמָּוְתָנוּ בְּמִדְבָּר: ¹³ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם
אֶל־תִּירְאוּ הַתִּיַצְבוּ וּרְאוּ אֶת־יְשׁוּעַת
יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשׁוּר
רְאִיתֶם אֶת־מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם לֹא תִסִּיפוּ
לְרַאֲתָם עוֹד עַד־עוֹלָם: ¹⁴ יְהוָה יִלְחָם
לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תַּחֲרֹשׁוּן: פ
¹⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מַה־תַּעֲשֶׂה אֵלַי
דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִסְעוּ: ¹⁶ וְרָאִתָּה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + Why did Moses think it would reassure the Israelites to tell them (v. 13) they would never see the Egyptians again? They might have replied, "If we're dead we won't see the Egyptians, the Canaanites, or anyone else either!" + Moses wasn't "crying out" to God—why did God tell him (v. 15) to stop? + Why did God blame Moses for the fact that the Israelites were not moving, when they had stopped on His instructions? + Shouldn't "lift up your rod and hold out your arm" (v. 16) be the other way around?

NJPS ³⁰Thus the LORD delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea. ³¹And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the LORD had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD; they had faith in the LORD and His servant Moses.

OJPS ³⁰Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. ³¹And Israel saw the great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the LORD; and they believed in the LORD, and in His servant Moses.

15 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD. They said:

RASHI **30 Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea.** For the sea dumped them up on the shore so that the Israelites might not think, "The Egyptians got out just as we did, but farther down the shore, and are still pursuing us."

31 The wondrous power. This is half right, as is OJPS "the great work." It is literally "the great hand," that is, the great power exhibited by the hand of God. There are many biblical idioms using the word *hand*, and all refer literally to the hand; the commentator must explain each one individually in a way that is appropriate to its context.

15:1 Then Moses ... sang. The verb is in the future singular. "Then," when Moses saw the miracle, he decided that "he would sing." Future verbs occur with the same function in Josh. 10:12, "Joshua would address the LORD," and 1 Kings 7:8, "Solomon would construct a palace ... for the daughter of Pharaoh." Here too Moses' heart told him that he *should* sing, and so he did. Similarly Joshua's intention was also followed by the corresponding action: "He said in the presence of the Israelites: 'Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon, O moon, in the Valley of Aijalon!'" The same is true for the song of

NAHMANIDES **31 Israel saw the wondrous power.** Rashi takes it to mean "the great power"; Onkelos translates it "the power of the great hand"; Ibn Ezra takes it as "the great blow," following "the hand of the LORD will strike your livestock in the fields" (9:3). But according to the Way of Truth, the verse means that He revealed to them the "mighty hand" of His aspect of judgment, **which the LORD had wielded against the Egyptians.** For it was there among the Egyptians and striking at them. This was the "right hand" of which the Israelites sang, "Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the foe!" (15:6), and the "arm of the LORD ... that made the abysses of the Sea a road the redeemed might walk" (Isa. 51:9-10). **[E] The people feared the LORD.** "The people" refers to all of them collectively. But when the text says "the Israelites," it means only certain individuals. See my comment to v. 11.

15:1 Then Moses ... sang. Rashi explains the future tense verb by saying that "Moses' heart told him that he *should* sing, and so he did," and gives other examples. But what would he say about "They made a calf at Horeb" (Ps. 106:19), which uses the same

[E] Nahmanides refers the reader there to his kabbalistic explanation of "the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob" (Gen. 49:24).

30 The LORD delivered Israel. At this point. For up until this point they were still afraid of Pharaoh. **Dead on the shore of the sea.** Some of the Egyptian corpses were tossed up on shore, while others "sank like lead in the majestic waters" and "the earth swallowed them" (15:10,12). **[N]**

31 When Israel saw. When Israel saw this great blow inflicted on the Egyptians, they feared God, just as David did when God struck down Uzzah when he touched the Ark (2 Sam. 6:1-11). **They had faith in the LORD.** They believed that He was real. **And His servant Moses.** That Moses was God's servant and would not do anything but what He commanded him.

15:1 Then Moses ... sang. Biblical Hebrew frequently follows the word "then" with the past tense expressed by a "future" form: e.g., Deut. 4:41, Josh. 10:12, and 1 Kings 11:7. Arabic does the same. But in my opinion this is meant to be the present tense, which does not

[N] In the long commentary Ibn Ezra explains the phrase as Rashbam does.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **30 The LORD delivered Israel that day.** By the death of those who wished to enslave them. For up to that point they were still like fleeing slaves (Sforno).

31 The wondrous power. Literally, "the mighty hand." They saw it only as one "sees" a foot by the imprint it leaves in snow or mud (Abarbanel). **And His servant Moses.** Following Onkelos, "and the prophetic nature of His servant Moses" (Hizkuni).

15:1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang. The verb is causative. Moses sang and had the others sing with him (Bekhor Shor). **They**

וַיִּוְשַׁע יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מֵתִים
עַל־שַׁפַּת הַיָּם: ³¹ וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יְהוָה
הַגּוֹדֵלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיִּירָאוּ
הָעָם אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּאֱמִינוּ בַּיהוָה וּבְמֹשֶׁה
עַבְדּוֹ: פ

טו אִזּוֹ וְיִשְׂרָיִל־מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־
הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאִמְרוּ

15 Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spoke, saying:

RASHBAM **30 Israel saw the Egyptians dead and drowned in the sea. On the shore of the sea.** It was the Israelites who, as soon as they were "on the shore of the sea," saw the sea turn back upon the Egyptians and saw the Egyptians drown in it. That is the point of the straightforward sense. I have explained "They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden" (Gen. 3:8) the same way. **[C]**

31 They had faith in the LORD. That even in the wilderness they would not die of starvation.

15:1 He has triumphed gloriously. The root of this verb literally means "to be high," but in fact it is used in a number of

[C] Rashbam's commentary to Gen. 3:8 has not survived. Presumably he understood that verse to say that "they heard the sound of the LORD God while they were moving about in the garden."

IBN EZRA the Israelites were walking through the sea on dry ground at no great distance from them. "At the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up, The floods stood straight like a wall"—the east wind dried the sea for the Israelites, while "You made Your wind blow, the sea covered them"—an opposite wind simultaneously blew the walls of water back on the Egyptians (15:8, 10). Don't be surprised that the Israelites passed through in a single night, even though the 600,000 men were only a quarter of the complete total. Perhaps the women and children went by a different route, or perhaps there really were 12 paths through the sea, as our Sages said. Remember that the Israelites did not *cross* the sea; they entered and left on the same side. See my comment to 15:22.

NJPS 22 Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds. They went on into the wilderness of Shur; they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; that is why it was named Marah. 24 And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet.

RASHI 22 Moses caused Israel to set out. Against their will. For the Egyptians bedecked their horses with jewelry of gold, silver, and precious stones, and the Israelites would find them in the sea. They got a greater amount of plunder at the sea than they did in Egypt itself. That is why Moses had to force them to set out.

24 Grumbled. In Hebrew and Aramaic they use a reflexive verb for this form, just as we do in French—the action is something that affects the one who is acting.

25 There He made for them a fixed rule. At Marah, He gave them some of the sections of the Torah to occupy themselves with: the Sabbath, the red heifer, and

NAHMANIDES 25 The LORD showed him a piece of wood. In this situation the verb clearly means "showed," but since elsewhere I have never found it to mean anything but "taught," I conclude that the particular kind of wood that was used has the natural ability to sweeten water, and that God taught this to Moses. But our Sages say that the wood itself was bitter; hence this was a double miracle, like the salt that Elisha threw into the spring in 2 Kings 2:19–22. In this case He literally had to "teach" Moses where to find the tree, because it did not grow in that particular location; or perhaps God made it appear for him miraculously. Again, I have found in Midrash Tanhuma: "It does not say 'He showed him,' it says, 'He taught him'—He taught him His ways." The way of the Holy One is to sweeten the bitter by means of the bitter. **There He made for them a fixed rule.** Rashi's comment here follows the opinion of our Sages. But if this is correct, why doesn't it say here something like, "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Command the Israelite people," and then spell out the commandments, as it did, for example, in 12:3? It certainly does this for all the commandments given at the Tent of Meeting, on the steppes of Moab, and even in the case of the special passover celebrated in the wilderness (Num. 9:2). Rashi's choice of language, "He gave them some of the sections of the Torah to occupy themselves with," suggests that Moses indeed informed them of these laws and taught them that the Holy One was going to command them—just as our father Abraham learned the Torah before it was given. [J] The purpose was to get them used to obeying commandments, and to find out whether they would indeed accept them willingly and joyfully;

[J] B. Yoma 28b interprets Gen. 26:5, "Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings," to mean that Abraham observed all the laws of Judaism.

while in Num. 33:8, "they made a three-days' journey in the wilderness of Etham and encamped at Marah." Perhaps Etham and Shur were the two cities of that region, or perhaps it had two names for some other reason. Remember that Israel did not go into the sea in order to get to Canaan, but merely to draw the Egyptians in to drown there.

25 A piece of wood. We have no idea what kind of wood this was, for the text does not tell us; it was simply a miracle. You could take all the trees in the world of whatever kind of wood it was and throw them into a puddle and they would not sweeten it. It was

[X] See his discussion of this issue at 40:38.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 22 Moses caused Israel to set out. Either because some of them wished to remain to see what Egyptian goods the sea might cast up, or because they all wished to stay and celebrate at the place where they were saved. But God set them going by means of the pillars (Gersonides). Since the order of march described in Numbers 2 was not set up until they reached Sinai, Moses had to organize them for the march this time (Abarbanel). **They traveled three days.** Three encampments—Etham, Pi-hahiroth, and Marah (Hizkuni).

24 The people grumbled against Moses. This was the first time Moses had directed their travels; they thought he did not know what he was doing. But God arranged that, before reaching Sinai, they should be in need of Him and know that there was indeed a God in Israel (Abarbanel).

25 He cried out to the LORD. Because miracles must be instigated by the prophet through prayer (Gersonides). **A piece of**

OJPS 22 And Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. 23 And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. 24 And the people murmured against Moses, saying: "What shall we drink?" 25 And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD showed him a tree, and he cast it into the waters, and the waters were made sweet.

וַיִּסַּע מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּם סוּף וַיֵּצֵאוּ אֶל-מִדְבַר-שׁוּר וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת-יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְלֹא-מָצְאוּ מַיִם: 23 וַיָּבֵאוּ מַרְתָּה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשַׁתֵּת מַיִם מִמָּרְתָּה כִּי מָרִים הֵם עַל-כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ מָרָה: 24 וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַה-נִּשְׁתָּה: 25 וַיִּצְעַק אֶל-יְהוָה וַיַּרְהוּ וַיְהוּה עֵץ וַיִּשְׁלֹךְ אֶל-הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why is the list of marches in Numbers 33 not given here, when Israel sets out in v. 22? ♦ How could God let Israel go for three days in the wilderness without water? ♦ What was the "test" of v. 25?

RASHBAM 25 Showed him. Rather, "taught him." **There He made for them a fixed rule, and there He put them to the test.** There, at Marah, by means of the test He had arranged by making them thirst for water and then sweetening it for them, He began to train them that they must accept the rules that He would teach them and He would fulfill their needs. What was the

IBN EZRA 22 Moses caused Israel to set out. In my opinion the pillars were there to enable them to travel day and night. But once Pharaoh drowned, they were no longer afraid for their lives and so had no need to travel at night. (Num. 9:15–22 does not prove that they traveled at night.) [X] Moses instructed them (at God's command) when and where to go. There were only six stages in the journey to Mount Sinai, less than 40 days travel. The weather was mild, not too humid or too cold, and whoever had no tent could simply sleep in the air. Once they got to the wilderness of Sinai, they built booths, for they would be staying there until they built the Tabernacle. They had brought acacia wood with them from Egypt for this purpose, as I shall explain in my comment to 25:5. It is these booths that are commemorated by the Feast of Booths. Once the Tabernacle was built, God came down upon it in the form of a cloud; from which time again "Your cloud rests over them and ... You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night" (Num. 14:14). **The wilderness of Shur.** That is, the wilderness of Etham. Notice that three days travel from here brings them to Marah,

NJPS of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. ²In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death."

RASHI this exact day the cakes that they brought from Egypt gave out and they needed the manna. This teaches us that they ate the leftovers from the dough that they brought from Egypt for 61 meals. [Q] Manna began to fall on the 16th of Iyar, a Sunday, as we learn from B. Shab. 87b.

2 Grumbled. Because the bread had given out.

[Q] The figure assumes two meals a day.

NAHMANIDES for that. The wilderness of Sin is quite large, stretching from Elim to Sinai. After leaving Elim, they stopped at the Red Sea, in that wilderness. Leaving the shore of the sea, they entered the wilderness, where they also stopped at Dophkah and Alush before reaching Rephidim. According to our Sages, the manna episode took place at Alush, for by that time they had camped several different places without managing to get out of the wilderness, and they began to be afraid and "grumbled against Moses" (v. 2). **Between Elim and Sinai.** This is to distinguish between the wilderness of Sin and the wilderness of Zin (Num. 20:1), which they reached in the 40th year of their wandering. There Miriam died and, as here, the people had no water to drink.

2 In the wilderness. See the previous comment. They did not grumble as soon as they entered the wilderness, but only after having been there for some time. **The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.** The text ought to have given the content of their complaint, as it did in 15:24 and 17:2, by saying, "There was no flesh to eat nor bread to satisfy the people's hunger." Rashi's comment (to v. 1), that the dough they brought from Egypt gave out on this day after 61 meals, is based on rabbinic tradition; this explains why their complaint was not spelled out. For the text did not wish to deal at length with this miracle of the 61 meals, which was done for them secretly. I have already explained the reason for this in my comments to Gen. 17:1 and Gen. 46:15. [O] Ibn Ezra thinks the point of their complaint was that by this time they had eaten most of the livestock they had brought with them. In my opinion, the point is that they were now at some distance from Egypt and wondered what they would eat in the great desert that they were entering. They may have thought that within a few days they would reach one of the local cities, and now they had been traveling for a month without finding a town. It was the thought of dying in the wilderness that caused the grumbling. And see the next comment.

3 You have brought us into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death. A group this large will inevitably starve in a desert this vast — The Holy One heeded them and began, at this point, to "spread a feast in the wilderness" (Ps. 78:19) for them, "until they came to a settled land" (16:35).

[O] The righteous are rewarded miraculously, but in such a way that no alteration of the natural order is evident.

already eaten most of their livestock, for by now it was 30 days after their departure from Egypt. A group this size could not easily buy food except at a very high price.

[A] In the short commentary, Ibn Ezra does accept that the Israelites left Egypt "on Thursday or Friday." [B] Apparently Ibn Ezra means that all monotheistic nations agree with Israel on what day of the week it is. He goes on to show that this is true for Christians and Muslims, but not for Hindus (who, according to him, start the week on Wednesday).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **3 If only we had died by the hand of the LORD.** And not, as we are doing now, die before our time, of hunger (Hizkuni). If God wanted to kill us, it would have been better if He had done it when our bellies were full (Sforno). **When we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread!** Meat was expensive in Egypt; while they sat waiting for it to be cooked, they would eat their fill of bread, which was cheap (Abarbanel).

OJPS children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt.

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

RASHBAM 16:1 The fifteenth day of the second month. This is when they ran out of the "unleavened cakes" that they brought with them from Egypt.

3 By the hand of the LORD. That is to say, "in ripe old age" (Job 5:26), not of starvation.

IBN EZRA an intermediate encampment by the Sea of Reeds (Num. 33:10-11) where nothing in particular happened. **The fifteenth day of the second month.** According to Saadia, the point of recording this date is to inform us that the Israelites left Egypt on a Thursday. Now if the 15th of Nisan was a Thursday, so was the 1st, making the 1st of Iyar a Saturday, meaning that the action of our verse took place on the Sabbath. Manna begins to fall on the next day, Sunday. Thus "the sixth day" (v. 5) is really the sixth day of the week, Friday. Let us accept what Saadia says here on the basis of tradition, but not on the basis of exegesis. [A] For who told him that the manna began to fall on the day after they came to the wilderness of Sin? They may have stayed there four or five days before the manna began to fall on a Sunday. We should begin to count from the day the manna began to fall, for all the nations rely on Israel for this number. [B]

2 The whole Israelite community grumbled. At the waters of Marah they grumbled against Moses alone, for he was the one who "caused them to set out" (15:22) to that spot. Moreover, only a few of them complained, and only about water. But now "the whole ... community" grumbled, and against Aaron as well (saying that both he and Moses had brought them out of Egypt, v. 3), and not only about water but also about food. For they had

אֵילָם וּבֵין סִינַי בְּחַמְשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ
הַשְּׁנִי לְצֵאתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ²וַיִּלְוֵנוּ
וַיִּלְוֵנוּ כָּל-עֵדֶת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-מִשְׁהַ
וְעַל-אֲהֲרֹן בַּמִּדְבָּר: ³וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי-יָתֵן מוֹתָנוּ בְּיַד-יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבְתָנוּ עַל-סִיר הַבֶּשֶׂר בְּאֶבְלָנוּ
לֶחֶם לְשֹׁבַע כִּי-הוֹצֵאתָם אֶתְנוּ אֶל-
הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לְהָמִית אֶת-כָּל-הַקְהָל הַזֶּה
בַּרְעָב: **ס**

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS † Now that they have water, why are the people "grumbling" against Moses and Aaron (v. 2)? If it is about the lack of food, why doesn't the text say so? † Why are we told this happened "in the wilderness," which we already know? † Why are the Israelites not punished for what they say in v. 3, as they are in Numbers 11 for saying essentially the same thing?