

wafers in honey. ³²Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: Let one *omer* of it be kept throughout the ages, in order that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out from the land of Egypt."

³³And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, put one *omer* of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout the ages." ³⁴As the LORD had commanded Moses, Aaron placed it before the Pact, to be kept. ³⁵And the Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a settled land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. ³⁶The *omer* is a tenth of an *ephah*.

³² וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה
מִלֵּא הָעֶמֶר מִמָּנּוּ לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם
לְמַעַן יֵרְאוּ אֶת-הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר הָאֵלֶּלְתִּי
אֲתֶכֶם בְּמִדְבָּר בְּהוֹצִיאִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם: ³³ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן קַח
צִנְצָנָה אֶחָת וְתֵן-שָׁמָּה מִלֵּא הָעֶמֶר מִן
וְהִנֵּחַ אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: ³⁴ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה
וַיַּנְיחֻהוּ אַהֲרֹן לִפְנֵי הָעֵדֻת לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת:
³⁵ וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָכְלוּ אֶת-הַמָּן אַרְבָּעִים
שָׁנָה עַד-בָּאָם אֶל-אֶרֶץ נוֹשָׁבִת אֶת-הַמָּן
אָכְלוּ עַד-בָּאָם אֶל-קְצֵה אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:
³⁶ וְהָעֶמֶר עֲשָׂרִית הָאִיפָה הוּא: פ

17 From the wilderness of Sin the whole Israelite community continued by stages as the LORD would command. They encamped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people quarreled with Moses.

יז וַיֵּסְעוּ כָּל-עֵדֻת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִמִּדְבַּר-סִין לְמִסְעֵיהֶם עַל-פִּי יְהוָה
וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּרֶפְדִּים וַאֲיֵן מַיִם לְשִׁתָּת הָעָם:
² וַיִּרְבּ הָעָם עִם-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ תָנוּ-לָנוּ

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equal to an individual's daily ration—is to be preserved as a kind of cultural relic and serve future generations as a reminder of God's providential care of Israel throughout the wilderness period.

33. before the LORD That is, in front of the Ark in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle, which was not erected until the first anniversary of the Exodus. Because the priesthood in Israel has not yet been established, the instruction to place the *omer* of manna "before the LORD" cannot be contemporaneous with the events described earlier.

34. the Pact That is, "the Ark of the Pact." The Ark housed the two tablets of stone on which the Decalogue was inscribed.

35. After the Israelites crossed the Jordan and celebrated the Passover in the land of Israel for the first time (Josh. 5:11–12), the manna ceased.

to the border of the land of Canaan This additional note is not consistent with the tradition that was just cited. Ibn Ezra thought "the border of the land" might refer to Gilgal, the first Israelite encampment west of the Jordan.

36. The note is needed here because the *omer*, which never recurs in the Bible as a measure, became obsolete and unintelligible to later generations. The *ephah* (*eifal*), a dry measure of Eryp-

tian origin that approximately equals 1 bushel (35 L), is frequently mentioned in the Bible.

MASSAH AND MERIBAH (17:1–7)

For the third time the people grumble against Moses. This time they even question God's providence. The incident made a profound impression on Israel's historical memory. Its locale was called by a derogatory symbolic name: *Massah-M'rivah*, literally, "trial-quarrel." The frequent reference to this narrative in the Bible indicates that it was much talked about in ancient Israel.

1. Rephidim The last station on the journey from the Sea of Reeds to Sinai, according to Exod. 19:2 and Num. 33:14–15. Although its precise location is still uncertain, Exod. 17:6 shows that it was situated close to Horeb/Mount Sinai. A wilderness station would have water. Why, then, was there no water for the Israelites when they arrived at Rephidim? Either the area was affected by a severe drought or the Amalekites were in control of this region and blocked the approaches to the sources of water.

2. quarreled The narrative uses the Hebrew verb רִיב, "fight," a term that conjures up a picture of an angry, hostile confrontation.

"Give us water to drink," they said; and Moses replied to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you try the LORD?" ³But the people thirsted there for water; and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do with this people? Before long they will be stoning me!" ⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people; take with you some of the elders of Israel, and take along the rod with which you struck the Nile, and set out. ⁶I will be standing there before you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock and water will issue from it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. The place was named Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and because they tried the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD present among us or not?"

⁸Amalek came and fought with Israel at

מִים וְנִשְׁתָּה וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה מִדֵּי תִרְיֹבוּן עִמָּדִי מִדֵּי־תִנְסֹון אֶת־יְהוָה: ³וַיִּצְמָא שָׁם הָעָם לַמִּים וַיִּלָּן הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה הָעֲלִיתָנוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם לְהָמִית אֹתִי וְאֶת־בְּנֵי וְאֶת־מִקְנֵי בְּצָמָא: ⁴וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה לָּעָם הַזֶּה עוֹד מֵעַט וּסְקָלָנִי: ⁵וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲבֹר לִפְנֵי הָעָם וְקַח אִתָּךְ מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבִטָּן אֲשֶׁר הִכִּיתָ בּוֹ אֶת־הַיָּאֵר קַח בְּיָדְךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ: ⁶הִנְנִי עֹמֵד לְפָנֶיךָ שָׁם אֶעֱלֶה הַצּוּר בְּחָרֵב וְהִכִּיתָ בַּצּוּר וַיֵּצְאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מִים וּשְׁתָּה הָעָם וַיַּעַשׂ בֵּן מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינָיו זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ⁷וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם מַסָּה וּמִרִיבָה עַל־רִיב אֲבֵנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל נִסְתָּם אֶת־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר הִיֵּשׁ יְהוָה בְּקִרְבָּנוּ אִם־אֵין: פ

⁸וַיָּבֵא עַמְלֵק וַיִּלָּחֶם עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל

Give us water The demand, in effect, is both a denunciation and an accusation.

3–4. The situation has deteriorated. The language of the people is unrestrained; their mood, explosive. A riot may break out any moment.

6. at Horeb At this site—known as “the mountain of God,” another name for Mount Sinai—Moses first received the call to leadership and the promise of Israel’s redemption.

Strike the rock Most likely, soft porous limestone, which can retain water. A sharp blow to such rock can crack its crust and release a flow of groundwater. The miracle is credited to God

and not to Moses, a point emphasized several times in the Bible. Moses acts only as the agent of God’s will, not on his own initiative.

THE BATTLE WITH AMALEK (vv. 8–16)

According to the more detailed account given in Deut. 25:17–19, the Amalekites made a surprise rear attack on the famished and exhausted Israelites not long after the escape from Egypt. They cut down the stragglers—the elderly, the weak, and the infirm. Israel was forced to fight its first war of survival. The Amalekites were a tribe of

CHAPTER 17

3. The text reads literally, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill me and my children?” When the Israelites were leaving Egypt in triumph and the future looked glorious, they thought in terms of “us,” all of us together. But when times became hard and there was not enough to eat and drink, they stopped saying “us” and began to speak of “me and my children.”

5. take along the rod with which you struck the Nile Thus the people might know that the rod that had been used to start a plague, to make the waters of the Nile undrinkable, could also be used to produce a blessing, to call forth water in the wilderness.

8. Amalek is the Torah’s symbol of pure malice, attacking without cause. Some people commit crimes for profit or revenge, but Amalek acts that way for the sheer joy of hurting people. God’s “war from generation to gener-

pure person, and fresh water shall be added to them in a vessel. ¹⁸A person who is pure shall take hyssop, dip it in the water, and sprinkle on the tent and on all the vessels and people who were there, or on him who touched the bones or the person who was killed or died naturally or the grave. ¹⁹The pure person shall sprinkle it upon the impure person on the third day and on the seventh day, thus purifying him by the seventh day. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe in water, and at nightfall he shall be pure. ²⁰If anyone who has become impure fails to purify himself, that person shall be cut off from the congregation, for he has defiled the LORD's sanctuary. The water of lustration was not dashed on him: he is impure.

²¹That shall be for them a law for all time. Further, he who sprinkled the water of lustration shall wash his clothes; and whoever touches the water of lustration shall be impure until evening. ²²Whatever that impure person touches shall be impure; and the person who touches him shall be impure until evening.

20 The Israelites arrived in a body at the wilderness of Zin on the first new moon, and

מֵעֵפֶר שְׂרַפַּת הַחֲטָאִת וְנָתַן עָלָיו מִיִּם שְׁנֵי חַיִּים אֶל־כֹּלִי: ¹⁸ וְלָקַח אֲזוּב וְטָבַל בְּמִים אִישׁ טָהוֹר וְהִזָּה עַל־הָאֹהֶל וְעַל־כָּל־הַכֵּלִים וְעַל־הַנְּפֹשׁוֹת אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ־שָׁם וְעַל־הַנֶּגַע בַּעֲצָם אוֹ בַחֲלָל אוֹ בַּמָּת אוֹ בַקָּבֵר: ¹⁹ וְהִזָּה הַטָּהוֹר עַל־הַטָּמֵא בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּ�בִיעִי וְחִטְאוֹ בַיּוֹם הַשְּ�בִיעִי וְכִבֵּס בַּגָּדָיו וְרַחֵץ בַּמִּים וְטָהַר בַּעֲרֵב: ²⁰ וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־יִטְמָא וְלֹא יִתְחַטֵּא וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִתּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל כִּי־אֶת־מִקְדָּשׁ יְהוָה טָמָא מִי נִדָּה לֹא־זָרַק עָלָיו טָמָא הוּא:

²¹ וְהִיָּתָה לָהֶם לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם וּמִזָּה מִי־הַנִּדָּה יְכַבֵּס בַּגָּדָיו וְהַנֶּגַע בְּמִי הַנִּדָּה יִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: ²² וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־יִגְעֹבוֹ הַטָּמֵא יִטְמָא וְהַנֶּפֶשׁ הַנֶּגַעַת תִּטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: פ

shall be impure Open earthenware vessels are impure forever and must be broken.

18. A person who is pure This obvious condition is made explicit to bar those who had already handled the ashes and were thereby contaminated.

on all the vessels Afterward these must undergo washing, as people must.

19. Full purification comes only after laundering and bathing.

21. See Comment to 19:10.

22. Whatever That is, anything or anyone.

FROM KADESH TO THE STEPPES OF MOAB (20:1–22:1)

THE SIN OF MOSES AND AARON (20:1–13)

After Miriam's death, the people complain about the lack of water. Moses and Aaron are com-

manded to bring forth water from the rock. They produce the water but in so doing commit a sin akin to heresy and are condemned by God to die in the wilderness.

CHAPTER 20

1. The Talmud connects Miriam's death to

brown cow atone for sin, the death of a righteous person does the same" (BT MK 28a). In the wake of a good person's death, we are

the people stayed at Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there.

²The community was without water, and they joined against Moses and Aaron. ³The people quarreled with Moses, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished at the instance of the LORD! ⁴Why have you brought the LORD's congregation into this wilderness for us and our beasts to die there? ⁵Why did you make us leave Egypt to bring us to this wretched place, a place with no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates? There is not even water to drink!"

⁶Moses and Aaron came away from the congregation to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and fell on their faces. The Presence of the LORD appeared to them, ⁷and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁸"You and your brother Aaron take the rod and assemble the community, and before their very eyes order the rock to yield its

צֶן בַּחֲדָשׁ הָרֹאשׁוֹן וַיָּשֶׁב הָעָם בְּקֹדֶשׁ וַתָּמָת שָׁם מֵרִים וַתִּקְבֹּר שָׁם:

²וְלֹא־הָיָה מַיִם לַעֲדָה וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן: ³וַיָּרֹב הָעָם עִם־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר וְלוֹ גִּיעָנוּ בַּגֹּעַ אַחֲינוּ לַפָּנִי יְהוָה: ⁴וְלָמָּה הֵבֵאתֶם אֶת־קֹהֶל יְהוָה אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לָמוּת שָׁם אֲנַחְנוּ וּבְעֵירָנוּ: ⁵וְלָמָּה הֶעֱלִיתָנוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם לְהֵבִיא אֹתָנוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם הַרֹעַ הַזֶּה לֹא מָקוֹם זֶרַע וְתֹאנָה וְגֶפֶן וְרִמּוֹן וַיִּמָּוֶן וַיָּמָּוֶן אֵין לִשְׁתּוֹת:

⁶וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן מִפְּנֵי הַקֹּהֶל אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד־יְהוָה אֲלֵיהֶם: ⁷וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ⁸קַח אֶת־הַמַּטֵּה וְהַקְהֵל אֶת־הָעֵדָה אֹתָהּ וְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ וְדַבְּרֶתֶם

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THE DEATH OF MIRIAM (v. 1)

1. The generation of the Exodus has died out and this is the 40th year. According to 13:26, however, the Israelites had already arrived at Kadesh at the start of their sojourn in the wilderness. Some commentators suggest that after having left Kadesh they returned to it in the 40th year. Most likely, these are two variant traditions.

Miriam died there On the 10th day of the first month, according to an ancient tradition.

3. when our brothers perished During the Korahite rebellion (16:35, 17:14). Although the

people identify with the Korahite rebels, God does not punish them because their complaint is legitimate: They are dying of thirst.

6. came away from That is, in flight.

fell on their faces Out of fear.

The Presence That is, the fire-encased cloud.

8. rod Of Moses, which had been employed in the performance of God's miracles in the wilderness (see Exod. 14:16, 17:1–7,9).

to yield its water Because of the will of God, not the rod of Moses.

2. The community was without water A legend tells of a marvelous well that sprang up wherever the Israelites camped, as a tribute to Miriam's piety. As she waited by the waters of the Nile to see the fate of her baby brother, as she celebrated God's power at the Sea, so was she blessed with water, a substance more valuable in the desert than gold. When she died, the well vanished.

4. When Israel was leaving Egypt, triumphant and optimistic, they saw themselves as "the LORD's congregation." In the midst of the wilderness, thirsty and discouraged, they seem to be saying "We who used to think of ourselves as the LORD's congregation can now only think in terms of being thirsty, along with

our cattle." Similarly, in verse 8, God promises to send water for "the congregation and their beasts." This has been understood to mean that the people, desperate with thirst, were responding at virtually an animal level, no different than their cattle (*Meshekh Hokhmah*).

6–12. When Moses strikes the rock to draw water instead of speaking to it as God commanded, he is condemned to die in the wilderness. In this puzzling incident, the punishment seems grossly disproportionate to the offense. Why should Moses, who has served God so loyally for so many years through so many trying times, be so harshly punished for what seems like a minor infraction? The classic commentators labor to find in the text some justifica-

water. Thus you shall produce water for them from the rock and provide drink for the congregation and their beasts.”

⁹Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as He had commanded him. ¹⁰Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock; and he said to them, “Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?” ¹¹And Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. Out came copious water, and the community and their beasts drank.

¹²But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm

אֶל-הַסֵּלַע לַעֲיִיֵּהֶם וְנָתַן מִיָּמּוֹ וְהוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם מַיִם מִן-הַסֵּלַע וְהִשְׁקִיתָ אֶת-הָעֵדָה וְאֶת-בְּעִירָם:

⁹ וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הַמִּטָּה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ: ¹⁰ וַיִּקְהֲלוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶת-הַקָּהָל אֶל-פְּנֵי הַסֵּלַע וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהֶם שְׁמְעוּ-נָא הַמַּרְיָם הַמִּן-הַסֵּלַע הַזֶּה נוֹצִיא לָכֶם מַיִם: ¹¹ וַיִּרָם מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדוֹ וַיַּךְ אֶת-הַסֵּלַע בַּמִּטָּה שְׁנַיִם וַיֵּצֵאוּ מַיִם רַבִּים וַתִּשְׁתְּ הָעֵדָה וּבְעִירָם: ^ס

¹² וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאַל-אַהֲרֹן יַעֲזוּב

9. from before the LORD That is, from the tabernacle.

as He had commanded him This statement would have been expected before or after the account of the fulfillment of the command, not in the middle. Its “misplacement” is deliberate, however. Up to this point Moses executes God’s command; thereafter, he deviates from it.

11. twice This indicates Moses’ anger, but it is not his sin. Nor is his sin in striking the rock.

Rather, his sin is in speaking so as to imply that what follows is his miracle—not God’s.

12. trust Me Just as Israel, who did not “trust Me” (14:11), must die in the wilderness (14:23), so must Moses and Aaron.

in the sight of the Israelite people Their sin was aggravated because it was witnessed by all of Israel.

this congregation The new generation, now eligible to enter the Land—an indication that this event takes place in the 40th year.

tion for God’s being so angry with Moses (and with Aaron, who seems to be a bystander at worst). Rashi points out that Moses’ striking the rock (rather than speaking to it) diminished the greatness of the miracle. Ḥananel and Ramban both fasten on verse 10: “Shall we get water for you out of this rock?” This seems to imply that Moses and Aaron present themselves rather than God as the source of the miracle. And why was Aaron punished? After the first strike, he could have stopped Moses from repeating his error, but did not.

Ibn Ezra and Albo criticize Moses for “needing to be told” to work a miracle instead of being confident that God would work one for the people (after all, Moses presumed to anticipate a miracle in the showdown with Korah). Several modern commentators fault Moses for using a tactic that had worked in an earlier generation (see Exod. 17:6) but was inappropriate for this generation.

Perhaps the most persuasive explanation is that offered by Maimonides in the 12th century and Hirsch in the 19th century. Moses was punished for losing his temper and losing pa-

tience with the people, calling them “rebels,” striking the rock (and then striking it a second time) in exasperation with the people. (One suspects he would as readily have struck the complainers with his staff.) “When a prophet loses his temper, his gift of prophecy abandons him” (BT Pes. 66b).

One might conclude that God’s decree of death in the wilderness for Moses and Aaron was not so much a punishment as a recognition that their time of leadership was over. They were emotionally worn out by having led the people for so long. In some cases, there was a two-generation gap between them and their followers. Moses and Aaron were not sinners; they were the right leaders for the Exodus, for Sinai, for establishing the tabernacle. They were not the right people to lead a younger generation into battle.

11. the community and their beasts drank

The people drank like beasts, each person concerned solely with easing his or her own thirst. Only when we share with others what we ourselves also crave, do we rise above the animal level and become truly human.

My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them.” ¹³Those are the Waters of Meribah—meaning that the Israelites quarrelled with the LORD—through which He affirmed His sanctity.

¹⁴From Kadesh, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom: “Thus says your brother Israel: You know all the hardships that have befallen us; ¹⁵that our ancestors went down to Egypt, that we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and that the Egyptians dealt harshly with us and our ancestors. ¹⁶We cried to the LORD and He heard our plea, and He sent a messenger who freed us from Egypt. Now we are in Kadesh, the town on the border of your territory. ¹⁷Allow us, then, to cross your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, and we will not drink water from wells. We will follow the king’s highway, turning off neither to the right nor to the left until we have crossed your territory.”

¹⁸But Edom answered him, “You shall not pass through us, else we will go out against you

13. Israelites quarrelled with the LORD They had quarrelled only with Moses, but their real object was God.

affirmed His sanctity Although Moses and Aaron defied God, God continued to supply the Israelites with water, and thereby caused His name to be sanctified in Israel.

ENCOUNTER WITH EDM (vv. 14–21)

After the abortive attempt to enter Canaan from the south (14:40–45; see v. 25), Israel attempts to enter from the east, across the Jordan River. To reach the Jordan from their base at Kadesh, however, they must go north through Edomite territory.

14. The text closely resembles formal address

15. dealt harshly with us Hebrew: *va-yarei-u lanu*; one rabbinic rendering is: “they made us seem harsh, bad.” To justify their cruel treatment of us, they proclaimed that we were evil and deserving of persecution.

לֹא־הָאֱמָנָתָם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישָׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָכֵן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת־הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם: ¹³ הַמָּה מִי מְרִיבָה אֲשֶׁר־רָבוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּקְדַּשׁ בָּם: ס

רביעי ¹⁴ וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה מַלְאָכִים מִקְדָּשׁ אֶל־מֶלֶךְ אֱדוֹם כֹּה אָמַר אַחִיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֵת כָּל־הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר מָצָאתָנוּ: ¹⁵ וַיֵּרְדּוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ מִצְרָיִםה וַנֵּשֶׁב בְּמִצְרַיִם יָמִים רַבִּים וַיַּרְעוּ לָנוּ מִצְרַיִם וְלֹא־בָתִּינוּ: ¹⁶ וַנִּצְעַק אֶל־יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמָע קֹלָנוּ וַיִּשְׁלַח מַלְאָךְ וַיִּצְאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְהִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ בְּקֶדֶשׁ עִיר קֶצֶה גְבוּלָךְ: ¹⁷ נַעֲבְרָה־נָּא בְּאַרְצְךָ לֹא נַעֲבֹר בְּשָׂדֶה וּבְכָרִם וְלֹא נִשְׁתֶּה מִי בְּאֵר דֶּרֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ נֵלֶךְ לֹא נִטֶּה יָמִין וּשְׂמָאוֹל עַד אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲבֹר גְּבוּלָךְ: ¹⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֱדוֹם לֹא תַעֲבֹר בִּי פֶן־

in letters that was common throughout the ancient Near East: beginning with the addressee (“to the king of Edom”), followed by the addresser (“thus speaks your brother Israel”), and then the message (“You know . . .”).

your brother The personification of a people in the singular is frequently found in direct address (see Exod. 14:26). Here the personification is that of a brother or a kinsman.

hardships Israel’s misfortunes are emphasized solely to elicit sympathy.

16. He sent a messenger Literally: “angel,” which, although at variance with the standard view, is found elsewhere (see Exod. 33:2).

17. king’s highway The main route through the length of Transjordan.

and our ancestors The reference is not only to the parents and grandparents of the current generation. When Israel suffers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah in heaven feel their pain (Num. R. 19:15).

The **Documentary Hypothesis** is a scholarly theory that seeks to explain the origins and composition of the first five books of the Bible (the **Torah**), which are traditionally attributed to Moses. According to the Documentary Hypothesis, the Torah is not the work of a single author but rather a compilation of multiple sources or documents, each with its own distinct style, theological perspective, and historical context. These sources were gradually woven together over time.

The most widely known version of the Documentary Hypothesis was developed in the 19th century by biblical scholars, particularly **Julius Wellhausen**. The key elements of the hypothesis suggest that the Torah consists of four main sources, which are usually designated by the letters **J**, **E**, **D**, and **P**:

1. **J (Yahwist)** – This source is characterized by its use of the name *YHWH* (translated as "LORD") for God. It is believed to be the oldest of the sources and has a vivid, anthropomorphic depiction of God.
2. **E (Elohist)** – This source uses the term *Elohim* for God and is thought to represent a different tradition, perhaps from the northern kingdom of Israel. It often focuses on prophetic figures and emphasizes morality.
3. **D (Deuteronomist)** – This source is primarily associated with the book of **Deuteronomy** and reflects the reforms of King Josiah in the 7th century BCE. It emphasizes the centralization of worship in Jerusalem and a strong covenantal theology.
4. **P (Priestly)** – This source is concerned with rituals, laws, genealogies, and temple worship. It is believed to have been written during or after the Babylonian exile, when the Jewish community was focused on maintaining religious identity through ritual practice.

Significance of the Documentary Hypothesis:

1. **Historical and Literary Understanding:** The Documentary Hypothesis helps scholars understand the development of the Torah over time. Rather than seeing it as a single, unified work, it provides a framework for understanding how various traditions, beliefs, and practices were combined to form the text we have today.
2. **Theological Insights:** The different sources reflect different theological perspectives. For example, the **J** source presents a more intimate, personal relationship between God and humans, while the **P** source focuses on ritual purity and law. Understanding these differences can offer insight into how ancient Israel's understanding of God and religion evolved.
3. **Textual Analysis:** The hypothesis provides a tool for textual criticism, allowing scholars to identify different layers and redactions in the biblical text. By analyzing repeated or conflicting narratives, scholars can trace how the various sources were combined.
4. **Cultural Context:** It highlights how the Torah reflects the diverse cultural, political, and social contexts in which it was written. The different sources come from different periods and locations in Israel's history, and their blending helps explain the complex character of the biblical text.

While the Documentary Hypothesis has been influential, it is not without challenges. Some scholars question its assumptions or suggest alternative models for the composition of the Torah, and recent scholarship has offered refined or revised versions of the hypothesis. However, the Documentary Hypothesis remains a cornerstone of modern biblical scholarship, shaping how we understand the origins and development of the Hebrew Bible.

The Documentary Hypothesis is a theory about the origins of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible), proposing that these texts were not written by a single author (traditionally Moses) but instead are the product of multiple sources and traditions, each with their own unique perspective. It divides the Pentateuch into distinct literary strands, commonly referred to as J (the Jahwist source), E (the Elohist source), D (the Deuteronomist source), and P (the Priestly source).

From a **spiritual perspective**, the Documentary Hypothesis can be seen as offering several layers of insight:

1. **Diversity of Perspectives:** The hypothesis highlights the spiritual richness of the Bible, suggesting that the diverse voices and perspectives within the text reflect the complexity of human experience with the divine. Different sources express varying understandings of God, worship, laws, and history. This can encourage a more nuanced and dynamic relationship with the text, where believers might be drawn to specific themes or images of God depending on their personal spiritual journey.
2. **Evolution of Religious Thought:** The multiple sources of the Pentateuch may represent the evolving relationship between God and the people of Israel over time. As different generations faced unique challenges, their expressions of faith and understanding of divine commands evolved. This speaks to the idea that spiritual traditions are living and adaptive, responding to changing contexts while still rooted in shared foundational principles.
3. **Interpretation of Sacred Texts:** Recognizing the multiplicity of sources can lead to a more flexible and interpretive approach to scripture. Spiritual significance can be found in how different communities or generations might have understood God's will at various points in history. It encourages believers to explore the layers of meaning in scripture and to understand that sacred texts can offer timeless wisdom, even if their origins are complex.
4. **Unity Amid Diversity:** Despite the multiple authorship theories, the Pentateuch is often regarded as a unified text, emphasizing the overarching narrative of God's covenant with Israel. This reflects the belief that, despite human diversity and variation in spiritual expression, there is an underlying unity in the divine plan. The Documentary Hypothesis thus provides a lens through which one might see both the unity and diversity within sacred texts—and by extension, within the faith community itself.

In essence, the spiritual significance of the Documentary Hypothesis lies in the invitation to see the Bible as a deeply layered, evolving, and multifaceted work that mirrors the complexities of faith, history, and divine interaction. It encourages a thoughtful engagement with scripture, understanding its origins, its diversity, and its profound spiritual messages across time.