

and covered the chariots and the riders of all Pharaoh's force who were
29 coming after them in the sea, not a single one of them remained. And
the Israelites went on dry land in the midst of the sea, the waters a wall
30 to them on their right and on their left. And the LORD on that day delivered
Israel from the hand of Egypt, and Israel saw Egypt dead on the
31 shore of the sea, and Israel saw the great hand that the LORD had performed
against Egypt, and the people feared the LORD, and they trusted in the LORD
and in Moses His servant.

29. *the waters a wall to them.* This key phrase serves as a formal refrain, and will be picked up in the Song of the Sea.

31. *the great hand.* "Hand" here obviously means something like "demonstration of power," but it picks up all the previous uses of "hand," both literal and figurative, in this story of liberation from bondage.

they trusted in the LORD and in Moses His servant. The whole story had begun with Moses's understandable doubt as to whether the people would trust, or believe, him. Now all doubt is banished (for the moment) in the great triumph at the Sea of Reeds.

CHAPTER 15

Then did Moses sing, and all the Israelites with him, this song to the LORD, and they said, saying:

"Let me sing unto the LORD for He surged, O surged—
horse and its rider He hurled into the sea.

1. *Then did Moses sing.* The conclusion of many large narrative units in the Bible is marked with a relatively long poem (*shirah*). After the destruction of Pharaoh's army, the Egyptian phase of the Exodus story is completed, and the sequence of Wilderness tales (the very first is the Marah story, verses 22–26) that is the narrative skeleton of the rest of the Torah begins.

Let me sing unto the LORD. This poetic beginning reflects an ancient Near Eastern literary convention of announcing the topic and the act of song at the beginning of the poem, roughly parallel to the Greek and Latin convention for beginning an epic (as in Virgil's "Of arms and the man I sing").

for He surged, O surged. The poem begins with a vivid pun. The Hebrew verb *ga'ah* means something like "to triumph," "to be exalted," "to be proud," but it is also the verb used for the rising tide of the sea, a concrete image that is especially apt for representing God's overwhelming the Egyptians with the waters of the Sea of Reeds.

horse and its rider. Perhaps, as many scholars have argued, rider (*rokhev*) should be translated as "driver" because chariots are stressed, and the evidence appears to indicate that in the late second millennium B.C.E. the Egyptians did not make much use of cavalry. Nevertheless, the plain meaning of the Hebrew word is "rider," and only with some strain can it be made to mean "chariot driver." Anachronism about such details is familiar enough in the Bible—witness the ubiquity of camels in Genesis in a historical period before they were generally domesticated.

2 My strength and my power is Yah,
and He became my deliverance.
This is my God—I extol Him
God of my fathers—I exalt Him.
3 The LORD is a man of war,
the LORD is His name.
4 Pharaoh's chariots and his force
He pitched into the sea
and the pick of his captains
were drowned in the Reed Sea.
5 The depths did cover them over,
down they went in the deep like a stone.
6 Your right hand, O LORD, is mighty in power.
Your right hand, O LORD, smashes the enemy.

2. *power*. Scholarly consensus is that this is the most likely sense here of the Hebrew *zimrah*, but it is probably a pun on the more common meaning of the word “song”—God, Who is the source of the speaker’s power, is for that very reason the theme of his song.

3. *The LORD is a man of war*. The representation of God as a fierce warrior is recurrent in biblical poetry and draws on a literary background of Ugaritic/Canaanite mythological poetry.

4. *He pitched into the sea*. The vivid hyperbolic image of God’s “pitching” or “hurling” the Egyptian troops into the sea provides a hint to the representation in the preceding prose narrative (which is later in composition) of God’s “shaking out” the Egyptians into the sea.

5–6. *down they went in the deep like a stone*. / *Your right hand . . . mighty in power*. The Song of the Sea is a rare instance in the Bible of a poem that has clearly marked strophic divisions, as Umberto Cassuto and others have noted. Near the end of each strophe one encounters the simile “like a stone” or “like lead.” The simile is followed by lines that celebrate the LORD’s triumphal supremacy. The first strophe (verses 1–6) offers a kind of summary version of the victory at the sea. The second strophe (verses 7–11) goes over the event in more concrete terms, providing some dialogue for the pursuing Egyptians as well as a more particular account of how God’s breath or wind (the same word in the Hebrew) first heaped up the waters in a mound or wall and then sent

In Your great surging You wreck those against You, 7
You send forth Your wrath, it consumes them like straw.
And with the breath of your nostrils waters heaped up, 8
streams stood up like a mound,
the depths congealed in the heart of the sea.
The enemy said: 9
‘I’ll pursue, overtake, divide up the loot,
my gullet will fill with them, I’ll bare my sword, my hand
despoil them.’
You blew with Your breath—the sea covered them over. 10
They sank like lead in the mighty waters:

them back to engulf the Egyptians. The right hand smashing the enemy derives from the martial imagery used for representing battling deities in ancient Near Eastern poetry, but it also resonates with all the references to God’s powerful hand in the preceding narrative.

7. *In Your great surging*. Or, “in Your great triumph.” The use of the noun derived from the verb *ga’ah* aligns the beginning of the second strophe with the beginning of the first.

it consumes them like straw. The straw simile might appear to conflict with the stone simile, but it is generated, almost formulaically, by the language of “wrath” and, in the next line, “breath of Your nostrils,” because in Hebrew poetic idiom, wrath is represented as a kind of fiery emanation from the nostrils. The Hebrew *’af* thus means both “nose” and, by metonymy, “flaring anger.”

8. *waters . . . streams . . . depths*. The Hebrew word for water is always plural. The various synonyms used by the poet for the depths or the bottom of the sea are all in the plural as well—possibly a poetic plural of intensification but in any case a form that imparts a sense of grandeur or epic sublimity.

11 Who is like You among the gods, O LORD,
 who is like You, mighty in holiness?
 Awesome in praise, worker of wonders.
12 You stretched out Your hand—
 earth swallowed them up.
13 You led forth in Your kindness
 this people that You redeemed.
 You guided them in Your strength to Your holy abode.

11. *Who is like You among the gods.* This line has inspired a good deal of rather nervous commentary. The most unapologetic way of explaining it is that in the early part of the first millennium B.C.E., or possibly even earlier, to which the composition of this poem may plausibly be assigned, Hebrew writers had no difficulty in conceding the existence of other deities, though always stipulating, as here, their absolute inferiority to the God of Israel.

Awesome in praise. The Hebrew uses a plural, “praises.” The word may refer in a kind of ellipsis to the tremendous acts performed by God that make Him the object of praise.

12. *You stretched out Your hand— / earth swallowed them up.* The hand that smashes the foe here works like Moses’s hand, signaling to the sea to engulf the Egyptians. Since it is the sea, not the land, that does the swallowing, there is probably a play on the secondary meaning of the Hebrew *’arets*, “underworld.” But in a doubling of the pun, *’arets*, which also means “land,” points forward to the prospect of the promised land to which the people will be brought that is the topic of this third strophe.

13. *You led forth . . . You guided.* The Hebrew exhibits a sequence of three phonetically overlapping verbs—*natita*, “You stretched out,” *nahita*, “You led forth,” *neihalta*, “You guided.” This sound pattern helps to effect the temporal and spatial transition as the beginning of the third strophe moves from the Sea of Reeds to Canaan and, in the space of a single line, from this event in the thirteenth century B.C.E. to the establishment of God’s temple on Mount Zion in the tenth century.

Peoples heard, they quaked, 14
 trembling seized Philistia’s dwellers.
Then were the chieftains of Edom dismayed, 15
 the dukes of Moab, shuddering seized them,
 all the dwellers of Canaan quailed.
Terror and fear did fall upon them, 16
 as Your arm loomed big they were like a stone.
Till Your people crossed over, O LORD,
 till the people you made Yours crossed over.

14. *Peoples heard, they quaked, / trembling seized Philistia’s dwellers.* The national triumphalism of the whole Exodus story comes to a climax here as the victory at the Sea of Reeds is imagined to reverberate throughout the region, panicking the peoples of Canaan who will face a Hebrew invasion led by the unconquerable LORD of Israel. (These lines will be echoed in the speech of Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, in Joshua 2 as a kind of on-the-ground “confirmation” of the terrific impact in Canaan of the event at the Sea of Reeds.) The reference to Philistia is an anachronism because the Philistines did not arrive on the coastal strip of Canaan from the Aegean until about a century after the Exodus.

15. *quailed.* The literal meaning of the Hebrew verb is “melted.”

16. *they were like a stone.* It is also possible to construe the verb to yield “they were still as a stone.” However, the image of the Canaanites petrified with fear seems stronger, and plays against the (literal) “melting” of the previous line.

Till Your people crossed over . . . / till the people You made Yours crossed over. The use of this sort of incremental repetition is particularly characteristic of the older strata of biblical poetry. (The Song of Deborah, which is older still than this poem, abounds in such patterns.) The Hebrew for “You made Yours,” *qanita*, means “to acquire,” “to purchase,” and occasionally “to create.” The liberation from Egyptian slavery is taken as the great historical demonstration that God has adopted Israel as His special people.

- 17 You'll bring them, you'll plant them, on the mount of Your estate,
a firm place for Your dwelling You wrought, O LORD,
the sanctum, O Sovereign, Your hands firmly founded.
- 18 The LORD shall be king for all time!"
- 19 For Pharaoh had come with his chariots and his riders into the sea, and
the LORD turned the waters of the sea back upon them, but the
- 20 Israelites went on dry land in the midst of the sea. And Miriam the
prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the
- 21 women went out after her with timbrels and dances. And Miriam sung
out to them:

17. *a firm place for Your dwelling . . . / . . . Your hands firmly founded.* The Hebrew noun *makhon* and the related verb *konen* are regularly associated in biblical idiom with the solid establishment of a throne or dynasty. Since a mountain is also referred to here, and a sanctum, *miqdash*, is mentioned at the end of the verse, it is highly likely that what the poet has in mind is the temple on Mount Zion, which is imagined as God's earthly throne or dwelling place.

18. *The LORD shall be king for all time!* Although some construe this line as a kind of epilogue to the poem (it lacks the parallelistic structure of a complete line of poetry), its celebration of God's supremacy corresponds to the endings of the two previous strophes (verses 6 and 11). God's regal dominion is confirmed both by the victory over the Egyptians and the establishing of a terrestrial throne in Jerusalem.

20. *And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand.* One surmises that she is called "prophetess" (*nevi'ah*) because the singing and dancing are an ecstatic activity, and one of the established meanings of the Hebrew term for "prophet" is an ecstatic who typically employed dance and musical instruments to induce the prophetic frenzy. Miriam is designated as Aaron's sister in accordance with a practice of identifying a woman in relation to her oldest brother. The custom of women's going out in song and dance to celebrate a military victory was common in ancient Israel and the surrounding peoples and figures significantly in the David story. The women here sing out the opening lines of the song we have just heard as a kind of antiphonal refrain. Everett Fox notes that Miriam is a witness by the water both at the beginning of the Moses story and now.

"Sing to the LORD for He has surged, O surged,
Horse and its rider He hurled into the sea!"

- And Moses made the Israelites journey onward from the Sea of Reeds, 22
and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur, and they went three days 23
in the wilderness and did not find water. And they came to Marah and 24
could not drink water from Marah, for it was bitter. Therefore is its 25
name called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying,
"What shall we drink?" And he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD
showed him a tree, and he flung it into the water, and the water turned
sweet. There did He set him a statute and law, and there did He test

22. *the Wilderness of Shur.* The name means "wall" in Hebrew and evidently refers to a fortified region on the northern border of Egypt. (The Egyptian Hagar flees toward this region, Genesis 16:7.)

23. *Marah.* The name means "bitter," as the story goes on to explain.
could not drink water from Marah. The desperate need for water in the desert, which is a recurrent feature of the stories that follow, is of course a realistic aspect of the Wilderness narrative. At the same time, it links the tribulations of the Hebrews in the wilderness with the Plagues narrative. Here there is an explicit echo of the first plague when the Egyptians "could not drink water from the Nile." Moses, who as an infant was "drawn from the water," and who has just led the people between walls of water, is now called upon to provide them water to drink in the wilderness.

25. *There did He set him a statute and law, and there did He test him.* Nearly everything about this gnomic sentence is uncertain. Since the only plausible candidate for setting statutes and laws is God, He would logically be the subject of the verb in the parallel clause, though some have claimed it could be Moses. "Him" might be Moses or a collective reference to Israel. The meaning of "statute and law" is obscure because, at least in this episode, no legislation is stipulated. The phrase might merely refer to the idea that it became a set practice in the wilderness that, as in this incident, Israel's urgent needs would be filled by God, if only Israel trusted in Him. The "testing," then, would be the testing of Moses's, or Israel's, trust in God's power to provide for the people's needs, though that is far from clear. In the famous parallel incident in Numbers 20, Moses will fail the test by angrily striking the rock in order to bring forth water.



- 1 A David psalm.
The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
- 2 In grass meadows He makes me lie down,
by quiet waters guides me.
- 3 My life He brings back.
He leads me on pathways of justice
for His name's sake.

1. *The LORD is my shepherd.* Although the likening of God or a ruler to a shepherd is a commonplace in this pastoral culture, this psalm is justly famous for the affecting simplicity and concreteness with which it realizes the metaphor. Thus, in the next line the shepherd leads his sheep to meadows where there is abundant grass and riverbanks and where quiet waters run that the sheep can drink.

2. *makes me lie down.* The verb used here, *hirbits*, is a specialized one for making animals lie down; hence the sheep-shepherd metaphor is carefully sustained.

3. *My life He brings back.* Though "He restoreth my soul" is time-honored, the Hebrew *nefesh* does not mean "soul" but "life breath" or "life." The image is of someone who has almost stopped breathing and is revived, brought back to life.

pathways of justice. With this phrase, the speaker glides from the sheep metaphor to speaking of himself in human terms.

Though I walk in the vale of death's shadow,
I fear no harm,
for You are with me.
Your rod and Your staff—
it is they that console me.
You set out a table before me
in the face of my foes.
You moisten my head with oil,
my cup overflows.

4

5

4. *in the vale of death's shadow.* The intent of the translation here is not to avoid the virtually proverbial "in the shadow of the valley of death" but rather to cut through the proliferation of syllables in the King James Version, however eloquent, and better approximate the compactness of the Hebrew—*begey tsalmawet*. Though philologists assume that the Masoretic *tsalmawet* is actually a misleading vocalization of *tsalmut*—probably a poetic word for "darkness" with the *ut* ending simply a suffix of abstraction—the traditional vocalization reflects something like an orthographic pun or a folk etymology (*tsel* means "shadow," *mawet* means "death"), so there is justification in retaining the death component.

I fear no harm. The imbalance between this extremely brief verset and the relatively long first verset, equally evident in the Hebrew, gives these words a climactic effect as an affirmation of trust after the relatively lengthy evocation of the place of fear.

You are with me. / Your rod and Your staff. At this crucial moment of terror in the valley of the shadow, the speaker turns to God in the second person, though the rod and staff are carried over from the shepherd image.

5. *You moisten my head with oil.* The verb here, *dishen*, is not the one that is used for anointment, and its associations are sensual rather than sacramental. Etymologically, it means something like "to make luxuriant." This verse, then, lists all the physical elements of a happy life—a table laid out with good things to eat, a head of hair well rubbed with olive oil, and an overflowing cup of wine.

6 Let but goodness and kindness pursue me
all the days of my life.
And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for many long days.

6. *for many long days.* This concluding phrase catches up the reference to “all the days of my life” in the preceding line. It does not mean “forever”; the viewpoint of the poem is in and of the here and now and is in no way eschatological. The speaker hopes for a happy fate all his born days, and prays for the good fortune to abide in the LORD’s sanctuary—a place of security and harmony with the divine—all, or perhaps at least most, of those days.



A David psalm.

The LORD’s is the earth and its fullness,
The world and the dwellers within it.
For He on the seas did found it,
and on the torrents set it firm.
Who shall go up on the mount of the LORD,
and who shall stand up in His holy place?

1
2
3

1. *The LORD’s is the earth and its fullness.* The cosmological proclamation of this and the next verse looks like an editorial introduction to the structure of question and response that makes up the rest of the psalm.

2. *For He on the seas did found it.* This is one of many psalms that invoke the creation story—harking back to Canaanite mythology—of the deity who establishes the world by subduing the threatening power of the sea and setting a firm limit between land and sea.

3. *Who shall go up on the mount of the LORD.* These questions and responses, as scholarship has long recognized, are liturgical in nature. (Compare the parallel questions in Psalm 15.) One can easily imagine a procession of pilgrims ascending the temple mount while a chorus chants these questions, perhaps with an antiphonal response.



- 1 Psalm, song for the dedication of the house, for David.
 2 I shall exalt You, LORD, for You drew me up,
 and You gave no joy to my enemies.
 3 LORD, my God,
 I cried to You and You healed me.
 4 LORD, You brought me up from Sheol,
 gave me life from those gone down to the Pit.
 5 Hymn to the LORD, O his faithful,
 acclaim his holy name.

1. *song for the dedication of the house.* The consensus of traditional interpreters is that the reference is to the temple (the literal sense of the Hebrew for temple is "house of the sanctuary"), or to a renovated altar or some other structure within it. Some scholars, noting the somewhat odd syntax of the superscription with "psalm" (*mizmor*) separated from "for David" (*l^eDawid*), suspect that this entire phrase is an editorial interpolation not originally belonging to the psalm.

2. *for You drew me up.* The Hebrew verb *daloh* is the one used for drawing water from a well. Death, then, is imagined as a deep pit from which the speaker has been drawn up by God. In this fashion, at its beginning the poem announces itself as a thanksgiving psalm.

4. *from those gone down to the Pit.* The Masoretic text uses a form that does not correspond to biblical grammar, *miyordi*, which would mean "from my going down." Several ancient versions, however, show *miyordey*, "from those gone down," which is not only grammatical but highlights the idea that the speaker felt he had gone down to death, yet of all who go down there, he alone was raised up.

- But a moment in His wrath, 6
 life in His pleasure.
 At evening one beds down weeping,
 and in the morning, glad song.
 As for me, I thought in my quiet days, 7
 "Never will I stumble."
 LORD, in your pleasure You made me stand mountain-strong. 8
 —When You hid Your face, I was stricken.
 To You, O LORD, I call, 9
 and to the Master I plead.
 "What profit in my blood, 10
 in my going down deathward?
 Will dust acclaim You,
 will it tell Your truth?"

6. *At evening one beds down weeping, / and in the morning, glad song.* This upbeat vision of life has, of course, been manifested in the recent experience of the speaker.

8. *You made me stand mountain-strong.* The translation is only an educated guess, because the sequence of words in the Hebrew (not the meaning of the individual words) is perplexing. Literally, it would be: You-made-stand my-mountain-of-strength (or, simply, mountain-of-strength).

9. *To You, O LORD, I call.* These words, through to the end of verse 11, appear to be self-quotation: the speaker, now rescued from death, recalls the words of desperate supplication that he addressed to God from his straits.

10. *What profit in my blood, / in my going down deathward?* Here the poet sounds, with powerful compactness, the recurrent theme shared by the psalms of thanksgiving and supplication: man cannot fulfill his vocation of celebrating God if he is engulfed by death. It is living human beings whom God needs to sing His praises. It looks as though the giving of praise to God is imagined as a replacement of the pagan idea in which the sacrifices were thought of as food necessary to the gods.

- 11 Hear, LORD, and grant me grace.
LORD, become helper to me.
- 12 You have turned my dirge to a dance for me,
undone my sackcloth and bound me with joy.
- 13 O, let my heart hymn You and be not still,
LORD, my God, for all time I acclaim You.

12. *undone my sackcloth and bound me with joy.* The general synecdoches for mourning and rejoicing, dirge and dance, of the first verset are focused concretely through the metaphor of clothing in the parallel second verset: The garment of mourning is undone, or removed, and joy becomes the new garment that God pulls tight or binds (verbal stem ²-z-r) around the person He has rescued.

13. *O, let my heart hymn You.* This translation, following one ancient Greek version, reads *keveidi*, "my liver" ("heart" being the viable English substitution) instead of *kavod*, "glory." Like many other thanksgiving psalms, this one exhibits an envelope structure, beginning and ending with the declaration that the speaker will exalt God for His mercies granted.



- To the lead player, a David psalm. 1
In You, O LORD, I shelter. 2
Let me never be shamed.
In Your bounty, O free me.
- Incline Your ear to me. 3
Quick, save me.
- Be my stronghold of rock,
a fort-house to rescue me.
- For You are my crag and my bastion, 4
and for Your name's sake guide me and lead me.

2. *In You, O LORD, I shelter, / Let me never be shamed.* Both these clauses, as they stand or with minor variations, are encountered in many other psalms, immediately identifying this one as a supplication. The predisposition of the psalmist to draw on a repertory of stock images and even stock lines is especially evident in this poem, which repeatedly echoes other psalms as well as a sentence from the psalm that occurs in the Book of Jonah and some lines from Jeremiah.

3. *Incline Your ear to me.* The literal sense of the Hebrew verb should be preserved because it suggests an urgently anthropomorphic image of God's bending down to hear the speaker's prayer.

Quick, save me. The abruptness of this verset mirrors the Hebrew, which is truncated (two beats instead of three) to suggest the frantic urgency of the speaker—*meheirah hatsileini*.

a fort-house. The addition of "house" to the conventional "fort" (plural in the Hebrew here) is unusual, and perhaps may be intended to suggest shelter as well as quasi-military protection.

8 The LORD will requite me.
O LORD, Your kindness is forever.
Do not let go of Your handiwork.

8. *requite me*. The Hebrew verb *gamar* might also mean “finish” or “complete” (its fixed meaning in later Hebrew), but the context suggests that here it is the equivalent of the verb *gamal*, “requite.”

Do not let go of Your handiwork. The Hebrew verb has a concreteness diluted by the conventional translation as “forsake.” The verb *hirpah* means to relax the muscles of the hand so that what it holds is dropped or released. The speaker, as a human creature, reminds God that he is God’s own handiwork. The use of the “hand” component in all likelihood encouraged the poet to choose this particular verb. God is thus implicitly figured as a potter (as in Genesis 2) who is implored not to loose his hand and allow what he has made to fall and shatter.



For the lead player, a David psalm. 1
LORD, You searched me and You know, 2
It is You Who know when I sit and I rise, 2
You fathom my thoughts from afar. 2
My path and my lair You winnow, 3
and with all my ways are familiar. 3
For there is no word on my tongue 4
but that You, O LORD, wholly know it. 4

1. *LORD, You searched me and You know*. These words inaugurate one of the most remarkably introspective psalms in the canonical collection. Although the invocation of bloody-minded enemies in verses 19 and 20 indicates a connection with the psalms of supplication, this poem is essentially a meditation on God’s searching knowledge of man’s innermost thoughts, on the limitations of human knowledge, and on God’s inescapable presence throughout the created world. The reflection on the wonder of man’s creatureliness in verses 13–16 is reminiscent of Job 10, and certain linguistic features of the Hebrew recall if not Job directly then the late period in which Job was composed.

3. *My path and my lair You winnow*. The word represented as “lair,” *rov’a*, is unusual; interchangeable with the root *r-b-ts*, it generally indicates the place where an animal lies down. The verb here, from the root *z-r-h*, reflects an extension of its agricultural meaning, an extended sense also in usage in English (“winnow” in the sense of “to analyze and critically assess”).

5 From behind and in front You shaped me,
and You set Your palm upon me.
6 Knowledge is too wondrous for me,
high above—I cannot attain it.
7 Where can I go from Your spirit,
and where from before You flee?
8 If I soar to the heavens, You are there,
if I bed down in Sheol—there You are.
9 If I take wing with the dawn,
if I dwell at the ends of the sea,
10 there, too, Your hand leads me,
and Your right hand seizes me.
11 Should I say, “Yes, darkness will swathe me,
and the night will be light for me,

5. *From behind and in front You shaped me.* The verb could also mean something like “besiege,” “bring into straits,” but the sense of shaping or fashioning like a potter seems more likely here, especially as the poem moves ahead to the imagining of the forming of the embryo in the womb. In this understanding, “You set Your palm upon me” is not a menacing act but rather the gesture of the potter.

9. *If I take wing with the dawn, / if I dwell at the ends of the sea.* Some interpreters have understood this as a simple indication of east and west (a different Hebrew term for “dawn” means “east,” and “sea” can sometimes mean “west”). The image of the line, however, is more vividly mythological than that. The speaker imagines taking wing with the dawn as it appears in the east, then soaring with the sun on its westward path to the limits of the imagined world, “the ends [singular in the Hebrew] of the sea.”

11. *darkness will swathe me.* This fantasy of being enveloped in darkness picks up the idea of bedding down in Sheol, the underworld.

and the night will be light for me. That is, I will immerse myself in darkness, acting as though the pitch-black of night could be my light, could serve instead of the illumination of daylight existence.

Darkness itself will not darken for You, 12
and the night will light up like the day,
the dark and the light will be one.
For You created my innermost parts, 13
wove me in my mother’s womb.
I acclaim You, for awesomely I am set apart, 14
wondrous are Your acts,
and my being deeply knows it.
My frame was not hidden from You, 15
when I was made in a secret place,
knitted in the utmost depths.

13. *innermost parts.* The literal meaning of the Hebrew is “kidneys.” Though the kidneys are generally thought of as the seat of conscience in the Bible, the context here (see the parallel verset, “wove me in my mother’s womb”) suggests that in this case the term is a synecdoche for all the intricate inner organs of the human creature. The location in the womb is associatively triggered by the idea of being enveloped in darkness expressed in verses 11 and 12.

14. *for awesomely I am set apart.* The Hebrew *ki nora’ot nifleiyti* is not clear. Most interpreters understand *nifleiyti* as a variant spelling of *niflei’ta*, a verb whose root means “wonder” and render it here as “wondrously made.” But there is scant evidence that this verb can mean “wondrously made” rather than simply “was wondrous.” Spelled as it is with a *heh* and not an *aleph*, the verb means “to be set apart” or “to be distinct.” That meaning might be appropriate for the speaker’s reflection on how he evolved in the womb from an unformed embryo to a particular human being with the consciousness of his own individuality.

15. *knitted in the utmost depths.* The literal sense of the Hebrew phrase is “in the depths of the earth.” With the movement from the enveloping darkness of a cosmic netherworld to the womb earlier in the poem, at this point there is an archetypal association between womb and the chthonic depths. (The Aramaic Targum renders this phrase flatly as *kereisa de’ima*, “mother’s womb.”) This translation chooses an English phrase that might suggest both womb and netherworld.

- 16 My unformed shape Your eyes did see,
and in Your book all was written down.
The days were fashioned,
not one of them did lack.
- 17 As for me, how weighty are Your thoughts, O God,
how numerous their sum.
- 18 Should I count them, they would be more than the sand.
I awake, and am still with You.
- 19 Would You but slay the wicked, God—
O men of blood, turn away from me!—

16. *and in Your book all was written down.* The Hebrew is obscure—an obscurity compounded by the introduction of a plural (literally, “they all are written down”).

The days were fashioned. The textual difficulties continue. If the received text is correct, it might mean “the future days of the child to be born were already given shape in the womb.”

not one of them did lack. The enigmatic Hebrew text says literally, “and not one in them.” The verb “did lack”—in Hebrew, this would be *yehsar*—is added as an interpretive guess.

17. *weighty.* The Hebrew root *y-q-r* more often means “precious,” but the sense of “weighty” registers an Aramaic influence, reflecting the late composition of this psalm.

18. *I awake.* The effort of many modern interpreters to link the verb with *qets*, “end,” is dubious, because *heqitsoti* elsewhere always means “I awake.” What the poet may be imagining is that after the long futile effort of attempting to count God’s infinite thoughts, he drifts off in exhaustion, then awakes to discover that God’s eternal presence, with all those endless divine thoughts, is still with him.

19. *God.* The name used here is *’eloah*, which occurs only in poetry and is especially common in Job.

- Who say Your name to scheme, 20
Your enemies falsely swear.
- Why, those who hate You, LORD, I hate, 21
and those against You I despise.
- With utter hatred I do hate them, 22
they become my enemies.
- Search me, God, and know my heart, 23
probe me and know my mind.
- And see if a vexing way be in me, 24
and lead me on the eternal way.

20. *say Your name.* The Hebrew says only “say You,” but “name,” as the parallelism with swearing falsely (the same idiom as in the Decalogue) indicates, is implied.

21. *those against you.* Some scholars, with an eye to the symmetry of expression, prefer to read—instead of the Masoretic *tequmemekha*—a noun cognate with the verb, *mitqotetekha*, “those who despise You.”

23. *Search me, God, and know my heart.* The echo of verse 1 marks a closure through envelope structure.

my mind. The Hebrew says “my thoughts,” but because a different word is used from the one that occurs in verses 2 and 17, the translation opts for “mind.”

24. *vexing.* Others understand this as “idoltrous,” but the word for “idol” is *’etsev*, whereas the form appearing here, *’otsev*, would usually mean “pain,” “sorrow,” “vexation.” Wayward thoughts are imagined to vex God.

lead me. The very verb that in verse 10 had an ambiguous sense, perhaps of entrapment, here at the end is wholly positive.

JOB Chapter Three

1. Afterward, Job opened his mouth and cursed his day. 2. And Job spoke up and he said:

3. Annul the day that I was born
and the night that said, "A man is conceived."

4. That day, let it be darkness.
Let God above not seek it out,
nor brightness shine upon it.

5. Let darkness, death's shadow, foul it,
let a cloud-mass rest upon it,
let day-gloom dismay it.

6. That night, let murk overtake it.
Let it not join in the days of the year,
let it not enter the number of months.

7. Oh, let that night be barren,
let it have no song of joy.

8. Let the day-cursers hex it,
those ready to rouse Leviathan.

9. Let its twilight stars go dark.
Let it hope for day in vain,
and let it not see the eyelids of dawn.

10. For it did not shut the belly's doors
to hide wretchedness from my eyes.

11. Why did I not die from the womb,
from the belly come out, breathe my last?

12. Why did knees welcome me,
and why breasts, that I should suck?

13. For now I would lie and be still,
would sleep and know repose

14. with kings and the councilors of earth,
who build ruins for themselves,

15. or with princes, possessors of gold,
 who fill their houses with silver.
16. Or like a buried stillbirth I'd be,
 like babes who never saw light.
17. There the wicked cease their troubling,
 and there the weary repose.
18. All together the prisoners are tranquil,
 they hear not the taskmaster's voice.
19. The small and the great are there,
 and the slave is free of his master.
20. Why give light to the wretched
 and life to the deeply embittered,
21. who wait for death in vain,
 dig for it more than for treasure,
22. who rejoice at the tomb,
 are glad when they find the grave?
23. —To a man whose way is hidden,
 and God has hedged him about.
24. For before my bread my moaning comes,
 and my roar pours out like water.
25. For I feared a thing—it befell me,
 what I dreaded came upon me.
26. I was not quiet, I was not still,
 I had no repose, and trouble came.

JOB Chapter Seven

1. Does not man have fixed service on earth,
and like a hired worker's his days?
2. Like a slave he pants for shade,
like a hired worker he waits for his pay.
3. Thus I was heir to futile moons,
and wretched nights were allotted to me.
4. Lying down, I thought, When shall I rise?—
Each evening, I was sated with tossing till dawn.
5. My flesh was clothed with worms and earth-clods,
my skin rippled with running sores.
6. My days are swifter than the weaver's shuttle.
They snap off without any hope.
7. Recall that my life is a breath.
Not again will my eyes see good.
8. The eye of who sees me will not make me out.
Your eyes are on me—I am gone.
9. A cloud vanishes and goes off.
Thus, who goes down to Sheol will not come up.
10. He will not return to his home.
His place will not know him again.
11. As for me, I will not restrain my mouth.
I would lament with my spirit in straits,
I would speak when my being is bitter.
12. Am I Yamm or am I the Sea Beast,
that You should put a watch upon me?
13. When I thought my couch would console me,
that my bed would bear my lament,
14. You panicked me in dreams
and in visions you struck me with terror.
15. And my throat would have chosen choking,

- my bones—death.
16. I am sickened—I won't live forever.
Let me be, for my days are mere breath.
17. What is man that You make him great
and that You pay heed to him?
18. You single him out every morning,
every moment examine him.
19. How long till You turn away from me?
You don't let me go while I swallow my spit.
20. What is my offense that I have done to You,
O Watcher of man?
Why did You make me Your target,
and I became a burden to You?
21. And why do You not pardon my crime
and let my sin pass away?
For soon I shall lie in the dust.
you will seek me, and I shall be gone.

PROVERBS Chapter Seven

1. My son, keep my sayings,
and my commands store up within you.
2. Keep my commands and live,
my teaching like the apple of your eye.
3. Bind them on your fingers,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
4. Say to Wisdom, "You are my sister,"
and call Discernment a friend.
5. To keep you from a stranger-woman,
from a smooth-talking alien woman.
6. For from the window of my house,
through my lattice I looked down,
7. and I saw among the dupes,
discerned among the young men a witless lad,
8. passing through streets, by the corner,
on the way to her house he strides,
9. at twilight, as evening descends,
in pitch-black night and darkness.
10. And, look, a woman to meet him,
whore's attire and hidden intent.
11. Bustling she is and wayward,
in her house her feet do not stay.
12. Now outside, now in the square,
and by every corner she lurks.
13. She seizes him and kisses him,
impudently says to him:
14. "I had to make well-being offerings,
today I've fulfilled my vows.
15. And so I've come out to meet you,
to seek you, and I've found you.

16. With coverlets I've spread my couch,
dyed cloths of Egyptian linen.
17. I've sprinkled my bed with myrrh,
with aloes and cinnamon.
18. Come, let us drink deep of loving till morn,
let us revel in love's delights.
19. For the man is not in his house,
he's gone on a far-off way.
20. The purse of silver he took in his hand,
at the new moon he'll return to his house."
21. She sways him with all her talk,
with her smooth speech she leads him astray.
22. He goes after her in a trice,
as an ox goes off to the slaughter,
as a stag prances into a halter.
23. Till an arrow pierces his liver,
as a bird hastens to the snare,
not knowing the cost is its life.
24. And now, sons, listen to me,
and attend to my mouth's sayings.
25. Let your heart not veer to her ways,
and do not go astray on her paths.
26. For many the victims she has felled,
innumerable all whom she's killed.
27. Through her house are the ways to Sheol,
going down to the chambers of Death.