

Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael Tractate Vayassa, Exodus 15:22

They travelled three days in the wilderness and found no water (Ex. 15:22). Rabbi Joshua says: This is to be taken literally.

Rabbi Eliezer says: But was there not water underneath the feet of the Israelites, since the earth is but floating upon the water, as it is said: *To Him that spread the earth over the water* (Ps. 136:6). How is it then that Scripture says: *And found no water*? This was simply to tire them out.

Others say: The water that the Israelites took along with them from between the clefts gave out at that time. Accordingly, what is the meaning of: *And found no water*? That even in their vessels they found no water, as when it is said: *Their nobles sent their servants for water; they came to the cisterns, they found no water. They returned, their vessels empty* (Jer. 14:3).

The allegorists say: *And found no water* - The words of Torah that are likened to *water*. And whence do we know that the words of the Torah are likened to water? It is said: *Ho, all that are thirsty, come for water* (Isa. 55:1). It was because they had been without words of Torah for three days that they became rebellious. It is for this reason that the elders and the prophets instituted the reading from the Torah for the Sabbath and for the second and fifth day of the week. How so? They read on the Sabbath, and they skip only one day after the Sabbath. Then they read on the second day and skip the third and fourth. Then again they read on the fifth day and skip the day preceding the Sabbath.

Babylonian Talmud *Baba Kama* 82a

(Context - a list of laws enacted by Ezra)

That the law be read [publicly] on Mondays and Thursdays. But was this ordained by Ezra? Was this not ordained even before him? For it was taught: *They travelled three days in the wilderness and found no water* (Ex. 15:22), upon which those who expound verses metaphorically said: water means nothing but Torah, as it says: *Ho, all that are thirsty, come for water* (Isa. 55:1). It thus means that as they went three days without Torah they immediately became exhausted. The prophets among them thereupon rose and enacted that they should publicly read the law on Sabbath, make a break on Sunday, read again on Monday, make a break again on Tuesday and Wednesday, read again on Thursday and then make a break on Friday so that they should not be kept for three days without Torah.