

# Isaiah 51:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name.

## Analysis

**But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name.** This magnificent declaration of divine identity and power serves as the foundation for God's promise to comfort and deliver His people from exile and oppression. The verse begins with the emphatic Hebrew construction **וְאֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ** (ve'anokhi YHWH Elohekha, "But I am Yahweh your God"), using the independent pronoun *anokhi* for maximum emphasis—literally "But I, I Myself, am Yahweh your God." This emphatic self-identification recalls God's revelation at Sinai (Exodus 20:2) and establishes His unique authority to make the promises that follow in verses 16 and 22-23.

The covenant name **יְהוָה** (Yahweh/LORD) reveals God's eternal, self-existent nature—the One who is absolutely independent, unchanging, and faithful to His promises. Combined with **אֱלֹהֶיךָ** (Elohekha, "your God") using the second-person singular possessive suffix, this becomes intensely personal: not merely "God" in abstract theological terms but "YOUR God"—personally committed, covenantally bound, intimately engaged with His people's circumstances. This is relationship language, covenant language, promise-keeping language. The God who speaks is not distant, uninvolved, or indifferent but personally pledged to His people's welfare and redemption.

The participle **רֹגַעַת הַיָּם** (roga hayyam, "that divided the sea" or "that stirs up the sea") describes God's sovereign control over chaotic waters—a loaded image in Hebrew thought where seas represented primordial chaos, threatening forces, and

powers opposing God's ordered creation. The verb *raga* can mean "stir up," "disturb," "calm," or "divide," with contextual meaning determining which translation fits best. Most English versions read "divided" or "stirs up," while some ancient versions favor "calms" or "stills." The ambiguity actually enriches the meaning: God has absolute authority over the sea whether stirring it to judgment, dividing it for deliverance, or calming it for peace. He commands the chaos; the chaos does not command Him.

This imagery unmistakably recalls the Exodus deliverance when God divided the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-22), enabling Israel's escape from Egyptian slavery while destroying Pharaoh's pursuing army. That defining historical event demonstrated Yahweh's unmatched power over nature, nations, and supposedly mighty empires. No Egyptian deity could prevent Israel's liberation; no natural barrier (the sea) could obstruct God's saving purposes; no military force (Pharaoh's army) could withstand His judgment. The divided sea became Israel's primary redemptive metaphor, constantly referenced as proof of God's power and covenant faithfulness (Psalm 74:13; 78:13; 106:9; 136:13; Isaiah 43:16; 63:12). By invoking this imagery, Isaiah 51:15 connects the exiles' future deliverance from Babylon with their ancestors' deliverance from Egypt—the same God who performed the one will accomplish the other with equal certainty and power.

The phrase "whose waves roared" (וַיִּהְיוּ גַלָּיו, *vayehemu gallav*) personifies the sea's tumultuous waves, emphasizing their threatening power and chaotic violence. The verb *hamah* means to murmur, roar, growl, or be in tumult—capturing both sound (the sea's roar) and motion (churning waves). Yet despite the waves' roaring, God controls them absolutely. This image appears frequently in Scripture to represent nations in uproar, enemies threatening God's people, or chaotic forces opposing divine purposes (Psalm 46:3; 65:7; Isaiah 17:12). The theological point: however threatening the chaos, however powerful the opposition, however overwhelming the circumstances, God remains sovereign. He who divided the roaring sea at the Exodus can and will deliver His people from any threatening power—including the Babylonian Empire that seems invincible to eighth-century hearers or sixth-century exiles.

The verse concludes with the majestic title יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ (YHWH Tseva'ot shemo, "The LORD of hosts is his name"). Tseva'ot (hosts) refers to armies, organized

forces, or heavenly multitudes—emphasizing God's absolute military supremacy as commander of all angelic armies and sovereign over all earthly powers. "LORD of hosts" declares God's universal authority over all created forces, whether heavenly or earthly, spiritual or physical, friendly or hostile. Every angel, every star ("host of heaven"), every nation and army exists under His supreme command. The phrase "is his name" (shemo) indicates this isn't merely a title but His revealed identity—the essential nature by which He makes Himself known and on which His people can rely. Names in Hebrew culture revealed character and nature; God's "name" is LORD of hosts—Sovereign Commander of all forces, guaranteed Victor in all conflicts, Protector of His people against all threats. When God identifies Himself as LORD of hosts, He stakes His reputation, His revealed character, His essential nature on His ability and commitment to deliver His people. This is who He IS; therefore, this is what He WILL DO.

## Historical Context

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Isaiah 51 continues the "Book of Comfort" (chapters 40-55), prophetic oracles addressing both immediate eighth-century circumstances and future Babylonian exile (586-538 BC). The chapter falls into a series of prophetic appeals beginning "Hearken unto me" (vv. 1, 4, 7), calling different audiences (those pursuing righteousness, the people, those who know righteousness) to trust God's coming salvation despite present distress. Verse 15 grounds these appeals in God's character and past redemptive acts, providing theological foundation for confidence in future deliverance.

The Exodus deliverance—the divided sea, the roaring waves, the destroyed Egyptian army—formed Israel's core redemptive narrative and primary theological paradigm for understanding God's character and salvation. Every major feast (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits) commemorated aspects of the Exodus. Prophets consistently invoked Exodus imagery when proclaiming future deliverance (Hosea 11:1; Micah 6:4; Jeremiah 2:6). The divided Red Sea particularly captured imagination as the ultimate demonstration of Yahweh's power over chaos, nature, and hostile nations. Archaeological evidence confirms Egyptian military strength during the likely Exodus period (13th century BC under Rameses II), making Israel's escape and Egypt's defeat humanly impossible—

precisely the point. Only supernatural intervention could accomplish what the Exodus narratives describe.

For eighth-century hearers facing Assyrian threats, Isaiah's invocation of the Exodus provided crucial perspective. The Assyrian Empire (911-609 BC) was the ancient world's most brutal military machine, documenting their conquests in vivid reliefs showing impaled victims, piled skulls, and mass deportations. Assyrian annals boasted of conquered peoples' suffering. The northern kingdom Israel fell to Assyria in 722 BC, with 27,290 citizens deported according to Sargon II's records. When Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 BC, he claimed to have conquered 46 fortified cities and shut up Hezekiah "like a bird in a cage" (Sennacherib's Prism, discovered 1830). Archaeological excavations at Lachish confirm the siege's violence through destruction layers and mass graves. Against this overwhelming threat, Isaiah proclaimed: the God who divided the roaring sea and destroyed Pharaoh's army remains "LORD of hosts"—sovereign over Assyria as over Egypt. Sennacherib's subsequent mysterious withdrawal after 185,000 soldiers died overnight (Isaiah 37:36-37; 2 Kings 19:35) vindicated this prophetic confidence.

For sixth-century exiles reading these prophecies during Babylonian captivity, verses like 51:15 addressed profound theological crisis. How could they trust Yahweh when Jerusalem lay in ruins, the temple was destroyed, Davidic kingship had ended, and they languished in pagan Babylon? Weren't Babylon's gods more powerful? Hadn't Marduk defeated Yahweh? Isaiah's answer: remember who your God IS—the One who divided the sea, whose essential nature is "LORD of hosts." If He delivered from Egypt, He can deliver from Babylon. If He destroyed Pharaoh's army, He can humble Nebuchadnezzar's empire. Past redemption guarantees future salvation because God's character and power remain unchanging. The Cyrus Cylinder (discovered 1879) confirms that Cyrus II of Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BC and decreed exiled peoples could return home—precisely as Isaiah prophesied over a century earlier (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1, 13).

New Testament writers saw Exodus typology fulfilled in Christ's greater redemption. Jesus is the new Moses leading a new exodus from slavery (now to sin, death, and Satan rather than Egypt). His death and resurrection accomplish the ultimate "divided sea" deliverance, destroying the enemy army (sin, death, hell)

while bringing God's people safely through to promised inheritance (eternal life, resurrection glory). Paul explicitly connects Christ's death to Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). Hebrews presents Christ's work as the reality prefigured by Exodus events (Hebrews 3:1-6). Revelation depicts final judgment and eternal salvation using Exodus imagery including a "sea of glass" before God's throne and the song of Moses and the Lamb (Revelation 15:2-4). The God who divided ancient seas divided death itself through resurrection, revealing His ultimate identity as "LORD of hosts"—Commander of life, death, time, eternity, and all created forces.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

## Study Questions

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1. How does remembering God's past redemptive acts (like the divided Red Sea) strengthen your confidence in His ability and willingness to address present seemingly impossible circumstances?
2. What 'roaring waves' or overwhelming circumstances in your life currently feel more powerful than God, and how does His identity as 'LORD of hosts' challenge that perception?
3. In what ways does your life demonstrate trust (or lack thereof) that the God who performed the Exodus can deliver you from present bondage to sin, fear, or adverse circumstances?
4. How should God's covenant commitment ('I am the LORD thy God'—personal, not generic) affect your approach to prayer, worship, and daily trust in His promises?
5. What would change in your attitude toward current trials if you truly believed that 'LORD of hosts is his name'—that all forces, circumstances, and powers exist under His sovereign command and serve His redemptive purposes?

## Interlinear Text

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| וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם |
| roared                | the sea               | that divided          | thy God               | But I am the LORD     | whose waves           |
| H1993                 | H3220                 | H7280                 | H430                  | H3068                 | H1530                 |
| וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם |
| is his name           | of hosts              | But I am the LORD     | whose waves           | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם |
| H8034                 | H6635                 | H3068                 | H1530                 | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם | וַיִּהְיֶה מִן הַיָּם |

## Additional Cross-References

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**Jeremiah 31:35** (References Lord): Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name:

**Isaiah 54:5** (References God): For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

**Isaiah 47:4** (References Lord): As for our redeemer, the LORD of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel.

**Isaiah 51:10** (Parallel theme): Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?

**Psalms 74:13** (Parallel theme): Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters.

**Psalms 136:13** (Parallel theme): To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever:

**Jeremiah 10:16** (References Lord): The portion of Jacob is not like them: for he is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: The LORD of hosts is his name.

