

Psalms 77:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.

Analysis

Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. The psalm's closing section (verses 16-20) recalls the exodus, and this verse captures both the glory and the mystery of God's ways. Having moved from despair to memory, Asaph now contemplates divine transcendence.

"Thy way is in the sea" (bayam darkekha, בַּיָּם דַּרְכְּךָ) recalls the Red Sea crossing. God's "way" or path led directly through the sea—an impossible route made possible by divine power. The Hebrew derek denotes a road, path, or journey. God's road ran where no road could naturally exist.

"Thy path in the great waters" (ushvilkha bemayim rabbim, וּשְׁבִילְךָ בַּמַּיִם רַבִּים) parallels and intensifies the first clause. Shevil is a narrower term for path or track. The "great waters" (mayim rabbim) could refer to the sea or to primordial chaos waters that God conquered in creation. Either way, God walks where no creature can.

"Thy footsteps are not known" (ve'iqvotekha lo noda'u, וְעֵקְבוֹתֶיךָ לֹא נֹדָעוּ) adds profound mystery. Iqvot means footprints, traces, tracks. Though God led Israel through the sea, no footprints remained to trace His path. The waters closed, leaving no visible evidence of the route taken. This speaks to divine transcendence: God's ways can be experienced and trusted without being fully comprehended or mapped.

Historical Context

The exodus dominated Israel's memory as the paradigmatic act of divine salvation. When prophets promised future deliverance, they often used exodus imagery (Isaiah 43:16-19, 51:9-10). When psalmists sought to encourage faith, they recalled what God did at the sea.

The image of God walking through the sea connected to ancient Near Eastern cosmology, where the sea represented chaos and cosmic opposition. By walking through the sea, God demonstrated sovereignty over chaotic forces. The Babylonian creation myth (Enuma Elish) depicted Marduk defeating the sea goddess Tiamat. Israel's theology was more radical: Yahweh didn't merely defeat the sea but walked through it, using it as His path.

The "hidden footsteps" theme has profound theological implications. God's ways are often inscrutable (Romans 11:33). We trust not because we understand fully but because we remember what God has done. Mystery is not the absence of God but the depth of His presence beyond our comprehension.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does it mean that God's way is 'in the sea'—in places where no path seems possible?
2. How does the image of God walking through chaos waters encourage faith during turbulent times?
3. What is the significance of God's footsteps being 'not known' even though His presence is real?
4. How does this verse balance confidence in God's action with humility about understanding His ways?

Interlinear Text

בַּיָּם	דֶּרֶךְךָ	וְשִׁבִּילֶיךָ	בְּמַיִם	רַבִּים	עֲקֵבוֹתֶיךָ
is in the sea	Thy way	and thy path	waters	in the great	and thy footsteps
H3220	H1870	H7635	H4325	H7227	H6119
לֹא	נִדְעוּ:				
H3808	are not known				
	H3045				

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 14:28 (Parallel theme): And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.

Nehemiah 9:11 (Parallel theme): And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters.

Habakkuk 3:15 (Parallel theme): Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.

Psalms 97:2 (Parallel theme): Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.

Psalms 29:10 (Parallel theme): The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever.

Romans 11:33 (Parallel theme): O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!