

Beshelach **When He Let Go** **Free At Last, Thank G-d Almighty We Are Free at Last**
Torah: Exodus 13:17-17:16
Haftarah: Judges 4:4-5:3
Brit Chadashah: Revelation 10:1-20:6 (obviously and error- see I Corinthians 10:1-5)

After what must have been an exhausting year, filled with uncertainty and tension, Pharaoh finally admits defeat and lets our people go. It is quite amazing that even after 400 years, they did not assimilate and part of it may have been the persecution and prejudice they encountered. In the last portion we see that a large group of Egyptian converts, called the mixed multitude, come out with them. Some of them were persons of colour.

The big challenge now, was how to get a large undisciplined multitude from Egypt to the Holy Land. They are first to be taken to the Holy Mountain where they are to go through a Covenant Ritual, so that both all the darkness of Egypt can be removed and to prepare them (vaccinate them), so that none of the darkness of Canaan can find its way into the camp.

There are 70 elders who give the people spiritual guidance, but there is no political leadership to organize the people and help them get out of bondage without a lot of confusion. They were literally woken up in the middle of the night and only took what they could carry. They probably had tents and some carts, for the very young and the very old. They also had to find a way to herd their livestock, so that nothing of value was left behind.

The big question is which body of water they crossed on their journey to get out of Egyptian held territory. At that time, Egypt was protected on the east by both a series of Philistine fortresses and a substantial salt water marsh, called the sea of Reeds. The Red Sea was also called the sea of Reeds because the word for red and reed were the same. They would not have crossed the portion of the Red Sea that separated Egypt from the Arabian peninsula because in places it reached a maximum depth of some 2,800 meters and could be as wide as 340 KM.

The salt water marsh on Egypt's eastern frontier has since dried up, but in the time of Moses it provided Egypt with an impassible barrier that no army could cross. Now, understand me when I say that YHVH could have parted the Red Sea if He had wanted to, but we have to distinguish between what He can do and what He actually did. After they cross the Sea of Reeds, the House of Israel travelled along the western shore of the Suez until they turned and headed inland when they were parallel to Mount Sinai. I am not placing limits on what YHVH could do, I just want to understand what it is that He actually did.

As their journey begins, a cloud is formed which shades them during the day, and which turned into a pillar of fire at night, so that they could march night and day. They needed to walk for seven days, before they were out of Egyptian territory, but all along the way, they never stopped to set up camp, which would have been quite time consuming. When they halted, the people would have just lay down and slept, catching what little sleep they could.

The Egyptians kept tabs on their progress and reported to Pharaoh that they were camping next to the Sea of Reeds, an impassible salt marsh. They were trapped and could be surrounded, because there was nowhere for them to go, since the marsh was blocking their journey eastward.

Pharaoh has a change of heart, probably because his rule was threatened and it would have been over for his regime unless he could capture the Jews and bring them back into slavery. He took his whole army with him and he probably thought he could overwhelm the people, kill their leadership and anybody else who resisted. Those who survived his assault would be too crushed to give the Egyptians any more trouble.

When the people see the Egyptian army approaching, they knew they could not outrun it and would be slaughtered if they tried to scatter. They wanted to surrender rather than face annihilation. Moses told them to stand firm and the cloud and fire angel, moved to the back of the camp and did not let the Egyptians come close, as the people made a run for the Sea of Reeds. Moses lifted up his staff and extended his hand towards the sea and the waters melted and formed two walls on either side of the people. A mighty wind came and dried the newly exposed ground.

The Israelites would have had quite the time herding their flocks into the newly opened gap, but YHVH slowed down the pursuing Egyptians until the entire camp had made it to the other shore. Pharaoh may have thought that his gods were finally defeating the G-d of the Jews and refused to flee, even though his camp was being stalled by chariot wheels falling off. Once the people are safely through the salt marsh, Moses did the ritual in reverse and the returning waters drowned the pursuing army, so that not one of them escaped.

Without an intact army, Pharaoh's regime could not impose its will on the people and there was likely a civil war until a new regime was able to get control of the battered country.

The relieved House of Jacob broke into song, led by Moses and we still sing part of their song every Shabbat: Mi Kamocha – who is like you YHVH). It was likely broken into verses, because Miriam and the tambourine ladies sang the refrain (the horse and rider thrown into the sea).

They walked three more days into the wilderness and came to a well or a small lake filled with bitter water, which neither they nor their flocks could drink. The people murmur against Moses for a second time and YHVH indicated a solution. A tree or large bush is placed into the water and they become sweet (not sugary, but drinkable). The people take their first extended break since leaving Egypt and the waters do their job. The water acted like a diarrhetic and the people are purged of all the parasites they might have brought with them out of Egypt. They are promised that YHVH would not strike them with any of the plagues He brought upon Egypt, as long as they walk with YHVH according to all that He asked of them.

They have their flocks with them, but they have run out of any of the food they brought with them out of Egypt. They complain to Moses for a third time. They are given manna in the morning and quail at night. From the text, it is likely that they did not get quail every night, but they are told to collect the manna six mornings a week. On Friday, they are given a double portion of manna, so that they can rest and not labour on the Sabbath. They could still prepare their food, but they were not to gather it. They were also not to keep any of this heavenly food overnight.

Those who tried to collect manna on the Sabbath went hungry and even though they could keep the extra manna over night on Friday. Those who tried to keep it over night on any other day of the week, found that the bread quickly rotted and became full of worms. The people were given manna six days a week for the entire forty years they wandered in the wilderness.

The land they were wandering through had little or no surface water and when the people reach Horeb and find no water, in their thirst, they are ready to stone Moses. YHVH indicates a rock to Moses, which gushes with water when he strikes it. During the wandering years, this provision was either repeated or the people dug wells when they camped in one spot long enough. This is an unlikely possibility since the people never knew how long they would be allowed to stay at any one camp site. Just because we are not told how they were given water during the 40 wandering years, they obviously were given water.

Wow, they had a cloud by day and a beacon of fire by night. They got manna in the morning and always had enough water to drink. Later, we learn that their clothes did not wear out and their feet never swelled, but at this early stage the people were just getting used to relying on the L-RD. Have you gotten used to relying on YHVH in your life?

The Sinai was sparsely populated, but a group of known bushwhackers, the Amalekites, somehow found them and they have their first military action since leaving Egypt. They are not skilled warriors, but as long as Moses lifted up his hands, their war leader, Joshua, slaughters the Amalekite army. Since there was no good reason for this raid, YHVH says that there will war between Him and the Amalekites until their memory is erased. It is going to take time, but here, as in every other spiritual battle, the L-RD will always be our banner to bring us victory over those who assault us (YHVH Nissi).

Sermon: Getting it Right: Proactive Spirituality

Passage: “Be careful to walk with positive caution and not as fools, but as wise people. Redeem the time for the days are evil. That is why, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the L-rd is. Do not be drunk with wine, for that is debauchery. On the contrary, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with Psalms, with hymns and by songs from the Spirit, singing and celebrating with all your heart the praises of the L-rd. Continually give thanks to G-d the Father for all things in the name of our L-rd Yeshua Hamashiach, submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of the Messiah.” (Ephesians 5:15-21)

Paul was a passionate teacher and a lively preacher. Once he fully integrated his faith in the Messiah into every part of his life, he took this balanced, proactive spirituality with him as he visited many congregations which were full of new believers, Jew and Gentile. It is not always very easy to get it right in the Messiah and carnal believers and immature believers are a great barrier to our faith and they clog up congregations and prevent them from growing spiritually.

Paul is not calling us to be perfect and to never make any mistakes. He wants us to strive to be mature and to learn to deal with our mistakes. All of us have unique temperaments, with various strengths and weaknesses, but we all have the same calling – to use proactive spirituality so that we learn to get it right. This may take a lot of time and energy, but without this commitment to walking with wisdom in the L-rd, we will become choked and shrivelled and not be a garden where the fruit of the Spirit is cultivated.

As a young believer, I heard the story of a Hindu mystic who asked a missionary to give him a copy of the New Testament. Shortly afterwards he took it and threw it at the missionary's feet. Take your book, every time I read it, it kicks me. Are you letting the Bible kick you?

The Torah has the same kicking power as the New Testament and lets not forget the prophets, the Psalms and the other writings in what is called the Old Testament. But just because we receive our salvation, the moment we come to faith in the Messiah, it does not mean that we will automatically become spiritual.

Our people left Egypt and as they wandered around on their journey to the Holy Land, Moses had to work very hard to get Egypt out of them. They had picked up some pretty bad Egyptian habits and Moses wanted to train them, so that they would not pick up any bad Canaanite habits when they finally entered the land.

Paul had a lot of bad theological baggage when he came to the faith and the world he lived in was full of some pretty sophisticated forms of paganism. It was not an easy job or a quick fix for the people he led into the faith. He wanted them to walk with positive caution, becoming filled with wisdom and not sinking into spiritual or moral folly. The Bible is very clear about our need to walk with both faith and obedience and we need to learn to walk the bumpy straight and narrow and not get stalled or sidetracked by the lies and the deceit that the enemy wants to infect us with.

Positive caution is really different from negative paranoia or passive apathy. We cannot live on constant red alert, but we need to maintain a healthy early warning system so that we can recognize spiritual attacks when they come and not be done in by them. We need a very well maintained spiritual "Iron Dome" defence system in order to neutralize the attacks of the enemy, before they can do us any real damage.

We know that the enemy, the world and the flesh will always try and devise new, subtle ways of getting through our spiritual defences, to render us ineffective and too damaged to be any good in the service of our beloved Messiah. However, we have to know how to recognize an actual threat and not waste our ammunition dealing with product of our imagination or false alarms.

It may seem funny, but when radio first came out, it was considered to be an instrument of the devil for the destruction of naive believers who foolishly let it into their homes. The television was considered an even a bigger threat because so much of it was considered to be carnal propaganda. Then came the internet and all the various forms of social media.

But, most believers and many ministries came to adopt these means of communication to share their faith and to encourage and teach other believers. We cannot hide ourselves away from anything which may try and influence our lives, because a gun only becomes dangerous when a criminal shoots it. The misuse of the Bible can also be just as dangerous.

Some believers take the opposite approach and do not exercise caution in what they watch and what they listen to. We live in a spiritually dangerous world and there are many enemies who would like to sink us or put us out of commission. Paul wants believers to use positive caution, which does not mean being so focused on possible threats that we run blindly into the fox's cave when there is no real danger.

The days are evil and our world is darkening, but we should be focused on redeeming the time. But what does that look like? Should we spend every Waking hour on our knees or glued to our Bibles? Are we really wasting our time and energy when we are not pouring our hearts out in prayer or trying to solve biblical riddles?

The will of G-d is something better and bigger than that. Regular Bible Study should be a staple of our lives on a daily basis. Consistent and constant prayer should also be a daily habit. But time we spend relaxing and taking care of our personal needs is not time wasted. I was led to faith by a rather fanatical group that wanted to maintain military discipline in every area of our lives. So we were either attending meetings, praying, studying our Bibles or sharing our faith all the time.

When I first met Patti, she wanted us to go to a performance of Handel's Messiah and I thought it would be a waste of time which could better be used on more spiritual pursuits. I reluctantly agree to go, and spent the whole performance looking up the verses in Bible it was based on. Every activity and every conversation needed to be looked upon as a potential ministry opportunity and nothing was done that did not have an active ministry component. That is not what is meant by redeeming our time. It was an exhausting way to live and I quickly burned out and had to learn to slow down and not feel that every situation was a spiritual conflict I had to fight my way through in order to win and be a good soldier of the Cross. Being hyperactive is not the same as being proactive.

We do live in a society which is slipping more and more into immorality and substance abuse, but if we see our lives as a relentless battle against the forces of evil and darkness, we cannot be effective for our Messiah. Now, I want to recognize a ministry situation when it arises and not turn every conversation and every situation into some kind of spiritual Amway moment.

Being filled with the Spirit means allowing all the peaceful fruit of the Spirit to bloom and not become like Moses before his father-in-law stepped in. He spent all day, every day listening to the questions and problems of the people and it was a very inefficient way of helping them make the transition from slaves to disciples of YHVH. Down time is an important feature of successful spiritual warfare and self care is not a waste of time and energy.

Paul goes on to make a comparison between drunkenness and being filled with the Spirit. They need to be seen as contrasting experiences and not as different versions of the same thing. Some Pentecostal and Charismatic people preach that being filled with the Spirit is somehow like being drunk in the Spirit. They shout and scream and jump and bounce around as if being filled with the Spirit was just a kind of spiritual drunkenness. It is not.

Now there is nothing wrong with being excited and enthusiastic and we shouldn't always walk around frowning, with a sour look. We should live our lives wisely and recognize the L-rd in every situation of our lives. When Israel camped around the mountain or wandered under the cloud and the fire, they developed a balanced lifestyle based on the festival cycle and we should do the same. Always living on red alert can be quite exhausting.

I want to always be conscious of the L-rd's presence, without trying to fill every moment always being aware of Him. An eastern Orthodox monk, once came up with a way to say the name of the Messiah 10,000 times each day, but all I think he achieved was a constant state of hyperventilation and not a close walk with the Messiah.

We need to talk to each other with Psalms and hymns and not fill our lives with the folly of our fading age, but it does not mean you are wasting your time if you are not constantly praying and studying the Bible. Around 30 years ago, I went through a bad burnout by not taking good care of my needs and the needs of my family. I was in charge of 18 reserves, was teaching in three different colleges at the same time and had a weekly radio program.

I was either preaching all the time or I was sleeping, because there was always too much to do. My health began to fail and I resigned from my spiritual treadmill and came back to Alberta to recover. For quite a while, reading my Bible made me physically sick and I just started to cry whenever I prayed. I was tired all the time and did not want to be around people. I just did not know what to do to recover. However, I gradually began to relax.

Someone gave us a black and white TV and after I did my preparation work for the next school day, we would sit down as a family and watch TV. I felt guilty, but I had to learn to relax and calm down or my health would really collapse. Then a funny thing started to happen.

As I watched shows like Star Trek, suddenly the room would seem to grow quiet and G-d spoke to my heart through what was being said on the television. I began to relax and to build spiritual balance in my life. I began to be able to read the Bible again and I could pray without crying. Being stuck on red Alert is no way to walk with the L-rd and even combat soldiers have to take a step back when they develop battle fatigue.

I want to fill my heart and my life with Psalms and Hymns and Songs of the Spirit, but not to the exclusion of some healthy self care. I love to read (reread) a good book. I love to take walks, either alone or with my patient wife. I want to give thanks to the L-rd in everything, but this does not mean that I am wasting my time and sinning if I am not constantly praying and trying to bring the L-rd into every conversation and activity in my life.

Proactive spirituality means not letting the darkness of this world infiltrate our lives. It also means redeeming our time because the days we are living in are getting progressively darker. But if we live our lives on constant red alert, we will eventually collapse, not because the enemy has succeeded in infiltrating our lives, but because we are overheating on our way to self destruct.

I knew of a preacher who could not relax. If he did not have something to do for the L-rd, he would just fall asleep in a chair because he was constantly on the verge of physical collapse. He was not a good role model to follow. I want to work hard for the L-rd and it is true that there are so many things to do and so many people to reach – and questions to answer and good deeds to be done, but we are not called to be a one man show who tries to get everything done by ourselves. We need to be proactive members of a team.

We need to celebrate our Messiah with all of our heart, but that does not mean always singing and praising every moment that we are awake. We are also called to give thanks to the Father for all things in the name of the Messiah, but that does not mean we cannot have some down time and relax as part of our regular spiritual lifestyle. When you come to my home, you will not always catch me praying and studying, but these are regular parts of my life. We worship and study on Shabbat, but we also need to take time to rest

I like to engage people in conversation, but I am not always looking for a way to share my faith. I know someone who feels that they have to make a gospel presentation with everyone they encounter. People shut down and get hostile if we become relentless and are always on the verge of sharing our faith. Now, I always want to be ready and willing to share my faith, but downtime for self care is also important. I will deal with the last verse in another sermon. May the L-rd help us to be proactive and not just hyperactive! Shabbat Shalom.