

PARASHAH: B'shallach (After he had let go)
ADDRESS: Sh'mot (Exodus) 13:17-17:16
READING DATE: Shabbat
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*Updated: January 29, 2006

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

**"I will sing to ADONAI, for he is highly exalted: the horse and its rider he
threw into the sea."**

**"Sing to ADONAI, for he is highly exalted! The horse and its rider he threw
into the sea!"**

These are the jubilant words of Moshe and his sister Miryam the prophet as they express their praise at the miraculous rescue of Am Isra'el (People of Isra'el) by HaShem (15:1, 21). We all know the story: Pharaoh had finally released them, allowing them to travel into the desert to worship their God, but as soon as he and his fellow Egyptians "came to their senses," they took up after them in hot pursuit, intending to reverse the situation. HaShem knowing the glory that was due his mighty name had led the mixed multitude by the way of Yam Suf (the Sea of Reeds, also known as the Red Sea). This was no ordinary wandering, for indeed, the text tells us that it was the Angel of the LORD, who is the LORD himself, which took the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When the Egyptians finally overtook them at the seashore, it was then that the Holy One performed his mighty work, and drove the sea back on either side, allowing them to cross over on dried ground. When the Pharaoh and his armies followed in pursuit, HaShem released the waters and they were all destroyed, both horse and rider!

Traditions

A couple of interesting features dot this story of the most miraculous deliverance in the history of Isra'el. They are not readily found in the text of the Torah itself, but, rather, they have been preserved in the traditions and memories of the people who have been through it. According to tradition, when the Pharaoh followed Moshe into the sea, he did not meet his demise when the waters came crashing back into one single mass. Instead, he escaped destruction by turning his chariot back around to the point of origin, thus, only his henchmen died that awful day. For the sake of teaching purposes, the tradition goes on to say that instead of eventually dying, he in fact, lives forever at the gates of Sh'ol (hell) and persistently warns all of the evil kings and earthly rulers that come that way, "Why did you not learn from my example? Don't you know that to resist the Holy One of Isra'el is utter chutzpah (sheer foolishness)?!"

Although we recognize that this is merely a teaching tool, and not to be taken literally, the lesson remains rooted in our lives and hearts today: the Torah has been given to us so that in learning of its examples, we might learn from its examples and serve our Mighty God in a closer walk with him. The lives of the people in the Torah have been preserved for us today, that we might not make the same foolish mistakes as some of them. Captured within the pages of its examples is the ultimate lesson that remains timeless: "I AM ADONAI," says the LORD (14:4, 18).

Of this song that they sang in chapter 15, it is interesting to notice that the Hebrew word translated "sang," in verse one, is in the future tense. Here is what the rabbis have to say about this peculiarity:

The Torah uses the future tense [yashir], *will sing*. In the plain sense, the term means that upon seeing the miracle, Moses and the people decided that they *would* sing. From this use of the future tense, the Sages derive a Midrashic allusion to the principle that God will bring the dead back to life in Messianic times—and then they *will* sing God's praises once again (Rashi).¹

Of this particular song, the New Covenant has this to say,

"And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, [and] over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song

¹ *The Chumash*, Stone Edition, ArtScroll Series (Mesorah Publications, 1993, 1994), p. 376 (emphasis theirs).

of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous [are] thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true [are] thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For [thou] only [art] holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest" (Rev. 15:1-4, KJV, emphasis mine).

How marvelous that the redemption of God's elect began during this season of Passover, the beginning of the seasons of prophetic provision for his chosen ones, signified by the singing of this song. Likewise, the ultimate redemption of his people will also take place when the final culmination of the Wrath of HaShem is meted out to his enemies (possibly a final Yom Kippur; see the context involving the Temple and the Ark of the Testimony in verse 5), during the final judgments of those last days, and signified by the singing of this very song.

Another lesson preserved within the stories of the Jewish People is the tradition that as the people observed the horses and riders drowning in the Sea of Reeds, as they began to rejoice, that HaShem became saddened, and scolded them. "How can you rejoice at the death of my children? For even Pharaoh and his armies are my children also." This causes us to recognize the fact that our Great Heavenly Abba is compassionate beyond our comprehension. Even though the King of Egypt willfully hardened his heart against the Holy One, it was not our Maker's original intent to destroy him. Indeed as I have stated elsewhere, as taught in the Torah, our God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance! Our LORD is not a "killing machine," ready to strike down all that oppose him. To be sure, he has demonstrated his patience and abundant mercy time and time again throughout the pages of the Torah. The option to turn from his wickedness, unto repentance, was offered to Pharaoh time and time again, yet he chose to refuse. Ours is a lesson in humility and fear: if he did not spare those evil men who persistently refused to surrender under the almighty hand of the Almighty personified, how much more will he not spare us, who have been given the revelation of the Son of God and the free gift of the Ruach HaKodesh who testifies of him (a short drash of Romans 11:21)?

Yes, even though our God demonstrated mightily through the Pharaoh and his armies that "there is none like him among the "gods" (mighty), and that there is no other like him in sublime holiness, praises, and wonders (15:11), he is in fact a loving God that desires genuine fellowship and a living relationship with each and every one of his created sons and daughters. We need to keep this in perspective as we study the Torah, especially the portion that we call the "Old Testament." For we in the Church today tend to reduce the God of the "old" to a "holy terror" and a merciless manslayer, while at the same time, we pit him against the God (his Son) of the "new" who is much more gentle, loving, and forgiving. In reality, the Father and the Son share the exact same purpose, divine will, and character. We have been given a glimpse of the judgment of God in the TaNaKH; we have been given a glimpse of his mercy in the B'rit Chadashah.

Finally, another feature lost in the translation from the original Hebrew text of this particular parashah, but preserved in the memories of the Jewish People is the structure that the Masoretes, the preservers of the written text, have cast chapter 15 in. To see this feature, one needs to obtain a copy of the original Hebrew text, as it is presented in any standard Chumash (a version used in many synagogues, containing mostly the Torah portions and their haftar'ot) or in many other versions of the TaNaKH (the one by ArtScroll, for example). The words are laid out in a "brick" pattern, suggesting the awesome fact that the waters stood up on either side of the people that day as a "wall" that held back the destruction of the sea. This visual reminder forever captures the idea that the Word of HaShem (displayed on the page as the "wall" of Hebrew words and letters) protected the people not only from the onslaught of the Pharaoh and his wicked soldiers, but it preserved them in the midst (that is, within the depths and death) of the Sea of Reeds! Moreover, once the people had crossed over safely, the same "wall" that protected them, came crashing down upon their enemies! To be sure, as soon as we finish reading verse 19 of the story in chapter 15 (the destruction of Pharaoh's armies), the "bricked" pattern returns to a normal structure with the beginning of verse 20.

The True Cornerstone

I want to make my own drash out of this story: the Torah teaches elsewhere that in the beginning the Word existed. In the fullness of time, the Word became a human being and dwelt among men. The purpose of this Word is twofold: all those who will "fall upon" it will find life everlasting; all those upon whom the Word itself falls, will meet their destruction! The choice is ours: will we "fall upon" the Word of HaShem, bringing about a real change in our spiritual makeup? Or will we resist the Word of HaShem, and bring its power "crashing down" upon us, resulting in our demise? Allow the Torah to speak for itself:

"Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16, KJV).

Of this "precious corner stone" it has also been explained,

"Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" (Matt. 21:42, KJV)

This verse quoted by Yeshua is found in the book of Psalms:

"The stone [which] the builders refused is become the head [stone] of the corner" (118:22).

Moreover, of this stone, Yeshua proclaimed,

"And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. 21:44).

Just like the "stones" of the "brick wall" of Sh'mot chapter 15, which protected the people as they made their way to safety, but came crashing down upon those wicked men, so the Stone which is Yeshua—the Living Torah—shall protect and save those who believe in HaShem unto righteousness! But this same Stone shall fall upon all the wicked men of humanity and grind them to powder!

The closing blessing is as follows:

***"Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-'Olam,
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v'chay-yeh o'lam nata-b'tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn."***

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

"Shabbat Shalom!"

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