

Parasha Be-Shallah (When He Let Go)
January 22, 2005/12 Shevat 5765

Torah: Exodus 13:17-17:16

Haftarah: Judges 4:4-5:31

Brit Chadashah: John 6:22-40 (Lederer)

Rev. 19:1-20:6 (Feinberg)

Today is Shabbat Shirah, the Sabbath of Song. There are no special Torah readings this week in addition to the ones already mentioned – there doesn't have to be. The Torah portion contains the Song of Moses, while the Haftarah has the Song of Deborah. Just as an aside, as someone involved in worship, I found this to be a very musical Parasha.

One of the biggest criticisms that I have heard from non-Believers towards Believers, is that we're a bunch of automatons who check our brains at the church door and blindly follow rules that we don't even understand. When I am faced with this attitude, I try to explain the concept that G-d gave us free will and we have a choice to do two things: 1) to accept G-d and His promises, and 2) to follow His Word. Being human as we are, we're not always consistent in our choices and experience times of doubt or backsliding. This week's Torah portion deals directly with the choices that we have and must make with regards to G-d and His place in our lives, and how to act on the knowledge that we have of G-d leading and directing us.

The Israelites have escaped Egypt and are making their way through the desert, lead by Moses. The Egyptians are hot on their trail. But the Israelites face a roadblock, quite literally – the sea. If they can't cross the sea, the Egyptians will catch up to them and kill them. People are asking Moses what to do, and he cries out to G-d.

Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the L-rd will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The L-rd will fight for you; you need only to be still."

Then the L-rd said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground." Exodus 14:13-16 (NIV)

An act of faith is sometimes just that – moving forward in fear, without knowing what the other end will bring. We turn to G-d for help and direction, but often the move we have to make is our own. He gives us the strength, the wisdom, the courage – but the initiative remains ours. While we are to “pray without ceasing,” (1 Thess. 5:17) at the same time, “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).

The Prophetic portion also features people bursting into song praising G-d for His miracles and protection. But in some of the verses there is also the theme, once again, of these blessings falling upon those who have chosen to follow Him:

"When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves- praise the L-RD ! Judges 5:2 (NIV)

"So may all your enemies perish, O L-RD ! But may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength." Then the land had peace forty years. Judges 5:31 (NIV)

In order to "let go and let G-d," (Psalm 46:10) we must make the choice to put Him at the center of our lives. Only then will be able to claim the promises He makes with those who enter His kingdom.

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. John 6:35 (NIV)

This does not mean that whenever are hungry, food will magically appear, any more then when we are poor, money will find its way into our wallets or bank accounts. We have to hold up our end of the bargain and take responsibility for our lives. Having "faith like a child," (Mt. 18:2-4) does not necessarily mean acting like one.