

Beshalach**When He Let Go****We're Still Marching to Zion****Torah:**

Ex. 13:17-17:18

(1) **13:18:** *"But G-d made the people take a detour by way of the wilderness towards the sea of reeds. The children of Egypt went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle"* They had been set free by the hand of the L-rd and He was preparing them for their part in the fight – always in His timing and under His supervision – are you letting Him choose your battles and letting Him tell you when it is time to take a detour?

(2) **13:21:** *"The L-RD went before them in the daytime in a column of cloud to guide them on their way, and at night in a column of fire to give them light, so that they could walk day and night."* They did not walk night and day until the Holy Land, only until they were out of Egyptian controlled territory. Sometimes we have to be in a hurry and our walk will be intense and arduous, until we are out of Egyptian held territory. How is your walk? Is there some Egyptian territory you need to skedaddle out of?

(3) **16:1:** *"All the assembly of the Children of Israel departed from Elim and arrived in the wilderness of Shin, which is between Elim and Sinai, the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from Egypt."* They walked for two and a half months before they got into the real wilderness, on their way to the mountain. Sometimes it takes time to get where we are going in the L-rd and we can't rush the process – we just have to plod along until He tells where to go next – or that we are ready for some real wilderness training. Are you plodding along or just dragging your feet, impatiently wanting to be somewhere he has shown you that you are not ready to be yet (not ready to face yet)?

(4) **17:16:** *"He said because the hand was lifted up against the throne of the L-RD, there will be war between the L-Rd and Amalek, from generation to generation".* There will always be ongoing spiritual combat in our lives that we will have to endure our entire lives, but as long as we remember that it is a combat between the L-rd and the enemy and not just between us and the enemy, we will see Him win the encounters and rescue the captives and drive off the marauders every time they come back to plague us.

Haftarah:

Jud. 4:4-5:31

(5) **4:24:** *And the hand of the children of Israel was heavier and heavier upon Jabin King of Canaan until they had exterminated Jabin King of Canaan."* An initial victory does not always mean the problem is dealt with or that it will go away with a single treatment. Sometimes it takes a long campaign of extermination for our problems to be dealt with thoroughly and completely. Are you letting the L-rd exterminate your problems or are they still chasing you around?

(6) **5:20:** *"From the heavens the battle raged and in their pathways, the stars fought against Sisera."* There will always be a heavenly component to every battle we face and as long as we do our part on earth, we can be assured that the L-rd and His angels will do their part. Are you doing your part?

Brit Chadashah: Rev. 19:1-20:6

(7) **19:14:** *“And the armies that are in heaven followed Him on white horses, clothed with fine, pure white linen.”* There is a day coming when the final battle between our Messiah and the forces of evil will be engaged from the3 heavenlies. As long as we are fighting here below, we can have confidence that He will bring it to its final, glorious conclusion when our enemies are vanquished forever. We are fighting a winning war, even if we lose a few battles. How are your battles doing?

Ps. 66 **Jewish Hero: Benjamin Netanyahu**
Tu B'Shvat **Shabbat Shireh** **Tenth Anniversary**

It is now ten years since our congregation got organized and it was an amazing process, full of joy and sorrow and progress and resistance. As we enter our second decade, I want to look at our fourfold Mission Statement, so that we know who we are and what kind of community we want to build and so that we can stay focused on why it is we came into existence and not lose touch with our core objectives.

As part of preparing for this, I looked over some of the documents we put together ten years ago and one of the features of our initial mission statement was that we wanted to build a safe, friendly Messianic community which “maintained the highest standards of integrity, morality and accountability” and where we were able to avoid “the unfortunate tendency of religious communities to splinter and expend unnecessary energy disagreeing and manoeuvring for control, while maliciously reverting to destructive behaviours”.

Over the last ten years, we have welcomed many visitors and we have seen people come into our midst for a while and then move on – some for practical reasons such as moving away – like the Wylie’s, the Jonas’ and the Brown’s, to name a few and others for reasons which at first troubled me, because I was worried that we have not done a good enough job at meeting their needs.

Two considerations then we will move onto our current fourfold mission statement. The Messianic Jewish movement is not for everybody and some people have difficulty relating to the distinctive lifestyle we lead – with Sabbath observance and festival observance and the use of Hebrew in maintaining authentic Jewish space while we retain a firm grip on our New Testament faith in the Messiah from Nazareth. So we lost some because we were too Jewish and we lost others because we emphasised the Messiah and the New Testament too much.

Others had personal concerns and previous baggage which we were helping them unpack and they found the process very difficult and they moved on with many of these issues unresolved, while others even retreated from participating in any spiritual community and put their spiritual lives on hold. Now I am glad to say that some found healing and answers to their questions and moved on to enrich communities in a more general Christian context and we are patiently waiting for others to come to their senses and in the process, we will keep our fourfold ministry focus and grow and make all the changes we need to bring us successfully through our next decade – especially now my health is coming back and I am not so sick all the time.

Once we became established and adopted our amazing constitution, we went through the ups and downs and encountered all the bumps and twists and turns (and turnovers) that all congregations encounter and

we have made some major changes and have retained some of the original features we first adopted as we got ourselves organized.

Several years ago, our elders were concerned that we did not have a clear enough focus of what we wanted to accomplish and wanted us to articulate a mission statement which would also serve as description of our unique spiritual identity as we deepened our understanding of what it meant to be a New Testament Messianic Jewish community of Jews and Gentiles in the midst of the spiritual confusion and spiritual compromise which seems to characterize our world more and more.

We wanted to be sure that we would always be a Bible based, Sabbath observing, festival driven community of Jewish and Gentile believers that acknowledges that Yeshua is the promised Messiah and celebrates this fulfillment of Torah in a Jewish lifestyle. A tall order, but one well worth the energy and the effort we have given it over the last decade.

Well what is this fourfold mission statement which describes what we look like as a community and where we are going on our corporate pilgrimage from conception to the grave into our Father's House in Glory?

We are a lighthouse. We are also a tree. We are also a bride. And we are also a repair shop. All of these roles work together in cooperation and are never in conflict or competition with each other. In celebration of our tenth anniversary, let me examine them each individually and as we gear up for Purim and for Passover, let us see how good a job we are doing at allowing these functions to be what our ministry is all about as we forge ahead into our next decade.

To misquote Buzz Light year, we will not be heading: ***to Infinity and Beyond***, we will always be heading to Infinity, beyond this world and this life, while we wait for our beloved Messiah to return from infinity and establish His eternal kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Why did we say that we were first a lighthouse? A lighthouse does not yell or spew tracts at passersby and try to argue people into the kingdom – there is enough of that on the radio, on the TV and more and more on the internet. We are a light which shines in the darkness and when people are attracted to it, we let it shine on them so they can understand who G-d really is and who they really are in this dark and confusing world.

We are Bible believing creationists who affirm the universal flood in the times of Noah, the exodus from Egypt, and the death and resurrection of our beloved Saviour and Messiah, in fulfillment of the Scriptures, because the children of Abraham have always been a great nation and have blessed all nations through our beloved Messiah.

How do we get this message out? We do so in several ways. We have a website and an internet ministry. We have weekly worship and Bible Study services. We have a Shabbat school and we follow the annual festival cycle.

Even more than this, we each shine in our places of work and in our neighbourhoods and when people see how we live, and how we talk, they come and ask us a reason of the hope that is within us, both as individuals and as a community.

How is your light doing? How is our light doing?

But people never stand still in this life and we are all changing and going through changes, and yet deep down we have a genetic imperative which defines who we are, physically, temperamentally and even spiritually and our success as people – and as a community of people, will depend on how well we grow into the potential which the L-rd placed in each one of us, and on how well we grow in our relationship with the resurrected L-rd, who first spoke to our ancestors in the garden, then in the ark, on the Holy Mountain and when He sojourned among us in the flesh.

We are a tree and each of us are branches grafted into the Messiah who grow by **spiritual disciplines** (prayer, study, fellowship, worship and outreach) and by **spiritual decisions** – by the values and the morality we maintain in the world we live in. Sometimes we will encounter storms which may rip branches off the trunk, but as long as the roots remain firmly planted in the rock and as long as the trunk continues to draw its sustenance from the Lamb, we will survive and thrive and grow our way back from any setbacks this life, this world or the enemy can throw at us, time and time again.

And this will always be to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, no matter how young or how old we are and no matter which valleys we descend into or which mountains we ascend on our generational journey to our Father's home in glory.

How is your growth doing? How is your recovery doing? How are your roots (how are our roots)? How is your trunk – your core (our core) doing? Are you letting the seasons of the Spirit guide you through the springs and summers and autumns and winters of your life?

Do you know what season it is now in the L-rd for you (for us)? Life is rarely easy, but solid growth needs to respond wisely to the climate we are placed in by the L-rd and by the decisions we have made as we do our best to grow, to recover and to survive/thrive. How about you?

But it is not all about outreach or about growing and changing, it is also about **celebration**, because no matter who we are and no matter what we are going through, forever we shall be part of the bride of the Lamb, spending eternity drinking from the river of life and eating of the tree of life in glory – and that is something we can always be singing about! We are stubborn worshippers who allow our personal and our corporate celebration of His goodness to be a refuge where we refuel and recharge – and where we escape from the things of this life and allow our spirits to drink in the things of the life to come.

This is a weekly discipline where we never allow what is going on in our lives to distract us from the life we will live forever when our journey is done. It is kind of like a look backwards and a look ahead so we can put our look around in perspective – where we learn to number our days and admit we have never seen the righteous forsaken or their seed begging their bread and where we know that since He is for us forever, in all things we are more than conquerors in Him, daily and constantly, from the moment we were conceived until we draw our last breath.

A good bride must keep her lamp filled with oil and her wick trimmed, so that when the Groom calls her, she is ready to go and is not so caught up with the temporary things of this life that she has lost her current grip on the things of the life which is to come. You see, Mishpocah, we have to be heavenly minded before we

are any earthly good. I know many of us feel that the words of that old spiritual were written for us: ***nobody knows the trouble I've seen***, but we also need to have the words of that great hymn constantly on our lips and in our hearts: ***Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!***

How is our bride function doing? How is your bride function doing? How good are you at praising Him for both who He is and for what He is doing – in your life and in the life of all the nations and generations of mankind – to the Jew first and also to the Gentile?

When all or any of these functions sputters, stumbles or starts to slip, we will all take turns needing our last function – because as individuals and as a community, we will always also be a repair shop (2 Cor. 1:3, 4), where healing and restoration will intervene and have more of an enduring impact on our lives than all and any of the circumstances we travel through on our pilgrimage through this life.

I have been severely ill for the last decade and it has not been fun. We have just lost a valued member of our community and too many of us have lost beloved family members and have encountered other rocky shoals which have come close to sinking us and many of us have come limping back into port in need of major TLC before we are ready to face life again.

That is not to say that we want to encourage weakness or allow people not to deal with their issues, but that we acknowledge that sometimes life can wound us, and even sometimes break us and that in spite of all of that, as believers, we know there is never a problem too big which our L-rd cannot help us to deal with successfully, both as individuals and as a community.

We also know that healing can take time, both physical and spiritual and that we need to set straight paths for our feet (and for the rest of us), so that how we live and how we recover and how we grow and how we celebrate and how we shine will make us better and stronger and not worse or weaker.

How about you? How is your healing coming?

How is your shining (our shining) coming? Do we need to renovate or upgrade any aspect of our lighthouse?

How is your growing (our growing) coming? Do we need to strengthen our roots and take care of our trunk – or hunker down when the winter winds blow and wait patiently for spring?

How are we growing – are we growing? Do we need to increase our spiritual disciplines? Do we need to strengthen our spiritual responses to the happenstances of our lives?

Are we celebrating the eternal goodness of our G-d and Saviour?

Do we let our heaven bound direction drive our lives? Are we spending enough time filling our lamps and fixing our wicks?

Are we looking for our beloved Groom and letting the things of this life regularly grow strangely dim or do we need to move back into a regular discipline of praise and worship as we watch this life whizzing by on our train to glory?

When we encounter loss, or pain or tragedy, are we letting the L-rd and our community help us to heal, or do we just sit in our little corner festering, grumbling and feeling sorry for ourselves, when we could be getting better, when we could be finding healing and comfort as part of a redemptive community?

We are a ***lighthouse*** with a pretty intense clear light, ready to face the next ten year and beyond!

We are a ***tree***, growing through all the seasons of this life as we bear fruit for our Master and allow His pruning to keep us in shape and free of dead wood – how about you?

We are a ***bride***, passionately in love with our Groom and constantly celebrating His goodness as we patiently and impatiently wait for His return in glory. How about you?

We are a ***repair shop***, fully equipped to handle all contingencies our sheep may encounter – either personally or by referral, so that we do not stumble, bleeding and bruised into the Kingdom, but walk together at the same pace through all the valleys and over all the mountains, recovering again and again with a wholeness which will not go away, but will keep coming back until all our wounds are treated and all our bones are set and all of our systems are functioning at their full potential, no matter how long it takes.

This is who we are and this is what we do.

How about you?

Have you found your place in the body of Messiah?

Have you found your place in the Messiah?

You are welcome to come alongside and walk with us because this is how we walk and what we are focused on and what we will remain focused on through every succeeding decade until the L-rd returns.

Let's pray.