

15 Shevat, 5777 (11/2/17) **Renewal of our Commitment to Our Gifting** J. M. Terrett

## **Beshalach                      When He Let Go                      We are on the Winning Side**

Torah:                                  Exodus 13:17 - 17:16  
Haftarah:                              Judges 4:4 - 5:31  
Brit Chadashah:                      Revelation 19:1 - 20:6

### **SHABBAT SHIREH Tu B'Shevat**

Reading:                              Jack p. 159 and Ps. 66  
Jewish Hero:                            Ishmael  
Torah Carrier:                        Bernie

This week's Torah portion deals with five exciting events: (1) the victorious crossing of the Sea of Reeds (2) the cleansing waters of Mara (3) The giving of manna in the morning and quail at night (4) water from the rock of Horeb (5) victory over the bushwhacking Amalekites.

The Haftarah portion deals with the victory over Jabin the Canaanite at hands of Devorah, Barak and Jael (the wife of Heber).

The New Testament portion deals with the final victory of the returning Messiah from two perspectives – first the passage talks about the final battle and then about His rule and reign among us, using the symbol of one thousand years (In the Bible one thousand is used to speak of the grace and mercy of G-d over all the nations and generations until He brings about the end of the world).

(1) The victorious crossing of the Sea of Reeds. At one time, the north end of the gulf of Suez ended in a salt water swamp, similar to the mangrove swamps which are sometimes found near the shore or at the mouth of rivers. This swamp was called the Sea of Reeds and was a treacherous place, considered functionally impassable. When our people left Egypt they headed south and had their first camp at the edge of this water barrier.

Pharaoh thought he had them cornered and pursued after them with his elite core of charioteers. The L-rd prevented the two camps from coming together and opened a way through the swamp for the people to escape. Pharaoh entered after the people, but his progress was continually hampered by the L-rd. The waters of the swamp formed a solid wall on either side of the fleeing crowd. Once the people were through the waters returned and drowned the Egyptian army. Moses composed a song of victory to commemorate this mighty victory and Miriam led the people in dancing and singing a chorus, which is why today is called Shabbat Shirah.

(2) The first place the people actually set up camp after their seven day flight from Egypt was at a place called Mara, where the bitter waters were undrinkable. Moses put a branch into the waters and the people drank this diuretic and evacuated all the parasites and sicknesses of Egypt.

(3) As they began their trip to the mountain, they wondered what they would eat, since they did not have time to pack supplies. They were provided with quail in the evening and a special kind of bread in the morning. It was called manna, which comes from the Hebrew phrase man hou (what is this?). Along the way they kept their first Sabbath as free people and were able to collect a double portion of

manna the day before the Sabbath began.

(4) Their journey was not from one oasis to another and at Horeb, they and their thirsty flocks demanded water to drink and in their distress they were ready to stone Moses and head back to Egypt. Moses was told to strike the rock and water came out for the people and for their flocks. It is not likely that it became a permanent spring, but it gushed as long as they were camped there.

(5) As they journeyed through the southern Negev, the stragglers were set upon by the Amalekites who specialized in ambush – suddenly striking and retreating, only to strike again until their enemies were divided and scattered. Moses went up on a hill and as long as his hands were held up, the people were able to defeat the bushwhackers and drive the remainder off so they could not bother them again. It is likely they also recovered the captives which their enemies had taken, though this is not specifically mentioned.

(6) In the time of the Judges, Israel displeased the Lord and a local Canaanite ruler oppressed them for twenty years. A nervous general, Balak and a courageous female Judge, Deborah, lead the hosts of the Lord, who stormed down Mount Tabor and overcame the chariot force which got bogged down in the dry, but soft soil. Sisera, their general fled to take refuge with Jael, the wife of a Kenite and she put a spike through his head as he slept. Israel turned the tables against Jabin until he and his Canaanites were destroyed.

(7) In the New Testament, we are given a glorious picture of the wedding feast of the Lamb and spectacular picture of His return, armed with a sharp sword to smite the nations. We also see the final defeat of the Beast and the false prophet, who are thrown into the lake of fire. The passage ends with the mention of a thousand year reign where the saints rule and the enemy is bound. This is mentioned after the final victory of the Lamb, so that we can see that during our own lives, we can exercise the rule and reign of the heavenly Messiah, until His return.

After this blessed period where those who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, shine and are salty, mention is made again of the Lord's final victory, not just over the Beast and the False prophet, but also over the devil himself, who is also thrown into the lake of fire.

The Book of Revelation uses 243 quotes from the Old Testament and is meant to show us how what happens in the heavenly impacts us on earth and what we do on earth can also impact the heavenlies. It mentions the end of the world more than once and lets us see various aspects of the spiritual warfare which surrounds us, but which can never completely engulf us.

Three stories of victory which should encourage us and give us confidence in the hand of the Lord to deliver us, both in times of great trials, and also when we run out of water as we wander through various spiritual deserts in our life. He will give us water to drink and food to eat and will even feed us with the hidden manna of His Word, as long as we walk with Him and do not succumb to the trials and tribulations through which we must wander on our journey to our Father's home in glory, because in Him, we are always on the winning side.

*Passage: "For as the body is one and has many members, and as all the members of the body, despite their number, form one body, so it is with the Messiah. We have all been immersed (baptized) into one Spirit, to form one body, whether we are Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – we have all been made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:2, 3)*

There is an aspect of our spirituality which is not always easily understood, but which is essential to our development, both as individuals and as a community and that is our corporate identity as individual members of a local congregation. You see we have all been given a role to play in our local community and part of what renewal means is to find and to reaffirm our place as essential parts of a local whole. It is kind of like realizing that we are just pieces of a local puzzle which the L-rd wants to put together.

This does not mean that unless the community is functioning well as a whole that somehow the will of G-d is being thwarted, but it definitely means that until we find our place of service together, that our potential as a dynamic community of gifted individuals cannot be fully realized. You see, part of our calling as individual believers is to be and the remain community members of a local congregation and not to become lost in that constant migration we talked about last week when we mentioned the perpetual circulation of the saints.

The apostle Paul ministered to a variety of local communities and each had its own flavour and each presented its own set of challenges and each became dynamic when its members pulled together and discovered their place in the local body of the Messiah.

I believe that G-d has a particular calling for our local community of Messianic Jews and Gentiles that can only be activated as each of us and all of us find our place in this body as part of a gifted team of special individuals who are learning to walk together as a flock and as a herd. We may have our differences, but we determine to have them together and not alone.

This team identity or team spirit is the place which G-d is blessing and is a major part of the local outreach we have to our lost and dying world. Some believers spend their entire pilgrimage through this life without finding or activating their place in a local community and never learn how to benefit from the team spirit which the L-rd is calling all of us and each of us to embrace. This is because who we are as part of a local community of believers which is just as important as who we are as individual believers, and the two are inseparable.

We are all unique individuals with special talents and special needs which can only be fully accessed and met when we function as part of a local team and our participation will either bless everyone else as everyone else blesses us, or we will keep bumping along, unfulfilled, not realizing our special team potential. Do you know who you are called to be in our dynamic local body of believers, whether you function as a Messianic Jew or a Messianic Gentile?

I want the Spirit of G-d to move in our midst, but not just so that we are noisier or so that we see more charismatic manifestations, even though signs and wonders are part of what G-d wants to do in our midst. But you see, that is part of what He is going to do in our midst as we learn to pull together and work together and activate our dynamic group, team identity.

His power and His activity in our midst will both depend on our ability to work together and will always move us towards becoming a community of praise and fellowship, because that is His will for each of us and for all of us, day by day, week by week, month by month, as we cycle through the festivals, year by year on our journey to our Father's home in glory. It is never a problem when a group of strong individuals comes together, unless this group has members who compete against each other instead of learning to work together and have not learned the wonder and the power which comes from placing our individual strengths and talents at the disposal of the common good.

You see each of us receives both an individual calling, where we come to the L-rd and allow Him to dwell in our hearts and lives by faith, and also a corporate calling where we learn to adopt a flock mentality and find our place of participation in a local community of believers. One voice can sing loudly and with great volume and gusto, but the voice which the L-rd really wants to world to hear is a chorus which sings in harmony, from the cradle to the grave and it is this corporate voice which our congregation exists to build and to develop.

We have lots of things we are trying to get done in our community, as we move through the festivals and experience the various life transitions which will enrich us and cause us to grow in both strength and numbers. Said another way, we have a place for everybody and we want everybody to find their place. Our public ministry cycles through three weekly meetings with seven annual holy days which we rejoice in every spring and every fall, along with two extra celebration times which help us make it through our mighty Canadian winters, but that is only part of the picture.

We all have our homes and our personal and neighbourhood witness as we go about the business of living and this is just as important as our participation in the public life of our shul. And truly our spiritual success and progress will depend on how well we balance our private spiritual lives with our participation in the public life of our dynamic community. It takes a considerable amount of effort to pull our services together and to prepare for our seven plus two special celebrations, especially when there are also a considerable number of personal issues which keep traipsing through our lives and which can be prone to do their best to throw us off our spiritual balance.

We cannot make sustained spiritual progress, either as people or as a community, unless this balance between our private lives and our public spirituality remains in balance, and these parts of our lives are not allowed to compete against one another.

We want to promote official membership so that we know who we can call on to help with all the initiatives which the L-rd is calling us to undertake. We need workers in every one of our departments and ministries. We are quite firmly flexible in how we encourage people to engage in this essential community participation, especially since we constantly and consistently aim for dynamic cooperation as we avoid needless competition. No one is the king of the castle, except the L-rd and we will all take turns being the dirty rascal.

We want to meet the needs of our children and prepare them for that awesome, scary launch into adulthood and not lose them when they struggle with all the temptations and rabbit holes which their years as young people will try and snare them with. We want to see our excellent worship team always be able to find new and ever awesome music as new members bring their talents to this essential function of our public worship.

We want to show consistent hospitality to our newcomers and to our old timers so that everyone who attends one of three weekly services senses how much we care about them and are glad to see them, whether they are having an awesome week or are going through a deep valley. Through our prayer line and our website (and our Facebook page), we want to stay in touch with each other during the week and discover the marvellous potential which deepening friendships in the L-rd offer to those who take the time to develop them.

We are also part of a bigger picture, both in Alberta and around the world and we want to stay in touch with all that the L-rd is doing in Israel and around our busy, changing world. But we want to do this from a firm, active participation in our local body, so that we do not lose ourselves among all the

internet and media voices which are competing for our attention.

Now you understand that there are many good ministries which we support and recognize, because the job of reaching our world will always be bigger than what the efforts of a single person or a single community or even a single ministry can hope to achieve.

But remaining rooted in the L-rd personally and locally is still our primary double calling and is the place where we are known and cherished and where we can be held accountable and not get caught up in things which will drain our resources, or which will pull us into depths which are above our heads and cause us to drown.

All that glitters is not gold and there are ministries out there which teach false doctrine and do not have very good scruples and whose bottom line is after your bottom dollar, because they want to turn you into enthusiastic, but passive supporters and fans instead of equipping and enriching you as active disciples.

A local community can also act as a sounding board so that we do not become too full of ourselves or become too isolated and easy for the enemy or the world or the flesh to pick off. There is a big, sad difference between a lone wolf and a lone sheep and guess which one wins in a tussle? He is roaming the world as a roaring lion, seeking for those whom he can devour and is especially targeting social media such as the internet, looking for new and unconnected victims to snare and take and twist and break.

Being involved with real people in real time as part of a dynamic community of praise, which is focused on Bible Study and prayer will spare us from much hurt and loss at the hands of those who will aim the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in our direction. The Bible asks if two can walk together except they are agreed, because some level of cooperation and understanding is needed. But it also states that two are better than one, so that if one falls, the other can pick him up and a threefold cord is not easily broken.

We will all take turns needing to be picked up and if we are woven into a strong cord, none of us need be broken, because learning to walk together is part of what it means to learn to walk with the L-rd in agreement and not in contention and dispute. G-d has gifted each of us for all of us and when we understand that our gifting is for the common good, then we see that our community participation has the potential to help us grow and heal in ways which our individual spirituality is not equipped to handle.

We have access to one G-d, who is our only true Father. Our salvation and forgiveness comes from a single source, which is our blessed Messiah and Saviour. Our gifting and our togetherness comes to us from the only Spirit in this world which is Holy and able to renew us and revive us again and again.

We are individual members, called to form a single body of gifted, united believers and when we came to faith we were immersed into a single Spirit, who wants to guide us and bless us, separately and especially together. This is so that we grow together into both a sanctuary which is a safe haven from the storms of life and into a collective, salty light which is reaching out to the darkness dwellers who are prowling around our lives, hungry for the truth of which we are guardians.

There are a lot of things which we are doing as a growing community of gifted individuals and there is a lot more we could do as more people realize their call to grow and become involved as members of

our local body. This is the vision we want to promote and the one which G-d will renew for us repeatedly so that our flock life binds us together and we never lose our way or suffer loss because we have functionally become spiritually dismembered – a meandering part which is not really part of a spiritual whole. The voice of the Spirit is calling us to explore and to become involved in this communal life as part of a local body of believers.

Any gift or enabling He empowers us with is not solely for our own benefit, because, whether we are Jewish, or Gentile, slave or free, the Spirit we have been immersed into will only satisfy our spiritual thirst as we learn to drink of Him together and not just run around doing our own thing.

The Corinthian church had so much wasted potential, not because there were not enough gifted people, but because instead of being a well connected flock, they were all running around doing their own thing, stepping on each other and bumping into each other and knocking the whole community off balance.

Our strength and growth and renewal will not come to us as we repeatedly scatter and head for the hills. It will only come to us as we send down community roots and become involved with other imperfect, limited people who are willing to pool their giftedness as they let the Spirit mould them, heal them and weave them together as part of the flock He is blessing and using to accomplish G-d's purposes in our lost and dying world.

Sure He can bless us and guide us as individuals, but this is only part of the story and there are heights and depths we will never reach on our own, because they are only available when we become part of a dynamic spiritual community.

Sure there will be challenges and even heart breaks and set backs but until we learn to function in community, there are things about the L-rd and about His Spirit which we will never learn because He only teaches them to active members of the flock which He is leading through the valleys and over the mountains of this life. Green pastures, overflowing cups and tables which are set in the presence of our enemies are the sole communal domain of the sheepfold and are only available to believers who are learning to access their community oneness.

We are called to be one in Him together and not to stumble or skip along by ourselves, just doing our own thing and not really getting the wonder and the glory of the generational body of believers He is calling us to join, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Without exploring and restoring our community giftedness, we can never sustain a lifestyle that is truly Sabbath powered or festival driven.

This is because walking with the L-rd is never a "do it yourself" endeavour we can experience in our own little corner. Even more importantly, you can never truly understand what it means to be an individual in the L-rd and in the world, unless you are connected to a community which serves and worships the L-rd in the world.

Oneness with Him involves at least two people, and since we acknowledge that our G-d is a three-in-one individual, we also need to acknowledge that we can never be truly and fully one with Him until and unless we are actively and solidly one with each other.

Have you found your place in our midst? Are you willing to place your giftedness at our community's disposal? We are certainly willing to place our community giftedness at anyone and everyone's disposal. Will you pray with us so that we can grow our togetherness and our oneness and see many

more lives changed, renewed and dynamically empowered by it?

Hanging around with other sheep is the best way to really get to know the shepherd, because His hand and His blessing are on the sheepfold as well as on each sheep and lamb and there is a big part of what He is doing which cannot be experienced or understood except as a participating part of the flock.

How is your flock life doing?

How is your renewal doing?

How is your giftedness doing?

Do you see how all three are so interconnected and really cannot work well without each other?

Let's pray.