

Parashat Beshallach

Exodus 13:17-17:16

FEBRUARY 7, 2020



SUMMARY

This week we read about the Israelites leaving Egypt and heading into the wilderness. G!d goes with them, appearing as a pillar of cloud during the daytime and as a pillar of fire at night. After setting them free in last week's *parasha*, Pharaoh changes his mind and goes after the Israelites with the army. The Israelites find themselves trapped between Egyptian warriors and the Sea of Reeds.

G!d tells Moshe to hold his staff out over the sea, and when he does, the sea splits! The Israelites cross over on dry land and then the sea closes up on the Egyptians as they are still crossing. Miriam and Moshe lead the people in musical celebration. This is the *parasha* where we read *Mi Chamocha! Sheerat HaYam* (The Song of the Sea) is chanted with a special melody and is written in the Torah in a brick-like pattern. This week's *Shabbat* is known as *Shabbat Shirah*--the *shabbat* of song.

Three days into their wilderness journey, the Israelites complained about not having water to drink. When they came to *Marah*, the water they found was bitter, so they complained to Moshe. G!d showed Moshe a piece of wood to throw into the water to sweeten it--making it drinkable for the Israelites. The Israelites then complained of hunger so G!d sent birds to be eaten as meat and also sent *mannah*.

The Israelites were told to gather and eat just what they needed of the *mannah*, but some tried to gather more and to save it. By the next day it smelled terrible and became infested with insects. On the sixth day, they were told to gather double the amount of *mannah* and save half for Shabbat. That *mannah* stayed fresh the next day. Once again, the people find no water. G!d tells Moshe to strike a rock to bring water out of it. The Israelites are attacked by the tribe of Amalek, but with G!d's help, they defeat their attackers.

From Our Commentators:

Ramban

... וחמושים עלו בני ישראל

ויש אומרים (ראב"ע) שספר הכתוב שיצאו ביד רמה וחשבו להיות גאולים, ולא הלכו כדמות עבדים בורחים:

And there are those that say [that the reason for the phrase is] that the verse is telling us that they left 'with a raised hand' and they considered themselves redeemed people, and they did not walk like slaves who ran away.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- 1) If G!d chose not to lead the Israelites the short way to the Promised Land--through the land of the Philistines, because G!d feared that the Israelites might have a change of heart and want to return to Egypt when they saw war, then why would the Israelites need to carry weapons with them on their way out of Egypt?
- 2) If G!d didn't want to Israelites to have a chance of heart and choose to return to Egypt when they saw war with the Philistines, then why would G!d lead them on a route where they get stuck between the Egyptian army and the Sea of Reeds--where they have a change of heart and complain to Moshe about ever leaving Egypt?
- 3) After all they have seen and experienced, why would the Israelites break every single rule they were given for gathering and eating *manna*?