

FEBRUARY 7, 2020

Parashat Beshallah

Exodus 13:17-17:16

Taught By:

Isaac & Malaya

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.

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?

ISAAC: Maybe they took weapons because, although G!d doesn't want them to have to go to war, the Israelites wanted to be prepared just in case there is fighting. They may be thinking ahead and not want to be caught in a situation where they have to choose between being killed or running away back to Egypt.

MALAYA: I liked what the commentator Ramban taught--that the Israelites left slavery confidently and that taking weapons with them showed this confidence. The Israelites may have seen that one way that Egyptians showed their confidence was through use of weapons against the Israelites, so they expressed their freedom in the same way. Ramban said that the Israelites left Egypt armed and with their hands raised up, like free people, not running away like slaves.

2) If G!d didn't want to Israelites to have a change 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?

ISAAC: Maybe G!d leads the Israelites this way because G!d knows that the Egyptians will come to chase after them and wants to show the Israelites, by drowning the Egyptians, that there are consequences for enslaving the Israelites and for trying to keep them in slavery. Or maybe G!d *wants* them to have a change of heart about leaving Egypt and then do one more miracle--parting the Sea of Reeds--just for the Israelites, to earn their trust and help them see how powerful G!d is.



3) After all they have seen and experienced, why would the Israelites break every single rule they were given for gathering and eating *mana*?

MALAYA: Maybe they're still thinking like Egyptians--they are used to listening to Pharaoh, but maybe they still have a hard time listening to G!d or Moshe. Or maybe they're just testing their freedom and are doing what they think makes sense instead of what they are told to do.

ISAAC: Maybe they are practicing their freedom by testing G!d. Maybe they want to see if G!d will actually enforce the rules about mana with consequences.