

# TORAHSCOPE: B'shalach (When he let go)

by Mark Huey posted 18 January, 2008 www.outreachisrael.net

Exodus 13:17-17:16  
Isaiah 27:6-28:13; 29:22-23

## "Complaining Slaves"

"The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness...and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumbings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?" (Exodus 16:2, 7).

In *B'Shalach*, the people of Israel are finally allowed to leave Egypt and depart for the long awaited sojourn to the Promised Land. At last, after the ten plagues have devastated Egypt, Pharaoh succumbs to Moses' pleas and "lets the people go" to the wilderness to worship the Lord. The first few months of the journey from the bondage of slavery to freedom is recorded with some of the most memorable events in the history of Israel.

The great miracles of deliverance and provision are described in great detail. Pillars of clouds and pillars of fire lead the people from place to place. The incredible parting of the Red Sea and the subsequent destruction of Pharaoh's army is highlighted and then punctuated with a memorial song and celebration. Of course, in any desert trek, water and food problems are critical. Here, we are told about sticks of wood that make bitter water sweet. At another juncture, Moses obeys the instructions of the Lord and strikes a rock with his staff and the water flows. The introduction of manna to Israel's daily diet is described in great detail. Finally, quail is included for the sustenance of the people.

In many respects when one remembers the events in this Torah portion, the primary thoughts are of deliverance and provision. In these Scriptures, there are many visible and tangible testimonies of God's unconditional love for Israel. On the other hand, there is another theme that cannot be overlooked. When you consider some events you also discover that these particular people have one very consistent negative tendency. Even in this period of incredible signs and wonders, no matter what miracle or sign had just taken place, the people of Moses' generation would grumble and complain about their circumstances. This propensity was very bothersome. After all, when you consider the future of this generation, you are reminded that only two of the adults (Joshua and Caleb) actually make it into the Promised Land.

What was the problem with these people? Did they lack faith? How could people who were firsthand witnesses to these incredible miracles be such complainers? Was there something about this group of Israelites that generated such negative tendencies? As I meditated upon this predisposition, I kept going back to the different instances recorded in this portion to see if there was some discernable common thread that could explain this penchant for complaining. Four times, references comparing life back in Egypt seemed to surface. I asked myself if it were possible that the Israelites had developed a slave mentality. Right from the opening lines of the portion an indication of their problem is mentioned:

"Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, 'The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt'" (Exodus 13:17).

From the very beginning of this transformation from bondage to liberty, the Holy One knew He was going to have to monitor His children all the way. The more direct route to Canaan would cause them to encounter the Philistines, who would aggressively resist their migration. The Lord knew that His people did not have the stomach for war. They had just spent several centuries in Egypt, most recently as slaves, and they were not strong enough to encounter the hardship of conflict. Additionally, God had to demonstrate to the Israelites that it was He alone who could deliver them from slavery and their enemies. The Holy One wanted the Israelites to be dependent upon Him and Him alone.

Within a few days of them leaving, we see that the heart of Pharaoh changes and he orders his chariots to turn back the Israelites. Here is how the Israelites reacted when they were confronted by a mere 600 chariots:

“As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. Then they said to Moses, ‘Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, “Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians”? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness” (Exodus 14:10-12).

This is hard to imagine. At this point, the Israelites have been following a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, but now they are encamped by the sea without any escape route. How could several hundred thousand people be frightened by 600 chariots? Is it because they had a slave mentality that did not give them the confidence to stand up and fight for their freedom? As you read their complaints to Moses, you can understand that they would much rather be in the comfort of their former homes in Egypt. Incredibly, the Lord uses this pitifully weak complaint to bring about His deliverance. He parts the Red Sea and then lets the Egyptian charioteers all drown as the water returns. The Lord instructs Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea and then watch the waters part:

“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea *back* by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided” (Exodus 14:21).

Again, God demonstrates in a very powerful way that He wanted the Israelites to depend upon Him for salvation and deliverance. The Lord did not disappoint!

About a month later, the people begin to complain about the lack of food. Once again the reference to Egypt is in the forefront of their minds:

“The sons of Israel said to them, ‘Would that we had died by the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Exodus 16:3).

In order to handle this complaint, God brings down a regular supply of manna. To top this off, He also gives them a feast of quail. As the provision continues, the Israelites are beginning to understand that the Lord is their provider. As the Scripture relates, this specific provision continues for forty years.

Finally, the fourth major complaint again references the comparison to Egypt when the Israelites have traveled to Refidim:

“Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water that we may drink.’ And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?’ But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, ‘Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’ So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, ‘What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me” (Exodus 17:2-4).

At this point, the Israelites are again confronted with a challenge that generates grumbling, and even quarreling. This time the lack of water is the issue. The Lord instructs Moses to strike a rock with his staff and the water would flow forth. Moses does this and the water flows.

Interestingly, it appears that the Israelites are now ready for some battling with the dreaded Amalekites. Something has happened to them. Is it possible that through the various tests and trials, they had begun to trust in the Lord for His deliverance and provision?

In some respects, the challenges of the Israelites coming out of the slavery of Egypt are not too different from our individual walks with the Lord. As Believers in Yeshua the Messiah, we are all coming out of bondage to sin. As we struggle with that deliverance, there are times when we are prone to wander. Early in our walks we do not often have the intestinal fortitude or sometimes knowledge to stomach the battles against sin. In a loving way, the Father often steers us

away from the temptations that He knows would let us return to sinful ways. He also knows that learning total dependence upon Him is crucial to handling the spiritual battles of life. At times, He will allow us to witness His deliverance from situations that might seem impossible. These victories give us greater confidence to press further into Him for even more provision and deliverance.

Finally, it is important that we learn from the mistakes of the Ancient Israelites in the desert. Their slave mentality gave them a propensity to complain and grumble about many of the trials and tests they faced. Even though they had eyewitness accounts of the deliverance and provision of the Lord, from their actions and statements you can conclude that many would prefer to be back in Egypt.

Let us be Believers in the God of Israel who desire to be and function as free people who willfully choose to be slaves to Him, and not to our former life in sin. In Him we have not only our provision, but also our deliverance and salvation!

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