

Shavua Tov

Weekly  Parsha

A Rood Awakening! Torah Commentary
By Glenn McWilliams

Torah Portion: *Beshalach*

בשלה

“He sent forth”

When Pharaoh let the people leave, God did not lead them along the Philistine Highway¹, although it was the shorter route. God's consideration was that if the people encountered armed resistance, they would lose heart and return to Egypt

Vayehi beshalach Par'oh et-ha'am velo-nacham Elohim derech erets Plishtim ki karov hu ki amar Elohim pen-yinachem ha'am bir'otam milchamah veshavu Mitsraymah

Scripture for study:

Shemot (Exodus) 13:17 – 17:15



Our Torah portion this week marks a significant transition in the life of the children of Israel. We witness in the opening chapters of our portion the grand conclusion of the standoff between Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt, and YHWH ELOHIM, Ruler of the Universe. The standoff began when Moses appeared to Pharaoh and demanded that Pharaoh release the children of Israel that they might go to serve YHWH their Elohim in the wilderness.

“And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith YHWH ELOHIM of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.” (Exodus 5:1)

But Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt, was not to be so easily bossed around by Moses, Aaron or their Elohim.

“And Pharaoh said, Who is YHWH, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not YHWH, neither will I let Israel go.” (Exodus 5:2)

From this moment on the conflict of wills began to play itself out in a most dramatic fashion. The Hebrew word *shalach* (Shin, Lamed, Chet), which is evident in the title of our portion, *beshalach*, means “sent,” or “let go,” and plays a very prominent role in this conflict. We should note its early appearance in the story of the exodus. In the beginning of the story it is Moses being “sent” to the children of Israel in Egypt to carry forth the Redeemer’s charge before Pharaoh.

“Come now therefore, and I will send (shalach) thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” (Exodus 3:10)

“And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent (shalach) thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve Elohim upon this mountain.” (Exodus 3:12)

“And Elohim said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent (shalach) me unto you.” (Exodus 3:14)

“And Elohim said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, YHWH ELOHIM of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, hath sent (shalach) me unto you.” (Exodus 3:15)

We witness the centrality of the word *shalach* as it appears repeatedly at the heart of YHWH’s demand to Pharaoh.

“And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith YHWH ELOHIM of Israel, Let (shalach) my people go...” (Exodus 5:1)

“And thou shalt say unto him, YHWH ELOHIM of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let (shalach) my people go...” (Exodus 7:16)

“And YHWH spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith YHWH, Let (shalach) my people go...” (Exodus 8:1)

“And YHWH said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh; lo, he cometh forth to the water; and say unto him, Thus saith YHWH, Let (shalach) my people go...” (Exodus 8:20)

“Then YHWH said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith YHWH ELOHIM of the Hebrews, Let (shalach) my people go...” (Exodus 9:1)

“And YHWH said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith YHWH ELOHIM of the Hebrews, Let (shalach) my people go...” (Exodus 9:13)

“And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith YHWH ELOHIM of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let (shalach) my people go...” (Exodus 10:3)

This word *shalach* appears another twelve times in the negotiations between Moses and Pharaoh,² culminating in Pharaoh's final refusal and the people of Egypt begging the children of Israel to go.

"But YHWH hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let (shalach) them go." (Exodus 10:27)

"And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send (shalach) them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men." (Exodus 12:33)

It should not surprise us that our portion begins by declaring the outcome of this intense battle of the wills between Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt, and YHWH ELOHIM, Ruler of the Universe and Elohim of the Hebrews, by declaring,

"And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let (shalach) the people go..." (Exodus 13:17)

There are some who have raised concern over the opening verse of our portion, claiming that it appears as though the Torah were giving Pharaoh credit for the exodus, when in fact it was YHWH who won the battle. We must understand that what the Torah is recording for us is not a tribute to Pharaoh's generosity and benevolent attitude toward the Hebrews, but rather his complete submission to the will of YHWH ELOHIM, the Ruler of the Universe and Elohim of the Hebrews. It is the Hebrew word *shalach* that ties the beginning of the conflict to its conclusion. By juxtaposing the beginning statements of this battle of wills with the final outcome, the meaning of our opening verse becomes very clear.

"And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith YHWH ELOHIM of Israel, Let (shalach) my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is YHWH, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not YHWH, neither will I let (shalach) Israel go." (Exodus 5:1-2)

"And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let (shalach) the people go ..." (Exodus 13:17)

Through the consistent use of the word *shalach*, we see that in the end Pharaoh will indeed bend and submit to the will of YHWH, the Elohim of the Hebrews and ruler even over Egypt. The Midrash Rabbah offers an interesting take on this very topic.

"Another interpretation of: 'And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go' (XIII,17). It is written: 'He sendeth out His commandment upon earth' (Ps. CXLVII,15). Woe unto the wicked who are mere worms that perish from the earth, but who seek to frustrate God's Word! God said to them: 'You said: "I will not let Israel go," but I say: "Let my people go" (Ex. IX,1). Well, we will see whose word will be fulfilled and whose annulled.' The end was that Pharaoh arose of his own accord and fell at the feet of Moses, and said to the Israelites: 'Rise up; get you forth' (XII, 31). Then did God say to him:

*'Well, Pharaoh, whose words have been fulfilled, thine or Mine?' Hence does it say: 'He sendeth out His commandment upon earth, His word runneth very swiftly.' When was this? When Pharaoh had let the people go. Was it then Pharaoh who had let them go? Balaam said: 'God who brought them forth out of Egypt' (Num. XXIII,22), and here we are told: 'And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go' (XIII,17). This, however, is to teach that Pharaoh escorted them and pleaded: 'Pray for me, and ask for mercy for me,' as it says: 'Take both your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also' (Ex. XII,32)."*³

Another interesting point made in the above quotation is that Pharaoh let the people of Israel go of his own free will. By stating that it was indeed Pharaoh that let the Hebrews go, the Torah also gives us the basis upon which YHWH will judge Pharaoh when he tries to take Israel back. By letting the children of Israel go, Pharaoh willingly relinquished any rights or claims that he may have laid against them. To pursue them once they have been set free is a grave act of injustice. Yet this is exactly what Pharaoh did. It seems that as soon as YHWH removed the pressure from Egypt, Pharaoh's mind lapsed into a state of grave forgetfulness. Shortly after the departure of the Hebrews from Egypt, report came to Pharaoh that the children of Israel had indeed fled from his grasp, and once again his heart was hardened.

"And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: and he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt...and he pursued after the children of Israel." (Exodus 14:5-8)

Again, let me share an appropriate testimony from the Midrash Rabbah.

"Another explanation of: 'And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go' (XIII,17). It is written: 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts: the children of Israel and the children of Judah are oppressed together...their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is His name' (Jer. L,33-34). To what can this compare? To a man who had an orchard, and to whom his friend said: 'Sell me this orchard.' He sold it to him for a hundred dinars, without knowing what it contained. When he was asked at what price he had sold it, and he replied: 'For a hundred dinars,' they said to him: 'Why, it contained olives worth a hundred dinars, pomegranates worth a hundred dinars, various kinds of spices worth a hundred dinars, and all kinds of other things worth a hundred dinars each. Did you not know what you were selling and what the orchard contained – spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon' (S.S. IV,14). If the purchaser had only received the fountains therein, he would have had value, as it says: '[Thou] art a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and flowing streams from Lebanon' (ib. 15). At this, the vendor regretted his bargain. Similarly, when Pharaoh let Israel go, they were accounted of little worth in his eyes; but his regal advisers said to him: 'What hast thou done? Why, if they had only departed with the plunder, it would have been enough [to mourn their loss], for it says: "And a mixed multitude went up also with them, etc." (Ex XII, 38). Add to this the number of rich people and skilled craftsmen that they possess, as it says: "Thy shoots are a park of pomegranates" (S.S. IV, 13). Consider the number of men, women, and children

they include, as it says: "And all that took them captives hold them fast" (Jer. L, 33). What does it say after this? Their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is His name' (Jer. L, 34). Alas! Hence 'wayyehi beshalach' (there was woe when he let the people go)."⁴

Here we are reminded of the days of the Patriarchs when kings and leaders recognized that they were being blessed by the presence of YHWH's chosen ones living in their lands, and therefore valued YHWH's elect.

"And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, Elohim is with thee in all that thou doest: Now therefore swear unto me here by Elohim that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned." (Genesis 21:22-23)

"Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army. And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? And they said, We saw certainly that YHWH was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of YHWH." (Genesis 26:26-29)

"And Laban said unto him (Jacob), I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that YHWH hath blessed me for thy sake. And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it." (Genesis 30:27-28)

"And YHWH was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that YHWH was with him, and that YHWH made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put it into his hand." (Genesis 39:2-4)

"And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of Elohim is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as Elohim hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt." (Genesis 41:38-41)

"And the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, Joseph's brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Say unto thy brethren, This do ye; lade your beasts, and go, get you unto the land of Canaan; And take your father and your households, and come unto me: and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the Land." (Genesis 45:16-18)

“My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die: in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again. And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father’s house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen.” (Genesis 50:5,8)

In all the above verses we see that the Hebrews were blessed by YHWH wherever they were, and that they became a blessing to those with whom they dwelt, whether it be family, master, or Pharaoh. In this we see that the Hebrews were indeed fulfilling the commandment given to Abraham to be a blessing, but we also see that those who valued the blessing of the Hebrews among them were likewise blessed. This too is a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham.

“Now YHWH had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

The Pharaohs that arose later in Egypt did not remember Joseph and the many blessings of the Hebrews among the Egyptians, and therefore did not value the presence of the righteous ones. They did not know the source of Israel’s blessings and power, and therefore did not esteem the Israelites as being of any value. Thus they oppressed and cursed Israel and were themselves cursed.

All of this should cause us to reflect long and hard on today’s current political situation. We must ask ourselves if we are truly being a blessing in the land of our exile. Are we living as lights and *tzadikim*⁵ in the places we have been scattered to? Do the lands and nations where we live value the presence of the *tzadikim* of YHWH? What of the land of Israel? What of those bent on the destruction of the chosen of YHWH ELOHIM? For those living in the United States, do we still value Israel, or is oil more important? We may ponder this portion for answers in our current affairs. For now, however, let us look further into this portion.

How true the adage, “We never appreciate what we have until it is gone.” So it was with Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Now waking to the reality that they are without servants and laborers to build their cities and till their fields, their hearts are grieved, and so Pharaoh charges after Israel with his 600 chariots in thoughts of recapturing what he willingly set free. The heart of Pharaoh is revealed to us in the Song of the Redeemed sung by Moses after the defeat of Pharaoh.

“The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.” (Exodus 15:9)

I cannot help but draw both a comparison and a contrast with two other similar passages of Scripture. The first is the fivefold comparison to the self-serving words of the ruler of Babylon, referred to in the King James translation as "Lucifer."

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou has said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of Elohim: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." (Isaiah 14:12-15)

The contrast to both of these passages is witnessed in the declared will and promise of the Deliverer as given to the children of Israel while still in captivity.

"Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am YHWH, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you an Elohim: and ye shall know that I am YHWH your Elohim, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am YHWH." (Exodus 6:6-8)

As Pharaoh, Egypt, and Israel discover, YHWH is always true to His Word. With all of the promises received, miracles performed, and signs and wonders witnessed, one might come to think that it would be very easy to believe and follow YHWH ELOHIM without question. Although the Deliverer reveals His purposes and intentions beforehand, as in the case of taking the children of Israel by the way of the wilderness, nevertheless true faith does not always come easy. Even with a pillar of fire leading and protecting them through the night and a pillar of cloud by day, their faith could not overcome their human reasoning. So we witness the power of human reason and its influence over trust and fear of Elohim.

Even though YHWH had explained why He was bringing them toward the sea, when the children of Israel saw the chariots they feared Egypt more than Elohim. Once delivered of this apparent threat by the parting of the Red Sea, the children of Israel did indeed rejoice. The Torah declares,

"And Israel saw that great work which YHWH did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared YHWH, and believed YHWH, and his servant Moses." (Exodus 14:31)

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch writes of the two attributes evoked by the mighty act of YHWH.

"Fear and trust; these are the two basic attitudes toward God that are to remain alive and awake forever in the heart and mind of the Jew. There is only One whom we must fear and trust at the same time and that is God, the One sole God, who is as loving as He is just, and just as He is loving, and whose almighty power is equally unlimited whether He

practices loving-kindness or metes out justice. To reveal and to teach all three: His justice, which is to be feared at all times; His loving-kindness, which is to be trustingly awaited at all times, and His almighty power, commanding freely over all things in which He can practice loving-kindness and justice simultaneously – this constitutes the eternal significance of the moment of redemption, unique in its greatness, when the once enslaved nation, now forever free, saw the colossus of Egypt stretched out dead at its feet. But even as it gave eternal proof of the almighty power in which the hand of God practices both loving-kindness and justice, so too, this moment is everlasting testimony to the veracity of his servant Moses...It was through the hand of Moses that God led Egypt to its death, and Israel toward the path that led to life and freedom.”⁶

Even with this nascent fear and faith being evidenced in the children of Israel, it is apparent from the rest of the portion that complete faith was not yet perfected in them. Indeed, through their experiences in Egypt they had learned much about their Elohim. They had seen the power of YHWH to perform phenomenal and wonderful miracles. They had learned that YHWH ELOHIM was able to command nature – to cause rivers to turn to blood and to stir up plagues of frogs, lice, swarms and locusts. YHWH could cause it to rain down hail and fire in one place, and remain sunny in another. He could bring darkness and emanate light. Ultimately He could part a sea to deliver His chosen, and close the same sea to swallow His enemies. Clearly YHWH ELOHIM was quite capable of spectacular displays of power. With the immediate threat of total destruction at the hands of the enemy now erased from their minds, another more pressing question emerges in the hearts and minds of the children of Israel – can the Elohim of the spectacular also perform in the realm of the ordinary and the mundane?

It is difficult to imagine what the children of Israel were going through at this time of upheaval and transition. Their very lives, nation, economy, routine, source of sustenance, homes, and security were suddenly uprooted. The children of Israel were free, but were they self-sufficient? There is nothing familiar or secure in the wilderness. They are free, but what does such freedom mean without land to plant and graze, without a source of income or trade, without a source of provision, without order, and especially without a clear purpose for the transition?

The worries and fears experienced in these circumstances are very real. YHWH brought the children of Israel by way of the wilderness not only because He feared they would return to Egypt if they saw the Philistines waiting for them on the border of Canaan,⁷ but because there was much the children of Israel needed to know about their Redeemer, Deliverer, and Elohim. In many ways the wilderness experience was to become a time of courtship, a time of relationship building, and a time of discovery and testing. It is important that we realize that the testing would be in both directions. The children of Israel would be tested by both circumstance and by the need to trust and obey. What we witness throughout the rest of this portion is YHWH teaching the children of Israel that He is not only the Elohim of the spectacular, but that He is the Elohim of the ordinary and the mundane as well.

With nearly three million people moving through a relatively arid land, the concern for the fundamental needs of life is very real and pressing. We should note that as the children of Israel wrestle with their frail human reasoning and murmur against Moses and Aaron, and yes, even against their Deliverer, there is no real rebuke from Elohim. After three million people

walk in the desert without water for three days, murmuring is to be expected. When Moses finally leads them to water, it is bitter and undrinkable. The Holy One shows Moses a tree to put in the waters to sweeten them so the people could drink. YHWH reveals Himself as One who cannot only quench their thirst, but also remove the bitterness of their lives. Here at the bitter waters of Marah The Holy One reveals yet another attribute of YHWH.

“If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of YHWH thy Elohim, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am YHWH that healeth thee.” (Exodus 15:26)

In Hebrew this name is YHWH-RAFA. So at Marah the children of Israel learn that the Deliverer is also their health and their salvation. Not only does YHWH reveal His nature here, He also reveals the purpose of Israel’s freedom. Clearly Israel is to keep the commandments of Elohim and do what is right in His sight. This purpose is also alluded to in the next part of the journey. The very next verse tells us,

“And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.” (Exodus 15:27)

From this simple setting we are given a symbolic glimpse of the sacred calling and purpose of Israel’s freedom. The twelve wells represent the twelve tribes living in the land. The water is the Torah. The twelve wells of water are the twelve tribes of Israel bringing forth the fullness and life of Torah. The other detail tells us that there were seventy date palms at Elim. Seventy is the number of the nations which populated the earth after the flood.⁸ That the trees are identified as date palms in the Hebrew means that these trees are producing fruit. What may we derive from this idyllic scene? I would suggest that what the Holy One is showing Israel is that when the twelve tribes are filled with the life-giving Torah, even the nations around them will become righteous and fruitful for the kingdom of YHWH!

A month after leaving the oasis and the lessons of Marah and Elim, the children of Israel were to learn yet another important lesson. Their journey through the wilderness revealed to them that there are many kinds of bondage. While Israel was indeed free from the political bondage of Egypt, there was yet another, possibly harsher taskmaster still oppressing them – their flesh! While the children of Israel are indeed the chosen, they are still human beings with earthly needs for food, water, and oxygen. Although they were able to leave Egypt, they are not able to leave the very real needs of their bodies. And so once more we see Israel crying out for sustenance. We should notice that again there is no rebuke from YHWH for the children of Israel expressing concern for their needs. YHWH simply uses these very real situations to reveal Himself as the Elohim of the ordinary and the mundane needs of His people.

There is also another purpose being revealed in the events that transpire. YHWH has indeed brought Israel out of Egypt for a purpose, as we just learned at Elim. We also witnessed in last week’s portion that YHWH was creating a new life for Israel, and marked it so by establishing a new calendar for them.⁹ Here we witness YHWH training Israel to walk in a new rhythm.

What we see being set in place for the children of Israel is the daily rhythm of gathering food morning and evening, and the weekly rhythm of the Sabbath.

“Then said YHWH unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my Torah or no.” (Exodus 16:4)

“And Moses said, This shall be, when YHWH shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that YHWH heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him...” (Exodus 16:8)

This pattern of the morning and evening meals would eventually change into a daily morning and evening offering called the *Tamid*, or “Continual Offering.”¹⁰ The weekly pattern of keeping the Sabbath was likewise a test of Israel’s willingness not only to walk **with** YHWH, but **as** YHWH in the world. YHWH would indeed reveal much about Himself and the children of Israel through the manna. The Redeemer made it very clear that He would provide all that the children of Israel would need each and every day; thus they were commanded to gather only enough for each person for that particular day. By doing this, the children of Israel would learn to have faith in YHWH’s ability to meet their daily needs, as well as learn necessary skills such as restraint, sharing, using only what one needs, and most importantly, implicit trust in YHWH. The Torah reports,

“And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating.” (Exodus 16:18)

Not all the children of Israel, however, had learned this skill, and they tested YHWH by holding manna over until the next day, and were repulsed when it bred worms and stank.¹¹ Now knowing what happens when manna is kept over became an even bigger test when YHWH commanded that the children of Israel intentionally gather twice as much manna on the sixth day and hold it over to be eaten on the seventh day.

“And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which YHWH hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto YHWH: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a Sabbath unto YHWH.” (Exodus 16:22-25)

The Sabbath served as a threefold test for the children of Israel.

1. Would the children of Israel simply trust and obey the command of YHWH to honor a particular day?
2. Would the children of Israel trust YHWH to provide double on the sixth day?

3. Would the children of Israel trust YHWH that the manna would not stink and breed worms if they kept it over for dinner on the seventh day?

The Sabbath also became a small symbol of freedom from the taskmaster of the flesh – from greed, from selfishness, from anxiety, and materialism. By keeping the Sabbath the children of Israel declare their faith in the ability of their Redeemer and Deliverer to provide for their daily needs and cares.

As the children of Israel continue their journey, their needs likewise persist, and again Israel cries out for water.

“And YHWH said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.” (Exodus 17:5-6)

Here again YHWH reveals His ability to provide the most mundane of our needs, even in the most improbable of ways. There is, however, clearly a bigger message to be gleaned from this display of power. First let us take careful note that this is the second story that involves water and a tree, or staff. The first was the bitter waters of Meribah, and now here. We should also note that YHWH explicitly describes the rod as the one that smote the river in Egypt and turned it to blood. Those witnessing this act of Moses may have certainly expected blood to come forth from the rock. Instead, it was water that gushed forth, bringing life to all the children of Israel and the wilderness.

The Messianic implications of this story are too obvious for us to ignore. Clearly the Rock is the Messiah who would be smitten by the tree, and blood and water would pour forth from his side and give life to all who by faith would drink. It was the apostle Shaul who would later write to his brethren,

*“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Messiah.”
(1 Corinthians 10:1-4)*

We see the wisdom of YHWH in bringing the children of Israel by way of the wilderness, so that in this vast emptiness He could show Himself present, ready, and willing to provide for their every need, whether it be spectacular or ordinary. It was also here in the quiet of the wilderness that the children of Israel would best be able to hear the rhythm of their Creator, Redeemer, and Deliverer, and begin walking in step with Him in their new life and freedom to the glory of YHWH.

SHAVUA TOV!

¹ Philistine Highway

Literally, 'Way of the land of the Philistines.' Josephus refers to this as the 'Palestine Highway' (*Antiquities* 2:15:3). This is the usual route to Egypt, along the Mediterranean coast through Philistine territory (cf. Herodotus 3:5). There was an ancient enmity between the Israelites and the Philistines (*Targum Yonathan; Mekhilta; Rashi; Josephus* 2:15:3). See Genesis 10:14, 21:32, 26:14; 1 Chronicles 7:21, *Targum ad loc.*

² Exodus 8:2, 8, 20, 21, 28; 9:7, 28, 35; 10:4, 10, 20; 11:10

³ Midrash Rabbah Vol. 3, Exodus, 20:3, Soncino Press, Pp. 245-246

⁴ *Ibid.* 20:2 Pp. 244-245

⁵ Righteous ones

⁶ The Pentateuch, Samson Raphael Hirsch, Judaica Press, Pg. 265

⁷ Exodus 13:17-18

⁸ Genesis 10

⁹ Exodus 12:2

¹⁰ Exodus 29:38ff

¹¹ Exodus 16:20