

For us today, these same words need to be considered. Will we serve the Holy One of Israel with diligence—correcting previous mistakes of the past—or will we continue to be denied the blessings of remembering Passover? Hopefully, our answer will echo Joshua’s admonition to Ancient Israel to serve the Lord. Today, we can visibly display our allegiance to the Lord by **continuing to make the Passover celebration a perpetual feast forever!** We can see people enriched in their faith, and understand all of the great lessons that the Passover and Exodus teach us.¹⁶

B’shalach

After he had let go “Complaining Slaves”

Exodus 13:17-17:16
Judges 4:4-5:31 (A); 5:1-31 (S)

The previous three Torah readings of Exodus: *Shemot*, *V’eira*, and *Bo*, all detail some of the most important and memorable events in the Holy Scriptures—getting us to learn about how God miraculously involves Himself in delivering His people. Yet as important as the Exodus from Egypt is, why do we see God’s chosen complaining, **immediately after they are released?** In *B’shalach* this week, we see the Ancient Israelites complaining right after they have been delivered through the Red Sea, and have seen the Egyptian army defeated:

“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 journey 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 trek from the bondage of slavery to freedom are 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.¹⁷ The

¹⁶ For further teaching on the themes of Passover and the Exodus, we recommend that you consult the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

¹⁷ Exodus 13:17-22.

incredible parting of the Red Sea and the subsequent destruction of Pharaoh's army are highlighted and then punctuated with a memorial song and celebration.¹⁸ Of course, in any desert trek, water and food provisions are critical, and we are told about sticks of wood that make bitter water sweet.¹⁹ At another juncture, Moses obeys the instructions of the Lord and strikes a rock with his staff and the water flows.²⁰ The introduction of manna to Israel's daily diet is described in great detail.²¹ Finally, quail is included for the sustenance of the people.²²

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 which cannot be overlooked. When you consider some of these events, it is easy to detect how the chosen 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 consistently whine 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?** What was it about this group of Ancient Israelites which generated such negative tendencies?

As I thought through these questions, I kept going back to the different instances recorded in this reading 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 our *parashah* 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 Israel's 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 (Exodus 13:17). The Lord knew that His people did not have the stomach for war. They had just spent several centuries in

¹⁸ Exodus 14:1-15:21.

¹⁹ Exodus 15:22-27.

²⁰ Exodus 17:1-7.

²¹ Exodus 16:1-7.

²² Exodus 16:8-21.

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 their enemies. God 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 a mere 600 chariots? Is it because they had a *slave mentality* that did not give them the confidence to stand up and defend their freedom? As you read the Ancient Israelites’ complaints to Moses, we see their sentiments of how 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, in a very powerful way, God demonstrates that He wanted the Israelites to depend upon Him for salvation and deliverance. The Lord did not disappoint!

About a month later, the people complain about the lack of food. Once again a reference to their former lives in 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 begin 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 travel 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 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 (Exodus 17:1-7). But this scene is to be remembered very soberly, as Moses names this place Massah and Meribah, to describe the contentious attitude of the Israelites:

“He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, ‘Is the LORD among us, or not?’” (cf. Psalm 95:8; Hebrews 3:8).

Interestingly, as we arrive at the end of our *parashah*, it appears that the Israelites are now ready for some battling with the dreaded Amalekites.²³ *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? Have they been able to dispense with just enough of the slave mentality, that they are beginning to take on the responsibilities of being the chosen nation of God?

In some respects, the challenges of the Ancient 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 have all had to experience the initial difficulties of coming out of the bondage of sin. As we have struggled with sin, there have doubtlessly been times when we were prone to wander. Early in our walks with the Lord, we do not often have the intestinal fortitude or sometimes knowledge to stomach the battles against sin **that can only come with spiritual growth and experience.** In a loving way, the Father often steers us away from the temptations that He knows could cause us to 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. In time, while the spiritual battles we encounter might be more serious, the ability to overcome temptation and be victorious becomes easier!

It is important that we learn from the mistakes of the Ancient Israelites in the desert (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11, RSV). Their slave mentality gave them a propensity to complain and grumble about many of the trials and tests they faced.

²³ Exodus 17:1-16.

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 (Romans 6:16-18). In the Lord we have not only our provision, **but also our deliverance and salvation!**

Yitro Jethro "Shema Yisrael"

Exodus 18:1-20:23[26]
Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:5-6[6-7] (A);
6:1-13 (S)

After considering what has thus far transpired in the Book of Exodus, this week's Torah portion, *Yitro*, involves one of the most memorable scenes outside of the deliverance from Egypt. It is in this reading where the Lord visits Mount Sinai and delivers the Ten Commandments.²⁴ The Ancient Israelites were deathly afraid of what was taking place, and so Moses has to explain what the intention of this awesome scene is intended to mean for them:

"Then they said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.' Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin'" (Exodus 20:20).

Here at the bottom of Mount Sinai, the people of Israel actually hear the voice of the Lord. One would think that this would be a blessed event, but from the reaction recorded, we read that the people were absolutely terrified by the Voice:

"All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance...So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God *was*. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven"' (Exodus 20:18, 21-22).

Prior to this time since the Exodus from Egypt, the Lord had chosen to communicate to Israel through His intermediary Moses. For the most part, the

²⁴ Exodus 19:1-20:17.