

FOREVER WAR

A Devotional Meditation on Beshelach (When He Let Go)

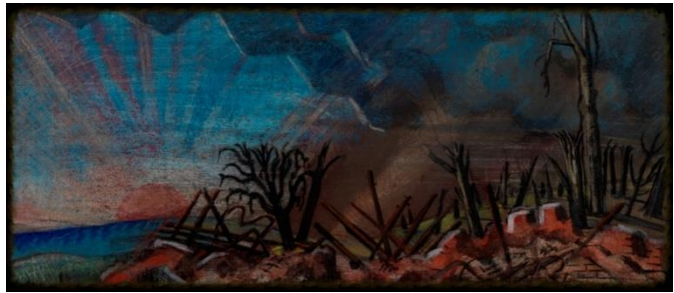
Exodus 13:17-17:16, Judges 4:4-5:31

Deuteronomy 25:17-19; Isaiah 2:4, 9:6-7; Jeremiah 6:13-16; Ezekiel 13:8-16;
Ephesians 6:10-17; Philippians 4:4-7; Hebrews 4:4-12, 8:8-12, 11:1-6; Revelation 6:3-4

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One thing I've learned from studying wars and rumors of war is that nothing happens in a vacuum. Conflict is a constant element of the human condition, from the interpersonal conflict of siblings vying for their parents' attention (and perhaps for a larger share of the inheritance), to the macro-conflicts of nations competing over land and resources.



World War I - War of Destruction. Image by Diego Sideburns, August 3, 2014, [via Flickr](#).

Every conflict has a cause, and those causes extend back in time in a simmering cauldron of offenses and outrages that erupts periodically in active confrontation. No war settles an issue. At best, it stops the fighting and gives the combatants time to lick their wounds and rearm. Even the casual observer of recent history can see that the seeds of the Second World War were sown in the peace of the First World War. What the casual observer might miss is that the seeds of the Cold War were sown in the peace of the Second World War. When that conflict between Superpowers ended, regional conflicts erupted because the American and Soviet overlords stopped restraining their clients. Even the war in Ukraine is an outgrowth of the Cold War.

We can extend these connections backward in time as well. The Great Powers went to war in 1914 because everyone had a grudge. The French, for example, wanted to regain provinces they lost to the Germans in 1871. The Germans started that war so they could establish an empire to rule Europe and reverse the humiliating defeat they suffered from the French under Napoleon in 1806. And so it continues back through the mists of time in a chain of human conflict that began when Cain argued with his brother.

This persistent state of conflict is something our Creator predicted. We rightly proclaim the advent of the Prince of Peace, but ignore the rampages of the Rider on the Red Horse who continues to take peace from the earth. Like Israel of old, we heal the wounds of God's people superficially, saying, "Peace! Peace!" while overlooking the dismal reality that there is no lasting peace, either in our hearts or among the nations.

That reality clashes with the biblical promises of peace that passes understanding, an end to war, and eternal rest. It also seems to clash with the experience of many faithful disciples of Messiah Yeshua. We do have peace that passes understanding, and we have experienced spiritual rest, even though conflict still rages around us. If we're honest, though, we will admit that there is still conflict in our hearts. Persistent bad habits, secret sins, and unpleasant encounters with disagreeable people threaten to upset our inner peace at a moment's notice. Then there are those physical, mental, and emotional

ailments that nip at our heels like an annoying puppy – except that annoying puppies don't usually put us in hospital or cripple us with chronic pains.

How do we reconcile these contradictions? We must reconcile them if we want to keep our sanity and maintain our faith in an Eternal Creator. Many have experienced these contradictory conflicts and chosen to walk away entirely from what they perceive as a God Who cannot keep His promises – if He ever existed. Assuming, though, that we have passed the first test of faith by believing that God exists, then we have to find a way to reconcile what we read in His Word with what we experience in this fallen world.

It helps me to describe our present age as, “Now and not yet.” The Prince of Peace has come, and He has brought freedom to captives of sin and death, but He has not yet completed the work of final redemption in the New Covenant inaugurated by His blood. Here's what our Redeemer says about that:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says *ADONAI*. I will put My *Torah* [Law] into their mind, and upon their hearts I will write it. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And no more will they teach, each one his fellow citizen and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know *ADONAI*,’ because all will know Me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and their sins I will remember no more.”

Hebrews 8:10-12 TLV

Since we're still in the business of telling people to know the LORD, we can conclude that the Covenant is in the process of being fulfilled. Until then, we're still in a combat zone dealing with a relentless enemy who pounces on the weak and isolated. He has to do that because he's not capable of confronting the united household of faith. He must divide and conquer, using us to do his dirty work by fighting against each other.

That's what the enemies of God's people have always done. When Israel and the foreigners who joined them were thrust out of the ruins of Egypt, many of them might have assumed their problems had just ended and they would have rest, peace, and joy forever. We now know that the Exodus didn't unfold that way. Freedom from Egypt was just the beginning of the process of reshaping this Hebrew mob into a holy people whose hearts beat in rhythm with the heart of their Redeemer. They didn't understand that until they lived through the perils of war as Pharaoh's army tried to bring them back, and then the life-threatening realities of thirst and hunger in the trackless desert. We judge our spiritual ancestors for reacting with fear, anger, paralysis, and desperation, but how have we reacted in similar circumstances? We shake our heads at their hardness of heart for quickly forgetting God's miraculous salvation at the Red Sea, His provision of manna and quail, and the water gushing from the rock at Horeb. How quickly, though, have we forgotten when He provided just enough to pay the bills at precisely the moment of need? If He provided once, He can certainly do it again, but we trade the peace of that certainty for the anxiety of speculating on how God would come through for us on our own terms.

These are the daily trials we must learn to navigate if we are to stand against our real enemy. That's what the ancient Hebrews had to learn. Once the issues of basic survival were settled, then they could begin acting like a united people instead of a mob scrambling for dwindling resources just like the rest of the world. If they needed further motivation, Amalek provided it.

The Exodus account simply says that the Amalekites came and fought against Israel, that Joshua picked some warriors to fight them, and that Moses, with help from Aaron and Hur, held up his hands in supplication to the Almighty until Israel won the battle. In Deuteronomy, Moses explains that the Amalekites “attacked those among you in the rear, all the stragglers behind you, when you were tired and weary—he did not fear God.” (Deuteronomy 25:18)

This is where the real victory of the Exodus began. The masses of Israelites were unprepared for battle, but some were ready to fight. Those were the ones Joshua chose to fend off the ravaging Amalekites. Others might not have been able to fight, but they could tend the wounded, heal the sick, adopt the orphans, and rescue the stragglers lost in the desert. The concerted effort by this mixed multitude of native born and strangers welded them into a people. They were far from perfect, and they would face many trials in years to come, but the ordeal of Amalek sealed their identity.

Amalek is still with us, which is why God said He would fight against Amalek from generation to generation, and commanded His people to blot out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Amalek is the spirit behind those who cause divisions among us, and who smite the weak, the helpless, the sick, and the wanderers. We have the choice of joining with Amalek and helping dismember Messiah’s body, or uniting with our sisters and brothers and finding ways to fight this forever war until our King returns and brings the final victory.