

VISION BEYOND SURVIVAL

A Devotional Meditation on Sh'lach L'cha (Send for Yourself)

Numbers 13:1-15:41; Joshua 2:1-24, 6:22-25; Proverbs 29:18;

1 Peter 2:1-25; Revelation 5:6-10

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June 17, 2023

Long before France colonized Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, the tribes of the region engaged in an endless struggle for power over one another and over the urban centers. At times, a powerful desert chieftain would be able to make alliance with discontented urban elites and overthrow the regional ruler. That chieftain would be hailed as a hero and become the new ruler, establishing a dynasty that lasted as long as he and his successors enjoyed the loyalty of the urban elites and kept the other tribes at bay. Inevitably, the cycle repeated as the balance of power shifted and a new tribal chieftain arose to lead rebellion.

Current events in North Africa continue to unfold according to this same pattern. The French subdued the local rulers, and in time were driven out by the descendants of those rulers, recast in the role of democratic leaders. Today those leaders fight a constant battle against opposition that wields automatic weapons instead of scimitars and lances.

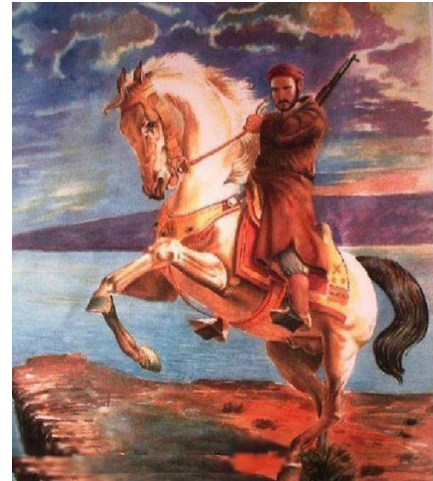
This cycle of conflict is a familiar feature of our shared human story. When people feel their survival is at stake, they are willing to trust any potential savior, even if those saviors turn out to be worse tyrants. That's how liberators like Fidel Castro and Pol Pot became the authors of genocide. Whatever vision they had for removing tyrants did not translate into a vision for governing as selfless servants of the people.

It could also be said that the people had very little vision beyond their immediate circumstances. That's an observation America's Founders included in the Declaration of Independence:

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

In other words, people don't like change. What they really want is to be left alone to move through life on familiar paths. Sometimes they don't even recognize when they are miserable, and even when they do, it takes a lot of provocation to get them to look for a savior.

That may be why it took a literal Act of God to get the Hebrews to leave Egypt. The promise of a prosperous life in a fertile foreign land was hardly worth the struggle to



Abd El-Krim al-Khattabi, or Molay Muhand Amazigh as he is known to the Berber people of Morocco, led a fierce resistance against Spanish and French colonial forces in the Rif War (1921-26). Illustration by Imdukar, December 31, 2013, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

overcome the abusive power of the pharaohs. Once that Act of God had made Egypt uninhabitable for the Israelites and the foreigners who joined them, that promise of a new land became much more appealing – until the people found out what it would take to receive the promise. They thought “promised” meant “it’s yours, free of charge, ready for occupation without opposition.” God meant, “I promise to aid you in the struggle to liberate the land I gave to Abraham and his children. It will be yours, but you are my agents for taking possession of it and bringing judgment on those who have polluted it.”

This is where vision failed, if it ever existed in the heart of the average Hebrew. All twelve of the men the Israelites sent to look over the Promised Land reported that it was as good as God had said. Ten of them, however, had no vision beyond the fortifications that protected Canaan’s cities, and the giants who lived in them. Their bad report convinced the people to opt out of the agreement:

All through that night, the entire community raised up their voices. The people wept. All *Bnei-Yisrael* [children of Israel] grumbled against Moses and Aaron and the whole community said, “If only we had died in Egypt! If only we had died in this wilderness! Why is *ADONAI* bringing us to this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be like plunder! Wouldn’t it be better for us to return to Egypt?” They said to each other, “Let’s choose a leader and let’s go back to Egypt!”

Numbers 14:1-4 TLV

We’re amazed that people who had seen the power of God in the plagues of Egypt, and who had been sustained by His power in the desert, had trouble trusting God to fulfill His promises. They hadn’t had to do much to deliver themselves from Egypt, or to gather manna in the desert, so maybe they didn’t expect to have to fight a war to make God’s promises come to pass. Their fear contrasts with the faith of Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho, in her confession to the children of those Israelites as they prepared to take possession of the land:

I know that *ADONAI* has given you the land—dread of you has fallen on us and all the inhabitants of the land are melting in fear before you. For we have heard how *ADONAI* dried up the water of the Sea of Reeds before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard about it, our hearts melted, and no spirit remained any more in anyone because of you. For *ADONAI* your God, He is God, in heaven above and on earth beneath. So now, please swear to me by *ADONAI*, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father’s house. Give me a true sign that you will spare the lives of my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters and all who belong to them, and save our lives from death.

Joshua 2:9-13 TLV

Why did Rahab make this confession when the rest of her people didn’t? Why could she trust the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob more than His own people could trust Him? Maybe she was desperate for a way to escape the grinding abuse of a society sold out to debauchery, and to live through the Hebrew invasion. Or maybe she saw something the Hebrews of the previous generation hadn’t seen.

Those people weren't lazy. They worked hard and endured adversity as well as anyone. What they lacked was the vision that made them a nation: God's vision to have a people for His very own who could teach the nations about His ways and partner with Him in the redemption and restoration of the whole world. That's the reason God is creating a kingdom of priests from the seed of Abraham – a kingdom that is including people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. The Promised Land wasn't the end of the journey for Israel, but the beginning. It was the home base for a Covenant Nation that was to expand the Kingdom of Heaven to embrace all nations, partnering with the Redeemer to restore His creation.

To be fair, it's hard even to think about such a lofty vision when you're hungry, or hurting, or fearful for the lives of your children. Maybe it's especially hard for those who have known God's provision, but haven't made the connection that His provision, like the land of Canaan, is only the starting point. Without the Kingdom vision, our faith walk becomes an exercise in behavioral modification in hope of having an easier life. With that vision, we find reason and means to endure every ordeal in the journey to bring our assigned part of the vision into the present reality.