

THE WISDOM OF NOT QUITTING

A Devotional Meditation on Beshalach (When He Let Go)

Exodus 13:17-17:16; Judges 4:4-5:31; Jeremiah 16:14-21

Luke 9:57-62; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

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My first Army adventure occurred in the summer of 1980, when I received an assignment to Air Assault School at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. That's where soldiers learn about transporting people and equipment on helicopters. I found the course to be challenging and fun, especially when we had to climb up a ladder into a hovering helicopter, and when we rappelled out of a helicopter to the ground.



Soldiers rappel out of a UH-60 Blackhawk during Air Assault training at Camp Smith, NY, July 29, 2010. US Army photo by Pfc. Jose L. Torres-Cooban / Released, [via Flickr](#).

Not everyone shared my view about the training being fun. It was physically and mentally demanding, and some trainees did not finish the

course. One of them quit after our first morning exercise session. He was a tall, muscular young man who should have been able to handle the training with ease, or at least with less difficulty than most of us, yet he was the first to go. He said he had volunteered for the training just to see what the Army was like, and found out very quickly that it was not what he expected. The whole class pleaded with him to stay, but he had made up his mind.

The United States Army does not look with favor on quitters. Army life is difficult even in peacetime, and much more so in times of war, but true warriors stay the course. They are the ones who remain constant not only through the dangers of combat, but also through the endless trials of low pay, slow promotions, and misunderstanding of family and friends who can't imagine why they stay under such conditions.

Recruits rarely enter the ranks as warriors, which is why the Army goes to great lengths to transform them through rigorous training and immersion into Army culture. Some adjust immediately, some require more time and opportunity, and some never make the transition. The majority complete their terms of service with honor, but relatively few complete the transition and make the Army not merely a career, but an identity and a way of life. Those are the kind of people who ensure the Army survives and thrives, both in their own generation, and in the next generation they train up to carry on the warrior traditions and values.

Come to think of it, our Savior doesn't look with favor on quitters either, or so we conclude from His words:

As they were traveling on the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go."

But *Yeshua* said to him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." He said to another, "Follow Me."

But that one said, "First let me go and bury my father."

But *Yeshua* said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Then another also said, "I will follow You, Master, but first let me say goodbye to those in my home."

But *Yeshua* said to him, "No one who has put his hand to the plow and looked back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Luke 9:57-62 TLV

The Kingdom of God, like the United States Army, is looking for a special kind of candidate. These would be people who are willing to leave their old identities, submit to Messiah's transformation process, and embrace the new identity He offers. Those who submit eventually cease thinking and doing wicked things as they increasingly think and do righteous things. However, unless the transformation truly involves a change of identity, it remains little more than behavior modification to become good citizens of someone else's kingdom who never fully identify with either.

This is the radical transformation that makes the redemptive call of our Creator so dangerous to the existing world order. That's why persecution of those who remain true to His call has been an identifying mark of His people. We learn about persecution in biblical accounts of pharaohs, kings, and emperors who sought to annihilate the Hebrews of old, the Jews who returned from Babylonian exile, and the first generation of Christians. We see it in operation in our day as the Jewish and Christian faithful are hunted to death by radical Muslim and Hindu gangs, and shouted down by perpetually angry woke activists. This same spiritual phenomenon is also present in less confrontational settings, such as in nations that nominally embrace what we call Judeo-Christian values. The most insidious threat to God's redemptive plan exists in that kind of environment.

It's easy to dodge the identity question in a society that finds it profitable and convenient to honor God's righteous ways, even if they are honored in the breach. When pastors, priests, and rabbis are respected members of the community, then there's little thought about the inherent incompatibility of the world's system with God's Kingdom. That was the environment in the Egypt that welcomed Joseph and his family, in the Persia that presided over the reconstruction of God's Temple, and even in the Evangelically friendly Britain and America of the 19th and 20th centuries. Under such circumstances, God's people had little reason to choose between the nations of their birth and the Kingdom of God.

Except Jews, of course. They have always had to choose between their identity as the visible remnant of God's Covenant people of Israel, and their adopted identity as citizens of the nations where they lived. That's why God chose to divide His people in half, with the Jewish nation as the undeniable sign of His existence simply by their continued existence. Christians who have been adopted into the Covenant Nation by professing allegiance to Israel's Messiah have rarely had to choose between their Hebraic

identity and their national identity. That's because up to now neither they nor the world nor the Jewish people have recognized Messiah Yeshua's Hebraic identity.

This situation is changing before our eyes, just as it did in the Exodus from Egypt. When the God of the Hebrews showed up to redeem His people, they were the first who had to choose whether to accept His salvation and the identity that His salvation imparted, or maintain their allegiance to Egypt. His judgments revealed the wise choice, but many Israelites chose unwisely and died in Egypt. Many Egyptians and foreigners did choose wisely, and joined the Hebrews in the march toward life, a new identity, and a Promised Land where they and their descendants could live out that identity.

None of this happened instantaneously. Both the native-born Hebrews and the naturalized foreigners had to be immersed in the culture of the God of Israel. Their new identity took shape as they responded to the many trials they faced in the desert. The same Cloud and Pillar of Fire that led the native-born also led the naturalized. At the Red Sea, light and life shined on them, but darkness and death brooded over the unrepentant Egyptian army that pursued them. When they emerged on the other side, they had all been baptized into their new reality. Of course, most of them died in the desert over the next four decades, and it was their children who moved triumphantly as God's Covenant Nation into the Promised Land.

Is this happening again in our day? God promised that it would. Israel and the multitude from the nations joined to Israel are destined to walk out of their old identity with this world, and into their new identity as the Covenant People of God. We will face many trials as we walk toward the promises of our God, and we will not succeed every time, but the only way we truly fail is if we decide to quit.