

LEARNING TO GATHER

A Devotional Meditation on Beshalach (When He Let Go)

Exodus 13:17-17:16; Judges 4:4-5:31; Isaiah 49:5-6; Ezekiel 11:14-21;
Matthew 12:22-32, 23:14-15; Acts 10:9-16; Revelation 7:9-10

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How grieved is God that the various parts of his redeemed people spend so much energy trying to exclude others among the redeemed? Our covenant-keeping God insists that he will receive the praise of multitudes from every nation, tribe, people, and language. Isaiah explains how that happens:

And now the LORD says,
he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him;
and that Israel might be gathered to him—
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD,
and my God has become my strength—
he says:
“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Isaiah 49:5-6 ESV



Photo by Stephen Paterson, October 12, 2020, on [Unsplash](#).

The Savior mentioned in this passage issued a scathing indictment about how the spiritual leaders of Israel in his day administered access to the Kingdom of God:

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

Matthew 23:14-15 ESV

Readers of this passage might assume that Messiah Yeshua was pronouncing the end of Jewish exclusivity, and perhaps even Jewish access to the Kingdom. That misunderstanding has contributed to the tragic history of Christians and Jews as each maintains the belief that the other is in grievous error and excluded from the counsels of the Almighty. Actually, Yeshua was indicting not only the Jewish spiritual authorities of his generation, but religious leaders of all ages who have maintained that they alone have the right formula for entering the Kingdom. We have seen that in the Christian wars of religion that pitted Protestants against Catholics, and in the doctrinal disputes that continue to divide us. We're not as familiar with the history before the cross, when the various segments of God's Covenant people of Israel fought against one another and against outsiders, all the while claiming exclusive access to the God of Israel. That's why God had to explain through Ezekiel:

Son of man, your brothers, even your brothers, your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, “Go far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession.”

Ezekiel 11:15 ESV

Ezekiel recorded this message as Israel's southern kingdom of Judah was about to be conquered by the Babylonians. The northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered over a century earlier. Even at that desperate hour, some among the leadership in the Jewish kingdom sought to exclude the remnant of the non-Jewish Israelites who had remained in the land because they were no longer pure according to their standards. Centuries later, the Jewish leadership continued to exclude the descendants of those people, whom we know as Samaritans. They also excluded God-fearing Gentiles from full participation in the community of faith. In contrast, Yeshua chose a Samaritan woman to be the first to hear him assert his identity as the Messiah of Israel. As for Gentiles coming into the faith, God explained to Peter, “What God has called clean, do not call common [unholy]” (Acts 10:15).

The problem is, we all tend to establish our own criteria of what is holy and unholy. That's what it means for every man to do what is right in his own eyes. We may start with some knowledge of God's ways, but unless we remain humble and teachable, we are in peril of claiming our imperfect understanding as the final revelation. That's why Yeshua spoke so harshly to the Pharisees of his day, and why he would speak just as harshly to the Pharisees of our day – both Christian and Jewish.

When God made his covenant of redemption for the world, he specified the nation of Israel as the vehicle of that covenant. That's why the mixed multitude of Egyptians and others who left Egypt with Moses after the Ten Plagues were no longer identified by the nations of their birth, but as Hebrews of the Israelite nation. However imperfect their understanding of the God of Israel and his ways, they knew enough to attach themselves to him when they saw his power to save his people.

Some Jewish sages have said that this foreign-born multitude could have comprised half or even more of the total number of Israelites in the Exodus. The native born probably felt threatened by the demographic changes such an influx of foreigners brought to the nation. Even so, the Bible doesn't say anything about a pecking order at the Red Sea crossing, other than Jewish tradition that Nahshon, prince of the tribe of Judah, was the first to step into the parting waters. That is in keeping with the biblical principle that Judah must go up first, or, as Paul says, “to the Jew first.” At that moment of crisis, however, no one was checking ID cards or temple purity or even circumcisions to ensure that only properly vetted Hebrews could go through the sea and escape Pharaoh's chariots. When they came out the other side and realized the great salvation God had wrought, all of them, foreigners and native born, praised the Lord together.

That is the great salvation we await in the final redemption of Israel and the nations. The divisions we suffer now will fade away at the full revelation of Messiah and the advent of the Messianic era of peace that we all desire. Until then, we would be wise to learn how our Messiah gathers the redeemed of Israel, and then do likewise.