

Messianic Rabbi's Advice for Facing Fear: Please Don't 'Stand Still and See the Deliverance'

For many years now on Rosh Chodesh (the biblical start of a new month), our synagogue family gathers together for family game night. Our fellowship hall fills with the smell of hot pizza and the sound of people being family. As the evening goes on, discussions begin to take place. Hearts begin to open up. Needs, hurts and fears that have been bottled up inside bubble up to the surface and are shared without fear of rejection or judgment. Those who need prayer, uplifting and encouraging receive it, and people leave knowing how to pray and who to pray for.

As we play these games, people will begin to have discussions and many will start to open up about their family, their jobs, their hopes. Over the past few years, a real topic of discussion has been their fears. Over the past few years, so many people in our communities have dealt with such significant losses. However, many of them have kept their feelings bottled up inside, partially out of fear of personal failure and partially because of terrible teaching that tells people that if they are having a problem of any kind it is the result of their sin. This horrible doctrine, which instead of preaching the delivering power of G-D, joins the adversary, Satan, as he screams accusations at the children of G-D.

During one of these family game nights, I began to think about the Exodus story and when Moses was leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. The people find themselves between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. As they realize their predicament and begin to complain to Moses, we read:

“They said to Moses, ‘Have you taken us away to die in the wilderness because there were no graves in Egypt? Why have you dealt this way with us, to bring us out of Egypt? Did we not say to you in Egypt, “Let us alone, so that we may serve the Egyptians?” It was better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness!’” (Ex. 14:11-12, TLV).

Moses provides a response to them in the next verses:

“But Moses said to the people, ‘Don’t be afraid! Stand still, and see the salvation of Adonai, which He will perform for you today. You have seen the Egyptians today, but you will never see them again, ever! “Adonai will fight for you, while you hold your peace’” (Ex. 14:13-14).

In the very next verse, G-D seems to respond to Moses, however we only see G-D’s response to Moses. We don’t actually know what Moses said that brought about G-D’s response:

“Then Adonai said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying to Me? Tell Bnei-Yisrael to go forward. Lift up your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea, and divide it. Then Bnei-Yisrael will go into the midst of the sea on dry ground.’” (Ex. 14:15-16).

As I thought about these verses, I noticed three things:

1. The children of Israel were being honest in their fears based upon their reality, just as those who are struggling with their present situation are being honest with their fears today. The truth is, if we are honest, many of us have felt as if the Egyptian army were behind us and the sea in front of us, and when we turned to our leaders, they were just as perplexed and fearful of our circumstances as we were.

2. Moses responded exactly as too many rabbis and pastors responded over the past few years: Don’t be afraid; Stand still; Watch what G-D is going to do; The victory is ours; and many other cliches and platitudes. However, while Moses was speaking “faith” to the children of Israel, it appears from G-

D's reply that he was whining to G-D with the same level of disbelief that the people were expressing to him.

3. G-D's response to Moses is so important and often mistaught. Look closely at what G-D says. He doesn't tell Moses the things Moses told the people. G-D doesn't say, "Don't be afraid! Stand still, and see the salvation of Adonai, which He will perform for you today." Not at all. G-D tells Moses to stop crying to Him and to tell the children of Israel to go forward. G-D actually tells Moses to tell the people the opposite of what Moses told them. G-D's instructions continue by telling Moses to lift his staff, stretch out his hand over the sea and divide it.

Contrary to the teaching of Moses and many rabbis and pastors, our response to fearful events in our lives, like those we have experienced over the past few years, is not to "stand still and see the salvation of G-D."

Rather, our leaders should be stepping forward in faith and telling all those in the body of believers to move forward in faith.

One last but important thing to note is that G-D didn't tell Moses to chastise the people for their fear and unbelief. G-D didn't say, "You guys are stuck in between the army and the sea because of sin in your lives." G-D told Moses to stop crying to Him and to tell the people of G-D to move forward.

I hope you hear my heart from my words today as I encourage you: Don't look at the army behind you, don't look at the sea in front of you and don't look for someone to blame. Just move forward. I can't promise that the sea will always part, but I can promise that with each step, you will move closer to G-D's promise for you. {eoa}

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