



Mordekhi's Drash for Shabbat January 12, 2008 / Shevat 5, 5768
Parashah #15
Torah: *Bo* (Go/Enter/Come), *Sh'mot* (Exodus) 10:1-13:16
Haftorah: *Yirmeyahu* (Jeremiah) 46:13-28
Suggested Messianic Writings: Romans 9:14-29

Shalom,

We have arrived at the reading which contains the very first *Pesakh* (Passover). Moshe and Aharon have appeared before Pharaoh seven times previously, thus bringing on the first seven of the plagues. Plague eight now is to come, locusts over all the land of Egypt. In our land, we sometimes call the noisy cicadas a locust, but the locust of the plagues (and also the devastating locust we read of in *Yo'e'l* (Joel)) are actually a type of grasshopper. Cicadas are a harmless insect, except for the loud volume thousands of them can make on a warm summer evening. These damaging locusts are of a species that can breed rapidly under suitable conditions, and then they tend to travel in a group and are very migratory. They are able to journey vast distances, and these predators can rapidly strip fields and greatly damage crops.

HaShem revealed to Moshe a new element in the purpose in the plagues with the eighth plague, that is, "So that you can tell your son and grandson about what I did to Egypt and about My signs that I demonstrated among them, and so that you will all know that I am ADONAI." Pharaoh asked Moshe "who would be going to worship ADONAI your G-d?" Moshe responded that all Israel would go to celebrate a feast to ADONAI. Pharaoh's response, seen in verse 10, was very sarcastic according to some commentators: "Right! Your G-d will be with you, just as much as I am letting you go. Now go with only the men!" And Moshe and Aharon were driven from Pharaoh's presence.

The locust came in such a number that the ground looked black. They completely destroyed all of the plant life of Egypt. Pharaoh was of course convinced only momentarily, and then relented. Then came the three days of darkness, darkness so thick it could be felt.

Let me amplify a bit more on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart by HaShem. The Hebrew root word is קִיחַ *kha-zakh*, the most common definition being, "to strengthen, to make firm." At the end of the reading of each book in the Torah cycle the blessing is given, "יְהַדְּקֵם יְהוָה! יְהַדְּקֵם! *Kha-zakh! Kha-zakh! V'neet-kha-zayk! Be strong! Be strong! And let us be strengthened!*" So in other words, HaShem did not manipulate Pharaoh as a puppet, but rather He strengthened Pharaoh's heart to do what he really wanted to do. HaShem did not override Pharaoh's free will, instead he reinforced it. A key is given in 10:3, where HaShem, through Moshe and Aharon, asks Pharaoh, "How much longer will you refuse to submit to Me?" (CJB); or, "Until when will you refuse to be humbled before Me?" (ArtScroll). Pharaoh had chance after chance to repent.

The ArtScroll commentary notes that, "God's justice decrees that one who refuses of his own free will to obey Him will be forced to do so in a less pleasant manner." This is the paradox of the Almighty – HaShem strengthened Pharaoh's heart to do what he wanted to do, but at the same time HaShem carried out His own purposes for Israel through Pharaoh. I believe this picture gives us a better understanding of why Israel faces what they face in our own day from their enemies, and a little closer to home, why each of us have certain individuals from time to time that we must deal with, who treat us obnoxiously, unfairly or worse. Each "rescue" that we receive from HaShem is to strengthen us, and our flesh is weak to catch on oftentimes, even to a large miraculous deliverance. Israel saw the hand of ADONAI working through the plagues and the night of the passing over, but it was not until later, after they had crossed the sea and beheld the destruction of the army of Pharaoh, that Torah testifies of Israel that "they had faith in HaShem and in Moshe His servant" (Sh'mot 14:31).

The common understanding is that Israel was enslaved in Egypt for 430 years. Let's break that down for a new look. Levi was one of the sons of *Ya'akov* (Jacob) who went down to Egypt. Levi lived to be 137 years old. His son *K'hat* (Kohath) lived to be 133 years old. *K'hat's* son *Amram*, Moshe's father, lived to be 137 years old. Moshe was 80 years old when he appeared before Pharaoh. That totals 487 years, but very obviously each child was not born on the day of the father's death, so we know there was an overlapping of time. Jewish commentators tend to number the beginning of the enslavement with the arrival of *Ya'akov* in Egypt, and thus lasting for a total of 210 years. In *B'reshet* (Genesis) 15:13, HaShem promised Avram (as his name was not yet changed) that his descendants would be *oppressed*

for 400 years in Egypt, given in round number. From the moment Ya'akov and family arrived in Egypt, Yosef settled them in the area known as Goshen, for they were shepherds, and shepherds were abhorrent to Egyptians (B'reshet 46:34). Thus we see the small beginning of oppression.

Other writers date the oppression from the time of the covenant with Avraham himself, found in B'reshet 15. During the making of this covenant, which involved the thick darkness, the smoking fire pot and the flaming torch passing between the cut-up animal sacrifices, Avram experienced a terrible horror and a great darkness came over him. This certainly could have been the beginning of the 430 years of oppression, and *Sha'ul* (Saul, also known as Paul) touches upon this in Galatians 3, where he wrote of the promises that were given to Avraham, and then mentions that Torah (meaning the event at Mt Sinai) came into being 430 years later. Irregardless of the beginning date, Israel was always on G-d's mind.

As believers in Yeshua as Messiah, we of course see a great picture of "The" Sacrifice Lamb in these chapters. We know that when His blood is placed "over" us we are spared from a fiery death. We also know that Yeshua Himself observed the Seder, for the Gospels tell us so. What is commonly known as "the L-rd's Supper" is simply a portion of the Pesakh Seder.

Following the death of the firstborn of Egypt and the passing over of the death angel over the obedient of Israel, the Israelites were to redeem their firstborn before ADONAI, as a reminder of how He brought them out of Egypt. The firstborn were to lead out in worship, and the tribe of Levi was later consecrated in place of all firstborn in Israel, in *B'Midbar* (Numbers) 3. And since the *Levi'im* (Levites) had not yet been set aside by the arrival at Sinai, very possibly these original firstborn were among the *kohanim* (priests) that are mentioned in Sh'mot 19:22 and 42:5.

Israel failed their Creator many times after the events of the Passover, yet from the Haftarah HaShem speaks through the prophet Yirmeyahu to Israel and says, "Don't be afraid, Ya'akov, I am with you. I will finish off all the nations where I have scattered you [a frightening thought - Mordekhi]. However, I will not finish you off, I will discipline you as you deserve, but not completely destroy you" (46:28).

שְׁאַלוּ שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם – *Sha'alu shalom Yerushalayim* – Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

B'rakhot v'todah rabbah

(Blessings & thank you very much)

Mordekhi (Marc)

This Yeshua, who has been taken away from you into heaven, will come back to you in just the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

(Acts 1:11 CJB)