

SHABBAT SERVICE

Saturday, January 13th

10:00 AM Lolo Community "Synagogue"

12:00 PM Oneg Shabbat

&

Interactive Torah Study



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"Blessed are those whose way of life is blameless; who live by the Torah of Adonai. Blessed are those who observe His instruction; who seek Him with all their heart." Psalm



"And God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord; **and I appeared** to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by My name, Lord, I was not known to them."

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי יְהוָה:

Va y'daber Elohim el-Moshe va yomer elav ani Adonai.

And spoke God to Moses and He said unto him, I am the Lord

וְאֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי עֲקֵב בְּאֵל שְׂרַי וְשֵׁמִי יְהוָה לֹא נֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם:

Va'era el-Avraham el-Yitschak v'el-Ya'akov b'El Shaddai ushmi Adonai lo noda'ti lahem.

And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty & (but by) my name, Lord, not was I known to them.

Exodus: A Picture of God's *Redemption*

Last week I said that the book of Exodus can be seen as God's picture of *redemption*. It was God's promise to establish Jacob's seed, Israel, as a great nation in a land promised to them. (Genesis 12:1-2). However, due to the corrupting Canaanite influence on His people, God removed His chosen people to Egypt to accomplish this. God prepared the way for them to enter Egypt by sending ahead Joseph and allowing him to gain power and favor with the Semitic Pharaoh in order to provide for them and to preserve them in Egypt (Genesis 50:20-21). In the Torah portion for last week, we saw how God had prepared Moses to lead His people as a nation out of Egypt and into their "promised land." God *redeemed* His people from assimilation in Canaan and from slavery in Egypt. Now that they had become a great and populous nation, it was God's time for His people to return to their "promised land."



"Let my people go....that they may serve Me in the wilderness."

God's demand to Pharaoh was that he release His people from servitude, so that they could serve God instead. God knew that Pharaoh would not allow His people to leave and gave Moses His plan for the deliverance of His people in Genesis 7:1-5. The active part of redemption is service. "Avodah," in Hebrew translates as "work," "wages," or "labor" in English but also can mean "worship;" devoting our time, abilities, and energies - our labor - to serve the Lord. As a manifestation of gratitude for the redemption God has provided us, we actively seek to serve (worship) Him. In Exodus 7:16, God instructs Moses to confront Pharaoh and tell him to "Let My people go that they may serve Me in the wilderness." Pharaoh, who considered himself a god, already had the service of the Hebrews. Why should he allow them to leave him to serve another? Even today, it is incomprehensible to a secular world that believers should expend their time, abilities, and energies to serve God. Today, as in the days of the Pharaoh, the secular world does not know God, nor are they willing to let God's people go. They have not experienced God's redemption and therefore have no relationship with Him. The principle for us to understand is that God created mankind for worship (avodah), and therefore we will worship something! We will either devote our time, abilities, and energies in service to God or in service to the secular world. Where do you focus your time, abilities, and energies? Whom do you serve?

Pharaoh's reply to God's demand was, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go." Pharaoh's response should not surprise us, as it did not surprise Moses. In Genesis 4:21, God told Moses that He would harden the heart of Pharaoh, so that Pharaoh would not let the people go. In this week's Parsha, Pharaoh will begin to learn about the Lord, the God of Israel. **God will "speak" directly to Pharaoh and all the Egyptians in a way that will be quite meaningful to them. Soon they will all "know the Lord."** God's plan for the *redemption* of His people includes giving Himself glory in the sight of both His people and the Egyptians. Although both Egyptians and Israel were given the opportunity to experience *God's redemption* and serve Him, only Israel and some others chose to do so. **Redemption has always involved active service, which costs us something.** Therefore, only some chose to take the redemption that God offers. Isn't it that way today too?

Rebuke: It's All Your Fault, God!

As this week's parsha opens, God used harsh language with Moses as a rebuke for his outburst of complaint against God: "Va y'daber Elohim," "and spoke God." "**Elohim**" is usually considered to be the name of God that is associated with power and strict judgment. "Y'daber," "spoke," (telling off) is also considered much harsher language than "va yomer," "say/said" which follows in the same sentence. In the last parsha (5:22-23), **Moses responded to his perception of God's failed plan to deliver the people** by complaining to God that God had used Moses to bring harm, rather

than deliverance to the people. Moses felt disheartened that God had not delivered the people, who blamed Moses for their **tsuris**, (troubles). Moses, like all of us, could only see circumstances through human eyes. Although God had given him God's "big picture," and he knew that God would deliver His people, Moses was upset that things didn't go the way he had envisioned, and he blamed God! Don't we do the same thing because of our lack of trust?

Yet in the same sentence that God began with rebuke for Moses's lack of trust, God softens His tone, saying ("**va yomer**,") to Moses (rather than telling him off) "I am the Lord," "**Adonai**" (" the Hebrew substitute for **YHVH**, the personal covenant-keeping, merciful name of God). **Adonai** freed His people from Egyptian bondage, led them out of Egypt to freedom in the land He promised by covenant to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God told Moses that His people, as slaves in Egypt, had only experienced Him as **Elohim** (power and judgement), but would now begin to see Him as **Adonai** (His personal covenant-keeping, merciful name). In English there is little difference between "spoke" and "said" and between "God" and "Lord." But the Hebrew language brings out a world of difference, which illustrates both the strict as well as the merciful nature of God. Sometimes suffering is necessary to bring about redemption, as we saw with the life of Joseph. Without the suffering of God's people in Egyptian bondage, would they have wanted to leave Egypt for a land physically unknown to them? **It is Jewish tradition that teaching is accomplished with both hands! With the left hand (the weaker hand), you push away. With the right hand (the stronger hand), you immediately draw the person near. Rebuke is followed with softness!**

Moses responds to God with a classic, Jewish "**kal va chomer**" (from the smaller to the greater) argument, saying that if the people had not listened to him, why would Pharaoh listen to him? God ("**Adonai**") assures Moses that He would make Moses as God ("**Elohim**") to Pharaoh and speak through Aaron, his brother.

Just what they needed...more snakes!



When Moses approached Pharaoh for the second time, he followed God's instructions to throw down his staff, which would then become a snake. Pharaoh was unconvinced that this supernatural sign from the Hebrew God was more powerful than could be produced by the Egyptian gods. He called for his wise men and sorcerers, who were able to duplicate the sign, making more snakes. **Just what they needed...more snakes!** (Miracles never authenticate a person or his message. Being in agreement with God is the only reliable authentication of a person or his message - **2nd Thess.2:9-10; Rev.13:13-14**). The fact that the snake of Moses ate the other snakes, only

hardened Pharaoh's heart against God because Pharaoh had already made a conscious choice against God.



As a person continuously chooses against God, he becomes less and less sensitive to God's call, until his heart is hardened against God! Is it not true in our lives today that the first time one chooses to disobey God in a particular matter and do something one knows to be wrong, it causes us anguish? We wrestle with the decision because we know it is wrong. We are also keenly aware of the possible results of this sin in the lives of others and our possible punishment for the sin. However, if time after time, we choose not to obey the "voice of God," we find that with repetition, the sin becomes easier to commit. We hardly think about the ramifications to others or the punishment for ourselves. Our hearts gradually become "hardened" to the sin. By his choices against God, Pharaoh hardened his own heart. With God's redemption in Messiah so close, we dare not harden our heart against Him!

A Plague on Your House!



Plagues were actually miracles of God. There were two other periods of history in which God chose to use miracles to accomplish His purposes, as we see He does in the book of Exodus; the time of Elijah and Elisha; the time of Messiah's life on earth.

In Exodus, God used plagues to ultimately free Israel, while punishing Egypt. (Gen.12:3, "And the one who curses you, I will curse.") The plagues showed the futility of worshipping Egyptian gods, as the God of Israel triumphed over them with each plague. The plagues showed God's power and proclaimed His name (Ex.9:16), so that all the Egyptians knew that God is the Lord (Ex.10:2).

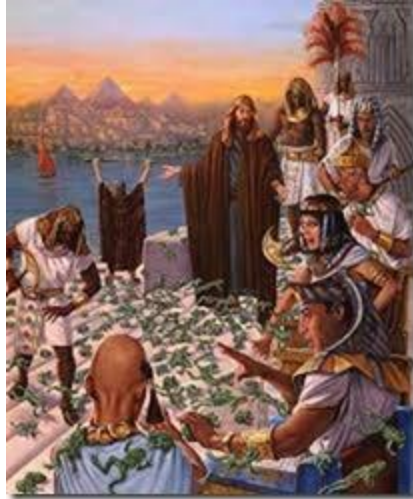
Some of the plagues were an intensification of natural phenomena. Some of the plagues were announced in advance. Many of the worst plagues only affected the Egyptians. Some feel the plagues continued in series for approximately 6 months, becoming more severe as they progressed to the final plague.

Let Them Drink Blood!



God's instruction to Moses was to await Pharaoh, an Egyptian god, himself, on the bank of the Nile, another of the Egyptian gods, as Pharaoh came for his daily ritual presiding over the Egyptian Nile gods. The first plague God used to afflict Egypt began when Aaron raised his staff and struck the water from the Nile River. All of the flowing water throughout Egypt turned into blood, killing fish, and making it necessary for the people to dig wells for fresh water. The Egyptian sorcerers were also able to take fresh water and turn it into blood. **Just what they needed...more blood!** However, they could not remove the blood from the water. Nor could the Egyptian god of the Nile or the Nile fish gods prevent their pollution, which continued for at least 7 days. All Egypt knew that the God of the Hebrews had prevailed over their gods!

Bring on the Frogs!



Then because Pharaoh still refused to allow God's people to leave, God told Moses to again have Aaron take his staff and strike the water in one of the irrigation canals of the Nile. Frogs, which normally inhabited the canals, came up from the canals and invaded the whole land of Egypt, even coming into their homes of the people. The Egyptian sorcerers were called and were also able to make more frogs. **Just what they needed...more frogs!** However, they were not able to remove the frogs from the land. The Pharaoh must have been impressed that his sorcerers could only add to his misery but could not relieve it; nor could the Egyptian goddess of birth (with the head of a frog). All Egypt knew that the God of the Hebrews had prevailed over their frog god and neither Pharaoh nor his sorcerers could remove the frogs!

Pharaoh's Lie produces Lice!

Pharaoh called for Moses to come to him. He agreed to allow the Hebrews to leave, if Moses would remove the frogs. Moses allowed Pharaoh to state the time that the frogs all over Egypt would die, except for those normally inhabiting the canals of the Nile, so that Pharaoh would know that it was God who removed the frogs. However, as soon as Pharaoh saw that the frogs began to die, he went back on his agreement with Moses. **A principle for us today is to recognize that one cannot compromise with evil!** One cannot (negotiate in good faith with a tyrant! If we naively expect goodness from evil-doers, then we are bound to be disappointed! (Is President Obama attempting to compromise with evil-doers by giving them a pathway toward a nuclear bomb?)

Therefore the Lord told Moses to have Aaron use his staff to strike the dust of the earth, so that without warning all of Egypt was covered with lice (also translated as "gnats", "sand-fleas", and "mosquitoes") like dust on their bodies. Fortunately for the Egyptians, their sorcerers were unable to duplicate this plague, but they recognized it as "the finger of God." The Egyptian god of the desert was unable to prevent this infestation, which must have greatly disturbed the Egyptian priests, who prided themselves on their ritual purity and personal hygiene. Yet Pharaoh would not relent. **Another life principle we see operating is that stubbornness (hard-heartedness) can become so deeply entrenched in a life, that it becomes the over-riding element in that person's life; like a grimy window, through which even the purest light appears dingy.** All Egypt knew that the God of the Hebrews had prevailed over their god of the desert and neither Pharaoh nor his sorcerers could remove the gnats, which would have been all over their bodies and in their food and beds.

Swarms (A Mixture) of biting Flies & Insects

The fourth plague sent by God to infest the Egyptians was swarms of biting insects, which may have included biting flies. These were not simply individual, nuisance insects but were swarming insects all over the ground and throughout their homes; in their food; in their beds. Although the translation of the Hebrew word, "arov," is uncertain, "swarms" can be used of insects or flies. Certain Rabbinic commentaries even feel that these swarms were a mixture of wild animals. The Egyptian

gods of insects (one with the head of a fly) could not spare the Egyptians from this infestation. However, the Hebrews were spared, showing the Egyptians the power of God to bring this plague only upon them, while sparing God's people. In this instance, God decided to spare His people, but, as seen in earlier plagues, He does not always choose to do so. Perhaps God may have spared His people as instruction to all the Egyptians that God had the power that their gods did not have; to bring plagues upon them, while at the same time sparing those who believed in Him.

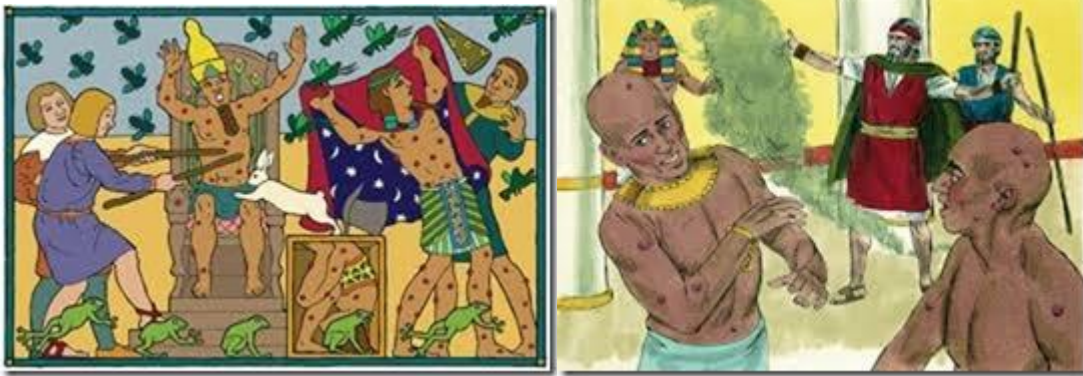
Pestilence (murrain) on Livestock in the Fields



When Pharaoh saw that the insect swarms only affected his people, he summoned Moses and Aaron and attempted a compromise. He would let them worship God but not leave Egypt. Moses insisted on obedience to God's command to go a distance of three days journey into the desert. **Moses illustrates for us today that we should never compromise with the ungodly!** Pharaoh acquiesced and asked Moses to "make supplication for me," so that the swarms of flies and/or insects might be removed. But when the swarms of insects were removed, Pharaoh again refused to make good on his promise to let the Hebrews go.

God instructed Moses to again go to Pharaoh to let him know that if he did not allow God's people to leave by the next day, God would cause a pestilence or an epidemic to fall upon all Egyptian animals pasturing in the field. Again, God chose to spare the animals of His people. This would effect Egyptian food as well as transportation and agriculture. There were Egyptian gods for each of their animals, including Hathor (who had a cow's head) and the goddess of love, beauty, and joy, who could not prevent this catastrophe. Again, all Egypt could see that the gods of each of their animals was incapable of protecting against the God of the Hebrews. Yet, even after the pestilence destroyed all Egyptian animals in the fields but spared Hebrew animals, Pharaoh refused to give in. Therefore, while Moses and Aaron were still in the presence of Pharaoh, God instructed them to take brick dust from kilns, where the Hebrew slaves had made bricks for Pharaoh, and throw it into the air.

Festering Boils on Man and Beast



The brick dust spread throughout Egypt settling on men and the animals left alive. It then festered into boils or blisters. The Egyptian sorcerers were also affected with boils and could not even try to duplicate God's miracle. (Besides, why would they even want to attempt to make more boils?) The Egyptian goddess of healing and the lion-headed goddess with the power over diseases could not prevent the misery caused by the boils. Even as Pharaoh was covered with boils, the Lord hardened his heart, so that he would not listen Moses. For God to accomplish His plan to free His people by exalting Himself over Pharaoh and the rest of the Egyptian gods, Pharaoh would have to continue to refuse to let God's people go. God's foretelling the future to Moses at the burning bush was, "But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. So I will stretch out My hand, and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go" (Ex. 3:19-20).

Hail with Fire



God told Moses to confront Pharaoh in the morning (probably as he came out to the canal). Moses told Pharaoh that if God had wanted to simply kill him, He could have done so by now. But God wanted to proclaim His name and power in Egypt. Yet having done so, Pharaoh still insisted in exalting himself over God's people (and therefore over God). Therefore the next day any man or animal not inside under shelter would have fiery hail rained upon them. Although Pharaoh's heart was already so hardened that he did not care about his peoples' fate, some of Pharaoh's servants heard this prediction from God and took action. They had "faith" in God's being able to cause them harm (not the same as redemptive or worshipful faith) from having observed His past performance. Immediately, they acted on their "faith" by having their servants flee from the fields, putting their livestock under shelter. Others paid no attention to God and took no action. It seems that nothing ever changes! Even today, some read about God-instructed morality from scripture, having seen the destruction caused immorality (AIDS, abortion, incest, etc.) and exhibit their "faith" by taking action to obey Him. They are spared from the effects of immorality. Others, have no spiritual sensitivity at all and pay God no heed.

God's prediction came to pass. Except in Goshen, where God's people lived, all those out in the field were struck by hail mixed with fire, which also struck trees and the early ripening

plants. Pharaoh sent for Moses and said, "I have sinned this time; the Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones." Sounds like a confession of faith doesn't it? However, his actions show that he had ulterior motives for his "statement of faith." From this statement of Pharaoh, we learn that **mere words (even the "correct words") do not always indicate a change of heart!** Stated another way, **words of faith are not necessarily "saving faith;" words issued from a redemptive, repentant spirit that allow one to become reconciled to God.** Only God knows the heart behind the words, and He is the Righteous Judge of our hearts. Pharaoh again "sinned" after the hail ceased, and again he hardened his heart towards God.

As we finish reading this Torah portion and get ready for our Sabbath service, let us resolve to keep our hearts soft before the voice of God; ready to seek and obey Him; ready to repent when God's Ruach instructs us; ready to show our faith by our actions!

SHABBAT SHALOM

