

PARASHAH: Bo (Go)
ADDRESS: Sh'mot (Exodus) 10:1-13:16
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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

The name of this week's portion is called "**Bo**," meaning, "**Go**." This was the command of HaShem as Moshe made his way into the audience of the Pharaoh once again. However, by the context of the portion, we could just as well apply the title to the verbal imperative possibly given to Moshe at the mouth of the king of Egypt as he reached his final amount of "patience" with this fellow named Moshe. In the latter part of chapter 10, as well as verse 8 of chapter 11, we see the confrontations of these two men drawing to a close. I can almost imagine Pharaoh commanding Moshe, "Go! Get out! You and all that belong to you! Go into the desert and serve your invisible God! Just let me and my people be! You've ruined Egypt, and if I ever see your face again, it will be you who is ruined!" Later on, as you read this parashah, you shall see that this supposition is not too far from the truth.

This man Pharaoh, by now, had indeed realized that his kingdom lay in ruin. Even his trusted advisors informed him of this grim reality, in the opening paragraph of our parashah. Isn't it rather amazing that even though the Pharaoh's heart was so hardened to the truth, so that he couldn't fathom any other opinion other than his own, that HaShem still allowed his closest counselors to see that to resist the Holy One of Isra'el was futile. In fact, their advice to him was to do as Moshe requested. This doesn't teach that his advisors were now genuine believers in Moshe's God, but it does teach us that even unregenerate man (minus the supernatural callus of the heart) is capable of recognizing when "God shows up on the scene." In other words, even though the text doesn't tell us that these advisors came to trust in HaShem, the opportunity

was certainly there. For, had they hardened their hearts the way their king had hardened his, they too may have failed to recognize that this was no ordinary, everyday God that Am Isra'el served.

In fact, rather than honor Moshe's request, Pharaoh tries one last-ditch effort to "bargain" with Moshe. Rather than let all of the people go, why not just allow the men to go and worship this God of theirs? This request seemed reasonable to the king of Egypt. But Moshe wasn't operating under his own pretenses. Moreover, he wasn't in a position to bargain with this evil man. He and everyone else—indeed everything else that belonged to HaShem—would leave Egypt!

HaShem had allowed this foolish resistance to continue so that he might demonstrate his mighty power in all of the earth. As I mentioned last week, the Pharaoh willfully hardened his own heart. God pleaded with the Pharaoh, via the agents of Moshe and Aharon. When it was apparent that there was no getting through this willful stubbornness, God saw this as an opportunity to use the Pharaoh as a vessel to demonstrate his holiness. What a stark contrast to the purpose and calling that we as believers have on our lives! We are called out of the earth, out of Egypt (spiritually) as Isra'el was literally, to demonstrate the holiness of our God in the earth. We have been singled out to become living witnesses of his mighty power and mercy, among a world of unbelievers. The Pharaoh served this same purpose, albeit, in an infamous sort of way! The choice is ours: do we surrender to Almighty God, and fulfill his purposes by allowing him to showcase our lives as a living testimony of his power and holiness? Or do we stubbornly resist him, until he has no choice but to confirm our resistance, thereby bringing upon us the judgment? Either way, HaShem will have his way with us, for, he alone is sovereign! Either he will have his way with us in glory, or he will have his way with us in judgment! The choice is ours.

I don't know about you, but I'd rather he had his way with me in blessing and glory! The Torah teaches us that his Word will not return unto him "void," that is, without accomplishing that which it set out to accomplish. The word of HaShem to Moshe was that Isra'el would serve him in holiness and in truth. The Pharaoh foolishly placed himself in opposition to the Will and fulfillment of this promise, and the LORD had to "put him in his place." It was in this setting that HaShem instructed Moshe to tell Pharaoh that the final plague was about to befall Egypt, and that it was this final plague that would "jettison" Isra'el out of Egypt.

Pesach and the Death of the Firstborn

Compared to the previous nine plagues, the death of the firstborn is a rather bleak and sorrowful plague. Here, the stubbornness of the ruler of Egypt had merited the judgment of God in such a degree as to bring about conclusive judgment on the inhabitants of his kingdom as well. No longer would the plagues simply afflict Egypt. Now the Pharaoh's subjects would also feel the sting of ADONAI's swift judgment, as he slew the firstborn male of each household! This

alone seems like a rather staunch punishment, until we realize that amidst the judgment of the Holy One, he always provides a way for us to return to him. We find that HaShem instructed the people of Isra'el to select a lamb or kid without blemish slay it in the presence of the entire assembly of Isra'el and sprinkle its blood on the sides and top of the doorframes of their houses. Afterwards, they were to roast the flesh in fire and consume as much as possible that evening (12:1-10).

This mitzvah, this command, is the first official mitzvah of Corporate Isra'el, according to our sages. It is significant for our studies to notice that this mitzvah came before the actual giving of the Torah at Sinai. We know from our knowledge of the New Covenant, that our Sacrificial Lamb Yeshua is being represented here. In fact, even his method of death is accurately portrayed, in the symbol of the blood at the head and sides of the "sacrificial post." Moreover, his sinless atonement is vividly portrayed in the choice of a lamb without spot or blemish. But what we might have missed is the fact that his death signifies for us, the beginning of a genuine relationship with our Heavenly Abba. You say, "Torah Teacher Ariel, of course I knew that!" But do we really actualize this truth?

Why is it so true sometimes that we try so hard to have a relationship with our LORD without first surrendering to his Spotless Lamb? We go to church, we read our Bibles, we have our spiritual things surrounding us—and I'm not saying that these things are wrong in and of themselves—yet, many times we know inside of us that there is something vitally missing from our relationship, and yet we still willfully resist. Why is that? Allow me to use a midrash (homiletic application).

When the People of Isra'el were instructed to participate in the first Pesach (Passover), the LORD promised that whoever was obedient to this mitzvah would be spared the "death Angel" as he passed throughout the land of Egypt that night. This was an act of faith on the part of the participants! Logically, blood on a house served no rational function, in that day, or our present day. Why would anyone expect to receive protection from "death" by placing lamb's blood on his or her house? But to HaShem, this act of obedience signified a placing of one's trust in his Word. In this case, it was the Word of HaShem through his servants Moshe and Aharon. Sh'mot 12:29-33 testifies that this is precisely what happened that awful night.

The Pharaoh in his hardened disbelief did not heed the warning of the LORD and when the Angel of ADONAI came to his house his firstborn son was slain. The Torah tells us that this was a great cry—in fact, the greatest cry in all of Egypt (11:6; 12:30)! Such was the disaster of those who set themselves in opposition to the Sovereign of the Universe!

"Isra'el is my firstborn son. I have told you to let my son go in order to worship me, but you have refused to let him go. Well, then, I will kill your firstborn son!"

These words, spoken by HaShem, seem like they belong in our current parashah, yet amazingly, they are found in Sh'mot 4:22, 23! Even that far back, HaShem foreknew the willful hardness of the Pharaoh's heart. I'm sure that as the current events unfolded before Moshe's eyes that it was then that this awesome statement of HaShem's came to his remembrance. This final plague inflicted such terror on the people of Egypt that they hurried Am Isra'el out of their land, for fear that they might be completely destroyed in this judgment (12:33). It was also during this time that ADONAI caused the people of Egypt to look on the offspring of Avraham with favor. As they left Egypt, the Egyptians nearly "forced" Am Isra'el to take their gold, silver, precious stones and fine clothing. This was also promised of the LORD way back in Sh'mot 3:21, 22. At first it might seem rather useless to cause the Egyptians to commit such a ludicrous act. Why would a bunch of former slaves have need of volumes of such costly things—especially in the desert? We like to tickle our imaginations and suggest that when HaShem saves his people, he would prefer to line their pockets with the riches of this world. But that would be just another "prosperity message," and one which we could do without. No, the real reason that HaShem caused this supernatural favor, was that later on, these same recipients of riches would have an opportunity to give it right back to the One who posses all riches in the first place. We shall read about that in Sh'mot chapter 25.

Getting back to my point stated earlier, the Exodus from Egypt, I believe, is very significant for us today. Not only did our LORD deliver the descendants of Isra'el, but any Egyptian who placed his or her trust in HaShem left Egypt that day as well (12:38)! Our LORD is surely awesome in mercy and grace! He had no reason to accept the Egyptians; he did not cut a covenant with them or their forefathers. Yet his heart, as is demonstrated time and time again in the pages of the Torah, is disposed towards those who are willing to demonstrate genuine faith in him. His offer of deliverance from the bondage of sin (characterized by physical Egypt in that day) is open to anyone who will surrender his or her own will to HaShem's loving Will instead.

The LORD our Deliverer

'Am Isra'el had not received the Torah at this point in history. And yet however, they were delivered from their bondage! What does this say of the proper relationship to the Torah and trust in HaShem? As summarized above, our trust in Yeshua is the beginning of a genuine relationship with God; similarly, the Exodus from Egypt (a departure from the bondage of sin) was the beginning of the people's relationship with Almighty God. Please don't misunderstand me here. I'm not dogmatically saying that the relationship that HaShem had with their forefathers Avraham, Yitz'chak, and Ya'akov meant nothing. Rather, I am teaching you that corporately, their salvation relationship with HaShem, as a people, did not begin until this promise (the Exodus) was fulfilled. We also learned last week that Moshe and his generation would come to know HaShem

in a way that his forefathers did not know. This was precisely as the "God who delivered us from the bondage of the Egyptians." This can also be characterized in the following example.

In B'resheet 15:12-16, HaShem and (then) Avram were agreeing to a covenant. This covenant declared that HaShem would deliver (future tense verb implies a change or "maturation" in the knowledge of HaShem) the descendants of Avram from the hands of an oppressive nation exactly 400 years after they became enslaved. This promise also detailed the elaborate giving of the riches (of the above-mentioned, oppressive people) to the Avram's offspring, as I also mentioned earlier. But what is significant to notice is that in our current parashah, this faithful word came to pass exactly as HaShem promised (see 12:40-42). The number mentioned in our current portion (430 years) might seem to contradict the promise of HaShem in B'resheet 15:13; indeed, it might also seem to contradict another portion of Scripture found in Acts 7:6, 7 (Stephen's discourse), until we disclose some unknown details of this promise.

Quoting from the Chumash, on the commentary to B'resheet 15:13, we read,

"There would be a total of four hundred years of alien status, in which would be included the two hundred ten years of literal exile in Egypt, and also the twenty years that Jacob spent with Laban in Haran [see *Vayetze*]. The *servitude* mentioned in this prophecy took place during the last one hundred sixteen years of the Egyptian servitude, the last eighty-six years of which were a time of harsh *oppression*, when Pharaoh intensified the suffering of the Jews. The calculation of the four hundred years would begin thirty years after this vision, with the birth of Isaac; since he never had the permanent home or the prestige of and honor enjoyed by Abraham, he and his offspring were considered aliens, even during the years that they lived in *Eretz Yisrael*. After those four hundred years, Abraham's offspring would be able to take possession of the Land (emphasis theirs)."¹

Whether or not this sequence was played out exactly as the sages have suggested here is not really important. The important aspects to realize are that:

1. Moshe does emphasize that it was 430 years to the exact day (clearly Moshe knew when the sequence of time started) that the offspring of Avraham left Egypt (12:40), vindicating HaShem's promise of B'resheet 15:13, and,
2. It was a collective multitude of peoples that left and traveled into the wilderness to eventually receive the Torah at Sinai.

¹ Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Commentary to Genesis* (Jewish Publication Society, Stone Edition ArtScroll Series, 1989), p. 69

We have here at least two very important characteristics of our Loving, Heavenly Abba: he can be trusted at his Word, despite the chaotic circumstances surrounding us; he is faithful to deliver us completely, even before we have received his written revelation and put it into practice in our everyday lives! To be sure, the Children of Isra'el did not keep the Torah the way that they would eventually be instructed to keep it, after Sinai. Yet, HaShem honored their faith in him (demonstrated by the Pesach incident), and brought about the greatest collective deliverance that the world has ever known! This monumental deliverance should have caused that people, both Isra'el and Egyptian, to understand that faith in HaShem alone is what brings about the freedom so desperately desired in the midst of slavery! I must state it plainly one more time for my brothers according to the flesh, the majority of which are seeking to be justified by their Jewish heritage and by obediently keeping the "Torah" of Moshe, while remaining (seemingly) ignorant of the "Torah" of Avraham: our ancestors were delivered (a symbol of genuine faith in the Holy One) BEFORE they received the Torah on Mount Sinai! The sequence of the covenants is crucial for a proper understanding of the righteousness of HaShem!

Conclusions

The New Covenant book of Romans, chapter 9 says that Isra'el, striving to achieve the righteousness that the Torah has to offer, [will not] gain this righteousness until they realize that it is attained by faith and not by "works," where works here was understood to be a ritual of conversion for Gentiles wishing to become Jews, viz, covenant members (vv. 30-32)! The first Pesach took place in the absence of a written Torah, but not in the absence of a previous, living covenant! The people left Egypt without a written document stating how they should serve their God! The Torah of Moshe is a very important, covenant document, to be sure! But it cannot take the place of the covenant made with Avraham! The covenant with Avraham must be internalized, by faith, before actualizing the covenant (that was about to be made) through Moshe! In other words, in the correct sequence, the two perfectly compliment each other.

Today, the spiritual rules have not changed one bit. Our salvation/Exodus (through the sacrifice of Yeshua) is an effectual, life changing, mental and spiritual appropriation that takes place in the midst of our sinful state of existence.

Only after we willfully place our trusting faithfulness in HaShem, through his Only Son, can we ever hope to correctly be obedient to the Written Revelation of HaShem—that is, his Torah.

The closing blessing is as follows:

“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,

***asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v'chay-yeh o'lam nata-b'tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn."***

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

"Shabbat Shalom!"

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