

**November 19, 2017 - Ex. 10:1-29 - Plagues of locusts and darkness**

**Torah Reading: Exodus 10:1-29 - Plagues of locust and darkness**

**Psalm 48**

**Haftarah: 1 Samuel 6:6-14**

### **The Plagues of Locusts and Darkness**

**Exodus 10:1** - "And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him:"

Rashi - "shew" = "that I may place these signs of Mine in his midst" [Again referring to the plagues on Pharaoh's heart]

**Exodus 10:2** - "And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the LORD."

This story is vital in revealing who God is, to pass on to other generations, whether our own children or new disciples. It's repeated in the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:7 - "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" etc.

Rashi - "what things I have wrought in Egypt" = how I made a mockery of the Egyptians. This relates to the week's Haftarah in **1 Samuel 6:6** - The Philistine diviners explain that the captured Ark is bringing plagues: "And why should you make your heart heavy as the Egyptians and Pharaoh made their hearts heavy? Will it not be, just as He mocked them, and they sent them away, and they departed?" The word "wrought" in the King James is rendered "mocked" in both scriptures in the Jewish translation.

**Exodus 10:4** - "Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, to morrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast."

i.e. "Locusts... from coast to coastus," as we say in our Passover skit.

**Exodus 10:9-10** - "And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the LORD. And he said unto them, Let the LORD be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: look to it; for evil is before you."

Rashi - See that evil is before your faces - A midrash says: There is a star named Ra'ah [i.e., רעה meaning evil]. Pharaoh said to them [Moses and Aaron], "With my astrology I see that star ascending toward you in the desert [where you would like to go], and that is a sign of blood and slaughter." When the Israelites sinned with the calf, and the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to kill them, Moses said in his prayer, "Why should the Egyptians say, 'With Ra'ah He took them out...?'" (Exod. 32:12) This is what he [Pharaoh] said to them, "See that Ra'ah [evil] is opposite your faces," [implying that their blood would be shed in the desert]. Immediately, "The Lord repented of the Ra'ah [the

sign of the star]" (Exod. 32:14), and He turned the bloodshed [symbolized by this star] into the blood of the circumcision, for Joshua [in fact] circumcised them. This is the meaning of what is said: "This day I have rolled away the reproach of the Egyptians from you" (Josh. 5:9), for they were saying to you, "We see blood over you in the desert." -[from Midrash Shir Hashirim, Wertheimer 1:2]

## Locusts

Locusts are usually solitary, but under certain circumstances, become more abundant and change their behavior and habits, becoming gregarious in what has been called a 'Jekyll and Hyde'-style transformation. (The two stages were thought to be separate species until 1921.) Under suitable conditions of drought followed by rapid vegetation growth, serotonin in their brains triggers a dramatic set of changes: they start to breed abundantly, becoming gregarious and migratory when their populations become dense enough.

Swarming behavior is a response to overcrowding. Increased tactile stimulation of the hind legs from justling in a crowd causes an increase in levels of serotonin. They form bands of wingless nymphs which later become swarms of winged adults. These groups behave like cohesive units and move across the landscape, mostly downhill, but making their way round barriers and merging with other bands. Both the bands and the swarms move around and rapidly strip fields and cause damage to crops. The adults are powerful fliers; they can travel great distances, consuming most of the green vegetation wherever the swarm settles.

A large locust swarm can consist of billions of locusts with a population of up to 200 million per square mile.

**Isaiah 40:22** - "It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent."

Besides expressing the idea of humans being small and insignificant compared to the Lord, God sees fallen humanity as the devouring locusts we are, especially when drawn together in cities, where anonymity breeds deception and greed.

**Proverbs 30:27** - "The locusts have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks."

The most blatant example of man's locust-like self-seeking is in war, and the Bible compares armies to locusts in several places.

**Joel 1:4-7** and **Joel 2:1-11** compare God's judgment on Israel to an army of locusts:

**Joel 2:25** - And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent

among you. (i.e the stages of locust development)

Exodus and Joel both figure in John's depiction of the first "woe" in Revelation 9:

### The Strange and Terrible Locusts of Revelation

**Revelation 9:1-11** - "And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

v.3 - And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man."

v.6 - And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.

v.8 - And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

v.11 - And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

**Exodus 10:19** - "And the LORD turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt."

The removal of the locusts was as great a miracle as the bringing them at first.

The locust plague revealed the powerlessness of Egypt's gods to protect the land's fertility. Neper (Nepri), the god of grain; Renenutet, the cobra-goddess of grain; and Seth (Set), also ruler over crops, were proven impotent.

### Darkness

**Exodus 10:21-23** - "And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may

be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings."

Targum Onkelos paraphrases it, "after that the darkness of the night is removed;" so Targum Jonathan; that it might appear to be different from that, and be much grosser.

"No power of the fire might give them light: neither could the bright flames of the stars endure to lighten that horrible night." (Wisdom 17:5)

### **Light in Their Dwellings**

Compare with the pillar of cloud and of fire:

**Exodus 14:20** - "And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night."

**1 John 1:5-7** - "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Compare 3-hours of darkness at the crucifixion

**Matthew 27:45** - "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour."

Besides the gospel accounts, this darkness is also confirmed by three extra-biblical historians: Thallus, Phlegon, and Africanus.

Phlegon (around AD 137) - "In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad (i.e., AD 33) there was 'the greatest eclipse of the sun' and that 'it became night in the sixth hour of the day [i.e., noon] so that stars even appeared in the heavens. There was a great earthquake in Bithynia, and many things were overturned in Nicaea.'"

Phlegon attributes it to an eclipse, but a solar eclipse could not have occurred during the lunar cycle of the Passover, nor would it cause earthquakes.

The Plague of Darkness came upon Amon-Re, the national god of Egypt and the divine father of Pharaoh.

The light in Israel's dwelling was probably the Shekinah glory of God's presence. Darkness indicated God had completely withdrawn from dealing Egypt. All that could come after was death.

**Proverbs 4:19** - “The way of the wicked is as darkness, they know not at what they stumble.”

**1 John 1:5-9** - “God is light; In him there is no darkness at all”

Believers are children of light:

**Ephesians 5:8** - “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:”

**2 Corinthians 4:6** - “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Egypt's thick darkness was a foreshadowing of the “blackness of darkness forever” (Jude 13) and the “outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12) reserved for those who refuse God's grace.

### Negotiating with Pharaoh

**Exodus 10:24-26** - "And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you. And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God; and we know not with what we must serve the LORD, until we come thither."

The dialogue between Pharaoh and Moses represent the temptations of our distracted minds. Satan wants us to compromise God's demands in some small way.

Pharaoh first tried to keep them in the land, then to keep them *near* the land, next to keep *part* of themselves in the land and finally, when he could not succeed in any of these three, he sought to send them forth without their possessions or the ability to serve God.

**Matthew 6:24** - "No man can serve two masters"

We have our possessions as *stewards*. What we have - stuff, money, time, abilities, etc - belongs to God, and we are to use it to serve him.

This sacrifice/service is described as a "feast." Life in Christ is more joyful and satisfying than anything else we can imagine:

**Exodus 10:9** - "And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the LORD."

"there shall not an hoof be left behind" - All we are, and all we have is at God's disposal.

--from *Gleanings in Exodus*, Arthur W. Pink.