

Bo

Go

“Faithful Physical Actions Depict Spiritual Realities”

Exodus 10:1-13:16
Jeremiah 46:13-28

Our Torah reading for this week, *Bo*, turns to describing the Lord’s final three judgments upon the Egyptians. We find that there are some foundational spiritual themes for the Ancient Israelites to not only understand, but most importantly, incorporate into their interactions with God, or we might say, their walk of faith. For beyond any doubt, the overall premise communicated in *Bo* is Israel’s deliverance from physical bondage as slaves in Egypt, which in many regards symbolizes and foreshadows the ultimate deliverance of humanity from Adam’s fallen nature, by true saving belief in the atoning blood of Yeshua the Messiah (Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45). But while considering this critical need in order to inherit eternal life (Galatians 6:20-23), our Torah portion also reveals some additional spiritual realities and principles for living a life by faith (Hebrews 11:6), which as we consider and survey the Torah, and indeed the Bible as a whole, include:

1. God may, for a season, regard the sincere supplications of those who eventually forsake Him
2. God gives light and revelation to His chosen people, even in the midst of utter darkness
3. God honors those who honor Him
4. Imagined faith without works is worthless
5. The redemption of the firstborn
6. The critical need to pass various “signs” to future generations
7. The reality that deliverance from sin and salvation is provided to all humanity, regardless of family heritage

Of course, it is to be understood that the Lord did choose a specific individual, Abraham (Genesis 18:19), and the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 19:5-6), to perhaps not only be a “laboratory experiment,” as it were, among the rest of humanity—but most critically, to take knowledge of Himself and the light of salvation, the very essence of what would be revealed to them, to the other nations of the world (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). This is something which we know today has ultimately culminated via the arrival of Yeshua on the scene of history. So

with this goal in mind, Israel must endure, record, and persevere for posterity's sake (Romans 3:2)—a wide range of both positive and negative interactions with the world system, both physical and spiritual, as it was created. As the final three plagues are cast upon Egypt in this week's reading, resulting in physical freedom from slavery, Messiah followers should all recognize that even the initial liberation from being born from above (John 3:16), is just a starting point on a lifelong journey. God's people are to learn more and more about Him, and become closer and closer to Him, as His righteousness becomes a true reality in their lives.

As we turn to our Torah reading, with the plague of locusts falling upon Egypt, one finds that the judgment was so extreme that it literally covered the whole land of Egypt. But curiously, because the Lord is inherently a compassionate and merciful God (Exodus 34:6-7)—when Pharaoh confessed his fault to Moses and Aaron, there was a brief relenting of the judgment, and the locusts were driven into the Red Sea:

“So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD directed an east wind on the land all that day and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt; *they were* very numerous. There had never been so *many* locusts, nor would there be so *many* again. For they covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every plant of the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Thus nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt. **Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, ‘I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and make supplication to the LORD your God, that He would only remove this death from me.’ He went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. So the LORD shifted the wind to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt.** But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go” (Exodus 10:13-20).

Although the continual hardening of the heart of Pharaoh resulted in the next two judgments, the fact that there was a respite from the locusts, could be reminiscent of a later scene in Scripture. The idol-worshipping people of Nineveh were forewarned by Jonah about their imminent judgment, and because of their appeal to God, the judgment was delayed:

“Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, ‘In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water.

But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.’ **When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it”** (Jonah 3:5-10).

Nineveh’s seemingly universal appeal to God in sackcloth and fasting, forestalled the judgment, albeit for just a period of time until it did finally fall (Nahum 2:6-11). Nevertheless, the principle that the Lord will even listen to the pleas of the ungodly for mercy, reveals His heart toward all of humanity, as it is His stated desire that no one should perish (2 Peter 3:9).

The penultimate judgment issued upon Ancient Egypt, was almost tangible, thick darkness, which undoubtedly brought great fear to the inhabitants of the region. Yet it is noted that even during this terrifying, three-day long judgment, that in the dwellings of the Israelites, there was still some light:

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt.’ **So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings.** Then Pharaoh called to Moses, and said, ‘Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even your little ones may go with you.’ But Moses said, ‘You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice *them* to the LORD our God. Therefore, our livestock too shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we shall take some of them to serve the LORD our God. And until we arrive there, we ourselves do not know with what we shall serve the LORD.’ But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was not willing to let them go. Then Pharaoh said to him, ‘Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!’ Moses said, ‘You are right; I shall never see your face again!’” (Exodus 10:21-29).

The fact that the Israelites were preserved with light, in the midst of the darkness—should serve to establish the spiritual principle that God’s people residing in every wicked and perverted generation since, are to walk as children of the Light, because of the spiritual insight and blessings bestowed upon them. The Apostle Paul stated this responsibility in categorical terms:

“Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful

even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. **But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light**” (Ephesians 5:7-13).

When properly understood that in due time, everything will be exposed to the light of the truth, followers of the Messiah should innately have a holy fear of the Almighty, which should result in a sincere desire to walk in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Despite the abhorrence of many of the Egyptians to even share bread with the Israelites—as indicated several centuries earlier during Joseph’s lifetime (Genesis 43:32)—the Lord actually gave them favor in the sight of the Egyptians, even to the point of eventually receiving items of gold and silver upon their departure (Exodus 12:35-36). Here it is noted that even Moses delivering the harsh words of judgment from the Lord was greatly esteemed:

“The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Furthermore, the man Moses *himself* was greatly esteemed in the land of Egypt, both in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people. Moses said, ‘Thus says the LORD, “About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the cattle as well. Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been *before* and such as shall never be again”’” (Exodus 11:3-6).

Another spiritual principle can be discerned here, in how followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will often receive favor from the godless people of the world—because despite, perhaps, innate abhorrence with Believers’ solemn faith in God, their behavior before the Holy One and His blessings are evident and often respected. This principle is noted in the Book of Proverbs, and given even more credence in Paul’s letter to the Romans:

“When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Proverbs 16:7).

“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:17-18).

The critical need to faithfully follow the instructions of the Lord is addressed, as the requirements for avoiding the death of the firstborn are described. It is critical to note that the Lord had some very specific things that the Ancient Israelites had to complete, in order to receive protection from the angel of death, which was soon to descend upon the environs around Egypt. After following the procedures for inspecting a chosen lamb for the sacrifice, and taking the required

days to search for any blemishes—it was imperative that the blood of the lamb be put on the doorposts and lintels of each residence of Israel:

“Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ‘This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, “On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household. Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons *in them*; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. **Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.** They shall eat the flesh that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, *both* its head and its legs along with its entrails. And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. Now you shall eat it in this manner: *with* your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD's Passover”’” (Exodus 12:1-11).

This explicit method, for avoiding the judgment of death, had to be done without reservation. This would illustrate and foreshadow the ultimate requirement: that every human being needs to faithfully receive and apply the blood of the Lamb of God, Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Messiah), upon the doorposts and lintels of a believing heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

The next spiritual principle is the requirement of the Israelites, to understand that the redeeming blood on their houses, was to serve as a sign to them—and to the Ancient Egyptians and the world at large—of the God in whom they were placing their trust. The Lord gave Israel a description of two annual appointed times, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which were to be permanent observances throughout the generations:

“For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the LORD. **The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance.** Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that

person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and *another* holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten by every person, that alone may be prepared by you. **You shall also observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance.** In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he* is an alien or a native of the land. You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread” (Exodus 12:12-20).

A critical role of Israel was to preserve the revelation received, so that future generations would be able to persevere, in order to fulfill God’s mission and purpose:

“And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ you shall say, **‘It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.’** And the people bowed low and worshiped. Then the sons of Israel went and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did” (Exodus 12:24-28).

Understanding that the Lord passed over the houses of the Israelites was, and is critical to note, for every generation—therefore memorializing how it is essential for instilling a holy and worshipful attitude toward the Almighty. But as noted, this final horrific judgment to kill the firstborn of the Egyptians, while preserving the Israelites because of their faithful actions, even communicates how favor was continued to be bestowed upon Israel by the grieving Egyptians:

“Now it came about at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. **Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, ‘Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship the LORD, as you have said.** Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also.’ The Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, ‘We will all be dead.’ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, *with* their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders. **Now the sons of Israel had**

done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians” (Exodus 12:29-36).

It needs to be recognized how a mixed multitude of people did leave Egypt with the Israelites. Even though Israel proper was the definite recipient of God’s protection and blessing—this is not at all to disregard those from the world at large who are to be substantially impacted with His goodness and grace. As the Israelites and this multitude left Egypt, we are also reminded that God’s promise to release His people from Egyptian servitude had ended, according to His timing and purpose:

“Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. **A mixed multitude also went up with them**, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock. They baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of unleavened bread. For it had not become leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. **Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.** It is a night to be observed for the LORD for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the LORD, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations” (Exodus 12:37-42).

Our Torah portion comes to a close with a reiteration of many of the principles previously stated. Repetition is a great instructor, and as *Bo* ends with a reminder about the killing of the firstborn males and beasts of Egypt, also included is a reminder to find means such as phylacteries (or *tefillin*), to keep the instructions and admonitions of the Lord at the forefront of the mind:

“On this day in the month of Abib, you are about to go forth. It shall be when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall observe this rite in this month. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. **You shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt.** Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year. Now when the LORD brings you to the land

of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD. But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck; **and every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.** And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ then you shall say to him, ‘With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. **Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.**’ So it shall serve as a sign on your hand and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt” (Exodus 13:4-16).

In closing, this powerful Torah portion has much to be gleaned by those seeking to please the Lord in their personal walks of faith. The spiritual principles implied by these many physical acts are to be understood on so many different levels, so that God’s people can truly fulfill their mission to the world at large.

May the Holy One endow each and every one of us to not only study in order to be approved—but by faith *and* with a stirred heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:25-27)—work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), knowing that He loves us and desires that no one should perish!

B’shalach After he had let go “Freedom Faith Tests”

Exodus 13:17-17:16
Judges 4:4-5:31 (A); 5:1-31 (S)

Some of the details, about the miraculous deliverance of Ancient Israel from Egyptian servitude, are recorded in this week’s Torah portion, *B’shalach*. It includes particular attention to the ongoing struggles that the liberated nation will have to endure, as the Lord desired His chosen people to replace the burdens of slavery to other people, with a wholehearted dependence upon Him. However, as recorded in this *parashah*, what God wanted for Israel regarding its principal mission—to be a light, illuminating the existence and blessings available to all from the One True Creator God to humankind at large (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6)—would not come without considerable reorientation of priorities. After all, the propensity of the carnal