

THE OPEN BIBLE



Parasha Va'era

- Exodus 6:2-9:35
- Ezekiel 28:25-29:21
- Revelation 16:1-21

The Torah Portion at a Glance

YHWH reveals Himself to Moses.

Employing the "four expressions of redemption," He promises to take out the Children of Israel from Egypt, deliver them from their enslavement, redeem them and acquire them as His own chosen people at Mount Sinai; He will then bring them to the Land He promised to the Patriarchs as their eternal heritage.

Moses and Aharon repeatedly come before Pharaoh to demand in the name of YHWH, "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me in the wilderness." Pharaoh repeatedly refuses. Aaron's staff turns into a snake and swallows the magic sticks of the Egyptian sorcerers. YHWH then sends a series of plagues upon the Egyptians.

The waters of the Nile turn to blood; swarms of frogs overrun the land; lice infest all men and beasts. Hordes of wild animals invade the cities, a pestilence kills the domestic animals, painful boils afflict the Egyptians. For the seventh plague, fire and ice combine to descend from the skies as a devastating hail. Still, "the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he would not let the children of Israel go; as YHWH had said to Moses."

(adapted from chabad.org)

The Messiah in the Torah Portion

This week's Torah portion begins with the horrible plagues that ravaged the nation of Israel and eventually led to their exodus. This is a story that Bible students and unbelievers are very familiar with, as most have seen the various Hollywood versions of the account. Hopefully our familiarity will not breed contempt and stop us from finding the Messiah in the parasha.

"Vaera" is a special section of the Bible that is remembered every year during a Passover Seder. A "seder" is a special commemorative meal that is held in the Spring time and remembers the events surrounding the exodus from Egypt. Traditional seders include bitter herbs, matzah, and four cups of wine. These four glasses of wine are each symbolic of statements made in our current Torah portion. These cups tell the Passover story and vividly remind us that Y'shua is the Passover lamb.

The first cup consumed during the Passover Seder is the Cup of Sanctification. This cup of holiness originates from Exodus 6:6 when YHWH said, "I will take you out." The first cup is the Kiddush cup, or glass of holiness. With this juice, we remember the promise of YHWH to bring the people out of slavery and establish a holy nation. Similarly, Y'shua sanctifies us, "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified," John 17:19.

The cup of deliverance is the second cup. It is with this cup that the seder recalls the ten plagues of Egypt. Just as YHWH delivered the children of Israel, He still delivers His people from judgment. John 8:32 expresses the deliverance of Y'shua. "I will deliver you," is found in Exodus 6:6.

The third cup of wine during the Seder is the cup of redemption. This cup of blessing shows how YHWH redeems Israel from sin. Galatians 4:4-5, "4But when the time had fully come, Elohim sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

Finally, the last cup is the cup of the Kingdom. This is also called the cup of praise or the cup of acceptance. YHWH says in Exodus 6:7, "I will take you as a nation." This is the cup of joy that we will experience fully in the coming kingdom. John 15:11 says, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

The pattern is simply: YHWH will bring, redeem, deliver, and take us as His people. In Luke 22 and Mathew 26 we can read of the Messiah partaking of the traditional Seder. He takes up the cup of redemption and offers it as a symbol of his covenant with believers. We were once in spiritual bondage to sin and satan. Y'shua gave his life to deliver us from sin and the plague of death. The shed blood of Messiah paid the price to redeem us. And finally we are to live a life worthy of praise. Our actions should reflect the principles and practices of the cup of the Kingdom. Titus 2:1-5 makes this point, "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of Elohim."

Applying the Portion to Life Today

What do you do when you have a sudden toothache? Many people simply take a few Tylenol and suffer through the pain for a few minutes while continuing life as normal. Small sudden toothaches don't command that much attention. They seem to be more of a nuisance than anything. When your molar sings with a sudden sharp sting as you bite down on a cob of corn do you rush right out to the dentist? For most people a slight pain in the mouth is just that – a slight pain in the mouth.

A dentist though, has a different view on tooth pains. Dentists and doctors will tell you that your mouth is communicating to you when you experience a pain. “Something is wrong,” the pain-filled and painful tooth, screams with a jolt on a nerve. If the problem is soon treated it can usually be repaired without much trouble. But if the pain is ignored, if the warning signs are looked over, the tooth can decay and grow an infection. Even worse, the tooth can abscess and become a big problem. (And if you’ve never experienced the agony of an abscessed tooth then count yourself blessed because they are about as painful as a soaking wet person sitting in the electric chair. Ouch!)

It doesn’t take long for a cavity left without proper treatment to soon become a major mouth problem. Just a little toothache won’t bring someone to their knees but an abscessed tooth can lead to stomach pains, missed work, and an expensive dentist bill. All of this could be avoided though if the warning signs were heeded and the source of the pain is dealt with before it grows worse. A lot of pain could have also been avoided if Pharaoh would have obeyed and let Israel go.

Like an ongoing toothache that grows and grows in the level of pain are the plagues upon Egypt. To stop the pain all Pharaoh had to do was release the Israelites. All you have to do is go to the dentist when the pain starts, but who does? Who rushes out to the dental office at the first sign of pain? It is a sad fact that everyone has a little pharaoh “inside” themselves. To this the Scriptures say not to act like Pharaoh and “harden not your heart,” in Tehillim (Psalm) 95:8.

Pharaohs continue on with life even though they can see it causing anguish to those around them. We, little Pharaohs, ignore words of caution because of self-interest. We curse those people who play the part of Moshe and warn us of danger. We tell ourselves that “they’re just meddling” as the plagues continue and as the pains continue. When there is distance between man and YHWH it is not hard to figure out who moved away – it is always man. Again we are like pharaoh, doing our own will. How different though would the Biblical account would read if Pharaoh had allowed Egypt to journey into the dessert the first time he was asked? How different would your life be if you would heed the good advice of the prophets around you who point you in the direction of the Word?

For many years Bible commentators have somehow blamed Father YHWH for Pharaoh’s obstinate heart and actions. They teach that YHWH had violated Pharaoh’s free will and made him treat Israel and Moshe with contempt. This is simply not the case. What happens to Pharaoh and Egypt is Pharaoh’s fault. Don’t blame YHWH. And don’t blame YHWH for what happens in your Pharaoh-like life. If a person sets himself or herself against the Mighty One of Israel there will be consequences. This week’s story is simply reflective upon the principle of cause and effect. “Do not be deceived: Elohim cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows,” Galatians 6:7.

Any action performed sets off an undeniable chain of events that will result in that action being responded to. Scientists will tell you that for “every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” In this Parasha reading it is easy to see that the action of slavery brought about freedom, disobedience led to the plagues, and Pharaoh hardening his own heart resulted in YHWH confirming this attitude and allowing it to continue. It seems that for His own purposes YHWH allows people to wallow in their sins for a season. “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life,” Galatians 6:8.

You can read in the portion and find that during the first five plagues Pharaoh’s “heart remained steadfast.” His heart simply would not yield to YHWH. It did not take a divine action on behalf of YHWH to cause Pharaoh to be disobedient to the words “let my people go.” Pharaoh had nothing and no one to blame for his cruel attitude and behavior but himself. Five times his heart was set on setting itself against

the will of YHWH. As a direct result Pharaoh's heart will continue to grow cold five times more. Five times Pharaoh sowed a "steadfast" heart and five times he received a "hardened" heart. Five plus five equals ten right? There were ten plagues right? It seems to all add up.

A warning sign was given each time Moshe went to Pharaoh and a plague followed. They proclaimed, "you reap what you sow, if you obey the Elohim of the Hebrews you will be blessed but if you disobey you will be cursed." The plagues were proving Beresheet 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." Pharaoh had at least ten opportunities to heed YHWH's commands but did not. During each act of rebellion his heart moved farther away from YHWH's will and grew colder in the process. Each of the plagues occurred to teach Pharaoh, the entire world, and even Israel about YHWH. "Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. And the Egyptians will know that I am YHWH when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it," Shemot/Exodus 7:4-5.

Here are a few of the lessons that are taught in this Parasha:

YHWH is Elohim. "This is what YHWH says: By this you will know that I am YHWH: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water," Shemot 7:17-18. "Then YHWH said to Moshe, "Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what YHWH, the Mighty One of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth,'" Shemot 9:13-16.

YHWH is all-powerful. "But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. And the gnats were on men and animals. The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of Elohim." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as YHWH had said," Shemot 8:18-19.

YHWH is righteous. "And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moshe and Aharon, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: YHWH is righteous, and I and my people are wicked," Shemot 9:27.

YHWH distinguishes between Israel and the pagans. "But YHWH will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt, so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die," Exodus/Shemot 9:4.

These plagues occurred to teach the world that His name is YHWH and His might is unequal. "Therefore I will teach them—this time I will teach them my power and might. Then they will know that my name is YHWH," Jeremiah 16:21. Unfortunately, the warning signs continued to go unheeded and build in severity until Pharaoh's own magicians could not reproduce them (as with the lice). The magicians even soon became subject to them (as with the boils.) The seventh plague, hail, was the first to claim human life, foreshadowing the death that would rain down during the last and final plague. All of this happened as a message, "I have cut off nations; their strongholds are demolished. I have left their streets deserted, with no one passing through. Their cities are destroyed; no one will be left—no one at all. I said to the city, 'Surely you will fear me and accept correction!' Then her dwelling would not be cut off, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did," Zephani'yah 3:6-7.

The events in this week's Torah Parasha are set in place to soften Pharaoh's heart not harden it. It was Pharaoh's own disobedience, his own pride that caused his punishment and ironically brought glory to YHWH. Like a toothache that grows in intensity of pain, the plagues were admonitions of trouble. "Happy is the man that feareth his ways: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief," Mishlei (Proverbs) 28:14.

Do you feel a slight pain when you read this teaching? It could be that your heart is hardened to the voice of YHWH. Have you recently told YHWH "no?" Maybe through the years you have been hurt by religious systems or religious people. Perhaps your actions or attitudes have built walls of separation between yourself and YHWH. The throbbing pain you might be feeling is that of distance. You see when a person disobeys YHWH that person distances themselves from YHWH. Each step in disobedience leads farther and farther away from the Truth. And with each step away from the Almighty it is harder to hear his voice. The heart, the mind, the will, and the soul hardens as a result of separation from the Creator. Will it take ten plagues for you to obey? Will your small cavity of distance abscess into a painful infection? Messiah Y'shua asks, "Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (Mark 8: 17)

Portion Points to Ponder

1. The Hebrew name for this portion is "Va'era." What does this mean?
2. Read Ezekiel 28:25-29:21. How does this relate to the story of Genesis this week?
3. Consider the words found in Revelation 16:1-21. What did you learn from studying this passage?
4. How does this Torah portion speak of the Messiah Y'shua?
5. Describe two ways that you can apply this week's Torah portion to your life.
6. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
7. The four cups of the Passover Seder are: the Cups of Sanctification, Deliverance, Redemption and Praise. These cups derive from the four "I will" promises of Exodus 6:6-7. Discuss these steps of redemption/salvation and how Y'shua is at the center of it all.
8. What does it mean that Elohim placed Moses in the role of god to Pharaoh? What is the difference between God (upper case G) and a god (lower case g)? How can anyone be "a god" to someone? Is there anyone in your life who is "a god" to you?
9. How is Aaron a prophet? What is a prophet? Is there a difference between Moses as a prophet and Aaron as a prophet? If so, what?
10. How long did Levi live?
11. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
12. Give two reasons why the blood was chosen as the first plague.

13. How long did the plague of blood last?
14. Did Abraham know the name of yod-hey-waw-hey YHWH?
15. Could Exodus 6:3 be better translated as a rhetorical question and read, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as El Shaddai, and my name YHWH, did I not make myself known to them?"
16. What was the covenant given to Abraham that YHWH remembered in Exodus 6:5?
17. How did the depression of the people stop them from believing the word of YHWH in Exodus 6:9?
18. Moses' parents were Amram and Yocheved. Exodus 6:20 states that Yocheved was Amram's aunt. How does Leviticus 18:12-13 speak against such a relationship? How does the birth of Moses to parents in sin show us that YHWH can use anyone, regardless of their upbringing?
19. The phrase "troop by troop" in Exodus 6:26 is an interesting word usage. How does this passage describe the Exodus as a military formation?
20. Pharaoh did not listen to the will of YHWH and his heart was hardened. Compare this to Matthew 24:12.
21. How old were Moses and Aharon when they went before Pharaoh? Who was the first born? Did YHWH choose the firstborn as the redeemer?
22. Exodus 7:3-5 explains that signs and wonders helped the Egyptians know that YHWH is supreme. How did Y'shua use miracles to draw people to Himself in the Gospels?
23. Why specifically did YHWH want Pharaoh to let His people go? What would the people be doing in the wilderness?
24. How were the plagues a type of warfare against the gods/elohim of Egypt? Explain how the Egyptians worshipped the Nile River.
25. How long was the plague of blood water against Egyptians? What is this number symbolic of?
26. Did YHWH reveal the first 3 plagues and warn Pharaoh before the judgement? How does YHWH give people time to repent?
27. According to Exodus 8:7, what was the purpose of the plagues?
28. The magicians were able to easily duplicate the plagues of blood and frogs. Were they able to use their magic to stop the plagues? Who does Pharaoh plead with to end these judgments?
29. The third plague is usually translated as "lice" or "vermin." What exactly was this plague?
30. Who did the magicians profess was behind the plagues?
31. The fourth judgment against Egypt is a little confusing. The Hebrew word used is "arov." This word is usually translated as "swarms as insects" or as "wild beasts." In your opinion, what is the correct meaning? What was the fourth plague?

32. How does YHWH place a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites during some of the plagues. Did the Israelites have to suffer the first three plagues? Will believers have to suffer some during the Great Tribulation? Reference Exodus 8:18 & 19.
33. Why was the worship of the Hebrews unacceptable to the Egyptians? Compare Genesis 42:32 to Exodus 8:22.
34. What was the fifth plague?
35. The plague of boils affected even the Egyptian magicians. Why did their skin problems stop them from confronting Moses?
36. Exodus 9:16 states the purpose of the plagues was to spread the knowledge of YHWH throughout the entire earth. According to 9:20, such actions worked and even some Egyptians began to fear YHWH. How does the fear of YHWH inspire the fear of YHWH?
37. Did the plague of hail affect the Hebrews in Goshen?
38. Was Pharaoh's repentance in Exodus 9:27-28 a sincere act?
39. With the horrible hail, the flax and barley crops were damaged. Where in Scripture is the Aviv barley crop once again mentioned. Why is it important?
40. Our portion ends with Pharaoh's heart stiffening even more. How does continued rebellion harden a person's heart more towards YHWH?
41. Why didn't Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
42. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring lice?
43. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?
44. As Moses and Aaron took on Pharaoh, the world leader of their day, so will the two witnesses of Revelation 11. What other similarities can you see between the workings of Moses and Aaron and the two witnesses?
45. What did you learn from this week's "Open Bible" teaching?

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