



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah Name: Bo** (בּא, "enter, come in")
- **Chapters: Exod. 10:1-13:16**



בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסוּק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

Last week’s Torah portion (*Va’era*) reported how Pharaoh refused to listen to Moses’ pleas for Israel’s freedom, despite witnessing seven devastating plagues that came upon Egypt in God’s Name. In this week’s portion (*Bo*), the battle between God and Pharaoh comes to a dramatic conclusion. The last three of the ten plagues are unleashed upon Egypt: a swarm of locusts devoured all the crops and greenery; a palpable darkness enveloped the land for three days; and all the firstborn of Egypt were killed at the stroke of midnight of the 15th of the month of Nisan.

Before the final plague, God instructed the Jewish people to establish a new calendar based on the sighting of the new moon of spring. On the tenth day of that month, God told the people to acquire a “Passover offering” to Him, namely an unblemished lamb (or goat), one for each household. On the 14th of that month (“between the evenings”) the animal would be slaughtered and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel of every Israelite home, so that God would “pass over” these dwellings when He came to kill the Egyptian firstborn that night. The roasted meat of the offering was to be eaten that night with unleavened bread (*matzah*) and bitter herbs (*maror*). God then commanded the Israelites to observe a seven-day “festival of *matzah*” to commemorate the Exodus for all subsequent generations.

Just before the final plague was delivered, God instructed the Israelites to ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver and jewelry, thereby plundering Egypt of its wealth. The death of the firstborn at last broke Pharaoh’s resistance and he finally allowed the Israelites to depart from his land. Because they left in great haste there was no time for their dough to rise. The Torah states that there were 600,000 adult men who left Egypt, along with all the women, children, and a “mixed multitude” of non-Israelite slaves who tagged along with the Israelites.

The Israelites were commanded to consecrate all the firstborn to God and to commemorate the anniversary of the Exodus each year by celebrating the LORD’s Passover. During this time they were to remove all leaven from their homes for seven days, eat *matzah*, and retell the story of their redemption to their children. The portion ends with the commandment to wear “tefillin” (phylacteries) on the arm and head as a reminder of how the LORD saved the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt.



Parashah Questions



1. What does the word “bo” (בּוֹ) mean? ¹
2. Why (again) did the LORD harden Pharaoh’s heart? (10:1-2) ²
3. If God hardened Pharaoh’s heart by making him stubborn, how could he be held responsible for his actions? (Rom. 9:17-ff) ³
4. What is a telltale sign of “false repentance”? ⁴
5. What are some characteristics of *true* repentance (*teshuvah*)? ⁵
6. What was the eighth plague? (10:3-6) ⁶
7. Did Pharaoh’s officials repent after Moses warned of the 8th plague? (10:7) ⁷
8. What festival did Moses have in mind when he told Pharaoh that all the Jewish people – men, women, children, and so on – must attend? (10:8-9) ⁸

¹ The word “bo” (בּוֹ) is the masculine singular imperative of the verb bo (בוֹא) meaning “to enter,” “come in.”

² The LORD made Pharaoh’s heart “heavy like liver” (כָּבֵד) for the purpose of performing His signs (אוֹתוֹת) in their midst. In addition, the signs were for Israel’s benefit, so that it could be remembered how God made fools (לֵלֵאִים) of the Egyptians by mocking them of their supposed power. Through this, Israel would know that the LORD is God, and it was His power alone that delivered them.

³ God hardened Pharaoh’s heart but only *after* the despot had already hardened it by refusing the message of the first five plagues (Exod. 7:22, 8:15, 8:19, 8:32, 9:7). After the 6th plague, however, the Torah reads, “And the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Exod. 9:12). One sin leads to another. If someone repeatedly refuses to submit to God, the Lord may ratify the decision and prevent repentance (see Paul in Romans 9:17-ff). Another interpretation: God “strengthened” the king’s heart so that he would be able to express his free will – *despite* the afflictions upon Egypt. Since Pharaoh openly spited the LORD, he was destined to die in judgment.

⁴ False repentance is an insincere turning away from evil that is based on the selfish desire to avoid further pain rather than for the sake of righteousness. When evil befalls the wicked, they initially beg God for mercy, but once the evil has passed or subsided, they rationalize and immediately revert to their evil ways.

⁵ There are four basic characteristics: 1) Forsake the sin; 2) Regret the breach caused by the sin; 3) Confess the truth and make amends (*mechilah*); and 4) Accept your forgiveness and press on.

⁶ The eighth plague was locusts (אַרְבֵּה) which would strip the land bare of all vegetation. Of the swarm of locusts, God said they would “cover the eye of the land” (וַיִּכְסֶה אֶת־עֵין הָאָרֶץ), suggesting that the occultic eye of the Egyptians would be “covered” and made blind.

⁷ No, they were not ready to give in to Moses’ demands and sought to bargain with him (“Let all the *men* go...”). Moreover, they were not ready to attribute their misfortunes to the hand of the LORD, but instead regarded Moses as a great sorcerer. That is why they said, “How long must *this man* be a menace to us?”

⁸ Moses was planning on returning with the Israelites to Sinai to celebrate the festival of Shavuot (שַׁבּוּעוֹת), that is, the day that the LORD would give them the Torah (see Exod. 3:12; 3:18; 5:1; 7:16; 8:27, etc.).



9. What did Pharaoh mean when he said to Moses, “The LORD be with you, if I ever let you leave with your children!” (10:10) ⁹
10. Why did the LORD ask Moses to “stretch out his hand” (rather than his staff) to initiate the plague of locusts? (10:12-13) ¹⁰
11. Briefly describe the severity of the plague of locusts... ¹¹
12. After the plague began, Pharaoh hastily called Moses, “confessed” his sin, and then begged him to plead with the LORD to “take this death away from me.” What did Moses then do? (10:16-19) ¹²
13. What was the ninth plague? (10:21-23) ¹³
14. How did Pharaoh attempt to bargain with Moses during this plague? (10:24-25) ¹⁴
15. After Pharaoh lost “round nine” of the showdown, what happened? (10:27-29) ¹⁵

⁹ This was a threat as well as a curse. By the occult power of Ra, Pharaoh said, “Beware, evil confronts you.” Pharaoh foresaw that the generation that left Egypt would die in the desert, and assumed it was Ra who did this. The king did not believe that Moses was really intending to go on a “three day journey into the desert” for the sake of a religious festival, and therefore repudiated his demand.

¹⁰ According to Pirke Avot 5:6, the staff (מִטָּה) was one of the ten things that were created on the very first erev Shabbat at twilight. There were Hebrew letters engraved on the staff which formed an acronym for the ten plagues. When God said, “stretch out your hand” (גָּדַל מִטָּה), Moses understood to grasp the staff in the place where it was written “locusts.” When he did, the east wind began blowing that would soon bring the swarms.

¹¹ It was a miraculous swarm that darkened the skies and then covered the surface of the land, making the ground entirely black. The locusts filled the Egyptian’s houses and royal palaces and began attacking store food supplies (risking a great famine). The insects devoured all of the greenery that remained after the devastating hail. After the swarm was removed, all of Egypt was devoid of greenery. It was so severe that God said He would never again bring such a plague upon the land of Egypt.

¹² Moses prayed that the locusts would leave, and the LORD sent a strong west wind that carried the locusts into the Sea of Reeds (יָם סוּף). Since the time that Moses prayed, no swarms of locusts have been seen in Egypt...

¹³ The Ninth plague was *choshekh* (חֹשֶׁךְ), a “darkness that could be felt,” or a palpable darkness, like a deep black cloud had suddenly descended upon Egypt. According to Jewish tradition, the darkness lasted seven days, with the last three days constituting total and absolute darkness (i.e., 10:22 and 10:23 refer to two different phases of this darkness). The darkness was said to be like the primordial and chaotic darkness that existed at the beginning of creation, before God had said, “Let there be light!” During this time many Jewish people died because they refused to believe or no longer wanted to leave Egypt. This plague was undoubtedly sent to overthrow the Egyptian god of the sun, Ra.

¹⁴ He said that all the Israelites could go – including the children - but they must leave their sheep and cattle behind (as collateral?). Moses of course repudiated Pharaoh’s (insincere) offer and plainly explained to him that “not a hoof shall be left behind.”

¹⁵ God hardened his heart so that he was no longer willing to entertain the idea of letting the people go at all. Pharaoh said to Moses, “Leave my presence! Be careful not to come before me face again...” Moses replied, “As you say – though indeed you and all your officials will soon come before my face and bow down before me.”



16. What was the final plague upon Pharaoh and Egypt? (11:1) ¹⁶
17. Why did God instruct the people to ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver, and jewelry? (11:2-3) ¹⁷
18. Pharaoh seemed to be operating under the impression that all Moses wanted was to give the Israelites a three day furlough in the desert (Exod. 3:5). Did Moses actually lie to Pharaoh in this matter? ¹⁸
19. How did Moses describe the final plague to Pharaoh? (11:4-8) ¹⁹
20. Why did the LORD harden Pharaoh's heart again? (11:9-10) ²⁰
21. Why did God say Nisan would be the "head of the months" to you? (12:1-2) ²¹
22. What is the first month of the Jewish year – Nisan or Tishri? ²²

¹⁶ The final plague was the death of the firstborn (*makat bechorot*). The LORD had earlier explained that Pharaoh would not release the Israelites until after the killing of the firstborn: "Say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son'" (Exod. 4:22-23).

¹⁷ This was for repayment for their years of slavery and the fact that Joseph had created the wealth for Egypt in the first place... More importantly, God had promised Abraham that after his descendents were enslaved for 400 years, He would send them out with great wealth (Gen. 15:13-14). Note that the Hebrew text has God saying to Moses, "Please ask the people to do this..." since they were reluctant to do this under the circumstances. However, the LORD gave the people great "status" in the eyes of the Egyptians so they were willing to comply.

¹⁸ No, of course not. Moses had simply told Pharaoh that the Israelites would travel the distance of three days into the desert to worship God. Nothing further was said about what would happen after this excursion, though Pharaoh and his officials made their own assumptions.

¹⁹ Moses loudly proclaimed that at "about midnight" the LORD would kill all the firstborn people and animals so that there would be a great scream throughout all the land of Egypt – though no evil would befall the Israelites. It would be a night of sheer terror for Egypt, for there will not be a single Egyptian home that would not experience death. Moses further prophesied that all of Pharaoh's officials and officers would come and bow down before him, begging for him to take the Israelites out from the land of Egypt... Since Moses was forbidden to appear before Pharaoh (10:28-29), he directly shouted this message out so that the king could hear every word.

²⁰ The LORD wanted to multiply His signs and wonders in Egypt in order that His Name would be revered and sanctified among all the nations.

²¹ Egypt also had a lunar calendar that began with the month of Nisan (the sign of Aries), but it counted the days of the month from one full moon to the next. The Hebrew calendar, however, was to be different, with the month beginning during Rosh Chodesh of the month of the redemption. This was foretold to Abraham, who had the vision of darkness on Nisan 1 as well. It is no wonder, then, that the LORD called for the burnt sacrifice of the Passover lamb during the time of the full moon - as a further judgment against the gods of Egypt (Exod. 12:12).

²² Originally Tishri 1 was regarded as the month Adam was created, the Rosh Hashanah and birthday of the human race. Later, God changed it to Nisan 1 to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt. This can be explained by a parable: A king had an only son, and made a great feast when he was born and every year celebrated his birth. One day the boy was kidnapped, however, and was away from home for a long time. When the child was finally ransomed, the king made a greater celebration than when he was born: the anniversary of his return was greater than even the anniversary of his birth.



23. Why is the month of Nisan so important for us? ²³
24. What was the first commandment given to the Israelites as a nation? (12:1-2) ²⁴
25. Who established the “calculated” Jewish calendar that is still in use today? ²⁵
26. What were the people instructed to do on the 10th of the first month? (12:3-4) ²⁶
27. What characteristics were required of the Passover sacrifice? ²⁷
28. How long was the lamb to be kept in safekeeping before the sacrifice? (12:6) ²⁸
29. At what time of day was the Passover to be sacrificed? (12:6) ²⁹
30. Who was to slaughter the sacrifice? (12:6) ³⁰

²³ Nisan was the month when God made the Covenant between the Halves (בְּרִית בֵּין הַחֲצָיִים) to Abraham (Gen. 15) and he knew that exactly 400 years later Israel would be redeemed from their bondage. It was also the month that Isaac was born, and (according to some) the time when Isaac was offered up and bound to the altar (Gen. 22). God appeared to Moses in the burning bush during Nisan and later redeemed Israel on the first Passover. Nisan is also the month when Yeshua was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. It is also called Aviv, the “av” of the months.

²⁴ The first commandment was to sanctify the new moon (rosh chodesh). When the new moon is observed as a thin sliver, this is called the *molad* (“rebirth”) of the moon, since it marks the start of a new lunar cycle. The declaration of a new moon (month) by the Sanhedrin was vital for later Jewish life, since the people could not keep the holidays unless they knew what day of the month it was (note that the Sanhedrin was regarded as a legal embodiment of the 70 elders of Israel mentioned in Numbers 11:16 and elsewhere in the Torah).

²⁵ Hillel II (the elder) was president of the Sanhedrin between 320 and 385 AD and is traditionally regarded as the creator of the modern fixed Hebrew calendar, though the calculated calendar is surely a lot older, since Jonathan determined the occurrence of the new moon apart from direct observation (1 Sam. 20:18).

²⁶ Each person was required to acquire a lamb for the Passover sacrifice on this date. This meant that each person of a family or other small group was to share the cost of the lamb.

²⁷ The animal must be flawless, without the slightest blemish, a male that is less than one year old (note that these were the exact qualifications for animals dedicated/worshipped in Egyptian temples). Note that the Hebrew word *seh* (שֶׁה) can mean either a lamb or a kid (goat). In Jewish tradition, the lamb is intended to recall the merit of the binding of Isaac (as well as to illustrate the korban principle), though ultimately the Passover foreshadows Yeshua, the great Lamb of God (שֶׁה הָאֱלֹהִים) who takes away the sins of the world.

²⁸ It was to be kept in safekeeping until the 14th of Nisan (i.e. tethered to a bedpost within the house). One day to God is as 1,000 years (Psalm 90:4). God created the world in six days, one for each of the 6,000 years of human history. The seventh day, the Sabbath, parallels the Messianic age to come. Note that the preparation for the Exodus took place 2,000 years after the creation of Adam. When the LORD commanded the people to take hold of the Passover sacrifice for four days (Exod. 12:3-6), this foretold of the 4,000 years that remained before the final redemption. Note that the 4 day period was said to begin on a Sabbath, and therefore came to be known as “Shabbat Ha-Gadol” (שַׁבַּת הַגָּדוֹל) the great Sabbath that precedes the holiday of Passover. The sages say it is the most important Sabbath since Creation, since the “lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.”

²⁹ The Passover sacrifice was to be slaughtered “toward evening,” in the afternoon. Note that the day is divided into three unequal parts: 1) *boker* (בֹּקֵר), from sunrise to about 10 am; 2) *tzoharaim* (צֹהַרַיִם), from 10 am to noon (the “zohar” of the day); and 3) *erev* (עֶרֶב), anytime after noon until twilight. The phrase “between the evenings” (בֵּין הָעֶרְבַיִם) means between the first part of erev (just after noon) and the last part of erev (just before sunset).

³⁰ The entire community – each person – was to participate in the slaughter of the Passover lamb.



31. What was done with the blood of the Passover sacrifice? (12:7) ³¹
32. How was the Passover sacrifice to be prepared? (12:8-10) ³²
33. Discuss some reasons for the Passover sacrifice. ³³
34. How was Passover later observed in the Temple? ³⁴
35. What miracle is associated with Shabbat Hagadol? ³⁵
36. Which of the Ten Commandments says we are to remember that God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt? ³⁶
37. Why was the Passover eaten in haste? (12:11) ³⁷
38. What was the LORD going to do during the night of Passover? (12:12) ³⁸

³¹ The blood was to be put in a basin and then daubed (smeared) on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they lived. Rashi states the blood was to be smeared on the inside of the house – as a sign for them (12:13), whereas others say it was smeared on the outside of the house as a sign for the Egyptians.

³² It was to be roasted over fire, with its head on its knees, and eaten with matzah and bitter herbs (maror). The internal organs were placed on the outside so that they also would be roasted by the fire. Any leftover meat was to be burned in the fire.

³³ The defect-free lamb was to be offered because it was a symbol of innocence and purity. In addition, the Egyptians worshipped the sheep, and especially the sign of Aries (Taleh: אֵרֵס) so the sacrifice demonstrated God's power over the occult and astrological powers. Third, the Egyptian calendar was based on moon phases, but it reckoned the start of the month with the full moon, on the 14th of the month – the exact time of the sacrifice of the lambs – which demonstrated God's judgment of Aries. Fourth, the sheep was regarded as a god to the Egyptians, and perfect male specimens were worshipped in their temples, paraded around the streets, and so on, especially during the month of Nisan. God therefore commanded the sacrifice of the lamb during the month of Nisan – under the sign of Aries – to demonstrate His power over all of Egypt. Aries was the first sign of the zodiac and was associated with fire. Roasting a lamb over fire mocked the idea that the sheep had power over its element.... God wanted the symbol of their deity to be roasted over the fire and utterly devoured.

³⁴ Both men and women were obligated to offer the sacrifice. Each would bring his animal to the main hall (azara) where it would be ritually slaughtered by a shochet. The Levites would chant Hallel (Psalms 113-118) and shofars were sounded while the priest would receive the blood in a basin, which was passed from priest to priest until it reached the altar, where it was poured out at its base or foundation. The empty basins were then passed back. The lamb would then be hung and skinned and butchered.

³⁵ It was considered miraculous that the Egyptians did not riot and kill the Israelites for the sacrilege of sacrificing one of their deities. Moreover, when it was learned that the last plague meant the death of the firstborn, a civil war broke out and many Egyptians attacked Pharaoh's palace and were killed.

³⁶ The First Commandment mentions God as our Redeemer from bondage in Egypt (Exod. 20:2), and the Fourth Commandment links Sabbath with the the freedom given by God through the exodus (Deut. 5:15).

³⁷ This applied only to the first Passover in Egypt, not later commemorative services (i.e., seders). The people were to be eager to start their journey to freedom; their loins were to be girded ("belt of truth"); their shoes were to be on their feet ("shoes of peace"); their staffs in their hand symbolized their authority ("sword of the spirit").

³⁸ God would pass through the land and kill all the firstborn. Only God could do this, since only God knew who of all the animals and people were indeed firstborn (even in the case of twins, etc.). The firstborn included women as well as men, and if a house did not have a firstborn, then the oldest member of the household was killed.



39. What is meant by the phrase, “the blood will be a sign for you”? (12:13) ³⁹
40. What does the word “Passover” (פֶּסַח) mean? (12:13) ⁴⁰
41. Beside the firstborns, what else did God destroy on the night of Passover? (12:12) ⁴¹
42. Was Passover meant to be replaced by “Good Friday”? (12:14) ⁴²
43. What is the Jewish date for Passover? (12:14) ⁴³
44. What else was required to observe the LORD’s Passover? (12:15) ⁴⁴
45. What is “chametz”? ⁴⁵
46. Why is Passover regarded as a weeklong holiday? (12:16-18) ⁴⁶

³⁹ The blood would be a sign for the Israelites – i.e., “for you” – not for the Egyptians. It was not meant to be a protective sign for the firstborn, either, since then it should have been placed on their foreheads rather than on the doorway of the house. What is the nature of this sign? Its presence demonstrated faith that the blood of the slain lamb was shed for their forgiveness and redemption. When the people looked at the door and heard the screams outside, they would see the blood and remember how God was showing them mercy and not judging them along with the Egyptians... According to the sages, the blood of the lamb recalled the sacrifice of Isaac (the Akedah), which of course is the “gospel according to Moses.”

⁴⁰ The name “Passover” is derived from *pasach* (פָּסַח) which means “to pass (over).” There are several instances of this: (1) Exod. 12:13, “When I see the blood I will ‘pass’ over you.” (2) Exod. 12:23, “The Lord Will ‘pass’ through... and the Lord will ‘pass’ over the door.” (3) Exod. 12:27, “It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s passover who ‘passed’ over the houses of the children of Israel.”

⁴¹ During the dreadful plague of the firstborn the LORD destroyed all the idols of Egypt - melting the silver and gold idols; shattering the stone idols; pulverizing the clay idols, and burning to ash all the wooden idols. In this way all of the so-called gods of Egypt were revealed to be powerless, as the temples of the Egyptians were all simultaneously desecrated and defaced. Through all this, Egypt would recognize the unrivaled power of the LORD...

⁴² No. The death of Yeshua as our Passover Lamb of God is to be commemorated during the Passover Seder “as a festival to the LORD for all generations; an eternal decree...” This is repeated in the New Testament: see 1 Cor. 5:7-8. Besides, Yeshua was certainly not crucified on a Friday, since there is no way to compress three days and nights from Friday to before sunrise on Sunday morning....

⁴³ The 15th of Nisan is Passover, though the day begins just before sundown on the 14th of Nisan (erev Pesach). Another name for the night of the Passover Seder is לַיַּל שְׁמֹרִים, “a night of watching” (Exod. 12:42). This phrase comes from the verb *shamar*, which means to guard or “observe.”

⁴⁴ For seven days only matzah was to be eaten – and all chametz (leaven) was to be cleared from the homes. The seven day festival of matzahs (chag ha-matzot) begins exactly on Nisan 15 and runs until Nisan 22. Because of the overlap between this and the Passover, the two ordinances are usually combined to refer to “Passover.”

⁴⁵ Chametz is “leaven,” metaphorically regarded as a corrupting influence, a hidden uncleanness that manipulates purer elements. Like the influence of a lump of leaven in a batch of dough, “spiritual” leaven functions as an evil impulse within us (i.e., *yetzer ha-ra*) that corrupts and “sours” our soul. This “yeast in the soul” is essentially pride that manifests itself in idolatrous desires and lusts.

⁴⁶ Immediately after describing the Passover and Unleavened Bread, the LORD said that the first day as well as the seventh day were to be regarded as special sabbaths on which no work would be done. Note that in the Diaspora, Passover is celebrated an extra day.



47. What was the punishment promised to those who ate chametz during the week of Passover? (12:19) ⁴⁷
48. Describe how Moses explained the sacrificial ritual of Passover to the elders of Israel (12:21-28) ⁴⁸
49. When did God strike down all of the firstborn of Egypt? (12:29) ⁴⁹
50. Did *all* the firstborn of Egypt die during the final plague? ⁵⁰
51. How did Pharaoh respond to the final blow? (12:31-32) ⁵¹
52. Why were the Egyptians afraid they would all die? (12:33) ⁵²
53. When the Israelites left, what did they take with them? (12:34) ⁵³
54. How many people left from Egypt during the Exodus? (12:37) ⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Those who ate chametz during Passover were promised *karet* judgment – being “cut off” from Israel by means of an untimely or premature death. The sages note that the gematria for the word chametz (חמץ) is the same as the word for blemish (פגם) – whoever eats chametz on Passover blemishes his soul.

⁴⁸ The elders were to “lead by the ear” (lit. “pull”) the lamb to be slaughtered and its blood captured in a basin. They were then to take the blood back to their homes, gather a bunch of hyssop (*ezov*) and dip it into the blood, and then smear the blood on the two doorposts and lintel (forming the Hebrew letter Chet, “life”). Note that the branches were to be dipped into the blood three times. Later, when the people were in the Promised Land, this service was to be commemorated as a Passover Seder where the children were to be vividly retold the events of the deliverance. “You must explain to your children how merciful God was. The Israelites deserved to be exterminated, but God spared them because of the merit of their faith in the sacrificial blood. This is why it must be offered each year.

⁴⁹ The LORD struck down all the firstborn at midnight on Nisan 15... Why the firstborn? Because originally all of the firstborn was to be devoted to God. Later the Kohanim (priests) functioned as surrogate “firstborns” for Israel. All the firstborn died – whether firstborn of mothers or fathers. If there were no firstborn in a house, either the oldest person present or the head of the household died. “There was a great scream in Egypt” (12:30).

⁵⁰ No, there were many who did not die. The firstborn of the Jews were believed in God’s ransom for their lives were spared, of course, but so were some of the Egyptians. “The situation is like that of a king who made a feast for his child and on the same day announced that he would kill all his enemies. The announcement was, ‘Whoever is a friend of my son, let him come to the feast.’ Even those enemies who came to the feast were spared... In addition to this, Pharaoh was a firstborn son but was spared by Moses’ prayer on his behalf to witness God’s greatness (though of course Pharaoh’s firstborn son died during the plague). According to midrash, Moses’ surrogate mother Batya was spared from the plague because Moses prayed for her.

⁵¹ Midrash: When Pharaoh arose during the night and saw his son dead, he grabbed his sword and began killing all his advisors and officers (as well as their family members). He began to run through the streets trying to find Moses and Aaron, crying out “Moses! Where are you?” He went to the Hebrew ghetto and then began screaming: “Get out! Get out! All you Hebrews – leave my country!” Finally he found Moses and said, “Go, and bless me too,” which was thought to mean that he really meant, “Go on your three day festival.. but you will still return to me.”

⁵² Moses had said all the firstborn would die, but that did not mean that others would not die... Indeed, many who were not technically firstborn died that night, and the Egyptians thought the plague would eventually kill them all.

⁵³ They took dough before it was leavened plus gold, silver, and jewels they obtained from the Egyptians (12:34-39).

⁵⁴ 600,00 men, not including women, children, and the “mixed multitude,” with an estimated total of 3 million.



55. What is the *erev rav* (עֶרֶב רַב)?⁵⁵
56. How long were the Jewish people in Egypt? (12:40-41)⁵⁶
57. What does *Leil Shimurim* (לַיִל שְׁמֹרִים) mean? (12:42)⁵⁷
58. Who was eligible to eat the Passover sacrifice? (12:43-49)⁵⁸
59. What is a unique requirement for the Passover sacrifice? (12:46)⁵⁹
60. Why is it wrong-headed to try to find a more “accurate date” for Passover than the date established by Jewish tradition and the fixed Jewish calendar? (12:47)⁶⁰
61. What does it mean that there shall be one Torah for both the native-born and for the proselyte? (12:49)⁶¹
62. What does *pidyon ha-ben* (פְּדִיּוֹן הַבֵּן) mean? (13:1-2)⁶²
63. Why is the month of redemption called *Aviv* (אָבִיב)?⁶³

⁵⁵ These we thought to be a huge number of proselytes who left with the Jewish people during the Exodus. The sages say that Moses let them accompany Israel because “just as a good fruit must be protected by a rind, so the Israelites were protected by the mixed multitude.” The *erev rav* are blamed for most of Israel’s problems in the desert as well as bearing the brunt of God’s punishments.

⁵⁶ This question is a matter of some debate... The Torah later says the Jews were in Egypt 430 years, “to the day” (Exod. 12:40-41), though the debate centers on whether God shortened the time there and reckoned the years from the time of Abraham’s original vision (Gen. 15:13) or from the date of Isaac’s birth. The standard Jewish response is that Israel was in Egypt for 210 years, counting “30 cycles of seven years” as the extra 30 mentioned beyond the 400 told to Abraham.

⁵⁷ This means a “night to be guarded” (from the verb *shamar*, which means “to watch” or “to guard”). Since “this night” - *ha-lailah hazeh* - was guarded by God from the beginning to be the time of redemption, Israel must therefore “guard this night” by means of the Passover Seder (Exod. 13:10; Deut. 16:1). The festival of Passover recalls and celebrates God’s faithfulness and redemptive love.

⁵⁸ Only a circumcised member of the community of Israel (Exod. 12:43-49).

⁵⁹ None of the bones of the sacrifice were to be broken, which is unique to the *korban pesach*. This was also prophetic of the coming Lamb of God (John 19:36; Psalm 34:20).

⁶⁰ The entire community of Israel was to keep the Passover – not just those who thought they understood the exact time based on the appearance of the new moon, the appearance of barely, etc.

⁶¹ The Jew and the proselyte are equal in their obligation to observe the Passover.

⁶² “Redemption of the firstborn.” When a man has a firstborn son, he must redeem him, since God laid exclusive claim on all the first fruits of creation. Today, this is day after the child reaches 30 days of life and the father redeems him using five shekels of silver (or five silver dollars). This is the meaning of *pidyon* – ransom money. Until the child is redeemed, it is as if he belongs to God (or to the priests, who served as surrogates for the firstborn sons of Israel). The reason the redemption price is five shekels is because this was how much Joseph was sold for by his brothers (4 dinars per shekel: Gen 37:28).

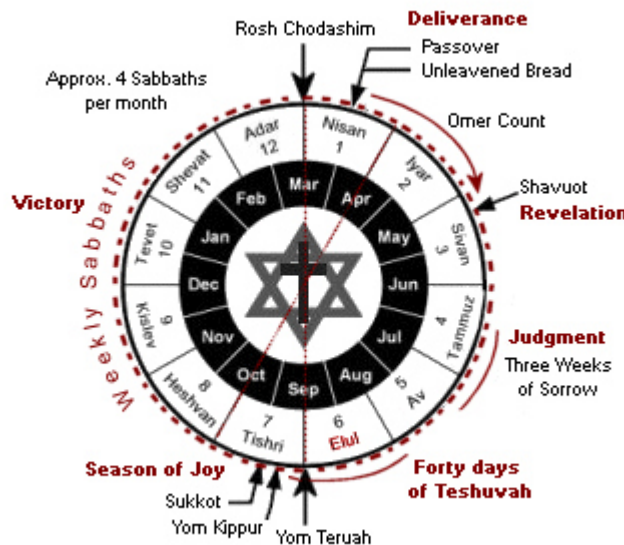
⁶³ *Aviv* is called the leader or “father” (*Av*) of the months, the first month of spring.



64. What are *tefillin* (תְּפִילִּין) or “phylacteries” (13:9) ⁶⁴



65. Why does the Torah state that the Israelites must keep the decree (of Passover) “in its season from year to year”? (13:10) ⁶⁵



⁶⁴ Tefillin are two black leather boxes containing scrolls with Bible passages on them (Exod. 13:1–16; Deut. 6:4–9, 11:13–21). During synagogue prayers men affix one to their hand and arm and the other to their forehead, in obedience to Deut. 6:8. The idea that “*totafot* (טוֹטְפוֹת) between your eyes” (Exod. 13:9, 6, Shema: Deut. 6:8, 11:18) refers to the elaborate rules and ceremonies attached to modern tefillin usage is a rabbinical invention. Metaphorically, of course, the idea of *totafot* means practicing the Presence of the LORD in every moment of our day and remembering that we are His redeemed people... Yeshua warned, however, that the literalist approach in this case was ostentatious: “But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments” (Matt. 23:5). Most likely this was intended to be a warning that one shouldn’t affect religiosity before men in a vain attempt “to be seen” as righteous/zealous.

⁶⁵ The Hebrew text literally says, “in its appointed time (מוֹעֵד) from days to days” to allow for seasonal adjustments to the lunar calendar system (i.e., the insertion of Adar II to ensure that Passover occurred in the spring).



Discussion Questions

1. During the account of the Exodus, the Torah says that “the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (וַיִּחְזַק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה) so that he would not change his mind and set the Israelites free.⁶⁶ Indeed, even *before* Moses returned to Egypt God told him: “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart so that he will not let the people go (Exod. 4:20). Some of the commentators have said that the phrase “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart” means that He (eventually) took away his freedom to choose (i.e., by ratifying his rebellious attitude so he had no further choice). Others, however, have said that the phrase can be understood to mean that “God *strengthened* Pharaoh’s heart” so that he was enabled to make a free decision. *Discuss...*
2. The Israelites were commanded to slaughter the korban Pesach⁶⁷ and daub its blood on the two sides and top of the doorway of their houses.⁶⁸ God would then see the blood and “pass over” their houses during the plague of the death of the firstborn. Based on this description, we might assume the blood was put on the *outside* of the door, though Rashi reasoned that it was placed on the *inside*, where they themselves could see it as a “sign for them” (Exod. 12:13). In what ways was the blood a *sign* for those who were being redeemed?
3. In Jewish tradition, Passover (Pesach) has become associated with the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (*chag ha-matzot*), based on the verse: “you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread (מַצֹּת), for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt” (Exod. 12:17).⁶⁹ Strictly speaking, “the Passover” (פֶּסַח) refers to the sacrifice of the lamb and the accompanying meal the night before the Exodus took place (Exod. 12:11). The English word is seen as a play on the Hebrew word (פָּסַח) used to describe how God would “pass over” the blood-smeared doors of the Israelites (Exod. 12:23). Why do you think that eating matzah, *lechem oni* - the “bread of affliction” - is used to remember the Exodus?
4. The Torah designates the month of Aviv (later called *Nisan*, see Esther 3:7) as the first month of the year (Exod. 12:2). Since the Torah also identified Sukkot (Tabernacles) as “the end of the (harvest) year” (Exod. 23:16), the sages of the Mishnah later said the fall month of Tishri (i.e., Rosh Hashanah in the “seventh month”) was the start of a new year as well. The first New Year marks the month of the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt, whereas the second marks the month of Israel’s corporate salvation that will be fulfilled in the End of Days. How do you understand the two advents of Yeshua in light of the Jewish calendar? How do you see Him fulfilling the spring holidays (i.e., Passover, Firstfruits, Shavuot)? How do you anticipate him fulfilling the fall holidays (i.e., Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot)?

⁶⁶ The midrash (Shemot Rabbah) notes that God indeed hardened Pharaoh’s heart, but only after the despot had *already* hardened it by refusing the message of the first five plagues (Exod. 7:22, 8:15, 8:19, 8:32, 9:7). After the sixth plague, however, we see, “And the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Exod. 9:12; 10:16-20; 11:1).

⁶⁷ I.e., an unblemished sheep or goat (Exod. 12:5-6). It’s strange to think of a “Passover goat,” but there it is.... The word “korban” comes from a Hebrew root (קָרַב) that means “to draw near.” It also means “kinsman redeemer.”

⁶⁸ This would form the letter Chet (ח) which is connected with the word *chai* (חַי), short for *chayim* (חַיִּים), “life.” The blood of the lamb not only saves from the judgment of death, but also is a symbol of divine life.

⁶⁹ To fulfill this commandment, we first prepare for Passover by removing all traces of *chametz* (leaven) from our homes. Leaven (i.e., yeast) produces fermentation and is the result of natural processes of decay.



The Plagues of Egypt

The plagues of Egypt (i.e., *makot Mitzraim*: מַכּוֹת מִצְרַיִם) refer to the series of calamities that befell Egypt by the hand of the God of Israel as recounted in the Book of Exodus. Since there were a total of ten distinct plagues delivered upon Egypt, they are also called the “Ten Plagues” (i.e., *eser ha-makot*). These plagues are also mentioned in Psalms 78:44-51 and 105:23-38.

Exodus 12:12 God says, “... on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments.” Thus the plagues are thought to be symbolic of the defeat of various gods venerated in ancient Egyptian mythology (and occultism in general):

| # | Plague | Reference | Egyptian god |
|----|--|------------------|--|
| 1 | Water to blood (<i>dam</i> : דָּם) | Exod. 7:14–25 | Hapi and/or Khnum (god of the Nile) |
| 2 | Frogs (<i>tzefarde'a</i> : צְפַרְדֵּי'עַ) | Exod. 7:25–8:11 | Heket (goddess of fertility and water) |
| 3 | Lice, vermin (<i>kinnim</i> : כִּנִּיּוֹם) | Exod. 8:12–15 | Geb (god of the Earth) |
| 4 | Swarms (<i>arov</i> : עֲרוֹב) | Exod. 8:20–32 | Khepri (lord of flies or beetles) |
| 5 | Pestilence (<i>dever</i> : דֶּבֶר) | Exod. 9:1-7 | Apis (goddess of animals) |
| 6 | Boils (<i>shechin</i> : שְׁחִין) | Exod. 9:8-12 | Isis (goddess of nature and healing) |
| 7 | Hail and Fire (<i>barad</i> : בָּרָד) | Exod. 9:13-35 | Nut (sky goddess and sister of Geb) |
| 8 | Locusts (<i>arbeh</i> : אֲרֵבָה) | Exod. 10:1-20 | Set (god of storms and disorder) |
| 9 | Darkness (<i>choshekh</i> : חוֹשֶׁךְ) | Exod. 10:21-29 | Ra (the Sun god) |
| 10 | Death of the firstborn (<i>bechorot</i> : בְּכוֹרוֹת) | Exod. 11:1-12:36 | Pharaoh (“son of Ra”), Khnum / Amon (ram god); Horus (war god) |

Some commentators ask whether the plagues were intended more for the Israelites than for the Egyptians, since the Israelites had been oppressed by the powers of Egypt to the point of being “without the breath of hope” (Exod. 6:9).

detzakh, adash, be'achav

During (the Maggid portion of) the Passover Seder, we spill from the second cup while reciting the names of the ten plagues. A tradition arose to recite three acronyms (“detzakh, adash, be'achav”) while spilling from the cup three times:

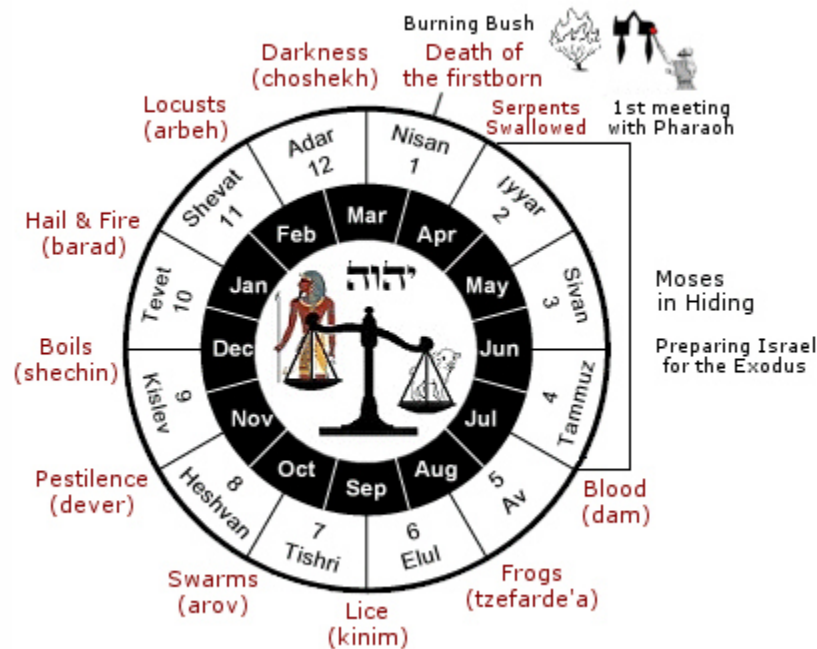
| | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| בְּאֵחָב | עֲדָשׁ | דֵּצַח |
| בָּרָד Barad | עֲרוֹב Arov | דָּם Dam |
| אֲרֵבָה Arbeh | דֶּבֶר Dever | צְפַרְדֵּי'עַ Tzefarde'a |
| חוֹשֶׁךְ Choshekh | שְׁחִין Shechin | כִּנִּיּוֹם Kinim |
| בְּכוֹרוֹת Bechorot | | |





The Sequence of the Plagues

Rabbi Bachya wrote that the ten plagues followed one another over a twelve-month period. On Nisan 15 God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and commissioned him to go to Pharaoh. On Nisan 21, Moses told his father-in-law Yitro (Jethro) of his mission and left for Egypt. Near the end of the month of Nisan, Moses immediately went before Pharaoh and warned him to release the Jews. For the next three months (Iyyar, Sivan, and Tammuz), Moses went into hiding and instructed the elders of Israel regarding their coming deliverance. The plague of blood began on the first of Av and lasted seven days. A respite of three weeks occurred before the next plague (frogs). This was the pattern for all the ten plagues (i.e., roughly a plague a month). The last plague - that of the death of the firstborn - occurred in the month of Nisan, a year after Moses first warned Pharaoh (Exod. 4:22-23). The period of the plagues therefore totaled twelve months:



The Divine Calendar

The first commandment given to the nation of Israel (as opposed to patriarchs or individual leaders such as Moses) was that of *Rosh Chodashim* (i.e., the Biblical New Year that begins on the first new moon of spring). “This month shall be the beginning of months for you” (Exod. 12:2). Our corporate identity therefore begins with a shared consciousness of *time* from a Divine perspective. The *mo’edim* (festivals of the LORD) all are reckoned based on the sacred calendar given to the redeemed people of God.

For Next Week

- Read parashat Beshalach (i.e., Exodus 13:17-17:16)
- Haftarah: Jeremiah 46:13-28

