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Honors Chumash

Parshat Bo

Summary

- Parashat Bo is a continuation of the previous Parsha, as it starts with the plague of locusts.
- Next, came the plague of darkness, and finally, the plague of the death of the first born sons. Before the plague of the death of the firstborns, Moshe tells the Jews that G-d wants them to ask the Egyptians for their gold and silver, and then that each house should slaughter a lamb and put the blood on their doorposts so that the Hebrew firstborns do not get killed.
- Following this last plague, Pharaoh told the Jews that they had to leave Egypt, and they left before their bread could rise.
- Moshe tells the Jews that they should always remember this day, and that they should redeem every firstborn in remembrance of this day in addition to the festival.

Classical Commentary

Seforno Shmot 10:21

Seforno lived from 1475-1550 in Italy

וימש החשך ויסיר את החשך הטבעי של לילה. כי אמן החשך הלילה הוא אויר מוכן לקבל האור, והוא החשוך בהעדר האור בלבד. אמן זה החשך יהיה אויר בלתי מוכן לקבל האור לרוב עבי, ולא יפול עליו העדר האור בהיותו בלתי מוכן אליו, ולפיכך לא ראו איש את אחיזי כי לא הספיק לזה אור נר ואבוקה:

this will remove the normal darkness called “night.” The reason this was necessary was that the night consists of air ready and capable to absorb light in the morning. The darkness that would occur now was something unable to interact with light at all. The reason for this inability to interact with light was the density of the texture of this darkness. As a result of this totally different kind of darkness **לא ראו איש את אחיזי**, for even a lit up flare would not be able to make a “dent” in that darkness.

I was confused as to what the darkness in the pasuk actually was, which is why I chose this commentary. This commentary by Seforno attempts to explain what the darkness described in the Pasuk actually was. This commentary is interesting because it says that the darkness was not only dark, but absorbed light, and created a texture to darkness, which is something unknown to us in modern times. It is unfathomable, which is what makes this plague so intriguing, because we know what blood, frogs, lice, and animals are, but this specific darkness is so different and really does show G-d’s might in such a strong way. This commentary is really good at portraying G-d’s might and emphasizing the importance of the plague.

Most Marvelous Midrash

Midrash Tanchuma Buber Bo 18:1

ולמה בכור בהמה, שהיו המצרים משתחווים לTELAIM, שלא יאמרו קשה יראתינו שלא שלט בה את הפורענות [לכך וכל בכור בהמה].

THE FIRST-BORN OF THE CATTLE killed? Because the Egyptians were bowing down to the lambs. <It was> so they would not say: Our idolatry is too strong for him to have dominion over it with divine retribution. [Therefore (in Exod. 12:29): AND ALL THE FIRST-BORN OF THE CATTLE.]

The excerpt that I have taken from a long Midrash is addressing the question of why the Chumash states that the first born of the cattle were killed as well. This was puzzling to me, because as Eliana said in class the other day, we have had so many plagues that targeted the animals of the Egyptians, so why would they need to be victimized by this plague as well? I believe that the Midrash's answer is trying to teach the lesson that Hashem is the greatest and only higher being. Other nation's Gods are not real and have no power against Him, which has been shown on numerous occasions throughout the anecdote of the Exodus from Egypt. This was just a final "nail in the coffin" to show the Egyptians that their "Gods" were and are powerless. This Midrash was probably written to further show us that we should have faith in G-d because he is the strongest and he chose US. In recent history, many Jews have lost faith, and this seems (but probably is not) to be in response to that in order to show the strength of G-d.

SHABBAT SHALOM!