

## ***Parashat Vaera* Exodus 6:2-9:36 - Haftarah Ezekiel 28:25-29:21 – January 1, 2022**

*Parashat Vaera* continues the story we know so well from its annual Pesach seder retelling. The battle of wills between God and Pharaoh begins: Moshe tells Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go free; he refuses. We read of the first 7 of the 10 plagues brought upon Egypt: water turned to blood; frogs; lice; flies; cattle plague; boils; hail. Pharaoh remains resolute in refusing to let them go; 3 times he agrees, only to change his mind afterward, hardening his heart each time.

In the haftarah that goes B'yachad, together, with the parashah, Ezekiel speaks of a time of restoration for the nation of Israel, in conjunction with 2 prophecies of doom for Egypt; these events took place around the time of the destruction of the First Temple (586 BCE). Israel will be resettled securely in the land, while Egypt will be exiled from hers for 40 years (exactly the amount of time Israel spent in the wilderness).

There is a strong connection between the Torah and haftarah readings: God reiterates that all these things will take place so that “they will know that I am *Adonai*.” These words appear 5 times in the haftarah, once directed at Israel (28:26), 4 times at Egypt (29:6, 9, 16). The same or similar phraseology occurs 6 times in the *parashah*, once in reference to Israel (Exodus 6:7), once the Egyptians (7:5), and 4 times Pharaoh himself (7:17, 7:6, 8:18, 9:14). Clearly, both the people of Israel and Egypt need to be convinced of Hashem’s power.

Four times each in the parsha and the haftarah, we read the phrase, “**אֲנִי יְהוָה**”, “... I am the Lord”. There can be no doubt Who is Redeeming the people of Israel.

## ***Parashat Bo Exodus 10:1-13:16 Haftarah Jeremiah 46:13-28 - January 8, 2022***

*Parashat Bo* continues the story of the Exodus, beginning with the description of the last of the plagues: locusts, then darkness; both times Pharaoh agrees to let them go, and once again changes his mind. Finally, there is the death of the firstborn. God instructs the Israelites to sacrifice a lamb and put the blood on the doorposts; for 7 days they are to eat unleavened bread.

In the haftarah Jeremiah issues 2 prophecies of doom against Egypt, predicting its downfall at the hands of the Babylonian King Nebuchednezzar. Egypt will be punished for having enslaved Israel. These messages are followed by 2 messages containing the promise that Israel will be released from Babylonian captivity.

The Torah portion and haftarah are connected *beyachad* very strongly by language. The name of the *parashah*, *Bo*, comes from the verb *lavo*, to come. This same verb appears in various forms 5 times in the haftarah (*lavo* in verse 13; *yavo*, it will come, v. 18; *ba*, comes, twice, v. 20 and again in v. 21; *ba-u*, they come, v. 22). There is also a homonym, *bo* (spelled with a vav instead of an aleph), meaning “on him”, appearing in verse 25.

The first plague in the *parashah* is locusts; the enemy in the haftarah is described as coming down like locusts (v. 23).

Finally, and most importantly, in the *parashah*, God finally exacts punishment on the Pharaoh of Egypt for refusing to let the people of Israel go free, demonstrating very vividly *Hashem's* power and authority over the gods of Egypt; in the *haftarah*, Jeremiah foretells that the God of Israel will inflict punishment “on Pharaoh—on Egypt, her gods and her kings...” (v. 25) The prophet speaks of the end of Egypt's reign.

Reading the *parashah* and the haftarah together delivers a powerful message: ours is a God who keeps promises.

## ***Parashat Beshallah* Exodus 13:17-17:16 - Haftarah Judges 4:4-5:31 - January 15, 2022**

*Parashat Beshallah* tells the dramatic story of our liberation from Egypt, and the parting of the Red Sea; the Israelites pass through on dry land, escaping Pharaoh and his army. Similarly in the haftarah the judge and prophetess Deborah and her husband Barak celebrate an unprecedented military victory over the Canaanites. Another woman, Yael, plays a decisive part in the victory by driving a tentpin through the temple of the Canaanite general Sisera. Both stories are told as narratives, and then in song: Moses leads the nation in Shirat HaYam, The Song of the Sea, and his sister Miriam leads the women in song and dance; Deborah, too, leads the people in a beautiful song of praise.

There are numerous things connecting these 2 texts *B'yachad*, together. Moses' song begins with the word *az*, then (Ex. 15:1); this word appears 5 times in Deborah's song (Judges 5:8,11,13,19,22). Moses' first words are *ashira ladoshem*, I will sing to the Lord (15:1); this is echoed in the haftarah (5:3). Both texts speak of *ohz*, strength (15:2, 5:21), the chariots (*markevot*) of the enemy (15:4, 5:28), and their horses (sus—15:1, 5:22). Pharaoh's army is swept away in the Red Sea (15: 4-5), the Canaanites in the Kishon River (5:21). We read *that not one (ad-echad)* of either Pharaoh's (14:28) or Sisera's (4:16) men survived.

Additionally, the *parashah* concludes with the story of the battle of Amalek, whose forces struck the fledgling nation of Israel in the desert; Deborah describes the attacking Canaanite army as having roots in Amalek.

Most importantly, there are strong women represented in both texts. Miriam led the women of Israel in song and dance in praise of Hashem; she, along with Moses' mother and adoptive mother, Yocheved and Pharaoh's daughter and midwives Shifra and Puah played pivotal roles in the Exodus story. The military victory in the book of Judges was brought about through Deborah and Yael. That is the reason why many years, including this year, this Shabbat, Shabbat Shirah, is designated as Women's League Shabbat. Let us celebrate our strong women—from our history, and from the present.