

Triennial Torah Study – 5th Year 04/10/2014

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We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Ex 8	1 Kings 15-16	Ps 115-117	Luke 22:39-71
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Still More Plagues (Exodus 8:20—10:20)

Before sending the fourth plague, God says that He will prevent it and the remainder of the plagues from afflicting the Israelites in Goshen. Thus, the first three plagues had been experienced by everyone, including the Israelites. But the seven last plagues (out of 10) afflict the Egyptians only. That the “seven last plagues” are distinct is quite interesting in light of the fact that we actually find this phrase in Revelation 15:1, in reference to the final plagues poured out on rebellious mankind—following a period of suffering that will come on God’s people (physical *and* spiritual) and on the rest of the world. And, just as in Egypt, God’s people of the end time will be spared the seven last plagues.

- 4. Flies:** Concerning the word “flies,” the *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* states that these were “not ‘flies,’ such as we are accustomed to [or perhaps not *only* such flies, as Egypt had and still has those too] but divers sorts of flies [i.e., flying, buzzing insects] (Ps. 78:45), the gad-fly, the cockroach, the Egyptian beetle, for all these are mentioned by different writers.... The worship of flies, particularly of the beetle [in the form of the scarab god Kheper], was a prominent part of the religion of the ancient Egyptians” (1961, note on Exodus 8:20-31). Furthermore, as the flies crawled all over them, flew into their eyes, covered their food and buzzed incessantly around them, adding to their misery, where was the supreme Amun, helper of the pious and god of the wind, to blow away this plague? Where was the guardian goddess Mafdet and the protector god Sed? Finally, the “divine” pharaoh begins to bargain, agreeing to let the Israelites sacrifice to God in Goshen. But Moses points out that this would be an abomination to the Egyptians, since they considered it detestable to sacrifice sheep (see Genesis 43:32; 46:34), and that—now really hating the Israelites—they might stone them. So, with flies still buzzing around him, Pharaoh agrees to let the Israelites travel a short way into the wilderness to sacrifice. But once again, the stubborn ruler changes his mind.
- 5. Death of livestock:** As in most pagan societies, oxen had strong attachments to various deities in Egypt. Apis, the bull god, was the living personification of the creation god Ptah. The creator sun gods Atum and Re, later syncretized into a single deity, were represented by the black bull Mnevis of Heliopolis. Nut and Neith were both depicted as the great celestial cow who gave birth to the cosmos and other deities. Mehet-Weret, another goddess associated with creation, was depicted as a cow. The mother goddesses Hathor and Nekbet were both pictured with the form of a cow. Hesat, the goddess of

birth, was depicted as a cow. And the foster mother of Horus, the cow goddess Sekhet-Hor, was even invoked to safeguard cattle—a prayer that now availed nothing in the face of the true God’s power. It should also be noted here that the Egyptians did possess some sheep (see 9:3), though apparently not for food or sacrifice (compare 8:26). And ram gods figure prominently in the Egyptian pantheon—Ba, Banebdjedet, the primeval Heryshaf, and the Nile god Khnum. Even the supreme god Amun was symbolized by a ram with curved horns. The statement that “*all* the livestock of Egypt died” (9:6) must actually mean that the *vast majority* of their animals died, as livestock are still alive in verses 19-21 and horses in 14:7-9. Even so, we can imagine that this was a major blow to the economy and military strength of Egypt. Once again, God spares the Israelites, as Pharaoh discovers. But still he refuses to let God’s people go.

6. **Boils:** Once again, the false deities of Egypt are of no help, including Sakhmet, a guardian goddess against disease (besides her major role as war goddess), Imhotep, the god of medicine, and Isis, goddess of life and healing. Pharaoh’s magicians are now too afflicted to be present; yet Pharaoh’s heart is still hardened. Interestingly, the narrative for the first time states that *God* actually hardened Pharaoh’s heart (9:12)—an intent God had earlier stated (4:21; 7:3). Yet before this, Pharaoh is seen as hardening his *own* heart (8:15, 32). God, then, is now reinforcing Pharaoh’s stubborn inclination—for the purpose described in verse 16 (see Romans 9:14-24). To better understand this, please refer to the article “Twist of Fate” at www.ucg.org/brp/materials.
7. **Hail:** This plague killed servants, animals and cattle if they were not under shelter. Plants and trees were also destroyed, including crops in the field. That this was an extremely severe thunderstorm of icy hail and that the “fire” darting to the ground was lightning is apparent from Psalm 78: “He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He also gave up their cattle to the hail, and their flocks to fiery lightning” (verses 47-48). These destructive elements, of course, had a devastating impact on the nation’s food supply. And still the gods of Egypt were shown to be powerless: the sky goddesses Nut and Hathor; the sky god Horus; Shu, the god of air and bearer of heaven; Seth, the god of storms and protector of crops; Neper, the god of grain crops; Osiris, the ruler of life and vegetation; Isis, the goddess of life; and all the cow and ram deities mentioned above proved impotent before the true God. Pharaoh now relents—for the time being. Of course, once the plague subsides, he again changes his mind.
8. **Locusts:** By this point, Pharaoh’s servants are attempting to impress on him that “Egypt is destroyed” (10:7). So he resorts to bargaining with Moses once again. But as he will not accede to God’s demands, a mighty wind brings an infestation of locusts on the land. The results are horrible to behold. Whatever vegetation had been left after the hail is now devoured by the locusts. The land is stripped bare. It must have been a wonder to look out over what was once a fertile, bountiful land and to no longer see the color green among the plants (verse 15). Again, Seth, Neper, Osiris and Isis are all defied—as are Shu, god of the air, and Amun, god of the wind. This terrible plague must have left the nation on the brink of starvation. In desperation, Pharaoh even confesses sin and asks forgiveness—outwardly. But his contrition is short-lived. By now, Moses may have become accustomed enough to Pharaoh’s stubbornness so as to not be surprised when, once again, Pharaoh changes his mind about releasing the Israelites.

Abijam (1 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chronicles 13)

Establishing the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah is not a straightforward exercise, and Abijam’s reign provides a simple example. He begins his reign in the 18th year of Jeroboam. His son Asa begins his reign in the 20th year. Yet Abijam (called Abijah in 2 Chronicles 13, and Abia in 1 Chronicles 3) is said to have reigned three years. This may be because he reigned during portions of three years. But more likely, there was some overlap or co-regency (shared rule) in their reigns. This was done with David and Solomon, and is a fairly common occurrence among the kings, albeit not always stated directly.

In 2 Chronicles 13, Abijah's mother is given as Michaiah, the daughter of Uriel. First Kings 5 says she was Maachah, which is probably a second name or variant, just as Abijam himself had different forms of his name. Maachah is also listed in some translations as the daughter of Abishalom, but granddaughter, as in the New King James Version, seems more likely. She can have only one father, and Abishalom is probably David's son Absalom, who had been killed many decades earlier. By way of explanation, ancient Hebrew was typically written with consonants only (no vowels), so spelling variations among names are fairly common.

While most of Abijam's story is recorded in Chronicles instead of Kings, the reference in 1 Kings 15:7 to the "book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah" is apparently to some other book, as our book of Chronicles appears to have been written long after the books of Kings. (In our next reading, we will see a reference in 1 Kings 14:19 to the "book of the chronicles of the kings of *Israel*"—yet *another* book.)

As is often the case, Chronicles relates a story that emphasizes the priesthood and the more positive aspects of the Davidic kings. Of course, putting together all the accounts in Scripture of a particular ruler's life yields a more complete picture. Abijam was not given a high rating in 1 Kings 15:3, yet Chronicles records an appeal to Jeroboam that illustrates how the proper temple worship (compare Ezekiel 44:15; 48:11) continued under most of the Jewish kings—often with the king's approval—even when the king saw no personal need to steer himself or the nation clear of idolatry. The victory over Jeroboam is attributed to Judah's reliance on God (verse 18).

"He Has Sent Redemption to His People"

Psalm 115 is another psalm of praise, portions of which appear in Psalm 135. As stated earlier, Psalm 115 was, and still is among the Jews, the first of those traditionally read or sung following the Passover meal. It is a song expressing communal confidence in God to help and bless His people, apparently originally intended to have groups singing responsively. "Structurally, the song advances in five movements involving a liturgical exchange between the people and temple personnel: (1) vv. 1-8: the people; (2) vv. 9-11: Levitical choir leader (the refrain ["He is their help and shield"] perhaps spoken by the Levitical choir); (3) vv. 12-13: the people; (4) vv. 14-15: the priests; (5) vv. 16-18: the people" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 115).

The psalmist has the people begin by directing praise away from themselves to where it rightly belongs—to God (verse 1a). As the song later shows, God's people are not the source of their own blessings. Rather, God Himself is. God's glory is revealed in His "mercy" (*hesed*, steadfast loyal love) and His "truth" (His revelation of what is true and His commitment to maintain His word)—His "love and faithfulness" toward His people (verse 1b, NIV)—as evidenced through their many blessings.

What, then, the people continue, is the basis for the gentile nations to question the whereabouts—the existence or power-of Israel's God? (verse 2). God is not bound to the earth. He dwells in heaven, from where He rules over the universe with all power and authority to do throughout it as He pleases (see verse 3; compare verses 15-16). *Their* gods, in contrast, are merely lifeless metals formed into shape by the hands of men (verse 4). These idols are pointless "do-nothings." They can't speak, see, hear, smell, feel, walk or talk (verses 5-7)—all things the true God *can* do. Then notice Psalm 115:8: "Those who make them [i.e., idols] are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them." Yet idolaters themselves speak, see, hear, smell, feel, walk and talk. In what way, then, are they like their idols? Perhaps with the people the words are meant in a figurative sense of lacking spiritual discernment and ability—i.e., being spiritually deaf, dumb and blind. Note, for

example, Jeremiah 5:21: “Hear this now, O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not.” Further, they lack spiritual power, being unable to “walk” in the way of God. The idolaters could also be said to be like the idols in the general sense of being foolish things. Both are also ultimately powerless and ineffectual. It could even be that the *end* of idolaters is in mind-that those who persist in idolatry will *become* like idols in that they will end up as lifeless human forms. They will have noses but will do no smelling, hands but will do no handling and mouths but will do no talking-because they will be dead (compare Psalm 115:17).

In contrast to vainly worshipping false idols is serving and trusting in the true God-who has all power and glory-for help, for protection and for perpetual blessing. The Levitical choir appeals to three groups of people to trust Him: the Israelite nation (verse 9), the house of Aaron, i.e. the priesthood (verse 10) and those who fear God (verse 11). The last group apparently means all God-fearers everywhere, in every nation, as the complementary statement in verse 13 adds “both small and great.” Verses 12-13 contain the response of the people, who refer to themselves as “us,” as in verse 1. “The threefold call to trust the Lord, the three groups of people, and the threefold assurance of God’s protection find their symmetric complement in vv. 12-15a with a threefold formula of blessing (‘will bless us’) and a restatement of the three groups (‘house of Israel,’ ‘house of Aaron,’ and ‘those who fear the LORD’)” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 12-15). These groups are also found in Psalm 118:2-4 (compare 135:19-21, where the house of Levi is also mentioned).

Verses 14-15 of Psalm 115 follow with the priests’ blessing on the people, ending with the declaration that God is the maker of heaven and earth. In the next and last section, the people give the final response in the song, acknowledging God’s sovereignty over heaven and earth, including His appointment of man’s subordinate dominion over the earth (verse 16, compare Genesis 1:28-30). This is part of God’s great blessing. Furthermore, He desires that people acknowledge and enjoy His blessings-not that their lives and participation in His creation be snuffed out in death (verse 17). Those who sing this song in faith and hope conclude that they will bless God forevermore (verse 18)-implying a joyous eternal life of praising Him.

“I Will Praise You, for You Have Answered Me, and Have Become My Salvation”

Psalm 116 is a song of thanksgiving to God for deliverance from “the pains of death...the pains of Sheol [the grave]” (verse 3). The circumstances of its original composition are unknown. In similar language to that of some of David’s psalms, the author here speaks of personal rescue by God from some severe life-threatening situation. However, the “I” in the song eventually came to represent all of Israel, being sung on the occasion of Passover-the second of those psalms sung after the traditional Jewish meal, as explained in previous comments. In that sense, the song came to be seen as celebrating deliverance from Egyptian bondage (compare verse 16). Interestingly, in Jewish interpretation every follower of God is to view himself as having been personally delivered from Egypt, making the “I” in the song all the more fitting for that occasion. We could say the same in a spiritual sense for those who make up God’s Church-as Egypt represents the evil world we live in and its sin leading to death. In any case, the song certainly has application to all of God’s saints (verse 15)-His holy ones-even today. And it particularly applies to the *quintessential* saint-the One who offered Himself up in sacrifice on Passover as the true Passover sacrifice-Jesus the Messiah. Jesus Himself was miraculously saved more than once

from attempts against His life-until it was time for Him to make the supreme sacrifice and die. Yet even after He died, God the Father nevertheless rescued Him from death by resurrecting Him to eternal life. Just the same, God will often intervene throughout the physical lives of His people to keep them from untimely death. But should He choose to allow them to die before they have reached old age-or even if they do reach old age and die naturally-He will ultimately rescue them later through the future resurrection.

Looking at some of the specifics of the psalm, verse 6 says that God preserves the “simple.” Whereas this word often means naïve, here it could probably better be translated “innocent, clean, or untarnished” (*The Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 6). Perhaps the person intended is uncomplicated in manner of thought because he is not trying to spin and maintain a web of deceit. The NIV translates the word in this instance as “simplehearted,” which could imply “those who are childlike in their sense of dependence on and trust in the Lord” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on verse 6).

Having been rescued from death’s clutches (verses 3-6, 8), the psalmist is able to find rest and peace of mind (verse 7). He knows that he “will walk before the LORD in the land of the living” (verse 9)-similar to words used elsewhere by David (Psalm 27:13; Psalm 56:13). Indeed, it appears that the psalmist believed in this outcome even during his ordeal, as his next words, “I believed, therefore I spoke” (verse 10a), are probably to be linked with the statement in verse 9 (contrary to the NKJV punctuation). “The belief in v. 10 is the hope, articulated in v. 9, that the psalmist would walk in the land of the living” (*Nelson*, note on verses 9-10). This interpretation we may surmise from the apostle Paul’s quotation of the first part of verse 10 in 2 Corinthians 4 as a profession of faith, explaining why he risked his life preaching the gospel (see verses 7-14). Note Paul’s words in verses 13-14: “And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.” Paul in this statement may imply that the psalmist himself had faith not only in being presently rescued, but ultimately even in the future resurrection of the dead.

The latter part of Psalm 116:10 should probably not be within the quotation of what the psalmist had earlier spoken. Rather, it is likely just a statement of fact, as Green’s Literal Translation presents it: “I was greatly afflicted.” In verse 11, the word rendered “haste” could be interpreted “dismay” (NIV) or “alarm” (Green’s). And the despairing statement that “all men are liars” could mean that all are “vain” or “unreliable” (see *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 10-11)-in contrast to God, who is always true and trustworthy, the only one who can be absolutely counted on to come through on His promises.

In verse 12, the psalmist considers what he will give to God for the good that God has done for Him. Of course, none of us could ever repay God for the blessings He has given us. That is not the point. Rather, our obligation to our Maker and Savior is to do all that He requires of us-to give to Him what He expects of us-to submit our lives wholly to His will. This is the context to bear in mind for the rest of the psalm.

The first thing the psalmist answers with is that He will “take up the cup of salvation” (verse 13a). Some see here a drink offering (compare Numbers 28:7). However, it appears that the psalmist is taking up this particular cup to drink from it himself rather than pouring it out as a drink offering. The figure of the “cup” occurs elsewhere in the Psalms as signifying one’s lot in life-what has been apportioned to him (see 16:5). In 23:5, as part of dining at the Lord’s banquet, the cup is shown to be running over with blessings. Here in Psalm 116 it offers salvation. The meaning, then, would seem to be that the psalmist will embrace this salvation that God has apportioned to

him. As his duty to God, he will *accept* God's offer of eternal life and blessing along with all the terms that accompany it.

There may be more to the imagery here as well. Some view the "sacrifice of thanksgiving" in verse 17 to mean a thank offering-a special peace offering-and see the cup as "the cup of wine drunk at the festal meal that climaxed a thank offering (cf. 22:26, 29; Lev 7:11-21)-called [it is presumed in this case] the 'cup of salvation' because the thank offering and its meal celebrated deliverance by the Lord" (*Zondervan*, note on Psalm 116:13).

Furthermore, recall that this psalm became associated with the Passover-and consider that this verse may have given the psalm its special place in the Jewish liturgy of the evening. As *The Nelson Study Bible* comments: "At Passover this psalm is read after the meal, immediately following the third cup of wine, called *the cup of salvation*. How appropriate that this Passover psalm would call to mind God's cup of salvation the very night that the Savior was betrayed (Matt. 26:27; Luke 22:14-22)" (note on Psalm 116:12-13). We do not eat a meal as part of the Passover service today, recognizing that Jesus implemented new symbolism. But the truths expressed in these psalms readily correspond to the spiritual meaning of this sacred memorial of Christ's death. The psalmist's sufferings certainly prefigured those of Jesus. And there may well be a relation between the cup of salvation here and the cup of the New Covenant that Jesus instituted at the Passover. Indeed, all of God's people must accept the redemption and salvation that comes through it.

Harkening back to his question of verse 12, concerning what he will render to God, the psalmist next answers that he will call on the name of the Lord (verse 13b). That is, he will look to God as his source of help-as his God. Next he says he will pay his vows to God (verse 14)-honor the promises and commitments he has made-in the presence of all God's people, as a witness and example.

The psalm then makes what may seem a strange, non-sequitur statement in verse 15: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints." Some think the word for "precious" here should be translated "costly"-meaning that God takes it as a heavy loss-so that He does not readily allow it. Yet God does not lose His faithful saints. Those who die are preserved for His Kingdom, and for Him the time passes quickly. So how are we to understand the verse?

The *Zondervan Student Bible* comments: "This verse, often read at funerals, in no way implies that God enjoys the death of his people. Instead, it means that he carefully watches over their death, and that it matters deeply to him" (note on verse 15). While true, this does not explain how the verse fits here. Indeed, if the psalmist were glad of God rescuing him from death, why is he saying this at all?

Recall the context of verse 12: "What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me?" Immediately after saying he will render the paying of his vows in verse 14, we find this statement in verse 15 that God considers the death of His saints to be precious or valuable. In context, it too is something rendered to God. The point would seem to be that the giving of ourselves wholly to God-unto death if necessary-is highly valued in His sight. After all, in such death God does not lose His servant. Just the opposite, it is a moment of immense gain. For when saints die their salvation is assured-surely a very precious thing in God's sight, as in their next conscious moment they will be immortal spirit members of His family, faithful through all eternity to come. Even though God has rescued him, the psalmist knows that God could still require the sacrifice of his life-which he is willing to give, knowing that God will resurrect him in the future. Here, of course, is a very strong parallel with Jesus Christ, who willingly submitted to the sacrificial death God required of Him in anticipation of life with the Father yet to come.

Following on in the listing of what he will give to God, the psalmist next commits himself to being God's humble servant. Interestingly he points out in this context that God has loosed his bonds. God has released him from death's grip not to wild abandon, but to freely and fully serving the true God. Israel shared this responsibility in the Exodus and throughout its national history. And Christians have likewise been freed from their sinful past to obey God from now on (compare Romans 6:15-22).

The psalmist next declares that he will offer the "sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Psalm 116:17). As mentioned above, this could refer to the giving of a special thank offering (Leviticus 7:12). Yet it could more generally apply to simply thanking and praising God, at least in a figurative sense. We should be extremely grateful for all that God has done for us and express our gratitude to Him regularly and often when we call on Him in prayer.

Throughout this section, we see a loving relationship in action. God loves the writer, providing him with many blessings, including instruction on his obligations to his Creator. The author loves God, responding with a willing heart eager to fulfill his responsibilities in living according to God's Word. In the briefest of terms, God commands and man obeys. But there is more-a loving relationship exists, as illustrated throughout the psalms. The New Testament further develops this relational aspect of mutual love between the Father and the believing son or daughter.

Verse 18 may be only a reiteration of verse 14. Yet it could well be more than that, signifying that the psalm itself, in its composition and later actual performance in the temple (compare verse 19), is a fulfillment of paying vows made to God. On a prophetic level, the wording may also foreshadow Jesus' offering of Himself in Jerusalem as the true Passover sacrifice-and the witness and example given to His followers.

"I Will Praise You, for You Have Answered Me, and Have Become My Salvation"

Psalm 117 is the shortest psalm and the shortest chapter in the Bible. It has a simple yet important directive: *everyone* is to praise the Lord (verse 1). The psalmists typically call for the faithful of Israel to offer praise. But in this psalm, the writer calls for "all you Gentiles"-that is, "all you nations" (NIV)-and "all you peoples" to praise God.

In Romans 15:11 the apostle Paul quoted Ps.117:1 in conjunction with other Old Testament passages to explain that God intended the gentiles to have a relationship with Him as well (see Romans 15:8-12; compare Psalm 18:49; Deuteronomy 32:43; Isaiah 11:10).

Along with the other songs of this section, the psalmist here uses *Hallelujah*-*"Praise the LORD"* (Psalm 117:1-2). He also uses the word *shavah* for "laud" or "extol" (verse 1, NIV). "*Laud*, which means 'to speak well of,' nicely parallels the term *praise*, which means 'to be excitedly boastful about'" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 1).

God is to be praised for His *hesed* (His loyal, steadfast lovingkindness and mercy) and His enduring *emet* or truth, implying "faithfulness" (NIV) to maintain His word, to keep His promises (verse 2). Through these, those of all mankind who respond in sincerity and faith may share in the wonderful, eternal blessings of the people of God-for they, too, will be His people.

Luke 22:39-71

Yeshua is now at the Mount of Olives and His taught ones follow. He has gone there to pray. He admonishes them to watch and pray, pray that they do not enter into trial. Yeshua knows He must drink the cup of jealousy in place of His Bride and He is asking to let the cup pass from Him if at all possible but always placing the Will of the Father before His own.

He receives strength from heaven similar to how perhaps a good friend sits with us during times of mourning or agony and just their being there does strengthen us. He prays all the more earnestly. His taught ones fell asleep due to exhaustion and Yeshua awoke them to again rise and pray, lest they enter into trial.

Then Judas came upon them with a crowd and he delivered Yeshua to them by a kiss. As one of them cut off the ear of the high priest in defense of Yeshua, Yeshua comforted them in saying basically that now is not the time for violence or fighting. Yeshua healed the priests ear and queries them as to why they have come after Him with clubs and swords when He has been available to them all the time. Knowing though, that they do their work under cover of darkness.

Then Kepha undergoes his trials as they take Yeshua to the elders and courts. He denies knowing Yeshua three times just as Yeshua told him he would... Three times before the cock crowed. They blindfolded Yeshua, beat Him, mocked Him, and blasphemed.

He was taken to the council for further questioning by the chief priests and scribes. Yeshua does nothing, but allow them to convict their own selves with their questioning and statements. He knows their hearts.