

This week's Audio, Video, and Teaching Notes are posted here.

The Pentateuch: A New Look – The Final Plague – Class Sixteen (A Great Contest Between Clashing Cultures; Egypt's Gods Defeated by the Power of YHVH; Concluding the Ten Plagues; Slaying the Firstborn with Bad Angels; Critical Text Studies; Pharaoh Hardens His Heart; Send Forth My People; Moses in Hot Anger to Pharaoh – You are Going to Bow Down to Me; Distinction vs. Extinction; Textual Variances; A Separation Between Israel and Egypt; Who Kills the Firstborn; The Firstborn of Israel are Redeemed; The Passover Narrative (Exodus 12: 1-28); Israel Plunders the Egyptians; A Three Days Journey Into the Wilderness; How Many People Left Egypt; Moving Chicago Through the Wilderness; This Great Thing)

January 8, 2022 – Ross Nichols

Torah Portion: Bo: "Come" – Exodus 10:1 – 13:16

Haftarah Reading: Jeremiah 46:13 – 28

Audio/Video Links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONjVQZ1Se-c>

<https://unitedisraelworldunion.com/the-pentateuch-a-new-look-the-final-plague-class-sixteen/>

Teaching Notes Link:

<https://unitedisraelworldunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2022.1.8-The-Pentateuch-A-New-Look-The-Final-Plague-Class-Sixteen.pdf>

TODAY'S INTRODUCTION

-Welcome to United Israel World Union, this is our Sabbath morning scripture study coming to you live from the United Israel Center in Saint Francisville, Louisiana. Thank you so much for joining us today. Many of you are in your own place today, alone, Shabbat Shalom and thank you for joining us this morning. We need one another to help us go through what the world is going through today. I pray that all of you and the ones that you care for remain healthy today and throughout the coronavirus.

-United Israel is pleased to announce a new teaching series for the Jewish calendar year 5782 (October 2021 – October 2022). The entire year will be dedicated to a careful study of the words of the Bible's first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) based upon an honest and objective new look at the Pentateuch. The materials for the weekly lessons will be arranged according to the annual cycle of readings that are followed in most Jewish Communities.

-We're going to talk about some of the theological motifs and some of the things that inspire and move us to connect with God and the spiritual aspects of these texts. We'll also talk about some of the historical, critical, scholarly, and academic approaches to the text to help understand how this book came together. These are the most remarkable stories in all of history. So, how did we get these books and what makes them up?

TEACHING NOTES

-Today's class on The Pentateuch – A New Look is on Torah portion Bo, (Exodus 10:1 – 13:16) which is translated, “Go” to Pharaoh. This is the third reading in the annual Torah cycle of readings from the Book of Exodus, the Book of Names. Thank you for joining us today. Today's material is a continuation of the confrontation that we started last week. A great confrontation between, on one side you have Moses, Aaron, and the Hebrew God YHVH and that's a strong team, and on the other side you have a strong team as well but not as strong, including Pharaoh and his people who are opposed to the children of Israel, and the gods of Egypt. It's a great contest between these two clashing cultures.

-Last week I mentioned a view by Hoffmeier, Old Testament Hebrew Bible Scholar, who puts his theory forward that the plagues are aimed at Maat / Order. You have to knock Pharaoh on his backside in front of the people, showing that he's not in control, and that's what God is doing with the plagues. Some have suggested that at least in part that the plagues are a demonstration in our narrative of a defeat of Egypt's gods by the power of YHVH is really what's going on. In a general way, this idea does have support from several texts.

-Exo 12: 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am YHVH.

-Num 33: 4 while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom YHVH had struck down among them. On their gods also YHVH executed judgments.

-Num 33: 1 These are the stages of the people of Israel, when they went out of the land of Egypt by their companies under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. 2 Moses wrote down their starting places, stage by stage, by command of YHVH, and these are their stages according to their starting places. 3 They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month. On the day after the Passover, the people of Israel went out triumphantly in the sight of all the Egyptians,

-We'll look at Numbers 33 quite a bit as I want to bring you, my dear friends, on a literary journey involving a horizontal study of the marches in the wilderness. Welcome to class sixteen in our ongoing series, The Pentateuch – A New Look. In today's reading we conclude the ten plagues. According to Exodus there are ten plagues, Exodus 7: 1 – 12:36. Two other texts in the bible describe this confrontation and the plagues and are poetic in nature, so the number of plagues isn't exact. In Psalms 78:12, & 42-51, there are eight plagues listed. In Psalms 105: 23-28, there are seven plagues listed. I want to focus on Egypt's tenth plague, the slaying of the firstborn, which is consistent in all three of our sources.

-Psa 78: 49 He let loose on them his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels. 50 He made a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death, but gave their lives over to the plague. 51 He struck down every firstborn in Egypt, the firstfruits of their strength in the tents of Ham.

-This tells us that God's anger is inflicted upon the tents of Ham, and he does this according to the text with a band of deadly messengers. ASV says, a band of angels of evil. KJ says, by sending evil angels among them. ESV says, a company of destroying angels. How does God kill all the firstborn humans and animals? We know from the text

that sometimes these messengers (angels) are from another realm and here, they are going through and killing the firstborn.

-Psa 105: 26 He sent Moses, his servant, and Aaron, whom he had chosen. 27 They performed his signs among them and miracles in the land of Ham.

-Psalms 105: 28 – 34 give you the plagues and all seven are recounted here.

-Psa 105: 36 He struck down all the firstborn in their land, the firstfruits of all their strength.

-Psalms 78:51 sounds very similar to Psalms 105:36 and are almost exact, yet in the Hebrew there are a couple of slight differences between the two. This tells me that the writer of Psalms 78, attributed to Asaph, and the writer of Psalms 105, which doesn't tell us who wrote it, are relying on a single source. Comparing similar texts like this to determine what the source says is called Critical Text Studies. "He struck down all the firstborn" is the same in both texts. In Psalms 105 it says, "in their land", and Psalms 78 says, "in Egypt". Psalms 105: 36 says, "the firstfruits of all their strength", and Psalms 78: 51 says, "the firstfruits of their strength". The idea is that both of these writers are looking at the same source. Even though the accounts vary in their details, we do have some points in common. Again, the death of the firstborn occurs in all three sources, but they don't all contain the plague of darkness. According to our narratives, what I'm about to tell you takes place before Moses and/or Aaron appear(s) before Pharaoh. This is something that God tells Moses to tell Pharaoh and it happened before his first visit to the throne.

-Exo 4: 21 And YHVH said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says YHVH, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 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.'"

-Though this is slightly out of order, right before this I want to pick up...

-Exo 4: 19 And YHVH said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead." 20 So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand.

-It says, he loaded up the donkey's, his wife, and the kids and they went back to Egypt; but they did not go back to Egypt yet because in the next verse it says, "When you return to Egypt"... This word happens in Midian before he returns to Egypt and he's told, when you do go back and after you perform these signs and wonders, then I want you to tell Pharaoh..., now it makes sense. Now he's going to say, I've told you to let my son go, you didn't let him go, now I'm going to kill your firstborn. I exposed a textual difficulty and then I explain it.

-He's not getting ahead of himself, God is giving him a chronology, criteria which must be met, wait until you perform the signs and wonders, he refuses, then you're going to hit him with this one. Then it says, God will stiffen his heart. God says, you want to harden your heart, I'll fix it so there's no turning back. The Egyptians are really big at measuring the heart at death. Five times in the text it tells us the Pharaoh stiffened his own heart. In Exodus 4:21, it says that God will stiffen Pharaoh's heart, but he doesn't do it right off the bat, nor is Moses to say this thing about killing the firstborn then.

-Exo 10: 1 Then YHVH said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them,
 -This is the first time where God says, I did that to his heart... He says he's going to do that in Exodus 4. What Moses and Aaron meet is an obstinate, unwilling to bend Pharaoh who says, I don't know YHVH, I don't know what you're after, you are not going to leave etc, and he kept resisting and he hardens his heart repeatedly. Ultimately, God says, that's what you've decided, now I'm stepping in. The time has come to bring about the final plague, the criteria have been met, and the conditions of Exodus 4 have been met.

-Exo 11: 1 YHVH said to Moses, "Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will drive you away completely.

-Exo 6: 1 But YHVH said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."

-Here, God is reaffirming to Moses that not only will he let you go, but he's also going to drive you out. Where it's translated as "let my people go", I see it as, "send forth my people", so I see it more forceful. It's a battle between, who are you going to serve? You must serve somebody, is it going to be the devil or the Lord? This is a battle for who's servant these people will be. Will the people of Israel serve Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt or will they serve YHVH?

-Exo 11: 4 So Moses said, "Thus says YHVH: 'About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, 5 and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle. 6 There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again. 7 But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that YHVH makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.'

-One of the key points in the Exodus story and in the Bible is that God intends to make a distinction between Israel and other nations. A person can always join Israel, but this chosen group is set up for distinction and quite often those opposed are set up for extinction. God chooses, and others who choose not to be part of that are taken out of the scenario. I believe what we read here in Exodus 11 is a fulfillment of what was said in Exodus 4: 21-23. I've even taught in the past, God told Moses to go tell this to Pharaoh and he doesn't, but I wasn't reading closely. Moses was told to go say this about the firstborn dying, but don't say it until I've hardened his heart which didn't happen until Exodus 10:1. Now it's come down to firstborn vs. firstborn.

-Exo 11: 8 And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, 'Get out, you and all the people who follow you.' And after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger.

-Have you ever noticed where Moses says, when this is done, you are going to bow to me and you're going to send me forth? He is not speaking for God there. Moses is hot and angered and tells him, you're going to bow low to me, you're going to tell me to depart and all the people who follow you. Imagine Moses point his finger at Pharaoh while he's telling him this and then he walks out and slams the door behind him.

-When we talk about textual variance, the bible as we have it, the Tanakh / Old Testament is based upon the Masoretic text which has been firm for quite some time and

what we know from a study of biblical text, there are variations. We see quite a bit in the Dead Sea Scrolls and when we compare the Masoretic text to the Septuagint. Some people have said you shouldn't trust the Septuagint, but the Septuagint (+/- 800 CE) often agrees with Dead Sea Scroll (+/- 100 BCE) readings which are earlier than the Masoretic texts (+/- 500 CE). Often the Hebrew in the Dead Sea Scrolls matches the Hebrew Bible which is closer to the Septuagint. There are variances in the text, and it is interesting to note that the Samaritan Pentateuch has something of a variation in Exodus 11. Here it has Moses clearly quoting what he was told in Exodus 4 to say to Pharaoh and therefore I connect Exodus 4 with Exodus 11. One thing we know from studying the Samaritan Pentateuch is that it often adds things, smooths things out. Many want to believe it's a more ancient text, but the Samaritan text is something that shows signs of textual editing to make things clearer. It's interesting that it inserts Exodus 4: 22-23 here, because that's the perfect place for it. Even without it where Moses tells Pharaoh in Exodus 11 where this plague is coming, he's clearly fulfilling what he was told to say in Exodus 4.

-The theme that I mentioned earlier about a distinction between Israel and Egypt is something that shows up throughout the narratives about the Exodus. We have a battle going on, God's firstborn son or Pharaoh and Egypt's firstborn son, there's going to be a tradeoff. One or the other, this is the distinction that's going to be made.

-Exo 11: 6 There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again. 7 But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that YHVH makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.'

-Exo 8: 22 But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am YHVH in the midst of the earth. 23 Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.

-Havoc is going to be unleashed on the people of Egypt, but not on my people. And the reason, God says there's a distinction between what's mine and what's yours and all of this will cause Pharaoh to send forth God's people.

-Exo 9: 4 But YHVH will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die.

-Exo 11: 7 But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that YHVH makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

-The Hebrew word for distinction means a separation. There's going to be a separation and you're going to see it. You'll see what happens to them versus what happens to you. That distinction is shown throughout the Exodus narrative even when the word distinction is not used.

-Exo 10: 21 Then YHVH said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt." 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. 23 They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.

-The next question is who kills all the firstborn? Who does it? Who's wielding the sword? Was it YHVH or an angel of evil? A messenger of evil? A sending of a messenger of evil? Is it more than one? This is the whole land of Egypt and all the firstborn, have to be killed. How's it done? Is it a bunch of bad angels running through?

This debate is discussed in the Talmud. Even in the Passover Haggadah they repeat a midrash that tries to push the angel image out of your mind. There are some contradictions in our sources.

-Exo 12: 23 For YHVH will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, YHVH will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.

-Who is doing the killing here? Is it YHVH or is it the destroyer? Is the destroyer even in the text? What are we dealing with here?

-Exo 12: 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am YHVH.

-Exo 12: 27 you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of YHVH's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

-Exo 12: 29 At midnight YHVH struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock.

-Who is striking who? See how there's a debate. Now the angel of death who's made popular in film and media, that phrase doesn't occur in our narratives about the Exodus. Who is it? The main point of this plague again is that a distinction is being made between God's firstborn son and the firstborn son of Egypt. Exodus 13 is devoted in large part to showing this distinction. The firstborn of Egypt is killed and the firstborn of the Israelites, which are the firstborn of YHVH, are spared, redeemed. Exodus 13 deals with the redemption of the firstborn and it's directly tied to what happens on this fateful night, the night of this plague.

-Exo 13: 15 For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, YHVH killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to YHVH all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

-This is the core point of the Exodus and what is popularly known as Passover. The story is told to eager eyed children around the table. It raises questions sometimes, so God killed all those people? The communication by Moses to Pharaoh of this final plague seems to be interrupted by Exodus 12: 1-28, those are the details of the Passover. Do you ever wonder why people fight over festivals and what day things occur? It's because the text is very difficult. In one place it will say one thing and in another it doesn't quite line up, so people are deciding their position based on a certain text with prominence.

-Exo 12: 29 At midnight YHVH struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. 30 And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. 31 Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve YHVH, as you have said. 32 Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!"

-This is followed by an urging on behalf of the Egyptian populists to the Israelites to leave with great wealth. This goes back to Genesis 15 where God tells Abraham your

descendants will be in Egypt and they're going to go out in the fourth generation with great wealth. This idea is shown in the text to have happened and they give them clothing, silver, and gold.

-Exo 12: 36 And YHVH had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

-Exo 12: 31 Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve YHVH, as you have said.

-How has he said he's going to go? What does that mean? Does Pharaoh think that he's going forever? Here's what he's said so far...

-Exo 3: 18 And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'YHVH, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to YHVH our God.'

-This is what he's been asking for, let us go three days, we're going to go to the wilderness, we're going to worship YHVH.

-Exo 5: 3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to YHVH our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."

-Exo 8: 27 We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to YHVH our God as he tells us."

-Plenty of other text are not as specific and just say let us go to serve God in the wilderness, and Pharaoh's words are heeded when he says go out.

-Exo 12: 37 And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. 38 A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. 39 And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

-The route goes from what's called Rameses to Succoth, and this could be a later edit. People have ideas and speculations, but we don't know who updated the text, or what group did it, we just know that it was changed. The question is, how many people are leaving Egypt? Here it says, six hundred thousand men on foot.

-Num 11: 21 But Moses said, "The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month!'

-Num 1: 46 all those listed were 603,550.

-Num 2: 32 These are the people of Israel as listed by their fathers' houses. All those listed in the camps by their companies were 603,550.

-That's a lot of people and that's only the men. Specifically, men only 20 years old and older if you look at Exodus 38:26 or Numbers 1:46-47 that talks about the counting age. Just count the ones that are 20 and older, men of war. To this number, Numbers 3:39 adds 22,000 Levites. Now we are at 625, 550 men, 20 and older. Don't forget we've got the mixed multitude and we don't have any idea how many of those there were. All told with women, children, and people that aren't fighting age, we're looking at let's say, conservative numbers – two and a half million, upwards of three or more million people.

The 2020 Census for Chicago has 2.75 million people. This is what we're talking about, everybody in Chicago and their animals and the zoo, everything. Chicago at 227 square miles in size has within it 2.75 million people. That's a density of about 12.6 thousand people per square mile. Houston is 2.3 million people with 640 square miles. That's a density of about 3.6 thousand people per square mile.

-Can you take this number of people in Chicago, 2.75 million inhabitants, and put that on a map in Goshen? I encourage you to take a look at that and think about that. It is such a problem and people have looked at this very clearly trying to figure out what does the text really mean?

-Exo 38: 24 All the gold that was used for the work, in all the construction of the sanctuary, the gold from the offering, was twenty-nine talents and 730 shekels, by the shekel of the sanctuary. 25 The silver from those of the congregation who were recorded was a hundred talents and 1,775 shekels, by the shekel of the sanctuary: 26 a beka a head (that is, half a shekel, by the shekel of the sanctuary), for everyone who was listed in the records, from twenty years old and upward, for 603,550 men.

-It suggests that this is not talking about clans, but people. Whether you accept the literal number or you think that this is an exaggeration, whatever you decide, I just want you to have an accurate picture. We're talking about moving Chicago through the wilderness.

The Exodus event is called in Deuteronomy, This Great Thing.

-Deu 4: 32 "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. 33 Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? 34 Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which YHVH your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

-This Great Thing, the Exodus, the departure, the moving of a people group out of Egypt through the wilderness. We are going to talk about and follow the wilderness itinerary. Don't be nervous, a lot of people have been told, not to think for themselves. Apologists have gone out of their way to take the difficulties off the table for you. When it says, 603,550 males twenty and older, I believe it. Have you ever considered what that looks like when you put those people in the desert? When you put those people walking through the sea? Movies show us great computer graphics and the wall of water at the Gulf of Aqaba splitting open. Those are really cool until you think that this doesn't do it justice. If you have 2.75 million people, how long does it take to move them this far? What if the water is 200 feet deep there or 1,000 feet deep, people have to think about these things?

-We're going to look at these things very closely and make sense of it as best we can. We are going to determine what the text says and see if there's a way to make it through these things and truly understand the picture that's being demonstrated for us by these texts. Next week we'll pick up with yet another chapter in This Great Thing. Don't miss it.

Shabbat Shalom, Shavua Tov, see you next week.

THIS WEEK IN TORAH

JANUARY 8, 2022

This week's Torah Portion Bo: "Come" (Exodus 10:1 – 13:16) The eighth plague/locusts; The ninth plague/darkness; Duration of the plague; Pharaoh's offerings; Pharaoh's final intransigence; Warning of the plague of the firstborn; The new status of the Jews; Rosh Chodesh; The Pesach offering; God himself will carry out the plague; The Pesach festival; The Pesach offering; The Passover; The tenth plague/death of the firstborn; Pharaoh's surrender; Passover instituted; The Exodus; The duration of the Egyptian exile; Additional laws of the Pesach offering; Leaving Egypt; Remember the Exodus; Consecration of the firstborn; The feast of unleavened bread; Tefillin and the Exodus. "Shavua Tov" and Have a Great Week!

"This Week in Torah" FB Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/571648826269105/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

-Blossoming Rose Israel Tours (2022): <https://blossomingrose.org/>

-UNCC Mt. Zion Archaeological Project, Dig Mt. Zion (2022): June/July 2022; <https://digmountzion.uncc.edu/>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/digmountzion/>

-Walking the Ancient Paths – (2022): Tabor – Nichols Israel Tour October 21 – November 1, 2022; <https://unitedisraelworldunion.com/israel-tours/>; <https://blossomingrose.org/2022-walking-the-ancient-paths/>