

Spiritual Complacency

This week's reading from Parashat Shemot (*Shemot / Exodus 47:28-50:26*) detail the sons of Israel who had come to Egypt. The narrative tells us that Joseph and all of his brothers had passed away and a new king arose in Egypt who did not know Joseph (*1:1-7*). This king of Egypt feared the people of Israel and placed them into slavery (*1:9-14*). It is interesting how, according to Parshiot Miketz, Vayigash, and Vayechi, we are told that the years of blessing were seven, and the years of famine were also seven. We are told in the book of Genesis, that the famine was so great, the people sold all that they had and then finally sold their lives into servitude for food. The introductory to the book of Exodus, we read of Joseph's death and of a new king in Egypt. According to the Scriptures, this new king placed Israel into slavery being afraid because of their numbers. Why do you think up until this point in time the people did not travel back to the land of Canaan? Did they become complacent in their new found life where they had an abundance of wealth, of food, and a good life in Goshen?

ספר שמות פרק א *Shemot / Exodus 1:5-11*

ה ויהי כל-נפש יצאי ירה-יעקב
 שבעים נפש ויוסף היה במצרים:
 ו ומת יוסף וכל-אחיו וכל הדור
 ההוא: ז ובני ישראל פרו וישר-
 צו וירבו ויעצמו במאד מאד ותמלא
 הארץ אתם: פ ח ויקם מלך-חדש
 על-מצרים אשר לא-ידע את-יוסף:
 ט ויאמר אל-עמו הנה עם בני יש-
 ראל רב ועצום ממנו: י הבה נתח-
 כמה לו פן-ירבה והיה כיתקראנה
 מלחמה ונוסף גם-הוא על-שנאינו
 ונלחם-בנו ועלה מן-הארץ: יא
 וישמו עליו שרי מסים למען ענתו
 בסבלתם ויבן ערי מסכנות לפרעה
 את-פתם ואת-רעמסס:

1:5 All the persons who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was already in Egypt. 1:6 Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. 1:7 But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. 1:8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 1:9 He said to his people, 'Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. 1:10 'Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land.' 1:11 So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. (NASB)

In the previous Parshiot, we are told that the years of blessing and famine was temporal, seven years each. Moshe tells us that Joseph died and a new king arose in Egypt who did not know him. The Scriptures say, **ט ויאמר אל-עמו הנה עם בני ישראל רב ועצום ממנו:** *1:9 He said to his people, 'Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. (NASB)* It appears that Pharaoh and his people saw the sons of Israel as being greater in number and stronger than Egypt. As a result of their perception the Scriptures say, this new king placed Israel into slavery out of fear of them. Thinking

on these Scriptures, why do you think up until this point in time the people did not return to the land of Canaan following the conclusion of the famine? According to *Bereshit / Genesis 47:28*, Jacob lived 17 years in Egypt before he died, this appears to be a significant amount of time following the famine. Was this simply a matter of their having sold themselves into servitude? The Scriptures tell us that up until this time the people remained free, and it was out of fear Pharaoh placed them into servitude. It seems as if their remaining in the land of Goshen was more a matter of choice rather than being forced to stay. Life was good, the people were prospering, becoming greater in number and stronger than the surrounding peoples. It can be safely assumed that the people had passed down knowledge of the Abrahamic promises, of the land of Canaan, and how the Lord God Almighty worked in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Did the people become complacent in their relationship with God and in their traditions in the midst of their prosperity?

The prophet Zephaniah, prophesied in the days of Josiah, king of Judah (BCE 641-610), a contemporary with the prophet Jeremiah, saying the following:

Zephaniah 1:12-18

1:12 'It will come about at that time That I will search Jerusalem with lamps, And I will punish the men Who are stagnant in spirit, Who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good or evil!' 1:13 'Moreover, their wealth will become plunder And their houses desolate; Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit them, And plant vineyards but not drink their wine.' 1:14 Near is the great day of the Lord, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the Lord! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. 1:15 A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness, 1:16 A day of trumpet and battle cry Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers. 1:17 I will bring distress on men So that they will walk like the blind, Because they have sinned against the Lord; And their blood will be poured out like dust And their flesh like dung. 1:18 Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the Lord's wrath; And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth. (NASB)

Note the state of the men to whom the Lord is speaking. These men are stagnant in spirit meaning they have become complacent in their faith. Those who have become complacent say the Lord will do neither good or evil. These men have prospered greatly and are wealthy; their wealth will become plunder for thieves and robbers. These things are brought into context with the “*day of the Lord.*” The prophet says that the day of the Lord is a day of weeping, of wrath, troubles, distress, and destruction. A day of darkness and thick clouds, and of war (e.g. the battle cry). The Lord says that these men will walk about blind because of their sins. It seems that according to these Scriptures,

wealth multiplies complacency, and complacency multiplies sins, and sins causes one to become blind to seeking the Lord for help which feeds the mentality of being complacent in one's faith, walk, and trusting in the Lord.

Midrash Rabbah Shemot, Parashat 1, Part 1 (מדרש רבה שמות פרשה א סימן א) has the following to say concerning the opening verses of the book of Exodus.

Midrash Rabbah Shemot, Parashat 1, Part 1

Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, who came into Egypt with Jacob. Thus we read, He that spares his rod hates his son; but he that loves him chastens him (Mishley / Proverbs 13:24). Ordinarily, if a man's friend says to him, so-and-so, smite your son, he is ready even to deprive him of his livelihood. Then why He that spares his rod hates his son? To teach you that anyone who refrains from chastising his son causes him to fall into evil ways and thus comes to hate him. This is what we find in the case of Ishmael who behaved wickedly before Abraham his father, but he did not chastise him, with the result that he fell into evil ways, so that he despised him and cast him forth empty-handed from his house. What did Ishmael do? When he was fifteen years old, he commenced to bring idols from the street, toyed with them and worshiped them as he had seen others do. So when Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne unto Abraham, making sport (Bereshit / Genesis 32:6) she immediately said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son (Bereshit / Genesis 21:10) lest my son learn of his ways. Hence, And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight on account of his son, because he had become depraved...

Another example, Now Isaac loved Esau (Bereshit / Genesis 25:28); hence because he did not chastise him, he became depraved. As we have learned, on that day, Esau the wicked committed five transgressions. He seduced a betrothed maiden, killed a man, denied resurrection, rejected the fundamental principles of religion, and despised his brithright. Moreover, he longed for the death of his father and sought to slay his brother, as it is said, Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob (Bereshit / Genesis 27:41). He caused Jacob to flee from his father's home and he also went to Ishmael to learn of him evil ways and to get more wives, as it is said, So Esau went unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives that he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, and took unto the wives that he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife (Bereshit / Genesis 28:9).

Similarly, because David did not rebuke or chastise his son Absalom, he fell into evil ways, seeking to slay his father, sleeping with his concubines, and becoming the cause of his wandering bare-footed and weeping, and of the slaughter of many thousands and tens of thou-

sands of Israelites, as well as of other sorrows without end...

The midrash opens on the verse that states *“Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, who came into Egypt with Jacob”* and then proceeds to comment on disciplining your son. Why do you think the rabbis look at *Shemot / Exodus 1:1* and then proceed to discuss disciplining one’s son? Could it be they too are thinking upon how the son’s of Israel become complacent in their position and place in Egypt? Could it be that their complacency led to their servitude in Egypt for 400 years? Could this be paralleled to the one who is complacent sins to a greater extent than those who take their faith and walk before God more seriously? The midrash states that *“anyone who refrains from chastising his son causes him to fall into evil ways and thus comes to hate him.”* The rabbis take the example of Abraham and Ishmael saying that Ishmael fell into sin and wickedness because Abraham failed to chastise him. The failure to chastise led to idolatry and worship of false gods. When one becomes complacent, sins multiply, and a sin can be the thing that one places in one’s heart (set up in one’s heart) as an idol (e.g. *Ezekiel 14*). The midrash says the reason Sarah asked Abraham to cast Hagar and Ishmael out was because of the idolatry of Ishmael, she did not want Isaac to learn his ways.

The midrash continues with another example, Isaac and Esau. Isaac did not chastise Esau and so he became deprived as he learned to do wickedness committing five transgressions, *“He seduced a betrothed maiden, killed a man, denied resurrection, rejected the fundamental principles of religion, and despised his brithright. Moreover, he longed for the death of his father and sought to slay his brother, as it is said, Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob (Bereshit / Genesis 27:41).”* He took from the wives of Ishmael, from the land of Canaan, that which was explicitly forbidden. Esau did not regard the word of the Lord, he was complacent, and abstinent against God. The midrash continues with the example from David and Absalom. In a similar manner, David did not chastise Absalom and so Absalom fell into evil ways, seeking to slay his father, sleeping with his concubines, slaughtering thousands, etc.

The apostle Paul wrote in *1 Thessalonians 1:2-4* saying,

1 Thessalonians 1:2-4

1:2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 1:3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father; 1:4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; (NASB)

Based upon Paul’s words, he was paying tribute to the believers in Thessalonica who suffered persecution to follow Yeshua the Messiah. Thessalonica was a large harbor city that was full of idolatry. It was not an easy place to live and Paul was praising what he had heard of their steadfastness and hope in Yeshua. The ekklesia was thriving and persecuted in Thessalonica, this may be paralleled to the children of Israel in the land of Goshen, they continued to prosper and grow in numbers in the midst of their servitude to

Pharaoh. 1 Thessalonians suggests that the people thrived more as they were persecuted more in Thessalonica. Shemot / Exodus tells us something similar, the sons of Israel also thrived as they were persecuted (put into servitude / bondage). Today, we can see believers standing strong in places where their faith in Yeshua is outlawed and driven underground. On the other hand, we can also see where faith in the Messiah is not persecuted, there is much complacency and compromise. Today we have more freedom to share the gospel, great resources, bibles, commentaries, the Greek and Hebrew translations, lexicons, tools for searching the Scriptures, etc. With all of these things, why is there so much complacency in faith, love, patience, hope, and God's Word today? The rapid acceptance of homosexuality across the Christian denominations is one such illustration of the sloppiness in the manner in which the Word of God is handled today. Is this because of complacency which leads to laziness in one's walk with the Lord? Has prosperity caused believers to become focused more upon other things, for example, focusing more upon the lusts of the flesh due to the availability and opportunity to sin today? In the book of Exodus, the sons of Israel appeared to be complacent in their lives which led them to remain in a land filled with idols and wickedness which also became a part of their own lives to a certain extent. Complacency led to sin, and sin to more complacency.

We need to break up the ground of complacency in our lives to rid ourselves of spiritual complacency and replace this with a hunger for God, His Messiah Yeshua, and for His word. A complacent person is a person who is satisfied where he is and what he has in God. His life becomes stale, similar to what Zephaniah said in *1:12* "... *Who are stagnant in spirit, Who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good or evil!'*" The idea is that the Lord does not care about how I live my life, I am fine... Complacency is also the deceiver's playground because this becomes a place for sin and worldly thinking. As Zephaniah stated, the one who has a stagnant spirit, he walks around blinded, he does not recognize his own spiritual deficiencies. The point of the Torah study for this week is that we are to guard our lives against complacency and not become comfortable like Israel appeared to be in the land of Egypt which led to 400 years of slavery and sin. The significance of these things on breaking complacency in our lives may be brought into perspective looking at *Revelation 22:10-11* which says the following regarding these things:

Revelation 22:10-11

22:10 And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 22:11 'Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.' (NASB)

Revelation tells us that those who sin will continue to sin, those who walk in righteousness will continue to walk in righteousness, and those who are holy will continue to keep themselves holy. Which group are you in? Which group do you want to be in? Has complacency made you think you are OK before God? The end of those who continue to practice sin, unrighteousness, wickedness, is not good resulting in eternal separation

from the Lord. It seems that the pattern of repetitive sin as described in Revelation is connected to these types of people who are complacent in their lives to live and to walk in opposition to the way the Lord God. Seek the Lord today to break the spirit of complacency, to turn from sin and to turn towards righteousness and truth in the Messiah Yeshua.

Heavenly Father,

We ask that You would show us mercy, create in us a new heart, a new spirit, and deliver us from the bondage to sin and complacency in our lives. Help us to have more faith, to trust and to seek You and Your ways, and to live our lives for Your glory. Thank You for sending Your Son Yeshua to save us and to empower our lives to overcome these things.

In Yeshua's name we pray! Amen.