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The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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וארא

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A New Leader in Lineage

By Ephraim Fischer

In the beginning of this week's פרשה, we see 'ה describing the mission of משה and אהרן. 'ה describes how He will take בני ישראל out of Egypt, and that He will be our God, and that we will be brought to ארץ ישראל, the land in which our forefathers lived and the land that we have been promised. However, right in the middle of this narrative, we are interrupted with the genealogies of שמעון, ראובן, and לוי, with the genealogy of לוי going all the way to משה and אהרן. This presents two questions. First of all, we were just speaking about how משה and אהרן were going to redeem בני ישראל from Egypt, why are we interrupting this discussion with seemingly random genealogies? Second of all, why are only the genealogies of שמעון, ראובן, and לוי listed? Why are we only stating the descendants of three out of the twelve שבטים?

With regards to the first question, the אור החיים says that this is to show that only direct descendants of יעקב could become kings over the Jewish people. If we look at the פסוק directly preceding the genealogies, פסוק, we see that in this פסוק, 'ה gives משה and אהרן the task of leading בני ישראל out of Egypt. In other words, they are being appointed as leaders over בני ישראל. This is why right after they were appointed as leaders their genealogies were listed; To show that they were direct descendants of יעקב, and therefore could be appointed as leaders over בני ישראל.

There are many different answers to our second question. Given the אור החיים we just learned, we see that the תורה only wanted to list the genealogy of משה and אהרן, that is, the genealogy of שבט לוי. Therefore, many מפרשים say that the genealogies of ראובן and שמעון were only mentioned in order to get to the genealogy of לוי. One instance of this is the opinion of רמב"ן. He explains that the תורה didn't want us to think that because of משה, שבט לוי was now the oldest שבט. Therefore, the תורה mentions ראובן and שמעון before mentioning לוי. One other opinion that follows this format is that of אבן עזרא. He states that the only honor left to ראובן was to be listed as the firstborn son. Therefore, out of respect, the תורה lists ראובן and שמעון before listing לוי.

Now that we know that the only genealogy that the תורה wanted to mention was the genealogy of שבט לוי, I would like to provide an alternative answer to our first question. To do this, I'd like to first bring a story: When רב דוב בער, the great ממזריטש, was five years old, a candle fell in his family's home, and his house burnt down. Because of this, his mother was extremely distraught. The מגיד asked his mother, "Do we really need to pity a house that burned down this much?". His mother replied, "I'm not distraught because our house burned down, really I'm sad because our family tree got burnt in the fire. Our יחוס (prominent lineage) went back to רבי יוחנן הסנדלר". The מגיד replied, "If so, may our new line of יחוס begin with me". Here too, משה and אהרן are beginning a new line of יחוס. At this point, משה and אהרן are told that they will be the first leaders of בני ישראל. We know that אהרן's descendants were not called בני לוי, rather they were called כהנים, and that initially, משה was supposed to be a כהן. The תורה is listing both of their genealogies to tell us that starting at this point, they will be recognized as the greatest people of their descendants' ancestors. משה and אהרן are starting a new line of יחוס, in which they will be recognized as the greatest members of this line: the כהנים. Even if משה didn't end up becoming a כהן, he was certainly the most prestigious member of קהת, therefore he began the new line of יחוס.

פרעה's Arrogance Versus משה's Humbleness

By Binyamin Orkaby

In פרשת וארא we are told the beginning of the story of יציאת מצרים. At first, משה and אהרן come together to meet פרעה to try and convince him to let בני ישראל go. To try and convince פרעה, אהרן throws down his staff and it turns into a snake. פרעה then calls his magicians and they are also able to turn their staffs into snakes. However, in the end, אהרן's staff was able to eat all the other magicians' staff. Then the תורה says, "וַיַּחֲזֹק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם", that פרעה hardened his heart and didn't listen to their plea to let בני ישראל leave מצרים. Immediately after this ה' tells משה to go and meet פרעה in the morning by the Nile river. Later when משה is told to go warn פרעה he is told to go early in the morning בַּבֹּקֶר and go meet פרעה by the Nile river. Why is it that ה' tells משה to go meet פרעה in the morning by the river? Additionally what is the difference between saying בַּבֹּקֶר, in the morning and הַשָּׁכֶם בַּבֹּקֶר early in the morning?

רש"י explains that פרעה pretended that he was like a god, and so wasn't able to go to the bathroom during the day, when people were watching, as gods don't need to go to the bathroom. This is why פרעה would wake up in the morning so as to go to the bathroom when no one would see him. Therefore, ה' told משה to meet פרעה by the river to show that he knew that פרעה was only pretending to be a real god.

The אבן עזרא gives a different opinion and says that it was the custom of the kings of Egypt that during the months of תמוז and אב they would go out to the Nile river to see how high it had risen. אבן עזרא then explains that ה' told משה to go in the morning, and so too אהרן, so that פרעה would be able to see אהרן hit the Nile and turn it into blood. Therefore, פרעה would know that it was ה' who had made the Nile turn into blood.

With regards to why the word הַשָּׁכֶם, get up early, is used by the other warnings, but not by מכת דם, it is asked and answered by the דעת זקנים. The דעת זקנים says that the reason by the first מכה the word הַשָּׁכֶם is not used is because it is the first time that משה is warning פרעה. However, the following times that משה is warning פרעה, it uses the word הַשָּׁכֶם because it is a different warning from the first one and the word הַשָּׁכֶם is used to differentiate between the warnings.

רש"י shows פרעה that He knows that פרעה is a pretender playing god. At least according to רש"י. However, even according to the אבן עזרא it would seem that ה' was showing his might to פרעה by having מכת דם performed before him. We can learn from this story about how bad arrogance is. We know from בראשית that the פרעה would hold a yearly birthday celebration. No one else in תנ"ך held these yearly shows of pomp around their birthday. Only פרעה. This teaches us, not that we shouldn't have birthdays, but rather how important it is to be humble like משה. In life, it is important to realize that we are not the best at everything, and that we're not perfect. However, we must also realize the importance of הַשָּׁכֶם בַּבֹּקֶר, to get up and be proactive just like אברהם who got up early to saddle his own donkey. May we be זוכה to be humble like משה and proactive like אברהם.

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