

January 19, 2013 – Bo (Exodus 10:1-13:16)

The last three plagues feature strongly in the first chapters of this week's parashah. We moved quickly past the eighth, locusts, to concentrate more time and attention on the ninth, darkness, and the tenth, death of the first-born. We discussed the qualities and character of a darkness which, as the text says, could be touched. Was it an impenetrable dust storm, whipped up from the sand and dirt of Egypt, which had recently been denuded of vegetation by the locusts? Could it have been a spiritual darkness, since the text clearly stipulates that the houses of the Israelites had light?

And since the houses of the Israelites were spared from the plague of darkness, whatever its substance, that would mean that God already knew where the Israelites were living, and so why did they need to identify the houses to be spared from the final plague by smearing lambs' blood on the doorposts and lintels? We studied some commentary which posited that the blood had little to do with sparing the Israelites and much to do with encouraging them to commit an act of rebellion against the Egyptians, in order to lay the groundwork for freedom.