

# Parsha Ponders

Bo | Jan 19, 2024 | 9 Shevat 5784

## *Sabbatical locust respite*<sup>1</sup>

ויעל הארבה על כל-ארץ מצרים וינח בכל גבול מצרים כבד מאד לפניו לא-היה כן ארבה כמה ואחריו לא יהיה-כן

The plague of locusts came up upon all of the land of Egypt. They rested in all of the region of Egypt. It was very dense. Never before was there such a number of locusts and there never will be like it<sup>2</sup>

The Torah, when describing the plague of locusts, uses an interesting verb. It says וינח, they rested. In fact, this verb appears one other time in Tanach<sup>3</sup>. When else? In the context of Shabbos. The Torah says<sup>4</sup> Hashem rested (וינח) on the seventh day of creation, and therefore commanded the weekly *mitzvah* of Shabbos. What's the significance of this shared word usage? This teaches us that the locusts rested on Shabbos<sup>5</sup>. The plague of locusts was that they consumed all of the crops of the entirety of Egypt. It would seem that they refrained from doing so on Shabbos.

However, if this is correct, how can this be considered "rest"? Our Sages tell us<sup>6</sup> that if we withhold food from our animals on Shabbos, that's not "rest". It's torture! How can it be that the locusts "rested" by not eating?

One of the Hebrew names for locusts is חסיל. Why does it have this name? Our Sages tell us<sup>7</sup> that the reason is because it is חוסל את הכל. Meaning, the nature of locusts is that they destroy and consume *everything*. They leave nothing untouched. This is true to the point that they consume things that aren't even considered food. We can suggest then that the locusts did indeed eat on Shabbos, but not in a destructive, cataclysmic fashion. They left the non-food items and only consumed what they needed<sup>8</sup>.

Although, one could still ask a question on this teaching. Of all the plagues that were afflicted upon the Egyptians, why was it specifically the plague of locusts where they got a reprieve on Shabbos? What's significant about the locusts that they would take a rest from their destruction on Shabbos? Perhaps the answer comes from why the Egyptians were afflicted with locusts in the first place. Our Sages teach us<sup>9</sup> that it was in retribution for the Egyptians forcing the Jews to plant wheat and barley in their fields. Measure for measure, the locusts came and ate up all of those crops, preventing the Egyptians from benefitting.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Rav Chaim Kanievsky's Ta'amah D'Krah to Exodus 10:14

<sup>2</sup> Exodus loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> It does appear four other times (Joshua 21:42, II Chronicles 14:6, 15:15, and 20:30), but as referring to placing, not resting

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 20:11

<sup>5</sup> Ba'al HaTurim to Ibid 10:14. Midrash Tehillim § 92 and Zohar III p. 273a say that dangerous forces don't have power on Shabbos

<sup>6</sup> Mechilta to Exodus 23:12, brought by Tosafos to Shabbos 122a s.v. מעמיד. This question is left unanswered by the commentary on Ba'al HaTurim called Itros Adar, although he phrases the question as יש לעיין קצת, whereas Rav Chaim Kanievsky phrases it as ותמוה

<sup>7</sup> Yerushalmi Ta'anis 3:6

<sup>8</sup> Although, I would have understood from Rashi to Exodus 10:14, that ארבה and חסיל are different species of locusts, and therefore the ארבה of our *parsha* wouldn't be as destructive as the חסיל

<sup>9</sup> Shemos Rabbah 13:6

However, we are also taught<sup>10</sup> that Moshe, when he was a prince in Egypt, made a request of Pharaoh. He knew that if the Jews were to perform forced labor seven days a week, they would become useless quite quickly<sup>11</sup>. He suggested that they be given a day off. Pharaoh agreed, and let Moshe pick which day. Moshe ended up choosing what eventually became the same day as Shabbos<sup>12</sup>. With this in mind, it makes sense why the locusts rested on Shabbos. Since the Jews never planted anything on Shabbos, there was no reason to punish the Egyptians on Shabbos. They rested, eating only what was necessary.

Good Shabbos

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<sup>10</sup> Shemos Rabbah 1:28, 5:18; Sefer HaYashar Shemos § 28; Bereishis Rabbasi p. 13 (attributed to Rav Moshe HaDarshan); see Torah Sheleimah to Exodus Chapter 2 § 93 for more sources

<sup>11</sup> The above *Midrashim* stress that if the Jews work non-stop, they'll end up dying. The *Midrash* that Torah Sheleimah brings says that they won't be able to build the buildings that Pharaoh wants. This seems to not fit with Sotah 11a, which says that the Jews were meant to do unproductive work

<sup>12</sup> This is what we mean when we say in the Shabbos day prayers: ושמח משה במתנת חלקו (Tur Orach Chaim § 281). See Torah Sheleimah *loc. cit.* for other sources that give this explanation of the prayers. As well, see there and Miluim § 13, where he brings a dispute how Moshe chose the correct day as the day of rest. One opinion is that Moshe sat down and calculated from the beginning of time when Shabbos is. The other opinion is that it was always known, from the times of the *Avos*, when Shabbos was