

VaEra **And I (Adonai) Appeared**
Torah: Exodus 6:2-9:35
Haftarah: Ezekiel 28:25-29:21
Brit Chadashah: Revelation 16:1-21

Today's portion deals with the beginning of spiritual hostilities between YHVH and the gods of Egypt. YHVH repeats His pledge to bring the people of Israel into the promised land (6:4) as He uses the name YHVH for the first time (6:3). The name appears in the Bible from Genesis 2 onwards, but it was not known to Israel until the battle lines are drawn and YHVH is prepared to judge the false gods of Egypt. He is going to reach out His arm and bring judgments on the Land of Egypt (6:6).

Even after this fresh encounter with YHVH and the revelation of His name, the children of Israel are being treated so severely by Egypt that they did not believe that deliverance was not only coming, but that it had already started. From this point on, YHVH speaks to Moses, Moses speaks to Aaron and Aaron is the spokesman who communicates with Pharaoh (7:2)

Since people in the Bible did not have last names, a brief genealogy of Moses and Aaron is given. It begins with Reuben and Simeon, but then concentrates on people who belong to the tribe of Levi. There are three "Houses" in Levi: Gershom, Kehath and Merari. Moses and Aaron belonged to the house of Kehath and his father, Amram, married his own aunt. The sons of Aaron are mentioned to their third generation as we are presented with the first three high priests: Aaron, Eleazar and Phineas. After the end of the genealogy, YHVH reminds Moses to tell Pharaoh everything YHVH is going to tell him. No editing.

Moses and Aaron go before Pharaoh again and warn him that YHVH will use signs and great judgments on Egypt until His people are set free. Moses was 80 at this time and Aaron was 83. Aaron's rod is turned into a snake, but the sorcerers of Egypt could also turn their rods into snakes. When Aaron's rod ate the magician's serpents, it was a way of saying that YHVH is going to do the same thing to the Egyptian gods.

We know from history that the Egyptian calendar had ten months, and the symbol for each month represented a powerful Egyptian god. From the context, we know that every time Moses went into Pharaoh, he asked for the Children of Israel to be set free. And each time Pharaoh refused the symbol of the god for the month was turned into a plague. So the spiritual battle took place over a little bit more than a calendar year.

We also know that at the beginning of each month, Pharaoh would go down to the Nile river to announce the new month and it was usually there that Aaron and Moses spoke with him. The first plague was turning the waters of the Nile into blood, so that the fish died and the water was undrinkable. Pharaoh's magicians could also perform this sign, so Pharaoh again declines to let the people go. The people dig wells beside the river to get drinking water and after a while, the waters of the Nile came back to normal.

Sign number two was an explosion in the frog population and these vermin covered the whole country. This is the last sign which Pharaoh's sorcerers are able to copy. Pharaoh is given the honour of saying when the frogs would go away, but he still hardens his heart.

He is given this privilege because Moses is saying that he is not trying to usurp Pharaoh or depose him. On the third month, when Pharaoh again refuses to let the people go, the dust of the earth is turned in fleas that infect everyone. The magicians admit that this is the finger of G-d, but Pharaoh was likely convinced that one of the monthly gods could overcome YHVH.

The fourth plague is venomous flies which plague the entirety of Egypt, but do not plague the land of Goshen, where the Children of Israel lived. Pharaoh is now prepared to budge a little and says that the Jews can make sacrifices to YHVH in the land. Making sacrifices to foreign gods was illegal in Egypt at this time. Moses knows that the Egyptian people would be horrified to witness some of their sacred animals being sacrificed to YHVH. Pharaoh is warned that YHVH is losing patience, but he still refuses to let the people go to make sacrifices to YHVH (8:23).

The fifth plague caused a great deal of death among the Egyptian livestock, but did not affect the Jewish livestock (9:4). Pharaoh still refuses to release the Children of Israel, so in the sixth month ulcers break out among both the Egyptian animals and also among the people. Pharaoh still refuses and Moses is about to take the plagues to a new level. You see the first six plagues were terrestrial, while the last four were going to come from the sky.

Pharaoh is warned that if he refuses again, great lightening and hail would strike the people. Moses warned Pharaoh to put his animals inside so they are not killed by the hail. Those Egyptians that feared the word of YHVH took their livestock indoors. The first series of crops which were nearing the time to be harvested, were destroyed by the hail. Much of the greenery of Egypt was also stripped bare.

Moses has got Pharaoh's attention, but this stubborn man is holding out, again hoping that one of his gods would defeat the G-d of the Hebrews. From the context we can know that none of the crops of the Children of Israel were affected and none of the devastation that Egypt experienced had any negative effect on the land of Goshen, which was still under the protection of YHVH.

Pharaoh knows that he will lose face if he lets the Hebrews go and he might have also been afraid that the conquered people of Egypt may get some ideas about getting rid of their foreign rulers. Pharaoh agrees to let the Children of Israel go free and asks Moses for the lightening and hail to stop. This meeting between Pharaoh and Moses occurred in doors and Moses declares that as soon as he and Aaron reach the city gates, the lightening and hail will stop.

Moses tells Pharaoh that he knows that he will not keep his promise because he did not yet fear YHVH. When the lightening and hail stopped, somehow a message comes to Moses that Pharaoh does not intend to keep his promise to let the people go. Moses waits for the next month to come, as the battle of the gods continues and one by one, the gods of Egypt are defeated.

It would be a dangerous thing for the supreme rulers of the mightiest country of the world to liberate a people they had so recently enslaved. Pharaoh may have also been hoping that Moses would run out of plagues and quit demanding that Pharaoh let the people go. Moses would not run out of plagues and the plagues just got worse and worse.

Sermon: Are We Really Dead? Colossians 3:1-4

Passage: *"If therefore you are resurrected with the Messiah, seek the things on high, where Messiah is seated at the right hand of G-d. Become attached to things on high and not to things which are on the earth. For you are dead and your life is hidden with the Messiah in G-d. When Messiah, who is your life, shall appear, you shall appear with Him in glory."*

The Scriptures use a rich assortment of images and symbols to illustrate the truths it is teaching. In this passage, Paul is writing to believers in Colossae in order to deepen both their understanding of spiritual truth and their commitment to apply these truths in every area of their lives. He says that they are both dead and resurrected, but that their life is hidden in the Messiah. How can we be both dead and resurrected at the same time and what hidden life is the apostle talking about?

This morning I want to discuss this passage with you, to make sure you understand that you are dead. When I came to faith, I did not stop breathing and my heart did not stop beating, but an inner transformation occurred and it began to be felt in every part of my life. A wise saying talked about this kind of spiritual reality.

You see, the Scriptures talk about two deaths and two births. It says that if you are only born once, you shall die twice, but if you are born twice, you shall only die once. I was born once on January 8, in 1953. I was born again on March 28, 1972, so even at the advanced age of 70 years old, I will only have to die once.

If you have had a natural birth, but not a second, spiritual birth, then you will die both naturally and spiritually. In a very real sense, when believers have their second birth, they are now dead to the darkening world we are only passing through, but it is neither a natural death or a spiritual one. It means that I have become detached from the carnal, natural life of the flesh and all of its works and I am now focused on heavenly things and the life which will produce the fruit of the Spirit.

We understand that the works of the flesh will choke up your inner spiritual man and eventually kill him. We also understand that the fruit of the Spirit will set your inner man free and give him lots of spiritual strength. So in a very real sense, you are either dead to your inner man or dead to this darkening world. Believers who allow the works of the flesh to choke their lives are actually in the process of dying spiritually. They may not die spiritually right away, but unless they change the way they live, they will slip into a spiritual comma, with no sign of life.

Is your life filling with spiritual life or spiritual death? What are your eyes focused on? What expectations do you have for what you shall get from this life? All that some believers expect is to be dealing with the cares, the pleasures and the riches of this fading world. They have heard the words of the Scriptures and our beloved Messiah, but they have not put them into practice. In this state, the house of their faith has no solid foundation.

In a very real sense, you will either be dead to the things of the coming Kingdom, or be dead to the things of our darkening world. The things of this life offer no abiding satisfaction and no future in the life which is to come.

So, we can either live as those dead people who are happy and satisfied, or as those who are living in this world, but are not happy or satisfied. As we grow in the Messiah, we will want to keep on dying to this world in every area of our lives, so there is no lingering spiritual death which is waiting to reinfect our lives and cause us to die to the world which is still to come.

Now, I do not want you to get the mistaken impression that every time you sin, you begin to die spiritually. You are just opening up your heart and life to sin which serves the enemy of our souls. When we fall, we need to get back up, dust ourselves off and allow the Messiah to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It is like riding a bike. You know you are going to fall sometimes, but the whole point of cycling is not to fall and also not sit down in a heap and give up on cycling every time we fall.

There once was a rock band with an interesting name: The Grateful Dead. They were popular at a time when death and darkness were popular images in the popular culture of the day. I am not sure whether I had the dubious pleasure of listening to their music, but I know it would be a good thing if their name described how believers should live their lives. I am increasingly grateful that the Messiah and His Word are helping me to die to this life as I grow in Him. Sometimes, the key to successful spirituality is a matter of perspective.

I want to be healthy and live out the span of years that are coming to me. I do not have a morbid fixation with death and do not feel that a little bit of everybody dies every day. I get tired with the spiritual struggles, where the enemy is trying to retake territory which now belongs to the Messiah. I sometimes grow weary of all the snares and traps the enemy tries to derail my spirituality with. I am also getting increasingly frustrated with a world which says that pleasure only comes when you break the commandments of G-d.

It would seem that the works of the flesh are becoming embedded in how our modern society sees itself and the life it wants us to lead. Violence, cheating and sexual immorality are flooding social media and it is these influences which the Messiah wants me to die to. So there is a positive and a negative way to be dead. When we are dead to the things of this world, we are in good spiritual shape. When we are dead to the things of the world to come, then the darkness of this present age will chain my heart and my life to an unsatisfying life which does not seek for any spiritual life and is content to dwell in the darkness.

Are you dead in a good sense and are you continuing to die to the world which is fading away? When our beloved Messiah died, after three days, He rose from the dead and is now alive for evermore. In our passage, Paul says we are resurrected with the Messiah and are able to walk in the newness of His life in us.

We were all born with the image of G-d dwelling in our hearts, along with the Torah, which YHWH also placed in our hearts. Before we came to faith, the image of G-d in our hearts was broken and twisted until it was almost unrecognizable. The copy of the Torah which was also placed in our lives, got violated so many times that our desire to avoid wrong and seek that which is right, was not really operational any more.

There was only a growing darkness that wanted to chain every part of our lives to sin and death.. In my case, I still cried out in spiritual agony, but it was like I was caught in some kind of sinful quick sand that would not let me break free and the harder I tried to break free, the quicker I sank.

I remember the moment I gave my heart to the Messiah. He set off amazing waves of peace, which began the long process of healing my brokenness and setting me free from the grip of sin and death. It was as if the presence of Messiah entered into the damaged image of G-d and began to bring me back to life. His Word also entered the damaged Torah, to repair it, empower it, so that my concept of right and wrong once again became a force in my life and spiritual growth.

Bit by bit, issue by issue and circumstance by circumstance, the Messiah was resurrecting my inner man and bringing him back to life. When my flesh tried to get in the way, He showed me how to crucify the old man, so that he did not let sin and death regain a foothold in my life. The indwelling Messiah also showed me how to resist the devil and make him flee from me. He also showed me how to defeat the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life.

At first it was a slow process with a high learning curve, but the brand new one new man began to learn the ropes and Messiah helped me to take back much of my life which was broken and under the power of darkness. When Paul says we are resurrected with the Messiah, it means that the power of Messiah's resurrection becomes increasingly active in our lives. It means that spiritual death is being removed from our lives.

When we focus on things above, we feed our new man and crucify the old man. When we focus on things of the earth, it is the other way around – we feed our old man and crucify our new man. Who are you feeding and crucifying in your life? The power of Messiah's resurrection will one day cause His Kingdom to break forth over all the nations and generations of mankind. While we are waiting for this glorious day, this same resurrection power is at work in us to renew and renovate.

Our flesh will still try and regain control. The world will also try and regain our allegiance. And the enemy will want to devour us as a roaring lion, so that we cease to be salt and light. But the power of Messiah's resurrection is greater than the combined power of all of our enemies, and then some. Are you letting Him teach you how to defeat your spiritual foes and cause the fruit of the Spirit to grow and flourish in your heart and life?

The power of His resurrection is as real as the problems we are facing and one day, no matter how well we do, His Kingdom will break forth and all the pain and darkness, including the works of the flesh will dissolve and disappear. We know that the visible things are being held together by those that are invisible, but invisible is not the same thing as imaginary. His life, death and resurrection are established historical facts. He wants our inner resurrection to also become an established historical fact, both in our own lives and in the lives we are able to influence.

Now that we have established that, as believers, we are both dead and resurrected, lets move on to discuss the hidden life which has not yet been manifested. Yeshua did not ascend into Heaven because He was shy or afraid of the world which His new life was going to conquer. His new body was still only able to physically be in one place at once. When He ascended to the Father, He returned by the Spirit and can now dwell in the hearts of all believers simultaneously. He has planted His new life into our hearts and we have become His field and His building. What is He building in your life? What is He demolishing? How well is His hidden life doing through the new man He has created in our hearts?

Once His hidden life reveals itself, it will be as part of the arrival of the coming Kingdom and the entire creation shall dissolve with great noise and great heat. It is hidden for the protection of this fading world, because once it comes out, it will be game over forever.

I am patiently waiting for this new life to appear and it is more real to me than any of the fading world we are just passing through. You cannot really grow in the Messiah and make any real spiritual progress until spiritual realities are more real to you than any of the folly of this fading world. One day the light that all believers have on the inside, will break forth when our Messiah returns and it is in this light we shall dwell for all eternity.

Too many believers do not have a clear enough view of what is going to happen when the Messiah returns and many will be in store for a great surprise. First, when the Messiah leaves the true Holy of Holies, the world as we know it will come to an immediate and abrupt end. There will not be any imaginary period of seven years or even of a thousand years.

Before the new creation, when the Heavenly Jerusalem will be set up on the new earth and beneath the new heavens, all of mankind will be resurrected to stand before the Messiah and His judgment. They will not be given a final chance to repent and every hidden thing and every bit of darkness will be revealed. Whatever light is in their hearts will also be revealed. Two books will be opened, the book of Life and the Book of our works.

On a case by case basis, the Righteous Judge of the Ages will decide the eternal fate of all humanity. It will not be an easy task, but it will be Messiah's task and His alone. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life and no one comes to Father except through Him. Some goats in sheep's clothing will be judged along with the wolves in sheep's clothing. It is never the one who says L-rd, L-rd who will be invited to enter into eternal glory, but only those who do our Father's will.

Part of that will is to believe on the Messiah who was sent to win eternal life for those who hear His voice and walk according to His Word. Then, once humanity is divided into two large categories, rewards will be given and punishment will be handed out. We know that there will be levels of reward and we also know that there will be levels of punishment.

The Lake of Fire will burn forever and Satan and his angels will burn in its flames. People who have sinned will be cast into the fire until the punishment for their sins is complete. Some say that they will cease to exist, while others say they will spend eternity in darkness and regret. They will not be punished eternally, but they will be eternally excluded from the marvellous presence of our resurrected Messiah.

Among the sheep, we will also be judged, but only as concerns the rewards we are to receive. Paul calls it an eternal weight of glory and doubtless there will enormous spiritual giants, almost buried in their rewards. There will also be spiritual midgets who are not gifted with any substantial rewards. Many will just be glad to be part of redeemed humanity and nobody will be jealous of anybody's reward or the lack thereof.

As a believer, I want to be dead, I want to be resurrected and I want my life to be hidden with the Messiah. I want to keep my eyes focused on things which are above and be functionally blind to the things which are on this earth. This is the spiritual attitude which I want to drive my life, even as we come nearer and nearer to the end of the age. How about you? Shabbat shalom and Shavua Tov, campers.