

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



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Bo, Sicha 1

The Verse:

As G-d prepares to strike Egypt with the tenth and final plague, Moshe warns Pharaoh: "So said G-d, at the dividing point of the night, I will go out into the midst of Egypt. (Shemos 11:4)

The Rashi:

Rashi offers two interpretations of the phrase, "At the dividing point of the night" which, in the Hebrew, appears with the prefix "at about," which can be read in two ways:

1. Heb. כְּחֻצַת הַלַּיְלָה, when the night is divided... This is its simple meaning, which fits its context that חֻצַת is not a noun denoting a half.
2. Our Rabbis, however, interpreted it like כְּחֻצֵי הַלַּיְלָה, at about midnight [lit., half the night], and they said that Moses said כְּחֻצַת, about midnight, meaning close to midnight, either before or after, but he

did not say בְּחֻצַת, at midnight, lest Pharaoh's astrologers err and [then] say, "Moses is a liar," but the Holy One, blessed be He, Who knows His times and His seconds, said בְּחֻצוֹת, at midnight.

At First Glance:

Rashi's second explanation seemingly addresses the prefix "at about" which implies an inexact time, close to midnight. How could G-d not be exact with His timing? It must be that Moshe changed G-d's exact language to an approximation to prevent Pharaoh's astrologers from miscalculating and attributing the err to Moshe.

The Question:

1. The premise of this explanation is that the intended time was exactly at midnight, and the prefix "at about" implies Moshe deviated from giving that time. But why is this the case? Couldn't Moshe have meant that the time truly would be "close to midnight"?

2. Why does Rashi prefer the first explanation as more compatible with a literal reading?

The Explanation:

Rashi emphasizes that the first explanation, that the phrase means at the exact moment when the night divides, “is its simple meaning, which fits its context.” Meaning, the context of the verse forces us to interpret this phrase as referring to the exact moment of midnight. How does the context of the verse lead to this conclusion?

Because, until now, G-d does not provide the exact moment of an intended plague (besides for the plague of hail which was to forewarn the G-d-fearing Egyptians so they can remove their animals from the fields). Furthermore, G-d does not provide a date, only a time. So what purpose does this announcement serve?

The verse continues, “I will go out into the midst of Egypt,” meaning that Moshe was proclaiming that this plague would be unique as it will be carried out by G-d Himself. Midnight is a point in time that has no breadth or duration, if it can be further divided, it is not exactly midnight. So the

exact moment of midnight can only be known by G-d. The execution of the plague at midnight is therefore an indication that “I will go out into the midst of Egypt.”

Thus the context of the verse leads to the first explanation. But the language, at the end of day, does imply an approximation. This leads Rashi to his second explanation, that Moshe intentionally changed G-d’s language to protect his integrity. But because nowhere does the verse imply that there were two separate communications, one from G-d to Moshe, one from Moshe to Pharaoh, this explanation is not literal and considered Midrashic.

A further question rises: If only G-d can know the exact moment of midnight, what is the point of stressing that G-d will act at that moment if no one will be able to recognize G-d’s exactitude? Rashi therefore says that “Pharaoh’s astrologers” might make a mistake. The astrologers are the most equipped to know the exact moment of midnight, more so than the average population. Yet still Moshe was concerned that, perhaps, they too would miscalculate the moment and see Moshe as a liar.
