

## Parasha Shemot

*Shemot* means “names.” It comes from the first verse of the parasha where it says, “These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob...” The story begins this way because its events are intimately connected with Jacob and his 12 sons—it is not a story that stands by itself. In order to be understood, it must be seen in the light of the lives of the patriarchs and God’s promises to them.

### Sunday—Project Day

Here are some research projects that you can share with the rest of your family on Shabbat to help them in their understanding of this week’s parasha. You can choose just one, or you can do both of them, and you can do all the work today or spread it through the rest of the week.

1. Do some research on Pithom and Rameses, the storage cities which the Israelites built. Here are some websites that discuss archeological findings that may shed some light on these cities:

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/edwards/pharaohs/pharaohs.html>

<http://debate.org.uk/topics/history/rohl-1.htm>

See if you can find any other information on these cities to expand your understanding of the Israelites’ slavery in Egypt.

2. The websites listed above discuss the problems of Egyptian chronology and how it is a barrier to understanding the historical background of the Exodus.

—See how many different possibilities for the Pharaoh of the Exodus that you can find. Do some internet searches and look in Bible dictionaries, Bible atlases, or Egyptian history books. Select one or two that seem the most likely to you and list your reasons for selecting them.

—Collect some historical information about your choices, including lifestyles, culture, historical events from the same time period, etc.

## **Parasha Shemot**

**Monday**—Read Exodus 1

### ***Part 1: What is God Like?***

At the beginning of Shemot, the stage is set as we witness the inevitable progression of God's purpose. On one side, we see Pharaoh, whose evil intent is completely in conflict with God's purpose. On the other side, we see the midwives, whose righteous choices have placed them directly in line with God's purpose and, therefore, His blessing.

What do the results of this scenario teach us about what God is like?

Read Prov. 19:21 and Ps. 2:1-4. In what way is this demonstrated in today's reading?

### ***Part 2: Mitzvah Focus***

Read Lev. 11:45. Note: The word for "holy" is *kadosh*. It refers to what is sacred or set apart.  
a. What does it mean that we are to be set apart? Read Lev. 20:26.

When the family of Jacob originally came to Egypt, Joseph had the wisdom to place them in Goshen, somewhat removed from the other people of Egypt, who were pagans and did not worship the God of Abraham. By the time of today's reading, however, they had "filled" the land. No longer was there separation between Israel and the Egyptians—they had expanded to fill the borders of the land and had begun to fit in a little too well. They were no longer living out their identity as a set-apart people.

b. What methods does God use to separate out His people? Read Is. 48:10 and Deut. 4:20.

c. “Assimilation” is the process by which God’s people become indistinguishable from the pagans around them. Because God’s people are called to be holy, to be distinct, to be separate, assimilation always results in tragedy and suffering as God begins the painful process of separating out His people once again. Israel’s slavery in Egypt was the result of forgetting who they were and what God had called them to.

In what ways have you allowed yourself to be assimilated into a world that does not worship the God of Abraham? Write down the things that come to mind. What can you do to be holy in these areas?

### ***Part 3: Echoes...in Tradition and the Bible***

The Jewish sages taught that the slavery of Israel in Egypt was more than just a slavery of forced labor—it was a slavery to futility. The sites chosen for the storage cities built by the Israelite slaves, according to this tradition, was marshy, so that the brick would crumble and disintegrate, requiring the walls to be rebuilt over and over. Not only did the slaves spend their days under harshness and cruelty, they also were subjected to the despair and hopelessness of no purpose.

a. Yeshua and His apostles taught that the deliverance of Israel from Egypt is a picture of our own deliverance from the kingdom of darkness. In what way does the traditional picture of Israel’s slavery to futility accurately picture humanity’s slavery to the deceptions of sin and darkness? Read Zec. 10:2 and Ps. 7:14-16.

b. It is interesting that one of the Hebrew words for “iniquity” is *aven*, which comes from a root meaning to pant or make an effort in vain. This same word also has the idea of emptiness, deception, or trouble. How does the Bible say that we are redeemed from slavery to this futility of life? Read 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.

c. Even those who are redeemed often behave as if they were still slaves. We are so easily deceived by the lies of the kingdom of darkness. According to the writer of Ps. 119:33, how are we as God’s people to be delivered from these lies and from the futility of iniquity?

## **Parasha Shemot**

**Tuesday**—Read Exodus 2

### ***Part 1: What is God Like?***

a. At the end of today’s reading, it says that God looked at the children of Israel and God *knew*. The Hebrew word used here for “know” is *yada*, and it commonly carries the idea of “knowing by experience.” God saw, and God *knew*—He felt their pain and He understood. What does this tell you about what God is like? Read Ps. 103:10-14.

b. The Apostolic scriptures tell us that Yeshua demonstrated for us all the character of the Father. What we see in the life of Yeshua gives us a glimpse into the heart of God. How did Yeshua demonstrate the kind of compassion and understanding that we see in Exodus 2? Read Is. 53:4, 5.

### ***Part 2: Mitzvah Focus***

Read Ex. 23:9 and Lev. 19:34.

There are two important things to note regarding this mitzvah:

a. First of all, part of loving others the same way we love ourselves is to understand their feelings and their experience, just as God understood the feelings and experience of the Israelites in Exodus 2. One thing that helps us in doing this is remembering our own experiences and allowing ourselves to feel again what we felt when we were where they are.

Read Rom. 12:15. How do you think remembering our own experiences would help us to do what Paul says we should do?

b. The second thing we must remember regarding this mitzvah is that “strangers” often do not deserve love and compassion. Their behavior sometimes demonstrates ignorance, deception, and a lack of understanding. In today’s story, Moses attempted to help two fighting slaves, and yet their response was anything but grateful. In future years, they were told to look back on their behavior when they were strangers, and have compassion on others who did not deserve compassion, remembering that they were also once ignorant and undeserving.

Read Titus 3:2, 3. Do you have a tendency to look at others with a superior attitude? What would you need to do to change your perspective?

### ***Part 3: Echoes....in Tradition and the Bible***

Ancient Jewish sources tell a fascinating story regarding the events of this week’s parasha. According to the story, Pharaoh’s astrologers came to inform him that all the signs foretold of the birth of a great deliverer, who would arise from among the Israelites to lead them out of Egypt. Pharaoh decided that if he killed all the Israelite baby boys, the deliverer would never have a chance to grow up, and the threat would be eliminated. He decreed the death of the babies, thinking that he had succeeded in preventing the deliverance of Israel. Ironically, it was this very decree that ended up placing Moses in the palace as he was growing up, preparing him to be the deliverer that Pharaoh’s astrologers had foreseen.

Whether this story is true or not, the principle is a Biblical one. Men cannot thwart God's purpose for His people, and attempts to oppose it will end up furthering it in the end.

How should this principle affect our response to circumstances and the actions of other people?  
Read Rom. 8:28.

## **Parasha Shemot**

**Wednesday**—Read Exodus 3

### ***Part 1: What is God Like?***

In verse 14, God said something strange about Himself. He said, “I AM WHO I AM, ...You shall tell the children of Yisra'el this: 'I AM has sent me to you.'” Why did God identify Himself this way and what did He mean?

a. Yeshua identified Himself the same way when He was speaking to the Jewish leaders. The context of their conversation gives some insight into what God meant when He said “I AM.” Read John 8:56-58. What do you think Yeshua was saying and what does it tell you about God?

b. How does this relate to what God said about Himself in Exodus 3? Why do you think God told Moses to identify Him this way to the children of Israel?

### ***Part 2: Mitzvah Focus***

Read Exodus 3:5. God’s conversation with Moses in this passage established the mitzvah of going barefoot on “holy ground” and removing one’s shoes when standing anywhere that the presence of God rested. Later on, the priests were expected to serve barefoot in the Tabernacle and Temple out of reverence for the presence of God. Ancient Jewish writings indicate that the priests did this in the Temple courts even during winter days of rain and snow.

Why was it necessary to go barefoot in order to recognize the presence of God? The Mishnah says that the prohibition was not limited to shoes. The priests were not allowed to stand on anything at all

#### **The Mishnah**

The Mishnah was the first written record of the Jewish oral Torah. The oral Torah was a collection of teachings and interpretations on the written Torah, designed to guide the Jewish people in applying the commandments of God in specific situations.

While the Mishnah was not written down until around 200 CE, it contains the rulings, interpretations and traditions of Jewish authorities and teachers of many generations. Today, it is the main source of information regarding religious life and practice in the years preceding the destruction of the Temple.

but the holy ground itself when serving God in the Temple. This has been understood as a picture of the fact that we must base our lives on God alone and nothing else. When we try to “stand” or depend on anything else as a source of support, it reveals our lack of faith and reverence.

a. What kinds of “shoes” do people often wear that separate them from the presence of God? How do these things reveal their lack of reverence and dependence on God?

—Ps. 24:3, 4

—Is. 31:1

b. When someone truly depends on God alone as his support, what is his life like? Read Is. 26:3, 4.

c.. Do you depend on anything other than God? What do you base your life on? What is your foundation for all of your goals, dreams, hopes, and choices?

### ***Part 3: Echoes....in Tradition and the Bible***

In today’s reading, the angel of Hashem called to Moses from the midst of a burning bush. The Hebrew word used for “bush” literally refers to a bramble or a thorn bush. A Jewish midrash explains the meaning of this. Why a thorn bush? To represent Israel’s affliction. God placed Himself in the midst of it to demonstrate that He understood and felt their pain. Why was it not

burnt up? To represent the fact that God does not intend His people to be destroyed by their suffering.

a. God desires to be the source of comfort, security and refuge for His people. If we are called to be like Him, how should we respond to others who have hurts? Read 2 Cor. 1:3, 4.

b. God's purpose is never for suffering to destroy us. What is His real purpose in sending difficulties to His people? Read James 1:2-4 and 1 Pet. 5:10.

## **Parasha Shemot**

**Thursday**—Read Exodus 4

### ***Part 1: What is God Like?***

a. Compare Genesis 15:13, 14 and Genesis 17:7, 8 with Exodus 3:7, 8. What is one major reason that God sent Moses to be a deliverer for the people of Israel in Egypt?

b. As followers of God, we are called to be like Him. What was the sign of the covenant to be (Gen. 17:10, 11)? In today's reading, had Moses kept this sign?

c. What does this sign of the covenant represent? Read Deut. 10:16 and 30:6.

—Given this meaning, what is our part of the covenant?

—Why do you think God required this as our part of the covenant?

d. God requires the leaders of His people to reflect His character. What might be one reason why God came to kill Moses?

—Why would this particular aspect of character be important in a leader of God's people?

***Part 2: Mitzvah Focus***

Read Lev. 25:17. According to the traditional Jewish interpretation, this refers to wronging someone in speech.

a. Jewish commentators have long made a connection between Moses' leprous hand and the consequences to Miriam when she spoke out against Moses (see Numbers 12:10). How did Moses wrong the Israelites by his words in today's reading? Read Ex. 4:1.

b. Some estimates say that over half of all of our thoughts toward others are negative. According to the scriptures, what is in our hearts is going to eventually come out of our mouths. Think of some ways that you can remind yourself to think positively and rightly of others so that you will not wrong them in what you say.



## **Parasha Shemot**

**Friday**—Read Exodus 5:1-6:1

### ***Part 1: What is God Like?***

In today's reading, Moses was in a very difficult position. He had acted on God's instructions, but things just weren't working out like they were supposed to. Why wasn't God doing what He said He would do?

a. We often don't understand what God is doing or why. His purposes and His methods of accomplishing His purposes are sometimes completely opposite to what we think is right. What does this tell us about God? Read Is. 55:8, 9 and Rom. 11:33, 34.

b. What is to be our anchor in the times when we cannot understand what God is doing? Read Habakkuk 3:17-19, Is. 42:16 and Lamentations 3:21-26

### ***Part 2: Mitzvah Focus***

Read Deut. 4:39 and Ex. 20:2. Note: The word for "know" in Deut. 4:39 is *yada*, which most often implies "know by experience."

The Jews have always seen verse 2 of Exodus 20 as the first commandment. It isn't worded like a commandment (although it is in Deut. 4:39), but it creates a foundation for all the rest of the commandments. Repeatedly throughout the Torah, God accompanies a command with the words, 'I am the Lord your God.' It is like a parent who explains a rule to his child and says, "because I'm the Daddy and I said so." We obey His commandments because we recognize who He is.

a. In today's reading, did Pharaoh obey this mitzvah? Read Ex. 5:2 again. What difference would it have made in his actions if he had?

b. What about you? Are there things in your life that would change if you truly obeyed this mitzvah? What are they?

### ***Part 3: Echoes...in Tradition and the Bible***

Rashi records the traditional view regarding the Jewish foremen who appear in today's reading. In the story, the foremen were told that they must extract an unreasonable amount of labor from their fellow Jews by requiring a full quota of bricks in addition to the job of gathering the straw to make them. Rashi states that the foremen chose to submit themselves to the beatings of their Egyptian taskmasters rather than abuse their fellow slaves. This kind of leadership is not commonly valued in most cultures in the world, but it is an accurate reflection of the leadership promoted in the Bible.

a. What is the role of a leader to be, according to God's view? Read Matt. 20:27 and John 10:11.

## **Rashi**

Rashi was a famous Jewish biblical scholar in the eleventh century. He was born in France, and established a Torah study academy there. The name *Rashi* is actually an acronym for his name: Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki.

Rashi wrote what is today one of the most widely-used commentaries on the Torah, making use of the vast body of traditional Jewish wisdom and midrash available in his day. He also wrote a brilliant commentary on the Talmud, deciphering the sometimes incomprehensible language of the great scholars.

Rashi's interpretations and expansions of the biblical text were influenced by the culture and political situation of his day. Because of the brutality of the crusades and the negative impact of Christianity on the Jewish community of Europe, Rashi rejected many messianic interpretations of the scriptures, including the traditional view of Isaiah 53 as referring to the Messiah. His views strongly influenced the development of modern Jewish orthodoxy.

b. How does God feel about leaders who bring benefit to themselves at the expense of those they lead? Read Ezekiel 34:8-10.

c. What leadership positions do you hold? Are there family members younger than you? Are there others who follow your example or instructions? How do you behave toward them and do your actions follow the biblical model of leadership? If not, what would you need to change?