

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Shmos 5784

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Despite evil decrees, the midwives save the children.

וַיְהִי כִּי־יִרְאוּ הַמִּדְּוָיִת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בְּתָיִם:

“And it was, because the midwives feared the Lord, and they made for them sanctuaries.”
(Shmos 1:21).

Sefer Shmos commences a new chapter in the Torah. Noach, Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov are all gone. The Shevatim passed on. (Shmos 1:6). Then the Torah tells of new events about the Bnei Yisroel's descent into hard bondage and ultimate indentured servitude. Bnei Yisroel grow into a great nation—just as foretold—however, they are not free. They are trapped in Eretz Mitzrayim. Half of the Promise of Sefer Breishis is fulfilled but not the half about achuzas Eretz Yisroel (sovereignty in the Land of Yisroel). The Torah introduces a whole slew of new characters: the midwives, the new Melech Mitzrayim, some members of the shevet Levi and, ultimately, an adopted child called Moseh (Moshe in L'K).

In some respects, the Torah should have commenced at this point. A nation in bondage is freed by Hashem and they go up to the Land that He promises them. The rest is just history, isn't it? Unlike Sefer Bereishis, the characters here are not given much in the way of character development. The name of Melech Mitzrayim (or of Pharaoh for that matter) is not identified and the lineage of Shiphra and Puah is left out. Moshe's parents and sister are unnamed. His given name (he was three months old when he was put into the ark) is also not mentioned anywhere in the Torah. Pharaoh's daughter is not named until Divrei Hayamim I 4:18. The lack of details given here is obviously intentional.

Unlike Sefer Breishis, which gives the history and lineage of Bnei Yisroel, Shmos through the rest of the Torah focuses on Bnei Yisroel's relationship with Hashem. The events of Sefer Breishis tell how heritage and events gave the descendants of Avraham the right to inherit and gain sovereignty in Eretz Yisroel naturally. When that failed to happen—up and through Shmos 1:8—a new relationship had to be developed. The importance of the individuals gave way to the importance of the nation's connection to Hashem. Yes, they were promised freedom and the Land, but the events are paramount to the individuals. The rest of the Torah is about Hashem's controlling events and steering the nation to its destiny. Hashem, in a manner of speaking, is the main character.

Shmos begins with the nation succumbing to its bondage and one individual is then chosen to be its leader and prophet. The names of Moshe's parents, even his own given name, are unimportant at this juncture. The Torah, rather than getting bogged down in the details, wants to summarily give the foundation to the narrative, and within fifty pesukim gets to the point: Hashem summons Moshe.

With this introduction, it is perplexing why the Torah delineates eight pesukim to the narrative about killing the male children. The Torah could have said that the Melech Mitzrayim made such a decree. (Ibid 1:16). When it was not fulfilled Pharaoh made the decree against the entire Eretz Mitzrayim. (Ibid 1:22). That would set up the idea that Yocheved had to put Moshe in a basket on the Nile. Instead, the Torah spends eight pesukim giving the midwives' names (ibid 1:15) and how they feared the Lord (ibid 1:17) and that they were rewarded (ibid 1:20). Why? Also, what houses were made for the midwives?

The term **בָּתִּים** here does not mean houses. Instead, the term means a form of shelter. This is not necessarily a house to live in but an enclosed structure that keeps the inner contents, mainly property, secure. There is another group that feared Hashem and made use of such shelters. **“וְהַיִּירָא אֶת־דְּבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וְהָיָה אֶת־עַבְדָּיו וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ אֶל־הַבָּתִּים:”** (Shmos 9:20). Fearing the warning about the fiery hail, many in Eretz Mitzrayim sought to protect their property (slaves and animals). They did not allow their animals or slaves into their house, but they allowed them into their stables and other covered shelters. Further, Moshe commanded about the korban Pesach and said the blood should be put on the doorposts and lintels **“עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר־יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ בָּהֶם”** “On the shelters that they are eating inside of them.” The psauk should have said **“שֶׁל”** “of” the houses, if it referred to the houses that had the lintels and doorposts. Rather, it is a new clause. Put the blood on the doorpost and lintel. Also, on the shelters that they would be eating inside of. Their houses became more than a house to live in. By eating the korban inside them, they became their life-saving shelters from the final plague. (Ibid 12:13). The term is also used for the rings that secured the poles of various Mishkan keilim. (Ibid 25:27,26:29,30:4, et al).

Further, the word also means silos or storage when referring to obtaining stores of goods from the Canaanites without working for it. (Devarim 6:11). Also, Moshe warns **“When you have been satiated and build good batim and you settle.”** (Ibid 8:12). It cannot mean houses because houses come before eating. It means, **“When you eat to satiety, and have more means to build store rooms for goods, and you really settle in the Land....”** Finally, at the end of twenty years, King Shlomo finished building **הַבָּתִּים אֶת־בַּיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶת־בַּיִת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ:”** (Melachim I 9:10). Clearly, Hashem needs no “house” to live in and a king’s “house” is his palace. Both are more than houses. They are shelters, protections, and full of grandeur. They are not mere houses – as they are often mistranslated as – but sanctuaries.

In our pasuk the Torah is telling us how the midwives saved the children. **“And it was that the midwives feared the Lord. So, they built, for the children, sanctuaries.”** They were able to move the children to these sanctuaries to convince Melech Mitzrayim that they are already past birth, and it would be untraceable as to which Yisroel family any given child belonged to (was responsible for them).

May Hashem protect klal Yisroel and His Holy sanctuaries.