

VA'ERA

FUSION
WITH RABBI JASON



with
Rabbi Jason Sobel

5785 - THE YEAR OF OPEN WINDOWS

TORAH PORTIONS
Parashat Va'era



THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS EXODUS 6:2-9:35

Parashat Va'era / פרשת וארא

In this weeks guide...

COMMENTARY..... 1

It doesn't take long for the joy and flourish of the concluding chapters of Genesis to give way to the tragic hopelessness of the beginning of Exodus. The intervening years were so overrun with hardship and loss that the Children of Israel couldn't begin to process the message Moses brought them. If you've ever found it difficult to hope, this is going to bless you!

NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

Have you ever read a verse in the Bible and thought, "What in the world is that all about?" One such puzzling text in a Pauline epistle points all the way back to this week's *parsha*. Fair enough. But so what? We consider two powerful implications of Paul's obscure reference.

HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

The average person has five physical senses: touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight. It's the last one that concerns us this week. Physical realities (like the senses) can serve as a frame of reference that help us comprehend the spiritual realm. Join us as we investigate this prolific Hebrew term.



OVER VIEW

"God spoke further to Moses and said to him, 'I am *ADONAI*. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob...'" (Exodus 6:2-3a TLV). *Va'era* is the Hebrew word for "and I appeared." After his dialogue with the Lord, Moses surrendered to his calling and confronted Pharaoh. Despite a display of supernatural power, Pharaoh hardened his heart, and this *parsha* details the first seven plagues which ensued.

Fusion Global

Weekly Torah Portions – *Parashat Va'era* / פרשת וארא | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

COMMENTARY

This week's parsha begins with the following words:

Therefore say to *Bnei-Yisrael*: "I am *ADONAI*, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you to Myself as a people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am *ADONAI* your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. So I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, and give it to you as an inheritance. I am *ADONAI*." Moses spoke this way to *Bnei-Yisrael*, but they did not listen to him because of their broken spirit and cruel bondage. - Exodus 6:6-9

The final verse of this passage of Scripture speaks volumes! Israel was downtrodden; the Egyptians made their burden of slavery so heavy upon them that they couldn't bear it. The experience was dehumanizing, demoralizing, and depriving. Every waking day for Israel under Egyptian rule was a day awakened in dread and fear. Many would likely rather die in their sleep as opposed to waking to that abhorrent reality. All hope was lost...

So, when Moses, sent by the command of *ADONAI*, returned from the desert with a message of redemption, restoration, and deliverance, the people of Israel were not in a position to comprehend it. The relentless oppression of their masters, the stress of their surroundings, and the burden of their very existence rendered them unwilling to hope. There's a twisted wisdom in refusing to hope, after all. As we read in Proverbs 13:12, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." Accordingly, the Children of Israel embraced the mindset of "don't get your hopes up..."

Frustratingly, right before their very eyes was a man carrying the mantle of the *Ruach HaKodesh*. Later in the story, this same man would be so overcome by the *Shechinah* (i.e., divine glory) that he had to cover his face for fear of its effect on the people. The Israelites couldn't see the freedom standing before them because of the enemy's reign of terror in their hearts and minds.

Tragically, many believers today surrender the same oppressive control to *hasatan*. How often do we let him rob us of the promises God has prepared? How many times do we allow the shame of sin to hold us back from embracing the freedom of forgiveness? How often do we let the "old man" stifle the "new man," our true self, redeemed by the mighty hand of *ADONAI*?

Statistically speaking, there is a spike in depression and suicide at the beginning of a new year; the change in temperatures, the gloominess of the winter skies, and so on lead to a hot and stirring cauldron that is *hasatan's* delightful playground. So, it is no surprise to me that, by *HaShem's* providence, we read the Book of Exodus during this season of the Torah cycle, a book all about deliverance from the destructive hand of the enemy. There is grace on your life to hope again. See the Redeemer in your midst and trust His Word!

New Testament Tie-In

When *Yeshua* launched His earthly ministry, one of His first acts was to call twelve men to follow Him as His cohort of *talmidim* (disciples). This fundamental social-relational detail has been foundational to the collective experience of *Yeshua's* followers ever since. God has always intended His people to carry out His mission within loving communities of faith. The Apostle John even admonished the early believers: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar. For the one who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20 *emphasis added*). The apostle’s focus was not heathen strangers but spiritual family.

The point is, “doing life together” is essential, but it isn’t easy. We have a spiritual enemy determined to disrupt our fellowship by sowing discord. In addition, a carnal nature lingers within us that, if left uncrucified, will wreak havoc in our relationships (cf. Colossians 3.1-11). Beyond all this, there are good old-fashioned “personality issues”—not sinful (*per se*), just clashing. One of the roles of a spiritual leader is to serve their faith communities by promoting, building, and defending the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3 NASB).

Occasionally, this apostolic responsibility to steward *shalom* in a local community of faith requires the decisive and explicit confrontation of those who threatened it. We see a clear example of this in 2 Timothy 3. The Apostle Paul described an intensely carnal culture (v 2: “people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents...”) that provided the ideal setting for destructive agents to do their worst. These nefarious characters would “slip into households and deceive weak women weighed down with sins, led away by various desires” (v 6). What follows is utterly fascinating (and directly linked to this week’s *parsha!*).

Notice how Paul described those first-century troublemakers: “Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so do these people oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and worthless concerning the faith” (v 8). Wait. *Who?* What is Paul talking about? Biblical scholar Craig Keener explains:

Paul here employs Jewish tradition not found in the Old Testament. In a widespread Jewish tradition (various elements appear in Pseudo-Philo, the Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbis, etc.), Jannes and his brother Jambres were Pharaoh’s magicians who opposed Moses in Exodus 7:11. Even pagan accounts (Pliny the Elder and Apuleius) record them as magicians of Moses’ time. Because Paul’s opponents appeal to Jewish myths (1 Tim 1:4; 2 Tim 4:4; Tit 1:14), Paul cites such stories to fill in the names for these characters.¹

The first point worth considering is Paul’s usage—presumably under the Spirit’s inspiration—of extrabiblical content. This sort of reference is not the only example of this. In one of his most beloved lines²—delivered in his sermon at the Aereopagus in Athens—Paul was probably “citing words originally addressed to Zeus in a poem attributed to Epimenides of Crete”!³ All truth really is God’s truth—whether a pagan poem or “Jewish myth.” The Bible is not only our anchor; it’s the standard by which we can measure these “external” sources. A high view of the Bible does not necessarily delegitimize extrabiblical content; it creates the opportunity for us to assess and engage it in helpful ways. This strategic approach to Scripture and secondary sources is integral to what we do at Fusion Global.

But more than this, Paul's analogy suggests a direct connection between the exodus story and life in the New Testament Church. The apostle apparently discerned a link between what Moses experienced in Pharaoh's court and the struggles these earliest communities were navigating. In both cases, the purposes of God for the people of God were threatened by corrupted men. Timothy's congregations were not experiencing a new phenomenon.

Friends, the Church is not God's "Plan B," put into effect when He lost hope that Israel could get it right. There is one plan and one story, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22: the Creator operating in covenant with people to reveal His love and restore our brokenness. That mission has never lacked for opposition, be it "Jannes and Jambres" in the courts of ancient Egypt or subversive agents in first century Ephesus. Our confident hope is that ["everyone born of God overcomes the world. And the victory that has overcome the world is this—our faith"](#) (1 John 5:4).

Hebrew Word Study

ra'ah [ראה] / "to see or appear"

"I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, as *El Shaddai*. Yet by My Name, *ADONAI*, did I not make Myself known to them." - Exodus 6:3

The English word "appeared" is a translation of the Hebrew word *va'era*. It comes from the root word *ra'ah*, having to do with sight. It is used 1313 times in the Hebrew Bible. The term's use is relatively broad in scope, but ultimately, it is tied together in the linguistic thought patterns of the early Hebrews.

Its first appearance (in cognate form) is in the opening chapter of Genesis, where it literally means to have seen—by using one's visual senses.

"The land brought forth grass, green plants yielding seed, each according to its species, and trees making fruit with the seed in it, each according to its species. And God saw [*vayyar*] that it was good." - Genesis 1:12

Shortly after this, we come upon a metaphorical application of the term, pertaining to the mind's apprehension.

"*ADONAI Elohim* had formed from the ground every animal of the field and every flying creature of the sky, so He brought them to the man to see [*lir'ot*] what he would call them. Whatever the man called them—each living creature—that was its name." - Genesis 2:19

Additionally, the biblical writers used *ra'ah* in its passive tense, meaning to appear.

"Then God said, 'Let the water below the sky be gathered to one place. Let the dry ground appear [*vetera'eh*].' And it happened so." - Genesis 2:19

"Three times in the year all your men are to appear [*yera'eh*] before *ADONAI Elohim*." - Exodus 23:17

In both of these passages, there is an apparent reference to the visual sense, but specifically regarding how things are becoming visible or being seen.

However, *ra'ah* can describe more than the physical sense of sight

"When I consider [*er'eh*] Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You established." - Psalm 8:3

"For He knows deceitful men; when He sees [*vayyar*] wickedness, does he not consider it?" - Job 11:11

In Hebrew, especially, when a person considers a thing or a matter, they seek to look at it from every possible angle. For instance, the *Mishnah Avot* 5:26, compares the Torah to a gem with seventy facets, and thus, to fully contemplate the Torah, one must examine each of them.

Things really take a twist with the biblical writers' usage of *ra'ah* to describe a particular prophetic experience.

“Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, ‘Come, let's go to the seer’—for today's prophet was formerly called a seer [*haro'eh*].” - Genesis 2:19

“At that time the seer [*haro'eh*] Hanani came to King Asa of Judah and said to him: ‘Because you have depended on the king of Aram, and not depended on *ADONAI* your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand.’” - Exodus 23:17

"When I consider [*er'eh*] Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You established." - Psalm 8:3

Of course, people have written myriad books to analyze and describe the varying natures and types of prophetic experience in the Old Testament. For our purposes here, I think it suffices to note the Hebrew understanding of the prophetic phenomena as formerly hidden (and divine) truth being **revealed** via human agency. Hence, these ancient writers utilized the verb for **sight** as an appropriate descriptor.

FUSION

Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present
HEBREW WORD STUDY

ראה

ראה / ra'ah: v. **to see; to appear; to show.** *Used to denote the act of seeing in both literal and figurative senses or the act of appearing, showing, or perceiving.*

This is the basic Hebrew verb for “to see,” and is often used of literal seeing with the eyes (e.g., 1 Sam 31:5); some grammatical forms can also mean “to appear” or “to show.” Important for the notion of divine revelation are instances where people are said to have seen (*ra'ah*) God or where God is said to have appeared (*ra'ah*) to people. In Genesis 12:7, *ADONAI* appears (*ra'ah*) to Abram, and then speaks to Abram. The prophet Daniel saw (*ra'ah*) a vision (*chazon*) from God (Dan 8:15).

taken from the *Lexham Theological Wordbook*

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THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- The heart-breaking tragedy of Israel's enslavement in Egypt was only compounded by its effect on their collective soul—an inability to believe the words of hope Moses brought them. Perhaps you've suffered from “serial disappointment,” life's unrelenting hardships have left your soul callous or cynical. A Redeemer is in your midst! Ask the Lord for the grace to hope again!
- At the core of our ministry here at Fusion Global is the emphasis on the need for “new and old” (cf. Matthew 13:52). There is a critical continuum between Israel's experiences and ours. This is not fancy theological talk, however. As we come to terms with this truth, Israel's (hi-)story becomes a source of hope for our future. As we see God's power in their lives we can confidently ask Him to “do it again” for us!

GLOBAL

NEXT WEEK'S READINGS: *Parashat Bo* / פרשת בא

TORAH

Sunday / Exodus 10:1-11

Monday / Exodus 10:12-23

Tuesday / Exodus 10:24-11:3

Wednesday / Exodus 11:4-12:20

Thursday / Exodus 12:21-28

Friday / Exodus 12:29-51

Saturday / Exodus 13:1-16

Prophetic Reading (*Haftarah*):

Jeremiah 46:13-28

New Covenant Reading:

John 19:31-37

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Tree of Life Version*.

¹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 2 Ti 3:8.

² "In Him we live and move and have our being" –Acts 17:28

³ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 499.