
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for self study - by Menachem Leibtag

for SEFER SHMOT & PARSHAT SHMOT

PART ONE - INTRO TO SEFER SHMOT

FIVE 'BOOKS'

1. Recall that the Torah is called **Chumash** because it includes **five** individual books (i.e. 'chamesh' is the number five); as each individual book is referred to as a 'sefer' [=book].

How does the fact that each sefer is an individual book affect the manner by which it should be studied and understood?

Surely, each of the five books relate to one another, however, explain why considering the Torah as a collection of five individual **books** is different than viewing it as one book with five **sections**?

2. In your opinion, would the fact that Chazal consider each book of Chumash an individual sefer imply that each sefer contains a unique theme? If so, [based on your previous knowledge of Chumash], what would say is the unique theme of each sefer. [For the purpose of our shiur, answer this question at least in regard to Sefer Shmot.]

3. In our shiurim, we will attempt to identify an overall theme by following a very simple methodology. First, we construct a very general table of contents, listing all the major topics of the book. Then, we analyze that 'table of contents', while attempting to turn it into an 'outline' by thematically grouping together its various sections, and contemplating the progression from topic to topic.

Attempt to do this for Sefer Shmot. First, give it a try based on your previous knowledge of Sefer Shmot (i.e. from what you remember, without reading it again). In other words, try to divide the Sefer into approx. ten to twenty distinct sections, listing a general title for each. Then, turn your list into an outline, by identifying any sort of thematic progression from one section to the next.

Based on your outline, can you identify one overall theme for the entire book? If not, can you identify several 'sub-titles'?

4. With this in mind, take a few minutes to study the first Ramban on Sefer Shmot, noting how he attempts to identify an overall theme not only for Sefer Shmot, but for Sefer Breishit as well. Do you agree with his conclusions? [Explain why yes or not?]

Based on this Ramban, is it clear that he assumes that one should attempt to identify a theme for each sefer of Chumash? To verify your answer, see the first Ramban in Sefer Vayikra, Bamidbar and Devarim!

FROM BREISHIT TO SHMOT

5. Return to the first line of this Ramban, where he identifies the overall theme of Sefer Breishit. Note how he explains the connection between the story of Creation and the story of the Avot! Explain how the need to find one overall theme for each sefer may have affected Ramban's conclusion that all of Sefer Breishit, including God's choice of Avraham Avinu and his family, could be understood as a type of 'yetzira' (creation).

Relate this to why Ramban (in his commentary) will often favor the principle of 'ma'aseh avot siman le-banim'.

[Be sure to note how Ramban understands ma'aseh avot siman le-banim - that certain incidents in the life of the Avot reflect the nature of future events that will take place later on in Jewish history.]

How does Ramban's conclusion relate to our identification (in our shiurim on Sefer Breishit) of 'bechira' [God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become His special nation etc.] as the main theme for Breishit?

6. Continue your study of this Ramban, and make sure that you understand his conclusion (re: the overall theme of Sefer Shmot). How does he explain the progression of topics in Sefer Shmot? Relate to your outline of Sefer Shmot (from above). Do you agree with his conclusions? Explain why yes or why not? According to Ramban's conclusions, is there a thematic connection between the themes of Sefer Breishit and Sefer Shmot? Would you expect there to be one?

7. Where (and when) was the **last** instance that God spoke to Yaakov Avinu in Sefer Breishit? [If you give up, try Breishit 46:1-4.] What was Yaakov worried about, and what is God's message to him in this 'hitgalut'? Does this come as a surprise?

[Does this explain why Bnei Yisrael didn't return to Eretz Canaan once the famine was over?]

Where is the **first** time when God speaks to man in Sefer Shmot? [If you give up, try chapter three.]

What is God's message to Moshe in that hitgalut?!

Find both the **textual** and **thematic** parallel between this last hitgalut of Breishit, and the first hitgalut in Shmot.

Based on this parallel, explain what you would expect to be the connection between Shmot and Breishit. In your answer, relate to the phrase "al tira..." in 46:3, as well as in Breishit 15:1, and in 26:23-24. [Note the connection between all of these sources and Am Yisrael's relationship with other nations.]

8. Based on the above question, would you say that Sefer Shmot is a **continuation** of the story of Sefer Breishit, or does it describe the **fulfillment** of God's covenant made with the Avot in Sefer Breishit? In your answer, relate to Breishit 15:13-18 & 17:1-10.

Based on your study of Sefer Breishit, what do you expect **should** happen in Sefer Shmot? [Relate to God's various promises to the Avot, especially Breishit 12:1-8, 13:15-18, 15:1-20, 17:1-11, 35:9-13, 46:1-5, 48:21, & 50:24-25.]

9. In your opinion, was Sefer Breishit written during the time of the Avot, or was it first given by God to Am Yisrael at Har Sinai?

[In other words, did the people of Israel in Egypt have the book of Breishit, was did they only receive at Matan Torah?]

How would they answer this question affect how understand the primary themes of both Sefer Breishit and Sefer Shmot?

10. Assuming that Sefer Breishit was first given at Har Sinai, in your opinion, were the people of Israel in Egypt aware of their ultimate destiny. Were there any mitzvot that they needed to keep? If so, what were they.

Were there any 'family traditions' regarding their future destiny that should have been passed down from one generation to the next? If so, what were they, and would that affect how we understand what transpires in Parshat Shmot?

In your answer, be sure to relate to Breishit 12:1-3, 15:13-20, 17:1-11, 46:1-5, 48:21, & 50:24-25.

How would this help you understand Moshe Rabbeinu's questions in chapter 3 regarding his anticipation of what Bnei Yisrael will ask when he will inform them that the God of their forefathers had appeared to him, and promised their redemption? Relate to Shmot 3:6-7; 3:13-15; and 4:1-6.

TO SINAI or TO ISRAEL

1. To the best of your recollection, what was God's purpose in the events of the Exodus - to bring the people to the Land of Israel, or to bring them to Mount Sinai (to receive the Torah), or both?

Explain the underlying logic behind each possibility, and attempt to find psukim that would support each opinion.

Relate your answer to what God tells Moshe at the burning bush, noting especially 3:6-8; 3:10-12; 3:17-18 and 5:1-4.

Relate as well to Shmot 29:46 and Bamidbar 15:41!

for PARSHAT SHMOT

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

INCREMENTAL IMMORALITY

1. In the opening psukim of Parshat Shmot (see 1:7-10), the Torah explains how the Egyptians were quite worried about the 'Jewish population explosion', and hence decided to kill all newborn males. In your opinion, if the Egyptians were so worried, why didn't they just kill adult males as well to limit the population? Why was the edict only against **newborn** babies?

In your opinion, could one consider killing a newborn baby less 'problematic' (morally) than killing a child or an adult?

For an interesting perspective on this question, see Ramban on 1:10. Note how he explains the incremental manner by which the enslavement began (because of 'moral' considerations).

[Note as well how later persecutions of the Jewish people have begun in a similar manner.]

MOSHE RABBEINU'S FIRST EIGHTY YEARS

2. Chapter two describes the birth of Moshe, as well as his early adulthood. In your opinion, what is the purpose (and/or thematic significance) of these various stories?

In your opinion, was Moshe Rabbeinu chosen by God from the time of his birth to become the leader of Am Yisrael, and to take them out of Egypt, or, was he chosen by God at the time when redemption was necessary, based on his character (and life history), i.e. based on his 'credentials for the job'.

Explain how each approach would affect how we understand the stories in chapter two (concerning Moshe's birth and the key events in his life). [See also Ibn Ezra on 4:20!]

3. In your opinion, do the stories in chapter two (describing how Moshe killed an Egyptian and his interference with a quarrel between two Jews) reflect a strong moral character? Explain why yes, or why not. [Relate your answer to the question above.]

Do they relate in any manner to what will transpire later on his life? If so, bring examples.

4. Even though the Torah doesn't tell us how old Moshe was when he ran away from Egypt, in your opinion (based on the story), how old do you think he was? [In other words, how many years elapse from the time that Moshe runs away from Egypt until he returns from Midyan? Relate to 2:11-23, 4:19, and 7:7.]

How would the answer to this question relate to why Moshe Rabbeinu may have been reluctant to become the leader of Am Yisrael? [See Rashbam on Shmot 4:10.]

5. In your opinion, did Aharon serve in any official position before his brother Moshe was chosen by God to become the new leader of Bnei Yisrael? [Relate to 4:10-15, see Rashi on 4:10.]

Who (or what group) led Bnei Yisrael before Moshe was appointed as their leader? Was it one person, or a set of elders from each tribe? [Attempt to quote psukim that support your answer (especially from the end of chapter 4 and in chapter 5).]

See also Rashi on 4:10

In your opinion, did Moshe receive any official appointment from any previous governing body before he became Am Yisrael's accepted leader? As before, support your answer with psukim from chapter four. In your answer, relate to 3:16-18 & 4:27-31. [Relate as well to Moshe's question/request in 4:1-3.]

THE BURNING BUSH & HAR SINAI

6. Aside from serving as an 'attention getter', in your opinion, is there any symbolism to the 'burning bush' (see 3:1-5)?

Relate to the key events that later take place at this very same location, i.e. Har Chorev = Har Sinai. See especially Devarim 5:19-24 (and its context). How does the burning bush model what transpires at Matan Torah? [See also Shmot 19:11,16-18 & 20:15!]

Does Matan Torah take place at this same spot?

[In regard to Chorev and Sinai being the same site, see Shmot 17:6 and its context, as well as 3:1-2].

WHO WAS THE LEADER BEFORE MOSHE?

7. Before Moshe Rabbeinu becomes their leader, do Bnei Yisrael have an established leadership of any sort? If so, who were their leaders and how were they chosen? Does this leadership continue to function after Moshe becomes their leader?

[Relate to the 'zkeinim' mentioned in 3:16, 12:21 (in contrast to 12:3!); 19:7-8 etc..]

Do Bnei Yisrael have any official sort of representation before Pharaoh? If so, who represented them, and who chose those representatives? In your answer, relate to the 'shotrim' & the 'meyaldot' as mentioned in Shmot 1:18, 3:18, & 5:15.

[See also Ibn Ezra Shmot 4:27. and Rashi on 4:10!]

THE 'WIFE & KIDS'

8. In your opinion, did Moshe Rabbeinu make the proper decision by taking his wife and children along with him upon his return to Midyan? [See Shmot 14:18-26.]

Should Moshe return to Egypt with his wife and children, would this indicate to the people that their redemption is near, or that it will probably still take a long time before they will leave?

If he would return without them, would that indicate that their suffering will most probably continue for quite a while?

As a husband and father, would it be better for Moshe to have left this wife and children with his in-laws?

As 'redeemer of God's nation', would it not have made more sense for Moshe to hurry back to Egypt immediately, and not take away precious time by first dealing with his own family's needs?

In your opinion, did Tzipora and the children actually come with Moshe to Egypt, or did they change their plans and return to Midyan? If so, can you explain why?

In your answer, relate to 4:25-26 and 18:1-6.

After contemplating these questions, see how the commentators dealt with these questions. Note especially: Rashi on 18:2!

Then, see Ibn Ezra on 4:20, for a rather complex explanation.

Finally, see Seforno on 4:19 & 4:20 for an amazing spin on what took place. According to this Seforno, note how Moshe must have been with Tzipora and children while watching the sheep near Chorev, and was returning to Midyan to bring them home, before he would embark on his own journey to Egypt - by himself! What problems does this interpretation solve?

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PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for weekly shiur) TOPIC: LET MY PEOPLE GO

1. Most of us are very familiar with Moshe's recurring request to Pharaoh of 'Let My People Go'. To the best of your recollection, when Moshe asks Pharaoh to 'let my people go' - what precisely is he asking for:

- To free Bnei Yisrael from slavery?
- To allow Bnei Yisrael to leave to Eretz Canaan?
- Something else?

[Is so, what is 'that something else'?

Does Pharaoh ever 'give in' to Moshe's request?

If so, when does he give in and why does he change his mind?

[Note: These questions may appear to be quite simple, but as you study Sefer Shmot, you'll most probably realize that the 'classic answers' that everyone gives for these questions are 'all wrong'.]

2. Review 1:8-10, which describes how and why the enslavement began. Based on these psukim, what precisely are the Egyptians worried about, and how will Bnei Yisrael's enslavement (and later killing their male children) help 'solve' this problem?

Before the enslavement began, was there any reason for Bnei Yisrael to remain in Eretz Goshen instead of returning to Eretz Canaan? [Relate to Breishit 46:1-4.]

Before the enslavement began, was there any logical reason for the Egyptians to think that Bnei Yisrael would leave Egypt and return to Eretz Canaan?

[Which land is better? (Relate to Devarim 11:10-11.)]

3. Return once again to 1:10. How did you translate the phrase - "ve-ala min ha-aretz"?

Does this phrase imply that Egypt is worried that Bnei Yisrael would 'leave their country' once the Egyptians are defeated in war by their foreign enemies? If Bnei Yisrael were so eager to leave Egypt, then why didn't they just pick up and leave before the enslavement began? Furthermore, why would Pharaoh be so worried about Bnei Yisrael leaving Egypt before they were enslaved?

Is there any other possible interpretation of this phrase?

Note how Rashi offers **two** opinions in regard to the above question. Note also Ibn Ezra and Ramban. How did they understand this phrase? Finally, see Rashbam. What is difficult about Rashbam's explanation of this pasuk?

Keep this question in mind as you study Shmot (thru Parshat Beshalach), as this will be the key towards understanding Pharaoh's behavior.

4. Scan the first five chapters of Sefer Shmot, noting its division into 'parshiot'. Attempt to identify the primary topic of each 'parshia', and then construct a summary outline, listing the topic of each parshia. Can you explain the progression of topic?

In your opinion, which parshia could be considered the focal point of this unit, and which chapters lead up to it?

How does your answer relate to the theme of Sefer Shmot and its connection to the theme of Sefer Breishit?

5. Review the final three psukim of chapter two (2:23-25). [Note that they form a distinct parshia!] In your opinion, what specific 'brit' does God remember at this time (and why)?

Based on these psukim, are Bnei Yisrael praying for God to take them out of Egypt to the Promised Land, or do they simply cry out, in hope that someone will help alleviate their workload?

[For an interesting insight, see Ramban on 3:13.]

6. Review chapter 3 - i.e. the story of Moshe at the 'sneh' [the burning bush].

In your opinion, what was the primary purpose of this 'hitgalut' to Moshe Rabbeinu? In other words, what is the main point that God is telling him, and does everything else either lead up to this, or follow from it?

How does chapter 3 relate to Bnei Yisrael's crying out (at the end of chapter two), and in what manner does it 'set the stage' for what will take place later on in Sefer Shmot?

7. Construct an outline that summarizes the primary topics in chapter three, and the logic of its progression.

Based on your outline, is Moshe simply receiving 'information' from God in regard to the forthcoming redemption, or is he given a specific mission?

If there is a mission, what is it, and when and how is it supposed to be fulfilled? Is there more than one mission? If so, what is the second? [In your answer, be sure to relate to 3:10-12. See also question #2 in the Parshanut section below.]

8. Based on God's commandment to Moshe in 3:10-22, what message is Moshe supposed to deliver to Bnei Yisrael (concerning their forthcoming redemption) and what message is he supposed to deliver to Pharaoh?

If these messages are different, can you explain why?

Be sure to pay special attention to 3:7-8 & 3:6-22. Compare these psukim to God's earlier promises to the Avot, especially to brit bein ha-btarim (Br. 15:13-21) and brit mila (17:7-8), as well as 46:1-3 and 50:24-25.

Based on these parallels, could one conclude that God is telling Moshe that He has come now to fulfill His brit? If so, which brit & why now?

In your opinion, were Bnei Yisrael (in Egypt) aware of God's covenants that He had made with the Avot?

In your answer, relate to 3:13 and 4:1.

As you read 3:13, explain why Moshe is so sure that Bnei Yisrael will immediately ask: "what Name of God appeared to him"?

What should God's answer be to Moshe's question?

What is his answer? [See Ramban on 3:13.]

[See also Rashbam in question #3 of Parshanut section below!]

9. Does Moshe ever tell Bnei Yisrael that he intends to lead them to Har Sinai? If not, where does Moshe tell Bnei Yisrael that God is planning to take them? [How long should that journey take?]

10. Does Moshe ever demand from Pharaoh that he allow Bnei Yisrael freedom to migrate to Eretz Canaan? If so, quote those psukim?

If not, can you find what he does demand from Pharaoh in each encounter?

To verify your answer, scan from chapter 3 thru chapter 14, paying careful attention to each conversation between Moshe and Pharaoh regarding Moshe's demand - "shlach et ami ve-ya'avduni...", as well as the 'negotiations' that take place between Moshe and Pharaoh during the plagues:

Be sure to review: 3:18, 5:1-4, 7:16 & 26, 8:16-24, 9:13, 10:3-11,24-29. Explain how 5:1-4 'sets the stage' for all of Moshe's demands that follow!

Then, review the story of the Exodus itself (i.e. 12:29-38, paying attention to why, when, and how Pharaoh finally allows Bnei Yisrael to leave Egypt. Be sure that you fully understand 12:31-32, and how these psukim relate to the list of psukim quoted above! [See Ibn Ezra on 5:1-3!]

[In other words, when Pharaoh finally allows Bnei Yisrael to leave, is it in response to Moshe's original request (in 5:3) or is it a total expulsion from Egypt (i.e. forever)?]

Finally, review 13:17-20 and 14:1-8, making sure that you understand exactly **why** Pharaoh 'changes his mind', and decides to chase after Bnei Yisrael. Is it because Bnei Yisrael had left Egypt into the desert, or is it because they don't leave Egypt! [Be sure that you understand what transpires in 14:5 in relation to God's 'master plan' - as described in 14:2-3.]

[See also Ramban on 14:4-5.]

11. With this background (i.e. your study of the sources in the above question), review 3:10-12 once again, attempting to understand how each pasuk relates to the next.

[To help your understanding of what transpires in these three psukim, prepare a table that compares the first half of each of these three psukim to the other, and the second half of each of these three psukim to each other. Be sure that you recognize how there is a statement, followed by a question, followed by an answer.]

What is the obvious problem in this flow of topic in these psukim? [Relate to the question and answer.]

Considering the mission that God gives to Moshe in 3:10, what type of questions would you expect Moshe to ask? [How? Why, Why me?, etc.]

What question(s) does he ask? [Note how God's answer in 3:12 should be able to help you explain the ambiguity in Moshe's question in 3:11.]

12. Now, see Rashi on these three psukim. Does Rashi relate to any of the problems that you noticed? How does he answer them?

In your opinion, is this 'pshat' or 'drash'.

Next, see Ramban. How does he solve the problem in these psukim? How (and why) does he relate the answer to all of Moshe's questions to Ma'amad Har Sinai?

Then, see Rashbam on 3:10-12. Note how his peirush relates to your table (that compares these three psukim). Note how confident Rashbam is that his interpretation is the only correct one! [See both his opening and closing comments.]

In your opinion (based on the above questions), why is Rashbam so adamant that his interpretation to Shmot 3:11-12 is the **only** way to explain pshat?

Do you agree with Rashbam that his peirush is the only 'real' pshat?

13. Note how Rashbam deals with the 'moral' aspect of his conclusions, i.e. the fact that Moshe seems to be 'lying' to Pharaoh concerning his true intention. Can you explain why he brings an example from Shmuel (see Shmuel Aleph 16:1-3). [Relate to the fact that both stories include a 'zevach' as a 'decoy'.]

Note also how Rashbam refers to this 'white-lie' as 'derech chochma'. Relate his choice of words to Shmot 1:8-10!

14. Even if Rashbam is correct (that Moshe did not tell Pharaoh his real intention) - what is the obvious problem with the conclusion of his commentary? [In other words, what will stop Pharaoh from finding out the truth?]

In your answer, relate to what Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael in 4:29-31, based on 3:16-17. Would it not make sense that Pharaoh would sooner or later find out the 'truth'? Could everyone 'keep this secret'?

15. From the perspective of Pharaoh and the Egyptian people, how realistic would it be for the entire Jewish to pick up and emigrate en masse to Canaan? Without the assistance of miracles, would it be possible to make that journey with women and children? Would it be feasible to defeat the nations in Canaan - to inherit their land (see Bamidbar chapter 13!)?

Based on these considerations, can you suggest a reason why Moshe does not request permission from Pharaoh to emigrate?

Similarly, why is Pharaoh so reluctant to allow the Jews to travel into the desert? [In your answer, relate to 1:10!]

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PART III - PARSHANUT

PSHAT vs. DRASH

1. Note that the first parshia of Sefer Shmot (1:1-6) re-caps the 'toladot' of Yaakov, even though they have already been detailed in Sefer Breishit (see 46:8-27). Can you explain why?

Now, see the first Rashi on Parshat Shmot.

Is this the same question which is bothering Rashi?

If so, what is Rashi's answer?

Read Ramban on this same pasuk. What is his answer to this question? Why does he disagree with Rashi?

Now, re-read this Ramban, noting how he brings down both the opinions of Ibn Ezra and Rashi.

Note, that **even though** he disagrees with Rashi's explanation of 'pshat', he states that the **Midrash** that Rashi quotes to explain this pasuk is **true** ('emet'). How does this Ramban help us understand the difference between **drash** & **pshat**?

'HOUSES' FOR THE MIDWIVES

1. As you review Shmot 1:15-22, try to follow the flow of topic from one pasuk to the next.

Based on your study, would it make more sense that the 'midwives' (named Shifra & Pu'ah) were Egyptians in charge of giving birth to the Israelites, or were they Jewish?

In your opinion, are these two names Hebrew or Egyptian?

See Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, and Seforno on 1:15, noting how their commentaries relate to these questions. Note as well how many of them try to 'solve' the problem of their names being Hebrew.

2. Recall how the midwives Shifra & Puah feared God, and hence didn't obey Pharaoh's decree. Read 1:21 again (in the context of 1:20-22), and determine if it makes more to explain that God made them "batim", or that Pharaoh made them "batim". Based on each possibility, what would the word "batim" mean, and how would it make sense in the context of these psukim?

After you see Rashi & Ramban on 1:21, be sure to see Rashbam and Chizkuni (especially the second opinion he offers) on 1:20-22!

Are you surprised?

A 'CODED' INTERPRETATION

1. See the Rashbam on 3:13-15, especially his commentary on 'zeh zichri' (3:15), noting how he 'codes' his answer in 'at-bash' [a backwards Hebrew alphabet]. Decode it, and decide what his answer is, and how it relates to question #5 in Part Two above!

How does his 'coded' answer relate to his commentary in 3:13-15 which explains why we don't always use God's Name when referring to Him? Do you understand why he 'coded' this answer?

2. Next, see Ramban on 3:13. Can you explain how and why his peirush relates to Shmot 6:2-6? How is his peirush different, & how is it similar to Rashbam's?

Finally, see (but don't study) Ibn Ezra on 3:13. It's quite difficult, and I doubt that you'll understand it (as I didn't), but from reading it you can see at least how important this pasuk is to him.

FROM MIDYAN - BACK TO EGYPT

1. See 4:18-23. How do these psukim relate to what God had told Moshe earlier at the sneh in 3:6-4:17? [Relate to 2:23-25.]

In your opinion, when did God tell Moshe what is recorded in 4:19? [Before he returned to Yitro (see 4:18), or afterward?]

First, see Ibn Ezra on 4:19, noting how he answers this question. What problem leads him to this conclusion?

Would you consider this a 'classic example' of 'ein mukdam u-me'uchar', or a 'special type'?

Then, see Ramban. Note how and why he argues with Ibn Ezra's conclusion. Note as well Rashbam, Chizkuni, and Seforno. Do they support Ibn Ezra's approach or Ramban's?

2. During Moshe's journey from Midyan to Egypt, a very 'strange' story takes place along the way, where God meets Moshe and wishes to kill him (or his child). Review 4:18-26 and be sure you understand the difficulties in their interpretation.

As you review these psukim, note how often the concept of 'bechor' [first born] appears, and in what contexts. Note as well how this story ties together the mitzva of brit mila and the warning of 'makkat bechorot'. When do these two concepts appear together once again? [Relate to Shmot 12:43-50 and Yehoshua 5:1-5!]

3. Next, review 4:24-26 once again, this time in search of at least a 'hint' concerning what Moshe did wrong that God would want to kill him? Furthermore, try to determine who the 'mal'ach' wants to kill - Moshe or his son?

Then, see Rashi on 4:24, noting how he answers these questions.

Then, see Ibn Ezra, noting how his commentary is both similar, but different than Rashi's? How do both of them explain why Moshe did the 'wrong thing', even though he was trying his best to do what was right!

Next, see Rashbam. How (and why) is his explanation totally different than Rashi's? How is it different from Ibn Ezra's?

In your opinion, on which pasuk (or context) does Rashbam base his interpretation?

To better understand these different approaches, see also Chizkuni on this pasuk (and Seforno).

[Note also that there is no Ramban on these psukim!]

Finally, see Rabbeinu Chananel. Note how (and why) he explains that Moshe was not even present during this entire event! How does this interpretation solve most all of the problems raised above? What is problematic with this peirush?

be-hatzlacha,
menachem