

A TEST OF FAITH

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In this week's Parashah, we read of the Flood, which destroyed everyone and everything in the world except for Noach, his family, and the animals that shared the Tevah / Ark with them. R' Saadiah Gaon z"l (882-942; Egypt, Eretz Yisrael and present-day Iraq; author of the earliest known work on Jewish Thought) writes that whenever a "plague" strikes the general population -- be it famine, war, disease, or even the Flood in our Parashah -- we should not assume that everyone who is stricken is deserving of punishment. It is impossible, he writes, that there were not children or youth who were innocent of the sins committed by the Generation of the Flood. Rather, among those struck by any such plague, there are those who are being punished for their sins and others whose faith is being tested, for which they will be richly rewarded in the World-to-Come.

Similarly, R' Saadiah writes, there is no doubt that there were many righteous people among our ancestors who were enslaved in Egypt. They were not being punished by the enslavement, but rather being tested. The proof of this that the Tzaddikim Moshe, Aharon and Miriam were part of that generation; just as they were completely righteous, yet they experienced eighty or more years of the enslavement, respectively, so there surely were other righteous people among Bnei Yisrael.

R' Saadiah concludes: We are taught that Mashiach will come either at the pre-ordained time or when we all repent. However, the fact that he has not come yet does not mean that none among us has repented. If some are deserving and others are not, then those who are deserving will have their faith tested by the continuation of the exile, and they will be rewarded for that faith in the World-to-Come. (Ha'Nivchar B'emunot V'de'ot 8:2)

"Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself and planted a vineyard." (9:20)

Rashi z"l comments: "He debased himself, for he should have occupied himself first with planting something different."

R' Asher Kitzis shlita (Yeshivat Bet Meir, Bnei Brak, Israel) observes that Rashi does not understand the Torah to be criticizing Noach for planting grapes. After all, wine is a very necessary commodity. Rather, Rashi understands the Torah to be criticizing Noach for planting wine first, rather than some other crop.

In all areas of life, R' Kitzis explains, it matters not only what a person does, but also whether he does it in a logical, orderly way. A person whose clothes, books, etc. are constantly in a state of disarray is a person whose life will be in disarray, writes R' Kitzis. It is not for nothing that Moshe Rabbeinu's student and eventual successor, Yehoshua, used to devote his time to neatly arranging the benches in the Bet Ha'midrash / study hall, as recorded in Midrash Bemidbar Rabbah. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Minchah Sheluchah p.52)

"Make the Tevah / Ark Kinnim / compartments . . ." (6:14)

R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev z"l (1740-1809; early Chassidic Rebbe) writes: The word "Kinnim" means a dwelling place, as in "Kan Tzippor" / a bird's nest. Besides meaning "Ark," the word "Tevah" can mean "word." Thus, this verse is hinting that your dwelling place should be "built" with "Tevot" / words of Torah study and prayer.

Alternatively, let your words cause Hashem to dwell in this world. (Kedushat Levi)

"When Terach had lived seventy years, he fathered Avram, Nachor, and Haran." (11:26)

R' Yosef Gikatilla z"l (1248-1310; Spain; author of the Kabbalistic work Sha'arei Orah) writes: Terach's name signifies that he caused G-d's anger "to boil." Why was it G-d's Will that a great Tzaddik such as Avraham be born from such a wicked person? He explains:

G-d did man a favor by giving him free will, for otherwise man could not be rewarded for his good deeds (since they would not really be "his"). Likewise, if man did not have free will, G-d could not have a "Chosen People," for that would cause the other nations to complain, "Why did you force the Jewish nation to do Your Will, and not us? It's Your fault that we are distant from You!"

To highlight the impact of man's free will and the fact that G-d merely chose the nation (the Jewish People) whose ancestor (Avraham) chose Him voluntarily, Avraham was fathered by Terach, someone who could not have been a positive influence on his son. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Tzofnat Paneach)

"Yonah matz'ah bo manoch" / "The dove found rest on it [the Shabbat day]." (From the Shabbat Zemer "Yom Shabbaton")

Who is the "dove" referred to in this song?

R' Chanoch Zundel z"l (Russia; died 1867) writes: The "dove" is the Jewish People, who find rest on Shabbat. He adds: Some say that the song is referring to the dove that Noach sent from the Ark in search of dry land, which found rest in Gan Eden on Shabbat. (Etz Yosef)

Tehilim

Siddur Avodat Yisrael cites a custom to recite Psalm 29 on the Shabbat on which Parashat Noach is read. Accordingly, we present here verses from, and commentaries on, that Psalm relevant to the Parashah.

"The voice of Hashem is upon the waters . . ." (29:4)

R' David Kimchi z"l (Radak; 1160–1235; Narbonne, France) writes: Rainfall is one of Hashem's greatest wonders, as it is written (Iyov 5:9-10), "Who performs great deeds that are beyond comprehension . . . Who gives rain upon the face of the earth and sends water upon outlying fields."

Alternatively, Radak writes, this entire chapter may be understood as alluding to the era of Mashiach. [Since having abundant water is associated with wealth and power,] our verse can mean that Hashem will make His presence felt by the gentile nations that currently live very comfortably but are oblivious to Him.

Or, the verse can be alluding to the War of Gog U'Magog, about whom we read (Yechezkel 38:22), "I will punish him with torrential rain." (Peirush Ha'Radak Ha'shaleim)

"Hashem sat enthroned at the Flood; Hashem sits enthroned as King forever." (29:10)

Hashem's Name is mentioned 18 times in Psalm 29, paralleling the 18 Berachot of Shemoneh Esrei. Commenting on our verse, the Midrash elaborates:

"Hashem sat enthroned at the Flood" -- Hashem sat on his Throne of Judgment to judge the wicked of that generation, and He heard the prayers of those in the Tevah / Ark. This parallels the blessing of "Shomai'a Tefilah" / "Who hears prayers."

"Hashem sits enthroned as King forever" -- [Making a play on the Hebrew word "Yeishev," the Midrash states:] Hashem was "calmed" by Noach's sacrificial offerings, and He had mercy on the entire world. This parallels the blessing of "Retzei," which discusses the sacrificial service in the Bet Hamikdash. (Midrash Shocher Tov)

The Bet Hamikdash

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: Once the Jewish People entered the Land of Israel, they placed the Mishkan which they had built in the desert in Gilgal for the fourteen years that it took to conquer the Land and divide it among the Tribes. From there, they moved it to Shiloh, where they built a stone enclosure with no ceiling and spread the fabric covering of the Mishkan over it. The Mishkan stood in Shiloh for 369 years. When the Kohen Gadol Eli died, it was destroyed [by the Plishtim]. From there, they came to Nov, where they built a Mikdash / Temple. When the prophet Shmuel died, it was destroyed. From there, they came to Givon, where they also built a Mikdash. From Givon, they came to the "Bet Olamim" [literally, "Permanent House," i.e., they built the Bet Hamikdash in Yerushalayim]. The periods of Nov and Givon combined lasted 57 years. (Hilchot Bet Ha'bechirah 1:2)

R' Yeshayah Zilberstein z"l (1857-1930; rabbi of Vác, Hungary) writes: Rambam implies that structures were built in Nov and Givon as there had been in Shiloh. In contrast, the Midrash Seder Olam [the history of the world written by Rabbi Yosé, one of the Sages of the Mishnah] states that in Nov and Givon there was only a tent. Specifically, they put up the Mishkan which had stood in the desert.

R' Zilberstein brings support for Rambam's view from the Gemara (Zevachim 119a). We read (Devarim 12:9), "For you will not yet have come to the Menuchah / resting place or to the Nachalah / heritage that Hashem, your Elokim, gives you." The Gemara explains that "Menuchah" refers to Shiloh and "Nachalah" refers to Yerushalayim, and that the purpose of this verse is to teach that in between the era of Shiloh and the era of Yerushalayim, one could bring sacrificial offerings on a private altar in any location he wanted. If, argues R' Zilberstein, the Mikdash of Shiloh was not rebuilt in Nov and Givon, then why would a verse be needed to permit private altars? It must be that there was a Mikdash in Nov and Givon and, nevertheless, the Torah is teaching, private altars were permitted as well. (Ma'asi La'melech)