

PARSHAT NOACH

The **Mabul** (the Flood) and **Migdal Bavel** (the Tower of Babel) are undoubtedly the two primary stories in this week's Parsha. However, each of these two stories is preceded by a list of genealogies that appear to be rather irrelevant.

Furthermore, at the conclusion of Parshat Noach (see 11:10-25) we find yet another set of genealogies (that introduces the story of Avraham Avinu).

In this week's shiur, we explain how these 'sifrei toladot' (lists of genealogies) create a 'framework' for Sefer Breishit and can help us better understand how these stories (i.e the Flood and Migdal Bavel) contribute to its overall theme.

INTRODUCTION

In our introductory shiur on Sefer Breishit, we discussed the methodology that we employ to uncover the primary theme of each sefer. We begin our shiur with a quick review of those basic steps:

- 1) To identify the primary topic of each 'parshia'
- 2) To group the titles of these 'parshiot' into units that share a more common topic. [Each of these units could be considered as 'chapters' of the book.]
- 3) To group these 'chapter' divisions into larger units that share a common topic or theme [similar to 'sections' of a book].
- 4) To suggest an overall theme of the book, by analyzing the progression of theme from one section to the next.

In our shiur, we will show how the various sets of "toladot" in Sefer Breishit can help us apply this methodology, and can point us in a direction that may help us uncover its underlying theme.

FROM A LIST TO AN OUTLINE

In the following table, we list all of the 'parshiot' in the first seventeen chapters of Sefer Breishit, joining together only the most obvious groups of parshiot by noting their specific and then more general topics.

Study this list carefully, noting how the specific topics can easily group into more general topics:

PSUKIM	SPECIFIC TOPIC	GENERAL TOPIC
1:1-2:3	7 days of Creation	Creation of nature
2:4-3:15	The Gan Eden story	Gan Eden
3:16	Chava's punishment	Gan Eden
3:17-21	Man's punishment	Gan Eden
3:22-24	Expulsion from Gan Eden	Gan Eden
4:1-26	Cain's sin and punishment	Outside Gan Eden
5:1-31	[Toladot:] Adam->Noach	Dor Ha-mabul
5:32-6:4	Man's downfall	[pre-Mabul]
6:5-8	reason for Mabul / Hashem	[pre- Mabul]
6:9-12	reason for Mabul / Elokim	[pre-Mabul]
6:13-8:14	Punishment - the Flood	The Mabul
8:15-9:7	Leaving the Ark	[post-Mabul]
9:8-17	'Brit ha-keshet'	[post-Mabul]
9:18-29	Cham cursed/Shem blessed	[post-Mabul]
10:1-32	[Toladot:] sons of Noach	The 70 Nations
11:1-9	Builders of the Tower	Migdal Bavel
11:10-32	[Toladot:] Shem->Terach	Avraham Avinu
12:1-9	Avraham's aliya	Avraham Avinu
12:10-13:18	Lot leaves Avraham	Avraham Avinu
14:1-24	War of 4 & 5 kings	Avraham Avinu
15:1-21	Covenant/brit bein ha'btarim	Avraham Avinu
Chapter 16	Yishmael's birth	Avraham Avinu
Chapter 17	Brit mila - another covenant	Avraham Avinu

etc.

[To verify this, I recommend that you review this table (and its conclusions) using a Tanach Koren.]

As you review this chart, note how the first set of major topics all relate in one form or other to God's 'Hashgacha' [providence], i.e. His intervention in the history of mankind as He punishes man (or mankind) for wayward behavior.

In fact, just about all of the stories in Chumash (prior to God's choice of Avraham Avinu) relate in some manner to the general topic of 'sin & punishment' ['sachar ve-onesh']. For example, after Creation we find the following stories:

- * Adam & Eve sin & hence are expelled from Gan Eden
- * Cain is punished for the murder of Hevel
- * Dor ha-mabul is punished for its corruption
- * 'Dor ha-plaga' is 'punished' for building the Tower

Afterward, the focus of Sefer Breishit shifts from stories of 'sin & punishment' to God's choice of Avraham Avinu - and the story of which members of his offspring are chosen.

ENTER - 'TOLADOT'

However, within this progression of topics, we find a very interesting phenomenon. Return to the table (above) and note how each of these general topics are first introduced by a set of toladot [genealogies]. For example:

- * The **toladot** from Adam to Noach (chapter 5) introduce the story of the **Mabul** (chapters 6->9).
- * The **toladot** or Noach's children (chapter 10) introduces the story of **Migdal Bavel** (11:1-9 / the Tower of Babel).
- * The **toladot** from Shem to Terach (chapter 11) introduce the story of Avraham Avinu (chapters 12-...)

In fact, as surprising as it may sound, even the story of Gan Eden (chapters 2-3) is first introduced by toladot!

"These are the **"toladot"** of the heavens & earth..."

[See 2:4! / note the various English translations.]

Furthermore, later on in Sefer Breishit, we continue to find toladot. Note how we later find: **toladot** of Yishmael (see 25:12); **toladot** of Yitzchak (see 25:19); **toladot** of Esav (see 36:1); & **toladot** of Yaakov (see 37:2).

The following table summarizes this pattern, and illustrates how [some sort of] "toladot" introduces each of the main topics in Sefer Breishit. As you review this table note how the first several topics all relate to 'chet ve-onesh', i.e. God's punishment of man (or mankind) for his sins, while the remaining topics relate to the story of our forefathers - the Avot!

CHAPTERS	TOPIC
=====	=====
2	Toldot shamayim va-aretz
2->4	-> Man in (and out of) Gan Eden
5	Toldot Adam to Noach
6->9	-> ha-mabul - The story of the Flood
10	Toldot Bnei Noach - Shem, Cham & Yefet
11:1-9	-> Migdal Bavel - The Tower of Babel
11	Toldot Shem until Terach
12->25	-> God's choice of Avraham Avinu
25 -35	Toldot Yitzchak - story of Yaakov & Esav
36	Toldot Esav - story Esav's children
37- 50	Toldot Yaakov - story of Yosef & his brothers

Although this pattern is rarely noticed, these **sifrei toladot** actually create a framework for the entire book of Breishit!

In this manner, the **toladot** introduce each and every story in Sefer Breishit. To explain why, we must first take a minute to explain what the word **toladot** means:

WHAT IS A TOLADA?

The word *toladot* stems from the Hebrew word 'vlad', a child or offspring. Therefore, 'eileh toldot' should be translated 'these are the children of...'

For example: 'eileh toldot **Adam**' (5:1) means - 'these are the **children** of Adam' - and thus introduces the story of Adam's children, i.e. Shet, Enosh, Keinan, etc. Similarly, 'eileh toldot Noach' introduces the story of Noach's **children** - Shem, Cham, and Yefet. [See Rashbam on Breishit 37:2 for a more complete explanation.]

Some of these toldot in Sefer Breishit are very short; as they simply state that the person lived, married, had children and died (e.g. the generations from Adam to Noach). Other toldot are very detailed, e.g. those of Noach, Terach, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Nonetheless, **every** story in Sefer Breishit could be understood as a detail in the progression of these "toladot".

This explanation raises a question concerning the first instance where we find toldot - i.e. **toldot shamayim va-aretz** (see 2:4). How do the heavens and earth have 'children'?! [Note how various English translations attempt to solve this problem when they translate this pasuk!]

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The answer to this question may be quite meaningful. Recall that the first chapter of Breishit explains how God created **shamayim va-aretz** (heavens and earth) from 'nothing' (ex nihilo). Then, immediately afterward in the next chapter, we encounter the first use of toldot:

"Eileh **toldot ha-shamayim ve-ha'aretz** be-hibar'am..." (2:4).

So what does Chumash refer to as the **toladot of shamayim va-aretz**, i.e. what are the **children** of heaven and earth?

If we follow the progressive pattern of Sefer Breishit (as illustrated by the above table) then 'toldot shamayim va-aretz' must refer to man himself [i.e. **Adam ha-rishon**], for it is the story of his creation that immediately follows this introductory pasuk!

In other words, Adam ha'Rishon is considered the 'offspring' of shamayim va-aretz. This interpretation could help explain the significance of the pasuk that describes how God created man in **perek bet** (the first topic of this unit):

"And Hashem Elokim formed man from the dust of the **earth** and blew into his nostrils **nishmat chayim** - the breath of life" (see 2:7). This second ingredient may reflect the aspect of man which comes from (or at least returns to) heaven.

In contrast to the story of Creation in **perek aleph**, which features a clear division between **shamayim** [note the purpose of the 'rakiya' in 1:6], the special manner of God's creation of man in **perek bet** may reflect his unique ability to connect between heaven and earth.

[See Rashi on 2:5, where he explains that God created man so that he could pray for rain - in order for vegetation to grow. See also last week's shiur on Parshat Breishit.]

Similarly, the next set of **toladot** - from Adam to Noach (see chapter 5) lead immediately into the story of the Flood. Note how 9:28-29 - the psukim that conclude the Noach story, are clearly part of the same literary unit that began with the toladot in chapter 5 (i.e. they follow the same 'template').

This pattern of "toladot" that introduce stories continues all the way until the very end of Sefer Breishit. Therefore, we conclude that these sifrei toladot do more than 'keep the sefer together'; they also help develop the theme of Sefer Breishit.

We will now show how these toladot create not only a framework for Sefer Breishit; they can also help us identify its two distinct sections that create its primary theme. Let's explain:

THE TWO SECTIONS OF SEFER BREISHIT

Despite this successive nature of the **toladot** in Sefer Breishit, they clearly divide into **two** distinct sections.

1) God's creation of mankind (chapters 1-11)

w/ stories relating to 'sachar ve-onesh'

2) The story of the avot (chapters 12->50)

God's choice of Avraham's offspring to become His nation.

Even though the majority of Sefer Breishit focuses on the family of Avraham Avinu (Section **Two**), in the first eleven chapters (Section **One**), the Torah's focus is on mankind as a whole.

For example, even when Section One includes special details about Noach, it is **not** because he is designated to become a special nation - rather, it is because through Noach that mankind will be preserved. After the flood, the Torah tells us how Noach's offspring evolve into nations, and their dispersing (see chapter 10). Even though we find that Noach blesses Shem and Yefet (see 9:25-27), the concept of a **special** nation with a special covenant does not begin until the story of Avraham Avinu.

In contrast, Section **Two** (chapters 11-50) focuses on the story of **Am Yisrael** - God's special nation. In this section, Sefer Breishit is no longer **universalistic**, rather it becomes **particularistic**.

Therefore, this section begins with **toldot Shem till Terach** (see 11:10-24) that introduce the story of Avraham Avinu, whom God chooses in chapter 12 to become the forefather of His special nation. The remainder of Sefer Breishit explains which of Avraham's offspring are **chosen** [= 'bechira'], e.g. Yitzchak and Yaakov, and which are **rejected** [= 'dechiya'], e.g. Yishmael and Esav.]

This explains why Sefer Breishit concludes precisely when this complicated **bechira** process reaches its completion - i.e. when **all** twelve sons of Yaakov have been chosen, and none of his offspring will ever again be rejected.

[This may also explain the significance of Yaakov's name change to Yisrael [see TSC shiur on Parshat Vayishlach].]

Our final table summarizes how the toladot help define these two sections of Sefer Breishit:

I. UNIVERSALISTIC (chapters 1->11) - Creation of mankind

PEREK	TOLDOT	the STORY OF...
1-4	'shamayim va-aretz'	Man in (and out of) Gan Eden
5-9	from Adam to Noach	'dor ha-mabul' - the Flood
10-11	nei Noach to 70 nations	'dor ha-plaga' - Migdal Bavel

II. PARTICULARISTIC (11->50) - God's choice of Am Yisrael

PEREK	TOLDOT	the STORY OF...
11	Shem to Terach	leads up to Avraham Avinu
11-25	Terach	God's choice of Avraham & Yitzchak
25	Yishmael	*his 'rejection' (dechiya)
25-35	Yitzchak	Yaakov and Esav (their rivalry)
36	Esav	* his 'rejection'
37-50	Yaakov	the 12 tribes/ Yosef and his brothers 70 'nefesh' go down to Egypt

However, if our original assumption that each sefer in Chumash carries a unique prophetic theme is correct, then there should be a thematic reason for the progression of events from Section One to Section Two. Therefore, to identify the overall theme of Sefer Breishit, one must take into consideration how these two sections relate to one another.

To help uncover that theme, we must take a closer look at the structure created by these toladot.

SHEM & SHEM HASHEM

Note once again from the above table how each general topic in the first section of Sefer Breishit was first introduced by a set of toladot. In a similar manner, each of these units concludes with an event which in some way relates to the concept of 'shem Hashem' - God's Name, i.e. His reputation. Let's explain how.

Our first unit, the story of Adam ha-rishon, concludes at the end of chapter four with a very intriguing pasuk:

"And also Shet gave birth to a son and called him Enosh, then he 'began' to call out in the Name of God ['az huchal likro be-shem Hashem'] (see 4:26).

[Most commentators explain that 'huchal' implies that man began to 'defile' God's Name (shoresh 'chillul'), i.e. they didn't call in His Name properly - see also Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara I:1]

No matter how we explain the word "huchal" in this pasuk, all the commentators agree that God's intention was for man to 'call out in His Name'. Note, however, how this pasuk concludes the section that began in 2:4 with the story of Gan Eden. Even though man was banished from Gan Eden and Cain was punished for murder, God still has expectations from mankind - man is expected to search for God, to 'call out in His Name'.

Despite this high expectation, the next unit of toladot, which leads into the story of the **Mabul**, shows that man's behavior fell far short of God's hopes. God became so enraged that He decides to destroy His creation and start over again with Noah. This unit which begins in 5:1 concludes in chapter 9 with a special set of mitzvot for Bnei Noach (9:1-7), a covenant ('brit ha-keshet' (9:8-17), and ends with the story of Noah becoming drunk (9:18-29). However, even in this final story (of this unit) we find once again a reference to "shem Hashem":

After cursing Canaan for his actions, Noah then blesses his son Shem:

"Blessed be God, the Lord of **Shem**..." (see 9:26-27).

Now it is not by chance that Noah named his son - **Shem**. Most likely, Noah's decision to name his son Shem was rooted in his hope that his son would fulfill God's expectation that man would learn to call out "be-shem Hashem", as explained in 4:26!

[It is not by chance that Chazal consider Shem the founder of the first Yeshiva, the house of learning where Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov studied, i.e. 'Yeshivat Shem ve-Ever'.]

Noah blesses Shem in the hope that he and his descendants will indeed fulfill this goal. However, once again, we find that the next generation fails. In chapter 10, again we find a unit that begins with toladot - this time the development of the seventy nations from the children of Shem, Cham, and Yefet - and again, just like the two units that preceded it, this unit also concludes with a story where the word "**shem**" emerges as thematically significant, i.e. the story of Migdal Bavel. As we will now explain, in this story, once again mankind is not looking for God; rather they are interested solely in making a 'name [**shem**]' for themselves!

MIGDAL BAVEL

When reading the first four psukim of the story of Migdal Bavel, it is hard to pinpoint one specific sin: [Note, however, the significant usage of the first person plural.]

"Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. And as they traveled from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shin'ar and settled there. They said to one another: Come, **let us** make bricks and burn them hard... And they said, Come **let us** build **us** a city and a tower with its top in the sky, **and we will make a name for ourselves** - v'na'aseh lanu **shem** - lest **we** shall be scattered all over the world. Then God came down to see...." (see 11:1-7).

From a cursory reading, it is not clear exactly what was so terrible about the deeds of this generation. After all, is not achieving 'achdut' [unity] a positive goal? Likewise, the use of human ingenuity to initiate an industrial revolution, developing man-made building materials, i.e. bricks from clay etc., seems to be a positive advancement of society. Furthermore, there appears to be nothing wrong with simply building a city and a tower. Why was God so angered that He decided to stop this construction and disperse mankind?

Chazal focus their criticism of this generation on their

antagonistic attitude towards God (see Rashi 11:1). One key phrase in the Torah's explanation of the purpose for the tower reflects the egocentric nature of this generation:

"ve-na'aseh **lanu shem**" [**we** shall make a **name** for **ourselves**] (11:4) [see Sanhedrin 109a].

Instead of devoting themselves to the **name of God**, this generation devotes all of their efforts for the sake of an unholy end. Their society and culture focused solely on man's dominion and strength, while totally neglecting any divine purpose for their existence. [See Ramban on 11:4!]

Although this generation's moral behavior was probably much better than that of the generation of the Flood, God remained disappointed, for they established an anthropocentric society (i.e. man in the center) instead of a Theo-centric one (i.e. God in the center). Their primary aim was to make a '**name** for themselves', but **not** for God.

As God's hope that this new generation would 'koreh be-shem Hashem' - to call out in His Name - never materialized - He instigates their dispersion. God must take action to assure that this misdirected unity will not achieve its stated goal (see 11:5-7). Therefore, God causes the 'mixing of languages' - so that each nation will follow its own direction, unable to unify - until they will find a common goal worthy of that unity.

AVRAHAM IS CHOSEN FOR A PURPOSE

Our analysis thus far can help us identify the thematic significance of the story of Migdal Bavel within the progression of events in Sefer Breishit - for the very next story is God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become His special nation!

In a manner similar to the earlier stories in Chumash, the story of God choosing Avraham Avinu is first introduced, and not by chance, by tracing his genealogy back ten generations - so that it will begin with **Shem** - the son of Noah! The thematic connection to "shem" becomes obvious.

From this perspective, the story of Migdal Bavel should not be viewed as just another event that took place - so that we know how and when the development of language began. Rather, this story 'sets the stage' for God's choice of Avraham Avinu, for it will become the destiny of Avraham, the primary descendent of toldot **Shem**, to bring God's Name back into the history of civilization; to 'fix' the error of civilization at Migdal Bavel!

Therefore, it should come as no surprise to us that upon his arrival in Eretz Canaan, the Torah informs us of how Avraham Avinu ascends to Bet-El and builds a mizbeiach where he 'calls out in God's Name':

"And Avraham came to the Land, to Shechem... and God spoke to him saying: 'To your offspring I have given this Land'... and Avraham traveled from there towards the mountain range to the east of Bet-el... and he built there an altar - and CALLED OUT IN THE NAME OF GOD"

[See 12:8 (and Ramban), compare 4:26).

Similarly, it should not surprise us that when the prophet Isaiah describes the 'messianic age' (see Isaiah 2:1-5) - he speaks of unity of mankind:

- when all nations will gather together once again, but this time to climb the mountain of God (not a valley)
- arriving at the **city** of Jerusalem - to its special **tower** - i.e. the Bet ha-Mikdash - 'the place that God has chosen for **His Name** to dwell there' [see Devarim 12:5-12]
- thus rectifying the events that took place at Migdal Bavel.

And when the prophet Tzefania describes ultimate redemption, we find once again an allusion to Migdal Bavel: 'ki az ehpoach el amim **safa brura**, likro chulam be-**shem Hashem** le-ovdo shchem **echad**'. (see 3:9)

In our shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha we will continue this discussion, as we will discuss in greater detail the purpose for God's choice of Avraham Avinu. Till then,

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In light of our discussion, we can better appreciate a puzzling statement made by Ben Azai:

"Zeh sefer **toldot** ha-adam...

It is taught - R. Akiva says, 've-ahavta le-rei'acha kamocho' - **love your neighbor as yourself** - klal gadol ba-Torah - This is a **great principle** of the Torah.

Ben Azai says, 'zeh **sefer toldot ha-adam**' (5:1) - klal gadol mi-zeh - is an even **greater** principle.

(Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4).

How could one suggest that the very technical list of the genealogies from Adam to Noach found in Breishit 5:1-32 constitutes even a principle, let alone one more important than the famous dictum that one should love his neighbor as himself!?

One could suggest that Ben Azai's statement is not referring specifically to the genealogies, but rather to the overall structure of Sefer Breishit as formed by the **toladot**, and thus its theme. Although it is very important to 'love thy neighbor', the theme of Sefer Breishit - that Am Yisrael must lead all mankind to a theocentric existence - is an even greater tenet of our faith.

B. What other parallels (or contrasting parallels) can you find between Yeshayahu 2:1-6 and the story of Migdal Bavel? [Be sure to relate to 'bik'a' and 'har' as well!]

C. See Tzfatia 3:8-9 and its context, especially 'ki az ehpochei amim **safa brura**, likro chulam be-**shem Hashem** le-ovdo shchem **echad**'. How does this relate to our explanation of Migdal Bavel!?

Now, see Seforno in his introduction to Sefer Breishit. Note how he explains the progression of events from the Mabul until God's choice of Avraham Avinu! Does it become clear how the Seforno understood this pasuk in Tzfatia!?

[Be sure to find where he 'quotes' it.]

D. Am Yisrael is later commanded in Sefer Dvarim to establish the mikdash 'ba-makom asher yivchar Hashem leshachein **shmo** sham!' (Dvarim 12:5,11). Relate this to the above.

See also Shmuel II 7:22-27 and Melachim I 8:42-44).

E. The suggested thematic connection between Migdal Bavel and the bechira of Avraham Avinu is supported by the Midrash that states that Avraham was 48 years old when he recognized God for the first time. Avraham Avinu reached age 48 on the same year that Peleg died (see Rashi on 10:25), which according to Chazal corresponds to the precise year of Migdal Bavel - 1996 to briyat ha-olam. Recall that Avraham was born in year 1948!

F. In case you 'can't wait' until next week, some preparation for next week's shiur on Avraham Avinu & **shem Hashem**.

Note that when Avraham Avinu first arrives in Eretz Yisrael, he builds a mizbeiach at Bet-El and calls out be-**shem Hashem** (12:8). After his sojourn in Egypt due to the famine, Avraham returns to this mizbeiach at Bet-El and once again calls out be-**shem Hashem**! (13:4 / see also 21:33).

After reading this entire section (12:1-13:4) carefully, try to explain why Bet-El is the focal point of Avraham's aliya.