

PARSHAT TOLDOT - shiur #3

"MA'ASE AVOT- 'SIMAN' LA'BANIM"

In Parshat Toldot, we find a very lengthy story about the wells that Yitzchak dug (see chapter 26). As this is one of the few stories where we find details about his life, we should expect that story to be thematically important. To explore its significance, we begin our shiur with a short explanation of the difference between a "bor" (pit or cistern) and "be'er" (well), which will help us understand the story of Yitzchak and the Plishtim.

INTRODUCTION

In ancient times, there were two basic methods of water storage - the "bor" and the "be'er":

I. THE "BOR"

The simplest manner to store rain water was to dig a pit or 'cistern' into the bedrock. In Hebrew, this cistern is known as a "bor". To increase its efficiency, the "bor" must be covered with "sid" [plaster] to stop the water from seeping out.

II. THE "BE"ER:

A "be'er" (a well) is quite different, for instead of collecting rainwater (from the heavens), it taps the underground water table [better known as an aquifer]. The aquifer receives its water from accumulative rainfall, which seeps through the ground until it reaches a non-porous rock level. To reach the aquifer, one must dig a hole into the ground. Once opened, the well will supply water as long as water remains in the aquifer.

So what does any of this have to do with Torah?

AN ANCIENT 'WATER FIGHT'

This background explains the quarrel between Yitzchak and the Plishtim over the "be'erot" (see 26:17-26). Since time immemorial there have always been disputes concerning the rights to the underground water table, similar to the one that takes place in this week's Parsha.

During his life time, Avraham dug many wells, thus staking his claim to their water supply. After his death, the Plishtim plugged those wells, but then dug different wells to gain access to the very same aquifer (see 26:18), thus staking their claim to that water supply.

Years later, Yitzchak wants to re-open the same wells that his father had dug, thus claiming his water back. Upon doing so, the Plishtim protest, claiming that the water belongs to them (see 26:20-21). [See also Ramban on 26:17-18!]

Instead of fighting, Yitzchak tries again and again to re-open his father's wells, until he finally opens a well that no one else claims - and hence naming it "Rechovot" (see 26:22).

So why does the Torah discuss such mundane issues?

PEACE & THE MIKDASH

Ramban on 26:20-22 asks this very same question! He claims that if we follow only the "pshat" of these stories, they appear to carry very little significance. Instead, Ramban claims that this story foreshadows **future** events ["maase Avot siman la'banim"] that will take place in Jewish History - relating to the first, second, and third Temples.

In that commentary, Ramban suggests that the first two wells (that concluded with strife) reflect the First and Second Temples as they were ultimately destroyed, while the third well (that concluded in peace) reflects our aspirations for the Third Temple (that will never be destroyed).

To support Ramban's interpretation that these wells are 'Temple related, we examine the events that take place in chapter 26 in light of our thematic study thus far of Sefer Breishit.

Review 26:23-24, noting how immediately after these three 'well incidents', Yitzchak ascends to Be'er Sheva. There, God appears unto him, confirming his "bechira" (the blessing of Avraham), but reminds him once again that it is for the 'sake of Avraham'. In response to this "hitgalut" [revelation], Yitzchak builds a MIZBAYACH and CALLS OUT in God's Name.

The fact that Yitzchak 'calls out in God's Name' at this time should not surprise us, as once again he is following in his father's footsteps. Recall how Avraham had done precisely the same thing three times - twice at Bet-el (see 12:8 & 13:4) and once at Be'er Sheva (see 21:33). But why does he 'call out in God's Name specifically at this time? [And why didn't he do so earlier?]

As Ramban himself explained in Parshat Lech L'cha (see 12:8), by 'calling out in God's Name', Avraham preached the existence of God to the neighboring people - thus 'making a Name for God'. This in itself also foreshadowed Jewish History, for the very purpose of God's choice of Avraham Avinu - was to bring His Name to all mankind.

So what took Yitzchak so long to act in a manner similar to Avraham? Seforno suggests that Yitzchak was actually punished for not doing so earlier! In his commentary to Breishit 26:5, he explains that Yitzchak's troubles with the Plishtim were caused because he was not actively 'calling out in God's Name'. It was only after he did so in Beer Sheva that he became successful. In fact, immediately after Yitzchak builds his mizbayach, another well is dug without a quarrel (see 26:25 and Seforno), and afterward Avimelech himself offers to enter a covenant with Yitzchak, thus ending all future quarrels.

There remains however a small problem with Seforno's interpretation, for Yitzchak had already achieved peace after digging the third well - at Rechovot - which took place BEFORE he calls out in God's Name in Beer Sheva. According to Seforno, it is not clear why he achieved this success 'prematurely'.

WHAT COMES FIRST?

One could suggest a slightly different reason for why Yitzchak did not 'call out in God's Name' until after digging his third well. Recall that even before these incidents with the wells the Plishtim and Yitzchak did not get along so well. [See 26:6-14, especially 26:14.] It seems that they had always been quite jealous of Yitzchak and his wealth.

The backdrop, together with the serious disputes of the first two wells can provide us with a different reason for why Yitzchak had not 'called out in God's Name'. The reason why is simple - for there was no one would listen! If your neighbors don't like you, they won't be interested in your opinions.

It is only after peace is achieved - i.e. after digging the third well, that Yitzchak feels the time is finally ripe to ascend to Be'er Sheva to build a mizbayach and follow his father's legacy of 'calling out in God's Name'.

In other words, Yitzchak's troubles were not caused by the fact that he didn't call out in God's Name, rather - it was because he encountered so many troubles - he was unable to do so!

If our understanding is correct, then we can infer from these events that before Am Yisrael can fulfill its ultimate goal of building a Mikdash open for all mankind, it must first attain a certain level of stability and normalized relations with its neighbors. This 'prerequisite' can be inferred as well from the Torah's commandment concerning **when** to build the Bet Ha'mikdash as described in Sefer Devarim:

"... and you shall cross the Jordan and settle the land... and He will grant you safety from your enemies and you will live in security, THEN you shall bring everything I command you to HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM - the place that God will choose to establish His NAME [i.e. the Bet ha'Mikdash]" (See Devarim 12:8-11)

This prerequisite is actually quite logical, for if a primary purpose of the Mikdash is to provide a vehicle by which all nations can find God (see I Melachim 8:41-43!), then it should only be built once we achieve the status of a nation that other

nations look up to. [See also Devarim 4:5-8!]

[Of course, Bnei Yisrael need to have a MISHKAN - for their own connection with God - immediately after Matan Torah. However, the transition from a Mishkan to a Mikdash only takes place once Am Yisrael is ready to fulfill that role.]

In the history of Bayit Rishon [the first Temple], this is exactly the sequence of events. From the time of Yehoshua until King David, there is only a Mishkan, for during this time period, Am Yisrael never achieved peace with their enemies, nor did they establish a prosperous state that other nations could look up to. Only in the time of David did Am Yisrael reach this level of prosperity, peace, and security - and this is exactly when David ha'melech asks to build the Mikdash (see II Shmuel 7:1-3 and note the phrase "acharei asher hanyach Hashem m'kol oyveyhem m'saviv".).

Despite that request, God agrees with David that there has indeed been a tremendous improvement, but nevertheless Am Yisrael must wait one more generation until an even higher level of peace and stability is reached before the Mikdash can be built - i.e. only after Shlomo becomes king and both internal and external peace is achieved. [Read carefully II Shmuel 7:1-15.]

[The popular reason given for why David could not build the Temple - because he had 'blood on his hands'- is not found in Sefer Shmuel, rather in Divrei Ha'yamim in David's conversation with Shlomo - but this is a topic for a future shiur. See I Divrei Ha'yamim 17:1-20, & 22:2-15!]

In this sense, this sequence of events between Yitzchak and the neighboring Plishtim may not only 'foreshadow' what will happen in the future, but more significantly, it can serve as guide to help us understand how we should prioritize our goals and aspirations.

*shabbat shalom,
menachem*