

PARSHAT VAYECHI

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

'LUZ' OR 'BET EL'?

1. In 48:3, before Yaakov blesses his grandchildren, he first reminds Yosef of how God had once blessed him in the city of Luz. Note, however, that God had appeared to Yaakov at Luz twice, i.e. in 28:10-22 and 35:9-15.

Based on this pasuk and its context, which 'hitgalut' at Luz is Yaakov referring to (and why)?

Can you explain why Yaakov relates primarily to God's special Name of 'Kel Sha-dai'? [Relate to Ramban on 17:1!]

2. As you should remember, Luz was the original name of this site, but Yaakov had since named that place 'Bet El' (see 28:19 & 35:15). Can you explain why Yaakov (of all people) still calls this city Luz, instead of its 'new name' Bet El?

In your answer, relate to why Yaakov called that site Bet El, and his vow to build a Bet Elokim at that site (see 28:20-22).

Did Yaakov ever build a Bet Elokim, as he had promised? Is there a good reason why he didn't? Does he hope that some day in the future, that one of his offspring may fulfill his original vow?

If so, how would that explain his calling this site Luz at this time?

BLESSING, PROPHECIES, OR PREDICTIONS?

1. In your opinion, would you consider Yaakov's 'blessings' to his children (see 49:1-28) as 'hopes' or 'predictions'?

Support your answer based on their content. For example, do any of these 'blessings' relate to the future inheritance of the Land of Israel? Do any of them relate to leadership qualities? Are any of the 'blessings' actually 'curses'?

Be sure to relate as well to 49:28!

Then see Ibn Ezra on 49:1!

[See also Rashbam and Chizkuni on 49:1.]

2. Using a Tanach Koren [or similar], note how Yaakov's blessings to sons are divided into 'parshiot'. Note especially how this entire unit begins and ends! Can you explain the logic of these divisions?

Does each shevet have its own 'parshia', or are there exceptions? If so, can you identify which tribes, and explain why?

Similarly, can you explain the logic of the order of the tribes in these blessings? [See Chizkuni on 49:13.]

Finally, compare these 'blessings' to Moshe Rabbeinu's blessings to the tribes in Parshat Ve-zot Ha-bracha - in regard to their content, order, and style. What is similar and what is different?

In your explanation, relate to the purpose and setting for each set of blessings.

PASSING ON A TRADITION

1. Review 48:21, noting how Yaakov informs Yosef that God will one-day bring them back to the Eretz Canaan. Attempt to explain why Yaakov mentions this point specifically now in the context of what has transpired in chapter 48. Relate to 48:3-4!

Recall how Sefer Breishit concludes by telling us how Yosef relays this message to his brothers (see 50:24-26). In your opinion, why do you think that Sefer Breishit concludes specifically with this message?

Finally, based on Shmot 3:6-9, 3:13-17, 4:1 and 4:28-31, prove that even several hundred years later, Bnei Yisrael remain aware of this message (as well as the various earlier promises that God had made to the Avot). [In our shiur on Parshat Shmot, we will return to this topic.]

BURIAL IN CANAAN

1. Two times in Parshat Vayechi, Yaakov Avinu asks his children that he be buried in Eretz Canaan, but each time to different children:

1) First he commands Yosef - see 47:29-31.

[Note as well Breishit 46:2-4.]

2) Later on, he commands his other sons - see 49:28-33.

Review these two sources, noting their context, and then attempt to explain why Yaakov finds it necessary to make this request twice. Pay careful attention to what Yaakov commands Yosef to do, in contrast to what he commands his other children. What is different, and what is the same?

Relate this difference to 48:7. [In other words, why is Rachel's burial a 'touchy issue'? See Ramban on 48:7.]

Review 50:1-14. Were both requests fulfilled?

2. This story of Yaakov's burial contains two puzzling details:

a) Yosef appears to fear that Pharaoh may not allow him to bury his father in Eretz Canaan. [See 50:4-5.]

b) The official Egyptian funeral procession never enters Eretz Canaan. Instead, the ceremony takes place in 'ever ha-yarden' (on the 'other side' [i.e. eastern side] of the Jordan River). [See 50:7-12.]

Before you attempt to explain why, relate to the following questions as you formulate an answer.

First, review 47:28-31.

Then, explain why (in 50:4-5) Yosef speaks to 'beit Pharaoh' and not to Pharaoh himself? [or does he? - see 50:6.] Does this leave the impression that he is not as 'powerful' as he was before?

Now read 50:6-11. Based on these details, does it appear that Yosef's position remains as important as it had been during the time of the famine?

Why does Yaakov receive such honor from the Egyptians?

3. When the Egyptian delegation goes to bury Yaakov, note how the Egyptian escort stops at 'Goren Atad', while only Yaakov's children ascend to Eretz Canaan to bury him (see 50:11-13). Can you explain why?

Note that 'Goren ha-Atad' (where the public mourning takes place) is located on the **other** bank of the Jordan River, not in Eretz Canaan (50:10)! Can you explain why?

Could it be that the Egyptians are intentionally avoiding entering Eretz Canaan? In other words, would it not have been much shorter for everyone to travel directly to Hebron!

Relate your answer to the attitude of the Egyptians towards 'foreigners', based on Breishit 43:32 (& 39:14 & Shmot 8:22).

What appears to be the opinion of the Egyptians towards the people of Canaan?

Relate as well to Vayikra 18:1-3& 18:27!

Finally, relate this to why Yosef himself does not ask to be buried in Eretz Canaan, rather he only asks that his bones be taken when Bnei Yisrael will leave Egypt several hundred years later (see 50:24-26).

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PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for the shiur)

1. In your opinion, what was Yosef's original intention when he brought his two sons to his father's deathbed?

[In other words, was he expecting to receive a blessing, or was this simply an understandable visit by a concerned son?]

If he does expect a blessing, would it be for himself or for his children? Finally, what type of blessing should he expect?

[In your opinion, did Yosef hear what he expected? If not, was he pleasantly 'surprised', or was he possibly 'disappointed'?]

2. Have there been any earlier precedents in Sefer Breishit where a father has blessed his children before his death? If so, in what manner is this situation similar, and in what manner is it different?

Based on 48:1-20, what type of blessing does Yaakov grant? Is there a precedent for this type of blessing in Sefer Breishit?

Would you consider this a blessing to Yosef, or is it simply a blessing to Efraim and Menashe.

3. In relation to 48:5 (that Efraim & Menashe will be like Reuven & Shimon) - would you consider this yet another fatherly 'blessing', or might this relate to the concept of 'bechora' [right of the first-born]? If so, explain how and why, i.e. explain how it relates to 48:3-4. Then, see Rashbam on 48:5, as well as Ibn Ezra on 48:4-6, noting how they understand this blessing!

4. Attempt to categorize the different types of blessings that we have found thus far in Sefer Breishit, including both those bestowed by God as well as those bestowed by an [elderly] father to his children. [For example, note 9:24-27; 12:1-3, 13:14-16; 26:1-5; 27:26-40; and 35:9-13.]

Relate your answer to the theme of 'bechira', which we have been following thus far in our study of Sefer Breishit, as well as the concept of 'bechora' and 'bracha'.

5. Before Yaakov blesses Efraim and Menashe, in 48:3-4 he reminds Yosef of an earlier prophecy that he received.

How does this explain the background for his 'promise' (or 'blessing') to Yosef regarding his sons in 48:5-6?

[Relate this blessing to Devarim 21:17.]

How does all of this relate to Yaakov's statement in 48:7?

[Or, maybe it doesn't? If not, what does 48:7 relate to?]

6. What is the essence of Yaakov's actual blessing to Efraim & Menashe themselves in 48:15-20? How does this blessing relate to his earlier blessing in 48:5-6?

Would you consider this bracha or bechora?

In relation to 48:16, is there any reason why someone would have thought that Efraim & Menashe would not be identified with Yaakov's name? [Relate to when and where they were born!]

7. In your opinion, is 48:21-22 an **additional** blessing to Yosef? If not, what is it? [See Rashbam 48:21.]

8. What is the nature of Yaakov's blessings to his children in 49:1-28? Are they all 'blessings'? If not, what is common to all of them? [Note carefully Yaakov's opening statement in 49:1! See also 49:34 & Ibn Ezra on 49:1!]

9. Note 48:21, compare with 50:24-25.

How does this relate to 46:1-4?

Why is 50:24-25 an appropriate ending for Sefer Breishit?

How will it relate to what will transpire in Sefer Shmot?

[Relate to Shmot 3:15-18.]

PART III - PARSHANUT

SHECHEM - A CITY or a PORTION?

1. Review 48:22. What is difficult about this pasuk? Relate it to 33:18, and the word 'shchem' in each of these psukim.

What does the word shchem mean? Is there more than one possibility? How does the remainder of this pasuk affect the explanation of this word? How does the context of the entire chapter relate to the meaning of this word?

What did Yaakov **take** with his sword & bow?

When did this happen and **why**?

After answering these questions (on your own), go through the various commentators and try to organize their different approaches into at least two categories. As you study:

a. See Rashi, noting how does he answer the above questions?

Why does he bring **two** interpretations?

What is difficult about each one?

In your opinion, which interpretation does Rashi prefer?

b. See Rashbam (& Rasa"ng)!

How do they answer these questions?

How (and why) is this interpretation different?

See also Radak! How (and why) is his interpretation similar, and how is it different?

c. Next, see Ibn Ezra. How does he relate to these opinions (as discussed above)?

Which peirush [interpretation] does he prefer?

Can you explain why?

How is his answer 'better' (or different) than Rashbam's?

d. Now see Seforno? How is his peirush different?

Relate his peirush to Rashi's!

Would you consider his peirush 'pschat' - or more Midrashic?

Why do you think Seforno doesn't prefer the above peirushim?

e. Finally see Ramban! In what manner is his peirush totally different than the others? To whom is his peirush most similar?

How (and why) does he connect his peirush to Yaakov's original blessing of Efraim & Menashe?

Is this typical of Ramban's comprehensive approach to pschat?

Note his comparison of this pasuk to Melachim II 13:16-17!

How does this 'solve' the most difficult aspect of the peirush of Ibn Ezra and Rashbam?

'ACHARIT HA-YAMIM'

2. Read 49:1.

In your opinion, what does the phrase 'acharit ha-yamim' imply? [i.e. how many years into the future]

a. See first Chizkuni's interpretation! Why does he relate this to 'brit bein ha-btarim'? What is the basis of his peirush?

b. Next see Ramban. How is his opinion different?

What does Ramban base his opinion on?

c. Now see Seforno. Is his peirush the same as Ramban's or different? What pasuk does he base his peirush on?

d. See also Rashbam in 49:1 who explains 'et asher yikra etchem..' - about their strength [in battle] and their inheritance [nachalatam]. Can you infer from this how Rashbam understands acharit ha-yamim? Which of the opinions discussed above would this be more similar to - Chizkuni or Ramban?

e. Finally see Rashi on 49:1. Even though Rashi doesn't explain acharit ha-yamim specifically, how does his commentary relate to his understanding of this phrase?

'SEEING' OR 'RECOGNIZING'

3. In 48:8, when Yaakov sees Yosef's two sons, he asks: "**Who** are these children?" [& in 48:9, Yosef informs him that these are his two sons.] How could it be that after living in Egypt for some seventeen years, Yaakov did not know who Yosef's children were?

First, see Rashi on 48:8. Note how he 'solves' this problem by re-interpreting this pasuk. In your opinion, is this 'drash' or 'pschat'?

Next, see Chizkuni, noting how he begins with 'lefi pshuto'.

Why is Chizkuni's interpretation more 'pschat' than Rashi's?

See also Rashbam and Radak. Are they basically the same peirush as Chizkuni, or different? Explain.

4. In answer to Yaakov's questions 'mi eileh' (in 48:8), Yosef answers (in 48:9) that these are his sons who God gave him 'ba-zeh'. In your opinion, what does Yosef referring to when he says ba-zeh? How does it relate to the context of what Yaakov has said in 48:1-8?

See Rashi, noting how he explains that Yosef showed his fathers some 'official documents'? Can you explain what led Rashi to prefer this Midrashic interpretation?

Then see Rashbam, Ramban, Chizkuni and Seforno. Note how each commentator offers a slightly different interpretation, yet all of them relate to what transpires in 48:1-8.

be-hatzlacha,
menachem