

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

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Parashat Noach

Why Did the Global Flood Not Pour Down From Heaven Upon the Holy Land?

Reversing the Waters of the Flood into the Waters of Wisdom

We have returned to our daily day routine, praying for and awaiting the blessed raindrops. Rain can be so refreshing – so cleansing and satiating. The parched dry earth – having suffered the recent dry storms here in Israel, opens its cracked thirsty mouth, craving to be filled with heavenly rain. Now is high time to plant the winter crop of carrots, beets, radishes, parsley, kale, lettuce, and various greens here in Israel. In B’erot garden we have already planted most of the winter crop under the supervision of our super gardening teacher Tzvi Taylor! I hope to get help to turn the cakey soil in my own garden, so I too can plant the winter crop. The time for planting in the Land of Israel reflects our personal growth at this time. As we pray for the tender seeds to sprout forth through the coming of rain, so do we pray for renewed ways and deeper *kavanot* (intentions) in keeping Torah and mitzvot. This fall I hope to carve out some time from my packed schedule to return to playing my harp and to spend meaningful time with my granddaughters. As we enter the month of Cheshvan in the Land of Israel, we begin to sense the smell of rain. In the Tanach this month is called ‘בּוּל/Bul’ “And in the eleventh year, in the month Bul, which is the eighth month, the House [Sanctuary] was completed...” (1 *Melachim* 6:38). The word ‘Bul,’ derives from מַבּוּל/Mabul – ‘flood,’ for during this month rains are plentiful. An abundance of rain was decreed during Cheshvan since it marked the beginning of the Flood. The letter מ/Mem of Mabul is missing from the month’s names because actually ‘Bul’ means flood, and the letter Mem that precedes it, containing the numerical value of 40 indicates that the flood lasted for forty days, beginning on the seventeenth of Cheshvan and continuing until the twenty-seventh day of Kislev. This deep cleansing that the world experienced at this time is still available to us during the month of Cheshvan. “There is no water except for Torah” (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Kama* 84a). The generation of the flood was potentially fit for the receiving of the Torah and the understanding of its deepest secrets. However, due to their sins, they transformed the blessed waters of the Torah’s wisdom and grace into the bitter water of sin. The Month of Cheshvan is the opportune time to reverse their sins and transform the waters of the Flood back to the Waters of the Wisdom of Torah! I look forward to digging deep into the soil and into the inner dimension of Torah to strengthen my roots in the Land.

Did the Flood Affect the Land of Israel?

After the rain stopped falling, Noach opened a window in the ark, to find out whether the water had dried out from the earth. First, he sent a raven, then a dove but neither found a resting place, indicating that the entire earth was still covered by water. After waiting another seven days Noach sent the dove again and this time it found sustenance:

סֵפֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית פָּרָק ח פְּסוּק י א

וַתָּבֵא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לְעֵת עֶרֶב וְהָיָה עָלֶיהָ זַיִת טָרֵף בְּפִיהָ וַיֵּדַע נֹחַ כִּי קָלַו הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:

“The dove returned to him at eventide, and behold it had plucked an olive leaf in its mouth; so Noach knew that the water had abated from upon the earth” (*Bereishit* 8:11).

From where did it [the dove] bring it [the olive leaf]? It was from the branches in the Land of Israel. Rabbi Levi said: It brought it from the Mount of Olives, as the Land of Israel was not inundated during the Flood. That is what the Holy One blessed be He said to Yechezkiel: “It is a land that has not been purified, that was

not rained upon on the day of fury" (*Yechezkiel* 22:24); (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 33:9). There are different opinions in the Talmud on whether the land of Israel was affected by the flood, and to what degree. Reish Lakish holds that the flood descended upon Eretz Yisrael, whereas according to Rabbi Yochanan, the flood did not fall upon Eretz Yisrael. Both interpreted the same verse: *Yechezkiel* 22:24, Reish Lakish read the end of the verse as a question. Eretz Yisrael is not Tahor! Was it not flooded?! (I.e., surely it was!). Rabbi Yochanan read the beginning of the verse as a question. "Is not Eretz Yisrael *Tahor* (pure)? therefore it was spared from the flood! The Ramban quotes *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*: "The waters of the flood did not come down from heaven upon the land of Israel, Instead, the waters rolled from the other lands into it..." Since the torrential rain did not fall directly upon the land of Israel, and the windows of heaven were not opened there, the trees were unharmed in Israel, whereas, in the rest of the world, they were broken and uprooted by the flood (Ramban, *Bereishit* 8:11). The dove bringing an olive branch from the Land of Israel was still proof that the waters had abated since the trees of Israel were also covered with the water that had rolled in from the rest of the lands. However, because the heavy rains didn't fall directly on Israel the trees there were not destroyed.

The Land of Israel is a Self-Cleaning Land it Needs no Flood to Purify it

According to most opinions, the effects of the flood were less severe in Eretz Yisrael. Why did Hashem spare the Land of Israel from the flood? Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (the Ba'al HaTanya) asks: Why did G-d choose to bring a flood? He could have destroyed the world in other ways. The answer is that G-d specifically brought a flood to serve as a mikvah to cleanse and purify the world from its corruption. This explains why Eretz Yisrael was spared. The Chosen Land is so intrinsically pure and holy that it is virtually impossible to defile or corrupt it. Notice that whenever the Torah talks about the cardinal sins that cause exile, it says that the Land will vomit the sinners out. Thus, the land of Israel is self-cleaning – before impurity can cause any serious damage, the Land gets rid of evil, keeping itself pure. Even if the inhabitants of the Land also had to be destroyed during the flood, the Land itself retained its intrinsic holiness and did not need to be purified by the mikvah of the flood. Therefore Hashem didn't bring heavy rain torrents directly on Israel (Rabbi Moshe D. Lichtman, *Parashat Noach*). The notion that the flood didn't inundate the Land of Israel explains why Avraham's family wanted to move there. The very end of the *parasha* introduces us to Avraham's sojourns in Eretz Yisrael. The reason that Avraham was to go specifically there is alluded to in the *parasha's* first section, dealing with the flood, which the Land evaded. The fact that Israel did not require purification through the flood teaches us that it is a Land designed for living in sanctity and purity. Those who live here as well as those who visit the Holy Land get to experience a glimpse of this truth! May we all be united here in the Land protected under the wings of the Shechinah.