

MAN "AL HAPEREK"

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Shoftim Perakim 3-4

These perakim detail the events Am Yisrael experience during the period of the first three judges. We will examine the overarching characteristics of this period's leadership, focusing also on each judge's unique qualities.

General Overview < "וַיִּקְרְאוּ בְּסֵפֶר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים"

Perek 3

- ❶ Pesukim 1-5 mention two reasons as to why God left other nations in the Land. How are these reasons manifested in the story of Ehud Ben Gerah? See also the story of Shimshon (Shoftim 13:1 and 15:7-9). In that instance, did leaving the nations in the Land lead to the desired result?
- ❷ The story of Ehud ben Gerah (pesukim 12-30) includes many physical descriptions. How do these descriptions direct the plot towards its turning point?
- ❸ After the confrontation with the king of Moav, Ehud arrives at Mount Ephraim and calls the people to join him in war. Compare pesukim 27-30 of this perek to 8:1-3 and 12:1-7. How is the tension between the tribes-so typical of this period-reflected in these stories?

Perek 4

- ❹ a) The word "hand" functions in this perek as a *milah mancha*, a leading word. Examine its role in the story and in the dialogue spoken in the perek.
b) In pasuk 9, Devorah answers Barak, "*notwithstanding the journey that you take shall not be for your honor; for the Lord will give Sisera over into the hand of a woman.*" Looking at the story as a whole, what are the possible interpretations of the phrase, "*into the hand of a woman*"?

- 5 In perek 4 there are three characters fighting against the army of Sisera: Devorah, Barak, and Yael. Examine how each character contributes to victory in battle. How does pasuk 23 impact your conclusions?
- 6 a) Read pesukim 11 and 17 in our perek. Why does Yael come to the aid of the Jewish people, in opposition to the alliance between the Kenites and Sisera?
- b) Trace the development of the relationship between the Kenites and the Jewish people in the following sources: Bamidbar 10:29; Shoftim 1:16; I Divrei ha-Yamim 2:55 and Yirmiyahu 35.

In-depth Study < "מִפְּנֵי שׁוֹם שְׁכָל"

- 7 a) "Moshe received the Torah at Sinai and taught it to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets" (Pirkei Avot 1:1). The period of the judges is not mentioned in this Mishnah, which famously describes the process of the Torah's oral transmission. What could be the reasons for this omission?

b) Otniel ben Kenaz appears in 3:9-12 as a man of war. The Midrash presents additional facets of his character. Compare the Mishnah cited above to the Midrash below, noticing what place the Mishnah accords Otniel in the chain of Torah transmission:

"As Moshe went to Gan Eden, he said to Yehoshua, 'Ask me about any doubts you have!' He [Yehoshua] said to him: 'Rabbi, have I ever left you for one hour and gone somewhere else? Did you not write about me (Shemot 33:11), 'And his servant Yehoshua ben Nun did not depart from the tent'?' Immediately his strength vanished; he forgot 300 laws, and 700 doubts arose within him, and all of Am Yisrael was ready to slay him. The Holy One, Blessed be He spoke to him, saying: 'It is impossible to tell you. Go and trouble them with war,' as it says (Shoftim 1:1-2), 'And after the death of Moshe the servant of the Lord, the Lord said, 'Yehuda will go up, etc.'"

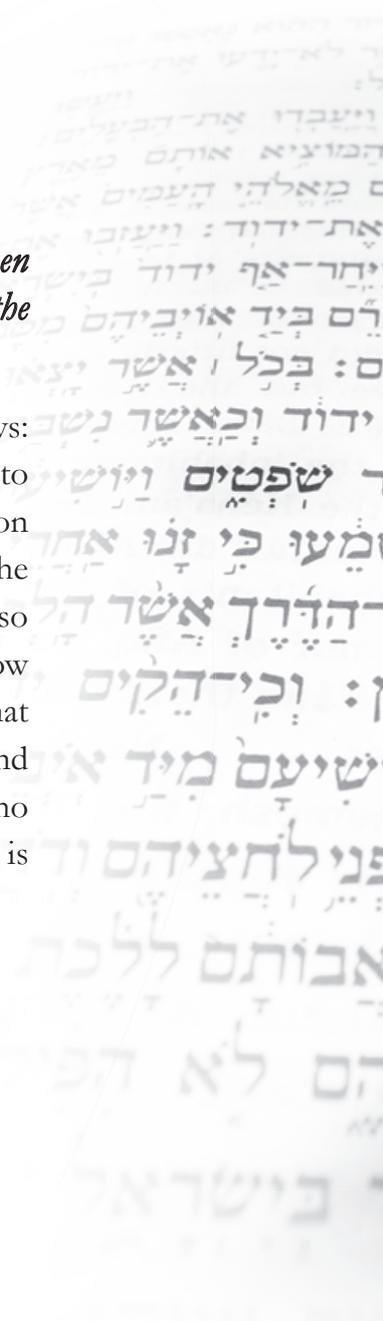
It has been taught: One thousand seven hundred leniencies and analogies, together with an equal number of decrees [gezerot] and grammatical distinctions, were forgotten during the days of mourning for Moshe. Rabbi Abahu said: "Nevertheless, Otniel ben Kenaz restored logical reasoning, as it says (Yehoshua 15:17) "And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, conquered it . . ." (Talmud Bavli Masechet Temurah page 16a).

- 8 What is included in the role of "judge" (shofet) in the book of Shoftim? Refer to the following pesukim: I Shmuel 8:1-2, 20; Tehillim 2:10. In light of this, what was unique about the position of Devorah the Prophetess?

Appendix < "וַיְבִינוּ בַּמִּקְרָא"

"And they were there, to try Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord, which He commanded their fathers by the hand of Moshe" (Shoftim 3:4)

"And God tried Avraham" - The matter of 'trial,' in my opinion, is as follows: Since a man's deeds are at his absolute free command, to perform them or not to perform them at his will, on the part of one who is tried it is called 'a trial.' But on the part of the One, blessed be He, who tries the person, it is a command that the one being tested should bring forth the matter from the potential into actuality so that he may be rewarded for a good deed, not for a good thought alone. Know further that God tries the righteous (according to Tehillim 11:5) for knowing that the righteous will do His will, He desires to make him even more upright, and so He commands him to undertake a test, but He does not try the wicked, who would not obey. Thus all trials in the Torah are for the good of the one who is being tried (Ramban, Bereshit 22:1, translated by Rabbi Dr. Charles Chavel).



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