

This week's learning is dedicated to the full recovery of Leah Feiga bat Spisia



"AL HAPEREK"

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Shoftim Perakim 11-12

In these perakim, we meet Yiftach, a figure whose leadership begins with high hopes but ends with both personal and communal tragedy.

General Overview < "וַיִּקְרָאוּ בְּסֵפֶר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים"

Perek 11

- ❶ A) The text describes Avimelech and Yiftach in similar terms (compare 8:29 - 9:5, with 11:1-4). How does the resemblance affect our perception of Yiftach?
 - B) Yiftach was chosen for his prowess in battle. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of selecting a leader for this reason. How is this particular ability reflected in each stage of Yiftach's leadership? (For example, dealing with the Ammonites, the vows, against the children of Ephraim).
- ❷ In his speech, Yiftach describes the history of conquest at Gilead at length. Compare his speech with the description of the actual event in Bamidbar 20:14-21. How do the two descriptions complete the historical portrait? Against the background of the short reply given by the King of the Ammonites (11:28), why does the text dedicate so much space to Yiftach's words?
- ❸ *"And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed; and she had not known man. And it was a custom in Israel"* (11:39). Why does the pasuk emphasize that Yiftach's daughter *"had not known man"*? What additional ways are there to understand how Yiftach's vow was fulfilled, according to the wording of the pasuk?

Perek 12

- 4 In perakim 11-12, Yiftach negotiates with different groups: the elders of Gilead, the king of the Ammonites, and the people of Ephraim. How do the results of these various discussions reflect both the hopes pinned on Yiftach's leadership and the subsequent disappointments with it?
- 5 The lists of "minor shoftim" are organized in two brief sections between the stories of Avimelech, Yiftach, and Shimshon. What might be the significance of their location in light of the content of the lists themselves?

In-depth Study < "מִפְּנֵי שׁוֹם וְשׁוֹם שְׁכָל"

- 6 *"Then it shall be, that whatever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the Ammonites, it shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering"* (12:31). Did Yiftach intend to sacrifice everything that came out of his house, including a human sacrifice? Examine the approaches of the commentators.
- 7 The separation and division among the tribes of Israel is expressed in the book of Shoftim not only in military contexts, but also in areas of daily life such as language and pronunciation. When a population splits into smaller communities that spread across a wide geographic area, different linguistic systems, naturally develop. The replacement of "shibboleth" for "shibboleth" illustrates the differences in dialects within the areas in which the tribes settled.

See the Radak's commentary on pasuk 6. According to him, what is the significance of the word "shibboleth"? See Tehillim 69:3 and Bereshit 41:5-7. Is there a reason this specific word is used as the 'test' word in our perek?

"As they experimented with this word, they would then test them with every word containing a 'shin,' and the people of Ephraim would say it as a 'sin.' And there are commentators who interpret the word 'shibboleth' according to the meaning 'the flowing river,' that is, the place where the people of Ephraim crossed over."

- 8 *"Rabbah, bar R. Huna, said in the name of Rab: 'Ibzan is Boaz.' What does he come to teach us? The same that Rabbah bar R. Huna said. Rabbah bar R. Huna said in the name of Rab: 'Boaz made for his sons one hundred and twenty wedding feasts, as it is said (in Shoftim 12), 'And he [Ibzan] had thirty sons, and he sent thirty daughters abroad, and he brought in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons, and he judged Israel for seven years'."* (Talmud Bavli, Masechet Bava Batra 91a). What in the pesukim causes Rabbah bar Rav Huna to associate Ibzan with Boaz? What is the significance in linking the books of Shoftim and Rut through the character of Boaz?

Appendix < "וַיְבִינוּ בַּפִּקְרָא"

"when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said: 'Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become my troubler; for I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot return' "(Shoftim 11:35).

"... Had Pinchas been there, would he have said, 'I cannot return'? Rather, Pinchas said, 'I am a high priest [cohen gadol], son of a high priest; will I lower myself and go along with the common man?' Yiftach said, 'I am the head of the tribes of Israel, leader of the officers; will I lower myself and go after the fool?' Both suffered great losses, and both were liable for her blood.

His daughter said to him, 'My father, where is it written in the Torah that we sacrifice living souls on the altar? Is it not written, *"When any one of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, of the herd, etc"*'? (Vayikra 1:2) From the cattle and not from people. He said to her, 'My daughter, my vow was *"whatever comes out, etc"* (Shoftim 11:31). She said to him, "When our Patriarch Yaakov vowed *"... and of all that You shall give me I will surely give the tenth unto You,"* (Bereshit 28:22), and The Holy One Blessed Be He gave him twelve tribes, did he sacrifice one of them? And although Channah said in her vow, *"And I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life,"* (Shmuel Alef 1:11), did she actually sacrifice her son to The Holy One Blessed Be He?

All these things she said to him, and he did not listen to her. She said to him, 'Go to the court [Beit Din]; perhaps one of them will accept my arguments,' as it is said, *"let me alone two months, that I may depart and go down upon the mountains"* (Shoftim 11:37). And she went to them but none found a way to release him from his vow . . . The Holy One Blessed Be He hid from them the ruling [halacha] so that they did not find a way to release him. Because they didn't find a way to release him from his vow, he [Yiftach] went up and slaughtered her before The Holy One Blessed Be He.

The Holy Spirit screamed: "Do I ask you to sacrifice living souls before Me?" *"which I commanded not, nor spoke it, neither came it into My mind"* (Yirmiyahu 19:5) . . . Oh, that I had not commanded Avraham to slay his son, and I did not tell Yiftach to sacrifice his daughter to Me . . . Who caused Yiftach to lose his daughter?—for not having read the Torah! If he had read the Torah, he would not have lost his daughter, for it is written, *"When a man shall clearly utter a vow . . . And if it be a female..."* (Vayikra 27:2-4). (Midrash Tanchuma (Buber), Parshat Bechukotai, section 7).

"... Nevertheless, I fell asleep. How do I know I was asleep? From the dream that I dreamt. What did I dream? I dreamt that a great war came to the world, and I was called to the war. I vowed to God that if I came back safely from the war, whatever came out from my house to greet me on my way back, I would offer up as a sacrifice. I returned safely to my home, and behold, I myself came out to greet me."

(Thus Far by S. Y. Agnon, page 76)

The World Wide Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program

טל': 02-5944555 • perek.matan@gmail.com

© כל הזכויות שמורות. המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך. מתן ירושלים

מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רננר
The Sadie Renner Women's Institute for Torah Studies

המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך