



5782 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Shoftim / פרשת שופטים

Yerushalayim as a Goal

Our parsha contains many laws of war. The Torah teaches us about who should go to war and who should not, and the limits of appropriate methods of warfare. All throughout this passage we are reminded that Jewish soldiers do not go into war alone, but are accompanied by God Himself: “For it is your God who marches with you to do battle for you against your enemy, to bring you victory.”¹

Characteristically, the Sages of the Talmud elaborate on this message. In Tehillim, King Dovid writes as follows: “Our feet stood inside your gates, O Jerusalem.”² The Talmud explains that this verse is an expression of Dovid’s wartime strategy:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: What is the meaning of that which is written: “Our feet were standing in your gates, Yerushalayim” (Psalms 122:2)? What caused our feet to withstand the enemies in war? It is the gates of Yerushalayim, where they were engaged in Torah study.³

The Torah study taking place in the gates of Yerushalayim will help ensure victory on the battlefield.

The simple meaning of this passage highlights the potency of Torah study in Yerushalayim. In what merit will God march forth with our soldiers to battle? How can we ensure that we will not fight alone but with God on our side? The answer is that the lynchpin is the Torah study in Yerushalayim. When the Jewish people immerse themselves in God’s word in His holy city, it creates a deep and close connection between God and the people.

Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Wexler⁴ suggests, though, that Rashi might have a slightly different understanding of this passage. Both in his commentary to the passage in the Talmud and in his

¹ Devarim 20:4.

² Tehillim 122:2.

³ Makkot 10a.

⁴ Available at <https://ytbb.co.il/%D7%9E%D7%90%D7%9E%D7%A8%D7%99-%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%A9-%D7%94%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%91%D7%94/%D7%97%D7%92%D7%99%D7%9D->



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commentary to the verses in Tehilim, Rashi adds in one word “*bishvil* Yerushalayim.” Generally, the word *bishvil* means “for the sake of” rather than “in the merit of.” Accordingly, Rabbi Wexler raises the possibility that Rashi asserts that it is not only in the merit of *past* learning of Torah in Yerushalayim that God accompanies them into battle. Rather, the study of Torah in Yerushalayim is the endgame; it is the *goal* for which the soldier’s fight.

A Jewish soldier must know that he is not going into battle solely for the sake of physical security, as important as that is. Rather, he fights to help bring the Jewish people and the entire world to its ultimate state of reality. This utopian vision is highlighted by Jewish people living and studying Torah in the gates of Yerushalayim. Keeping this goal in mind will motivate the Jewish soldiers to fight with extra vigor and will cause God to accompany them into battle.

This message is relevant even for those of us who are not soldiers. We all need a goal to work towards – a vision in our mind’s eye of a future that we want to create. Being able to study Torah and connect with God in the gates of Yerushalayim should certainly be part of that vision and should inspire us to work towards its actualization.

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