



5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schrier Parashat Korach/פרשת קרח

A Song From the Abyss: *Bnei Korach* and the Power of *Yerushalayim*

As the ground opened to swallow *Korach's* rebellious followers, the Torah tells us it tragically included man, woman, and child (*Bamidbar* 16:32). "How dreadful is *machloket!*" declares *Rashi* (ibid 16:27), for *Korach's* rebellion caused the death of even infants, the children of the sinners.

Yet remarkably, the children of one rebel were spared. And not just any rebel; the chief instigator himself! The Torah tells us that the sons of *Korach* did not die (*Bamidbar* 26:11). While sources differ on the details, it seems that *Korach's* sons either rejected their father from the outset of his rebellion, or repented at the last moment as the ground split open (see *Targum Yonatan* and *Rashi* to *Bamidbar* 26:11). As the earth gaped open, a narrow pillar emerged beneath them, suspending them above the abyss.

Rebbe Yehudah HaNasi dramatically describes this moment (*Yalkut Shemoni, Korach* 752): all of *Klal Yisrael* stares at these three young men as they stand above the yawning void. There is silence. Then, the sons of *Korach* begin to sing *shirah* to *Hashem*. What is the theme of their song?

"שעתיד הקדוש ברוך לבנות ירושלים בנין קבוע שאין לו הפסק" – that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* will build Jerusalem as a permanent structure, without any end."

A beautiful prophecy. But entirely irrelevant to their current predicament. Why would they sing about the future glory of *Yerushalayim* as their family and possessions vanish into the earth?

In truth, *Chazal's* portrayal of the *Bnei Korach's* obsession with *Yerushalayim* is deeply rooted in *Sefer Tehillim*. Generations later, their descendants composed twelve *pirkei Tehillim*, many of which focus exclusively on *Yerushalayim* and the *Beit HaMikdash*. In fact, one could argue that the *Bnei Korach* speak of *Yerushalayim* more than *David HaMelech* himself!

Why draws them so deeply to *Yerushalayim*?

A striking *Midrash* offers deeper insight. *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* (*Perek* 10) describes *Yonah's* descent into the abyss, swallowed by the giant fish. The fish takes *Yonah* on a "tour" and shows him the *Even Shetiah*, the Foundation Stone whose peak rests in the *Kodesh HaKadoshim*. On the stone, *Yonah* sees the *Bnei Korach* desperately praying. The fish informs *Yonah* that if he too prays now in this auspicious place, his prayers will be answered. *Yonah* cries out, "*Ribbono Shel Olam*, You are called 'He who casts down and lifts up.' You've cast me down, now lift me up! 'He who brings death and life,' I have reached death, now revive me!" *Hashem* responds, and the fish spits *Yonah* onto dry land.

This *Midrash* is a deep metaphor for the power of Jerusalem to reverse even the greatest descent. Both *Yonah* and the *Bnei Korach* are being "swallowed up" by primordial forces that threaten to drag them



פרשת קרח/Parashat Korach by Rabbi Reuven Schrier 5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem

permanently down into the שאול – the dark abyss beyond return. As their lives collapse under the weight of their respective mistakes, they desperately seek solid ground, a lifeline that can bring them back up to the surface. Then they find the *Even Shetiah*, the Foundational Stone from which the world itself was formed. From that spot, creation began: chaos turned into a beautiful, flourishing world.

Yerushalayim becomes their anchor. In *Yerushalayim*, these holy penitents see the ability to recreate themselves, to reverse the most hopeless situation into a vibrant paradise. From its depths they cry out, and impossibly, they are lifted back into the light.

This context allows us to appreciate the tragic depth of *Tehillim* 88. The *Bnei Korach* passionately capture the hopelessness of exile (see *Rashi* *ibid*); as Jerusalem lays in ruins, they cry out:

“...my life has reached the grave. I was counted with those who descend into the Pit... You have put me into the lowest pit, into dark places, into depths...You have afflicted me with all Your crashing waves!”

Yerushalayim had once been their lifeline. Now without the holy city holding them afloat, they feel themselves again sinking into the abyss.

This is why every Jew recites this *mizmor*. Without *Yerushalayim* and the *Even Shetiah*, we teeter on the edge of the shadowy depths *chas v'shalom*. But the *Bnei Korach* have already shown us the way. Even from the heart of the abyss, they promised that *Yerushalayim* will be rebuilt – permanently. No matter how far we've fallen, she remains the foundation stone from which we can once again rise.

