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SOURCES AND RESOURCES

DÉJÀ VU? BEKHOR SHOR ON SEEMINGLY REPEATED STORIES

There seem to be two accounts of both the *selav* and of Moses hitting the rock. The first is in Exodus 16-17 and the second in *Numbers* 11 and 20. *Bekhor Shor*, in contrast to the vast majority of *parshanim*, feels that the two accounts actually refer to the same incident. In general, anyone who wants to take such an approach has to ask two basic questions: First, why recount the story in a place that does not fit with the chronology? Second, what evidence suggests that the two accounts are, in fact, the same?

Bekhor Shor deals with the first question by arguing that the *man* story actually took place during the events of the book of Exodus. Because this is the first food story, the Torah mentions, in brief fashion, all the food stories that will occur later. Now, the idea that the Torah will mention details before they actually happen in order to fit them into an appropriate section is found in other *mefarshim* as well. An example is the end of the *man* story mentioning that the *man* was placed before the *Aron* (Exodus 16:33-34). At that point the *Mishkan* had not yet been commanded, but the Torah wanted to include all the details relating to the *man* in the same section (see Ramban Exodus 12:43 and Numbers 21:1). However, that example is not entirely comparable to our situation, because that detail (that the *man* was placed before the *Aron*) is not mentioned again in the Humash. Therefore, *Bekhor Shor's* idea, that the Humash would mention the same story twice, is a *biddush*.

For the second issue, regarding the existence of evidence to support his assertion, *Bekhor Shor* quotes a number of proofs. On Exodus 16:13,

he notes that when Moshe hears that God plans to give the Jews *Slav*, he responds incredulously, asking how there could be sufficient meat for such a large amount of people (Numbers 11:31). *Bekhor Shor* reasons that if God had already provided *selav* in Exodus, Moshe would have no reason to question. While the *mefarshim* on that *pasuk* suggest other ways of reading Moses' comment (Rashi and Abarbanel, ad. loc.), the *peshat* would seem to support the *Bekhor Shor's* point.

On *Numbers* 20:8, *Bekhor Shor* provides several other proofs. On the command to take the stick, he comments that the purpose was to hit the rock. While he does not explicitly use this as a proof for his overall approach, assumedly he felt that the only reason for Moshe to take the stick would be that he was meant to hit the rock. As opposed to Rashi (*Numbers* 20:11-12) who asserts that Moshe was supposed to talk to the rock, the implication that he was meant to hit it in *Numbers* would make Moshe's mission the same as what the *pasuk* states it clearly to be in Exodus. Here there is room to question his proof. Rashbam provides an alternative reason to take the stick. He postulates that the staff had been placed in front of the *aron* in chapter 17 after the Korah episode. Moses is now taking it because it had become a symbol of the Jews' stubbornness, a trait they were displaying once again.

As another proof, *Bekhor Shor* points out that the location of the hitting the rock incident in Exodus is Massah and Meribah (*Exodus* 17:7). Now, that exact name is not given in *Numbers*. However, in *Deuteronomy* (33:8) Levi is said to have been "tested in Massah and fought over the waters of Meribah." *Bekhor Shor* feels that this *pasuk* is referring to the story in *Numbers*, and therefore concludes that both the Exodus and *Numbers* account occurred in the same location and that the *pasuk* in *Deuteronomy* is critiquing Moses and Aaron for their actions. This proof is highly questionable. Ibn Ezra understands the word Massah in the context of *Deuteronomy* to mean that whenever the tribe of Levi was tested, they were found trustworthy, rather than interpreting it as being the name of a location. Ramban sees the two phrases as referring to two different incidents. The first time that the Jews complained about a lack of water, the tribe of Levi was not part of the complaint. The second time, even though Moshe and Aaron were punished, the sin was ultimately on account of the people. This explains how the two phrases in *Deuteronomy* relate to each other; both are praising the tribe of Levi, in contradistinction to the overall nation. Ramban musters Targum Onkelos as a proof for his reading. The Targum's addition of the words "and he (Levi) was whole" in Massah and "and he was faithful" in Meribah, certainly mitigate against the *Bekhor Shor's* reading that both are referring to God being upset with Moshe and Aaron.

TRADITION

Finally, *Bekhor Shor* points out that both the Exodus and Numbers stories are said to have happened in the Desert of Zin. Given what a large area is likely to be included in the description “Desert of Zin,” this is a questionable proof.

An obvious problem with the whole approach, that the stories of the *selav* and hitting the rock are one and the same, is why the two accounts of each story differ in their details. *Bekhor Shor* deals with one element of this issue by asking why the detail that Moshe was intended to hit the rock is not mentioned in Numbers. He resolves this issue by asserting that it is common for the Tanakh to mention a detail in only one version of the story. To prove this principle, he quotes the two accounts of the *Meraggelim*. The account in Numbers implies that God initiated the endeavor. The Deuteronomy version, however, makes it clear that the Jews requested spies first. After reading Deuteronomy, the reader is meant to now add that detail into how one reads the Numbers account. While this principle is certainly true, the comparison is not exact. Firstly, Deuteronomy is the book that retells many previously mentioned stories; that does not necessarily translate into the same story appearing in Exodus and Numbers. Secondly, in the aforementioned examples, the impression created by the Exodus stories is that both the *Slav* and the water from the rock were positive experiences. Suddenly in Numbers, both end with some form of punishment. This is a far cry from Deuteronomy merely adding a detail.

While *Bekhor Shor* does not provide any more of an explanation for why the details of the accounts seem to differ, perhaps one could argue that this point in Exodus was not the place to discuss punishments. At this point, God is providing whatever the Jews ask for and the nature of His relationship is more positive than the one in Numbers. Additionally, since the Torah is just alluding to future food stories, perhaps the story is intentionally given a brief treatment.

Bekhor Shor's unique interpretation highlights how many considerations must be taken into account whenever a *parshan* suggests an approach. Studying an issue in several areas of Tanakh together with the *mefarshim* in each place can lead to a richer understanding of all the *mekorot*.

For more *Iyyun*:

Bekhor Shor feels that the two accounts of counting the Jews in Exodus and Numbers are the same (Exodus 38:28 and Numbers 1:1, in contrast to Rashi Exodus 30:16). In what ways is that similar and in what ways is it different from the aforementioned examples?

On Numbers 21:3 he refers back to 14:45. How is that different from the previous examples?