

Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(32)

The Stubble, the Straw, the Chaff, and the Wheat
Genesis Rabbah 83:5



Background to the Fable "The Stubble, the Straw, the Chaff, and the Wheat"



Stubble



Straw



Chaff



Wheat

Malachi 3:19

"For, behold, the day comes, it shall burn like an oven; and all the arrogant, and all who do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will not leave them root nor branch" (Malachi 3:19).

Isaiah 41:16

"You shall fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the stormy wind shall scatter them; and you shall rejoice in the Lord, and shall glory in the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 41:16).

Day of the Lord



A day described by the Biblical prophets. On the Day of the Lord, God will punish the wicked and justice will ultimately triumph.

The prophets used the Day of the Lord as a warning to the people; the impression was given that it would happen in the near future so that now was the time to turn away from evil ways. The prophet Malachi promises that Elijah will return to earth

before the great and terrible day of the Lord (Ch. 3:4) and this is the origin of the belief that Elijah will be the herald of God's *messiah.



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Question: "What is the day of the Lord?"

Answer: The phrase "day of the Lord" usually identifies events that take place at the end of history (Isaiah 7:18-25) and is often closely associated with the phrase "that day." One key to understanding these phrases is to note that they always identify a span of time during which God personally intervenes in history, directly or indirectly, to accomplish some specific aspect His plan.

Most people associate the day of the Lord with a period of time or a special day that will occur when God's will and purpose for His world and for mankind will be fulfilled. Some scholars believe that the day of the Lord will be a longer period of time than a single day

The phrase "the day of the Lord" is used nineteen times in the Old Testament (Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5:18,20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7,14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi. 4:5) and four times in the New Testament (Acts 2:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10). It is also alluded to in other passages (Revelation 6:17; 16:14).

The Old Testament passages dealing with the day of the Lord often convey a sense of imminence, nearness, and expectation: "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near!" (Isaiah 13:6); "For the day is near, even the day of the Lord is near" (Ezekiel 30:3); "Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand" (Joel 2:1); "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14); "Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is near" (Zephaniah 1:7). This is because the Old Testament passages referring to the day of the Lord often speak of both a near and a far fulfillment, as does much of Old Testament prophecy. Some Old Testament passages that refer to the day of the Lord describe historical judgments that have already been fulfilled in some sense (Isaiah 13:6-22; Ezekiel 30:2-19; Joel 1:15, 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14-18), while others refers to divine judgments that will take place toward the end of the age (Joel 2:30-32; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:1, 5).

Besides being a time of judgment, it will also be a time of salvation as God will deliver the remnant of Israel, forgiving their sins and restoring His chosen people to the land He promised to Abraham (Isaiah 10:27; Jeremiah 30:19-31, 40; Micah 4; Zechariah 13). The final outcome of the day of the Lord will be that "the arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day" (Isaiah 2:17). The ultimate or final fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the day of the Lord will come at the end of history when God, with wondrous power, will punish evil and fulfill all His promises.

The Stubble, the Straw, the Chaff, and the Wheat Genesis Rabbah 83:5

מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה פג סימן ה

ה התבן והקש והמוץ מריבים (מדינים) זה עם זה זה אומר בשבילי נזרעה השדה וזה אומר בשבילי נזרעה השדה אמרו החטים המתינו עד שתבואו הגורן ואנו יודעין בשביל מה נזרעה השדה, באו לגורן ויצא בעל הבית לזרותה הלך לו המוץ ברוח, נטל את התבן והשליכו על הארץ

The stubble, the straw, and the chaff were arguing among themselves. One said, "The field is planted for me," and another said, "The field is planted for me."

The wheat said, "Wait until harvest time, and then you will see for whom the field is planted."

Harvest time came, and the owner went into to the field. He threw the chaff to the wind, tossed the stubble over the earth, burned the straw, and piled the stalks of wheat together. And all who passed by kissed them.

Genesis Rabbah 83: 5

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why do you think the stubble, the straw, and the chaff don't argue with the wheat?

? What could have prompted the stubble, the straw, and the chaff to think that the field was planted for them?

? Why do you think the wheat doesn't argue with the stubble, the straw, and the chaff and just say: "Wait until harvest time, and then you will see for whom the field is planted"?

Note on "The Stubble, the Straw, the Chaff, and the Wheat"

In this fable, the stubble, the straw, and the chaff are the symbols of the nations of the world that argue with Israel (the stalks of wheat) about which nation can boast of its supremacy over the others. Israel responds, "Wait for the day to come (the harvest) and we will see what happens." The response of Israel to the nations of the world and our fable both are related to the following verses: "For, behold, the day comes, it shall burn like an oven; and all the arrogant, and all who do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will not leave them root nor branch" (Malachi 3:19). And "You shall fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the stormy wind shall scatter them; and you shall rejoice in the Lord, and shall glory in the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 41:16).

More Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? What do you think was the social and political reality in the land of Israel, that prompted the author of Genesis Rabbah (a collection of midrashim from form the 6th century) to create our fable?

Marcelo Ferder's Drawing

? In Marcelo Ferder's drawing, the owner of the field is driving a tractor, which certainly wasn't available at the time our fable was composed. What do you think was the intention of the artist by including a tractor in his drawing?

! Wrapping Up

Boasting: the weapon of the weak and vulnerable!

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K-3rd GRADES:

- 1)
What did each one of these plant parts want to prove to the others?
- 2)
What happened to them at the end? Which one was saved and even loved by people who passed by?
- 3)
What does this story show us about bragging to others, especially about something which hasn't even happened yet?

4th- 6th GRADES:

- 1)
What would you say is the moral of this fable?
- 2)
Why do you think some people try to show others that they are more important than anyone else? What usually happens to them?
- 3)
Modesty and humility are characteristics highly valued in Judaism. Give examples of ways people act modestly or humbly. Why do we admire these ways of behaving?

7th- 12th GRADES:

- 1)
Even though the story seems to point to the wheat stalks as the definite winner of the argument, how do we also view the role of the chaff, the stubble, and the straw? What value do they have in life?
- 2)
How do you deal with people who are overly confident in themselves without taking away all their self-confidence?
- 3)
The midrash this fable is connected to tells of the destruction of the enemies of the Jewish people and the coming Day of Redemption for them and the world. How do you feel about this? What are other, less violent images of the coming of the Messianic era in our Tanach? How do you understand the fact that the Jewish people have survived longer than any other people, despite the many attempts to destroy them throughout the ages?

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Pre-Reading Strategy: Provide Background Knowledge

Invite a local farmer to speak about planting; the differences among and uses of stubble, straw, chaff, and wheat; and harvesting. In some classrooms, the students grow plants in order to observe the entire process.

Also, use one of the vocabulary exercises previously mentioned to discuss the words: stubble, straw, chaff, wheat, and harvesting.