

Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(33)

The Wild Peas and the Stalks of Wheat
Aggadat Bereshit 23.4 (Buber Ed., p. 48)



Background to the Fable "The Wild Peas and the Stalks of Wheat"



Wild Peas



Stalks of Wheat

? What do you think is special about the wild peas?

? What do you think is special about the stalks of wheat?

The Day of the Lord

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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.

Chosen People



<http://www.wikipedia.org/>

In Judaism, chosenness is the belief that the Jews are a people chosen to be in a covenant with God. In modern day Rabbinical Judaism, the idea is not connected with being the descendants of Jacob as it was in Biblical Judaism, since non-ethnic Jews can become Jews.

The Jewish idea of being chosen is first found in the Torah (five books of Moses) and is elaborated on in later books of the Hebrew Bible. This status carries both responsibilities and blessings as described in the Biblical covenants with God. Much is written about this topic in rabbinic literature.

The chosenness refers to a specific set of responsibilities beyond the 7 Laws of Noah given to all mankind. It is every child of Noah's (non-Jewish person's) responsibility to live by the seven Noahide laws.

Though not held by authority figures of the religious Jews around the world, there are people with the opinion that the acceptance to adhere to the laws and commandments of Judaism make the chosen-ness as one of the Jewish people choosing to be in the covenant with God, and not the other way around. Usual Orthodox thinking states that even completely secular Jews are part of the Jewish nation and are 'full-fledged' Jews.



See also in: <http://www.wikipedia.org/>: Jews as a Chosen People

? What are the challenges intrinsic to the concept of a “chosen people”?

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אגדת בראשית פרק כג.ד

[ד] ד"א וראיתם כיון שרואין את השכינה הן ששין ושמחין וגופן מתגדל ופרין ורבין, שנאמר ועצמותיכם כדשא תפרחנה (ישעי' סו יד). ד"א עצמותיכם כדשא תפרחנה. זש"ה הלא ידעת אם לא שמעת אלהי עולם ה' בורא קצות הארץ לא ייעף ולא ייגע וגו' (שם ישעיהו מ כח), אין לפני הקב"ה יגיעה, אלא בדיבור ברא הב"ה את העולם הזה, ובדיבור הוא עתיד לחדש אותו לעולם הבא. כתיב ויאמר אלהים תדשא הארץ וגו' (בראשית א יא), מיד תוצא הארץ (שם שם בראשית א' יב), אף לעתיד לבא הקב"ה אומר דבר ומיד הכל נעשין, לכך נאמר ועצמותיכם כדשא תפרחנה ונדעה יד ה' את עבדיו וזעם את אויביו (ישעי' סו יד). משל לזונני שאמרו לחיטים, אנו יפין מכם, שעליכם ועלינו המטר יורד, והשמש זורח על שנינו, אמר להן החיטים לא מה שאתם אומרים ולא מה שאנו אומרים, אלא המזרה בא ומפריש אותנו לאוצר, ולכם לעופות לאכילה, כך א"ה וישראל מעורבין כאחת בעולם, שנאמר ויתערבו בגוים וילמדו מעשיהם וגו' (תהלים קו לה), וא"ה אומרים לישראל אנו יפין מכם שעלינו ועליכם השמש זורח, אמרו להם ישראל לא מה שאתם אומרים ולא מה שאנו אומרים, אלא הרי יום בא ואתם יודעין שמכניס את הצדיקים בג"ע ורשעים בגיהנום, שנאמר ורבים מישני אדמת עפר יקיצו אלה לחיי עולם ואלה לחרפות לדראון עולם (דניאל יב ב), לכך נאמר ונדעה יד ה' וגו' (ישעי' שם ס"ו). אותה שעה ושבתם וראיתם.

The wild peas said to the stalks of wheat, “We are more beautiful than you are, even though the dew falls and the sun shines on both of us.”

The stalks answered, “It is not what you say or what we say; when the winnower comes, he will save us and feed you to the birds.”

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Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why do you think the wild peas said to the stalks of wheat “We are more beautiful than you are!”?

? Why do you think the stalks of wheat didn't retort: "We are more beautiful than you are!"?

Note on "The Wild Peas and the Stalks of Wheat"

This fable is very similar to the previous one. The stalks of wheat symbolize the people of Israel, while the wild peas symbolize the nations of the world among whom Israel lived as an oppressed people. This condition of oppression and misery incited the gentiles to ridicule the Jews for considering themselves the Chosen People. Our fable deals with this situation and with the response of the Jews to it.

Marcelo Ferder's Drawing

? Who looks more impressive in Marcelo Ferder's drawing, the wild peas or the stalks of wheat?

More Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Do you think the emphasis on the chosenness of the Jewish people, by the Jews, was a way of dealing with a hostile environment in the Diaspora, or do you think the hostile environment in the Diaspora was a result of the emphasis on the chosenness of the Jewish people by the Jews?

! Wrapping Up

When a "loser" wants to be a "winner" or dealing with "bullies" when you can't win.

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

Because the ideas behind this story and the previous one are so similar, I would make a choice for teachers to use either one of these with the same questions; just substitute the wild peas for the stubble, straw and chaff.

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Pre-Reading Strategy: Provide Background Knowledge

Invite a local farmer to speak about planting: the difference and uses among wild plants and wheat for consumer consumption. The previous fable and this one could easily be taught together. Also, ask the farmer to discuss the "cruelty" of nature, or what seems like cruelty but is the natural order.