



5779 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Shavuot / שבועות

Was the Torah Given in Yerushalayim?

It is generally assumed that Yerushalayim represents the continuity of the Giving of the Torah upon Mount Sinai. In other words, for a variety of reasons God decided to initially give the Jewish people the Torah in an ownerless desert. Only afterwards did the center point of revelation and Torah teaching transition from a lonely mountain in the wilderness to our capital city.

In this context it is enlightening to look at a passage from the Gemara in Ta'anit. The verse in Divrei HaYamim describes the building of the Beit HaMikdash:¹ “And Solomon commenced to build the House of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where He had appeared to his father David.” What is the meaning of the name Mount Moriyah? The Gemara records the following debate:²

What is the meaning of the name Mount [Har] Moriah, the Temple Mount? Rabbi Levi bar Hama and Rabbi Hanina disagree with regard to this matter. One said that the name alludes to the Great Sanhedrin that convened there, as it is the mountain from which instruction [hora'a] went out to the Jewish people. And one said that it is the mountain from which fear [mora] went out to the nations of the world, as this place signifies God's choice of the Jewish people.

The first meaning relates to Yerushalayim's significance as the site of Torah rulings while the second highlights the unique divine revelation upon the mountain.

Rashi, though, records an interpretation he heard regarding the second opinion:

I heard another interpretation: Har HaMoriyah is Har Sinai as there was fear upon the non-Jews at the time of the Giving of the Torah.

According to this tradition, the Gemara identifies Har HaMoriyah as Har Sinai.

The Maharsha, however, notes the difficulty of this approach. After all, the verse itself is clearly discussing the building of the Beit HaMikdash in Yerushalayim and not the giving of the

¹ Divrei HaYamim II, 3:1. Translation from Chabad.org.

² Ta'anit 16a. Translation from sefaria.org.



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Torah at Mount Sinai? Even if the notion of “fear” aptly applies to Mount Sinai, how does this interpretation fit the context of the verse?

The Klausenbinger Rebbe³ answers by citing a midrash⁴ that appearances can be deceiving. While a cursory reading of Tanach and Chazal would indicate that Mount Sinai and Mount Moriyah in Yerushalayim are distinct mountains, in truth they are one and the same. Really, he argues, “Mount Moriyah was uprooted for a temporary period” from Yerushalayim and was placed in the desert for the purposes of the Giving of the Torah. Therefore, Mount Moriyah refers both to the mountain in the desert and the mountain upon which the Beit HaMikdash rests as they are one and the same.

This midrash, though certainly not the majority opinion, demonstrates the centrality of Yerushalayim. According to this approach there is only a single mountain in the world that is truly able to be the site of revelation. Even on a temporary basis, the events of Har Sinai could not have but occurred on God’s true home in this world: Yerushalayim’s Har HaMoriyah.

³ Shut Divrei Yetziv, Chosesh Mishpat siman 92.

⁴ Midrash Tehillim 68:9.