

BS"D Parashat Balak 5784

The fine print of the Jew's right to Israel

Rashi in his opening commentary to Bereisheit quotes the Tanna Rabbi Yitzchak, that although the Torah is our divine Magna Carta – the God-given manifesto constituting the responsibilities (mitzvot), privileges and rights of the Jewish people in our status as His sacred, chosen nation, HaShem began the Torah describing the extraordinary, unprecedented act of creation “ex nihilo” – out of nothing.

And Rabbi Yitzchak explains: HaShem did this in anticipation that in the future (to this very day) the goyim would accuse us of ferocious military aggression when under the leadership of Yehoshua Bin Nun we entered the land and barbarically murdered all the Canaanites (the descendants of Canaan, grandson of Noach) in the 31 city states, and then claimed the land as our sacred possession. Therefore, let the nations know that HaShem created all that exists, including the land area at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea that joins the three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. It was His will to have them live in the land 1000 years; then HaShem repossessed the land and presented it to Am Yisrael forever.

Question: Rabbi Yitzchak's explanation is valid for the verses that deal with creation; but what about the continuation of the book of Bereisheit where the parshiot seemingly have no connection with the challenge of our possession of the land?

After some thought, it dawned on me that every parasha in Bereisheit has to do with our possession of the holy land.

For example, let's consider two seemingly unrelated incidents:

1- Akeidat Yitzchak (the binding of Yitzchak in preparation to be sacrificed at the hands of his father) in parashat Vayeira and,

2- In parashat Lech Lecha, we learn of the first international war when four kings from the east invaded the land, defeated the five kings of Sodom, Amora, Adma, Tzevu'im and Tzohar, and took the citizens captive including Lot, nephew of Avraham. Followed by Avraham's military offensive with his small group of 318 troops who defeated the four kings and released Lot and the others.

I submit:

Torah related incidents are generally centered around a dominant personality with minor side characters entering and exiting the drama.

In the two above mentioned episodes, the dominant character in the binding of Yitzchak could be Avraham who had to hold the knife, or Yitzchak who willingly was about to become a human sacrifice. – With the rescue of Lot from the four kings, it is – once again – Avraham, who fought and saved the captives.

I suggest that in both happenings, Avraham was an essential character; but he was not the dominant one for whom both incidents had to occur.

In both, the dominant personalities for whom each incidence occurred were shadowy figures who stood "behind the curtain", never uttering a word nor performing a challenging physical act; yet **they** were the object of both incidents, not Avraham.

Explanation:

HaShem promised Avraham, and through him to the Jewish nation for all time, that the external sign of the eternal bond between the Creator and the Jewish people would be the Land of

Israel. Empires, nations and religions would attempt to sever the bond by ripping the land from the Jews, but HaShem would always restore the people to the land.

However, HaShem "had a problem" that needed fixing.

HaShem is pure justice, and cannot falter in any way, even in dealing with mortal man. There were two individuals with halachic and moral claims to the land that prevented the smooth transfer of ownership to Avraham and his descendants.

The first was Avraham's son Yishmael, who at Avraham's demise would inherit at least half of the holy land. And then there was Lot, who although only a nephew, had a moral claim to part of the land, having been Avraham's faithful helper for many years.

HaShem will not just sever them from their rightful legitimate claims. It had to be done in another manner. The way to clear the path for Am Yisrael to be the sole possessor of the entire holy land, is for both Yishmael and Lot to voluntarily sever themselves from all connection with Avraham, spiritually and materially. But how could this be done?

Enter the episodes of the four kings and later on the Akeida.

When word reached Avraham that Lot was in captivity, he organized his militia of 318 men, attacking and defeating the four kings, and freeing the captives.

The Torah relates the meeting between Avraham and the king of Sodom, where Avraham refuses to accept any payment for his actions. At this meeting the name of Lot is not mentioned as a participant, but he was certainly there. So, the scenario was that Avraham and the king were discussing the results of the war, and Lot is the additional participant. At that moment Lot has before him a dilemma: to return to the family of Avraham and a life of kedusha, or return to Sodom where he would be elevated to the high position as chief Justice? In the

following verses we see Lot returning to the evil city of Sodom.

In making that decision, Lot abrogated all of his connection to Avraham, including his claim to Eretz Yisrael. Lot does not utter a word, but by his return to Sodom and leaving Avraham he severed all his connection with the Jewish nation.

From here I submit that the entire drama of that international war, with its many dead and wounded, occurred only to forge the moment when Lot severed his connection with the sanctity of Avraham.

Similarly, in the Akeida episode Avraham's faith in HaShem is tested. He leaves Chevron with his sons Yitzchak and Yishmael and with his servant of many years, Eliezer.

After three days, they arrived at a place from which they could see the future Temple Mount, where only Avraham knew that Yitzchak would be placed on an altar and sacrificed. The Torah relates that Avraham instructs Yishmael and Eliezer to wait – with the animals while he and Yitzchak make their way to the Mount.

Yishmael sees his father and younger brother about to leave toward the Mount. He knows that something is amiss. There is a knife, wood and fire, but where is the animal to be sacrificed? He realizes what is about to happen on the Mount. At that precise moment Yishmael, as the first born, had two choices: to call out "Abba, not Yitzchak, but me. I am the first son and the holier one. I am the preferred son for spiritual matters. Free Yitzchak and take me!" But Yishmael remains silent with the animals as Avraham and Yitzchak proceed to the appointed act of sacrifice.

At that moment by his silence Yishmael voluntarily severed all ties with his father's spiritual and material life, including partnership in the symbol of the holy bond – Eretz Yisrael.

With the claims of Yishmael and Lot invalidated, the way was clear for HaShem to present the land solely to the Jewish people, forever.

But not so fast; there is yet one more contender for ownership of the land – Aisav, who will share the land with Ya’akov his twin, on the death of Yitzchak their father. Aisav, too, must voluntarily sever his connection with the sanctity of Am Yisrael. Where do we find this act?

In last week's parasha, Chukat, the nation arrives at the border of the land of Edom, possessed by the descendants of Aisav. Moshe sends a message to the king stressing the point that they are “brothers” and the Jews wish only to pass through the area of Edom, on their way to Eretz Yisrael. The Edomites refuse and greet the Jews with their entire army. By doing so they reject Moshe's statement that the Jews and the Edomites are “brothers”; so, there is no longer a connection between them, thereby forfeiting all claims to the holy land.

Now let's jump 3000 years to our time.

Hamas, Hezbollah, and all the others that claim to be connected to Yishmael are demanding the land of Yisrael in contradiction to the fact that Yishmael severed all ties with Avraham, including any rights to the holy land.

The nations of the world who support these Arabs have no interest in what is written above, but in the Shamayim the truth lies in the “little letters” of the contract.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5784/2024 Nachman Kahana