



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Shmini / רשת שמיני / 5779

God's Choice of Yerushalayim

In this week's parsha we read about the dramatic culmination of the months long process of building the Mishkan with the descent of the Divine Presence into the Mishkan. Why did God choose to descend in this particular structure at this particular time? The midrash seems to address this question as follows:¹

Rabbi Shimon b. Yochai opened: "He stood and meted (וימדד) out to the earth" (Chavakuk 3:6). God measured all of the nations and only found that the generation of the desert was fitting to receive the Torah... God measured all of the cities and only found that Yerushalayim was fitting for the Beit HaMikdash. God measured all of the lands and only found that the Land of Israel was fitting to be given to the Jewish people.

This midrash recounts that before each of God's choices, he surveyed the entire array of options and then finally decided upon a particular nation or place.

While this midrash expounds a little bit on God's decision making process, it conceals a great deal. What was worthy about the Jewish people Yerushalayim and the Land of Israel? What factors or qualities did God find in them such that He chose them?

Perhaps the opening verse from Chavakuk provides us with a clue. In chapter one of Chavakuk, the prophet challenges God's system of justice:²

O Lord! How long will I cry and You will not hear! I cry out to You of violence, and You will not save! Why do You show me iniquity... Therefore Torah is slackened, and justice does not go out forever, for a wicked man surrounds the righteous; therefore, justice emerges perverted.

Chavakuk offered a strong challenge to God's decisions.

The third and final chapter of the book begins with a "prayer of Chavakuk the prophet concerning the errors." Apparently, Chavakuk overstepped boundaries and offered too audacious a

¹Vayikra Rabbah 13:2.

² Chavakuk 1:2-4.



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rebuke of God.³ The chapter then proceeds to outline God's love for the Jewish people and His general greatness. While the verses are riveting, Chavakuk never seems to address his original issue: God's seemingly unfair decisions.

It seems that by recounting God's greatness and activities, Chavakuk was expressing the notion that we will never understand God's ways. While He wants to try to understand Him as much as humanly possible, at a certain point we have to recognize that God is God and He and His thought processes transcend this world.

Perhaps this is the reason that a verse from this chapter is cited in the above Midrash. Why did God choose Yerushalayim as His permanent abode? One can come up with a list of reasons. However, ultimately, we need to recognize the fact that God's choices transcend human logic. We will never fully understand God's attraction to Yerushalayim. But that does not make it any less powerful. We know it to be true. We feel it in our bones. God's choice of Yerushalayim transcends any earthly and finite rationale or reason and instead is rooted in the deep, unchanging and eternal mysteries of God.

³ See Rashi to Chavakuk 3:1.