

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Parashat Noach/ פרשת נח

The King of the World Chooses a City

The beginning of the Torah seems to have a universalistic bent. Adam and Chava are the parents of “all living people”¹ and there are no specific nations until the dispersion engendered by the Tower of Bavel. The blessings, curses and covenants established between Hashem and humans in the first two parshiyot of the Torah are applicable to all of humanity equally. The first Jew, Avraham, only appears at the end of this week’s parsha and is only chosen to be the progenitor of a nation at the beginning of parshat Lech Lecha.

The same universalism seems to be true regarding geography as well. Once Adam and Chavah are banished from Gan Eden, there does not seem to be a special location in which God is more accessible than other locales. The Land of Israel does not feature in these early narratives in the least.

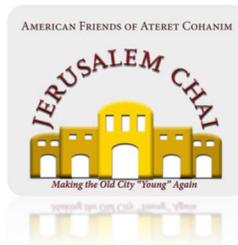
With this background in mind, it is fascinating to look at a series of subtly subversive verses in the haftorah of parshat Noach. Yeshayahu addresses Yerushalayim, and exclaims that the “barren woman” will burst out in song at the sight of her children returning in the end of times. This jubilation is increased by the knowledge that her estranged husband, God, is returning as well:²

Fear not, for you shall not be ashamed, and be not embarrassed for you shall not be put to shame, for the shame of your youth you shall forget, and the disgrace of your widowhood you shall no longer remember. For your Master is your Maker, the Lord of Hosts is His name, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, shall be called the God of all the earth.

God is described in this passage as the God of all of the Hosts and all of the earth, similar to the impression that one would receive from reading the first two parshiyot of the Torah. One would

¹ Bereishit 3:20.

² Yeshayhu 54:4-5.



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think that He would not care to focus on one small city in a corner of the Middle East. However, Yeshayahu emphasizes that this is not the case. Despite the dizzying general grandeur and sovereignty of God, he chooses to focus on this one city of Yerushalayim and take her as His “bride.”

This same theme is expressed a few pesukim later. God promises Yerushalayim that despite their past estrangement he will never abandon her again. As an analogy to the strength of this promise, God invokes the waters of Noah:³

With a little wrath did I hide My countenance for a moment from you, and with everlasting kindness will I have compassion on you," said your Redeemer, the Lord. "For this is to Me [as] the waters of Noah, as I swore that the waters of Noah shall never again pass over the earth, so have I sworn neither to be wroth with you nor to rebuke you.

In this passage, God takes a universal covenant that exists for all of humanity and uses it to express the depth of His connection to a particular city.

When one reads the parsha and haftorah in light of each other a delicate message emerges. God cares about all of humanity wherever they are on the globe. However, even in the midst of God’s comprehensive sovereignty, He showers special love and attention to a particular people and a particular city. Similarly, even as we travel the world and are awed by the beauty and charm of different locales, we should never forget that God has chosen a small city on a hilltop in southern Israel to be His capital city.

³Ibid 8-9.