



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayishlach / פרשת וישלח 5779

The Safe Yerushalayim

A running theme of Ramban's commentary to this week's parsha is how every aspect of Ya'akov's encounter with Esav prefigures the Jewish people's future relationship with its enemies. For example, before meeting Esav, Ya'akov splits his family into two camps, reason that "If Esav comes to one camp and strikes it down, the remaining camp will escape."¹ Ramban explains that this is a pattern throughout Jewish exile. Whenever one kingdom begins to persecute the Jews within its boundaries, there is always another Jewish community that lives in (relative) peace and ensures continuity of the Jewish nation.²

Ramban cites a midrash as support:

If Esav comes to one camp and strikes it down: these are our brothers of the South. "The remaining camp will escape: "these are our brothers in exile."

In the times of the midrash, the Romans persecuted those Jews who lived in the Land of Israel, and particularly those in the South of the land which includes Yeurshalayim. It was the Jews in Bavel who lived in peace that ensured a strong and robust Jewish community.

While in the times of the midrash it was the Land of Israel and Yerushalayim that were the dangerous locations, at the end of history the tides have turned. During the years of Nazi ascent and consolidation of power, one leading Torah personality discussed the disturbing Nazi actions and rhetoric with the Chafetz Chaim.³

In response, the Chafetz Chaim said that even while the Nazis could inflict much hurt on the Jewish people, they will never be able to fully actualize their plant to annihilate the Jewish people as the Torah says in this week's parsha: "the remaining camp will escape." The visiting rabbi asked

¹ Bereishit 32:9.

² Ramban, ibid.

³ Chafetz Chaim on the Torah, parshat Vayishlach.



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the Chafetz Chaim as to the whereabouts of this “camp” that would remain safe. The Chafetz Chaim responded by citing a verse in Ovadya:⁴ “And on Mount Zion there shall be a remnant, and it shall be holy.”

It is needless to say that the Chafetz Chaim was correct. Not only did the fledgling community in the Land of Israel and Yerushalayim survive the war, but it became the cornerstone of the rebuilding of the Jewish people after the Holocaust. Nowadays, it is Mount Zion – Yerushalayim – that is the safe space that ensures Jewish continuity and thriving.

Let us thank God that we live in a time that Yerushalayim is the center of the Jewish world, ensuring and enabling the furthering of the Jewish people’s divine mission!

⁴ Ovadya 1:17.