



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Noach / פרשת נח

Babylonian Jewry and Yerushalayim

The Midrash Tanchuma uses the opening of parshat Noach as a springboard to sing the praises of the Oral Torah.¹ After commenting that the “offsprings of Noach” mentioned at the beginning of the parsha refers to Noach’s righteousness and good deeds, the midrash notes that from all of the nations of the world, God chose the Jewish people and gave them the Torah in order for each and every Jew to be able to create such “offsprings.”²

The midrash then describes how the covenant with God was made regarding the Oral Torah and how through studying it one can reach the pinnacles of connection to God. However, this process takes years of painstaking and intense study and is thus not for the weak of heart or those who want to indulge in the pleasures of this world.

Due to the importance of studying the Oral Torah, the midrash then discusses the ideal setting in which this Torah is to be studied. This is the most famous section of this midrash as it extols the virtues of the yeshivot in Babylonia. According to the midrash, at the beginning of the Babylonian exile the Torah scholars of the Jewish people were forced to emigrate to Babylonia where they established these yeshivot.

These yeshivot have been functioning from that time all the way until the Talmudic and Ge’onic periods without stop or interruption. As opposed to their brethren in the Land of Israel, Babylonian Jewry had not experienced Greek or Roman persecution, allowing these yeshivot to flourish as bastions of the Oral Torah. In short, this midrash is an extended praise of the Babylonian yeshivot.

In this context it is fascinating to note the way that the midrash frames these yeshivot. They are the present powerhouses of Torah, but not the eternal one. The midrash explains that originally

¹ Midrash Tanchuma Noach, siman 3.

² This follows the explanation of the midrash found <http://www.mercazharav.org.il/default.asp?pg=3&id=486>.



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the center of Torah was Yerushalayim – “for out of Zion Torah will emerge.”³ It was only due to Jewish sins that the Torah scholars were exiled from Yerushalayim and found a temporary – albeit centuries long – home in the yeshivot of Babylonia.

Similarly, at the end of history, these yeshivot are destined to end. The midrash concludes that while some places in exile are a safe haven and the temporary homes for the Divine Presence, they are not the ultimate setting for Jewish history. In the end of times, the midrash says:

From there they ascend to Yerushalayim, as the verse states, ‘and the saviors will arise from Mount Zion’ and at that time ‘God will have the kingship.’

As great as they are, the yeshivot of Babylonia represent an exilic existence. The very midrash that extols their virtues also notes that the ultimate capital of Torah is the city of Yerushalayim. May we merit the full actualization of this destiny.

³ Yeshayahu 2:3.