

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

THEMES AND IDEAS IN THE HAFTARAH

Yeshivat Har Etzion

This haftara series is dedicated in memory of our beloved Chaya Leah bat Efrayim Yitzchak (Mrs. Claire Reinitz), *zichronah livracha*, by her family.

BEREISHIT

REDEMPTION AS CREATION

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The *haftara* for *Parashat Bereishit* (*Yeshayahu* 42:5-43:10)[1] is taken from the chapters of consolation in the book of *Yeshayahu*, and is a continuation of the series of prophecies that began with the prophecy of "Comfort, My people, comfort them, says the Lord" (*Nachamu*) (*Yeshayahu* 40). Thus, the *haftara* presents the creation from the unique perspective of a prophecy of consolation, in a manner that is different from the way that the creation is presented in *Parashat Bereishit*. We will, therefore, open with an examination of the aim of creation as found in the *haftara* and how the *haftara* relates to our *parasha*, and then see how the *haftara* fits in to the chapters of consolation and redemption.

THE AIM OF CREATION IN *PARASHAT BEREISHIT*

Throughout *Parashat Bereishit*, the story of creation is related to us from the perspective of "These are the generations of the heaven and of the earth when they were created" (*Bereishit* 2:4) – that is to say, creation is presented together with its ramifications upon the created world. The perspective of the first chapter of the book of *Bereishit* is primarily cosmological. It focuses on the creation of the world of nature, with its fixed laws, its internal hierarchy and ceaseless periodicity. What occupies the Torah is the establishment of this order and the assignment of blessings and roles to the different species. We are presented with the world of nature in all its majesty, with the animal and plant kingdoms contained therein, and this is what stands at the heart of the story. The Divine image bestowed upon man helps him gain dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the rest of creation. The natural order presented in the chapter provides the ruling species, headed by man, with the capability of conquering and ruling over nature. At the end of each day, God reflects upon what He did that day and sees it as good. The daily and week-end summary of creation finds expression in God's examination of His work, God

primarily manifesting Himself as "maker of heaven and earth." God creates the world, and the earth's inhabitants derive benefit from it and use it.

In the second chapter the picture indeed changes. Man is no longer just another creature in the world of nature, but rather the unique creature for the sake of which the earth and its fullness were created. In this chapter, we are also presented with the relationship between man and his Maker, which finds expression in God's breathing of life into the nostrils of man, in His worrying about a world that will provide for his needs, in the imposition of the task "to work it and preserve it," and in the concept of the commandment that is cast upon man. All this creates a picture that is very different from the one painted in the previous chapter regarding man's relationship to nature and his status as a unique creature. There is nothing new in what I have said thus far.[2]

Needless to say, in the framework of a *shiur* relating to the *haftarot*, we will not concern ourselves with a comparative analysis of chapters one and two of the book of *Bereishit*, but with an examination of the relationship between the two and the prophecy of Yeshayahu. An examination of the differences between the Torah's depiction and that of the prophet points to the significant difference between them.

THE AIM OF CREATION IN THE *HAFTARAH*

Fundamentally, the Torah's account of creation focuses on man and his world. Whether we examine the matter in the context of nature as in chapter one, or from the perspective of the uniqueness of man and his centrality in creation as depicted in chapter two – either way the Torah's account describes man and his place in creation. God provides man with his needs, He blesses and commands him, and He extends His providence over him. God's role in creation is to worry about man and direct him to his mission, but it is man who is the focus of the story. It is for this reason that Ben Azai declared that "this is the book of the generations of man" (*Bereishit* 5:1) is the great principle of the Torah.

Yeshayahu, in contrast, examines creation and its implications from the perspective of God through a reversal of the roles. While in the book of *Bereishit* it is God who worries about man, Yeshayahu describes man's role as giving glory to the Creator:

Sing the Lord a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth, you that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and their inhabitants. Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits: let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the islands. (*Yeshayahu* 42:10-12)

As we see, singing God's praises and glory is what stands at the heart of man's attitude toward creation. Truth be said, not only does the prophet cast upon man the obligation of giving praise, but he also defines the glory of heaven as the very objective and aim of creation. In one of the *haftarah's* most important verses, which was later discussed at great length by thinkers dealing

with these issues, the prophet declares: "Every one that is called by My name: for I have created him for My glory; I have formed him" (43:7). All of creation was intended solely for the recognition of the relationship between it and God. Thus, the *haftara* opens with the declaration of God as Creator: "Thus says God the Lord, He that created the heavens, and stretched them out; He that spread forth the earth, and that which comes out of it; He that gives breath to the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein" (42:5). And this perforce leads to the conclusion offered by the prophet later in the passage: "I am the Lord, that is My name: and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to carved idols" (42:8).[3]

REDEMPTION BECAUSE OF CONCERN ABOUT THE GLORY OF HEAVEN

Thus far we have pointed to the difference in perspective between the *parasha* and the *haftara*, but this does not exhaust the matter. As was noted earlier, this prophecy is included in the chapters of consolation of Israel, and it is in that context that the *haftara* must be understood. Thus, it seems that the primary objective of the *haftara* is not to teach us that the purpose of creation is the glory of the Creator – though this follows in passing – but rather to demonstrate how the glory of the Creator serves the redemption of Israel.

The idea of redemption because of concern about the glory of heaven is presented by the prophet as a two-fold process. First, Israel is presented by the prophet as God's people – "I the Lord have called you in righteousness, and will keep you, and give you for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations" (42:6) – and thus any impairment of their glory is also an impairment of God's glory. Based on this covenant, the prophet reaches the following conclusion:

I the Lord have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand, and will keep you, and give you for a covenant for the people, for a light of the nations. [Therefore, it falls upon Me] to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. [For] I am the Lord: that is My name: and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to carved idols. (*Yeshayahu* 42:6-8)

The explicit reason offered here for the redemption is that God will not give His glory to another, or His praise to carved idols, and this would be the unavoidable consequence of Israel's non-redemption. The operative conclusion that follows from this is offered several verses later:

The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, He shall stir up ardor like a man of war: he shall cry, indeed, roar; He shall show Himself mighty against His foes. I have a long time held My peace: I have been still and refrained Myself: now will I cry like a woman in travail; I will gasp and pant together. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools. And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These are the things which I have done, and I have not forsaken them. They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in carved idols, that say to the molten images, You are our gods. (*Yeshayahu* 42:13-17)

THE MEANING OF EXILE

In the continuation of the *haftara*,^[4] the prophet feels the need to relate to the question which begs to be asked regarding the very situation of Israel in exile. Were we to look upon creation exclusively from the perspective of *Bereishit*, that is, only from man's position and the degree to which he fulfills the mission assigned to him and the command imposed upon him, then man's reward and punishment in accordance with his actions and his exile in the aftermath of his sins would be self-evident. The world was meant to serve man, and when he fails to fulfill his mission – God reacts accordingly and judges man appropriately. And indeed, at the end of *Parashat Bereishit*, we read how God regretted having created the world and how He decided to destroy it in the wake of man's fall. As was stated, in light of the anthro-centric perspective on the world presented in *Parashat Bereishit*, this response is predictable and corresponds to the inner logic of the *parasha*. It goes without saying that from this perspective the redemption should also come as a result of penitence and good deeds.

If, however, the people of Israel are not promised redemption as a result of their actions, but because their glory is a component of God's glory, then alongside the promise of redemption for the sake of the glory of His name, a question arises regarding the exile: inasmuch as the exile of Israel impairs the glory of God, how could God have allowed for His great name to be impaired?

This is the question that the prophet raises when he asks: "Who gave Yaakov for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers" (42:24), in the wake of his proclamation regarding redemption for heaven's glory. But the answer is forthcoming: "Did not the Lord, He against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they would not walk, and unto whose Torah they were not obedient" (*ibid.*). The people of Israel are indeed God's nation, and thus they will be redeemed, but the relationship of "And I will keep you, and give you for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations" (42:6), obligates them to walk in the ways of God and observe His Torah. Were this not the case, then the fact that the people of Israel are God's nation would in effect be an invitation to sin, and the entire "covenant of the people, for a light of the nations" would become meaningless. On the contrary, precisely because the Jewish people are the nation of God, their actions receive heightened significance and therefore they become liable for exile. Let us not forget that the concept of a covenant includes the notion of mutuality, without which a covenant is meaningless, and it is that mutuality which is violated by sin.

We see then that the prophet presents us with the built-in tension between exile and redemption that follows from the fact that the people of Israel are God's nation. On the one hand, observance of the covenant and the Torah are required of them at the highest level, and that is what makes them liable for exile; on the other hand, the fact that they are God's children is also the strongest guarantee of their redemption. What follows then is that in the short term, their relationship to God increases the likelihood of exile; but in the long term and from a wider perspective, it also guarantees that redemption will come.

In light of this, we must once again analyze the key verse cited above: "Every one that is called by My name: for I have created him for My glory; I have formed him." We explained above

that the verse describes the purpose of creation in general. In truth, however, two exegetical approaches to the verse are found in the biblical commentaries.[5] The first indeed sees the verse as referring to creation in general ("The verse may be interpreted as referring to the entire world" – Radak, in his second interpretation), as we explained above. The second, in contrast, sees "Every one that is called by My name" as referring to Israel and serving as reason for their redemption. Israel will be redeemed because they are God's children, and their glory is His glory. According to this explanation, the verse is not dealing with the purpose of creation, but rather it emphasizes the status of the people of Israel and their relationship to God as part of the promise of redemption.

This process is a process of redemption that follows from seeing the world as the glory of God. This is why the *haftara* of *Parashat Bereishit* does not deal exclusively with the creation in and of itself, but rather integrates it into the prophecies of redemption.

REDEMPTION AS RENEWED CREATION

There is, however, yet another process that Yeshayahu integrates into the framework of his prophecy – seeing the redemption as sort of a renewed creation.

Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth, you that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and their inhabitants. Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits: let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the tops of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the islands. The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, He shall stir up ardor like a man of war: he shall cry, indeed, roar; He shall show Himself mighty against His foes.

I have a long time held My peace; I have been still and refrained Myself: now will I cry like a woman in travail; I will gasp and pant together. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools. And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These are the things which I have done, and I have not forsaken them. They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in carved idols, that say to the molten images, You are our gods. (*Yeshayahu* 42:10-17)

These verses describe the redeemed world as an entirely new reality; God will destroy and wipe out the current world order and replace it with a redeemed world. The song is a new song because the world is a new world. The inhabited wilderness ("Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice") symbolizes the recreated world, for the wilderness is the most primal and desolate area on earth, an uninhabited zone[6] that does not belong to the world of man. To the extent that the created world was given over to man's rule so that he may "work it and keep it" and by force of the blessing to "conquer it," the wilderness is located outside this world, for it is neither worked nor kept nor conquered by man. Yeshayahu's description of the process of redemption as turning the wilderness into an inhabited area with cities[7] is meant to give it the meaning of recreating the world. The idea of settling the wilderness during the period of the redemption as

connected to the principle of a recreated world, is explicitly mentioned in the chapter that precedes our *haftara* (*Yeshayahu* 41:18-20):

I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shitta tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the Arava cypress, maple, and box tree together: that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it. (*Yeshayahu* 41:18-20)

As may clearly be seen in these verses, bringing life to the wilderness is described as a Divine act of creation.[8] The next verses in the *haftara* – "the villages that Kedar inhabits" – also testify to a similar process of settling the nomadic tribes in organized communities.

A most interesting image, which illustrates the *haftara's* understanding of redemption as a process of recreation, likens the redemption to childbirth: "Now will I cry like a woman in travail; I will gasp and pant together."

In the wake of this new "creation," the nations of the world will be obligated to give God glory and honor:

Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits: let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the islands.

We saw above that the appropriate response to renewed creation is offering praise and glory to the Creator, and therefore the song that they will sing is a new song in honor of the new times. Redemption is described not as an improved historical world, but as an altogether new world.

In addition to the elation of spirit afforded by seeing the redemption as a new and smooth beginning vis-a-vis the past, the idea of redemption as creation is of great importance in giving hope to a stricken and afflicted nation. A nation given as spoil – one that is described at the beginning of the *haftara* as a prisoner locked up in jail and as a captive rotting away in a prison house – cannot imagine that the world is capable of changing. Like a prisoner who does not believe that his situation will improve, so too the nation is given to despair and loss of hope. Presenting the redemption as a process of creation attests to the possibility of sudden change. Just as the previous creation created a world *ex nihilo*, so too the redemption can come into the world *ex nihilo*. It can suddenly enter the historical arena through Divine providence, even if its buds are nowhere yet to be found.

The connection, then, between the *haftara* and the *parasha* is sharpened and strengthened. We are not dealing merely with an added perspective on creation or with the tidings of redemption because of the glory of heaven, but with a prophecy that speaks of a recreation of the world that will yet occur in the future. The *parasha*, then, describes the original creation,

whereas the prophet presents the "future creation," and thus completes the idea of creation, as a future that draws on the past.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] According to the Ashkenazi rite. According to the Sefardi rite, the *haftara* ends at *Yeshayahu* 42:21. As a rule, in cases of conflicting customs regarding the *haftara* relating to the same prophecy, the one shortening the *haftara* and the other lengthening it, we will relate to the added section in the longer version as part of the *haftara*.

[2] In this and in the previous paragraph, we have given an exceedingly general and schematic description, ignoring precise and deep analysis. In this we have wronged these two fundamental chapters, but they are not the subject of this *shiur*, and we have brought them only as background in order to better understand the *haftara*.

[3] The importance of the principle of recognizing and offering gratitude to the Creator as the purpose of creation was greatly emphasized by the Ramban in his commentary to *Shemot* 13:17: "The purpose of all the *mitzvot* is that we should believe in our God and thank Him for having created us. This is the purpose of creation, for there is no other reason for the original creation, and the supreme God wants nothing from His creatures other than that man should know and thank his God for having created him."

[4] According to the Ashkenazi rite. According to the Sefardi rite, the *haftara* ends earlier at *Yeshayahu* 42:21.

[5] See Rashi, Radak, and Ibn Ezra *ad loc*.

[6] It is appropriate to cite here Yirmiyahu's description of the wilderness (*Yirmiyahu* 2:6): "Through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and no man dwelt."

[7] *Yeshayahu* spotlights the wilderness as heralding the process of redemption in other places as well. See 35:1-10; 41:18-19; 43:18-20; 51:3. In parallel fashion, his depictions of the destruction speak about cities turning into wilderness; see 19:16-18; 27:10; 50:2-4; 64:9-10; and see also 32:13-18.

[8] It should be noted, however, that there we are talking about changes in nature, the wilderness becoming a place of water and springs. Here we are talking about settlement of the wilderness, and not about changes in its very nature. Nevertheless, from the perspective of seeing the world as a place given to man to settle, in the sense of "He did not create it a waste land, He formed it to be inhabited" (*Yeshayahu* 45:18), turning the wilderness into inhabited territory is no less significant than changing its natural climate.

(Translated by David Strauss)

