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THE PROMISE OF ISRAEL AS THE JEWISH STATE

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ABSTRACT: Gn12-06 through Gn13-07 contains the prophetic proclamation by God to the Patriarch Abraham, that Israel, would become the Jewish state and given to his descendants. An array of commenters on Gn12-06d, and Gn13-07a shed light on the politics of this promise. We find that Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, a city originally devoted to Priesthood and the service of God, was serviced by the descendants of *Shem* (Rashi). However, already in Abraham's time, the Canaanites from the *Cham* branch of Noah's children, a tribe-like conglomeration of gypsy-type shepherds, had pushed other inhabitants out so their flocks could graze on the land (*Ramban*). The Canaanites were joined by the similar tribes, the Prizites (meaning *spreaders*) and Emorites (meaning *branchers*) who overtook the land, stayed for a year or two till the pasture was depleted, and then spread and moved on (*Ramban*). We in fact find similar political-geographic concerns later in the bible recording how disputes over wells (similar to pasture) emerged (Hoffman). Abraham was in fact cautious about his stay in a land of tribes that took people over, and was worried that despite the abundance of pasture, the tribes would spread and branch out to where he was. This concern was exasperated by Lot's shepherds who didn't stop their sheep from wandering into other fields, a behavior that might warrant more aggressive ousting behavior (death vs vanquishing) when the gypsy tribes came. After Abraham separated from Lot, who had interpreted the Divine promise for future inheritance as implying current inheritance, more details of the inheritance of Israel were given to Abraham, including the breadth of the promise (entirety of Israel), as well as a more detailed reason for him not acquiring now (because the corruption of the Canaanite axis was still at a moderate level).

OVERVIEW

Noah's children defined three branches of the world civilizations, a classification which holds today also: There is *cham*, literally *hot-headed*, referring to what today we call the 3rd world nations, characterized by extreme emotion and lack of prolonged planning and creation; *Yefeth* literally, *beauty*, referring to what today we refer to the cultured nations specializing in the arts such as music, literature, and the like; and *Shem*, literally people of *Name*, referring to the more advanced cultures which have an organized religion, recognized status and name, and integrate well with the *culture* nations. Of course, today this classification reflects mingling as elements of all three civilizations are often found together.

The Bible already witnesses, that Jerusalem, the Capital of Israel, was serviced by Priests, from the *Shem* (religion) branch of Noah. Apparently, already in Abraham's time, 3rd world nations had overtaken it. These nations were really gypsy-like tribes; they might occupy territory for a year or two till the land was depleted and then move on. As they spread and branched out, they displaced the former inhabitants (*Ramban*, Gn13-07).

In passing, the idea of letting land rest so it could be reused was unknown in those days and in fact partially introduced by Joseph (Gn41), and later institutionalized in *Shemitah* and Jubilee laws (Lv25). Similarly, the idea that a principal driver of territorial disputes was the resource of the land itself is found elsewhere in the Bible such as with Isaac; there the concern was not grazing land but the availability of water (Hoffman). Most interestingly, Isaac, saw some legitimacy in their requests and he simply moved on till sufficient water for both him and the former country he lived in were found (Gn26-16:22).

With this background, we can more fully understand and appreciate that God prophetically appeared to Abraham and promised him a *return* of Israel to the Religion-nation component of civilization.

FEAR OF A CANAANITE TAKEOVER

However, there were complications with the prophecy in that it was a promise for the future. Currently, the Canaanite conglomeration occupied Israel. This created fears and concerns in Abraham about a takeover should he remain there for a long period (*Ramban*). We find similar territorial disputes between Isaac and the shepherds of *Gerar*, albeit there it was

about the availability of water, not of pastureland (Gn26). *Ramban* for example points to the parallelistic contrast between Gn12-06 and Gn12-07, one of which simply says that Abraham built an altar as an expression of gratitude to God for the prophecy that the land will be returned to him while Gn12-07 adds to the building of altars that Abraham actively did outreach to worshipping God. *Ramban* explains that Abraham felt uncomfortable in Canaan and didn't fully do everything he wanted to do there.

Ramban, makes a similar statement of Abraham's fear of takeover at Gn13-07. Perhaps he was motivated (Hoffman) by the contrast that Gn12-06 only speaks about the Canaanite tribes while Gn12-07 speaks about the Canaanites and Prizites which etymologically correspond to the general class of gypsy-type wanderers and *spreaders*. We don't know the exact relation of the Canaanites and Prizites: Perhaps it was two names (referring to two aspects) of one tribe (*Ibn Ezra*); or perhaps it was a new tribe that had just joined them (*Shadal*). *Ramban* gives more specifics: As indicated earlier these tribes would stay in a land for a year or two and then move on. At the time of Gn13-07, *Ramban* suggests that the tribes were south of Abraham making it likely that their next move would be to where he was.

CONCERNS ABOUT THE PRACTICES OF LOTS' SHEPPARDS

A contributing further concern of Abraham was the practices of Lot's shepherds something explicitly indicated in the cryptic verse, *there was a dispute between Abraham's and Lot's shepherds*. While we are not told what the dispute was Rashi uses *paragraph structure* analysis noting that:

- * The verse explicitly brings in Canaanite-Prizite presence as a reason relating to the dispute
- * A verse after the incident (Gn13-14) indicates that only *After Lot separated did God complete the prophecies to Abraham about the return of Israel to the Religion component of civilization*
- * Although no commenter mentions this explicitly, the biblical text explicitly notes that Abraham could not return to Israel for occupation *until the corruption (sin) of the Emorites had been completed* which might take 400 years (Gn15-15). The word *Emorite* from the root *amir* means *branch* and like the Prizites, *the spreaders*, could refer to a component of the gypsy-like bands that *branched out* as they spread. It is reasonable that in pushing current inhabitants out various war-crimes were committed; however, since the goal of these tribes was not conquest of people but obtaining grazing land, their corruption was not yet complete.

From these points we may infer as Rashi does (Gn13-17a) that the Abraham-Lot dispute was about the prophecy of future return to Israel. Lot interpreted that prophecy as being active now so that he wouldn't mind if his shepherds wandered into other fields. Abraham understood the prophecy was for the future after the corruption of the Emorites was complete. Thus, God did not tell Abraham the full story since Lot misinterpreted these prophecies; rather God waited until *after* Lot departed to complete the prophecies.

Abraham's concern about Lot's practices was coupled to fear of a takeover by the gypsy tribes. They would treat current occupants differently depending on whether the occupants were minding their own business or freely entered other's fields. They for example might be more aggressive if occupants would go into other fields. We find that Jacob in his disputes with non-Jewish owners emphasized honesty and most probably this was an important factor in how he was treated (Gn31-37:42)

Before leaving this aspect of Abraham's fear we should deal with two points. First, *Ramban* expresses surprise that Lot thought the prophecies to Abraham's descendants to return Israel to him, should apply to Lot who was a nephew not a descendant. But the *Torah Temimah* explains that Abraham was currently childless and in the absence of children, inheritance would go to the nearest relative, in this case, Lot. Thus, Lot's expectation that he would inherit the land was very realistic.

Second, we should deal with whether Rashi's observation is *peshat*, the straightforward meaning of the text, *deep reading*, of simply *homily*. In my doctoral thesis [1] and on my website [2], I point out that the grammatical rules of paragraphs are an exegetical standard for the establishment of the *peshat*. To defend this, I note that European countries, and Great Britain (as does the U.S.) all assess reading literacy as say a prerequisite for citizenship; this reading literacy is divided into 6 stages. Stage C includes the ability to recognize non-explicit inferences from a paragraph structure. If the paragraph structure of Gen 12:06-13:17 says that certain things happened *after* Lot parted and emphasizes that the dispute happened while the Canaanites were current inhabitants, it becomes reasonable and expected that the reader

should connect these: Lot thought the land belonged to him now. Such questions are routine on all reading literacy tests; they reflect that such inferences are the straightforward meaning of the text which literate readers are supposed to be able to infer.

CONCLUSION

We critically examined the prophetic promise of the return of Israel to Abraham's descendants. We have shown that this was a prophecy for the future and there were concerns about staying in the land while the Canaanites were still there. In reviewing these passages, we have integrated and summarized numerous commentaries. This review reflects our belief that the primary aspect of multiple commenters is not disagreement and diverse points of views but complementary support and explanation by which a holistic view of the text emerges. We will continue to espouse this viewpoint in future issues of *Essays* as it greatly enhances our understanding of the text.

NOTES

[1] Russell Jay Hendel, **The Dynamics of Peshat and Derash in Rashi**, Doctoral Thesis, Chicago, Ill: The Spertus Institute, Dr. Dean Bell Advisor, 2020-2022, accessible at <http://www.Rashiyomi.com/Rashibook.htm>; Chapter 1

[2] Russell Jay Hendel; The Rashi Website, http://www.Rashiyomi.com/The_Rashi_Database_Project.htm See especially the one-pager on paragraphs, <file:///C:/Users/drrus/Desktop/Website/Paragraphs.pdf>