

THE YISHMAELIAN EXILE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

"Get up, and pick up the boy. Hold onto him for I will make him into a great nation." (Bereishis 21:18)

Personally, I think that it is such a proof of the Divine origin of Torah, for those in search of one. There are many, for the reasonable mind, but in my opinion, this is one of the best, because it really shows the prophetic nature of Torah in such an empirical manner; very few prophecies, to date, have come true as clearly as this one.

In last week's parshah, after the angel found Hagar in the desert after fleeing the harshness of her mistress, it told her:

"You are pregnant, and you will give birth to a son. You will call him Yishmael, because God has heard your affliction. He will be a wild man, and his hand will be against everyone, and the hand of everyone against him. Yet, he will dwell over all of his brothers." (Bereishis 16:11-12)

He will be one who loves deserts, to hunt animals, as it says, "He dwelt in the desert and became an archer" (Bereishis 21:20) . . . He will be a bandit . . . All hate him and attack him . . . His offspring will be very great. (Rashi)

Even those who wish to deny the Divine origin of Torah, have to agree that the Torah is at least 2,000 years old. After all, Christianity, which is over 2,000 years old, based itself upon the Torah, which they call the "Old Testament," and they had no problem believing that the Torah was given by God to the Jewish people.

However, 2,000 years ago, the Arab world had yet to really become a nation, and Islam did not yet exist. It would take another 600 years for the Arab world to create a religion of their own, and even longer to become bold enough to try and export their religion to the rest of the world. Any prophecies the Torah made about Yishmael and his descendants were recorded long before it was clear to anyone what kind of people Yishmael would become, and how he would eventually affect the world.

Historically, the Arab world is kind of reverse culture. In the beginning, as they started to exert their influence on the rest of the world, their culture was one of the more advanced of the time. They were certainly, for the most part, more tolerant of the Jewish people than the Christian world was in Europe, even turning to Jews for the expertise and wisdom to help run their national affair (as long as they accepted their position as second-class citizens).

On the other hand, while as the gentile world of Europe evolved and became relatively more civil and technologically advanced, the Arab world did not. On the contrary, over time, Islam seems to have become more dogmatic and forceful in their ways, turning its back on Western education with the firm belief that it is the life of the infidel. The Christian world, for the most part, has learned to adapt, and even integrate modernity into its approach to life (if only for pragmatic reasons).

Not only this, but as much as some have tried over the ages to romanticize the Arab world, there is little today that is romantic about Arab culture. One need only watch news clips of prominent Arab speakers and religious leaders, or read articles about Islamic life in just about every Arab country, to see how much emphasis is placed upon hating non-Muslims, and taking violent action against them.

While many Christian religious leaders may remain anti-Semitic today, when they preach from the pulpit, at least in public, it is usually about learning lessons from the Bible about how to become a better human being.

They speak of loving one's neighbor as oneself, and of being more charitable, and rarely call for the death of another group of people. However, when Muslim religious leaders get their chance to speak, they are consumed with hatred for the Jews and the Western world, and call for an end to both. Everyone else beyond their world is an infidel, and must either convert or pay with their lives, and they have committed their lives to this end and cajole their followers to do the same.

After all, who is the most feared people today? Which is the staunchest religion at this time? Which one condones and recklessly calls for Jihad, and gets line-ups of people prepared to respond to such calls with their own blood, and that of countless innocent civilians who get in their way? And whose royal leaders live opulent lives, even stepping over religious boundaries of their own, while their masses live in abject poverty?

(Arafat's wife, ysv"z, remains a billionaire in France, while Palestinians, to whom the money actually belongs, go jobless and hungry.) Saudi Arabian leaders live the lives of the fabulously wealthy, including wild parties and pure gold faucets in bathrooms, while their people forage for their daily bread. The excesses are beyond belief, and certainly beyond anything imaginable by (most) Western leaders.

Then there are the blaring inconsistencies. Arab women will completely cover their hair, like Orthodox Jewish women do, but they will also wear clothing that only very modern, secular people might wear. In the Torah world, when a woman is strict about the laws of modesty, their families usually are as well. Not so, necessarily, in the Arab world, as a daily bus ride through East Jerusalem reveals. And should a daughter step out of line and try to do something radical like go to Western university, she is more than banned; she becomes the victim of a "mercy killing," even in the West. Hence, though the Torah praises Yishmael at the end of last week's parshah for allowing Bris Milah to be performed on him at the age of 13 (see Rashi), this week's parshah has him trying to murder Yitzchak years later:

Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she bore for Avraham, scoffing. She told Avraham, "Banish that maidservant and her son! The son of that maidservant shall not inherit with my son, with Yitzchak." (Bereishis 21:9-10)

They would go out to a field and [Yishmael] would take his bow and shoot arrows at [Yitzchak]. (Rashi)

An inconsistency? Apparently not for Yishmael, whose culture is full of moral inconsistencies, then and today.

Then there is what the Arabs do to one another, something that has also become more apparent over the last couple of years, especially now in Syria. If any society treats women like second-class citizens, it is Arab society, in which there are probably more unprovoked human rights violations than can be recorded. And they don't even try to hide it, because as far as they are concerned, the opinions of infidels don't make a difference anyhow.

To the advocates of Political Correctness, this is simply Islamophobia. After all, I'm a Jew, and one of the most detested of all Arab enemies today, all of whom contest my right to my land and are prepared to kill me and the rest of my people to make their point. They have successfully turned world opinion against me so of course I can't help but bash Arabs, many a liberal will argue.

Very true. But how many times have I done so over the last 20 years of writing? Almost never. Furthermore, how much have I made up or exaggerated? None. How much can be independently verified by readers? All of it.

Besides, why have I written about this subject at all? Not to make a point about the Arab world, but to make a point about the prophetic nature of Torah. The Torah did not have to go out on such a limb and make predictions about the descendants of Yishmael, or of any other people for that matter. It wasn't a make-or-break topic as far as the Divinity of Torah was concerned back then, and certainly is not one today, so why take the risk?

That's exactly the point. Human authors not only would not have taken such a risk, they probably would not have even thought of it. Only someone who knew the future and what such information would mean down the road would have thought to make such bold and prophetic statements, among the others that only someone with knowledge of the future could make.

It is also interesting that, of all the peoples to have risen and fallen over the last four millennia, our first enemy is also our last enemy. Yes, when it comes to the Jewish people, there are no shortage of enemies, but the most dangerous one today, it appears, is the Arab world, and by extension, Persia—Iran—as well.

Even more interesting is that we are truly brothers from another mother; Avraham was our father as well as theirs. Ya'akov and Eisav were also brothers, twin brothers in fact, with exactly the same parents, and which resulted in a different kind of rivalry. Eisav's descendants did not dispute that

God first chosen the descendants of Ya'akov, they just argued, and rather ruthlessly, that God later changed His mind and chose them instead.

Yishmael, on the other hand, believes that God never chose the Jewish people, just history by mistake. The true heir of Avraham, the believe, was Yishmael, not Yitzchak, and therefore everything that Yitzchak claims for himself really belongs to them, at least when it comes to the Land of Israel, even though, historically, as a religion, they came around much later than the Jewish people.

This, perhaps, is why Golus Yishmael—the Yishmaelian Exile—we seem to be living through was not one of those predicted in either Avraham's or Ya'akov's prophecies of exile. It is not an exile. At least not in the sense of the other four exile that were prophesied: Babylonian, Median, Greek, and Roman, all of which were meant to take us away from our land, even while still living on it.

Then, what is the purpose of Golus Yishmael? To return us to our land. Yishmael, apparently, is meant to cause us to soul-search in order to find out what we believe about ourselves as a people and our land. Clearly he has returned at the end of history, during this time of Kibbutz Golios, to help winnow out Jewish believers from Jewish disbelievers, those of us who are real with Jewish destiny, and those of us who reject it.

You can't get much more primordial than this, and therefore, it is only fitting that the one who challenged us at our beginning be the one who challenges us as the end.

Text

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