

THERE'S GOOD NEWS, AND BAD NEWS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape # 11, Rationing Medical Care. Good Shabbos!

Good News in the Middle of the Tochacha

There is a very long and interesting Ramba"n in this week's Parsha, which attempts to demonstrate that all the terrible things in the Tochacha, those things that the Torah predicts will occur if we do not keep the mitzvos, did indeed happen.

For instance, the Ramba"n says that the verse "G-d will return you to Egypt in boats" refers to the days of Titus when the Jews were loaded onto boats and shipped as slaves to Egypt. The Ramba"n brings many different examples... "The King which you will appoint over yourself..." refers to Agrippa; the pasuk [verse] hints to the fact that he was not worthy of being a King.

Finally, the Ramba"n says that the pasuk [26:32] "I will make desolate the Land, and your enemies who dwell upon it will be desolate" (V'shamemu aleha oyeveichem hayoshvim bah) is not a curse, but rather is a blessing. It is a bit of "good news" in the middle of the bad: the pasuk tells us that our Holy Land will not accept our enemies upon it. The Ramba"n says that this is a great proof of the Divine Hand in action. "For there cannot be found throughout the world a land that had been so good and fertile (which now became so desolate and inhospitable)".

If you want to be a Believer, says the Ramba"n, all you have to do is look at Eretz Yisroel. Look what happened there for 2000 years when it was occupied by Romans and by Arabs and by Turks and by the British.

It had previously been a beautiful and fertile land, but under foreign dominion it became the most desolate. The Torah assured us that from the day we left Eretz Yisroel the land would not accept any other nation or populace. They all tried to settle it, but none were successful.

This is the meaning of what the Torah says, "Your enemies will be desolate upon it". No nation will ever be successful at inhabiting Eretz Yisroel, except Klal Yisroel [The Jewish Nation].

What would happen if the Indians came to the Federal Government and said, "We made a silly mistake 200 years ago. We sold Manhattan Island to you at a rock bottom price -- \$24. We realize that you're entitled to a profit, so we'll give you \$48 for Manhattan"? Or even if they would offer 48 million dollars! Or 48 billion dollars! Guess what? There would be no sale. What has happened to Manhattan Island in those 200 years? Considering its value now, there is no way the Government would ever give it back.

Imagine if other nations had been successful in making Eretz Yisroel profitable. Imagine if in 1948, it was a beautiful and productive land. Would they have consented to returning it to the Jewish People? But as the Ramba"n says, they were not able to develop the land. In 1948, when we came to ask, "Can we have the land back?" those in power may have thought, "Do you mean that strip of land that's hard like iron, in which nothing grows? Are you talking about that worthless strip of land in the middle of the desert? Good Luck with it!" This is Divine Providence, as promised by the Torah in this week's parsha.

I have always wondered - if one examines the Middle East -- Saudi Arabia has oil, Quatar, Iraq, Yemen all have oil, every country has oil. Even Egypt has oil. How is it that from our Holy Land, the choicest of all lands, we can not squeeze a drop of oil? Is this "the Eyes of the L-rd are upon it from the start of the year to its end?"

But what would have been in 1948, if the British were sitting on a Saudi Arabia? What would have been if they were sitting on Kuwait? Obviously they would not have been so eager to give black gold to the Jews. This is part of "Your enemies will be desolate upon it."

The upshot of all of this is that if we seek a lesson in Emunah, if one is unimpressed with all the other miracles and wonders that G-d has done... Just look at this Ramba"n, just look at this Pasuk, just look at that Land. If one's eyes are open, one will see the Hand of G-d and His Divine Providence upon us and upon all the Jewish people.

Glossary

Chutz L'Aretz -- Outside the Land (of Israel)

Tochacha -- (Section of the Torah dealing with) rebuke (for sins)

Emunah -- Belief (in G-d)

Hashgocha Prottes -- Personal Divine Providence

Personalities and Sources

Ramba"n -- Rav Moshe ben Nachman (1194-1270); Spain; Eretz Yisroel.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. Many of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Behar / Bechukosai are provided below:

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