

Parashat Vayishlach 5778, 2017:

*“And the Kingdom Will Be Hashem’s”*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzhak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina and Chaya Mindel bat Leah Basha, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

This week’s *haftarah* is *Sefer Ovadiah*. Its final verse is particularly well-known, since it is recited every day immediately prior to *Yishtabach* in *Tefilat Shacharit* (Morning Prayers): “And saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, and the L-rd shall have the kingdom (*hamelucha*).” (This, and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) It is preceded by a *pasuk* (verse) from *Sefer Tehillim*: “For the kingship (*hamelucha*) is the L-rd’s, and He rules (*moshale*) over the nations,” (22:29) and is followed by a well-known statement of the prophet Zechariah: “And the L-rd shall become King (*melech*) over all the earth; on that day shall the L-rd be one, and His name one.” (14:9)

By deploying the terms, “*hamelucha*” and “*melech*,” these three *pasukim* present one of Judaism’s essential theological principles, namely, the universal kingship of the Almighty. It is crucial to note, however, that they are not describing the world as we know it; instead they are referring to the Messianic period when all mankind will finally recognize the truth of Hashem’s existence and His incomparable power and glory. A crucial aspect of this soon-to-be realized time is famously depicted by the *navi* (prophet) Isaiah:

And a wolf shall live with a lamb, and a leopard shall lie with a kid; and a calf and a lion cub and a fatling [shall lie] together, and a small child shall lead them. And a cow and a bear shall graze together, their children shall lie; and a lion, like cattle, shall eat straw. And an infant shall play over

the hole of an old snake and over the eyeball of an adder, a weaned child shall stretch forth his hand. (*Sefer Yeshayahu*, 11:6-8)

How are we to interpret these *pasukim*? The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) maintains that all *Nevi'im* (Prophets)-based descriptions of Messianic times must be viewed as metaphoric pronouncements:

Do not presume that in the Messianic age any facet of the world's nature will change or there will be innovations in the work of creation. Rather, the world will continue according to its pattern. Although Isaiah (11:6) states: “The wolf will dwell with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the young goat,” these words are a metaphor and a parable. The interpretation of the prophecy is as follows: Israel will dwell securely together with the wicked gentiles who are likened to a wolf and a leopard, as in the prophecy Jeremiah (5:6): “A wolf from the wilderness shall spoil them and a leopard will stalk their cities.” They will all return to the true faith and no longer steal or destroy. Rather, they will eat permitted food at peace with Israel as Isaiah (11:7) states: “The lion will eat straw like an ox.” Similarly, other Messianic prophecies of this nature are metaphors. In the Messianic era, everyone will realize which matters were implied by these metaphors and which allusions they contained. (*Mishneh Torah, Sefer Shoftim, Hilchot Melachim* 12:1, this, and all *Mishneh Torah* translations, Rabi Eliyahu Touger, underlining my own)

The Ra'avad (Rabbi Avraham ben David, c. 1125-1198) in his critical analyses of the *Mishneh Torah*, strongly disagrees with this position of the Rambam. After all, the Ra'avad contended, did not the Torah explicitly state: “I will remove wild beasts from the Land?” (*Sefer Vayikra* 26:6) If so, how is possible to imagine that the Prophets' words were merely allegorical in nature?

Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch *shlita*, the contemporary Israeli *posek* and former Chief Rabbi of the *Edah HaChareidit* in Jerusalem, suggests that the crux of the *machloket* (argument) between the Rambam and the Ra'avad is to be found in their respective analyses of the phrase, “I will remove wild beasts from the Land.” In Rav Sternbuch's view, Maimonides maintained that the time of the *Mashiach* (Messiah) will be a period wherein “the wild beasts will no longer be able to do harm to mankind.” This, Rav Sternbuch suggests, “is not a change in nature, [since it is inexplicit] rather than manifestly evident to one and all.” He asserts that in contrast, the Ra'avad maintains the literal meaning of the phrase, “I will remove wild beasts from the Land,” i.e. “this means there will longer

be any vicious animals.” In other words, vicious beasts will simply cease to exist. (*Sefer Ta’am v’Da’at, Parashat Bechukotai, 26:6*).

Given our Sages ongoing analysis as to how to understand the true nature of the Messianic period, it is evident that our people have ceaselessly yearned for the coming of the *Mashiach* (Messiah). This passionate longing was given powerful voice in the *Ani Ma’amin* (“I Believe”) section of the *siddur* that follows the standard Morning Prayers: “I believe in complete faith in the coming of the Messiah. And even though he tarries, I nevertheless continue to wait for him each and every day.” (Principle 12, translation my own)

How will we know, however, whether or not he has finally arrived? Here, too, we are fortunate in that we can turn to the Rambam for an answer to this vital question:

King Messiah will arise in the future and return the kingship of David to its former greatness and glory. He will rebuild the Holy Temple and gather all of the exiles to the Land of Israel. All of the laws will be in effect during his days just as they were in earlier times. We will [once again] offer *korbanot* (animal offerings) and keep the laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years just like all of the other laws stated in the Torah. (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 11:1*)

How will we know that the individual who accomplishes each of these holy tasks is indisputably the one and only *Mashiach*? A few *halachot* later, Maimonides provides us with his answer:

If a king will arise from the House of David, who, like his ancestor David, diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its *mitzvot* as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law, and will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of G-d, we may, with assurance, consider him *Mashiach*. If he succeeds in the above, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is definitely the *Mashiach*. (11:4, underlining and emendations my own)

One of our most important tasks as *ovdei Hashem* (servants of Hashem) is to be an *or l’amim* (light unto the nations, *Sefer Yeshayahu 49:6*). Little wonder, then, that our hopes and desires for the

imminent arrival of the *Mashiach* are universalistic ones that encompass a vision of peace for all mankind. As the Rambam teaches us in the concluding words of this passage:

He will then improve the entire world, motivating all the nations to serve G-d together, as *Sefer Tzephaniah* (3:9) states: “I will transform the peoples to a purer language that they all will call upon the name of G-d and serve Him with one purpose.”

May the stirring words of Zechariah the prophet be a clarion call to every nation of the world: “And the L-rd shall become King over all the earth; on that day shall the L-rd be one, and His name one.” May this time come soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

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