

Parsha Ponders

Vayeilech | September 10, 2021 | 4 Tishrei 5782

Resurrection of the dead and knowledge of the future¹

ויאמר יקוק אל-משה הנך שכב עם-אבותיך וקם העם הזה וזנה אחרי אלהי נכר-הארץ וגו'

Hashem said to Moshe: "Behold, you will lie with your ancestors, and this nation will get up and sway after the gods of the inhabitants of the land..."²

A non-Jewish matron³ once asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya a theological question⁴. Two basic tenets of the Jewish faith are that Hashem knows the future, and that in the final redemption there will be a resurrection of the dead. This matron asked for a source to these two beliefs. He responded from a verse in this week's *parsha*. Hashem told Moshe *עם אבותיך* you will lie with your ancestors. Moshe was told he was about to perish. Then it says *העם הזה וזנה אחרי אלהי נכר הארץ*, the nation will get up and serve idols. Rabbi Yehoshua said to read the verse as if *וקם*, "will get up", as if it was referring to Moshe⁵. Meaning, Moshe will die, but then he will get up. We see the dead will be resurrected. Furthermore, the verse says that the nation will serve idols, which they did. This shows Hashem knows the future.

The matron was unsatisfied with this response. The simple reading of the verse is that the *nation* will get up and serve idols, not that Moshe will die and will get up. Rabbi Yehoshua conceded to this rebuttal and said that at the very least we see Hashem knows the future. Although what he said is true, something must be missing. He surely knew that his reading of the verse was forced. Why then did he suggest it in the first place? The matron asked for a source for two beliefs, and he only provided a source for one. Is there any way to reconcile his response?

Rabbi Nosson Adler, the teacher of the Chasam Sofer, has an insightful suggestion for how resolve these issues. A verse we recite during the Friday night prayers is *אשר נשבעתי באפי אם יבואון אל מנוחתו* Hashem swore in His anger that the generation in the wilderness shall not see tranquility in the land of Israel⁶. Our Sages interpreted⁷ this verse to be saying that in the future there will be another moment of tranquility. That will occur when the dead will be resurrected, and then the generation of the wilderness will merit to see tranquility in the land of Israel⁸.

Accordingly, Moshe had to die. There are many sources⁹ which indicate that if Moshe hadn't died in the wilderness and had led the Jews into the land of Israel, that would have achieved the ultimate

¹ Based on Chasam Sofer's Toras Moshe to Deuteronomy 31:16

² Deuteronomy *loc. cit.*

³ מטרוניתא. Our version of the *gemarra* says the Romans asked him. In all the sources I saw quote this *gemarra*, they all say the Romans. I did find another time the Chasam Sofer quotes this *gemarra*, and he wrote צדוקים

⁴ Sanhedrin 90b

⁵ Rashi *ad. loc.*

⁶ Psalms 95:11

⁷ למנוחה זו אינם באים אבל באין הם למנוחה אחרת (Vayikra Rabbah 32:2 and Koheles Rabbah 10:20; cf. Bamidbar Rabbah 14:19 and Toras Kohanim Baraisa D'Rabbi Yishmael § 8)

⁸ As is evident from the wording of the *Midrash*, it's unclear if this was its intent. This must have been Rav Nosson Adler's interpretation of the *Midrash*

⁹ I believe I heard this idea from Rav Yitzchak Berkovits. My roommate told me there's a *Midrash* that says that had Moshe built the Temple, it would have never been destroyed. I subsequently found that this *Midrash* is cited by the Ohr HaChaim to Deuteronomy 1:37. It's also cited by the Parshas Derachim § 8. The earliest source I found which brings this *Midrash* is the Toras HaMincha parshas Vaeschanan § 67. Perhaps the *Midrash* they're quoting is

redemption. He would have built the Temple, and it would have never been destroyed. If that had happened, there would have been no need for “another moment of tranquility”. The world would have achieved its purpose. As such, the generation of the wilderness wouldn’t have merited to see the land of Israel. Hashem already swore they wouldn’t see tranquility, and there would have been no need for another moment of tranquility. Only if Moshe died would they merit such an opportunity.

Now we have a new way to read the verse. *וְיָשָׁב עִם אֲבוֹתָיִךְ*, Moshe, will lie with your ancestors. Through this, *וְקָם הָעָם*, the nation will rise up. Meaning, your death will allow the generation of the wilderness to arrive in the land of Israel. This will occur after the resurrection of the dead. How then do we read the end of the verse, *וְזָנָה אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵי נֹכַח הָאָרֶץ*, that they will sway after the gods of the inhabitants of the land? It’s referring to the cause of the destruction of the Temple. Since Moshe didn’t enter the land, the Jews had the opportunity to sin with idol worship, causing the destruction. This is what ultimately allowed the generation of the wilderness to enter the land. The destruction and subsequent exile left room for “another moment of tranquility”, that of the resurrection of the dead. It turns out then that this verse succinctly shows both the resurrection of the dead, as well as the fact that Hashem knows the future¹⁰.

Good Shabbos

Devarim Rabbah (Lieberman ed.) to Deuteronomy 3:6, although it’s worded differently than they how bring it. Additionally, without citing a source, the Seforno to Deuteronomy 1:37, 3:26, and 34:4 and Maharal in Netzach Yisroel Chapter 33 (see fn. 70 in the Machon Yerushalayim edition) say that if Moshe brought the Jews into the land, they never would have been exiled. See also Megaleh Amukos § 20, 84 and Nachal Kadumim Masei § 3. As well, see Zohar III *parshas Pinchas* p. 221a. The Chasam Sofer implies he didn’t think or know this was from *Chazal*, as he writes regarding this idea, *איתא בספרים*

¹⁰ According to this, the original way the *gemarra* was understood (with Rashi’s explanation) is how the matron mistakenly understood Rabbi Yehoshua’s intent. They then rebutted with the simpler way to read the verse. Rabbi Yehoshua in fact meant like Rav Nosson Adler explains, but it would seem that he felt it unnecessary to explain this deeper interpretation of the verses to the non-Jewish matron. He therefore said that at least one of their questions is addressed by the verses