

רמב"ן שמות הקדמה

השלים הכתוב ספר בראשית, שהוא ספר היצירה, ב

א. חדוש העולם

ב. ויצירת כל נוצר

ג. ובמקרי האבות, שהם כענין יצירה לזרעם, מפני שכל מקריהם ציורי דברים לרמוז ולהודיע כל עתיד לבא להם.

ואחרי שהשלים היצירה, התחיל ספר אחר בענין המעשה הבא מן הרמזים ההם, ונתיחד ספר ואלה שמות בענין הגלות הראשון הנגזר בפי', ובגאולה ממנו. ולכן חזר והתחיל בשמות יורדי מצרים ומספרם, אף על פי שכבר נכתב זה, בעבור כי ירידתם שם הוא ראשית הגלות, כי מאז הוחל.

והנה הגלות איננו נשלם עד יום שובם אל מקומם ואל מעלת אבותם ישובו. וכשיצאו ממצרים, אף על פי שיצאו מבית עבדים, עדיין יחשבו גולים כי היו בארץ לא להם, נבוכים במדבר. וכשבאו אל הר סיני ועשו המשכן ושם הקב"ה והשרה שכניתו ביניהם, אז שבו אל מעלות אבותם, שהיה סוד אלוה-עלי אלהיהם, והם הם המרכבה, ואז נחשבו גאולים.

ולכן נשלם הספר הזה בהשלימו ענין המשכן ובהיות כבוד ה' מלא אותו תמיד:

Ramban, Introduction to Exodus

Scripture completed the book B'reishit which is the Book of the Formation, dealing with

- the initiation of the universe
- the formation of everything formed
- the happenings of the Forefathers, which are like formation with regard to their descendants, as all their happenings are illustrative, to hint and inform about everything that would happen to them in the future.

So after Scripture completed the Formation, it began another book dealing with the actuality that came from these hints. The Book of Sh'mot was dedicated to the matter of the First Exile, which was explicitly decreed (in the Covenant Between the Parts), and the matter of the redemption from it. Therefore it returns and begins with the names of those who descended to Egypt, and their number, even though this had already been written, because their descent there was the outset of the Exile, which began from there.

Now this exile was not completed until the day of their return to their place, when to the heights of their ancestors they return. So when they left Egypt, even though they left the house of slavery, they were still considered exiles, as they were in a land not theirs, confused in the desert. But when they came to Mount Sinai, and made the Tabernacle, and The Holy Blessed One returned and flowed His Presence among them – that's when they returned to the heights of their ancestors, whom the Divine Secret rested on their tents, and they themselves were the Chariot, and at that point they were considered redeemed.

Therefore this book was completed when it completes its treatment of the Tabernacle, with the Glory of Hashem filling it constantly.

Why does the Torah end before Bnai Yisroel enter Israel? Mosheh Rabbeinu's death is not a sufficient cause; as his death itself is recorded, so clearly there was no bar to including events that he could only know prophetically.

I generally suggest that the Torah narrative is bounded by two perfect but unreachable places – the Garden of Eden, from which we are permanently expelled, and the Land of Israel. But the Land that Bnai Yisroel actually enter, in Sefer Yehoshua, is not Paradise, and everyone in it has eaten fully of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. So the Torah has to end before we actually enter, so that we can preserve our image of the Land as it should have been, and would have been had we merited it.

Ramban's introduction to Sefer Sh'mot, a remarkable compact bundle of broad theological and exegetical principles, may suggest a more radical approach. Some background is necessary.

An important theme in Ramban's work is the religious centrality of the Land of Israel. He famously adds the mitzvah of settling the land to Ramban's list of mitzvot, and appears to take seriously the idea that mitzvot are performed outside the Land only as practice for doing them in the Land. So the question of why the Torah stops at the border of the Land has particular importance within the framework of his thought.

In this introduction, Ramban raises a parallel question within Sefer Sh'mot. He defines Bereishit as the "Book of Formation", perhaps meaning that it is the book which sets the pattern that the rest of history plays out – we'll have occasion to talk about his understanding of maasei avot siman lebanim (= the events of the Forefathers are symbolic of what will happen to their descendants) some other week. He then defines Sh'mot as the Book of Exile and Redemption. This seems innocent enough, but he then notes that Redemption From is not sufficient – rather, one needs Redemption Toward, and it is complete only when one actually arrives at the destined destination. Sh'mot, then is incomplete, because it shows us leaving Egypt, but not arriving in Israel.

On some other occasion I hope we'll discuss the amazing literary assumption that apparently drives Ramban here, that each Book of Chumash must be a satisfying independent work that fully expresses its central theme. But today I want to focus instead on his even more astonishing answer to why Sh'mot ends where it does. Ramban says that complete redemption actually does happen in Shemot, because the presence of G-d in the Mishkan made the wilderness no longer Exile.

The questions this raises – and here I hope that many of you who have a more complete picture of Ramban than do I will offer suggestions – are why, according to Ramban, the Land is a goal in the first place, why it remained one after the Mishkan is built, and how his theory here can be reconciled with his positions re Eretz Yisroel mentioned above.

Shabbat Shalom!

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