

דברים פרק לד

(י) ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה אשר ידעו יקוק פנים אל פנים:
(יא) לכל האותות והמופתים אשר שלחו יקוק לעשות בארץ מצרים ולפרעה ולכל עבדיו ולכל ארצו:
(יב) ולכל היד החזקה והגדול אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל:

פירוש הרלב"ג

התועלת התשע עשרה –

הוא מה שהעידה התורה באמרה "ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה" שכבר יקום אחר כמשה כאלו הדברים אשר זכר, אך לא יהיה נביא בישראל לבד, אבל בישראל ושאר אומות, והוא יחדש רבוי האותות והמופתים כמשה במקום רחב מאד ולעם רב ויתמיד להראות יד הש"י החזקה והמורא הגדול לעם רב. ולפי שלא היה נביא כזה עדיין בשום מקום לאלו הדברים, ידענו שזה יהיה משיח בן דוד אשר ירום ונשא וגבה? מאד ויתחדשו על ידו המופתים הנפלאים להפוך אל עמים שפה ברורה לקרא כלם בשם ה' ולעבדו שכם אחד, ואז יהיה שלום בעולם מפני שלא תהיינה שם אמונות מתחלפות, ולזה וכתתו חרבותם לאתים וחניתותיהם למזמרות ולא ישאו גוי אל גוי חרב ולא ילמדו עוד מלחמה . . .

Devarim 32:10-12

And no other prophet arose in Israel like Mosheh, whom G-d knew face-to-face, with regard to all the signs and wonders which Hashem sent him to do in Egypt to Par'oh and all his servants and all his land, and with regard to all the powerful arm and all the great terror which Moshe did before the eyes of all Israel.

Ralbag on Chumash

The nineteenth useful lesson (that emerges from this section) – is that to which the Torah testified when it said “And no other prophet arose in Israel like Mosheh”, that another one like Mosheh would arise with regards to the things it mentioned, but that he would not be a prophet in Israel alone, rather in Israel and the other nations, and he will originate numerous signs and wonders like Mosheh in a very expansive space and for a numerous crowd, and he will consistently show the powerful hand of the Blessed Hashem and the great awe to a numerous crowd. But because there had not yet been a prophet like this in any place for these matters, we know that this will be Moshiach ben David, who will be very exalted and through him there will be originated the astounding wonders to transform the nations via pellucid speech so that they will all call the Name of Hashem and serve him shoulder to shoulder, and then there will be peace in the world, because there will not be differing faiths, and therefore they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and no nation will lift a sword against another and they will no longer learn war . . .

There's always something disconcerting about reading a text that disagrees with one of Rambam's 13 Ikkarim, even if one presumably should remember it from Marc Shapiro's The Limits of Orthodox Theology (I'm travelling and didn't bring my copy). And the principle of the uniqueness of Mosaic prophecy really carries a significant load in terms of the authority of Torah, if one accepts Rambam's understanding that only Mosaic-level prophecy is capable of transforming the Divine Will into legislation; I recall a Daniel Lasker article years ago arguing that Rambam had convinced the Karaites of this point, so they ceased deriving halakhah from Nakh.

Ralbag above does not seem to care very much about this. It might be possible to argue that he sees the Messianic King as greater than Mosheh in some ways but not all, and thus

preserve Mosheh's uniqueness with regard to law, but it would be a stretch. More straightforwardly he simply is not bothered by the issue.

For Rambam, Mosaic uniqueness is one basis for the eternally binding nature of Torah law – the other is that G-d cannot change His mind. R. Yosef Albo dismisses this quite compellingly by pointing out that a change of legislation can reflect a change of circumstance rather than a change of mind, as witness that the Torah itself became binding on the Jews at Sinai, and was not before. Rambam's argument is based on his very interesting conception of Torah laws as eternal in the same way as natural laws, which I have addressed at length in "Should Poskim be Doctors of the Soul?" and will not cover here. R. Albo concludes that Rambam is correct that the Torah is eternal, but that it was G-d's choice to give an eternal Torah rather than one that was binding until further instruction. If Ralbag shared Albo's critique, he would be less bound to Mosaic uniqueness.

But what interests me most about this passage is its matter-of-fact universalism. The Messianic King is not just the prophet of Israel, but rather of all humanity, and Ralbag makes no effort to qualify this statement. He does not, for example, say that the Messiah will be Israel's primarily and the Gentiles' secondarily. Furthermore, he attributes the Messianic peace (a universal piece, not one in which Ephraim and Yehudah "together will despoil the Sons of the East") not to a pax Yisraelus but rather to the absence of religious disagreement stemming from the universal acceptance of the Messiah.

Again, none of this tells us specifically what the relative position of Jews and Gentiles will be in the Messianic era, and if this were said self-consciously, it would probably mean very little. But it seems to be said 'lefi tumo', without any sense that it is groundbreaking or in tension with the Masoret, and yet it is central enough to be the way he ends his commentary. In other words, it seems to be Ralbag's starting point, and in that case we can legitimately claim to be following Ralbag's masoret if we interpret traditional texts in light of it.

Shabbat shalom vechag sameiach!

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