

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter VIII: Vayishlach (Gen. 32:4–36:43)

Essay 3. Obadiah's rescue of one hundred prophets

גמרא פרק ד' דסנהדרין מפני מה זכה עובדיה לנביאות וכו' מפני שהחביא "מאה נביאים . . . במערה" דכתיב וכו', ומאי שנא תמישים תמישים, אמר רבי אלעזר מיצקב למד "והיה המתנה הנשאב לפליטה", ר' אבהו אמר לפי שלא היתה המערה מסוגלת יותר מחמשים איש. והקשה מהרש"א מי דחקו לומר שמיצקב למד עובדיה לעשות כן, ודילמא מסבירא דנפשיה עבד הכי כמו שעשה יצקב כדי שיהיו הנשאבים לפליטה, ותיירץ בדוחק ועיי"ש. ועוד צריך עיון דלר' אבהו דאמר שלא היתה המערה מסוגלת יותר וכו' אם כן מה בא הכתוב להשמיענו.

There is a **Gemara in the fourth chapter of tractate Sanhedrin:**

Rabbi Yitzchak said: **For what [reason] did Obadiah merit prophecy? Because he brought “one hundred prophets . . . in a cave,” as it is written: “It was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took one hundred prophets, and hid them, fifty men in a cave, [and fed them with bread and water].”**¹

[The Gemara asks:] **What is different** [i.e., why did he decide, to conceal] **fifty** [prophets in one cave and] **fifty** [prophets in a second cave, and not conceal them all together in one cave]? **Rabbi Elazar said: He learned [this] from Jacob,** as is said: “[Jacob was greatly frightened; in his anxiety, he divided the people with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, thinking, ‘If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it,] **the remaining camp may escape.’”² Rabbi Abbahu said: Because there is no cave [in the area] big enough to contain more than fifty people.**

- Sanhedrin 39b

The Maharsha³ questions who forced [Rabbi Elazar] to say that Obadiah learned this from Jacob? Perhaps it was of his own opinion that he acted thus, as Jacob did, in order that a remnant would escape. His solution is forced, and see there. The Maharsha writes that if Obadiah had relied on his own opinion, just as Scripture explained what Jacob did and his motive,

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¹ I Kings 18:4.

² Gen. 32:8–9.

³ Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555–1631), Polish rabbi famous for his Talmud commentaries, *Chiddushei Halachot* and *Chiddushei Agadot*.

Scripture would have explained Obadiah's reason: that if Jezebel came to attack fifty, that there would be a remnant [of another fifty] that escaped. Because Scripture did not explain this, we understand that Obadiah did not decide this on his own, but learned it from Jacob.

Investigation is also required that Rabbi Abbahu said that there was not a cave that could hold more than fifty people. If so, what is Scripture coming to inform us by appearing to emphasize that he put them into two different caves?

ונש' לומר דאמרין בירושלמי דפאה דבדורו של אחאב לא היו בקהם דלטורין, שְהָרִי אֵלֶיהוּ מְכַרִּיז בְּהַר הַכְּרֶמֶל "אֲנִי נוֹתֵרִי נְבִיא לַה' לְבַדִּי" וְכֹל־עַמָּא יִדְעִי וְלֹא מְפָרְסְמִין לְמַלְכָּא שְׁעוֹבְדֵיהּ הִתְבִּיא מֵאָה נְבִיאִים וְכוּ' וְעֵי"ש. וְהוּאִיל שְׁכַל הָעוֹלָם הָיָה יוֹדְעִים זֶה אֵין סְבָרָא לִומר שְׁעוֹבְדֵיהּ הִתְבִּיאָם בְּשֵׁתֵי מְעָרוֹת כְּדִי שְׂאָם תִּהְיֶה הָאֵסֶת תִּהְיֶה הָאֵסֶרֶת נִיצוּלָת. דְּמַמָּה נִפְשָׁה אִם לֹא יִפְרְסְמוּ לְמֶלֶךְ הָרִי כּוֹלָם נִיצוּלִים וְאִם לֹא הָרִי כּוֹלָם מֵתִים, וְקוּשָׁה לְמָה הִתְבִּיאָם בְּשֵׁתֵי מְעָרוֹת, וְזוּ הִיא קוּשִׁית הַגְּמָרָא מֵאֵי שְׂנֵא חֲמִישִׁים חֲמִישִׁים.

It can be said what is said in the Jerusalem Talmud of tractate Peah (chapter 1, halacha 1), that in the generation of Ahab, there were no common informers among the Jews. That is, Elijah proclaimed on Mount Carmel, "I remain the sole prophet of the L-rd,"⁴ and everybody knew that there were at least one hundred others, and yet nobody informed the king that Obadiah had hidden one hundred prophets. As everyone knew this but wouldn't tell the king, there is no reason to say that Obadiah hid them in two caves so that if one group was killed, the other would be saved. Whichever way you look at it, if they hadn't informed the king, then all would have saved, and if not, i.e., if someone had informed the king, then all would have died. I.e., as the king didn't know, they could have all been hidden in one cave [assuming there was a large enough cave]. If the king had learned of it, then splitting them between two caves wouldn't have saved them. Thus, the question is why he hid them in two caves, and this is the difficulty of the Gemara: "What is different [i.e., why did he decide, to conceal] fifty [prophets in one cave and] fifty [prophets in a second cave, and not conceal them all together in one cave]?"

ותירץ מייעקב למד, כלומר לעולם לא היה צריך עובדיה לעשות כה, אלא לפי שיעקב עשה כה, ואמרין במדרש על הפסוק "ויחזק" וכו' שמכאן יש ללמוד דרך ארץ שלא יתן אדם כל ממונו בגנות אחת וכו'. אם הוא לא יעשה כן לא היו יודעים הדורות שהוא היה מפיר ורגיל בבגדי דורו שלא יקטרגו אותו, אלא יאמרו שאף על פי שהיה לו לחוש פן אינה אדם בליעל יפרסם הדבר למלך עם כל זה סמך על הגם. ואדרבא היו לומדים ממנו לקמוץ על הגם ולבטוח בהקב"ה אפילו היכא דשכית היצקא הפך הדרך ארץ שלימד לנו יעקב, ומה שלמד מייעקב היינו לשום אל לבו שבגני אדם ילמדו דרך ארץ זה בכל מקום ובכל זמן.

[Rabbi Elazar's] solution is that he learned it from Jacob, as if to say that Obadiah didn't have to do that, rather it was only because Jacob did so that he did the same. It says in the Midrash Gen. Rabbah 76:3 on the verse, "he divided the people with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps," that from here we learn the proper practice, that a person

⁴ I Kings 18:22.

shouldn't put all of his money in one corner, i.e., in one place. If [Obadiah] did not do so and divide the one hundred prophets, the generations would not know that he was familiar with and accustomed to the fact that his contemporaries would not persecute him. Rather, they would say that even though he had a feeling that some worthless person would announce this involvement of hiding the prophets to the king, with all this, he relied on the miracle that they would all survive. To the contrary, they would learn from him the wrong lesson: to trust in the miracle and to trust in the Holy One, Blessed be He, even where danger is to be expected. That is, instead of acting to mitigate the damage, [Obadiah] would have doing the opposite of the proper practice that Jacob taught us. But he did divide the prophets, and what he learned from Jacob would be to take to heart that people would learn this proper practice, to mitigate damage, in every place and every time, regardless of whether they perceived a danger.

ואתי שפיר לפי זה לשון המדרש "ויחז אֶת־הָעָם" לימדך תורה דרך ארץ שלא יתן אדם פל ממונו וכו' ממי אתה למד מיצקב וכו' שצאמר "ויחז" וכו' וכן הכתוב אומר "ויחזיבאם חמשים איש במערה" עכ"ל. ואם אף עובדיה למד מיצקב, לא אתי שפיר, וכן הכתוב אומר, שיקרי עובדיה אינו מלמד לנו כלום.

This understanding is fine according to this language of the Midrash “he divided the people,” it was to teach you the proper practice, that a man should not put all his money in one corner, and similarly, if one has to conceal friends from danger, to divide them into [at least] two camps. From whom do you learn this? From Jacob, etc., as it is said, “he divided the people with him,” and also the Scripture says, “and he hid them, fifty men in a cave.”

If Obadiah didn't have the idea on his own to split the prophets, and just learned this from Jacob, then the understanding we've developed of the Midrash above wouldn't have been fine, similarly the Scripture says that he split them into two, so if we don't have a deeper understanding of the Midrash and Scripture, then Obadiah isn't teaching us anything.

אלא ודאי צריך לומר שעובדיה לא עשה זה אלא בשביל שלמד מיצקב להורות דרך ארץ זה לרבים, אבל הוא עצמו לא היה צריך לכך כנ"ל. דממה נפשך הואיל שעתיד הדבר להתפרסם מחמת המים והמזון שהיה צריך להביא להם, או היו נמלטים פולם או היו נאבדים פולם. ואין הכי נמי שאף מעובדיה אנו למדים שאפילו במקום שאין נראה לנו שמועיל כלום לחלק ממונו בשני מקומות, עם כל זה יש לנו לעשות כן, שמיצקב לא היינו לומדים אלא דוקא במקום דאפשר שאם יאבד חלק אחד יהיה השני לפליטה.

But surely it should be said that Obadiah did this only because he learned from Jacob to instruct many people through this land, but he himself did not need to do so, as above, because there were no informers. Whichever way you look at it, since in the future the matter would become known because of the water and the food that he would need to bring to them, either they would all have fled or they would have all been lost. It is indeed so that from Obadiah, we learn that in a place where we do not think that there is any benefit for us to divide our money or valuables or people between two places, nevertheless we should do so.

For from Jacob, we would have learned to do this only in a place where it was possible that if one part of it would be lost, the other would escape.

ור' אבהו בא לחלוק ולומר שאף על פי שדרך ארץ הוא כד, אפילו הכי בפעם הזאת לא היה לו לעובדיה לעשות כד, לפי שפשהם בשתי מערות אנושא מילתא טובא להביא מים ולקחם לשתי מערות יותר משאם היו כולם במערה אחת, דמי הבטיחו שאיזה בליעל לא יפרסם הדבר, ולהניחם בשתי מערות היו יותר בסכנה ולמה לא הניחם במערה אחת.

Rabbi Abbahu came to disagree, and to say that even though customary practice is like this, even so at this time, Obadiah did not do so. That is because if they would be in two caves, it would be very noticeable to bring water and food to two caves, more than if all were in one cave. For who guaranteed that some worthless person wouldn't publicize the matter? So to put them in two caves would be more dangerous. Thus, why not place them in one cave?

ותירץ לפי שלא היה אפשר, שהמערות שלקחם לא היו מחזיקות אלא חמישים חמישים והכתוב אומר "ויחביאם . . . במערה" ומה איכפת לן לדעת אם החביאם שם או במקום אחר. אלא נדאי בא להודיענו שבמקום דשכים הינקה להניח הממון בשתי מקומות יותר מלהניח אותו במקום אחד, שפיר טפי להניחו במקום אחד. והכא שאני שהמערה לא הייתה מחזיקת יותר, דאי לאו הכי היה לו לחוש בתחלה כשהחביאם בשתי מערות פן יבוא איזה אדם בליעל ויפרסם הדבר למלך.

His solution is that this was not possible, that their caves only held fifty men in one and fifty men in the other, and the Scripture says, "and he hid them, fifty men in [each] cave," and what difference does it make to us to know if he hid them there or in a difference place? Rather, Rabbi Abbahu's view is that certainly [Scripture] came to inform us that in a place where expected danger is greater if one is to put the money or valuables or people in two places, then it is better to put it in one place. But here it's different, for the cave wouldn't hold more than fifty men, for if that's not the case, [Obadiah] would have feared from the start when he brought them to two caves, lest some worthless man come and publicize the matter to the king.

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