



Bnei Noach and Messiah

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Balak

The Prophecy Concerning the Nations of the World in the Future

A. In Balaam's final prophecy in our Torah portion, which primarily speaks about the time after the coming of the Messiah — "in the end of days" — in the words of the Ramban: "And this prophecy is about the days of the Messiah." This is the meaning of the verse *"A star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel"*, referring to the King Messiah. The verse concludes: *"and he shall crush the corners of Moab and break down all the children of Sheth."*

In the plain meaning (*peshat*) of the phrase **"and shall break down all the children of Sheth"**, we find two main interpretations:

a) *Targum Onkelos* interprets it as: "And he shall rule over all human beings."

b) *Ibn Ezra* explains: "Like tearing down a wall — the meaning is destruction," i.e., an expression of ruin and devastation.

Similarly, this implication is also found in *Targum Jonathan* and the *Jerusalem Targum*, where these translations emphasize the **nullification and killing of the nations**.

At first glance, it seems that the two interpretations differ on whether the nations of the world will remain in the future.

And this is puzzling: the destruction of *"all the children of Sheth"* — the annihilation of all nations — appears to contradict numerous explicit prophecies throughout Scripture that describe the existence of nations in the future. For example, beginning with the opening prophecy in Isaiah:

"In the end of days, the mountain of the house of the L-rd will be established... and all nations shall flow to it. And many people shall go and say, 'Come, let us go up...' And He will judge among the nations and rebuke many peoples..."

and continuing through to the closing prophecy of Isaiah:

"To gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and see My glory... and declare My glory among the nations..."

Similarly, we find the prophecy:

"Then I will transform the nations to speak a clear language, so that they may all call upon the name of the L-rd to serve Him with one purpose."

And likewise in many other places in the Prophets

B. In the book of Zechariah there is a prophecy:

"And it shall come to pass in all the land — says the L-rd — that two-thirds shall be cut off and perish, but the third shall be left therein."

The *Midrash* explains that this third portion — *"the third that remains"* — refers to **Israel**.

It follows that in the future, the nations will be *"cut off and perish."*

Accordingly, **Ibn Ezra's** interpretation of *"and he shall break down all the children of Sheth"* aligns with this prophecy in Zechariah — as referring to the destruction and downfall of the nations.

But this only brings us back to the original question (Section A) regarding the prophecy:

How does the prophecy in Zechariah — about two-thirds perishing — fit with the many other prophecies that speak of nations and peoples existing in the future?

In the *Gemara*, there is a dispute between **Reish Lakish** and **Rabbi Yochanan** regarding the verse *"but the third shall be left therein"*:

- **Reish Lakish** says: *"A third of Shem."*



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- **Rabbi Yochanan** responds: *"Their Master is not pleased that you say such a thing! Rather, even a third of Noah."*

There is a commentary among the *Rishonim (Yad Rama)* that states that the argument between Reish Lakish and Rabbi Yochanan is whether the remaining *"third"* includes only the descendants of Shem (i.e., Israel), or whether it includes **the nations of the world** as well.

According to Rabbi Yochanan, **G-d is also concerned about the nations**, and does **not** desire that they all be destroyed.

But the difficulty remains:

[In addition to the fact that, according to other commentators (and this also seems to be implied in Rashi's commentary), the disagreement between Reish Lakish and Rabbi Yochanan concerns only **Israel** — namely, whether **Israel** is included in the *"two-thirds shall be cut off"* — and Rabbi Yochanan's statement *"their Master is not pleased"* refers only to Israel — nevertheless,] according to Reish Lakish, **all agree** that the **nations of the world** will be cut off and will perish (*"yigva'u"*).

C. This issue — whether the nations will exist in the future — is not only a matter of interpretation of verses, but also a matter of **halachah (Jewish law)**:

The **Rambam (Maimonides)** rules in his *Mishneh Torah* (his code of law), in *Laws of Kings and Their Wars*, that one of the Messiah's actions will be:

"He will improve the entire world to serve G-d together, as it is said: 'Then I will transform the nations to speak a clear language, so that they may all call upon the name of the L-rd and serve Him with one accord.'"

And in the next chapter, the Rambam explains the prophecy *"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb"* as meaning:

"That Israel will dwell securely even with the wicked of the world... and they will all return to the true religion, and they will not steal or destroy, but will eat only permitted things peacefully together with Israel."

The **Mishneh Torah (Sefer HaYad)** is **not** intended to record future events or to simply describe what the Messiah will do. Rather, it is a book of **laws** — *halachot*, and only events that are **relevant in practice as law** are included.

Therefore, we must say that not only the **beginning** of the halachah — where the Rambam describes the process and criteria for identifying the Messiah

[*"If a king arises from the House of David who diligently studies Torah and observes the commandments like David his ancestor... and he compels all of Israel to walk in it and strengthens its observance, and he fights the wars of G-d — he is presumed to be the Messiah. If he succeeds and builds the Temple in its place and gathers the dispersed of Israel — he is definitely the Messiah"* —] is relevant to *halachah*, in terms of knowing and recognizing who is the **definite Messiah (Mashiach Vadai)** —

but **also** the **conclusion** of the *halachah* (describing what the Messiah will do after it has been established that he is the definite Messiah) is **also related to halachah**, insofar as it pertains to **knowledge and recognition** of *Certain Mashiach*.

It must be understood that the Messiah will **build the Temple in its proper place and gather the dispersed of Israel**, bringing about the **complete redemption of the entire Jewish people**.

Consequently, there will be a **complete fulfillment of all the laws and commandments of the Torah**,



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as the Rambam details at the beginning of Chapter 11 (as discussed at length elsewhere). Accordingly, there must also be **faith and awareness** that the Messiah will bring **redemption to the entire world**: *"He will perfect the entire world to serve G-d together."*

One can say even more:

This matter is not only relevant to **faith and belief** in the Messiah, but also to the **practical conduct of the Jewish people even now**.

The Rambam rules:

"Moses our teacher commanded, by the word of G-d, to compel all the inhabitants of the world to accept the commandments given to the descendants of Noah."

Since the Messiah will **bring about this correction of the world**, as in the verse *"I will transform the nations... to call upon the name of the L-rd together,"*

— it follows that **our present-day efforts to influence the nations of the world** to observe the Noahide commandments serve as a **preview and preparation** for the coming and work of the righteous Messiah.

[In this light, it is also more understandable why the Rambam places this law (and the other laws concerning the Noahide commandments) in the *Laws of Kings*, specifically before and close to the laws regarding the Messianic King.]

D. This can be better understood by first explaining the prophecy *"Two-thirds shall be cut off and perish"* — which, at first glance, is extremely puzzling:

How is it possible that in the future, **all** the nations will be destroyed? After all, it says: *"G-d is good to all, and His mercy is upon all His works."*

And although we do find historical events — beginning with the generation of the Flood — where it says *"G-d erased all existence,"* and *"The end of all flesh has come before Me,"*

— there the reason is clearly stated:

"The earth is filled with violence," and *"All flesh had corrupted its way on the earth."*

But the language of the prophecies mentioned above seems different:

Here, it does **not** speak (as in other prophecies) about punishing the wicked among the nations for their corruption, etc.

Rather, it speaks of the destruction (*"karkar"*) of **all** the "children of Sheth" — **all of humanity**, which would include even the *righteous among the nations*.

[As mentioned in Section B, the verse *"the third that remains"* — refers only to **Israel**.]

This idea — that only *"a third shall remain"* — has **no connection at all**, G-d forbid, to tragedies and persecutions of the Jewish people during times of the destruction of the Temple and neither to the sufferings all the time of exile up to the hardest of all them in the previous generation (the Holocaust), because all of this occurred during **the time of exile** and, since it is a time of **darkness and concealment**, G-d's mercy *"upon all His works"* is not in a revealed way, even towards **Israel, His close nation** (Which led to questions such as: *"Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?"* and *"Why have You done evil to these people?"* and the like.)

In contrast, regarding the **future to come** (the time of the Redemption), when the prophecy *"to perfect the world under the sovereignty of the Almighty"* will be fulfilled — as it says in the continuation of Zechariah's prophecy:

"And G-d will be King over all the earth; on that day, the L-rd will be One and His name One," and *"Your teacher will no longer be hidden,"* — there will be a **revelation of G-dliness**.



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So the question arises: **How is it possible** that there would then be **destruction and annihilation** of all the nations?

E. At first glance, one might answer that the interpretation of *"Two-thirds shall be cut off and perish"* (and likewise the verse *"He shall destroy all the children of Sheth"*) is **not** that the nations of the world will be destroyed through an act of destruction or annihilation (which would contradict Divine mercy), but rather that **they will not continue to exist through future generations** — they will **not bear offspring**.

And when the **power of procreation** is removed, then over time they will simply, **naturally**, *"perish and be cut off."*

And one should not ask: Isn't the very **withholding of the power of procreation** itself a contradiction to *"His mercy is upon all His creations"*?

After all, it is known that in the power of procreation within created beings, the **infinite and boundless power of G-d** is expressed. Since created beings are, by their nature, limited and finite, they should not, by themselves, possess the ability to produce endless offspring. This power exists **only** because of the **infinite divine energy** that G-d implanted in the **natural function of the reproductive body**. When the **power of procreation** is lacking, it does **not** mean that something natural is being taken away — rather, it means that **no additional power is being added**, a power which is, in essence, **above nature**.

F. However, this explanation is **not entirely sufficient**, because:

a) Since in the future it is said:

"Then I will transform the nations to speak a pure language, so that they will all call in the name of G-d and serve Him with one purpose," —

then why would the **existence of those who call and serve G-d** cease (even gradually)?

b) It is explicitly stated in the Prophets: *"And kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers"* and *"Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks."* And Reish Lakish even says:

"Whoever is meticulous with tzitzit will merit to be served by 2,800 attendants." If so, how can one claim that all the nations will be cut off in the future?

This compels us to conclude that, according to all interpretations, it does not mean that the existence of the nations of the world will be nullified in the literal sense in the future. Their existence will remain even in the time to come. Rather, the above-mentioned differences of opinion—such as the two interpretations of *"and he shall break down all the sons of Seth,"* and likewise the interpretations (in section b) of *"they shall be utterly cut off and perish"* and *"I will utterly destroy more of them"*—are about the *manner* in which their existence will continue in that time.

G. The explanation of this can be as follows:

After the future redemption, when there will be a revelation of G-dliness in the world—as the verse says,

"And the L-rd shall be King over all the earth; on that day the L-rd shall be One and His name One"

it is clear that at that time there will be no place for impurity or evil in the world (as it is written in Zechariah, prior to the verse *"two-thirds shall perish"*: *"And I will remove the spirit of impurity from the earth"*).



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It is therefore understood that in regard to human beings, in the time to come there will no longer be any existence of enemies of G-d or the wicked. Only after the enemies and the wicked receive their punishment, as described in many prophecies, will there be a time when

"the entire world (including animal, plant, and mineral life) will be rectified to serve G-d together."

[As Rashi explains the verse *"Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One"*: The L-rd, who is our G-d now and not the G-d of the idol worshippers, will in the future be the One L-rd—as it is said,

"For then I will convert the peoples to a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the L-rd", and as it is written, *"On that day, the L-rd will be One and His name One."*]

On this, there is room for discussion:

The primary revelation in the future is directed toward Israel, just as the redemption primarily concerns Israel—since we were exiled from our land—*"And He will gather the dispersed of Israel."*

The redemption of the entire world is a consequence and secondary to the redemption of Israel—just as the whole creation and its existence are for the sake of *"Bereishit"*—for the Torah, which is called *"the beginning of His way,"* and for Israel, who are called *"first."*

And within this, there can be two perspectives:

1. The state of redemption in the world, including the nations of the world, is felt by them as merely an extension or detail of Israel's redemption.
2. Or, that for them, their own redemption is also perceived as something meaningful in and of itself.

The explanation:

According to the first perspective, the essence of the redemption and the future revelation is solely for Israel—so that Israel can study Torah and fulfill the commandments in ultimate perfection. For this, it is not sufficient that there be no more subjugation by foreign kingdoms; the entire world must also be refined—*"They shall neither harm nor destroy"*—a purified world. And when the world reaches that state, it becomes a proper environment for Israel to serve G-d. And the perfection of this is when the nations themselves also assist Israel in this task, as mentioned earlier (Section 6). However, one can also say that the redemption, as it applies to the world, is not merely a detail within Israel's redemption but also an independent matter: That is, within the world itself—in every individual part of it—it is felt that the ultimate purpose of their creation and redemption is also their own clarification and refinement, because they too are the creation of the Holy One, blessed be He.

H. Based on the above, we can say that the two aforementioned perspectives correspond to the two interpretations (mentioned earlier, Section 1) of the verse

"He will break down all the sons of Seth",

and similarly, to the interpretations (in Section 2) of

"Two parts shall be cut off and perish, but the third shall be left in it"

specifically, whether *"the third"* also includes the nations of the world or not:

According to the first perspective—that the redemption of the entire world (including the nations) is merely a detail and a consequence of the redemption of Israel—then the independent existence of the nations will be nullified: *"They shall be cut off and perish,"*; and not just as nations, but even as individuals.

[An example in Jewish law may be cited: the status of a servant who has no independent existence—whatever the servant acquires, his master acquires.]



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But according to the second perspective—that there is a unique innovation and purpose in the refinement and elevation of the nations themselves (not merely as a detail within Israel’s redemption)—then their existence in the future will not be nullified.

This view is the interpretation of *“He will break down all the sons of Seth”* to mean that the Messiah will rule over all human beings—i.e., the nations retain the status of a distinct existence, and thus over them (by themselves) applies the concept of the Messiah’s dominion.

According to Rabbi Yochanan (in the first interpretation mentioned earlier in Section 2), it is said even about the nations: *“Their Master is not pleased that you speak to them this way”*: that is, with regard to G-d as *“their Master,”* of the nations, *“He is not pleased”* that they would not experience redemption. Therefore, Rabbi Yochanan maintains that the nations of **the world are also included in the phrase “the third shall be left in it.”**

I. Based on this, it follows that *halachically*, according to **Maimonides (Rambam)**—and likewise as explained in **Chassidic teachings**—the view aligns with the second approach mentioned above: Maimonides emphasizes in several places that the innovation of the future redemption and its aspects will also apply to the nations of the world, and in all these instances he presents this as an **independent concept**, not merely as a derivative of Israel’s redemption.

In the two well-known passages:

- At the end of **Chapter 11** of *Laws of Kings*, he writes: *“The entire world will be corrected to serve G-d together, as it is said...”*
- And in **Chapter 12**, he writes: *“Israel will dwell securely with the wicked of the world, and all of them will return to the true religion and they will not steal or destroy, but will eat permitted foods peacefully with Israel.”*

Similarly, at the conclusion of his work, where he writes: *“The occupation of the entire world will be nothing but to know G-d alone”*—from the plain meaning of his words, it is evident that this refers to the nations as well.

It can be said that Rambam, who holds that the future redemption will bring about a renewal and elevation for the nations of the world **by themselves**, follows his particular approach:

Rambam writes: *“A non-Jew who accepts the Seven Noahide Laws and is careful to observe them is among the righteous of the nations and has a share in the World to Come—**provided** he accepts and performs them because G-d commanded them in the Torah and informed us through Moses.”*

This indicates that **the giving of the Torah** (Sinai) added a new level of elevation even to the Seven Noahide Laws (which they were already commanded before), and thus also to the very **existence of the nations**—and therefore they merit independent reward.

This idea is also reflected in what **the Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)** writes in *Tanya*: *“From the additional radiance (that will be revealed) to Israel in the future, the darkness of the nations will also be illuminated.”*

As it is written:

- *“Nations will walk by your light”*
- *“House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the L-rd”*
- *“The glory of the L-rd will be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together”*



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- *"To enter the clefts of the rocks and the crevices of the cliffs, from before the fear of the L-rd and the splendor of His majesty"*
- *"Appear in the majestic splendor of Your strength upon all the inhabitants of the earth."*

The Alter Rebbe (Admor HaZaken) is not satisfied with what he previously stated:

"At that time, the physicality of the body and the world will be refined, and they will be able to receive the revelation of G-d's light that will shine upon Israel through the Torah, which is called 'Oz' (strength)."

This implies that the refinement of the physical world and body is relevant to Israel below, so they can receive the Divine light.

But then he **adds another point**:

"And from the increase of the illumination to Israel, the darkness of the nations will also be affected..."

Here the Alter Rebbe emphasizes, as previously mentioned, that this *"reaching the nations"* is **not merely** a secondary or incidental result of Israel's elevation and refinement, but rather it is **something essential and intrinsic to the nations themselves**.

Therefore, even though the impact on the nations comes from the increase of the Divine light revealed to Israel (as expected, since the main revelation is to Israel—who are unified with the Divine), it nonetheless causes a **deep internal effect**—a revelation of Divine light that leads the nations to a movement of **awe and nullification** before G-d, until it becomes:

*"Appear in the majestic splendor of Your strength upon **all** the inhabitants of the earth, Your land..."*—meaning that **G-d will be revealed to all the inhabitants of the earth**, which is referred to as **"Your land."**

J. What is the unique idea in stating that the nations will experience a revelation and transformation during the Redemption as something independent? Why was this necessary to mention in Tanya there?

Furthermore, one must ask:

Since the entire creation—heaven, earth, and all their hosts (including the nations)—exists **"for the sake of Israel and for the sake of the Torah"**, how can we say that the nations' redemption will feel like an independent objective **apart from** Israel's redemption?

We have to say that **this too is connected to Israel**—and the explanation is as follows:

When the world is conducted *properly*—where *"they do not steal and do not destroy"*—but their **submission to G-d** only comes **as a byproduct of their subservience and nullification to Israel**, and they themselves **do not feel this submission directly**, then **the Redemption**—whose essence is *"The L-rd will be King over the **entire** earth"*—is still **incomplete**.

Because the nations do **not yet feel** the Kingship of G-d directly, and thus the **revelation of the Redemption** connected to Israel is also lacking, since their "servants" (*"your nurturers"*) **do not feel** the "King."

However, **when the world and everything in it** senses on **its own** the "Kingship"—and **all** call upon G-d's name and serve Him with one accord, and they all return to the true religion until **their entire occupation is only to know G-d**—then the Redemption is complete. In this way, the ultimate Divine intention of making a **dwelling place in the lower realms** is fully realized—and through that, the **Redemption of Israel** also reaches its **fullest completeness**.



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K. Based on the above, we can reconcile the two interpretations of “He will destroy all the children of Seth” [and the alignment of the prophecy “they will be cut off and perish” with other prophecies about the continued existence of the nations in the future]—according to the path of Chassidut:

In the future, *“The L-rd will be King over all the earth,”* and there will be a full revelation of G-d’s unity (*“Hashem Echad”*) throughout the world. Specifically, this revelation will be experienced differently by Israel and by the rest of the world (*“all the earth”*), corresponding to the **difference in their very essence:**

All of creation—including the nations of the world—is an existence **brought into being** by G-d: He created [everything] from nothingness into existence by ten utterances. Or as Maimonides (Rambam) puts it: “All beings—from the heavens and the earth and everything between them—exist only due to the truth of His existence.” **Regarding Israel (the souls of Israel),** it is stated even more profoundly: **“Israel and the Holy One, Blessed be He, are entirely one.”**

Accordingly, in the future, when the **truth of G-d** is revealed to the world—the **complete revelation of “Hashem Echad”**—this will be felt throughout all of creation, including the nations. They will sense that: **“They exist only because of the truth of His existence,”** and that **without G-d, not a single thing could exist.**

This means: They will feel that their existence is **not a true existence** (that is, independent of G-d). This is the meaning of *“they will be cut off and perish”* or *“He will destroy”* (קִרְקַר)—*a collapse of their sense of independence from G-d.*

By contrast, regarding Israel, it will be revealed that **their very existence is G-d’s essence,** so to speak—**“Israel and G-d are one.”**