

Parashat Ha'azinu

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“For God’s Portion is His People”

- What does the Song of Ha’azinu deal with?
- “בהנחל עליון גויים בהפרידו בני אדם” – When the most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided humankind” – where is this division described in the Torah?
- “למספר בני ישראל” – according to the number of Bnei Yisrael” – what is the number of Bnei Yisrael?
- What is the connection between the division of the nations and Israel’s selection?

The song of Ha’azinu discusses Israel’s history: its past, present, and future. The song can be divided into five main parts:¹

1. 1-3: Introduction
2. 4-14: The selection of Am Yisrael, and God’s kindness towards them
3. 15-18: Israel’s future sins
4. 19-26: Future punishment
5. 27 – 43: Saving Israel from their enemies.

While the entire song requires in-depth study; in this context we will focus on verses 8-9 (in chapter 32), which describes the selection of Am Yisrael as the chosen people.

¹ For other possible divisions of the verses, see: Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in the Book of Devarim*, p. 323; *Da’at Mikra* on Devarim.

1. Kindness and Choice

Firstly, we will discuss the verses that deal Israel's selection and God's kindness with them (4-14):

He is
Righteous
and
Upright

The first verse (4) opens with a declaration of God's virtue and the perfection of His governance:

He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. **הַצּוֹר תְּמִיִּם פָּעָלוּ כִּי כָּל דְּרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאִין עֲוֹל צְדִיק וְיֵשֶׁר הוּא.**
A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He.

Israel's
troubles as
retribution

As a foil to God's virtue, the next verses, 5-6, describe Israel's obstinacy and the ingratitude of their wicked deeds, and the evil they bring upon themselves through actions which reject God's kindness:

Not His is the corruption, but the blemish is of His sons; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation. Is this the way you repay the Lord, you foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you? **שָׁחַת לוֹ לֹא בְנֵי מוֹמָם דּוֹר עֲקָשׁ וּפְתִילֵהֶלֶל: הֲ לָהּ תִּגְמְלוּ זֹאת עִם נֶבֶל וְלֹא חָכְם הֲלוֹא הוּא אָבִיךָ קִנְיָךְ הוּא עֲשֶׂךָ וְיִלְבְּנְךָ.**

2 As this verse is very difficult to understand, I will cite the Rashbam's explanation: "שחת לו" – שחת ישראל לעצמו... הוא גרם לעצמו: "השחתה. "לא" – כלומר: ולא אחר. "בניו מומם" – בניו של הקב"ה עשו מום בעצמם

"Not His is the corruption" – Israel has corrupted itself... causing its own corruption. "not" – that is, and no other. "the blemish of His sons" – the corruption is theirs, their troubles come to them from their own actions.

In contrast, the Da'at Mikra series explains: "שחת" – ההשחתה, הפורענויות שבאו על הבריות, "לו לא" – כלומר: לא לו הוא, לא הוא גרם להם. "בניו מומם" – ההשחתה שלהם, צרתם מהם עצמם באה להם "Corruption" – the corruption, the punishment that befalls creatures, "not His" – that is, it is not His, He did not cause them. "the blemish of His sons" – the punishment is theirs, their troubles came from their themselves.

These verses are, in a sense, a microcosm of the entire song: God is the father of Israel, Who cares for them; but His children are a “warped and crooked generation” who sin, thereby bringing trouble upon themselves.

**God's
governance
throughout
history**

In the next verses (7-12), the song shifts its focus to the past. The Torah first opens with the importance of reflecting upon the past and the obligation to draw conclusions from it:

Remember the days of old, consider the generations long past, ask your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will recount to you.

זְכוֹר יָמוֹת עוֹלָם בֵּינוּ
שָׁנוֹת דּוֹר וָדוֹר שְׁאַל
אָבִיךָ וְיִגְדֶךָ וְקִנְיֶךָ
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָךְ.

The division into nations

The first historical event mentioned in the song of Ha'azinu (verses 8-9) is the **division into nations and Israel being chosen above them all** (we will discuss these verses at length later on):

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided all humankind, He set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of Bnei Yisrael. For the Lord's portion is His people, Yaakov His allotted inheritance.

בְּתַנְחַל עֲלֵיוֹן גּוֹיִם
בְּתַפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם
יָצַב גְּבֻלֹת עַמִּים
לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
כִּי חֶלֶק ה' עַמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב
חֶבְל נַחֲלָתוֹ.

Bnei Yisrael's behavior in the desert

Afterwards (in verses 10-12), the song tells of God's kindness towards Israel during their journey through the desert, and of His special providence over them:

In a desert land He found him, in a barren and howling waste. He surrounded him and cared for him; He guarded him as an eyelid over the eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft. The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with Him.

יִמְצָאֵהוּ בְּאַרְצֵי מִדְבָּר
 וּבְתֵהוּ יִלְלֵי יְשֻׁמוֹן יִסְבְּבֵנְהוּ
 יְבוֹנְנֵהוּ יִצְרֵנְהוּ כְּאֵישׁוֹן
 עֵינָיו: כְּנֶשֶׁר יָעִיר קִנּוֹ עַל
 גֹּזְלָיו יִרְחֹף יִפְרֹשׁ כַּנְּפָיו
 יִקְחֵהוּ יִשְׂאֵהוּ עַל אֶבְרֵתוֹ:
 ה' בְּדָד יִנְחֵנוּ וְאֵין עִמּוֹ אֵל
 נֶכְרִי.

3 · Rashi's explanation:

"יסובבנהו" – סבבם והקיפם בעננים וסבבם בדגלים לארבע רוחות, וסבבם בתחתית ההר שכפהו עליהם כנגיית. "יבוננהו" – בתורה ובינה. "יצרנהו" – מנחש שרף ועקרב ומן האומות.

"He surrounded him" – surrounded and encompassed them with clouds and surrounded them with flags in every of the four directions, and surrounded them at the foot of the mountain which He held over them like a basin. "Cared for him" - with Torah and wisdom. "Guarded him" – from snake and scorpion and the nations.

The Rashbam's explanation:

"יסובבנהו" – במלאכיו ששמרום. "יצרנהו" – הקב"ה לישראל, כמו האישון ששומר על העין.

"Surrounded" – with angels who protected them. "Guarded him" – the Holy One, blessed be He, over Israel, like an eyelid that protects the eye.

The explanation in the *Da'at Mikra*:

"יסובבנהו" – הקיף אותו סביבו להיות לו למגן, כמו: "והבוטח בה' חסד יסובבנו" (תהילים, פרק ל"ב, פסוק י'). "יבוננהו" – התבונן בו להשגיח עליו תמיד. דבר אחר: נתן בו חכמה בינה ודעת, כלומר: נתן לו את התורה. "יצרנהו" – נצר אותו, שמר אותו.

"Surrounded" – surrounded them to serve as a shield, like: "He who trusts in the Lord will be surrounded by kindness" (Psalms 32:10). "Cared for him" – Watching over him perpetually. Another explanation: endowing them with wisdom, insight and knowledge, that is: gave them the Torah. "guarded" – watched over, protected.

**Future
Abundance**

Here (verses 13-14), the song continues with a prophetic description of what is to come, opening with a description of Divine abundance which will be bestowed upon Israel in the future, even after they have entered the Land. In the Land of Israel, Divine kindness takes the form of economic wealth from the bounty of the Land:

He made him ride on the heights of the land and fed him with the fruit of the fields. He nourished him with honey from the rock, and with oil from the flinty crag, with butter and milk from herd and flock and with fattened lambs and goats, with choice rams of Bashan and the finest kernels of wheat, and you drank the foaming blood of the grape.

יִרְכַּבְהוּ עַל בְּמֹתַי אֲרָז
וַיֵּאכַל תְּנוּבוֹת שְׂדֵי
וַיִּנְקְהוּ דְבֶשׂ מִסֶּלַע וְשֶׁמֶן
מִחֲלָמִישׁ צוּר: הַמָּאֵת
בְּקָר וְחֵלֶב צֵאן עִם חֶלֶב
כְּרִים וְאֵילִים בְּנֵי בָשָׁן
וְעִתוּדִים עִם חֶלֶב גְּלִיּוֹת
חֶטֶה וְדָם עֵנַב תִּשְׁתָּה
הַקָּר.

**The insult to
God and the
punishment**

The song goes on (15-26) to describe the spiritual corruption that results from Israel's sheer wealth, and the rebellion against God, the source of all wealth - "Yeshurun grew fat and kicked out."

The song then describes the harsh punishment that Israel receives as a result of their rebellion against God, until God restores His kindness and stops the corruption for the sake of His name - so the nations will not believe that they have succeeded in destroying Israel.

2. “When He Divided All Humankind”

As I have mentioned, we will focus upon verses 8-9, which describe how Israel became the chosen nation. Verse 8 describes how humanity was divided into different nations, and how they all inherited different parts of the earth:

When the most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided humankind and established the boundaries of nations...

בְּהִנְחֵל עֲלֵיוֹן גּוֹיִם
בְּהַפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם יָצַב
גְּבֻלַת עַמִּים...

The nations
are divided
in Bereshit
10

A similar description can be found in chapter 10 of Bereshit, in the description of Noah’s line:

This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah’s sons, who themselves had sons after the flood. The sons of Japheth...From these the peoples of the island spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language. Canaanite clans scattered and the borders of Canaan reached from Tzidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim, as far as Lasha. The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan ...Later the These are the sons of Ham by their

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת בְּנֵי נֹחַ שֵׁם
חָם וְיָפֶת וְנֹחַדָּדוּ לְהֵם בְּנֵי
אַחַר הַמַּבּוּל: בְּנֵי יָפֶת...
מֵאֵלֶּה נִפְרְדוּ אַיִי הַגּוֹיִם
בְּאַרְצֹתָם אִישׁ לְאִשְׁנוֹ
לְמִשְׁפְּחוֹתָם בְּגוֹיָהֶם: וּבְנֵי
חָם כּוּשׁ וּמִצְרַיִם וְפוּט
וְכַנְעַן... וְכַנְעַן יָלַד אֶת...
וְאַחַר נִפְצוּ מִשְׁפְּחוֹת
הַכְּנַעֲנִי: וַיְהִי גְבוּל הַכְּנַעֲנִי
מִצִּידֹן בְּאַבְקָה גְרָרָה עַד
עֵזָה בְּאַבְקָה סְדֹמָה וְעִמּוֹרָה
וְאַדְמָה וְצִבּוֹיִם עַד לִשְׁעֵי:
אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי חָם לְמִשְׁפְּחוֹתָם
בְּאַרְצֹתָם לְאִשְׁנָתָם
בְּגוֹיָהֶם: ו

clans and languages, in their territories and nations. Sons were also born to Shem, whose older brother was Japheth; Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber. The sons of Shem were...The region where they lived stretched from Mesha toward Sephar, in the eastern hill country. These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations. These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood. (Bereshit 10: 1-32).

לְשֵׁם יָלֵד גַּם הוּא אָבִי
כָּל בְּנֵי עֶבֶר אָחִי יִפֶּת
הַגָּדוֹל: בְּנֵי יֵשׁ... וַיְהִי
מוֹשְׁבָם מִמִּשְׁאֵא בְּאַרְכָּה
סִפְרָה הַר הַקְּדָם: אֵלֶּה
בְּנֵי שֵׁם לְמוֹשְׁפָחֵתָם
לְאֲשֹׁנֹתָם בְּאַרְצֹתָם
לְגוֹיֵהֶם: אֵלֶּה מוֹשְׁפָחֵת
בְּנֵי נֹחַ לְתוֹלְדֹתָם בְּגוֹיֵהֶם
וּמְאֲלָה נִפְרְדוּ הַגּוֹיִם
בְּאַרְצֵי אַחֵר הַמַּבּוּל.

This chapter describes the evolution of humanity from one family to different nations, each of them settling in a different place. From this description, this process seems to have unfolded naturally, with the Torah's purpose being to present how this evolution culminates in Shem's family being chosen as the infrastructure for God's nation ten generations later (as the Torah goes on to describe in Bereshit 11:10-32) with Avraham being chosen.

**The division
of nations
following the
Tower of Babel**

The process of the world population evolving into different nations was catalyzed as a result of the post-deluge generation's attempt to halt this process:

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel -because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (Bereshit 11:1-9)

וַיְהִי כָּל הָאָרֶץ שְׂפִיחַ אֶחָד
וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים: וַיְהִי
בְּנִסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּמְצְאוּ
בְּקִעָה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר
וַיָּשֻׁבוּ שָׁם: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ
אֶל רֵעֵהוּ הִבֵּה נִלְבְּנָה
לִבְנִים וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשִׂרְפָה
וַתְּהִי לָהֶם הַלְבֵנָה לְאֶבֶן
וַתַּחֲמֹר הֵימָּה לָהֶם לַחֲמֹר:
וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִבֵּה נִבְנֶה לָנוּ עִיר
וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַשָּׁמַיִם
וְנַעֲשֶׂה לָנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן נִפְזָר
עַל פְּנֵי כָּל הָאָרֶץ: וַיֵּרֶד
ה' לִרְאוֹת אֶת הָעִיר וְאֶת
הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְנֵי
הָאָדָם: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' הֵן עַם
אֶחָד וּשְׂפִיחַ אֶחָד לְכָלֵם
וְנִהּ הַחֹלֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעַתָּה
לֹא יִבְצֵר מֵהֶם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר
יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת: הִבֵּה נִרְדֶּה
וְנִבְלֶה שָׁם שְׂפָתָם אֲשֶׁר
לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שִׁפְתַּת
רֵעֵהוּ: וַיִּפְּזֵן ה' אֹתָם
מִשָּׁם עַל פְּנֵי כָּל הָאָרֶץ
וַיַּחְדְּלוּ לִבְנֹת הָעִיר: עַל
כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמֹהּ בָּבֶל כִּי
שָׁם בָּלַל ה' שְׂפָתַת כָּל
הָאָרֶץ וַיִּמְשָׁם הַכְּפִיצֵם ה'
עַל פְּנֵי כָּל הָאָרֶץ.

This passage describes the division of nations and their dispersion over the earth as a punishment for the sin of constructing the Tower of Babel. We discussed the significance of humanity's desire to be united, and God's desire to prevent this, at length in our discussion of parashat Noach.⁴

4 As I mentioned, the issue of the division of the nations is described twice in the book of Bereshit – in chapter 10 and 11. These descriptions differ from each other to the extent that two separate stories are created: chapter 10 presents the process of the nations' division as a natural process, without God's intervention; while chapter 11 describes the division of the nations as a result of (sudden,) direct intervention, as a result of sin, rather than as a natural process. However, despite the difference between the two stories, they are inextricably connected, so that both of them fuse into a single scene: the primordial state of the world comprised one united people, which is represented through their common language. Humanity was supposed to spread all over the face of the earth, as God commanded them. But humanity became corrupt, perceived itself as a divine entity, and tried to prevent the naturally ordained dispersion. Following their corruption, there was need for a change in the natural order through direct Divine intervention. The unison of the two stories teaches that there is Divine intervention within the natural order. For a wider discussion of this topic, see my thesis on the subject of the Tower of Babel: Sharon Rimon, "Migdal Bavel," an MA thesis, MaTaN – Machon Torani LeNashim (and Baltimore University), 2005.

3. “According to Bnei Yisrael’s Number”

The nations’ boundaries and Israel’s selection

Verses 8-9 connect the division of the nations with Israel being selected as the chosen nation: “He established boundaries for the peoples according to the number of Bnei Yisrael. For the Lord’s portion is His people, Yaakov his allotted inheritance.” Verse 8 draws a connection between the boundaries of each nations’ inheritance and “the number of Bnei Yisrael.” What is the meaning of this “number,” and how is it related to the nations’ assignment to their own portions?

A Breakdown of the Canaanite Borders

In chapter 10 of Bereshit, which deals with the division of the family into nations and their portions, the only *borders* mentioned specifically are those of the family of Canaan (verse 19):

and the borders of Canaan reached from Tzidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim, as far as Lasha.

וַיְהִי גְבוּל הַכְּנַעֲנִי מִצִּידוֹן
בְּאַחַד גִּרְרָה עַד עֵזָה
בְּאַחַד סְדֹמָה וְעִמְרָה
וְאַדְמָה וְזֵבֹיִם עַד לָשָׁע.

It is no coincidence that out of all the nations, the family line that the Torah discusses in the most depth is the family of Shem, where His chosen nation originates from. The same is true of the borders of the land of Israel – the Torah focuses upon the borders of the Land which is to be inherited by the chosen nation.

As early on as this chapter, the Torah hints to the connection between *number* and *portion*, counting the families of nations who are descended from Canaan:

Canaan was the father of זְצִידוֹן בְּכֹרֹוֹ
 Tzidon his firstborn, and of the וְאֶת חֵת: וְאֶת הַיְבוּסִי וְאֶת
 Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, הָאֱמֹרִי וְאֶת הַגְּרִגְשִׁי: וְאֶת
 Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, הַחִוִּי וְאֶת הָעַרְקִי וְאֶת הַסִּינִי:
 Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites וְאֶת הָאַרְוָדִי וְאֶת הַזְּמָרִי וְאֶת
 and Hamathites. הַחֲמָתִי.

**12 Canaanite
 nations and
 12 tribes of
 Israel**

If we count the number of families descended from Canaan who became a nation, an interesting fact comes to light: including the Canaanite nation itself (those who retained the actual name “Canaan”⁵), there are twelve nations! It seems that this number is no coincidence.⁶ Those twelve families settle within the borders of the land of Canaan – a land which will be inherited by the twelve tribes of Israel. It seems that the Torah created a parallel between the twelve nations of Canaan and the twelve tribes of Israel in

5 In many places in the Torah, the “Canaanite” is mentioned as a separate nation together with other Canaanite nations (the Perizi, the Hittite, etc). The Radak, ad loc., explains that one of Canaan’s sons (or grandsons) is named for his father, and his descendants are called “Canaanites.”

6 From a plain reading of the text, it seems that only Tzidon and Het were his actual sons, while Yevus, Emor and Girgash, etc, were not his actual sons, but rather his grandsons or descendants, and therefore they are not mentioned by name but by their nation – “Yevusite,” “Emorite,” “Girgashite,” etc. In light of this, the fact that they are categorized into a single proto-tribe, “Canaan,” emphasizes the Torah’s intention to hint that twelve tribes of Israel will inherit those same twelve nations.

order to teach us about the purpose of the division into nations.

This is how the Rashbam interprets verse 8 in our parasha:

“When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance” – when He gave them their portions.
“When He divided all humankind” – After Noah’s death, and in the days of Avraham, as it is written: “From these the peoples of the island spread out into their ... each with its own language” and there He established “the boundaries of the nations,” the descendants of Canaan, twelve against the twelve sons of Yaakov, who were twelve. You will find that Canaan and his eleven sons are together twelve, as it is written: “and the border of the Canaanites was from Tzidon,” etc, because all these were designated for Bnei Yisrael, but no borders are defined in relation to other descendants of Noah.

– “בהנחל עליון גוים” – שנתן להם נחלות.
– “בהפרידו בני אדם” – אחר מיתת נח ובימי אברהם שכת’ שם: “משם נפרדו איי הגוים [וגו’] איש ללשונו”, ושם תמצא שהציב “גבולות עמים”, בני כנען, שנים עשר כנגד מספר בני יעקב שהיו שנים עשר. שתמצא כנען וי”א בניו שנים עשר, וכת’ שם: “ויהי גבול הכנעני מצידון” וגו’, לפי שכל אלו היו לישראל, אבל בכל שאר בני נח לא פירש בהם שום גבול.

The Ramban also relates to the connection between the temporary portions of the Canaanite nations within Israel’s future inheritance and the division of the nations. While he does not explicitly address the division of the Canaanites into twelve, his insight

highlights a different point:

Know that the land of Canaan was designated for Israel and is their portion ever since it was settled by the nations, as it says (Devarim 32:8): “When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, He established the boundaries of nations according to the number of Bnei Yisrael,” but at the generation of the Tower of Bavel, He had Canaan settle in the Land, because he was a servant, in order to preserve the Land for Israel, like one who gives the master’s son’s inheritance to his servant for safekeeping, so that when he grows he will inherit both inheritance and a servant. (The Ramban on Bereshit 10:15)

...דע כי ארץ כנען
לגבולותיה מאז הייתה
לגוי היא ראויה לישראל
והיא חבל נחלתם, כמו
שנאמר (דברים ל"ב,
ח): "בהנחל עליון גוים
בהפרידו בני אדם יצב
גבולות עמים למספר
בני ישראל", אבל נתנה
הקב"ה בעת הפלגה
לכנען, מפני היותו עבד,
לשמור אותה לישראל,
כאדם שמפקיד נכסי בן
האדון לעבדו עד שיגדל
ויזכה בנכסים וגם בעבד.

The Ramban finds special significance in Canaan’s temporary inheritance of the land designated for Israel. The song of Ha’azinu mentions that from the dawn of time, before Israel was born and became a nation, the Divine plan already intended the Land for their inheritance. Therefore the sons of Canaan, a subordinate nation, were selected to settle the land temporarily in order that the land will be preserved for the “sons of the Master” – the children of Shem – Am Yisrael.

According to this understanding, particularly in light of the Rashbam's words, the "*number* of Bnei Yisrael" refers to a particular amount, the number 12, as the number of Canaanite nations whose borders will be restored to the tribes of Israel.

70 nations
of the
world
and 70
who went
down to
Egypt

There are other possible interpretations for the "number of Bnei Yisrael."

In the list of nations in chapter 10 of Bereshit, 70 names are mentioned, which seems to be Chazal's source for the concept of "seventy nations of the world."⁷

This number is also the number of the members of Yaakov's family who go down to Egypt: "All the members of Yaakov's household who came to Egypt totaled seventy" (Bereshit 46:27).

It may well be that the song of Ha'azinu refers to the parallel of seventy nations and seventy members of Israel. According to this reading, the meaning of the phrase "He established boundaries for the nations" does not refer to the borders where the Canaanites settled, but to the actual division of the nations and their settlement of different places all over the earth.

The
nations'
salvation
in Israel's
merit

Rashi and Seforno are inclined in this direction,⁸ and


7 See, for example, Tractate *Sukkah* 55b.

8 This idea already appears in the Targum Yerushalmi on our parasha (on verse 8):

When the Supreme Ruler distributed the world among the sons of Noah, when He separated humanity through different scripts and languages in the generation of the Tower of Bavel, at that time He cast lots with seventy angels, the ministering angels of

add that all the nations of the generation of the Tower of Bavel were saved from death only because Am Yisrael was destined to descend from them, as Rashi writes:

“When He divided humankind” - “בהפרידו בני אדם”
When He dispersed the generation כשהפיץ דור הפלגה
of the Tower of Bavel, He could היה בידו להעבירם מן
have erased them from the world העולם ולא עשה כן,
but He did not do so, but fixed the אלא יצב גבולות עמים
boundaries of the nations, and קיימם ולא אבדם.
let them exist and did not destroy “למספר בני ישראל”
them. “According to the number of בני - בשביל מספר בני
Bnei Yisrael” - for the sake of the ישראל שעתידים לצאת
number of Bnei Yisrael who were מבני שם, ולמספר
destined to descend from Shem, שבעים נפש של בני
for the seventy who descended ישראל שירדו למצרים,
to Egypt, He fixed boundaries הציב גבולות עמים
for seventy nations of different שבעים לשון.
tongues.

According to Rashi’s understanding, the “number of Bnei Yisrael” refers to a particular amount, the number 70 - the seventy nations of the world, and the seventy who went down to Egypt. However, the Seforno, although similar in approach to Rashi, explains these words differently:

the nations, to see the city, and at the same time, established the boundaries of the nations as the same number of the seventy people of Israel who went down to Egypt.

“He established the boundaries of the nations” – and established boundaries in the generation of the Tower of Bavel and did not completely destroy them as they should have been. “According to the number of Bnei Yisrael” – for Bnei Yisrael, who were few in number, and would come out of those nations in the future... – “יצב גבולות עמים” והציב גבולות עמים בפלגה ולא איבדם לגמרי כמו שהיו חייבים. “למספר בני ישראל” – בשביל בני ישראל שהיו מתי מספר, והיו עתידים לצאת מאותם העמים...

According to the Seforno, “according to the number of Bnei Yisrael” does not refer to a specific number, but relates to the fact that Bnei Yisrael are few in number. That is, the song of Ha’azinu notes that all of history and the all the nations of the earth have always revolved around a specific nucleus, small in quantity but of the highest quality – Am Yisrael.

**The
division
of nations
and Am
Yisrael**

It seems that the different explanations are not necessarily contradictory, and there is a common denominator to them all – that in every case, the song of Ha’azinu is related to chapter 10 of Bereshit. In this chapter, the boundaries of the Canaanite land, which are the borders of the Land promised to Am Yisrael, are mentioned, as well as many of the names of nations who were enemies of Am Yisrael at some point in the future.⁹ The song of Ha’azinu invites

9 Some of these nations certainly did not exist then, but they developed over the course of history. The nations who were in conflict with Israel and are mentioned in chapter 10 are: the nations of Canaan (Tzidon, Het, Yevusi, Emori, Girgashi, Hivi), Pelishtim, Bavel, Egypt, Assyria, Aram, Magog, Mede,

meditation upon the history of the world, and how the chronicles of Am Yisrael begins long before their appearance in the world. The book of Bereshit tells the story of Israel's ancestors, and while Am Yisrael are not defined as a people within it (besides the 12 potential nations it mentions, and the nucleus of 70 people who went down to Egypt), it essentially presents how all of history culminates in Am Yisrael's birth in the world.

4. Twelve Springs of Water, and Seventy Date Palms

**The
number
seventy in
the Bible**

As we have seen, the numbers 12 and 70 are brought in the demographical and geographical context of the nations of the world in relation to Israel. Reoccurrence of the number seventy illustrates how these particular numbers are typological symbols wrought with meaning, rather than random numbers:

- Seventy date palms in Eilim (Shemot 15:27)
- Seventy elders of Israel (Shemot 24:1; Bamidbar 11:16; Ezekiel 8:11)
- Seventy vanquished kings gather scraps from Adoni-Bezeq's table (Judges 1:7)
- Gideon has seventy sons (Judges 8:30)
- Ahav has seventy sons (2 Kings 10:1)
- Seventy years of Babylonian exile (Jeremiah 25:11)

All of these examples raise the question of whether

and Greece (Yavan).

these numbers are precise or symbolically rounded up. For our purpose, we do not require an answer to this question, for either case serves as proof that this number is a typological symbol. The number 70 is a particularly loaded number as it is a multiple of two typological numbers, 7 and 10.¹⁰ It is no coincidence that both the nations of the world and the people who went down to Egypt are seventy in number, nor that there were seventy date palms in Eilim (where Bnei Yisrael camped for the first time as a nation), nor that the Babylonian exile lasted for seventy years.

**12 springs
and 70
date palms**

Out of the places in the Bible where the number seventy features, it is particularly striking that the Torah chose to specify the number of date palms in Eilim: “And they came to Eilim and there there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms and they encamped there upon the water” (Shemot 15:27).

According to the simple meaning of the text, the Torah wishes to describe God’s miraculous governance of Bnei Yisrael and how He brought them to such a fruitful oasis in the arid desert, whose relatively large number of date palms illustrates God’s bountiful abundance.¹¹ However, many commentators have noted the fact that this verse contains the number 12 as well as the number 70, both of which are associated with the “number of Bnei Yisrael.”

 10 Even *peshat* commentators agree that the number 7 is of special significance in the Torah. See (Hebrew):

גינזברג רחל, מספרים ייחודיים במקרא, עבודת מאסטר, אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון, 2005.

11 For such a *peshat* reading, see the Ibn Ezra and Rabeinu Bahya’s first interpretation.

As Rashi writes:¹²

“Twelve springs of water” – to provide for twelve tribes of Israel. “And seventy date palms” – symbolizing the seventy elders.

”שתים עשרה עינות מים” – כנגד י”ב שבטים נודמנו להם. ”ושבעים תמרים” – כנגד שבעים זקנים.

According to this interpretation, the number of springs and date palms were a result of Divine providence in preparation for Am Yisrael’s arrival, and they may even have been created especially for this purpose.

The
significance
of 12 and 70
according
to the
Kabbalah

Kabbalic interpretations lend further significance to this verse:¹³

According to the Kabbalah... when they now came to this place in Eilim, they entered into the realm of מִיְהִלָּא, where there were 12 ministering angels, 3 in every direction, and each three commanded a heavenly host, and they are referred to as the 4 camps of the Divine Presence, and seventy date palms are the seventy angels which surround the Heavenly throne, who are appointed over the seventy nations of the world, each over their own nation...

ועל דרך הקבלה: ...בבאם עתה במקום הזה באלים נכנסו באותה השגה הנקראת אלהים, כי השיגו שם י”ב מלאכים שלשה לכל רוח מד’ רוחות העולם וכל שלשה מהם עם צבאותיהם מחנה גדול והם הנקראים ד’ מחנות שכינה, ושבעים תמרים הם ע’ מלאכים הסובבים כסא הכבוד, וממונים על ע’ אומות שבעולם כל אחד ואחד ממונה על אומתו...

12 Based on the Mechilta, ויסע, chapter 1.

13 "אלהים" is an anagram of "אלימה".

and because each is appointed over his own domain he cannot enter the domain of another, as it is said, none are like another, nor are the actions of one like the actions of another, and it is hinted to you through the 12 springs which are the 4 camps of the Divine Presence sustain the seventy date palms, that is, the angels that surround the Heavenly throne... similarly, from Yaakov, 12 tribes descended, who were divided into four camps, and they came from seventy people... (Rabeinu Bahya, Shemot, ibid.)¹⁴

ולפי שכל אחד ואחד פועל
מנוויו כמו שנתמנה עליו
ואיננו רשאי ליכנס לגבול
חברו, ולכך אמר אינם דומין
זה לזה ולא פעולתו של
זה דומה לפעולתו של זה,
ונרמז לך בזה כי מי"ב עינות
אלה שהם ד' מחנות שכינה
שואבים בה שבעים תמרים
הם המלאכים הסובבים
כסא הכבוד... והנה דוגמתם
יצאו מיעקב י"ב שבטים
הנחלקים לד' מחנות ומהם
היו שבעים נפש...

According to Rabbeinu Bahya, the numbers 12 and 70 are kabbalistically related to the government of the world: 70 ministering angels surround the Heavenly throne are 70 different, unique powers.

Twelve angels, divided into four different directions, constitute the four "camps" of the Divine Presence, and are the springs which sustain the 70 powers. Bnei Yisrael numbers twelve tribes and the nation evolved from 70 people, like the 70 powers that govern the world.


¹⁴ See also the Maharal's words, Gevurot Hashem, chapter 13.

5. Changes in God's Leadership after the Tower of Bavel

The introduction of ministering angels

The story of the Tower of Bavel describes the population's separation into nations as a result of human corruption, rather than as a natural process. Their sin moved God to introduce separate languages, which confused them and caused the once-united population to disperse.

God's decision to confuse their languages is uttered in plural form: "Let us go down and confuse their language." In our study of parashat Noach, we discussed this at length. Here I would like to focus on the words of the Midrash "*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*," which explains God's use of the plural as an address to the seventy ministering angels:

Rabbi Shimon said: As the people built the tower, God called to the seventy angels that surround the Heavenly Throne, and said, Let us go down...
(*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*, 24)

ר' שמעון אומר: בשעה שבנו בני האדם את המגדל קרא הקב"ה לשבעים מלאכים הסובבים כסא כבודו ואמר להם באו ונבלבל את לשונם...

From God's governance to the angels' governance

Why did God need to include the ministering angels in His decision to confuse the people's language? What is the significance of the angels' role in the punishment of the people who built the towers and were therefore divided?

In the Abrabanel's opinion, God included the ministering angels as a kind of ceremony of power

delegation. Until this sin, the entire world population enjoyed God's direct governance, and from here on in, God's abundance was only bestowed upon the nations through intermediaries (through the stars, *Mazalot* and the forces of nature), rather than directly:

The ministering angels joined forces with God so that God will dismiss them from His tongue and his unified holy providence, and the ministering angels will now control and govern and influence them from that point on, each over his own nation with their own language, within their own land. (Abrabanel, Bereshit 11)

נתחברו שרי מעלה עם ה' כדי שה' יתברך ישלכם מלשונו ומאחדות השגחתו המקודש, ושרי מעלה יחזיקו בהם להנהיג אותם ולהשפיע עליהם משם והלאה, כל אחד מהם על אומה מיוחדת בלשונותיהם לארצותם.

If so, it seems that the significance of the story of the Tower of Babel is very profound: the punishment given was not personal or individual, but resulted in a fundamental change in the way that God governed the world. Until this point, God ruled the world directly; after that generation, the world was not ruled directly by God but rather indirectly, by ministering angels, each ruling over his own nation.

The Ramban, too, explains this issue at length:

God created all, and governed the world below from above, and gave each and every nation in their own land a star and a mazal of its own, as the astrologers know.

והענין כי השם הנכבד ברא הכל, ושם כח התחתונים בעליונים, ונתן על כל עם ועם בארצותם לגוייהם כוכב ומזל ידוע כאשר נודע באצטגנינות.

And this is what is referred to (in Devarim 4:19) “which the Lord your God has distributed to all the nations,” for He distributed ministering mazalot to everyone, and Supreme angels are appointed over them as ministering powers, as it is written (Daniel 10:13): “And the ministering angel of Persia is standing opposite me,” and “And behold, here comes the ministering angel of Greece”¹⁵ (20). (Ramban, Shemot 20:2)

וזהו שנאמר (דברים ד', יט):
 “אשר חלק ה' אלוֹקֵיךְ אותם
 לכל העמים,” כי חלק לכולם
 מזלות בשמים, וגבוהים
 עליהם מלאכי עליון נתנם
 להיותם שרים עליהם, כענין
 שכתוב (דניאל י', יג): “ושר
 מלכות פרס עומד לנגדי,”
 וכתוב (שם, כ) “והנה שר
 יון בא.”

This delegated leadership began as a result of the sin of the Tower of Babel:

15 The Ramban goes on to explain that the land of Israel is unique in its capacity for direct providence of God, rather than being governed by angels:

והנה השם הנכבד הוא אלהי האלהים ואדוני האדונים לכל העולם, אבל ארץ ישראל אמצעות הישוב היא נחלת ה' מיוחדת לשמו, לא נתן עליה מן המלאכים קצין שוטר ומושל בהנהילו אותה לעמו המיוחד שמו זרע אוהביו, וזהו שאמר (שמות י"ט, ה): “והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים כי לי כל הארץ”, וכתוב (ירמיה י"א, ד): “והייתם לי לעם ואנכי אהיה לכם לא להים”, לא שתהיו אתם אל אלהים אחרים כלל...

For the honorable Name is the God of Gods and the Lord of Lords of all the world, but the Land of Israel is the portion of God and specially designated for His name, He did not assign a ministering angel to it when He portioned it out to the seed of the beloved nation that distinguishes His name, as it says (Shemot 19:5): “And you shall be a designated nation among nations, for the entire Land is mine,” and as it is written (Jeremiah 11:4): “And you shall be My people, and I will be your God,” that you should not be for other gods at all... for He distinguished us from amongst the nations, over which He appointed ministering angels and other gods, by giving us the Land, that He should be our God, and we will be designated for His name...

And it is certain in my eyes that this began in the generation of the Tower of Bavel when the Lord dispersed them over the earth, and appointed stars and mazalot over each division...¹⁶ (Ramban, Shemot 20:2)¹

...וקרוב בעיני שהוחל זה בדור הפלגה כאשר הפיצם השם אל הארצות, ומשלו בהם הכוכבים והמזלות למחלקותיהם...

According to the Ramban, then, the separation into nations is not just an arbitrary process, naturally resulting from human culture,¹⁷ but a fundamental, intentional change in God's governance of the world.¹⁸ From that point, the nations are not ruled directly by God, but are governed by 70 ministering angels, 70 unique powerful entities, thus resulting in the basic differences between the nations.

As we have discussed, the number 70 is a number charged with meaning that expresses collective wholeness (seven "minyanim") in Israel, against seventy nations. It is not surprising, therefore, that Chazal perceived the seventy nations listed in parashat Noach as different from each other, corresponding to the seventy unique ministering angels who were appointed over the nations; and this number, therefore, is certainly not coincidental.

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 16 In this verse, the Ramban, at length, explains the meaning of idol worship and how humanity began to serve idols.

17 As can be understood from chapter 10 of Bereshit.

18 As is described in chapter 11. For the difference between the description in chapters 10 and 11, see comment 4, and there is no room to expand here.

## 6. Israel as the Chosen Nation

The  
dynasty of  
Shem

After the story of the Tower of Babel, the Torah describes the dynasty of Shem (Bereshit 11:10-24):

These are the chronicles of Shem: אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי שָׁם שֵׁם בְּן־מֵאָה  
Shem was a hundred years old שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד אֶת אַרְפַּכְשָׁד  
when he bore Arpachshad two שָׁנָתַיִם אַחֵר הַמַּבּוּל...  
years after the flood...

Shem is Noah's chosen son, regarding whom Noah says: "Blessed is the Lord, the God of Shem" (Bereshit 9:26), meaning that Shem has a special closeness with God.

Focus on  
Avraham

It is notable from the verses that Shem's dynasty is mainly brought in order to lead up to the birth of Avram (verse 26), which concludes the ten generations between Noah and Avram:<sup>19</sup>

And Terah lived for seventy וַיְחִי תֵרַח שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד אֶת  
years and he bore Avram, אַבְרָם אֶת נְחוֹר וְאֶת הָרָן.  
Nahor and Haran.

With Avram's birth, the Torah concludes its lineage narrative, which is characterized by "dry" factual description of each descendant's birth and age at the birth of his own son, and begins recounting Avram's life in detail (starting with verses 27-32). From here, it is clear that Shem's dynasty is only brought as background to the main story: the life of Avram:

  
<sup>19</sup> Not all of Shem's descendants are described, only the line which led to Avraham. Shem's other descendants are mentioned in chapter 10.

This is the account of Terah's family line. Terah became the father of Avram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. Avram and Nahor both married. The name of Avram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Yiskah. Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive. Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran. (11:27-32)

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת תֵּרַח תֵּרַח הוֹלִיד אֶת אַבְרָם אֶת נָחוֹר וְאֶת הָרָן וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת לוֹט: וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל פְּנֵי תֵּרַח אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ מְלֻכְתּוֹ בְּאוּר כַּשְׁדִּים: וַיָּסַח אַבְרָם וְנָחוֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם שָׂרַי וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נָחוֹר מִלְכָּה בַת הָרָן אִמִּי מִלְכָּה וַיָּסַח: וַיָּסַח: וַתְּהִי שָׂרַי עֲקָרָה אֵין לָהּ וָלֵד: וַיָּסַח תֵּרַח אֶת אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן הָרָן בְּנוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרַי בְּלִיתוֹ אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם מֵאוּר כַּשְׁדִּים לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: וַיְהִי יָמֵי תֵּרַח חֲמִשָּׁה וָמֵאֵתַיִם וַיָּמָת תֵּרַח בְּחָרָן.

**Avram is  
chosen**

Immediately afterwards (at the beginning of parashat Lech Lecha), God's word appears to Avram:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Get thee out from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Bereshit 12:1-3)

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ  
מֵאֶרֶץךָ וּמִבְּיֹדֶיךָ וּמִבֵּית  
אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ:  
וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאַבְרָכְךָ  
וְאֶגְדַּלְתָּה שְׁמֹךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה:  
וְאַבְרָכָה מִבְּרַכְיֶךָ וּמִשְׁלָלְךָ  
אֲאֹר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחֹת  
הָאֲדָמָה.

**The  
selection  
of the  
people  
who will  
be ruled  
by God**

The Torah seems to have intentionally juxtaposed the story of Avram to the story of the dispersion of the nations after the Tower of Bavel. Avram's appearance in the world is the initial nucleus of Am Yisrael. After all the rest of humanity has been relegated to indirect providence, one nation – beginning with one man – are chosen to be God's chosen people, who will be ruled directly by God. This people will receive God's Land, the Land which is not governed by ministering angels, but directly by God,<sup>20</sup> as the song of Ha'azinu describes: "for God's portion is His people, Yaakov His allotted inheritance."



<sup>20</sup> See the Ramban on Vayikra 18:25, which is brought in comment 15, above.

## 7. All Families of the Earth shall be Blessed through You

As we have said, seventy nations are governed by seventy ministering angels, while Am Yisrael alone, “one nation on earth,” is governed directly by God. However, as we have seen, the number 70 is mentioned in relation to the Am Yisrael itself. Seventy people went down to Egypt; when they became defined as a nation, they encamped besides seventy date palms; appointed seventy elders; when they sinned, they were eventually punished with seventy years of exile. This is all hinted to in the song of Ha’azinu: “He established the boundaries of the nations according to the number of Bnei Yisrael.”

Israel  
includes  
all the  
powers

“The number of Bnei Yisrael” is seventy, the number of all ministering angels, all the powers that govern the world. That is, Bnei Yisrael are equivalent to all the powers that govern the world (whereas each of the nations is governed by a single power each). As Rav Mordechai Breuer eloquently explains in his book, *Pirkei Bereshit*:

When God took Avraham out of Ur Casdim, He did not seek to add a nation to the existing nations, but to found a microcosm of the humanity that was founded by Noach... Israel is not counted amongst the nations of the world, but stands alone against

כאשר הוציא ה' את אברהם מאור כשדים הוא לא ביקש להוסיף עם לעמים הקיימים, אלא לייסד אנושות בזעיר אנפין המקבילה לאנושות שנוסדה על ידי נח... ישראל איננו נמנה עם עמי העולם אלא הוא עומד לבדו מול

them all. He is the descendant of "Avraham the רב" – the entire world stands on this side (רבעמ), while he stands on that side. (Pirkei Bereshit, vol. 1, "Dor HaPalagah," pp. 218-19).

**Providing  
blessing  
for the  
nations**

Avram, chosen to found the most special of nations, governed directly by God and encompassing the equivalent of all seventy powers within him, receives a special blessing: "And you shall be a blessing... and all families of the earth shall be blessed through you" (Bereshit 12:3-4).

Am Yisrael's blessing is the ability to impart blessing to all the nations of the earth. As the Midrash describes:

"And you shall be a blessing" – "והיה ברכה" – אמר לו הקב"ה: מושעה שבראתי עולמי הייתי זקוק לברך בריותי. ברכתי לאדם וחיה, דכתיב: "ויברך אותם אלהים" (בראשית א); לנח ובניו, דכתיב: "ויברך אלוהים את נח ואת בניו" (בראשית ט); מכאן ואילך אתה ה' עשוי על הברכות...  
The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: From the time the world was created, I needed to bless My creations. I blessed Adam and Eve, as it is written: "And God blessed them" (Bereshit 1); Noah and his sons, as it is written: "And God blessed Noah and his sons" (Bereshit 9); from now on you will be responsible for the blessings... (Midrash Tanchuma [Warsaw] Parashat Lech Lecha, 4)

As the essence of humanity, Am Yisrael,

encompassing all seventy of the powers that sustain the seventy nations of the world, is a receptacle of the entire world's blessing and abundance, showering blessing over all seventy nations of the world. Because of this, this blessing is repeated to Avraham's descendant, Yaakov, when he flees from Esav: "and all families of the earth will be blessed through you and your seed" (Bereshit 28:14).

Just when the polarization between Yaakov and Esav climaxes, and the struggle over Yitzchak's blessing is at its peak, the Divine promise is repeated to clarify Yaakov's destiny – Israel's blessing will be to serve as a conductor for the blessing of all nations.

70 bulls  
for 70  
nations

This destiny is expressed on the festival of Sukkot,<sup>21</sup>

21 The Midrash (*Bereshit Raba [Vilna] 39:12*) brings examples of the manifestation of the influence of the nations' blessing in different generations:

"ונברכו בך", הגשמים בזכותך, הטללים בזכותך, הה"ד: (אסתר ב', כב) "ויודע הדבר למרדכי ויגד לאסתר המלכה" ... אמרה: יעקב בירך את פרעה שנאמר (בראשית מ"ז, י'): "ויברך יעקב את פרעה", יוסף גילה לו, דניאל גילה לנבוכדנצר. אף אני כן: "ויגד לאסתר המלכה".

ור' נחמיה אמר: אמר הקב"ה לאברהם אבינו: "ונברכו בך כל משפחות האדמה ובורעד", אין תימר דלהוי עתירין הרי עתירין אנון מינן [= אין הכוונה שנהיה עשירים, שהרי הם עשירים מאיתנו], אלא לשאלה [=לייעוץ], כשהן נכנסין לצרה הם נשאלים לנו ואנו מגלין להם.

"And they will be blessed through you," for the rains fall in your merit, the dew falls in your merit, as it says (Esther 2:22) "and the matter became known to Mordechai and he told Queen Esther"... he said: Yaakov blessed Pharaoh, as it says (Bereshit 47:10): "And Yaakov blessed Pharaoh," Yosef advised him, Daniel advised Nebuchadnezzar. So I, too will "tell to Queen Esther."

Rabbi Nehemiah said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Avraham Avinu: "and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you and your seed" – this does not mean that we will prosper, but that they will prosper through us, asking for advice, for when they encounter problems, we advise them.

when 70 bulls are offered for the 70 nations of the world:

“And you shall offer a burnt offering, a fire sacrifice to the Lord, one bull and one ram” (Bamidbar 29:36). Rabbi Pinhas ben Hama said: Israel would offer seventy bulls so that the seventy nations would dwell in peace. (Pesikta D’Rav Kahana, 28)

”והקרבתם אשה עולה לה' פר אחד איל אחד” (במדבר כ”ט, לו). אמר רבי פינחס בן חמא: שבעים פרים היו, שהיו ישראל מקריבין בחג כנגד שבעים אומות העולם שיֵישבו בשלווה.

**Israel's  
role  
amongst  
the  
nations**

With the separation into nations and the establishment of their boundaries as they were cast out from under God’s direct providence and placed under the ruling of ministering angels, Am Yisrael was created. Governed directly by God, this nation’s role is to spread God’s name in the world, to represent His name in the world, and to bless all the nations with their unique power.<sup>22</sup>

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided all humankind, He set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of Bnei Yisrael. For the Lord’s portion is His people, Yaakov His allotted inheritance.

בְּהִנָּחַל עֲלֵיוֹן גּוֹיִם בְּהַפְרִידוֹ  
בְּנֵי אָדָם יַצַּב גְּבֻלַת עַמּוּיִם  
לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: גֵּי חֶלֶק  
ה' עַמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶלֶל יִנְחַלְתּוּ.

<sup>22</sup> As a result of this special purpose, God’s great disappointment in Israel when they distance themselves from Him and fail to fulfill their vital roles is clear, and this is what the song of Ha’azinu warns about.