

Israel: a blessing to all nations



“ I will make of you a great nation? And you shall be a blessing? And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you” (Gen. 12: 2-3). Israel is a blessing to the other nations. As long as Israel succeeds in informing other peoples and proving that Yahweh is God, it will be understood to be a blessing to these nations. The very examples often employed to dispel the idea of Israel’s being a blessing serve as evidence to support it. The plagues in Genesis actually prove that Yahweh is God to the Israelites and the Egyptians.

In the infamous conquest of Canaan, Rahab and her family are spared because she acknowledges that Yahweh is God. Joseph gathers food to feed the Egyptians during the 7 years of famine. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites relationship with other nations ultimately leads its peoples to benefit by the realization that Yahweh is God. At first, Israel’s relationship with the Egyptians does not seem to be a blessing; however, The Plagues result in the Egyptians ultimately perceiving Yahweh as God.

God, so that the “ Egyptians shall know that I am Lord” (Exodus 7: 3, 5), puts the Egyptians through a gauntlet, comprised of some of the worst conceivable ills that can befall man. When God states that He will bring down a hail storm, Pharaoh’s courtiers, “? who feared the Lord’s word brought their slaves and livestock indoors to safety” (9: 20). This quotation signals a change in faith: previously, Pharaoh’s courtiers did not pay attention to Moses’ premonitions. Gradually though, the courtiers begin to take notice of Yahweh’s power.

Similarly, God vows to unleash locusts all over the land. Pharaoh's courtiers become increasingly involved with Pharaoh's decisions and favor allowing the Israelites to leave: "How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let the men go to worship the Lord our God" (10: 7)! Examined carefully, the quotation reads "the Lord our God." Even though the entire nation does not, Pharaoh's courtiers accept Yahweh as their God. In a similar manner, Israel's conquest of Canaan, at Jericho, reaffirms Israel's status as a blessing.

While hiding the two Israelite spies, Rahab confides, "I know that the Lord has given the country to you? for the Lord your God is the only God in heaven above and on earth below" (Josh. 2: 9,11). Rahab is a harlot, whom one would presume to be anything but pious. When Israel destroys Jericho, "only Rahab the harlot and her father's family were spared? and she dwelt among the Israelites?" (6: 25). This quotation highlights two important notions: the author's choice of stating "her father's family," can be interpreted as her immediate family or a larger group of people who also accept Yahweh.

Secondly, Rahab's "dwell[ing] among the Israelites" is a classic example of how the inhabitants of other nations remain and become a part of Israel. By remaining with the Israelites, Rahab embraces the fact that their God is the one and only God. Also part of Israel's conquest of Canaan, are the events surrounding the city of Gibeon. Upon seeing what Israel had done to Jericho, "the people of Gibeon had come to terms with Israel and remained among them?" (Joshua 10: 2). This is yet another example of people from other nations accepting Yahweh and becoming a part of Israel.

Without having directly experienced what Yahweh is capable of, the Gibeonites immediately identify Him as God. When Joshua arrives with Israel, and realizing what the king's true intentions are, commands, "Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon, / O moon, in the Valley of Aijalon" (10: 12). Miraculously halting these supernatural forces, Joshua defeats all five armies and kills the kings. These marvels further strengthen the people's faith in Yahweh and prove again that Israel is a blessing to the cities of Canaan. (Israel proves to be a blessing to Canaan because it reveals to Canaan's people the one true God)

Proving that he himself is a blessing to the Egyptians, Joseph saves Egypt and its surrounding nations, from death and starvation. Joseph prophesizes that there will be "seven years of abundance? After them will come seven years of famine" (Genesis 41: 29), and proposes that someone be in charge of gathering food to be used during the famine. Though Joseph is an Israelite, Pharaoh puts him in charge of the life-saving task. Just as Joseph foretells, "There was famine in the land, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread? So all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations?" (41: 54, 57).

In the above quotation, Joseph is portrayed as a godlike figure who saves the world from starvation, thus proving himself to be a blessing to the Egyptians and Canaanites. In addition to these cases, in which a named group of people (Pharaoh's courtiers, Rahab, the Gibeonites) are enlightened to Yahweh's existence, there are other instances in which unnamed groups of citizens prove Israel to be a blessing. As Israel finally departs from Egypt, the author describes how there are "about six thousand men on foot, aside
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from children. Moreover, a mixed multitude went up with them? ” (Exodus 12: 37-38).

The author specifically mentions that “ a mixed multitude,” which is understood to mean non-Israelites, joins the Israelites and recognizes Yahweh as God. In I Samuel, Israel is at conflict with the Philistines and has suffered a defeat because the Ark of the Lord is in Shiloh and not with the Israelites. Upon hearing Israel’s joyous shouts, the Philistines become “ frightened” and question, “ God has come to the camp? Who will save us from the power of this mighty God” (4: 7-8)? The inhabitants of other nations previously refer to Yahweh, as “ the God of Israel” or “ the God of the Hebrews. However, in this quotation, the Philistines refer to Yahweh as if they are speaking of their own god, by omitting a distinction of whom He rules. After Israel captures Edom, “? all the Edomites became vassals of David” (II Sam. 8: 14). Initially, this capture is not seen as a blessing. However, after examining what nations typically did after capturing another nation, Israel is truly a blessing, because not only did Israel refrain from destroying, robbing, and murdering the citizens and the city, but instead appointed them to official positions.

Israel’s conquests prove to be a blessing to other nations, as they allow the peoples to live by accepting Yahweh as God. Though Israel’s actions may not initially allow it to be apparent, Israel is a blessing to other nations. It is true that many people suffer, some innocently and others because they chose not to accept Yahweh as God. However, the Tanakh says it is much better to die with the truth, than it is to live in ignorance.