

Noach - Rabbi Lerner - October 14, 2012

The Bris of the Rainbow

8:8-17: *And Hashem said to Noach and to his sons with him [Ito]: Behold I am going to establish my Covenant with you and with your offspring after you, and with every living being that is with you, with the birds, with the animals, and with every beast of the land with you, of all that departed the Ark, to every beast of the land. And I will confirm my Bris with you - never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said 'This is the sign of the Covenant that I give between Me and you, and every living being that is with you, to generations [Ledoros] forever. I have set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the Bris between Me and the earth. And it shall happen, when I place a cloud over the earth, and the bow will be seen in the cloud, I will remember My Bris between Me and you and every living being among all flesh, and the water shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it to remember the everlasting Bris between God and every living being, among all flesh that is on earth.' And God said to Noach, 'This is the sign of the Bris that I have confirmed between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth.*

Abarbanel: this parsha all sounds good if you begin with 8:8; but if you look at what preceded this, some questions arise. Noach and his family are commanded to leave the Ark, and then Noach and his children are commanded to be fruitful and multiply, and that the animals will all fear humans; for the first time they can kill and eat animals, but cannot eat their blood. Furthermore murder is prohibited. If Hashem is already talking directly to them, why does it need a new introduction in 8:8 saying that God spoke to them - this pasuk seems to be unnecessary?

Oznayim LaTorah: not only is Hashem talking to Noach, but He is also speaking to his children - they are being treated like Nevi'im, even though they are not at the same level of righteousness as Noach. The extra word *Ito* - with him - tells us that they were with him in the Ark. Just as the Ark brought atonement to Noach, it brought Kaparah to his children. What does that mean? They, like their father, endured incredible afflictions for a full year in the Ark. They did not sleep the full year because they had to care for the animals - an endless, difficult, thankless job of continually feeding and cleaning them. They kept all the animal species alive. This was a tremendous zechus, and because of this, Hashem blessed them and spoke directly to them. That is what this pasuk is telling us. In 8:1 they were given a bracha directly to them, given a job to repopulate the world - there He has to talk directly to them for this command. Here, the Bris of the rainbow could have been just to Noach, but because of their mesiras nefesh, they were rewarded and Hashem spoke directly to them as well.

Abarbanel: It appears that in the first several pasukim of this perek, they are given the right to eat animals and not to fear them, and to be fruitful. Before that they were commanded to leave the ark, and Noach offered korbanos of thanks to Hashem on an altar he built. God then swears that He will not destroy the world again. The children of Noach at this point, were not yet appeased by God's words. They were given a guarantee that the animals would not destroy man, and their food needs were to be taken care of by letting them be carnivores, and that they should not kill other men - but who will guarantee that there won't be another occasional flood to destroy the world again? What if they mess up again like the previous 10 generations? What if it happens again and as humans we fall to our temptations - maybe God will be upset and wipe out

everything again? They, therefore, did not want to have children who would be killed - they were not convinced that it was safe, and they still had this fear on their minds. Hashem knew this, that they had a latent fear about having children - that is why this whole new section was introduced. Even though they did not deserve to be Nevi'im - they weren't that special - He had to talk to them directly to assure them; He had to prepare them for Nevuah and then to reassure them that He would not destroy the world again. He did this in a new section in the Torah because it was a whole new thing that was necessary when Hashem saw what was on their minds. He needed to promise all of them, to convince them, that there would be an irrevocable covenant, that there will never be a total destruction of mankind again. But it can be partial, as in Sedom.

8:9-17: The rainbow is the sign of this Bris. But is a rainbow a good thing or a bad thing? Should it frighten us when it appears? There are two opposing opinions:

8:12: **Rashi**: on the words *Ledoros Olam* - the word *Ledoros* is written missing its vavs. Why is the word written deficient? Because there will be generations that will not require the sign of the rainbow because they will be complete righteous, like when Chizkiyahu was king over Judea - he turned around the entire land from being idolaters to believers in Hashem - all Jews then were completely conversant in all laws of Torah - there was tremendous dissemination of Torah knowledge; he was so great and righteous that he could have been the Moshiach. During his time they never saw a rainbow. Also, during the generation of Rav Shimon Bar Yochai, after the destruction of the second Bais Hamikdash, there was none during his entire lifetime, because they were tzadikim and did not need a rainbow. **Sifsai Chachamim**: when the generations are lacking, when they are Rasha'im, that is when they need a rainbow - these are *Doros* written without a vav - they are deficient generations, without any merit. But those with tzadikim do not need rainbows. So it looks like the appearance of a rainbow is not a good sign - it means were are deficient.

Sforno: when a rainbow appears, it is a warning, an alarm bell, telling the tzadikim that their generation is evil and it is a dangerous time. If you saw a rainbow in your life you have to pray hard and be mekarev people to do Teshuvah - it means this is a generation in mortal danger.

Rabbeinu Bachya: He agrees with these others and says that you should know that this sign is not seen constantly, it does not appear every time there is a heavy rain. When the generation is guilty, Hashem shows that He is guarding his covenant with this sign. During times of tzadikim, like Chizkiyahu, there was no need for a rainbow. The word *Doros* is written without a vav to say that only the degenerate generations see the rainbow, to tell them they are in big trouble.

Opposing view:

Ramban: the rainbow appears in the sky as an arc, a semicircle; the feet of the arc of the rainbow come towards us on earth. This is highly symbolic. The feet are never going up, because it would look like the heavens are shooting at us with a bow and arrow. The arc would have to face the other way if God were aiming His arrow at us. Hashem shows us that he is turning it the opposite way, as a symbol of peace - it is a peace offering. Furthermore, there is no string on the bottom - it is a defective bow, telling us that Hashem is not going to come after us, He will not be shooting at us. When people declare a truce, they turn the bow the other way, just like a rainbow.

Chizkuni: it is an important sign - it is like a symbol of God. As is written in the first perek of Yechezkel in the Ma'ase Merkava - the description of God's throne, in 1:28: *Like the appearance of a bow (keshes) in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brilliance all around - like the appearance of the likeness and glory of God.* A rainbow is like the

appearance of God Himself. The symbol of the rainbow is like the revelation of God's shechina. When God is angry He becomes invisible to us - *Hester Panim*; when he reveals Himself to us it is when He is happy with us. So, a rainbow should be a very good sign - it is like God revealing Himself to us.

Oznayim LaTorah: it is not just a symbol - it is a Bris. A covenant is always between two parties, obligating both sides in a contractual agreement. It is completely irrevocable, cannot be uprooted. If it only one side agreeing, then it is not a Bris - then it is an oath. There are very few times in the Torah where there is a Bris. So why is this a Bris? Where is our obligation if Hashem is promising not to destroy the world - it is more like an oath than a Bris? In the Haftorah from Yeshayahu, Hashem swore not to destroy the world again - it uses the word Shvuah. What is man's role here that makes it a Bris? **Rashi** and others say that the rainbow shows itself only when the generations are deficient and God is angry - when men see the rainbow, it means there is a large amount of sin threatening this generation, and God is demanding they do Teshuvah. If God shows us the rainbow, we must understand its meaning and power. The Gemorrah tells us not to gaze at a rainbow, because we deserve to be killed if we stare at it - that is because we are looking at the face of the shechina. When Hashem shows us a rainbow He may be even showing Himself to us - it is to warn us. It is the light of Hashem, but He does not do that in normal times - He loves us and warns us that He doesn't want to destroy us. We have to take the symbol of the rainbow to heart and make extra efforts to get people back on track. It is a sign of danger, a wake-up call, telling us that He does not want to destroy us - we need to mend our ways.