

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Masei 5768

And you shall take possession of the land and live in it, for to you I have given the land to inherit it. (33:53).

The Ramban in his commentary to the Torah and in Sefer Hamitzvos argues that this verse is a commandment, not merely a promise as Rashi interprets it. He says that the commandment to live in Eretz Yisroel should be counted as one of the 613 mitzvos, and that this is why Chazal say (Sotah 44b) that Yehoshua's war against the Canaanites was a "milchemes mitzvah," an obligatory war.

However, the Rambam does not count living in Eretz Yisroel as one of the 613 mitzvos. In the Parsha Pearls of 5766, we analyzed the Megillas Esther's explanation of the Rambam's view. This year, we will look at a different explanation, that of Rabbi Isaac of Komarna (1806-1874).

Rabbi Isaac contends that the Rambam basically agrees to the Ramban that there is a mitzvah to conquer Eretz Yisroel and that we must not leave in the hands of gentiles or unoccupied. However, he holds that it cannot be counted among the 613 mitzvos because we do not count mitzvos that are not within human power to fulfill. For example, prophecy is central to Judaism, yet there is no mitzvah for a Jew to be a prophet, because a Jew cannot select that status for himself; it is up to G-d to give it to him.

Here too, the conquest of Eretz Yisroel, no matter at what point in history, was not something that the Jews could just do on their own. They needed to be commanded by a prophet to do so. The conquests of Yehoshua and David, as well as the establishment of the Second Commonwealth in the time of Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly, were all accompanied by commands from the prophets of the time. But in the absence of a command, Jews are forbidden under oath to rebel against the nations, and we must accept exile with love until the coming of moshiach. When moshiach arrives, the restoration of the Jews to Eretz Yisroel will not take place naturally, but through prophecy and wonders. Thus it cannot be counted as one of the 613 mitzvos, for the mitzvos were given to men of flesh and blood, not to prophets who change the laws of nature. (Otzar Hachaim, Kitzur Taryag Mitzvos, p. 59)

Although the Rambam (Melachim 12:2) quotes the Gemara's statement (Shabbos 63a) that "there is no difference between this world and the days of moshiach except the subjugation of the nations," the Minchas Elazar (5:16) explains that this means that in the general world there will be nothing miraculous, but moshiach himself will be a wondrous person. He will come in a miraculous way, predicted by a

prophet; he himself will be a prophet close to Moshe Rabbeinu's level (Rambam Teshuva 9:2), and he will be able to tell each Jew what tribe he comes from (Melachim 12:3). He will succeed in getting all Jews to repent (Melachim 11:4), a feat no one could accomplish under normal conditions. All the gentile nations will call in the name of Hashem (ibid.), and they will come to hear moshiach as well (Teshuva 9:2).

The difference between the Megillas Esther and the Minchas Elazar's explanation of the

Rambam, which we analyzed two years ago, and that of Rabbi Isaac of Komarno, is that according to the Minchas Elazar, conquering Eretz Yisroel was at one time in history a mitzvah given to the Jewish people to be fulfilled through natural means, like any other mitzvah. But since in the time of moshiach it will not be fulfilled through natural means, it is considered a temporary mitzvah and cannot be counted in the 613. Rabbi Isaac of Komarno, on the other hand, holds that even in ancient times it was not a natural mitzvah, since it required the command of a prophet.

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