

Was Avraham Responsible for the Egyptian Exile? PT 2

Source 1: History of the sages cited in the opening of our shiur

רבי יוחנן

גדול אמוראי ארץ ישראל בדור השני וראש הדור כולו: גם חכמי בבל היו כפופים לו. בטרם נולד, אמר עליו רבי את הפסוק: "בטרם אצרך בבטן ידעתיד" (יומא פ"ב ע"ב). היה יתום כפול מלידה, כי כשעיברתו אמו - מת אביו, וכשילדתו - מתה (קידושין ל"א ע"ב). בצעירותו למד לפני רבי (פסחים ג' ע"ב). רבותיו היו: חזקיה (עירובין כ"ד ע"א), ר' ינאי (ב"ב קנ"ד ע"ב), ר' חנינא (ירוש', הוריות פ"ג ה"ד) ור' אושעיא (עירובין נ"ג ע"א). המשיך לבוא לפני ר' אושעיא במשך 13 שנה, אף שכבר לא היה צריך לו (ירוש', עירובין פ"ה ה"א). בישיבה של מעלה יושב ר' יוחנן אצל ר' ינאי (ב"מ פ"ה ע"ב). כשנפטר רבי חנינא קרע עליו ר' יוחנן שלושה עשר בגדים (מו"ק כ"ד ע"א). את רב החשיב לרבו, ונהג לכתוב לרב לבבל: "לקדם רבותינו שבבבל" (חולין צ"ה ע"ב). יסד ישיבה גדולה בטבריה. היה ראש ישיבה 80 שנה (סה"ד). הראש והראשון בישיבתו היה ר' שמעון בן לקיש, שהיה לו גם כתלמיד (תענית ח' ע"א), ואח"כ הפך להיות לו תלמיד חבר (כתובות פ"ד ע"ב). רבי יוחנן הביא את רשב"ל ללימוד תורה, וגם נתן לו את אחותו לאשה, ובסוף ימיהם היה ביניהם דין ודברים חריף, ור' יוחנן העניש את רשב"ל והוא מת, ואח"כ מרוב צער נעקרה דעתו של ר' יוחנן וביקשו רחמים ומת גם ר' יוחנן (ב"מ פ"ד ע"א). רבי אלעזר בן פדת היה בתחילה תלמידו המובהק (יבמות צ"ו ע"ב), ואח"כ הפך תלמיד חבר (ירוש', סנהדרין פ"א ה"א), ולבסוף ישב על כסאו של ר' יוחנן כראש מתיבתא ("אגרת רב שרירא גאון"). לר' יוחנן היו תלמידים רבים מאד, וביניהם: ר' אמי [שהיה ממלא מקומו אחרי ר' אלעזר, שנפטר באותה שנה שנפטר ר' יוחנן] (כתובות ס"ב ע"א), ר' אסי (שם), ר' חייא בר אבא (ברכות ל"ח ע"ב), ר' יוסי בר חנינא (סנהדרין ל' ע"ב), ר' אבהו (כתובות נ"ז ע"א) ורבים אחרים שהיו ראשי הדור וראשי ישיבות אחריו. היה מבורך בכח גופני גדול (ב"מ ס"ב ע"א), יופי נדיר (שם פ"ד ע"א) ובעושר (תענית כ"א ע"א רש"י). היו לו יסורים של אהבה וכל עשרת בניו מתו עליו בחייו (ברכות ה' ע"ב רש"י). היה לו כח להחיות מתים ולאחר שהעניש בטעות את ר' כהנא, החיה אותו (ב"ק קי"ז ע"א). היה גדול כל כך, עד שאמרו: "רב ור' יוחנן, הלכה כרבי יוחנן" (ביצה ד' ע"א), וכן: "שמואל ור' יוחנן, הלכה כרבי יוחנן" (ב"ק ק"ד ע"ב תד"ה: ורבי יוחנן). יש "ראשונים" (ביניהם הרמב"ם) שמייחסים לו את סידור ש"ס הירושלמי. נפטר בשנת ד' ל"ט (279) "אגרת רב שרירא גאון".

רבי אבהו

אמורא ארץ ישראל בדור השלישי מתלמידי המובהקים של רבי יוחנן (כתובות נ"ז ע"א). אמר על רבו: "מפתח לנו רבי יוחנן פתח מאיר כאורה" (ירוש', פסחים פ"ב סה"ב). רש"י כתב, שרבי אלעזר היה רבו (יומא פ' ע"א), וכן קיבל מר"ל (פסחים מ"ו ע"א). מושבו היה בקיסרי והיה מקורב למלכות (חגיגה י"ד ע"א). התווכח הרבה עם המינים וניצחם (ברכות י' ע"א). חבריו הגדולים היו רבי אמי, רבי אסי, ורבי חייא בר אבא (יבמות ס"ה ע"ב). אחרי פטירת רבי אמי רצו להושיבו בראש ומרוב ענוה ביקש להושיב במקומו את רבי אבא מעכו (סוטה מ' ע"א). היה מבורך בעושר (שבת קי"ט ע"א) ביופי (ב"מ פ"ד ע"א). אמרו עליו "שופריה דר' אבהו מעין שופריה דיעקב אבינו" (שם). היה בעל כח רב (ברכות ס' ע"א). היו לו תלמידים רבים וביניהם ראשי הדור הרביעי רבי יונה (ירוש', סנהדרין ספ"ו) ורבי יוסי (סנהדרין ספ"ו) כן היו תלמידי, אבימי (קדושין ל"א ע"ב), רבי זעירא (ירוש', ברכות רפ"ט), ורבי חנינא בנו (קידושין ל"ג ע"ב). חמו של רבי אבהו היה חכם ושמו רבי תחליפא דקיסרין, ורבי אבהו אמר

משמו (קה"ר ספ"י). כשמת רבי אבהו הראו לו את חלקו המזומן לו לעוה"ב, ואפילו עמודי השיש שבקיסרי זלגו דמעות (מו"ק כ"ה ע"ב).

Recall R. Yochanan's critique of Avraham:

"Rabbi Yochanan said: Because he kept people away from entering beneath the wings of the Divine Presence."

R. Yochanan devotes many of his teachings to the defense of biblical sinners, casting them in a more positive light, and embracing biblical characters who were outcast from the community owing to their sins.

Source 2: Rav Nachman Kahana

On Chol Hamoed, while riding in the mountains of the tribes of Binyamin and Efrayim, just north of Yerushalayim, I recalled the episode of "pessel Micha" brought in the Book of Judges (Shoftim), which transpired in that area.

Micha erected a sanctuary for avoda zara (a"z) in the town of Gerev. But not being versed in the ceremonies, he required the services of a "talmid chacham" in a"z.

It just happened that when Micha was searching for the "right" man, that a Levi passed his door. One thing lead to another and Micha offered the Levi a handsome salary if he would serve as the kohen for a"z. The Levi accepted. differently then the others in order to camouflage his true identity. For if we remove the letter "nun" from the name The Tanach informs us that his name was "Yehonatan ben Gershom ben Menashe". But the letter "nun" in Menashe is written Menashe, we are left with the name "Moshe". Yes! The Layvi who dedicated himself to a"z was the grandson of Moshe Rabbeinu!

The facts get even more bewildering. The Yerushalmi in Brachot (chap. 9 halacha 2) relates that David HaMelech met with Yonatan and asked him how he serves a"z? Yonatan answered that he received from his grandfather Moshe, a rule that it is preferable to give yourself over to a"z then to live off the proceeds of tzedaka. And since he had no means of making a livelihood he accepted the position at Micha's a"z. David was shocked and explained to Yonatan that Moshe meant that it is preferable to do work which is "zara" strange to (if you cannot find work in your profession then do other work which is "zara" to you but do not accept charity). David understood that Yonatan was a man who craved material things and appointed him to the position of Minister of Finance. After the demise of David, King Shlomo dismissed all the ministers in David's cabinet including Yonatan, who, as the Yerushalmi tells us, returned to serve a"z.

Source 3: Talmud Bava Batrah 110a

"And [David] placed Shevuel son of Gershom son of Menashe as head of the treasuries" – But how did he come to be called "Shevuel," if his name was Yehonatan?! R. Yochanan taught: He returned to God (*shav la-el*) with all his heart

כיון שראה דוד שממון חביב עליו ביותר, מינהו על האוצרות, שנאמר: ושבואל בן גרשם בן מנשה נגיד על האוצרות. וכי שבואל שמו? והלא יהונתן שמו! א"ר יוחנן: ששב לאל בכל לבו.

Source 4: Talmud Bava Batrah 16b

R. Yochanan taught: Yishmael repented during his father's lifetime, as it is written, "And Yitzchak and Yishmael, his sons, buried him."

הכי אי"ר יוחנן : ישמעאל עשה תשובה בחיי אביו, שנאמר : ויקברו אותו יצחק וישמעאל בניו

Sanhedrin 103a

R. Yochanan taught: One who asserts that Menashe has no portion in the World to Come discourages penitents."

אמר רבי יוחנן : כל האומר מנשה אין לו חלק לעולם הבא מרפה ידיהן של בעלי תשובה...

R. Yochanan taught in the name of R. Shimon bar Yochai: What is the meaning of the verse, "He prayed to Him and He made an opening for him (va-yechater lo)" (Divrei Hayamim II 33:13)? Should the text not read, "And He acquiesced to him (va-ye'ater lo)"?[5] This teaches that God made a sort of opening (macheret) for him in the heaven, so as to accept him once he had repented, on account of the Attribute of Justice [which otherwise would have obstructed his acceptance].

אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי : מאי דכתיב וישמע אליו ויחתר לו, ויעתר לו מיבעי ליה! - מלמד שעשה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא כמין מחתרת ברקיע, כדי לקבלו בתשובה, מפני מדת הדין.

Source 5: Shmuel 2 Ch. 6

א וַיִּסָּף עוֹד דָּוִד אֶת-כָּל-בְּחוּר בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, שְׁלֹשִׁים אָלֶף. **1** And David again gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.

ב וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ דָּוִד, וְכָל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ, מִבְּעֵלְיָהוּדָה--לְהַעֲלוֹת מִשָּׁם, אֶת אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים, אֲשֶׁר-נִקְרָא שְׁם שָׁם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִים, עָלָיו. **2** And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him, from Baale-judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whereupon is called the Name, even the name of the LORD of hosts that sitteth upon the cherubim.

ג וַיִּרְכְּבוּ אֶת-אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים, אֶל-עֲגֹלָה חֲדָשָׁה, וַיִּשְׂאֶהוּ, מִבַּיִת אַבִּינָדָב אֲשֶׁר בְּגִבְעָה; וַעֲזָא וַאֲחִיו, בְּנֵי אַבִּינָדָב, נָהֲגִים, אֶת-הָעֲגֹלָה חֲדָשָׁה. **3** And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart.

ד וַיִּשְׂאֶהוּ, מִבַּיִת אַבִּינָדָב אֲשֶׁר בְּגִבְעָה, עִם, אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים; וַאֲחִיו, הַלֵּל לִפְנֵי הָאֲרוֹן. **4** And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was in the hill, with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark.

ה וַדָּוִד וְכָל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִשְׁחָקִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה, בְּכָל, עֲצֵי בְרוֹשִׁים; וּבְכַנָּרוֹת וּבְנִבְלִים וּבְתַפִּים, וּבְמִנְעִנְעִים וּבְצִלְצְלִים. **5** And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD with all manner of instruments made of cypress-wood, and

with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with sistra, and with cymbals.

ו וַיָּבֹאוּ, עַד-גֶּרֶן נָכוֹן; וַיִּשְׁלַח עֲזָה אֶל-אָרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים, וַיֹּאחֲז בּוֹ--כִּי שָׁמְטוּ, הַבָּקָר.
6 And when they came to the threshing-floor of Nacon, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen stumbled.

ז וַיִּחַר-אַף יְהוָה בְּעֲזָה, וַיִּכְהוּ שָׁם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל-הַשָּׂל; וַיָּמָת שָׁם, עִם אָרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים.
7 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.

ח וַיִּחַר לְדָוִד, עַל אֲשֶׁר פָּרַץ יְהוָה פָּרַץ בְּעֲזָה; וַיִּקְרָא לְמָקוֹם הַהוּא, פָּרַץ עֲזָה, עַד, הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.
8 And David was displeased, because the LORD had broken forth upon Uzzah; and that place was called Perez-uzzah, unto this day.

Source 6: Sotah 35a-b

“And he died there with the Ark of God” (II Samuel 6:7). Rabbi Yoḥanan says: Uzzah entered the World-to-Come, as it is stated: “With the Ark of God.” Just as the Ark exists forever, so too, Uzzah entered the World-to-Come.

וימת שם עם ארון האלהים אמר רבי יוחנן עוזה בא לעולם הבא שנאמר עם ארון האלהים מה ארון לעולם קיים אף עוזה בא לעולם הבא
The verse states:

Dr. Brachi Elitzur:

Likewise, R. Yochanan displays a conspicuously supportive position concerning converts. This is evident in his rulings concerning their status: And R. Yochanan replied: This means that converts may be accepted from Tarmod. (*Yevamot 16b*; 77a) It is also apparent in his teaching in the name of R. Shimon ben Yehotzadak condemning Shaul's attack on the converts from among the Giv'onim:

Contrast this with R. Yochanan's critique of who was a "righteous man in his generation" – relative to his generation, but who would not be considered righteous in other generations"

Source 7: Sanhedrin 108a

אלה תולדות נח [נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתיו] אמר רבי יוחנן: בדורותיו, ולא בדורות אחרים, וריש לקיש אמר: בדורותיו, כל שכן בדורות אחרים

R. Yochanan was the spiritual leader of the Jewish community in *Eretz Yisrael* at the beginning of the Talmudic period. **This period was characterized by acute economic crisis, prompting mass emigration to Babylon. In addition to economic troubles, Jewish society in *Eretz Yisrael* had to deal with Christian propaganda that was aimed at attracting converts. The missionary efforts exploited the weakness of the destitute Jews, encouraging them to join the ranks of the Church by idealizing their poverty and the poor.** The status of the "Christian Jews" who were led astray by the Church's promises but who continued to attend Jewish prayer services and *battei midrash*,

was hotly debated between conservative elements, which called for their exclusion from the community, and liberal elements, who hoped to welcome them back. **It seems that R. Yochanan's position with regard to their status was unequivocal: he believed that failure to embrace them would lead to the end of the Jewish community's presence in Eretz Yisrael.**

Impending Jewish exile was on his mind; Avraham is couched as someone who gave up on the people of Sdom:

R. Yochanan said: Because he (Avraham) kept people away from entering beneath the wings of the Divine Presence, as it is written, ([Bereishit 14](#)), [King of Sdom said:] "Give me the people, and take the goods for yourself." ([Nedarim 32a](#))

R. Elazar:

R. Abahu said in the name of R. Elazar: Why was Avraham punished by having his descendants subjugated in Egypt for 210 years? **Because he imposed a labor tax [angaria] on Torah scholars [i.e., pressed them into his service], as it is written ([Bereishit 14](#)), "He led forth his disciples, those born in his house..."**

One of the effects of the economic crisis was a blow to the status of the Sages. The scholarly echelon had been granted preferential status and rights by the leadership since the time of R. Yehuda Ha-Nasi, who took care to maintain these special privileges in light of the importance and contribution of those engaged in Torah and matters of the spirit to life in *Eretz Yisrael*. One of the privileges enjoyed by the Sages was an exemption from taxes and the obligation imposed on the townspeople to support them:

A typical instance was that of the crown tax which the inhabitants of Tiberias were called upon to pay. They came to Rabbi [Yehuda Ha-Nasi] and said to him, "Let the Rabbis give their share with us." He refused. They said to him, "Then we will run away." He replied, "Then go." (*Bava Batra 8a*)

Excerpts from the conclusion of Dr. Elitzur's article:
The acute economic crisis in the time of R. Yehuda Nesi'a (grandson of R. Yehuda Ha-Nasi) led this sage to reconsider the exemption and expand the ranks of those obligated to pay communal taxes, as suggested in several sources: (*Bava Batra 7b*)

Apparently, despite the opposition to participation in paying the taxes, the widespread collection continued, as we conclude from the continuation of the encounter between Resh Lakish and the Nasi:

When R. Shimon ben Lakish went up to inquire after the health of the Nasi, he said to him: Pray for me, for the [Roman] authorities steal and rob [from me]. Resh Lakish said to him: Stop collecting taxes from the people and the government will stop demanding your money." (*Bereishit Rabba 78:12*)

The Sages were concerned that imposition of a tax on the scholarly echelon would bring about the end of Jewish habitation in *Eretz Yisrael*. The destitution of the Sages would force

them to go down to Babylon – thus sealing the fate and future of those remaining in *Eretz Yisrael*.

R. Elazar, son of Pedat, was a disciple of R. Yochanan. Does his teaching concerning the reason for the Divine decree of subjugation in Egypt represent a contradiction of the position of his rabbi and teacher? Does R. Elazar belong to the conservative camp that opposes the acceptance of the "sinners of Israel"?

From the following teaching, we see that R. Elazar is in full agreement with his teacher's aim of welcoming those who have been led astray, but he disagrees with him concerning the essence of Avraham's sin. To his view, Avraham's actions are in fact a model of how to welcome converts:

"And Avram took Sarai his wife, and Lot, his brother's son, and all their substance, [and the souls that they had made]" – R. Elazar taught in the name of R. Yossi ben Zimra: Even if all the nations were to gather together to create a single gnat, they could not imbue it with a soul. How, then, can it be claimed that they "made souls"? This must surely refer to converts. But then the text should read, "[And the souls] that they had converted." Why the term "made"? This teaches that anyone who welcomes a non-Jew is regarded as though he had created him." (*Bereishit Rabba* 39:5)

The *midrash* proposing the reason for Avraham's punishment presents a theological question that traces the factors that may lead to exile. R. Yochanan argues that exile is caused by the unwillingness on the part of the nation and its leaders to welcome souls that have been led astray, while R. Elazar maintains that exile is caused by a situation of economic crisis among the Sages and their mobilization for other purposes that harm their Torah studies.

R. Elazar said: Greater is he who performs charity than [he who offers] all the sacrifices... And R. Elazar said: The performance of kindness is greater than charity... And R. Elazar said: The reward for charity depends entirely on the extent of kindness entailed in it... And R. Elazar said: One who performs charity and justice is considered as though he filled the entire world with kindness... (*Sukka* 49b)

R. Elazar said: ... Anyone who marries his daughter to a Torah scholar [thereby committing to help support him], or maintains a trade for Torah scholars, or benefits Torah scholars from his estate, is regarded by the Torah as cleaving to the Divine Presence." (*Ketubot* 111b)

And R. Elazar said: Any man who owns no land is not a [complete] man, as it is written, "The heavens are God's heavens, but the earth He has given to the children of man." (*Yevamot* 63a)

"And Yaakov remained alone" – R. Elazar said: He remained on account of some small jars. From here we deduce that for the righteous, their money is more precious to them than their own bodies. And why so? Because they do not stretch out their hands to [engage in] theft. (*Chullin* 91a)

"She took for him an ark made from bulrushes" – Why bulrushes? R. Elazar said: From here we deduce that for the righteous, their money is more dear to them than their own bodies. And why so? Because they do not stretch out their hands to [engage in] theft. (*Sota* 12a)[8]

R. Abahu's question, "Why was Avraham punished by having his descendants subjugated in Egypt for 210 years?," introduces a general teaching for the public in which the greatest of the Sages reveal their respective approaches, present principles for strengthening the rootedness of the Jewish People upon their land, and warn against actions that undermine this process and lead to exile. The critical issues addressed in their teachings – the status of Jewish souls that have been led astray; the obligation of supporting Torah scholars; and the boundaries of contacts and alliances with non-Jews – represent beacons for future generations of leaders of the nation upon its land.