

Parashat Haazinu: Rethinking Borderlands

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York¹

Devarim 32:8-9	
<p>בְּהִנָּחֵל עָלֵינוּ גּוֹיִם בְּהַפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם יִצֵּב גְּבֻלַּת עַמִּים לְמִסְפָּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: כִּי חֵלֶק יְהוָה עִמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ:</p>	<p>When the Most High gave nations their homes And set the divisions of humankind; the boundaries of peoples were fixed in relation to Israel's numbers. For the ETERNAL's portion is this people; Jacob, God's own allotment.</p>

1. Isaiah's Vision of Borders

Isaiah 2:2-4	
<p>(ב) וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים נִכְּוֹן יְהוָה הַר בֵּית־יְהוָה בְּרָאשׁ הָהָרִים וְנִשָּׂא מִגְבָּעוֹת וְנִהְרָוּ אֵלָיו כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם: (ג) וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ לָכֵן וְנַעֲלָה אֶל־הַר־יְהוָה אֶל־בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וִירְנוּ מִדְּרָכָיו וְנִלְכֶּה בְּאַרְחֵיתָיו כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה וּדְבַר־יְהוָה מִירוּשָׁלַם: (ד) וְשִׁפְטוּ בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם וְהוֹכִיחִים לַעַמִּים רַבִּים וְכִתְּבוּתָם חֲרֻבוֹתָם לְאַתִּים וְחִנִּיתוּתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמָרוֹת לֹא־יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל־גּוֹי חֶרֶב וְלֹא־יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה:</p>	<p>(2) In the days to come, The Mount of GOD's House Shall stand firm above the mountains And tower above the hills; And all the nations Shall gaze on it with joy. (3) And the many peoples shall go and say: "Come, Let us go up to the Mount of GOD, To the House of the God of Jacob; That we may be instructed in God's ways, And that we may walk in God's paths." For instruction shall come forth from Zion, The word of GOD from Jerusalem. (4) Thus [God] will judge among the nations and arbitrate for the many peoples, And they shall beat their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning hooks: Nation shall not take up sword against nation; They shall never again know war.</p>

Isaiah 10:5-13	
<p>(ה) הֲוֵי אֲשׁוּר שִׁבְט אֲפִי וּמִטָּה־הוּא בִּידֵם זַעֲמִי: (ו) בְּגִוִּי חִנֶּה אֲשַׁלְחֵנּוּ וְעַל־עַם עֲבָרְתִּי אֶצְנֶנּוּ לְשַׁלֵּל שְׁלָל וְלִבֹּז בָּז (ולשימו) [ולשומו] מִרְמָס כְּחֶמֶר חוּצוֹת: (ז) וְהוּא לֹא־כֵן יִדְמָה וְלִבָּב לֹא־כֵן יִחָשֵׁב כִּי לְהַשְׁמִיד בִּלְבָבוֹ וְלַהֲכָרִית גּוֹיִם לֹא מַעֲט... (יב) וְהָיָה כִּי־יִבְצַע אֲדֹנָי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשָׂהוּ בְּהָר צִיּוֹן וּבִירוּשָׁלַם אֶפְקֹד עַל־פְּרִי־גִדְל לִבָּב מֶלֶךְ־אֲשׁוּר וְעַל־תַּפְאֶרֶת רוֹם עֵינָיו: (יג) כִּי אָמַר בְּכֹחַ יְדִי עָשִׂיתִי וּבְחִכְמָתִי כִּי נִבְּגוּתִי וְאֶסְרִי גְבוּלֹת עַמִּים (ועתידיתיהם) [ועתידיתיהם] שׁוֹשְׁתִי וְאוֹרִיד כַּאֲבִיר יוֹשְׁבֵיהֶם:</p>	<p>(5) Ha! Assyria, rod of My anger, In whose hand, as a staff, is My fury! (6) I send him against an ungodly nation, I charge him against a people that provokes Me, To take its spoil and to seize its booty And to make it a thing trampled Like the mire of the streets. (7) But he has evil plans, His mind harbors evil designs; for he means to destroy, to wipe out nations, not a few... (12) But when all of my Sovereign's purpose has been carried out on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, the majestic pride and overbearing arrogance of the king of Assyria will be punished. (13) For he thought, "By the might of my hand have I wrought it, By my skill, for I am clever: I have erased the borders of peoples; I have plundered their treasures, And exiled their vast populations.</p>

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

Isaiah 11:6-8	
<p>(ו) וְגַר זֶאֵב עִם-כֶּבֶשׂ וְנֹמֶר עִם-גִּדִּי יִרְבֹּץ וְעֹגֵל וְכִפִּיר וַמְרִיא יִחְדּוּ וְנֹעַר קֹטָן נִהְגָּ בָם: (ז) וּפְרָה וְדֹב תִרְעִינָה יַחְדּוּ יִרְבְּצוּ יִלְדֵיהֶן וְאַרְיֵה כִבְקָר יֹאכֹל-תֶבֶן: (ח) וְשִׁעְשַׁע יֹנֵק עַל-תֵּר פֶּתֶן וְעַל מְאוֹרֹת צִפְעוֹנִי גְמוּל יִדּוּ הַדָּה: (ט) לֹא-יֵרָעוּ וְלֹא-יִשְׁחִיתוּ בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ קִדְשֵׁי גִימְלָאָה הָאָרֶץ דַּעַה אֶת-יְהוָה כָּמִים לַיִם מְכֹסִים:</p>	<p>(6) The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the kid; The calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together, with a little child to herd them. (7) The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw. (8) A babe shall play over a viper's hole, and an infant pass its hand over an adder's den. (9) In all of My sacred mount Nothing evil or vile shall be done; for the land shall be filled with devotion to GOD as water covers the sea.</p>

2. Whose Borders?

Bavli Haggigah 12b	
<p>וְחֻכָּמִים אוֹמְרִים: עַל שְׁנַיִם עֶשְׂרַ עֲמוּדִים עוֹמְדֵת, שְׁנֶאֱמַר: "יֵצֵב גְּבוּלוֹת עַמִּים לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל". וְיֵשׁ אוֹמְרִים: שִׁבְעָה עֲמוּדִים, שְׁנֶאֱמַר: "חֲצֵבָה עֲמוּדֵיהָ שִׁבְעָה". רַבִּי אֱלֵעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמוּעַ אוֹמֵר: עַל עֲמוּד אֶחָד, יִצְדִּיק שָׁמוּ, שְׁנֶאֱמַר: "יִצְדִּיק יִסּוֹד עוֹלָם".</p>	<p>And the Rabbis say: The earth stands on twelve pillars, as it is stated: "He set the borders of the nations according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deuteronomy 32:8). And some say: There are seven pillars, as it is stated: "She has hewn out her seven pillars" (Proverbs 9:1). Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua says: The earth rests on one pillar and a righteous person is its name, as it is stated: "But a righteous person is the foundation of the world" (Proverbs 10:25).</p>

Rasham on Devarim 32:8 ²	
<p>בְּהִפְרֹדוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם - אַחֵר מִיתַת נֹחַ וּבִימֵי אַבְרָהָם שִׁכְתוּב שָׁם: מִשָּׁם נִפְרְדּוּ אֵיִי הַגּוֹיִם אִישׁ לְלִשְׁוֹנוֹ, וְשָׁם תִּמְצָא שֶׁהֵצִיב גְּבוּלוֹת עַמִּים...</p>	<p>"When He separated the children of humanity" — this refers to the period after the death of Noah, in the days of Abraham. For it is written there: "From there the islands/coastlands of the nations were separated, each according to his language." And there you will find that He "established the boundaries of the nations"...</p>

3. Rethinking Borderlands

Israel Knohl, <i>The Divine Symphony: The Bible's Many Voices</i> , 53-56	
<p>Nowhere in the Torah, or in the historical books, do we have a vision or a hope that humanity will return to the Genesis period, where God had an intimate relationship with all human beings...</p>	
<p>Indeed, the king of Assyria had erased the borders that divide the nations, jolting the world from one end to the other. The static state described in Deuteronomy 32, namely, that God "established the borders of peoples," no longer existed. The borders of the nations set by God at the end of the Genesis period had been erased.</p>	
<p>...Isaiah accepted the new reality of his time, and gave it new meaning. Indeed, the borders between the nations had been erased, but not for the nations to be handed over to the king of Assyria. The borders had been erased so that all peoples would be able to seek out the word of the Lord. Isaiah's vision of all the nations of the world seeking out God's teachings can be seen as a reaction to the words and the deeds of the Assyrian king. From within this geopolitical crisis, there burst forth a new religious idea. Against the government of the sword that the king of Assyria employs, Isaiah holds up a vision of peace...</p>	

² Translation from ChatGPT.