

ABARBANEL- History and Parshanut Style

- ❖ Full name is Don Isaac Abravanel, but today we call him Abarbanel
- ❖ He was a rabbi, scholar, philosopher, statesmen, and parshan on the Tanach
- ❖ Born in Lisbon, Portugal in 1437, and was one of the last scholars from the Spanish Golden Age.
- ❖ Studied both Jewish studies like the Talmud and also secular works. He was one of the first Jewish learners to be influenced by the Renaissance going on at the time
- ❖ He was also very politically involved. The Abarbanel was the treasurer for King Alfonso V in Portugal, and used his power to help the Jews when they were in trouble. He had lots of power and was very high up with many political connections, especially to wealthy Christians.
- ❖ When Don Joao II took over, the new king wanted to get rid of all the nobility, including his ministers. The Abarbanel had to run away to Toledo, Spain in 1483, with his family and no money.
- ❖ In Spain, he became the tax collector for King Ferdinand, despite the Spanish Inquisition going on at the time. He believed this might help him protect the Jews during these tough times. During this time, the Abarbanel became very rich and very close with the king and queen of Spain.
- ❖ In 1492 though, all Jews were expelled from Spain. Abarbanel could not stop this from happening. He had to either convert to keep his high status and good job, or leave. He ran away once again with his family, this time to Naples, leaving his job and lots of his money.
- ❖ In Naples, he became adviser to both the king, and later, his son. But when France took over Naples, the two ran away, along with their families, to Sicily, where the Abarbanel continued to serve the exiled king until the king died.
- ❖ After moving around for a few more years, poor and suffering, the Abarbanel finally settled in Venice.
- ❖ In Venice, he became one of the leading statesmen to the Venetian Republic, until his death in 1508 at the age of 71. He was buried in Padua and mourned by Jews and non Jews alike who loved him greatly.
- ❖ During all this time, but mostly when things were more quiet in his life like during his first few years in Spain, the Abarbanel wrote commentaries on the Tanach.
- ❖ His commentaries show us insight into the 15th century society because he often compared things in the Tanach to things in his time, like monarchies.
- ❖ Focuses on the importance of prophecy and is very philosophical. Disagrees often with the Rambam.

- ❖ Unlike many other exegesis, the Abarbanel added social and political issues of the time into his comments. He would use lessons and ideas from back then and say how they could be used, fixed, or not used during those modern days.
- ❖ Quotes a lot from the Midrash, but liked when it corresponded with the actual text and would point out if it didn't.
- ❖ In his works on books in Neviim, he would write an introduction of the character of each book he commented on, the date, and its author. Christian scholars found this very helpful and used it when they wrote their own commentaries.
- ❖ One of the biggest parts of many of the Abarbanel's commentaries is how in them he tries to give hope to the Jews who were exiled from Spain. He writes about the Mashiach sometimes and about how the Mashiach was going to come during those hard days.
- ❖ Sometimes, he also would include Christian exegetes in his writings, either to disagree and fight with them, or to use their interpretation if it seemed right to him.

These are his main methods and styles found in his commentaries.

Pasuk Aleph:

TEXT: Question: השאלה הג' באמרו שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל למשפחותם לבית אבותם במספר שמות כל זכר לגולגלותם והוא בהפך מה שצוה תורה כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקודיהם ונתנו איש כופר נפשו לה'. ופרש"י (שמות ל' י"ב) כשתרצה לקבל סכום מנינה לדעת כמה הם אל תמנם לגולגלות וכו'. ואיך אם כן צוה כאן שימנם לגולגלותם. והנה רש"י (שם) להשמר מזה פירש לגולגלותם על ידי השקלים בקע לגולגלות אבל זה לא נזכר בכתוב ונזכר ההפך שאמר כל זכר לגולגלותם מורה שלא נמנו ע"י השקלים אלא לגולגלותם

Answer: וכבר פירשתי בסדר כי תשא שלא היתה המצוה היא ממחצית השקל שיתנו בעת המנין מצוה לדורות שיעשו כן תמיד אלא עצה נכונה שכאשר ירצה למנות את העם מדעתו ורצונו שיעשה כן כדי שלא יהיה בהם נגף ויועילו בזה שיתנו כל העם כסף הבקע לגולגלות למלאכת המשכן לצורך האדנים כי לא רצה יתעלה לצוותם שיתנו בחיוב אותו כסף לפי שגזרה חכמתו שיהיה המשכן וכליו נעשים מהתרומה והנדבה לא ממה שיתנו בהכרחם כן היה המנין ההוא מפני צורך הבקע. ולא הבקע להכרח המנין אם היה השם יתברך מצוה למנות כי שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע. לכן עתה שהיה המנין הכרחי בעם צוה יתברך שיעשה אותו מבלי בקע ולא מדבר אחר מפחד המגפה כי שלוחי מצוה אינם נזוקים. והמצוה יתברך במצוה ההוא ישמרם מדבר הוות ועל זה נאמר שימנה את העם ולא יפחד מנצוצותהעין הרע המזיקים בראש המנין. ושיהיה המנין למשפחותם לבית אבותם. רוצה לומר שיזכור כל אחד מהם משפחתו ושבטו ובית אביו ויזכור שמו. וזהו במספר שמות כל זכר לגולגלותם. והודיעו יתברך כי להיות המנין הזה במצותו אל יירא ואל יחת מדבר באפל יהלוך מקטב ישוד צהרים. והותרה בזה השאלה הג'.

TRANSLATION: The third question is about when Hashem says: “**שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל למשפחותם לבית אבותם במספר שמות כל זכר לגולגלותם**”. This is the opposite though of what the Torah actually allows. By counting people, a person can be called a heretic and is committing a very grave sin. The Torah even says in Sefer Shemot that when you want to count people, don't count them by their heads (meaning actually count each person.) So then how can Hashem be asking Moshe to count the people by their heads?! Rashi tries to solve this problem by re explaining the word **לגולגלותם** as meaning count them by shekalim for use in **לגולגלות** the in the Mishkan. But Abarbanel does not like this answer and finds issues with it - like the fact it doesn't say it like this in the text and there is no proof.

The answer: The Abarbanel says the mitzvah Moshe was commanded by Hashem to count the people was not saying to use a **מחצית השקל** whenever you wanted to count people, rather to teach us something about counting. When you want to count the nation just because of your own will and desire to do so, then the nation needs to give money, which will be given for the **לגולגלות** and other parts of the Mishkan. They

got the money from the people by counting them because they didn't want the Mishkan to be built by force. They didn't want people being forced to give money, rather voluntarily, so they would count the nation and in this way they would be getting money which they could use for the building and fixing of the Mishkan. These moments when they would count using money would be for the purpose of the Mishkan.

But when Hashem commanded the nation to be counted, then you did not use money for counting. During these forced counts, the people would just be counted in a regular way. No one should be worried of Ein Hara or a plague being sent if they counted the nation directly, since Hashem commanded the count to take place, so why would He punish them for listening to His command? Therefore, Hashem told Moshe to count the nation's heads, meaning get every male's name and tribe and count them all up.

By telling Moshe straight out to count the nation, Hashem is teaching us that when He commands a counting of the people, there is no need to worry of a plague or any bad coming if the nation is counted directly. Only when a voluntary count is done (which was done to get money for the Mishkan in a non-forceful way), was money necessary for counting and directly counting each person in not allowed.

ANALYSIS: The Abarbanel has a very interesting and different style. He asks many questions of the Perek, the above being only one of them, and lists them all first. Then, he gives a big answer/s for all his questions. First of all, in his question, the Abarbanel quoted Rashi and disagreed with him. Also, the Abarbanel then gave his own answer, which seemed more logical and rational than Rashi's. He did not add in anything extra, rather took what he knew from the Pshat and found how it worked well together. This shows how the Abarbanel likes for the text to make sense with whatever drash or outside source is being brought in to explain it. Lastly, he also puts a little bit of positivity in his answer. He explains that people should not have been worried because Hashem wouldn't send a plague or punishment for doing what He commanded. People don't always have to be so worried of getting in trouble, especially if they are pretty sure what they are doing is okay. This is a lesson that people reading Abarbanel's commentary at the time and today can take with them.

(I also noticed when reading more of his commentary on Perek Aleph that the Abarbanel often quotes many Parshanim, especially Rashi and Ramban, and explains why their answers are nice but his is the best.)

במדבר פרק ה

TEXT: Question:

השאלה הא' למה בא בזה וישלחו מן המחנה כל צרוע וכל זב וגומר כי זה הציוי היה ראוי שיכתב למעלה בספר ויקרא אצל הטומאות והטהרות
השאלה הב' באמרו וישלחו מן המחנה כל צרוע וכל זב וכל טמא לנפש כי הנה אין שלשתם שוים בדיון השלוח כי הצרוע היה שלוח מכל המחנות והזב היה מותר לשבת במחנה ישראל והטמא נפש היה מותר לשבת במחנה ישראל וגם במחנה לויים כי לא היה משולח רק ממחנה שכינה:

Answer:

וידבר ה' אל משה וגו' וישלחו מן המחנה כל צרוע וכל זב וגו' עד פרשת הנזיר. הנה נסמכה הפרשה הזאת לפרשת מחנות הדגלים והלויים לפי שכבר נאמר בספר ויקרא לענין המצורע בדד ישב מחוץ למחנה מושבו. האמנם עד שלא נבדלו בני ישראל והלויים במחניהם לא הוצרכו לשלוח טמאים כי הענין תלוי בהם כמו שאמרו ולא יטמאו את מחניהם אבל עתה אחרי שסדר כל המחנות איש על מקומו כהנים במשמרתם ולויים במושבם וישראל במעמדם. צוה את העם שיעשו מה שכבר צוה אותם בענין המצורעים וכל טמא לנפש שבדד ישבו מחוץ למחנה מושבם ויהיה כל אדם בגורלו אך ראוי לדעת שלא היו כלם משולחים במדרגה אחת כי כבר ביארו חז"ל במס' פסחים שהמצורע הי' משולח מג' מחנות מחנה שכינה ומחנה לויה ומחנה ישראל. והזב היה מותר לשבת במחנה ישראל אך היה משולח ממחנה לויה וממחנה שכינה והטמא נפש והוא הנוגע במת בנפש אדם הרי מותר לשבת במחנה ישראל ובמחנה לויה אך היה משולח ממחנה שכינה בלבד. ומפני זה אמר הכתוב וישלחו מן המחנה ולא מן המחנות לפי שלא היו כולם משולחים מכל המחנות בשוה. והותרו בזה השאלות הא' והב'.

TRANSLATION: The Abarbanel asks two questions on the first few פסוקים of the Perek. His first question is why this topic about impure people being sent out of the camp is commanded to Bnei Israel again, if it was already discussed in ספר ויקרא in the laws of טומאה and טהרה. His second question is on the way the command is given. By saying that a זב, מצורע, and טמא לנפש all need to be sent out of the camp in order for it to stay holy, it makes it sound like all three types of impure cases are equal in impurity and their obligation of separation. But, this is not true, since the מצורע is sent out of all three camps (the inner שכינה camp, the middle לוי camp, and the outside ישראל camp), the זב is sent out of only the first two but can stay in מחנה ישראל, and the טמא לנפש is only not allowed in the camp of שכינה.

The Abarbanel uses סמיכות פרשיות to answer his first question. He says that the reason the command is written here can be found by its placement right after the events of the מחנה setup and the inauguration of the לויים. The discussion about sending impure people outside of the camp only makes sense if it is commanded right after the camps of ישראל, the לויים, and the כוהנים are set up! The obligation to send impure

people out only came into play after the camps were set up, and depends on if בני ישראל have a camp or not. Otherwise, there is no need to send טמאים outside the camp because there is no camp.

In his answer to his second question, the Abarbanel says that by the fact that it says these three groups of טמאים need to be sent out of the “מחנה”, and not the “מחנות”, shows there a difference between all three cases. If it said “send out of the camps”, it would then seem that all three are equal, and therefore all three types of impure of people must be sent out of all three camps. But by writing “send out of the camp,” the תורה here shows that not all are sent out of all three camps, rather each level is sent out of different camps.

ANALYSIS: The Abarbanel uses the pshat to answer both his questions. In the first answer, he uses סמיכות פרשיות and the logic of the placement of the laws of טמאים in the מחנה after the camp is set up and the לויים are appointed. For his second answer, he focuses on grammar, and uses one word to answer his question. He proves that the תורה is very precise with its words and uses them carefully, unlike man. The Abarbanel clearly believes the Torah is not written like a person speaks, rather it chooses each word carefully to explain and teach different things. Each word is important and the Torah would not make a mistake in any the words it chooses. The choosing of the word מחנה and not מחנות teaches the inequality of the three levels of impurity and their consequences.

Additionally, the Abarbanel notices issues in the pshat by reading and analyzing other sources. By reading both ויקרא and מסכת פסחים, the Abarbanel is able to come up with questions by noticing how the sources and the פסוקים here do not seem to work well together. Not only does he uses these outside sources, but he often also says what the source said so the reader doesn't have to look for the sources himself.

Part 3 - 12/5/16

Bamidbar, Perek א'

TEXT:

Question:

השאלה הי"ב למה נענשו ישראל עתה בשאלתם הבשר ולא נענשו בפעם הראשונה כשיצאו ממצרים ושאלו בשר. ואם היתה שאלתם רעה בעיני ה' יותר ראוי היה שימנע מהם שאלתם משיתננה להם ומרה תהיה באחרונה. ולמה היו חדש ימים והיה די ביום אחד או עד חמשה ימים אחרי שלא היתה הכוונה אלא למלאת תאותם:

Answer:

וכדי שישראל יקבלו עונש חטאם צוה ית' לומר אליהם התקדשו למחר ואכלת' בשר ואינני נותנה לכם להיות שאלתכם נכונה כי היא רעה ומגונ' אלא מפני שאתם בכיתם באזני ה' לאמר מי יאכילנו בשר כי עם היות שמרע"ה כדי להקל בחטא אמר שכנגדו היה התרעומ' באמרו **תנה לנו בשר ונאכלה** אנכי ידעתי את רוע דבריהם שכפרו בהשגחתי וביכלתי ואמרו מי יאכילנו בשר. ולכן אתן לכם בשר לשבעה כי לא תאכלו אותו ימים אחדים שנים או חמשה או עשרה. עד חדש ימים כדי שיצא מאפכם כלומר שלא תוכלו להריח בו כי זהו עד אשר יצא מאפכם והיה לכם לזרה כלומ' להרחקה שתחפצו להרחיקו מכם כמו שקרבת' אותו בשאלתכם. זרה הוא מלשון ואתכם אזרה בגוים וזר לא יקרב שהם כלם מענין רחוק. וידוע כי זה דרך התאוות הגשמיו' למתמיד בהם שיבא לתעוב במהרה. והנה זכר גבולי הימים האלה לפי שכן היתה מיתתם שמהם מתו ליום אחד ומהם לחמשה ומהם לעשרה ומהם לעשרי' יום והיותר חי חיה עד חדש ימים כי כפי חטא כל אחד מהם כך קבל ענשו כדי שיכירו כלם כי יד ה' עשתה זאת להביא בהם תעוב הבשר אשר התאוו עד שכל חוטא מהם בו יקוץ ויחלה עד שימות וז"ש כי מאסת את ה' אשר בקרבכ' משגיח ומנהיג אתכם. והנה נתחייבו עתה בעונש הגדול הזה ולא נתחייבו כן בפעם הראשונה ששאלו הבשר לפי שהשאלה ההיא היתה קודם מתן תורה וקודם ירידת המן ולא נשלמו עדיין באמונת האלהיות. אבל אחרי שירד להם המן מזון נכבד מאד ושעמדו בסיני וראו את מעשה ה' כי נורא הוא והיה ארון הברית לפנייהם וענן כבודו עליהם ואש מן השמים ירד על זבחייהם לא היה ראוי שיספקו בהשגחתו ולא ביכלתו כ"ש שכבר נתן להם פעם אחרת את השלו. ואיך אמרו עתה מי יאכילנו בשר. הנה מפני זה נתחייבו כאן עונש ולא בראשונה. וע"כ אמר כי מאסתם את ה' אשר בקרבכם ור"ל המשגיח בכם ותבכו לפניו כי באמת לפניו היתה הבכיה שעשיתם לפי שהוא היה משגיח בכל מעשיכם. והנה יראה שמאסתם אותו באמרכם למה זה יצאנו ממצרים כאלו מאסתם את דבקות אלהותו. והותרה בזה השאלה הי"ב.

TRANSLATION:

Question: The Abarbanel asks a few questions on the story, specifically the punishment, of the מתאוים. First, he asks, why the Jews were not punished the first time they complained about wanting meat when they first left מצרים, while here they are being punished for asking Hashem for meat. Second, if their request was so bad in Hashem's eyes, why didn't he ignore their request and not give them what they wanted instead of giving them the שלו which would lead to bad in the end? Lastly, why did the punishment have to last for 1 whole month, instead of only one day or even five, since the whole purpose of the שלו was anyways only to fulfill the group's desires?

Answer: Hashem gave the group of מתאוים quails for one whole month, but not because their request was right, rather as a punishment for what they said. By their statement “מי יאכילנו בשר”, the Jews were doubting Hashem’s השגחה and abilities in the world by asking *who* was going to give them meat. Therefore, Hashem decides to give them meat, but not only for a few days, rather for one entire month, until they are sick of it, won’t be able to smell anymore, and will want to push it away from them. Just as the Jews desired it greatly, now they are going to want to make it as far away from them as possible. When Hashem said וזרא, He was implying that just like you want a stranger to stay far away from you, so to they will want the meat Hashem is going to give them to be far outside of their lives. This is the way of physical desires: wanting something so badly, but once you get it, you want it as far away from your life as possible.

Hashem made the שלו come for one month because there were levels to the punishment. The מתאוים each died after a certain amount of days due to how badly they sinned. Those who sinned the worst lived for the full month of the punishment until they died, while others who sinned less extremely died after 1 day or 5 days and did not have to experience the עונש for that long. Hashem made it this way to show everyone this event was from Him, and for them to recognize ה יד in the quails He had brought the Jews.

To answer the question of why the Jews were not punished the first time they complained for meat but were punished now was because Hashem held the generation now to higher standards. The first time they had complained, it had been prior to מתן תורה and Bnei Israel did not have much trust yet in Hashem and were not fully His people yet. But after the Jews received the מן and saw Hashem’s amazing miracles at הר סיני, it wasn’t acceptable for them to doubt Hashem’s השגחה and abilities anymore. How could the Jews ask “who will give them meat,” and doubt Hashem so much that they didn’t even believe He could give them what they desired?!

In order to truly give them the punishment they deserved and teach them a lesson, Hashem punished the מתאוים instead of ignoring them. He also expected more of them now that they had seen many of His amazing miracles, which therefore brought them the עונש and not just שלו to answer their request like they had previously received. The punishment was given to show everyone Hashem’s abilities in the world and why they have no right whatsoever to be doubting Him and His control over the world anymore.

Analysis: The Abarbanel uses comparisons to other similar moments in the Tanach to both ask a question and answer it. He also uses a thematic approach to Bamidbar and looks at the bigger picture of the Sefer. His answer of the higher standard Bnei Israel

are now held to also help understand the rest of the Sefer and why they get punished for so many things that they wouldn't have been in trouble for in the past. It helps explain why the Jews drop on the "rollercoaster" of Bamidbar and end up sinning so badly that they don't end up going to Israel like they had originally been supposed to do.

The Abarbanel also focuses on small Pshat details like the length of the punishment to help understand the punishment better. He additionally asks a bigger question about the punishment: 'why punish them at all?' to help once again understand Hashem's עונש more in depth.

Lastly, Abarbanel uses common recurring themes and ideas in the Torah, especially in this part of the Jews' history, like מידה כנגד מידה and Hashem's השגחה in his approach. These ideas both fit in well and also help clarify the reasoning behind Hashem's actions.

The Abarbanel also sends a hidden message about not doubting Hashem, especially since so many miracles prove His existence and abilities, a message probably needed greatly during the time the Abarbanel lived.

Part 4

1/6/17

Bamidbar, Perek 13 (המרגלים)

TEXT: ואמר ויבואו אל משה ואל אהרן להגיד שהאנשים ההם השחיתו התעיבו עלילה. כי אם היות שמשנה רע"ה שלח אותם וצוה אותם שלא ישיבו הדברים ממה שראו אלא אליו הנה המה לא עשו כן כי כאשר שבו מתור הארץ התפרסמו לעין כל ובאו אל אהל משה והקהילו שם את אהרן ואת כל העדה כדי שישמעו כלם דבריהם. וזהו טעותם הראשון שמשנה צוה אותם בהצנע לכת. וכמו שצוה יהושע למרגלים אשר שלח חרש לאמר שיחרישו צאתם ובואם. אבל אלו פרסמו את סתריהם. והוא טעות גדול בין אנשי המלחמה שיתפרסם להמון הלוחמים ורכי הלבב אשר בהם התחבולות שעושים שרי הצבא. ושידעו ישראל חוזק האויבים והלוחמים וכמו שאמרו אחינו המסו את לבבנו. וכדי להסיר הטעות הזה אמרו מאמרם הראשון כנגד משה באנו אל הארץ אשר שלחתנו וגומר. וזה היה הפשע הראשון אשר פשעו

המרגלי'. והפשע הב' הוא אמרו באנו אל הארץ אשר שלחתנו ולא אמרו אשר ה' אלהינו נותן לנו ולא אל הארץ אשר נשבע ה' לאבותינו. לפי שהיה דעתם שלא יזכו במתנה ההיא ולא יירשו את הארץ ע"כ אמרו אל הארץ אשר שלחתנו כאלו לא רצו בהליכה ובראיית הארץ ההיא... והפשע הו' שבא בדבריהם הוא אמרם וגם ילידי הענק ראינו שם כאלו מלאה הארץ מהם. וזה היה כזב גמור כי הם לא מצאו ולא ראו לא ג' ילדים מהם אחימן ששי ותלמי שהיו בחברון ולא היו ענקים אחרי' בכל הארץ אבל הם ברשעתם להפחיד לבב העם אמרו אליהם שכבוש הארץ היה נמנע מג' צדדים. אחד מצד העם כי עז הוא. והב' מצד הערים שאם יאספו אליהם האויבים לא יוכלו לכבשם. והג' מצד הצבא אשר להם הנוראים בגבורתם והם הענקים אשר זכרו כאלו כל הארץ מלאה מהם. והפשע הז' שבא בדבריהם הוא אמרם עמלק יושב בארץ הנגב וזה כי הנה משה לא שאל מהם דבר מזה ומה ראו לדבר בו. אלא שכווננו ברשעתם לומר שמלבד שהיה כבוש הארץ נמנע אצלם. הנה גם העליה שמה מפאת הדרכים היתה נמנעת בעצמה. כי הנה לא ימלט הדבר מחלוקה. אם שירצו ישראל לעלות ולהכנס בארץ בדרך הנגב שהיה קרוב לקדש ומשם להר או יכנסו מדרך הים רוצה לומר ים פלשתים וכן יד הירדן שהוא אשר קרא ים במקום הזה ואמרו שבדרך הנגב לא יוכלו לעלות לפי שעמלק יושב בארץ הנגב וכבר ידעו את רשעתו ואת שנאתו אותם ושיצא להלחם במ בדרך ואיך יוכלו לעבור בגבולו. ואם ירצו לעלות ההר לא יוכלו כי החתי והיבוסים והאמורי הם היושבים בהר. אם ירצו לעלות ולהכנס בדרך הירדן גם שם לא יונח להם כי הכנעני יושב על הים ועל יד הירדן הרי שכבוש הארץ וירושתה הוא נמנע והעליה אליה בדרכים הוא ג"כ נמנע. התבאר מזה כמה מן 'הרשעיות והפשעים באו בדברי המרגלים ותשובתם והותרה בזה השאלה הח

TRANSLATION: The Abarbanel lists seven sins that the מרגלים committed, each within their speech and response back to Moshe after exploring the land of Israel. The first sin is seen by the fact that it says that the מרגלים came to Moshe and Aharon. Moshe sent them to observe the land and to report only back to him. But when the מרגלים returned, they brought the news back to Moshe, Aharon, and the entire nation. He had wanted to keep this journey and information quiet, just like Yehoshua had when he sent מרגלים. By making the information public instead of keeping it a secret, they made a big mistake since they basically told the weak and scared people going to fight for the land that their enemy was big and scary and that they did not stand a chance. Usually army officers keep this secret in order to not discourage the nation and make them nervous. They did not follow Moshe's request, and when they realized they made a mistake, they committed their first sin by putting the blame on Moshe and saying it was Moshe who sent them to Israel.

The second sin they did was clearly showing through their speech to the nation that they did not want to inherit Israel and did not see it as a special gift from Hashem. This is seen by the fact that the מרגלים said what they saw in the land Moshe had sent them to, and not the land Hashem had promised them and was going to give to them soon. Their attitude towards the upcoming inheritance of Israel was negative instead of the spies being positive and running with excitement and happiness to explore the land.

The sixth sin that they did was their mention of the giants in Israel. Although they only saw the three giants that lived in חברון, they made it sound like Israel was filled with

giants in order to make a big deal and scare the nation. They made the עם nervous by telling them Israel was surrounded by others from three sides, one side was a strong nation, one side was filled with fortified, strong cities, and the third side had the powerful giants.

The seventh and last sin they did was mentioning עמלק and their occupation in the south, since Moshe never asked them about this, but they mentioned עמלק anyways to scare the nation. Not only was it difficult and scary because Israel was conquered and occupied by other nations, but it was even worse now for the nation knowing עמלק was there. The מרגלים made the nation fear not only being in Israel and fighting, but even the journey to get into Israel, since the south was blocked by עמלק, and if the עם tried to get in through another way like the mountains or ירדן, other nations would be blocking their path. The Jews feared עמלק and already knew how evil they were and how much they hated עם ישראל, so mentioning them in the report about Israel would especially cause chaos and apprehension within the nation.

These, the Abarbanel says, are some of the evil sins the מרגלים did to scare the nation and cause a commotion within the nation, using the answers to Moshe and way they spoke to do so.

ANALYSIS: Here, the Abarbanel closely analyzes the pshat and the words of the מרגלים to find the sin. He looks throughout the answers of the מרגלים very closely to find any possible ways that the spies might have sinned and therefore been the cause for their punishment. He also uses a source from another place where spies are also sent and compares them by seeing what the person sending spies usually asks for. Since Yehoshua had wanted to מרגלים to go in secret, it must be that Moshe probably had also wanted his מרגלים to be quiet about their journey, and since they didn't do so, they messed up and ended up sinning.

The Abarbanel finds many possible answers, possibly to show why there was such a big punishment for the spies, since it was not only one sin that brought it. Every line that the spies say, the Abarbanel compares it to Moshe's actual request to see how they did not follow what Moshe had wanted from them, leading to their many small sins. But he also explains how all these little sins in the report of the מרגלים work well with a big theme/sin that the spies were committing, which was to make the land look bad and make the worried nation scared and very doubtful. Although he focuses on the pshat, the Abarbanel uses a thematic approach here too by showing how everything they said follows the idea that they did not want to go into Israel and tried their best to accomplish this mission by making the land look bad and by scaring the עם.

Part 5
3/7/17

קרח ועדתו) Bamidbar: Perek 16

TEXT: Questions:

השאלה הד' בדברי משה הראשוני' בקר ויודע ה' את אשר לו וגו' זאת עשו קחו לכם מחתות וגומר, כי למה זה לא הוכיח' משה בראשוני' לאמר המעט מכם וגו' כאשר אמר להם אחר כך ולמה זה בתחלת הדברי' נתן להם מכשול המחתות השאלה הה' מה ענין שלשת הלשונות האלה שאמר. הא' בקר ויודע ה' את אשר לו. הב' ואת הקדוש והקריב אליו. הג' ואת אשר יבחר בו יקריב אליו. ובהיות המחלוקת מי היה ראוי לכהן גדול אם אהרן ואם קרח היה די באחד משלשה: המאמרים האלה

Answer:

וכבר זכרו חז"ל דברים אחרים שאמר קרח כנגד משה לקנטר. ואמר וישמע משה ויפול על פניו מלמד שנתבייש מאשר חשדוהו בנבואתו ושעם היות שדברו דבריהם בכלל. הנה

משה שמע והבין שלשה המחלוקת שהיו מכוונים בדבריהם וזהו וישמע משה שהוא מלשון הבנה ונפל על פניו אם לדרוש את ה' לדעת מה יעשה והוא ית' צוה אותו מה יעשה או להתבודד בעצמו מה לעשות. וחשב שאם יבוא להוכיחם באותה שעה כ"ש דפקר טפי ושהיה יותר טוב שלא להוכיחם בשעת כעסם ומפני זה השיבם כפי שאלתם בקר ויודע ה' את אשר לו ר"ל אין הדבר תלוי בי ולא בכם כי אם לעת מנחת ערב ולכן חשדם שהיו שכורים באותה שעה ומתוך שכרות יאמרו זה. ולכן תלה הענין עד הבקר. וכאלו אמר להם זאת עשו רוצה לומר אתם מבקשים הכהונה והקטורת היא היותר רוחנית שבעבודות וקדושה שבמקדש והיא נעשית בבקר על כן בקר של מחרת תעשו כלכם הקטורת והיום תכינו את המחנות ואמר ויודע ה' את אשר לו כנגד קרח בענין הכהונה. ואת הקדוש והקריב אליו אם הם בבכורות או בלויים. ואת אשר יבחר בו יקריב אליו אם ראובן ואם יהודה ויוסף לענין בכורת השבטים. הנה אם כן באו שלשת הלשונות האלו מכוונים לשלשת המחלוקות הנזכרים.

TRANSLATION:

The fourth and fifth questions the Abarbanel has on the perek are about the conversation between Korach and Moshe, specifically about Moshe's response to Korach's statements. His first question on the response is: Why did Moshe not right away refute Korach and prove who was the chosen one from Hashem. He could have fought their argument immediately after they said it, but instead he tells them to do the whole process with making קטורת and seeing who Hashem chooses the next day in the morning. Only later on does Moshe fight back, but the Abarbanel wants to know why the need to wait until the next morning and do the test with the קטורת. The second question the Abarbanel asks on the response is: Why does Moshe say three statements in his answer that all basically say the same thing: Hashem will choose and show who are the ones right for the job. It seems very repetitive, and Moshe could have just said one of these statements in order to get his point across that Hashem will show if Korach or Aharon is the rightful Kohen Gadol.

Abarbanel then answers the question by explaining more in detail about everything that happened after Moshe heard Korach's argument. When Moshe first heard, his immediate reaction was falling on his face because he was embarrassed that they doubted his נבואה and from the rest of the things they said. Moshe understood three different מחלוקות that they group was implying from their statements, which is why

it says Moshe heard, meaning he understood. He then fell on his face, debating if he should ask Hashem what to do and get directions from Him, or to decide on his own how he should respond.

Moshe then realized it wasn't so smart to prove to them right away that Korach and his group were wrong, and Aharon really was the rightful Kohen Gadol, which is why he told them in the morning they would find out. One reason he realized it was not a good idea was because they were too angry now, and proving wrong would be useless and even counterproductive. So, Moshe decides to give them something to do until the morning when he will tell them off, so the group has time to cool off. Also, Moshe realizes the group might be drunk which is why they were acting in such a disrespectful way, and since it was the afternoon around mincha time, Moshe gives them time until morning to sober up.

Moshe told קרח ועדתו to make the קטורת because they wanted to be כוהנים and this was the holiest job of the כוהנים, which was done in the mornings. If they are meant to be the rightful כוהנים, Hashem will accept their קרבן and this will symbolize they are holy and Hashem has chosen them for the job. Moshe said three times that Hashem would show who is the rightful/holy one not because he was being repetitive, but because there was three מחלוקות he was refuting. The first time Moshe said it, he was responding to the first argument, which is that Korach believed he was the rightful כהן גדול over Aharon. The second time Moshe said Hashem will show us who is holy was referring to the argument of all the firstborns in the crowd who believed they were supposed to work in the Mishkan, and not the Leviim who had taken their job. The third and last time Moshe says Hashem will choose the rightful one is to respond to the third argument, in which שבט ראובן (דתן ואבירם), complained that they were the rightful בכורות, and יוסף and יהודה who had received ראובן's blessing of leadership. Each of the three seemingly repetitive statements Moshe said in his response were actually each said as a response to the three different arguments being said against Moshe.

ANALYSIS:

As he often does, the Abarbanel here focuses on little details, and questions every little thing that happens. Instead of simply believing that Moshe responded how he did just because, the Abarbanel knows there has to be a better explanation and further reasonings. In his answer, the Abarbanel uses logic and human nature to explain why Moshe gave קרח ועדתו until morning before responding. People usually act irrationally when they are drunk, so Moshe believed Korach and his group therefore might have been drunk, which is why they acted so brazen. Also, he says logically it makes more sense for Moshe to answer קרח ועדתו when they had calmed down, since

there is a better chance they will listen and respond well. Additionally, Abarbanel takes Moshe's response as an opportunity to prove why Moshe is a good and fit leader of the nation, because he gives Korach and his group the benefit of the doubt and a chance to fix their mistakes before being punished.

The Abarbanel's approach on the way Moshe responds to people who fight and doubt him and his authority also teaches people an important lesson. An effective way to respond to people who argue with you is to give them time to cool off and give them the benefit of the doubt instead of attacking them back right away.

Lastly, Abarbanel also uses Midrash omni significance because instead of viewing Moshe's repetition as just the way man speaks, he believes there is a better reason for why Moshe said a similar statement three times instead of once. Each of the three times Moshe said Hashem will choose the rightful one, the wording is a little bit different, and the Abarbanel uses these little differences in the word choice to prove that each statement refutes a different מחלוקת. Abarbanel analyzes the pshat carefully and very in depth, which is a common thing he does in every perek he comments on.

Part 6
5/11/17

Bamidbar: Perek 22-Balak and Bilam story

TEXT:

Question: השאלה הח' אם הוא יתברך הרשה את בלעם ללכת ואמר לו אם לקרא לך באו האנשים קום לך אתם איך אחרי שהלך נאמר ויחר אף אלהים כי הולך הוא ויתיצב מלאך י"י בדרך לשטן לו והוא לא הלך אלא ברשותו ובמאמרו:

Answer: ואז בא לו בחלום הנבואי. ואמר אם לקרא לך באו האנשים קום לך אתם ואך את הדבר אשר אדבר אליך אותו תדבר. וענין זה המאמר שהוא יתברך אמר לו בראשונה לא תלך עמהם לא תאור את העם שהם שני דברים ההליכה והקללה ששניהם מנע ממנו. והנה בלק השיבו אל נא תמנע מהלוך אלי רוצה לומר לפחות אל תמנע מלכת ולבא אלי ונתראה פנים ונדברה יחד ואם לא תרצה לקלל לא תקלל אבל ההליכה לפחות אל תמנע אותה. והנה מנהג בני אדם בענין הרופאים שאם יקראו לרופא אחד שילך חוץ מארצו לרפאות אדם חולה שהוא במקום אחר הנה יעשו לו פרעון שכר אחר על ההליכה ואחר כך יעשו פשרה על ההתרפאות ויהיה זה שכר אחד לו. ומפני זה אמר יתברך כשבקש בלק ההליכה שמה עכ"פ אם לקרא לך באו האנשים כלומר שאינם מבקשים ממך אלא שתלך לשם בלבד קום לך אתם ותקבל מבלק שכר ההליכה. ואמנם בענין הקללה לא תדבר דבר כי הנני מודיעך שאין הדב' ברשותך וברצונך. אבל הדבר אשר אדבר אליך אותו תדבר רוצה לומר אם לברכם או לקללם או לשתוק מזה ומזה. הנה התבאר מזה שאין זה הדבור מחולף ולא סותר במה שדבר לו בראשונה ושלא הרשה השם יתברך לבלעם ללכת לקלל כי אם ללכת בלבד. ובלעם היה לו להבין מזה שלא היה הקב"ה חפץ שיקלל

את ישראל ומה תועיל אם כן הליכתו והיה לו לדבר באר היטב אל המלאכים לאמר הלוך אלך עמכם אפס כי לא תהיה תועלתכם ולא תרויחו במעשיכם ולא בבקשתכם כלל והוא לא עשה כן אבל אמר אל מלאכי בלק שכבר הרשהו האל ללכת עמהם. ולכן ויחר אף י"י כי הולך הוא כי חרה אפו בו בהיותו בוחר וחפץ בהליכה בדעתו שהיא לא תצלח

TRANSLATION: The question the Abarbanel is asking here is on a very clear issue: After not allowing him to go curse the Jews, Hashem later comes to בלעם and changes his answer. He tells בלעם that if Balak's messengers return to ask him to come with them, he should go with them. But when the messengers do come to call him, and בלעם does go with them like Hashem said to do, Hashem gets very angry and sends a מלאך with a sword to stop him. It makes no sense though for Hashem to be upset, since He allowed and even commanded בלעם to go!

The Abarbanel then answers by reinterpreting Hashem's answer. Hashem told בלעם that if the messengers came again, he should go with them, but only say what Hashem tells him to say. Beforehand, when Hashem told him not go at all, Hashem was stopping בלעם from both the action of cursing the Jews, and the action of going to Balak to discuss the king's request. So when בלעם told Balak no, Balak answered back asking him to at least travel to meet with him, and once he came they could discuss Balak's actual request from בלעם of if he could curse the Jews or not.

The Abarbanel then compares Balak's request of בלעם to a doctor who is asked to come heal a patient in another country. The doctor is paid both for his travels and for the actual action of healing the person. בלעם too will get rewarded for both steps. So during His second response, Hashem tells בלעם that if the messengers of Balak come to *call* בלעם, meaning just asking him to come, he should go and get the money from Balak for his travels. But he cannot go curse them, and has to say whatever Hashem tells him when בלעם goes to discuss if he will curse or bless the Jews, or do no action at all. בלעם has no say in this, but does not realize this. He should have understood that Hashem did not want בלעם to go curse them. He was only permitted to go to Balak for the traveling part of his request, but בלעם misunderstood, and just went right away the next morning with the messengers, implying he was agreeing to both the traveling and the cursing. בלעם thought Hashem was letting him go, so בלעם went with the mindset that he was going by his own will, and this was a sin on his part even though he knew in his mind cursing the Jews would not work out.

So basically, the issue with בלעם going even though Hashem had told him he could, was that he was going believing it was by his own will and choice, and that Hashem would tell him what to say that would make cursing the Jews ineffective. He did not understand that really Hashem was not giving בלעם full permission, rather just

allowing him to go on the journey to benefit, make some money, and discuss face to face with Balak if he would actually go curse the Jews or not. בלעם misunderstood Hashem and did not do what He had asked.

ANALYSIS:

The main technique the Abarbanel uses here is the method of doing a very close and focused reading of the text, in this case, Hashem's answer. He is being very particular and answering the question only by using a detailed analysis of the words. He reinterprets Hashem's answer based on his close reading, and points out things the reader may not have understood by a quick read of the text. He pay attentions to the little details, such as the fact Hashem says: "when they call you," meaning just summon you to come, and not meaning ask you to curse the Jews.

The Abarbanel also uses a common example to help explain the situation, which may relate to the Jews both at the time he was living and today. Many Jews at the time he lived did not learn all the time and their education was not always the best, so the Abarbanel uses a relatable example of a doctor to make his answer easier and more understandable.

Lastly, something interesting I also found in his commentary:

אמנם בלעם ברשעתו לא הגיד למלאכי בלק כל דברי השם. כי אם היה אומר להם מאמר לא תאור את העם כי ברוך הוא. אולי בלק לא היה פוצר עוד על הליכתו. אבל אמר אליהם בלבד מאן י"י לתתי להלוך עמכם ולכך נשאר באפשרות אולי יתן רשות ללכת עם שרים אחרים.

The Abarbanel calls בלעם evil, clearly taking a more חזק approach and a more close reading approach than the basic idea from the פשוט here that בלעם was neutral and an עבד Hashem. He says that because בלעם was evil, he did not tell the messengers the correct thing Hashem had told him. Instead of saying he can't curse the Jews because they are blessed, בלעם said it was because Hashem would just not allow him to go with them. This may have caused Balak to think there was still a chance that בלעם could come, which is why he continued sending more messengers with higher statuses, until he finally got בלעם to come.