מפרשים

Classical Commentaries

RAMBAN

Did Abraham lack anything, and why swear the servant in?

Genesis 24:1

Ibn Ezra reads "ba-kol" (in all things) simply as a description of Abraham's full complement of blessings—length of days, wealth, honor, and sons—and dismisses the midrashic idea that Abraham had a daughter named Bakkol, noting that if that were the peshat (plain meaning), the verse would have said "im" (with) Bakkol rather than "ba-kol." Ramban likewise explains the verse's plain sense as Abraham lacking nothing except grandchildren through Isaac, which is why he adjured his servant, but he then defends and expands the derash (homiletical reading), presenting Acheirim's view that "bakol" alludes to a Divine attribute called Kol, from which emanates a related attribute called "bat" (daughter)—identified with Knesseth Yisrael (the assembly of Israel) and the Shechinah (Divine Presence)—with which Abraham, as the embodiment of chesed (kindness), was specially blessed. Thus Ibn Ezra stays within the peshat and rejects the fanciful midrashic detail, while Ramban affirms the peshat but insists that the Rabbis' derash points to a deep kabbalistic truth not to be mocked by those who think themselves masters of Torah's secrets. AI SUMMARY

"Abraham was now old, advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things."

AND ABRAHAM WAS OLD, WELL STRICKEN IN AGE. — Scripture reiterates [Abraham's old age although it has already mentioned it] in order to inform us of the reason that he adjured his servant. Thus Scripture says that because Abraham saw himself to be very old and he thought that if he will send the servant to the land of his origin, perhaps before the messenger would return, he will have gone to his long home, he therefore adjured his servant — whose counsel Isaac would follow since he ruled over all that he had — that he should not take for him a wife from the daughters of Canaan.

In Bereshith Rabbah, the Rabbis said: "Here it was old age combined with vitality; further on it was old age without vitality." By this the Rabbis wanted to explain that ba'im [literally: "coming" in days — mentioned above] — means the beginning of the days of old age, as the word ba'im indicates the present, just as, 'Haba'im' (those that come) in at these gates. But here it says that he was very old for already he was ba bayamim [literally: "he had come in days" — past tense], just as: Thy brother 'ba' (came) with subtlety.

AND THE ETERNAL HAD BLESSED ABRAHAM IN ALL THINGS. — I.e., with riches, possessions, honor, longevity and children, which are all the treasures of man. Scripture mentions this in order to say that Abraham was perfect in every detail, lacking in no respect save seeing his son have children who would inherit his superior position and his honor. This was why he desired it.

Now our Rabbis have a wonderful insight into this verse. They said: "And the Eternal had blessed Abraham 'bakol' (in all things). Rabbi Meir said that Abraham was blessed in that he did not have a daughter. Rabbi Yehudah said that he did have a daughter. Acheirim say that he did have a daughter and her name was Bakol."

Rabbi Meir thus explained that Abraham did not have a daughter. This was a blessing for Abraham for he could not have married her except to the cursed sons of Canaan. If he were to send her to his country, she would also worship the idols as they did because a woman is subject to the authority of her husband. Indeed, Abraham did not want his worthy children from his wife Sarah to go outside the Land, and surely not that they worship the idols.

Rabbi Yehudah, however, explained that Abraham did have a daughter since the Merciful One did not even cause him to lack a daughter, and that was the blessing implied by the expression, in all things, for he had everything that people desire, completely without exception. Then came Acheirim and mentioned the name of the daughter.

Now truthfully, the intent of Acheirim and their controversy with Rabbi Yehudah were not merely to inform us of the name of this daughter. Far it be from them to expend the great and generalized blessing of Abraham on this matter, i.e., that Scripture is saying that G-d blessed him with one daughter with that name. However, Acheirim established a new interpretation on this verse, a very profound matter, and they explained with it one of the secrets of the Torah.

Thus they said that the word bakol hints at a great matter, namely, that the Holy One, blessed be He, has an attribute called Kol (All), so called because it is the foundation of everything. It is with reference to this attribute that it says, I am the Eternal that maketh 'Kol' (all). And this is also what Scripture says, And the profit of the earth is 'bakol' (in all), that is to say, the profit of the earth and the abundant goodness that is bestowed upon all that come into the world is on account of this attribute Kol. It is the eighth attribute of the thirteen attributes.

And there is another attribute called bath [literally "daughter"] that emanates from it, and with it He moves everything. This is "the Court of the Holy One, blessed be He," that is hinted at in the word, Vahashem (And the Eternal), in all places. It is called kalah (bride) in the book of The Song of Songs because it is comprised of hakol (the All), and it is this attribute which the Sages have surnamed Knesseth Yisrael (the assembly of Israel) in many places because it is the gathering of hakol (the All). It was this attribute which was to Abraham as a bath because he was the man of kindness, and he conducted himself in accordance with it.

This was why Acheirim said that this blessing with which Abraham had been blessed in all things does not allude either to his having begotten a daughter from his wife Sarah, as Rabbi Yehudah said, or not, as Rabbi Meir claimed, but instead it hints at a great matter, i.e., that he was blessed with an attribute called bath which is contained in the attribute Kol, and is therefore also called Kol, being analogous to the expression, For My name is in him. Thus Abraham was blessed in heaven and on earth. This is why he said, By the Eternal, the G-d of heaven and the G-d of the earth.

This matter is to be found hinted at in the traditions of our Rabbis in many places. Thus they said in the Midrash Chazita: "Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai asked Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yosi, 'Have you possibly heard from your father of the meaning of the verse, The crown wherewith his mother hath crowned him?' He said to him, 'Yes.' He asked, 'How?' He replied, 'It is like a king who had an only daughter whom he loved very much, and he would call her "my daughter." This did not completely express his love for her until he called her "my sister." Still he was not satisfied until he called her "my mother." In the same way, the Holy One, blessed be He, loved Israel in the beginning and called them "My daughter." It is this which Scripture says, Hearken, O daughter, and consider. This did not completely express His love for them until He called them "My sister," as it is said, Open to me, my sister, my love. Still He was not satisfied until He called them "My mother," as it is said, Attend unto Me, O My people, 'ule'umi' (O My nation). The word is written le'imi (O My mother).' Then Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai arose and kissed him on his head, and he said to him, 'Had I come to listen to this word of yours it would have been sufficient.'

..." Now, had the commentator who prides himself on his knowledge of the Torah's secrets known this, his lips would be dumb and not deride

the words of our Rabbis. Therefore, I have written this in order to silence those who speak arrogantly against the righteous one.

IBN EZRA, WHO READS IT DIFFERENTLY

AND THE LORD HAD BLESSED ABRAHAM IN ALL THINGS. — With length of days, wealth, honor and sons, these being all the things that men desire to have. If the interpretation that Abraham had a daughter named Bakkol were correct, then Scripture should have read: and the Lord blessed Abraham "with" Bakkol.

