



MA'AMAD HAR SINAI IN THE HAFTARA FOR SHAVUOT¹

The Gemara in *Megilla* 31a, assigns Habbakuk [2:20-3:19] as the haftara for the second day of Shavuot. Rashi ad loc. asserts that the reason for this choice of haftara is that it mentions the giving of the Torah. He quotes the phrase from Habb 3:3 “*Elokaḥ mi-Teman Yavo*” (G-d cometh from Teman), saying it refers to Matan Torah. At first glance, G-d’s coming from Teman [and later in the verse from Har Paran] would not seem to describe *Ma’amad Har Sinai* (the revelation at Sinai).

However, comparing the verse in Habbakuk to verses elsewhere in Tanach that describe *Ma’amad Har*

Sinai, we find that they too mention Teman and Har Paran. Evidently, these two places are an allusion to the revelation at Sinai, as Rashi notes. For example, in Deut 33:2, when Moshe Rabbeinu introduces his final blessings to Klal Yisrael prior to his death, he says:

ה' מסיני בא וזרח משעיר למו הופיע מהר
פארן ואתה מרבבת קדש ...
The L-rd came from Sinai; He shone upon them from Se'ir; He appeared from Mount Paran, and He came with many holy [angels that accompanied Him]...

Here, the reference to Sinai unquestionably sets the scene as

Ma’amad Har Sinai. However, Moshe then also mentions additional locations — Se’ir and Har Paran. The reference to Se’ir should be understood as equivalent to the reference to Teman, for Har Se’ir is where Esau established his home, and Teman was Esau’s grandson (Gen 36:8-11).

Another case in Nach where the prophet recalls *Ma’amad Har Sinai* is in Judges 5:4-5, in which Deborah praises Hashem for His revelation at Sinai, saying:

ה' בצאתך משעיר בצעֵדך משֹׁדָה אֲדוֹם אֶרֶץ
רָעָשָׁה גַם שָׁמַיִם נָטְפוּ גַם עֲבָיִם נָטְפוּ מֵיָם.
הָרִים נָזְלוּ מִפְּנֵי ה' זֶה סִינֵי מִפְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל.

O L-rd, when You came forth from Se'ir, advanced from the land of Edom, the earth trembled; The heavens also dripped, yea, the clouds dripped water, the mountains quaked — Before the L-rd, Him of Sinai, before the L-rd, G-d of Israel.

Again, alternative locations — in this case Se'ir and Edom — are associated with the revelation at Sinai, not only Mount Sinai itself. Having established a clear relationship between Sinai on the one hand and Se'ir, Edom, and Har Paran on the other, it is evident that Habbakuk 3:3's mention of these place names is indeed an oblique reference to *Ma'amad Har Sinai*.

But what is the nature of the connection between these alternative locations and Har Sinai that prompted

Habbakuk to adduce them as proxies for Har Sinai itself?

Rabbinic traditions offer a variety of explanations: According to *Sifre, Haazinu* 314, and other sources, the alternative locations demonstrate that G-d revealed Himself at Sinai from all four directions to warn Klal Yisrael not to be afraid, but to instead gather their strength to accept the Torah. *Shmot Rabbah* 5:9 sees in the approach from all four directions a demonstration of G-d's grandeur, which showed the Israelites, who could not figure out from which direction He was coming, that He fills the entire world.² The Gemara, *Avodah Zarah* 2b, finds in the pesukim a hint to the well-known tradition that prior to the revelation to the Jews at Sinai, G-d offered the Torah to other

nations, who refused to accept it. In this tradition, Se'ir and Edom in the verse are references to Edom, and Paran is a reference to Ishmael; after having His offer to them rejected, Hashem "came" to Mount Sinai.

Among *parshanim* (commentators), Radak (Habb 3:3) and others maintain that Se'ir and Paran are physically close to Sinai, and Teman simply means the south (as in Exod 26:18, Exod 27:9). Thus, they see the references in the various pesukim to nearby locales as further descriptions of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. On the other hand, some *parshanim* view these locations as *distinct* from *Ma'amad Har Sinai* and interpret them as referring to the sites of other revelations (see, e.g., Ramban Deut 33:2).

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Returning to the haftara, we can now appreciate the context in which Habbakuk mentions Matan Torah and his purpose in doing so.

ה' שְׁמַעְתִּי שְׁמַעְךָ יְרֵאתִי ה' פָּעֲלָךְ בְּקֶרֶב שָׁנִים
חַיִּיהוּ בְּקֶרֶב שָׁנִים תוֹדִיעַ בְּרִנּוֹ רַחֵם תִּזְכּוֹר.
אֲלֹכַי מִתִּימֵן יָבֹא וְקִדּוֹשׁ מִהַר פְּאָרְזַן סָלָה כְּפָה
שָׁמַיִם הוֹדוּ וְתַהֲלֵתוּ מְלֶאכֶה הָאָרֶץ. וְנִגְיָה כְּאוֹר
תִּהְיֶה קֶרְנֵי מִיָּד לֹא וְשֵׁם חֲבִיוֹן עֲזֶה.
O L-rd, I have learned of Your renown; I am awed, O L-rd, by your deeds. Renew them in these years, Oh, make them known in these years! Though angry, may You remember compassion. G-d is coming from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His majesty covers the skies, His splendor fills the earth. It is a brilliant light, which gives off rays on every side — and therein His glory is enveloped.

Rashi, Radak, and other *parshanim* explain that throughout this entire *perek*, Habbakuk is praying for redemption from the exile, and therefore wants to remind Hashem of the love and kindness He showed when giving the Torah to Israel at Har Sinai. According to Radak, Habbakuk's phrase "His majesty covers the skies" recalls the torches the Israelites witnessed at Har Sinai, which brightened the heavens and earth. The phrase "It is a brilliant light" recalls the vision of G-d's majesty as a fire on top of the mountain. "Which gives off rays on every side" is reminiscent of the rays emanating from Moshe's face or a reference to the two *luchot* given to him. Radak explains, "and therein His glory is enveloped" to mean that at Sinai, Hashem revealed an aspect of His glory, which had previously been hidden. Radak notes:

כי לא היה כיום ההוא לפניו ולאחריו שנגלה
לו הא-ל יתברך בכבודו הגדול על הר סיני
לעיני כל ישראל.

Because there was never like that day before it or after it that the L-rd, May He be for a blessing, revealed Himself in His great glory at Mount Sinai before the eyes of all Israel.

Hashem's chesed in appearing to the Israelites at *Ma'amad Har Sinai* is but the first in a series of kindnesses that Habbakuk recalls in the coming verses, such as miracles Hashem performed when conquering the Israelites' enemies in the Land of Israel, and the splitting of the Red Sea and the Jordan River. The prophet beseeches Hashem to remember these acts of loving kindness — and the love for His people that prompted them — and once again reveal Himself in a similar fashion to end the exile.

Comparing this mention of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* to the one in Deuteronomy 33 and the one in Judges 5, we see that in all three cases, the prophets *begin* their discussions with the mention of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, even though some of the gracious acts subsequently listed in later *pesukim* (at least in Habbakuk) occurred prior to *Matan Torah*. Praising G-d's revelation at Sinai out of sequence chronologically puts the spotlight on its preeminent importance; it may not have happened first, but it is mentioned first because it is transcendent. As Radak says, never was there such a day before or after it.

Studying Nach helps us see the role Torah and mitzvot played in the lives of later generations. In our haftara and other cases, we see evidence of the centrality of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* and *Matan Torah* in the lives of Klal Yisrael even many centuries after their occurrence, fulfilling the commandment in Deut 4:9-10:

רק השָׁמַר לָךְ וְשָׁמַר נִפְשֶׁךָ מֵאֵד פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת
הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ וּפִן יִסּוּרוּ מִלְּבָבְךָ כֹּל

יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ וְהוֹדַעְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וּלְבָנֵי בְנֶיךָ. יוֹם אֲשֶׁר
עֲמַדְתָּ לְפָנַי ה' אֲלֶיךָ בְּחָרֵב בְּאֶמֶר ה' אֵלַי
הַקְהֵל לִי אֶת הָעָם וְאֲשַׁמְעֵם אֶת דְּבָרַי אֲשֶׁר
לְמַדּוֹן לִירְאָה אֶתִּי כֹּל הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר הֵם חַיִּים
עַל הָאָדָמָה וְאֶת בְּנֵיהֶם יִלְמְדוּן.

But take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously, so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes and so that they do not fade from your mind as long as you live. And make them known to your children and to your children's children: The day you stood before the L-rd your G-d at Horeb, when the L-rd said to me, "Gather the people to Me that I may let them hear My words, in order that they may learn to revere Me as long as they live on earth, and may so teach their children."

Our sages deliberately chose this chapter from Habbakuk as the haftara for Shavuot, because it celebrates the momentous occasion of the revelation at Sinai. Just as the prophet Habbakuk recounts the memory of the one-time event of Matan Torah, so too we revel in being part of this great revelation and having been chosen to receive Hashem's Torah at Har Sinai. In so doing, we observe the commandment in the Torah to "not to forget that which we saw with our own eyes."

Endnotes

1. For more on the mentioning of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* in Tanach, see Yissachar Yaakobson, "Remizot le-Ma'amad Har Sinai ba-Miqra," *Ma'ayanot* 6, edited by Haim Hamiel (Jerusalem: 1958/9, 116-131).

2. *Etz Yosef* commentary on *Tanhuma*, Exod 4:25.