

טוב להם וטוב לעולם, פזור לרשעים טוב להם וטוב לעולם, והוא מצד שהם מסבימים על תכונות רעות, אשר בהתקבצם תתחזק התכונה ההיא, ובהתפזרם תחלש ותחסר<sup>79</sup>, עד שראינו יעקב אבינו עליו השלום מאשר ראה שני בניו והם צדיקים, עם כל זה, בהיותם מסבימים על תכונה אחת בלתי נאותה בעיניו<sup>80</sup>, אמר (בראשית מט, ז): "אחלקם ביַעֲקֹב וַאֲפִיצֵם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל."

וְזֶה הָיָה עֲנַן דּוֹר הַפְּלָגָה וְעֲנָשָׁם שֶׁהִנִּיחוּ אוֹתָנוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים בּוֹ<sup>82,81</sup>

Assembly for the righteous is beneficial for them and beneficial to the world, while dispersal for the wicked is beneficial for them and beneficial for the world.<sup>[78]</sup> — And the explanation of this is that [the wicked] under discussion share certain evil characteristics, such that their joining together would strengthen that characteristic, and with their dispersal it would weaken and decrease.<sup>[79]</sup> — This principle applies even in the case of *righteous* people who share an evil trait, such that we see that Yaakov, our father, peace be upon him, applied this in his appraisal of his two sons, Shimon and Levi; — for they were righteous and nevertheless, since they shared a common characteristic which was not agreeable in his eyes, as they were prone to intense rage and harsh wrath,<sup>[80]</sup> — he said (*Bereishis* 49:7): *I will separate them within Yaakov, and I will disperse them in Israel.* Yaakov's rationale was that since they shared an evil trait, it was crucial that they be separated, so that it would not grow through their unification.

### §3. THE GENERATION OF THE DISPERSION

[*Ran* commences a lengthy analysis of the episode of the Tower of Bavel and the Dispersion,<sup>[81]</sup> which connects with the discussion at hand. He begins by noting that the reason God dispersed that generation is not readily apparent from Scripture:]<sup>[82]</sup> — **וְזֶה הָיָה עֲנַן דּוֹר הַפְּלָגָה וְעֲנָשָׁם שֶׁהִנִּיחוּ אוֹתָנוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים בּוֹ** — **And this is the key to understanding the narrative of the Generation of the Dispersion and their punishment,**

78. The text of the Mishnah in the standard printed editions differs somewhat from *Ran*'s citation. Possibly, however, *Ran* intends to present a condensed version of the Mishnah.

79. Thus, according to *Ran*, the benefit from the dispersal of the wicked is not a generic prescription for preventing the wicked from collaborating in their evil endeavors (as *Rashi* indeed explains it), but rather is applicable specifically when they share certain evil traits, which would be strengthened by their banding together.

80. See beginning of *Bereishis* 49:7.

81. This discussion appears also in *Ran*'s

commentary on the Torah (Feldman ed., pp. 140-144).

82. The passage appears in *Bereishis* 11:1-9, as follows: (1) *The whole earth was of one language and of common purpose.* (2) *And it came to pass, when they migrated from the east they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there.* (3) *They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them in fire." And the brick served them as stone, and the bitumen served them as mortar.* (4) *And they said, "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed across the whole earth."* (5) *Hashem descended to look at*

בַּאֲפֵלָה, עַד שְׁכַמְעַט נִגְשָׁשָׁה כְּעוֹרִים קִיר<sup>83</sup>, בִּי אֵלֶּה הָאֲנָשִׁים  
 מָה עָשׂוּ<sup>84</sup>, מַה פְּשָׁעַם וּמַה חֲטָאתָם<sup>85</sup>. אִם רָצוּ לְהִיּוֹת כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד  
 חֲבָרִים<sup>86</sup>, הִיָּה רְאוּי לְהִיּוֹת לָהֶם בְּזֶה שְׂכָר טוֹב, בִּי רְאִינוּ הַכְּתוּבִים  
 כָּלֶם נוֹטִים אֶל זֶה הַדְּרָךְ<sup>87</sup>, עַד שֶׁאָמְרוּ (בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה לַח, ו')<sup>88</sup> שֶׁאֲפֵלוּ  
 עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוּדָה זָרָה כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהַשְּׁלוֹם בֵּינֵיהֶם אֵין מִדַּת הַדִּין מִתּוֹחָה  
 כְּנִגְדָם. וְהִסְמִיכוּ זֶה אֶל פְּסוּק (הוֹשֵׁעַ ד, יז): "חֲבוֹר עֲצָבִים אֶפְרַיִם  
 הִנָּח לוֹ"<sup>89</sup>. וְעַם הַיְיִוֹת שֶׁבָּאוּ בְּטַעַם עֲנָשָׁם שֶׁל אֱלֹהֵי מִדְרָשִׁים, אֵינָם  
 מְסַבְּימִים לְפָשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל מִקְרָא<sup>90</sup>, בִּי לְדַבְרֵי מִי שֶׁאֹמֵר שֶׁהִיָּתָה

בַּאֲפֵלָה עַד שְׁכַמְעַט נִגְשָׁשָׁה כְּעוֹרִים קִיר — regarding which the commentators have left us in darkness without any clarity, to the point that we are virtually like the blind, groping a wall<sup>[83]</sup> so as not to fall. בִּי אֵלֶּה הָאֲנָשִׁים מָה עָשׂוּ — For these men [in that generation] — what had they done?<sup>[84]</sup> מַה פְּשָׁעַם וּמַה חֲטָאתָם — What was their transgression and what was their sin?<sup>[85]</sup> אִם רָצוּ לְהִיּוֹת כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד חֲבָרִים הִיָּה רְאוּי — If all they desired was to be as one man, as companions,<sup>[86]</sup> as the passage seems to imply, then it would have been fitting for them to receive great reward for this rather than punishment! בִּי רְאִינוּ הַכְּתוּבִים כָּלֶם נוֹטִים — For we see that all Scripture inclines that way, indicating that unity is actually a laudable goal,<sup>[87]</sup> עַד שֶׁאָמְרוּ שֶׁאֲפֵלוּ עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוּדָה זָרָה כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהַשְּׁלוֹם — to the point that [the Sages] say (*Bereishis Rabbah* 38:6)<sup>[88]</sup> that even regarding idolaters, as long as there is peace between them, the Attribute of Strict Justice is not extended against them. וְהִסְמִיכוּ זֶה אֶל פְּסוּק: "חֲבוֹר עֲצָבִים אֶפְרַיִם הִנָּח לוֹ" — And they supported this with a verse (*Hoshea* 4:17): *Ephraim is joined to idols; let him be.*<sup>[89]</sup>

[Ran cites Midrashic interpretations of this incident, and then rejects them for a host of reasons:]

— And although there are *Midrashim* that supply reasons for their punishment, they do not accord with the plain sense of Scripture.<sup>[90]</sup> בִּי לְדַבְרֵי מִי שֶׁאֹמֵר שֶׁהִיָּתָה

the city and tower which the sons of man built, (6) and Hashem said, "Behold, they are one people with one language for all, and this they begin to do! And now, it will not be withheld from them all they proposed to do! (7) Come, let us descend and there confuse their language, that they should not understand one another's language." (8) And Hashem dispersed them from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. (9) That is why it was called Bavel, because it was there that Hashem confused the language of the whole earth, and from there Hashem scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

83. Stylistic citation of *Yeshayah* 59:10.

84. Stylistic paraphrase of *II Shmuel* 24:17.

85. Stylistic paraphrase of *Bereishis* 31:36.

86. Stylistic citation of *Shoftim* 20:11.

87. This is clear from the fact that numerous commandments are geared to foster peace between man and his fellow, and from the fact that the prophets constantly call for mankind to achieve peace between different peoples.

88. This teaching appears as well in *Sifri*, *Nasso*, *Piska* 42; and *Tanchuma*, *Tzav* 7, *Shoftim* 18.

89. The verse is being expounded as follows: *If Ephraim is joined* (i.e., if the Israelites are together and at peace with one another), [*then even if he worships*] idols, let him be (*Tanchuma*, *Tzav* 7 with *Eitz Yosef* ad loc.).

90. [Although *Ran* frames his objection to the

הַסְבָּמָתָם לְעֹלֹת לְרָקִיעַ, הוּא מִן הַתִּימָה: אֵיךְ הִסְבִּימוּ כָּל בְּנֵי הָעוֹלָם בְּשָׁטוֹת בְּזוּהָ,<sup>92</sup> וְלוֹ חָשְׁבוּ רְאוּתָם<sup>93</sup> וְעוּרוּ עֵינֵי שְׂכָלָם, הִיָּה רְאוּי לְהִיּוֹת פְּתִיּוֹתָם מִצִּיל אוֹתָם מִן הָעֲנָשׁ,<sup>94</sup> וְכִיּוֹצֵא בְּזוּהָ — (תהלים ב, ד) "יֹושֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק ה' יִלְעַג לְמוֹ"<sup>95</sup>. וְעוֹד, כִּי אֵלֹהֵי פֶשְׁטוֹ יָד בְּעֵקֶר, אֵיךְ הִסְפִּיק עֲנָשׁם לְהַפְיֵץ אוֹתָם לְבָר<sup>96</sup>.

הַסְבָּמָתָם לְעֹלֹת לְרָקִיעַ הוּא מִן הַתִּימָה — For according to those who say that [the people in that generation] agreed that it was unfair for God to claim for Himself the higher realm, leaving only the lower realm for man, and hence they built a tower in an attempt to rise up to the sky and take it for themselves,<sup>[91]</sup> it is perplexing: אֵיךְ וְלוֹ חָשְׁבוּ רְאוּתָם וְעוּרוּ עֵינֵי שְׂכָלָם הִיָּה רְאוּי לְהִיּוֹת פְּתִיּוֹתָם — How could all the people of the world agree to such a folly like this?<sup>[92]</sup> מִצִּיל אוֹתָם מִן הָעֲנָשׁ — And if their sight was dimmed<sup>[93]</sup> and the eyes of their intellects blinded, so that they had indeed imagined that such a foolhardy scheme was sound, it would be fitting for their foolishness to save them from punishment, just as a deranged person is not held responsible for his actions!<sup>[94]</sup> וְכִיּוֹצֵא בְּזוּהָ "יֹושֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק ה' יִלְעַג לְמוֹ" — And the verse states similarly (*Tehillim* 2:4): *He Who sits in heaven will laugh, the Lord will mock them.*<sup>[95]</sup> וְעוֹד כִּי אֵלֹהֵי פֶשְׁטוֹ יָד בְּעֵקֶר — Furthermore, if they had indeed sent forth their

Midrashic explanations as textual (in that they deviate from the plain meaning of the Scriptural text), some of his questions are essentially logical in nature.]

91. They sought to gain the heavens and wage war with God (*Bereishis Rabbah* 38:6, cited by Rashi to v. 1). [See more variations of this explanation in *Tanchuma*, *Noach* 18 and *Sanhedrin* 109a.] It is possible that *Ran* means to allude to another Midrashic explanation (also cited by *Rashi*) as well, to wit: The people who lived in the aftermath of the Flood rationalized that such an upheaval occurs [naturally] every 1656 years, so if they built supports to rise up to the sky and thereby prevent it from collapsing, they would have nothing to fear. This explanation of their heresy is also subject to the questions *Ran* presents below; see his *Commentary to the Torah*.

92. Perhaps they were wicked, but surely they were not fools! (*Ran* in his commentary to the *Torah*). [*Abarbanel* further points out that the generation included sages such as Noach, Shem, Eiver, and Avraham, making it more unlikely that the masses would fall for a folly of that magnitude without being corrected. He also wonders why — if they sought to support the heavens from collapsing — they would choose to build their tower in a valley! However, cf. *Ibn Ezra* to v. 2.] *Ran* in his commentary to the *Torah* considers the idea

of raising supports for the heavens so foolish that he wonders if there is perhaps some [deeper] explanation for this Midrash [אין זו כוונה], while *Abarbanel* asserts that there is “no doubt” that these Midrashim contain secret teachings and allusions.

93. See *Koheles* 12:3, and see also *Shabbos* 152a.

94. At first glance, one would assume that *Ran* does not mean that their foolishness should actually exempt them from any punishment, since, after all, they were not technically insane; but rather that their “insanity” should have been a mitigating factor in their deserving punishment, since they were driven more by folly than by wickedness. However, it seems from *Ran*’s next question that he means that they should have been totally exempt due to technical insanity; see note 96.

95. According to the explanation of *Metzudos* ad loc., this verse pertains closely to the matter at hand, as follows: If the nations attempt to combat God, how futile and comical is their vain threat, for He is in heaven. In any conflict, the adversary on higher ground has the advantage even if he is weak; how much more so if he is strong, like God! [Possibly, *Ran* takes this a step further, interpreting God’s “laughter” at the nations’ ludicrous endeavor as derision without punishment (see *Abarbanel*).]

ועוד, כי מפשט הפרשה יראה כי לא היה עונשם על מה שעשו כבר, אבל על מה שהיה אפשר להמשך ממעשיהם, והוא אמרו (בראשית י"א, ו): "הן עם אחד ושפה אחת לכולם וזה החלם לעשות ועתה לא יבצר מהם כל אשר יזמו לעשות", והנה הפסוק הזה מורה בפרוש כי היה הענש מדאגה מדבר<sup>98</sup> שאפשר שיתחדש<sup>99</sup>.

hand against that which is fundamental (i.e., their intentions were heretical), how would it have been a sufficient punishment to simply disperse them?<sup>[96]</sup> Surely, it would have been fitting for God to smite them in accordance with their wickedness!<sup>[97]</sup> ועוד כי מפשט הפרשה יראה כי לא היה עונשם על מה שעשו כבר אבל על מה שהיה אפשר להמשך ממעשיהם — Furthermore, this explanation is not satisfactory, because from the plain sense of the passage it appears that they were not punished for what they had *already* done, but rather because of what was possible to result in the future from their actions. והוא אמרו: "הן עם אחד ושפה אחת לכולם וזה החלם לעשות" — For [the verse] states (v. 6): *And Hashem said, "Behold, they are one people with one language for all, and this they begin to do! And now, it will not be withheld from them all they proposed to do!"* והנה הפסוק הזה מורה בפרוש כי היה הענש מדאגה מדבר שאפשר שיתחדש<sup>[98]</sup> that might come about in the future, but not for something that had already been done. And if they had already agreed on their heretical course of action, that would be sufficiently deserving of punishment on its own.<sup>[99]</sup>

96. That is, even if for some unknown reason God considered them rational and liable for their actions (*Ran's* previous question notwithstanding), the narrative is *still* difficult, since they should have been punished more harshly than they were. [This seems to indicate that *Ran's* previous question was that they should have been completely exempt due to insanity, for if he meant only that their punishment should have been mitigated, then *Ran's* two questions here answer one another: Perhaps God mitigated the more severe punishment for heresy due to their "insanity"! Rather, *Ran* means to ask that they should be totally exonerated due to their folly, and if not, they should have been punished according to the *full* extent of their sin.]

97. *Ran, Commentary to the Torah*. [The Midrash actually raises a similar question in contrasting the sin and punishment of the Generation of the Flood with that of the Generation of the Dispersion: Why in the former case, which did not involve heresy, but "only" lust and theft, were all of the wicked annihilated in a flood, while in the latter case, which involved heresy, the sinners were merely scattered to the corners of the world?

The Midrash's answer is the principle cited by *Ran* above; namely, that the love and friendship between those of the Generation of the Dispersion saved them from destruction. Apparently, *Ran* considers this answer insufficient to explain why God would permit heretics to live.]

98. Stylistic citation of *Yehoshua* 22:24.

99. *Ran, Commentary to the Torah*. [Although generally the rule is that God does not regard an evil thought as a deed that is punishable, heretical thoughts, e.g., denying God's omnipotence, is an exception (see *Kiddushin* 39b with *Meiri*). Furthermore, this rule applies only to Jews (see *Midrash Shocher Tov* 30:4; *Yerushalmi Peah* 1:1, toward the end; *Tosafos* to *Kiddushin* *ibid.*.)] *Abarbanel* further notes that this verse seems to indicate that God considered their endeavor achievable, which rules out the explanation that they sought to reach the heavens.

[*Ran* *ibid.* also rejects the explanation he attributes to *Ibn Ezra*, that they merely sought to be unified (as the verses seem to indicate) and God scattered them so as to ensure the continuity of mankind by safeguarding them from being wiped out in a single cataclysmic event. By scattering

וכֹּל<sup>100</sup> אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים מְשִׁימִים הַמְּשָׁפִיל בְּמִבּוּכָה וּצְרִיכִים בְּאוּר,  
וְהוּא נִמְשָׁךְ וְנוֹסֵד עַל הַשְּׂרָשׁ שְׂאֲמַרְנוּ, כִּי חֲבַרְת הַרְשָׁעִים וְאַסְפָּתָם  
דְּבַר מְזִיק הֵן בְּעַת הַשְּׂתַדְלוּתָם בַּפְּעֻלַת רְעֵתָם אוֹ לֹא יִשְׁתַּדְּלוּ בָּהּ,  
כְּאֲשֶׁר חֲבַרְת הַטּוֹבִים דְּבַר מוֹעִיל הֵן בְּעַת הַשְּׂתַדְלוּתָם אוֹ בְּעַת  
שְׁיִנוּחוֹ, כְּאֲשֶׁר נִרְמָז בְּאֲמָרוֹ<sup>101</sup> (קֹהֵלֶת ד, יא): "גַּם אִם יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנַיִם וְחָם  
לָהֶם וְלֹאֶחָד אֵיךְ יִחָם". וְזֶה הִיָּה עֲנִיָן דּוֹר הַפְּלָגָה, כִּי אֵינן סָפֵק, כִּי  
בְּעַת הַהִיא הָיוּ כָּל בְּנֵי הָעוֹלָם נוֹסְדִים<sup>102</sup> עַל אֲמוּנוֹת נִכְרִיּוֹת, וְאֲשֶׁר  
הַסְּבִימוּ בּוֹ כָּלָם הוּא עֲנִיָן עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, מְלַבֵּד סְגֻלוֹת וְאֲנָשִׁים מוֹעֲטִים  
אֲשֶׁר טָעְמוּ וְרָאוּ אֹרֹךְ שֶׁל עוֹלָם כִּי טוֹב<sup>103</sup>, וְהֵם גַּם הֵם, לֹא הִיָּה סָפֵק  
בִּידָם לְקָרֵא בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְעַבְד אֶת ה' שְׂכָם אֶחָד<sup>104</sup>, מִיִּרְאָתָם הָעַמִּים

[Ran now presents his explanation of this passage:]<sup>[100]</sup>

וְהוּא נִמְשָׁךְ — All of these matters put the wise person in a state of perplexity, and require clarification. והוא נמשך — And [the clarification] follows from, and is founded on, the root principle that we have stated above; כִּי חֲבַרְת הַרְשָׁעִים וְאַסְפָּתָם דְּבַר — i.e., that the grouping and gathering together of the wicked who share evil traits is injurious, regardless of whether they are presently exerting themselves in evil actions or they are not presently exerting themselves in that (i.e., their fraternization is harmful regardless of whether they are engaged in evil at the moment), כְּאֲשֶׁר חֲבַרְת הַטּוֹבִים דְּבַר מוֹעִיל — just as the grouping of the pious is beneficial, regardless of whether they are presently exerting themselves in righteous deeds or whether they are presently inactive. כְּאֲשֶׁר נִרְמָז בְּאֲמָרוֹ: "גַּם אִם יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנַיִם וְחָם" — As explained above,<sup>[101]</sup> this is alluded to [in the verse] when it states (*Koheles* 4:11): *Also, if two sleep together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?*

[Ran connects this to the Generation of the Dispersion:]

וְזֶה הִיָּה עֲנִיָן דּוֹר הַפְּלָגָה — And this was the underlying idea regarding the Generation of the Dispersion, כִּי אֵינן סָפֵק כִּי בְּעַת הַהִיא הָיוּ כָּל בְּנֵי הָעוֹלָם נוֹסְדִים עַל אֲמוּנוֹת — for there is no question that at that time, all the people of the world held<sup>[102]</sup> various foreign beliefs, and the only thing that they all agreed upon was idolatry, וְאֲשֶׁר טָעְמוּ וְרָאוּ אֹרֹךְ שֶׁל עוֹלָם כִּי טוֹב — aside from the outstanding individuals and the few people who contemplated and saw that the Light of the world, i.e., God, is good.<sup>[103]</sup> וְהֵם גַּם הֵם לֹא הִיָּה סָפֵק בִּידָם לְקָרֵא בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְעַבְד אֶת ה' שְׂכָם אֶחָד מִיִּרְאָתָם הָעַמִּים

them to the four corners of the earth, they would be protected from a single event affecting them all at once (see also *Rashbam*, *Radak*, and *Ralbag*). *Ramban* contends that this too is foolish, since one city and tower could not possibly suffice for all the people of the world and their progeny. See *Abarbanel* for further objections to this approach.]

100. *Ran* presents this same explanation, with some modifications, in his commentary to the Torah.

101. See above, at note 67.

102. Literally, *were founded upon*.

103. Stylistic paraphrase of *Tehillim* 34:9.

אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ בְּאַרְצוֹתֵם מוֹשְׁלִים עֲלֵיהֶם, עַד שֶׁהֲרֵאשׁוֹן שֶׁהִתְחִיל זֶה<sup>105</sup>, וְהוּא אַבְרָהָם, קָרָה לוֹ מִה שֶׁקָּרָה<sup>106</sup> עִם נִמְרוֹד עַד שֶׁהֲצַרְךָ לְעִזּוֹב אֲרָצוֹ וּלְלַכֵּת אֶל אֶרֶץ אַחֶרֶת<sup>107</sup>. וְאִין סָפֵק, שְׂאוֹתֶם צְדִיקִים שֶׁהָיוּ יְחִידִים בְּדוֹרוֹת הָהֵם, הִיָּה לָהֶם חֲלוֹק הָאֲמוֹת וְהִמְמַשְׁלוֹת לְטוֹב וּלְהוֹעֵלֶת, כִּי בְּאֲשֶׁר תִּצַּר לָהֶם הָאֲמוּנָה בְּאִיזָה מְלָכוֹת יִשׁוּטְטוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ אַחֶרֶת שְׂיֻכְלוּ שָׁם לְעַבְדוֹ ה' יִתְבָּרֵךְ בְּרִצּוֹנָם, בְּאֲשֶׁר קוֹרָה לָנוּ בְּגִלוּתֵנוּ הַיּוֹם, כִּי בְּאֲשֶׁר נִתְחַדֵּשׁ שְׂמֵד בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׁמַעְאֵל נָסוּ פְּלִיטֵיהֶם אֶל אֶרֶץ אֱדוֹם<sup>108</sup>, וּמֵאֲדוֹם לִישְׁמַעְאֵל<sup>109</sup>, וְזֶה אֲצִלְנוּ מִחֵיהָ מַעַט בְּעַבְדוּתֵנוּ<sup>110</sup>.

אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ בְּאַרְצוֹתֵם מוֹשְׁלִים עֲלֵיהֶם — However, even these outstanding individuals were not able to call on mankind to serve Hashem with a united resolve,<sup>[104]</sup> out of their fear of the nations living in their lands and ruling over them, עַד שֶׁהֲרֵאשׁוֹן שֶׁהִתְחִיל זֶה וְהוּא — to the point that the first one who began to do so,<sup>[105]</sup> that is, Avraham, suffered from the incident<sup>[106]</sup> with Nimrod, such that he had to leave his land and go to another land.<sup>[107]</sup> וְאִין סָפֵק שְׂאוֹתֶם צְדִיקִים שֶׁהָיוּ יְחִידִים בְּדוֹרוֹת הָהֵם הִיָּה לָהֶם חֲלוֹק הָאֲמוֹת וְהִמְמַשְׁלוֹת לְטוֹב — And there is no doubt that for those righteous people who were merely individuals, and a tiny minority in those generations, the division of the nations and governments was advantageous and beneficial, כִּי בְּאֲשֶׁר תִּצַּר לָהֶם הָאֲמוּנָה בְּאִיזָה — for when the dominant religion would oppress them in one kingdom, they would wander to another land where they would be able to worship Hashem, blessed be He, as they desired, free from oppression; בְּאֲשֶׁר קוֹרָה לָנוּ בְּגִלוּתֵנוּ הַיּוֹם — as is the case for us in exile nowadays, כִּי בְּאֲשֶׁר נִתְחַדֵּשׁ שְׂמֵד בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׁמַעְאֵל נָסוּ פְּלִיטֵיהֶם אֶל אֶרֶץ אֱדוֹם וּמֵאֲדוֹם — that when a period of forced apostasy begins in the land of Yishmael, the refugees flee to the land of Edom,<sup>[108]</sup> and when the opposite occurs (i.e., during periods of forced apostasy in those lands), they flee from the land of Edom to the land of Yishmael.<sup>[109]</sup> וְזֶה אֲצִלְנוּ מִחֵיהָ מַעַט בְּעַבְדוּתֵנוּ — And this is a slight revival for us in our servitude;<sup>[110]</sup> i.e., this state offers us some relief from our oppressors.

104. Stylistic paraphrase of *Tzephaniah* 3:9.

105. That is, the first one to urge the nations to abandon their idolatry and instead serve God.

106. [Literally, *occurred to him what occurred.*] In Avraham's early years, he destroyed the idols of his father Terach. Terach reported his son's "crime" to King Nimrod, who ordered that Avraham be thrown into a furnace for refusing to acknowledge the pagan deities. However, Avraham miraculously emerged from the furnace unscathed (*Rashi* and *Ran* to 11:28, citing *Bereishis Rabbah* 38:13).

107. *Ramban* (to 11:28) and *Ran* (to 11:1 and 12:1-3), in the course of explaining the chronology of events of Terach and Avraham's travels, tell that they left Kasdim for Canaan to escape from Nimrod

and his minions, rather than as a result of God's command (see *Ramban* there for why there was then a need for God to later command Avraham to go to Canaan). Cf. *Rav Saadiah Gaon* to 12:1 (with note 1 in *Kafich* ed.), *Ibn Ezra*, and *Radak*.

108. The Rabbis often refer to Rome as *Edom*; [see *Insight: The Fourth Kingdom of Daniel's Vision* [end] to *Derush* 5].

109. The history of the Jewish people fleeing from land to land in search of safety is unfortunately long. Just a few years after *Ran's* passing, the horrific massacre of 1391 erupted in Spain, forcing droves of Jews (including *Ran's* student *Rivash* and also *Rashbatz*) to make their way to the Muslim lands of Algeria and Morocco.

110. Stylistic citation of *Ezra* 9:8.

ובעת ההיא — “היתה כל הארץ שפה אחת ודברים אחדים”, והסבימו להיות לעולם בלד ראש אחד מנהיג ומושל, ושלא יהיו נפוצים ונחלקים בממשלותם, ולזה בחרו בקעה אשר מצאו להם רחבת ידים, שאין ספק שרב בני אדם יבחרו להיותם קרובים לפי כחם אל ראש ממשלתם<sup>111</sup>, ולזה גם כן הסבימו לבנות (שם ד) “מגדל וראשו בשמים”, כלומר: גבוה מפלג כפי האפשרות<sup>112</sup>, באשר בא פסוק אחר עם זה בשוה (דברים ט, א): “ערים גדלת ובצרת בשמים”<sup>113</sup>, כי כן היה ראוי למי שנבחר להיות מושל בעולם התחתון, שיהיה ארמונו ומגדלו גדול, עד שבראית המגדל יתלבש כל רואהו פחד ומורא, ושיהיה נראה מרחוק<sup>114</sup>.

[Ran continues:]

— And at that time *the whole earth was of one language and of common purpose*, והסבימו להיות לעולם בלד — and they agreed for the entire world to appoint one head to be leader and ruler, and [the people] should not be scattered and divided under their different governments. ולזה בחרו בקעה — And to that end, they chose a valley that they found to have ample room to build their capital, שאין ספק שרב בני אדם יבחרו להיותם קרובים — for without a doubt most people would choose to live as close as possible to the seat of the government (i.e., the capital).<sup>[111]</sup> ולזה גם — And to that end, they agreed to build a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, that is to say, exceedingly tall, as much as possible.<sup>[112]</sup> באשר בא פסוק אחר עם זה בשוה: “ערים גדלת ובצרת בשמים” — This usage of “heaven” is meant in the same sense as a later verse (*Devarim* 1:28, 9:1): *cities that are great and fortified up to the heavens*, which obviously does not mean that they reached the “heavens” literally.<sup>[113]</sup> — They desired to build this imposing tower because it is fitting for one who was chosen to rule the lower world to have a great palace and tower, עד שבראית המגדל יתלבש — such that seeing the tower inspires all viewers with dread and fear, and that it should be visible from afar.<sup>[114]</sup>

111. *Ran* makes clear in his commentary to the Torah that this city was not intended to house the entire world’s population, but only those who lived in and frequented the center of the world’s government. [This differs significantly from *Ibn Ezra*’s explanation, that *all* the people of the world were to live in this city, a notion *Ramban* dismisses as clearly impractical.]

112. That is, in *Ran*’s view they certainly did not intend for the tower to literally reach “the heavens,” as that would be impossible (see *Ibn Ezra* to v. 4).

113. The Gemara in *Tamid* (29a and *Chullin* 90b)

states that there are instances where the Torah spoke in hyperbole, illustrating this with the verse at hand. Obviously, the cities’ walls did not actually extend to the heavens, and this description is just an exaggeration.

*Maharsha* (to *Chullin* loc. cit.) explains (citing *Aruch* גומא ע) that this expression means that the fortifications were so high that one had to tilt his head to look upward as high as possible (as if to heaven) to see their tops.

114. [Possibly, *Ran* specifies that this is seemly for a ruler of the “lower world,” because only in that realm are these two goals — inspiring dread and

וְהָיָה אֱלֹהֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים בַּעַת הַהִיא לֹא חָטְאוּ בְדַבָּר בְּמַעֲשֵׂה וְלֹא  
בְּמַחְשְׁבָה<sup>115</sup>, אָבֵל ה' יִתְבַּרֵךְ שֶׁהוּא צוֹפֵה וּמְבִיט לְמִרְחֹק, יֵרֵד  
לְמַה שְׁיִמְשֹׁךְ מִקְבוּץ הָאֲנָשִׁים הָרְעִים, וְהוּא אָמַר (בראשית יא,  
ה): "וַיֵּרֵד ה' לָרְאֹת אֶת הָעִיר" וגו', כְּלוֹמֵר: יֵרֵד<sup>116</sup> וְהִשְׁגִּיחַ לְמַה  
שְׁיִמְשֹׁךְ מִמֶּנּוּ, וְאִם לָעַת עֵתָה אֵין רַע, אָמְנָם הַכְּנוּס הִיָּה רַע  
לָהֶם וְרַע לְעוֹלָם<sup>117</sup>. וְהוּא: שְׁכֻלָם הָיוּ מְסַבִּימִים עַל עֲבוּדַת זָרָה,  
וְהַבְקָעָה הַהִיא גַם כֵּן אֲשֶׁר בָּחֲרוּ לָהֶם הִיָּה אֶרֶץ שְׁנַעַר, הִיָּה  
רֵאשָׁה וּמְלֻכָה נְמֻרֹד<sup>118</sup> אֲשֶׁר הִיָּה רֵאשׁ לְעֲבוּדַת זָרָה<sup>119</sup>, עַד  
שֶׁהֲצִיק לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם בְּחֻלְקוֹ עָלֶיהָ כְּמוֹ שְׁנוּדַע,

[*Ran* next elucidates the matter of God's "descent" (v. 5) to examine their actions:]  
וְהָיָה אֱלֹהֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים בַּעַת הַהִיא לֹא חָטְאוּ בְדַבָּר בְּמַעֲשֵׂה וְלֹא בְּמַחְשְׁבָה  
— Now, these men at that time sinned neither in action nor in thought, for their plans in practice and in  
theory involved no immediate sins;<sup>[115]</sup> אָבֵל ה' יִתְבַּרֵךְ שֶׁהוּא צוֹפֵה וּמְבִיט לְמִרְחֹק יֵרֵד  
— however, Hashem, blessed be He, Who gazes and peers into the distant future, fathomed what would eventually result from such  
a gathering of wicked men. וְהוּא אָמַר: וַיֵּרֵד ה' לָרְאֹת אֶת הָעִיר" וגו' — And this is  
what it means when it says (v. 5): *Hashem descended to look at the city and tower*  
*which the sons of man built*; כְּלוֹמֵר: יֵרֵד וְהִשְׁגִּיחַ לְמַה שְׁיִמְשֹׁךְ מִמֶּנּוּ — that is to say,  
He descended<sup>[116]</sup> to the end of the matter and observed what would result from  
[their unity], וְאִם לָעַת עֵתָה אֵין רַע אָמְנָם הַכְּנוּס הִיָּה רַע לָהֶם וְרַע לְעוֹלָם — and even  
though at the moment it was not evil, nevertheless, the gathering was bound to re-  
sult in evil for them and evil for the world.<sup>[117]</sup> וְהוּא שְׁכֻלָם הָיוּ מְסַבִּימִים עַל עֲבוּדַת זָרָה  
— And this was because all of them were of one mind with regard to idolatry, i.e.,  
they were all idolaters. וְהַבְקָעָה הַהִיא גַם כֵּן אֲשֶׁר בָּחֲרוּ לָהֶם הִיָּה אֶרֶץ שְׁנַעַר הִיָּה רֵאשָׁה  
— And furthermore, that valley which they chose as the location for their capital was in the land of Shinar, and its head and king  
was Nimrod,<sup>[118]</sup> who headed the endeavor of idolatry,<sup>[119]</sup> עַד שֶׁהֲצִיק לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ  
— to the point that he persecuted Avraham our

the impression of omnipresence — paramount for maintaining authority.]

115. Since their plan involved only banding together into one society, without any heretical aims.

116. According to the Midrashic explanations cited above, that their very act of building was a rebellion against God, it seems that this verse is meant anthropomorphically (figuratively assigning human characteristics to God), stating that God "descended" to examine their sinful actions (see *Rashi*). However, according to *Ran*, God's "descent" refers to His examination of the inevitable results of their actions (see *Radak*; see also *Ibn Ezra* and *Rambam*, *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:10).

117. This is because, as *Ran* explained above, a union of entities sharing a specific evil trait will automatically compound that trait, even if they do not intend or act to make that happen.

118. As stated in *Bereishis* 10:10: *The beginning of [Nimrod's] kingdom was...Calneh in the land of Shinar.*

119. This follows *Eruvin* 53a and *Pesachim* 94b, which teach that Nimrod led the whole world in rebellion against God. [*Rashi* to *Pesachim* actually connects this teaching to the incident at hand, stating that Nimrod instigated the plan to build the Tower of Babel; but that is in accordance with *Rashi's* understanding that the tower's purpose was to aid them in a battle against God.]

לְכֵן אָמַר: "הֵן עִם אֶחָד וְשִׁפָּה אַחַת לְכֻלָּם וְזֶה הַחֶלֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעַתָּה  
 לֹא יִבְצֵר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת," בְּלוֹמַר: אִם יִמְשָׁךְ זֶה,  
 לֹא יִבְצֵר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּעַת הָרֵאשׁוֹן וְלֹא יִכְלוּ<sup>121</sup>,  
 עַתָּה לֹא יִמְנַע מֵהֶם<sup>122</sup>, בִּי אֵין סִפֵּק שֶׁהַדּוֹרוֹת הָהֵם הָיוּ מִשְׁתַּדְּלִים  
 לְרוֹמֵם עֲבוּדָה זָרָה שְׁלֵהֶם וּלְהַשְׁבִּיחַ שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא,  
 וְלֹא עָלָה בְיָדָם מִפְּנֵי חִלּוּק הַמְּמַשְׁלוֹת וְהָאֲרָצוֹת, בִּי הָיָה לְעוֹבְדֵי  
 ה' יִתְבָּרֵךְ מִפְּלֵט, מָה שְׁלֹא יִהְיֶה בֵּן אִם תִּמְשָׁךְ הַסְּבָמָתָם<sup>123</sup>,  
 בִּי בְּאֲשֶׁר בָּרַח אֲבָרְהָם מִפְּנֵי נִמְרוּד לְלֶכֶת אֶל אַרְץ כְּנַעַן,

father, peace be upon him, when [Avraham] challenged [idolatry], as is well known and alluded to above.<sup>[120]</sup>

[Ran continues with God's response in v. 6:]

לְכֵן אָמַר: "הֵן עִם אֶחָד וְשִׁפָּה אַחַת לְכֻלָּם וְזֶה הַחֶלֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעַתָּה לֹא יִבְצֵר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר  
 יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת" — And therefore [the verse] states (v. 6): *And Hashem said, "Behold, they are one people with one language for all, and this they begin to do! And now, it will not be withheld from them all they proposed to do!"* בְּלוֹמַר: אִם  
 יִמְשָׁךְ זֶה לֹא יִבְצֵר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּעַת הָרֵאשׁוֹן וְלֹא יִכְלוּ  
 this plan of theirs continues unimpeded, it will not be withheld from them all that  
 they had proposed to do from the beginning but had not been able to accomplish  
 at first, before they banded together;<sup>[121]</sup> עַתָּה לֹא יִמְנַע מֵהֶם — for now, if they are  
 successful in carrying out their plan of unifying, it will not be withheld from them  
 to accomplish what they had originally proposed to do.<sup>[122]</sup> בִּי אֵין סִפֵּק שֶׁהַדּוֹרוֹת  
 — For there is no doubt that those earlier generations of devoted idolaters had exerted  
 themselves to raise up and exalt their idol, and to make people forget the Name of  
 the Holy One, blessed is He. — וְלֹא עָלָה בְיָדָם מִפְּנֵי חִלּוּק הַמְּמַשְׁלוֹת וְהָאֲרָצוֹת  
 But until that point, they had not had the ability to accomplish this, because of the divi-  
 sion between the governments and lands, בִּי הָיָה לְעוֹבְדֵי ה' יִתְבָּרֵךְ מִפְּלֵט — since  
 there was always some escape for those who worshiped Hashem, blessed be  
 He, as explained above, מָה שְׁלֹא יִהְיֶה בֵּן אִם תִּמְשָׁךְ הַסְּבָמָתָם — which would no  
 longer be the case if the proposal of their agreement continued unhindered. If all  
 the world's idolaters united under a single banner, there would be no opportunity for  
 God's faithful to flee persecution by taking up residence in another land at odds with  
 the first.<sup>[123]</sup> בִּי בְּאֲשֶׁר בָּרַח אֲבָרְהָם מִפְּנֵי נִמְרוּד לְלֶכֶת אֶל אַרְץ כְּנַעַן — For when, for

120. See note 106.

121. Ran explains immediately what it was that they had "proposed to do from the beginning."

122. According to Ran, *it will not be withheld* is a declarative statement, that if left to their own devices, mankind would accomplish all that they had originally proposed to do [as Ran explains further below] (see also *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak*). This is unlike *Rashi*, who interprets this as a rhetorical

question: *Should it not be withheld from them all that they planned to do?*

123. This does not contradict what Ran wrote earlier, that the builders of the Tower of Bavel had no evil intentions, because Ran here means only that wiping out the loyal service of God was their *original* aim, which had never happened since it had never been possible. Once it would become feasible with their union, they would indeed endeavor

לו הָיָה נִמְרוֹד מוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם אָנָּה יִלְךְ מֵרוּחוֹ<sup>124</sup>. וְזֶהוּ שְׁאִמְרוּ  
בְּפֶסַח שְׁנֵי<sup>125</sup> (פסחים פז, ב) <sup>126</sup>: אָמַר לִיהּ הֵהוּא מִינְאָה: אָנָּן מַעְלִינָן  
מִינְיִיכוֹ, דְּכְתִיב (מ"א יא, ט): "כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת חֳדָשִׁים יָשָׁב שָׁם יוֹאֵב וְכָל  
יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד הַכְּרִית כָּל זָכָר בְּאֶדוֹם"<sup>127</sup>, וְאֵלּוּ אֲתוֹן יִתְבַּיְתוּ גַבְּן לֹא  
עֲבָדִינָן לָבוּ וְלֹא מִיָּדִי, אָמַר לִיהּ: הִיכִי תַעֲבָדוּ, תְּכַלְיִנְהוּ לְכוּלְהוּ,  
לִיתְנְהוּ גַבְיִיכוֹ, לְהַנִּי דְאִיתְנְהוּ, קְרוּ לָבוּ מַלְכוּתָא קְטִיעָא<sup>128</sup>,

example, Avraham fled from before Nimrod to the land of Canaan, לו הָיָה נִמְרוֹד — consider if Nimrod had been the ruler of the entire world at that time — where would [Avraham] have been able to go to escape from his spirit?<sup>[124]</sup>

[Ran cites a Gemara in *Pesachim* in consonance with this idea:]

וְזֶהוּ שְׁאִמְרוּ בְּפֶסַח שְׁנֵי — And this is the meaning of what [the Sages] say in Tractate *Pesach Sheni*<sup>[125]</sup> (87b):<sup>[126]</sup> אָמַר לִיהּ הֵהוּא מִינְאָה: — A certain apostate said to [R' Chanina]: — אָנָּן מַעְלִינָן מִינְיִיכוֹ דְּכְתִיב: — “We are better than you, for concerning you it is written (*I Melachim* 11:16): “כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת חֳדָשִׁים יָשָׁב שָׁם יוֹאֵב וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד — *Yoav and all of Israel stayed there for six months until he had destroyed all the males in Edom,*<sup>[127]</sup> וְאֵלּוּ אֲתוֹן יִתְבַּיְתוּ גַבְּן לֹא עֲבָדִינָן לָבוּ — but as for you, you have been with us for many years and we have not done anything to you at all.” — אָמַר לִיהּ — [R' Chanina] responded to him: הִיכִי — “You have not eliminated the Jews, because you do not know how to do it! תַּעֲבָדוּ — “If you say, ‘Let us destroy all of them,’ that option is not available, because they are not with you [i.e., not all the Jews are under your control, for they are scattered among several nations]. לְהַנִּי דְאִיתְנְהוּ קְרוּ לָבוּ מַלְכוּתָא — If you decide to kill those who are with you, that option too is ruled out, because you will then be called a genocidal government! [That is, through the efforts of the Jews who survive in other countries, your reputation will be tarnished.]”<sup>[128]</sup>

to make it happen, but that was not their *intention* in seeking to join all the peoples of the world together.

124. Stylistic paraphrase of *Tehillim* 139:7.

125. [Tractate *Pesachim*, as we call it today (in the plural) is so called because the tractate was divided in earlier times into two tractates, one known as “*Pesach Rishon*” (first *Pesach*) and the other as “*Pesach Sheni*” (second *Pesach*). “*Pesach Rishon*” consisted of the first four chapters of the tractate and the tenth, which deal with the prohibitions of *chametz*, the requirement to rid oneself of all *chametz* before the festival begins, and the various laws of the *Pesach Seder*. “*Pesach Sheni*” referred to the remainder of the tractate, which deals with the laws of the פֶּסַח, קָרְבַּן פֶּסַח, *pesach offering* (*Meiri*, in his introductory comments to the tractate).]

126. The standard printed edition contains minor

deviations from *Ran*’s version here. For another Gemara discussing a similar theme, see *Avodah Zarah* 10b.

127. This took place in the context of the war mentioned in *II Shmuel* 8:13, which was fought by Yoav, the general of David’s army, against Edom (*Rashi* to *II Shmuel*). These Edomites were descended from the nation of Amalek, the oppressors of Israel throughout history, whose annihilation is mandated by the Torah (*Devarim* 25:19; see *Bava Basra* 21a-b and *Rashi* to *Shemos* 17:16). [In fact, the apostate’s following analogy was not valid, since the Edomites (Amalekites) were longtime foes of the Jews and had attacked them many times. Nevertheless, he was given a response based on his very own premise, viz. that this was a massacre of innocent people.]

128. *He’aros* from *R’ Eliashiv* to *Pesachim* ad loc. דִּי לִיתְנְהוּ גַבְיִיכוֹ.

אָמַר לִיה: גָּפָא דְרוּמִי, בְּהָא נְחַתִּינָן וּבְהָא סְלָקִינָן. הִנֵּה הוֹרָה, בִּי סִבַּת  
הַשִּׁיב חַמְתָּם מִהַשְּׁחִית<sup>130</sup> אֵינָנו רַק לְהִיּוֹת מִמְשַׁלְתֶּם בְּלַתִּי בּוֹלְלָת.  
וְלִכְן, בְּהִיּוֹת מַחְשַׁבַת הַדּוֹר הַהוּא בְּעַת הַהִיא אֵינְנָה לְרַעָה<sup>131</sup>, אָבֵל  
בִּי רָאָה ה' יִתְבָּרַךְ הֲרַע שְׂיִמְשֹׁף מִמְּנָה<sup>132</sup>, לֹא עֲנָשָׁם, בִּי לֹא הָיוּ  
רְאוּיִים לְעֲנָשׁ<sup>133</sup>, אָבֵל סָבֵל עֲצָתָם<sup>134</sup> וּבִלְבָל לְשׁוֹנָם, בִּי גַם בְּבִלְבוּל  
הַלְשׁוֹן וְהַעֲלָם קִצְתוֹ אֶל קִצְתוֹ תּוֹעֵלַת בּוֹה<sup>135</sup>. כָּלְלוּ שֶׁל דְּבָר:

— גָּפָא דְרוּמִי בְּהָא נְחַתִּינָן וּבְהָא סְלָקִינָן — [The apostate] answered him: —  
“By the Wall of Rome!<sup>[129]</sup> With this thought we go down and with this thought we  
go up! [That is, we grapple with this very dilemma constantly.]” הִנֵּה הוֹרָה בִּי סִבַּת  
— הַשִּׁיב חַמְתָּם מִהַשְּׁחִית אֵינָנו רַק לְהִיּוֹת מִמְשַׁלְתֶּם בְּלַתִּי בּוֹלְלָת  
— Thus, we are taught that the cause turning away their wrath from destroying<sup>[130]</sup> us is only that their govern-  
ment does not encompass the entire world, thereby allowing us to escape and turn  
world opinion against those who annihilate Jews.

[Ran returns to the Generation of the Dispersion, explaining God’s response to  
their plans:]

וְלִכְן בְּהִיּוֹת מַחְשַׁבַת הַדּוֹר הַהוּא בְּעַת הַהִיא אֵינְנָה לְרַעָה אָבֵל בִּי רָאָה ה' יִתְבָּרַךְ הֲרַע שְׂיִמְשֹׁף  
— Therefore, since the intention of that generation at that time was not  
for evil,<sup>[131]</sup> only that Hashem, blessed be He, saw the evil that was to inevitably  
follow from it,<sup>[132]</sup> לֹא עֲנָשָׁם בִּי לֹא הָיוּ רְאוּיִים לְעֲנָשׁ — He did not punish them, as  
they were not deserving of punishment at that time.<sup>[133]</sup> אָבֵל סָבֵל עֲצָתָם וּבִלְבָל  
— Rather, He confounded their counsel<sup>[134]</sup> and even confused their lan-  
guage, בִּי גַם בְּבִלְבוּל הַלְשׁוֹן וְהַעֲלָם קִצְתוֹ אֶל קִצְתוֹ תּוֹעֵלַת בּוֹה — for there was also  
a benefit in confusing the language and thereby rendering them unintelligible to  
one another.<sup>[135]</sup> כָּלְלוּ שֶׁל דְּבָר — In conclusion, this is the essence of the matter:

129. He swore by a pagan deity (*Rashi* *ibid.*). [They referred to it as a “wall” possibly because of their belief in its protective powers.]

130. Stylistic paraphrase of *Tehillim* 106:23.

131. That is, *at that time* their intention was not for evil (see note 123).

132. [It is worth noting that God’s scrutiny of their intentions and the likely future outcome of evil is *unrelated* to the classic philosophical conundrum of how to reconcile God’s certain knowledge of the future and man’s absolute ability to choose good or evil actions (see **Insight: Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will** to *Derush* 3, which discusses this latter point). This is because in this case *Ran* attributes God’s knowledge of the future not only to His omniscience, but to the basic principle that the joining together of evil forces is bound to lead to an evil result.]

133. And God judges a person only according to

his present state, not according to his future transgressions (see *Rashi* to *Bereishis* 21:17).

134. Stylistic paraphrase of *II Shmuel* 15:31.

135. *Abarbanel* (*Bereishis* Ch. 11, *Chorev* ed., pp. 310-311) challenges *Ran*’s explanation of this passage with a series of questions. One question he poses is: If God’s purpose was to fracture the earth’s governments, as *Ran* contends, that would not explain why He confused their languages. For it is possible for a king to rule over nations with different languages, as we see in the case of King Achashveirosh (see *Esther* 1:22). However, it seems that *Ran* actually anticipated his question with this line, since he stresses that there was a benefit “also” from confusing their languages. Presumably, this is because the natural barrier of disparate languages makes it considerably more difficult to maintain long-term rule over a nation with a foreign tongue, even though it is technically possible.

רָאָה קְבוּץ הַרְשָׁעִים הֵהוּא רַע, בְּהִיּוֹתָם כָּלָם מְסֻבִּימִים עַל תְּכוּנָה אַחַת רַעָה, כִּי אֵי אֶפְשֶׁר לְכַלֵּל מְקַבֵּץ מִפְּרָטִים בְּעֵלֵי תְכוּנָה אַחַת רַעָה, שְׁלֹא יִהְיֶה הַכֹּלֵל רַע מִמֶּנּוּ אוֹ כְמוֹהוּ.

וְזֹאת<sup>136</sup> הִיא הַטְעָנָה אֲשֶׁר אִמַּת בָּהּ קִהְלַת הַפֶּסֶק דִּין שְׁנֵתָן לְהִיּוֹת הַמְרַכְּבִים כָּלָם הֶבֶל וּבִלְתֵי בְעֵלֵי קִיּוּם — בְּהִיּוֹתָם מְקַבְּצִים וּמְרַכְּבִים מִפְּרָטִים מְסֻבִּימִים עַל זֶה הַחֲסָרוֹן בְּעֶצְמוֹ<sup>137</sup>. אָבֵל לֹא תִמְשַׁךְ זֹאת הַגְּזֵרָה עַד שְׂוִיתְחִיב מִמֶּנָּה שְׁכָל הַחֲסָרוֹנוֹת שֶׁהֵם בְּפִשּׁוּטִים יִמְצְאוּ בְּמְרַכְּבִים, אָבֵל יִתְחִיב שֶׁהַחֲסָרוֹנוֹת הַמִּתְנַגְּדִים בְּפִשּׁוּטִים יִמְזוּגוּ

[God] saw — רָאָה קְבוּץ הַרְשָׁעִים הֵהוּא רַע בְּהִיּוֹתָם כָּלָם מְסֻבִּימִים עַל תְּכוּנָה אַחַת רַעָה that that gathering of the wicked was bound to result in evil, since they all shared a single evil characteristic (i.e., idolatry), כִּי אֵי אֶפְשֶׁר לְכַלֵּל מְקַבֵּץ מִפְּרָטִים בְּעֵלֵי תְכוּנָה אַחַת רַעָה שְׁלֹא יִהְיֶה הַכֹּלֵל רַע מִמֶּנּוּ אוֹ כְמוֹהוּ — for it is impossible to have a group of gathered constituents of a single evil characteristic, where the group is not more evil than [its constituents] or at least equal to them.

[*Ran* now returns to elucidate *Koheles*'s observation that compounds are subject to the limitations of their constituent elements. *Ran* pointed out above that this contradicted his own assertion (buttressed by several statements of the Sages) that advanced complex compounds are demonstrably more perfect than their lesser, baser elements. The basic answer *Ran* gives is that, as explained above, entities joining together generally amplify their positive qualities, while their negative qualities intensify only when they share the *same* negative quality. Hence, when entities with different positive and negative qualities join, their positive qualities are amplified, while their negatives traits remain unchanged or are even nullified. As a result, a compound is often more perfect than its elements:]

וְזֹאת הִיא הַטְעָנָה אֲשֶׁר אִמַּת בָּהּ קִהְלַת הַפֶּסֶק דִּין שְׁנֵתָן לְהִיּוֹת הַמְרַכְּבִים כָּלָם הֶבֶל וּבִלְתֵי בְעֵלֵי קִיּוּם — And this<sup>[136]</sup> is the argument through which *Koheles* verified his categorical assertion that all compounds are “futile” and not permanent: בְּהִיּוֹתָם מְקַבְּצִים — Because they are formed from joining and compounding together constituents that conform with one another regarding that same deficiency itself, i.e., since all of the elements have the *same* deficiency (impermanence), therefore, the compounds formed from them also have that limitation and are impermanent.<sup>[137]</sup> אָבֵל לֹא תִמְשַׁךְ זֹאת הַגְּזֵרָה עַד שְׂוִיתְחִיב מִמֶּנָּה — However, it does not follow from [*Koheles*'s] proclamation that *all* deficiencies of elements are necessarily present in compounds that they form; אָבֵל יִתְחִיב שֶׁהַחֲסָרוֹנוֹת הַמִּתְנַגְּדִים בְּפִשּׁוּטִים יִמְזוּגוּ

136. That is, the concept established immediately above, that components sharing a deficiency compound their deficiencies when they are combined.

137. [*Ran*'s explanation here of *Koheles*, that terrestrial compounds inevitably have the limitation of impermanence since all of their elements

share that deficiency, seems difficult. For living creatures incorporate the element of “earth,” and *Ran* stated earlier that earth *is* permanent. Accordingly, the elements of such entities do *not* in fact all share this same deficiency, and should not combine into an impermanent product! Presumably, the answer is that the negative quality of