

## וכלה מחפתה

אבנר רמו



In the Book of Isaiah we read:

רני עקרה לא ילדה; פצחי רנה וצהלי לא-חלה, כי-רבים בני-שוממה מבני בעולה אמר יהוה.  
“Sing, O barren, you that did not bear, break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you that did not travail; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, said *YHWH*” (Is 54:1).

כי-ימין ושמאול תפרצי; וזרעך גוים יירש, וערים נשמות יושיבו.  
אל-תיראי כי-לא תבושי, ואל-תכלמי כי לא תחפירי: כי בשת עלומיך תשכחי, וחרפת  
אלמנותיך לא תזכרי-עוד.

כי בעליך עשיך, יהוה צבאות שמו; וגאלך קדוש ישראל,

“For you shall spread abroad on the right hand and on the left; and your seed shall possess the nations, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

Fear not, for you shall not be ashamed. Neither be you confounded, for you shall not be put to shame; for you shall forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood shall you remember no more.

For your Maker is your husband, *YHWH* of hosts is His name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer” (Is 54:3-5).

In the Book of Jeremiah we read:

כה אמר יהוה, קול ברמה נשמע נהי בכי תמרורים-רחל מבכה על-בניה; מאנה להנחם על-  
בניה כי איננו.

כה אמר יהוה, מנעי קולך מבכי ועיניך מדמעה: כי יש שר לפעלתך נאם-יהוה,  
“Thus said *YHWH*: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not.

Thus said *YWH*: Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, said *YHWH*” (Jer 31: 15).

השבני ואשובה, כי אתה יהוה אלהי  
כי-אחרי שובי נחמתי, ואחרי הודעי ספקתי על-ירך; בשתי וגם-נכלמתי, כי נשאתי חרפת נעורי.

“Turn You me, and I shall be turned, for You are *YHWH* my God.

Surely after that I was turned, I repented, and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth” (Jer 31:18-19).

This remark apparently reflects Rachel’s experience as told in the Book of Genesis:

ויזכר אלהים את-רחל; וישמע אליה אלהים ויפתח את-רחמה.  
ותהר ותלד בן; ותאמר, אסף אלהים את-חרפתי.

“And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.

And she conceived, and bore a son, and said: God had taken away my reproach” (Gen 30:22-23).

A somewhat similar theme is found in the Book of Isaiah:

והחזיקו שבע נשים באיש אחד ביום ההוא לאמר, לחמנו נאכל, ושמלתנו נלבש: רק יקרא שמך עלינו-אסף חרפתנו.

“And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying: We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name; take you away our reproach” (Is 4:1).

These verses suggest that in biblical times, a woman that did not have children felt (or was considered) reproached.

It seems that there was even a special law concerning a “reproached” bondmaid:

ואיש כי-ישכב את-אשה שכבת-זרע, והוא שפחה נחרפת לאיש

“And whosoever lies carnally with a woman, that is a bondmaid, designated for a man” (Lev 19:20).

Although, the Greek (and English) translators assumed that here **נחרפת** means: “designated for” such understanding has no apparent basis and these words should be understood as: “and she is a reproached bondmaid to that man.”

This understanding suggests a new understanding of the following:

In the Book of Joel we read:

תקעו שופר בציון; קדשו-צום, קראו עצרה.

אספו-עם קדשו קהל, קבצו זקנים-אספו עוללים, וינקי שדים: יצא חתן מחדרו, וכלה []  
מחפתה.  
בין האולם, ולמזבח, יבכו הכהנים, משרתי יהוה; ויאמרו חוסה יהוה על-עמד, ואל-תתן  
נחלתך לחרפה

“Blow the horn in Zion, sanctify a fast call, a solemn assembly;  
Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and  
those that suck the breasts; [let] the bridegroom go forth from his chamber, and the bride  
[] [out] of her pavilion.  
Let the priests, the ministers of *YHWH*, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them  
say: Spare your people, *YHWH*, and give not Your heritage to reproach” (Joel 2:15-16).

It is not clear how the Greek (and English) translators determined that חפתה (*khupathah*) means  
“pavilion.” However, the content of these verses suggest that if the bridegroom will come out of  
his chamber, then the reproach will not be taken away from the bride. It is therefore suggested  
that instead of reading: וכלה [] מחפתה (*vekalah mekhupathah*) we should read:  
וכלה לא תצא מחרפתה (*vekalah lo thetsa mekherpathah*) - “and a bride will not come out of  
here reproach.”

In the Book of Zephaniah we read:

רני בת-ציון-הריעו ישראל; שמחי ועלזי בכל-לב בת ירושלים.  
“Sing, O daughter of Zion, shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O  
daughter of Jerusalem” (Zep 3:14).

יהוה אלהיך בקרבך, גבור יושיע; ישיש עליך בשמחה, יחריש באהבתו-יגיל עליך ברנה.  
נוגי ממועד אספתי ממך היו-משאת עליה, חרפה.  
“*YHWH* your God is in the midst of you, a Mighty One who will save; He will rejoice over  
you with joy, He will be silent in His love, He will joy over you with singing.  
Far from the appointed season I will take away from you, that have borne the burden of  
reproach” (Zep 3:17-18).

Now we hear somewhat similar words from the Psalmist:

לשמש שם-אהל בהם.  
והוא-כחתן יצא מחפתו; ישיש כגבור לרוץ ארח.  
מקצה השמים מוצאו-ותקופתו על-קצותם; ואין נסתר מחמתו.

“In them had He set a tent for the sun,  
And He is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to  
run his course.  
His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit to the ends of it; and there is  
nothing hid from the his sun” (Ps 19:5-7).

The Greek translator wrote here: “coming forth from his bride’s chamber” but it seems possible  
that instead of: יצא מחפתו we should read here: יצאה מחרפתה (*yotsiah mekherpathah*) - “will  
take her out of her reproach.”

The reading in the Book of Isaiah: **וחפרה הלבנה, ובושה החמה** - **“Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed”** (Is 24:23), tend to support such an understanding.