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Chapter 8. Eschatology

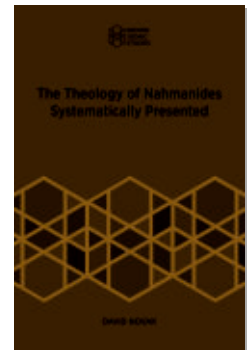
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Chapter 8

Eschatology

[8.1] For Nahmanides, the ultimate goal of the Torah and commandments is to bring the world back to its primordial condition, under the direct governance of God. The process of attaining this goal began with the redemption of Israel from Egypt and will culminate in the world to come:

In the past I and my court of justice (*u-vet dini*) went before them... but in the future age (*le-'atid la-vo*) it will be Myself alone... The mystical meaning (*sod*) of this midrash [Shemot Rabbah 19.7] is, as I have stated, that in the first redemption God was with them by day; his court of justice, by night. But in the future age, his court of justice will be subsumed in his mercy... which is God's unique Name.... everything will be united in God's unique attribute of mercy (*middat rahamim*). [CT: Exod. 14:21 - I, 348]

The Rabbis often glossed the name *Elohim* as designating God's attribute of justice; and the tetragrammaton (YHWH), God's attribute of mercy (see A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God* [New York: Ktav, 1968], 43 ff.). The theme that strict justice will be overcome by mercy is also frequently stressed (e.g., B. Berakhot 7a), but usually in a human context. The Rabbis typically apply the attributes of justice and mercy to the task of explaining God's relationship to his creatures. For the kabbalists, however, they become inner states of God's being, hypostatized attributes, with their own dynamic interrelations, *into* which human events are incorporated (see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 94). Thus the final redemption is primarily a reordering of God's inner nature, the fulfillment of God's own history. Only subsequently is it a reordering of human realities.

[8.2] The phrase 'world to come,' for Nahmanides, signifies a future age, not yet experienced in the past, although portended by its saving events. Its reality is temporal, unlike the world to come of Maimonides, which is an eternal, transcendent realm, a "world-beyond," existing timelessly alongside this world (*ha-'olam ha-zeh - Hilkhot Teshuvah*, 8.8). For Maimonides, the righteous person comes to the world-beyond. For Nahmanides, however, the future world comes to replace this world. The temporality of cosmic fulfillment for Nahmanides expresses his great emphasis on history:

Behold, the Garden of Eden and the world to come are signified here to those who understand these things. These places are where all blessings are consummated. This consummation will not occur until all Israel do the will of their Father and the building of heaven and earth is completed by God and us. Know that Israel has never fully attained these blessings, collectively or individually. No one's merit has risen to this level... That is why you will find that the Rabbis see in these verses an allusion to the future age... This has not yet been achieved, but it will be, in the time of completion (*ba-zman ha-shlemut*). [CT: Lev. 26:12 - II, 186]

[8.3] Although the world-to-come is everlasting (*qayyam*), it is created, not eternal (KR: *Torat ha-'Adam: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 303*), a historical succession rather than a realm ever present.

[8.4] The world to come is the culmination and fulfillment of history:

It has been made clear that the world to come is not a world of disembodied souls (*'olam ha-neshamot*) but a world which is created and then endures. Those who are resurrected there will exist in body and soul... The subsistence of those who merit the splendor of God will be like that of the soul in the body in this world... But this soul will be like that of the angels in its union (*be-hityahdah*) with higher knowledge... The subordination of body to soul will nullify the body's powers... so that the body will subsist like the soul, no longer eating or drinking, just as Moses subsisted for forty days on Mount Sinai. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 303-04*]

[8.5] For Maimonides, resurrection of the dead is a dogma in which a Jew must believe, even though there is no rational evidence for it. It is a possibility open to God's creative transcendence of nature, but it need never actually occur (see *Ma'amar Tehiyat ha-Metim*, ch. 8; *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2.25). Nor is it the ultimate aim of all human strivings. That end is the disembodied world to come, whose existence Maimonides holds to be rationally

evident (*Hilkhot Teshuvah*, ch. 8). He is quite critical of those who think that the ultimate beatitude hinted in Scripture and discussed by the Rabbis is bodily resurrection rather than spiritual immortality in the world to come (*Ma'amar Tehiyyat ha-Metim*, ch. 2). But for Nahmanides, there is no difference between the two realms:

Any commandment in the Torah, whose reward is mentioned along with it, entails the resurrection of the dead[Hullin 142a]... That means that bodies do not return to dust forever... [one might think that once dead] the body no longer has any function (*po'el raiq*), but God does nothing in vain (*po'el battel*). The answer to all of this is that the purpose the body was created for was its function at the time of the resurrection, as mentioned above. For God does not want it to be destroyed after physical death. Furthermore, the bodily form has many mysteries about it, for its formation was not pointless (*hefger*) or without reason. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 305]

[8.6] If the body loses its physical functions in the future realm, what is the point of its being resurrected at all? How does this differ from the Platonic idea of the immortality of the soul, that sees the soul's fulfillment in its being finally rid of the body altogether (*Phaedo* 66C)? Nahmanides replies that the body, however much spiritualized, still sustains the soul's temporality and thus its individuality. Without the body, the soul would simply merge into a panpsychic unity with all other righteous souls. How, then, could any soul be rewarded in the world to come for its own righteousness? This view of Nahmanides on the resurrection of the dead is clearly a compromise between the physicality of many of the Rabbis (B. Sanhedrin 90b *et seq.*; *Tanhuma*: Vayigash, no. 9, ed. S. Buber, 104b-105a) and the more spiritual views of others (B. Berakhot 17a). The standing of the more spiritualized rabbinic views was considerably enhanced when theologians like Nahmanides, who were usually suspicious of Greek metaphysics, accorded partial acceptance to the body-soul dualism that arose ultimately from the thinking of Plato. But despite his partial acceptance of dualism, Nahmanides differs pointedly with Ibn Gabirol, Maimonides and other Jewish rationalists, who professed spiritual immortality at the expense of physical resurrection. Nahmanides regards that approach as an unwarranted departure from tradition. He praises Saadiah for closely adhering to rabbinic tradition on this point (KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 311) and insists that the physical resurrection be taken absolutely seriously:

The eternal survival of the body is not the doctrine of the philosophers, nor of certain Sages of the Torah... they believe, by virtue of their speculation (*be-'iyunam*), in the eternal survival of the species. But we can believe, by virtue of our tradition, in

the eternal survival of the individual (*ha-perat*), by God's exalted will. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - I, 306]

[8.7] The soul's need for the body is never transcended. To assert any such transcendence would cast aspersions on the value of creation:

One might object to us that the body is composed of organs that exist to sustain the activity of the soul. These are classified into three divisions: ...organs of nourishment, of procreation, and of general sustenance... But once this purpose (*takhlit*) is no longer extant, in the world-to-come... the body no longer serves any need and should no longer exist, since God's work is not for naught. Our response is that this creation is for the time of the resurrection, when the organs will be needed for these functions once again. For God does not intend that they should be ruined hereafter... the survival of the body and the survival of the soul is through their becoming united with supernal knowledge (*be-da'at 'elyon*). [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 305]

[8.8] With an extensive marshalling of rabbinic sources, Nahmanides presents the eschatological order:

The reward of souls and their survival in the world of souls (*ba-'olam ha-nefashot*) is called the Garden of Eden by our Rabbis. Sometimes they call it "ascent" (*'aliyah*), or "the academy above" (*yeshivah shel ma'alah*). Then come the days of the Messiah, which are still within the realm of this world. At their end is the final judgment and the resurrection of the dead, which is the requital, involving both body and soul. It is the fundamental principle (*ha-'iqqar ha-gadol*) for all those who hope in God, the world to come, to which the body as well as the soul will return. The soul cleaves close (*be-hadbaqah*) to divine knowledge in the Garden of Eden, the world of souls. It then ascends with great insight into God from within itself. And the survival of the soul and body together is everlasting. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 306]

[8.9] Much closer to rabbinic tradition than Maimonides, Nahmanides conceives the world to come as essentially temporal, succeeding this world. The resurrection of the dead marks the final transition from this world to the world to come:

Concerning the world to come, which is the final reward for observance of the *mitsvot*, it is in doubt... whether it is the world of souls, and reward reaches each of them immediately after death... or whether it is the world wherein reward will be created for body and soul, or for the soul alone at this new time... But we are taught that the world to come is the world of reward for those whom God resurrects. It is not, however, the world of souls called the Garden of Eden. Rather, it is the world of the resurrection. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 302]

Maimonides' transhistorical view of the world to come, which Nahmanides so forcefully rejects, was criticized during Maimonides' lifetime by his best known contemporary critic Abraham ben David of Posquières (Rabad). Citing B. Sanhedrin 97a, which interprets Isaiah 2:17 – "the Lord will be exalted on that day (*ba-yom ha-hu*)" – Rabad (note on *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, 8.8) speaks of the world to come as "a new world" (*'olam hadash*) in an objective, temporal sense. Nahmanides similarly states that the world to come is a world which "God will create in the future (*le-hadsho*), after (*le-'ahar*) the days of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead" (KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 302). For Maimonides, the newness of the world to come is subjective, representing the experience of human beings who newly apprehend what is in itself eternal. This fundamental difference is glossed over by Joseph Karo in his note in *Kesef Mishneh*, *ad loc.*, where he responds to Rabad's critique. But Rabad's comment reveals Nahmanides' greater faithfulness to the rabbinic sources. As one text (cited by neither Rabad nor Nahmanides) clearly puts it, "This world departs and the world to come enters" (Y. Yevamot 15.2/14d re Ps. 140:8). For the radical character of Maimonides' view of history, see D. Novak, "Does Maimonides have a Philosophy of History?" in ed. Samuelson, *Studies in Jewish Philosophy*, 397 ff.)

[8.10] By emphasizing the timelessness of the world to come, Maimonides deemphasizes God's direct meting out of reward and punishment in history. For him the ultimate punishment is separation from the eternal realm of bliss, resultant from separating oneself from it during this life. Nahmanides criticizes Maimonides' seeming departure from rabbinic eschatology for a view closer to that of Plato (*Phaedo* 67C):

In another place (*Commentary on the Mishnah*: Sanhedrin, ch. 10 [*Heleq*], introduction) Maimonides avows ideas that are confusing... namely, that the great punishment means that the soul is cut off and lost and does not survive, and that is what the Torah means by *karet* (excision)... since whoever is drawn after bodily pleasures and casts the truth behind him, letting falsehood triumph over truth, shall lose that exalted state (*ha-*

-*ma'aleh ha-hu*), leaving but his mortal body alone... But these ideas are not satisfactory (*nohim*) in our opinion. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 292]

The reason Maimonides' thoughts are not satisfactory is that the Rabbis speak of a place always existent (*matsui tamid*) for punishment, and of a future time when the nations will be judged.

[8.11] Both the Garden of Eden and the world to come are beyond ordinary nature. But the Garden of Eden is a physical site where souls are rewarded. The world to come is that state of being, after the resurrection, when spiritualized bodies enjoy everlasting bliss. The Garden of Eden, then, is the anteroom of the world to come:

It is said that the reward of all the commandments and the good requital (*ha-gemul ha-tov*) is rooted in the world to come, as is evident from the words of our Rabbis. But the first reward that reaches a person after death is the Garden of Eden. This parallels what we explained concerning Hell (*Gehinnom*), which is the punishment that reaches a wicked person immediately (*miyyad*) upon death. This is what you find throughout the writings of the Rabbis – that the Garden of Eden is the counterpart of Hell. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 294]

It is a principle established in the Torah and expounded by the Sages that the Garden of Eden exists in this world in a particular geographic spot... Geographers (*anshei middot*) say that it lies exactly on the equator. [Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 295]

Nahmanides is adamant that on this question rabbinic *aggadot* must be taken literally (Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 296, 298, 304), although elsewhere (KR: *Disputation*, secs. 22-39 - I, 306-08) he argues that many *aggadot* should be taken figuratively, and in some cases simply rejected. His clear criterion here is that an essential doctrine seems to him to be at stake. What really exists requires a description adequate to it. (For Nahmanides' view of *aggadot* in general as vehicles of normative kabbalistic doctrine, see E. R. Wolfson, "By Way of Truth.")

[8.12] Predictably, Nahmanides locates the Garden of Eden in the Land of Israel, whose sanctity reflects its linking this world to the world to come:

The first human being, the immediate work of the hands of God, who was the choicest of the human species in understanding and knowledge, was made to dwell by God, blessed be he, in the choicest place for the pleasure and wellbeing of the

body. He depicted in this portentous place all the work of the upper world. The Garden of Eden is the world of souls in material form. Thus, from it one might understand the constitution of every creature: bodily, spiritual (*nafshi*), and angelic... Also, the Garden of Eden is the most significant place in the lower world (*ha-'olam ha-shafal*), for it is the center of the world, leading directly to the upper world. So those who are there will see divine visions more frequently than from any other place on earth. For the fact is, as we believe, that the Land of Israel and Jerusalem are the most auspicious places, especially suited for prophecy because of this direct linkage – all the more so with the Temple, which is the throne of the Lord. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 296]

[8.13] Nahmanides anticipates the objection that a physical Eden would have no real connection with the non-physical world to come:

You may say, 'It is obvious from all the rabbinic sources that the Garden of Eden is in this lower world, so what then is the reward of souls there? For what is beneficial to souls is not physical and is not to be had anywhere in the lower world.' But we have already explained that this term has a double meaning (*kaful*): It is a garden (*gan*) and a delight ('*eden*). That is how it got its name. It is the place where these lower beings can receive from the upper world... Its mystery is deep, open only to those who have received the teaching of faith (*meqabblei ha-'emunah*). But our sages explain it as the place of souls (B. Shabbat 152b), where the souls of the righteous are stored beneath God's throne of glory. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 297]

[8.14] Thus the delights of the Garden of Eden are spiritual, even though the place itself is physical:

During the twelve months [that the soul remains under physical influence – see B. Kiddushin 31b and Rashi *ad loc.*] the portion of the soul that is in the Garden of Eden derives its delight from the world above it, although it still inclines toward physicality (*notah le-gashmiyut*). It was not the sense of our Rabbis that souls enjoy the fruits of that Garden or bathe in its rivers. Rather their intent was that it is the Gateway to Heaven (*sha'ar ha-shamayim*), where one is "to bask in light everlasting" (Job 33:30). Thus it is said of one who stands in Jerusalem that his soul is clothed with the holy spirit, that prophetic agency (*mal'akhut nevu'ah*), by God's will, whether through dreams or

visions, is more accessible there than to one who stands in an impure land [B. Shabbat 14a]. The apprehension available to the soul from that place raises itself up to connection (*devequt*) with the upper world and apprehension of spiritual delight. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 298]

[8.15] Nahmanides asserts that the world to come will arrive only when there is sufficient merit (*zekhut*) in Israel:

Know that a man's life in the commandments is proportioned to his proclivity to them. For one who performs the commandments not for their own sake but in order to receive a reward will live in this world "many days" because of them... But those who engage in the commandments out of love and do what is right and proper in matters of this world... will merit a good life in this world according to the normal way (*ke-minhag*) of the world and in the world to come, where their merit will be complete... The children of the world to come will arise at the time of the resurrection. [CT: Lev. 18:4 - II, 100]

[8.16] The world to come will restore the world to its pristine condition, as it was before it was corrupted by sin:

Thus Scripture says of the days of the redeemer of the stock of Jesse that peace will return to the world, carnage (*ha-teref*) will cease... and the world will revert its primordial nature. [CT: Lev. 26:6 - II, 183]

[8.17] Sin removes humanity from its original condition of grace:

For the soul that sins is cut off because of its sin, but other souls remain in God's presence in heavenly splendor. [CT: Lev. 18:29 - II, 114]

[8.18] The reason for commandments about the dead is that humans were created to live forever. Only because of sin did death intervene between creation and resurrection in the world to come. So mourning is in reality for the presence of sin and its deadly effects in the world:

For man's original destiny (*toldat ha-'adam*) was to live forever, but through the primal sin (*he-het ha-qadmoni*) all became mortal... That is why it is right for us to understand mourning as an act of worship of our God. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: intro. - II, 12]

[8.19] By introducing death, sin disrupted the divine creative process:

For it is God's work to be active in the business of the world, in the perpetuation of species. That is God's desire in creating us to endure forever. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: intro. - II, 14]

[8.20] Considering original sin, Nahmanides distinguishes between physically inherited mortality and an actual moral taint. Despite our inherited mortality, sin itself is an individual responsibility. The point bears a special gravamen in the context of Nahmanides' polemic against Christianity:

It would be outrageous (*halilah*) for God if the righteous were to be punished in Hell because of the sin of the first man, their father – that my soul should be akin to the soul of Pharaoh, as it is to the soul of my own father! My soul will not enter Hell because of Pharaoh's sin! But bodily chastisements arise because my body stems from my father and mother. And when it was decreed that they [Adam and Eve] should be mortal (*benei mavet*), their descendants thenceforth were made mortal by nature. [KR: *Disputation*, sec. 45 - I, 310]

The point elaborated later, in CT: Gen. 2:17 (I, 37-38), that God's sanction on the first pair for eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was to change an immortal to a mortal nature (Gen. 3:19). The Rabbis similarly taught that not everyone dies because of some individual sin. For a few exceptional individuals, death comes only through inheritance of the mortality resultant from Adam's sin (B. Baba Batra 17a; *Midrash ha-Gadol*: Bereshit on Gen. 3:23, ed. Margalio [Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, 1947], 110).

[8.21] Jewish eschatology expects redemption both in this world and in the world to come. But the former is subordinate to the latter:

Our ultimate requital (*takhlit gemulenu*) is not the Messianic Age and eating the fruits of the Land... Nor is it the sacrifices and the service of the Temple... Rather, our sights (*mabitenu*) are on the world to come and the soul's delight in the Garden of Eden and escape from the torment of Hell. Even so, we hold firm to redemption in this world; for it is upheld as true among those who were masters of the Torah and prophecy... For we await it in hope of reaching nearness to God by being in his Sanctuary with his priests and prophets, augmenting whatever purity and holiness may be in us, by being in the chosen land in the company of the *Shekhinah*. This is more

than we can attain today, exiled among peoples who cause us to sin.... For in the days of the Messiah the evil inclination will be destroyed, so that we may reach the truth as it is... This is the essence of our desire and yearning for the days of the Messiah. [KR: *Sefer ha-Ge'ulah* - I, 279-80]

[8.22] Because Nahmanides awaits God's miraculous action in this world, he does not defer all reward and punishment to a transcendent realm:

There are sins for which God's judgment and righteous decrees exact punishment in this world, and sins for which punishment is exacted in the world to come. Similarly, there are meritorious deeds for which the Lord of requitals (*ba'al ha-gemul*) gives recompense in the world to come. [KR: *Torat ha-'Adam*: Sha'ar ha-Gemul - II, 264]

Nahmanides here chooses between two rabbinic opinions regarding reward in this world, one stating that all reward is otherworldly (M. Kiddushin 1.10; B. Kiddushin 39b; Y. Kiddushin 1.7/61b re Job 37:23; Hullin 142a re Exod. 20:12 and Deut. 22:7); and the other stating that some or most reward is this-worldly (B. Kiddushin 39b and Tos., s.v. *matnitin*; M. 'Avot 4.1 re Ps. 128:2; *Midrash Aggadah*: Ve-'ethanan, ed. S. Buber, 125). Clearly, Nahmanides prefers the second view.