

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 27-28

Perek 27

The first pasuk of this perek continues the same prophetic thread expressed by the two closing pesukim of perek 26. These pesukim describe the destruction of the world's evil through vivid, symbolic images that connect the future redemption with the Exodus from Egypt and which hint to a war between God and His rebellious early creations. Pesukim 2-6 detail a positive 'parable of the vineyard' which contrasts with the critical parable detailed in perek 5. The rest of the perek describes the fortification of Israel in its land and the blessing the other nations will receive as a result. The prophecy concludes with the ingathering of the exiles in the land of Israel following the redemptive blast of the *shofar*.

- 1 In 26:20-21 and 27:1 Yeshayahu prophesies the eradication of evil from the world. Why are the Jewish people commanded to seek refuge in their homes? Compare this to the related instruction given to the Jewish people during Egypt's tenth plague in Shemot 12:22.
- 2 What do the Leviathan and the dragon [תנין] symbolize in pasuk 1? Why does Yeshayahu use these specific images? See Cassuto's commentary for further insight:

In Mesopotamia, in Canaan, and in all the eastern lands, legends of wars waged between powerful gods and monstrous creatures were often told. Specifically relevant to our topic is the nation closest to Israel: the nations of Canaan. Ugaritic poems mention that among the enemies of Baal...were monsters such as dragons, leviathans, slant serpents, torturous serpents, and others. In Israel, the tradition regarding dragons and other creatures developed a spirit suitable for Israel: they were no longer godly powers who rebelled against a higher God but rather creatures that rebelled against their creator. This tradition is hinted to in multiple places in Tanach and in multiple midrashic

and kabbalistic traditions. In Yeshayahu 27:1 these monsters are referred to by the same names used in the Canaanite literature which also portray them as evils which God will eradicate from the world... The Torah recounts: “*And God created the great sea-monsters*” (Breishit 1:21) as if to say: one should not think that the sea-monsters were mythical creations... they were natural creations, like the rest of the creations and they were created in the fitting time and place for them through the command and desire of God. Similarly it is written in Tehillim 148:7: “*Praise the Lord from the earth, ye sea-monsters, and all deeps.*” The speaker invites all creatures to praise God, and among all the earthly creations he first invites the sea-monsters. (Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, pp. 30-31)

- 3 The ‘parable of the vineyard’ (2-6), which parallels the relationship between God and Israel with the relationship between a farmer and his vineyard, contrasts the first parable of the vineyard in perek 5. Compare the description of the watering (27:3) to the description in perek 5 (5:6), as well as the mention of thorns (27:4, 5:6). Try and understand the differences between them based on the context of each parable. (Note the parable’s introduction in pasuk 2: “*On that day*” and its connection to the previous prophecy.)
- 4 “*And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great horn shall be blown*” (13). Why is the *shofar* the tool that returns the exiles to the land of Israel? Review the functions of the *shofar* mentioned in Nechemia 4:14 and Vayikra 25:8-10. Notice that the prayer for the ingathering of the exiles is based on Yeshayahu’s prophecy: “*Blow the great shofar of our redemption*” [“תקע בשופר גדול לחירותנו”].

Perek 28

This perek discusses the people and leaders of Ephraim (1-6), the leaders of Yehuda (7-22), and includes harsh rebuke of their drunkenness and exaggerated confidence. This perek also teaches us about the leaders’ mocking reactions to Yeshayahu’s prophecies of calamity, which warned the nation of Assyria’s imminent arrival. The perek’s conclusion includes a parable borrowed from the world of agriculture.

- 5 Review the description of Ephraim’s drunkenness in pesukim 1-6. What negative consequences of drunkenness are described in these pesukim? In your analysis, note the contrast between the description in pasuk 1 and pasuk 5: [pasuk 1: **עֲטָרָת** ביום ההוא יהיה ה' צבאות לעטרת צבי ולצפירת; pasuk 5: גאות שכרי אפרים וציץ נבל צבי תפארתו]. תפארה לשאר עמו.

6 “But these also reel through wine, and stagger through strong drink...” In Pesukim 7-8 Yeshayahu discusses the drunkenness of the inhabitants of Yerushalayim and Yehuda. What is the focal point of his criticism? Compare this to the commandment given to the priests in Vayikra 10:8-11.

7 Yeshayahu’s agricultural parable includes two stages: The first stage (24-26) describes the preparatory plowing and planting. The second stage (27-29) describes the threshing of the produce. How does this parallel relate to the rest of the perek? See Amos Chacham’s summary explanation of this perek taken from the Daat Mikrah commentary:

The main lesson is that there is great wisdom involved in working the ground, [a skill] which God has taught mankind, and that God runs His world according to the same wisdom taught to the farmers...The first parable is meant to combat the claim that the words of the prophets do not have any practical results. The parable responds to this by saying that the words of the prophets are comparable to the plowing that readies the land for planting; so too prophecy preempts the actions God is about to do...The second parable is meant to combat the claim that prophets foresee many calamities—who can stand [to hear] all of this terrible news? The parable responds by saying that God gives a suited punishment to those who deserve it and they have the strength to withstand it, just as threshing can distinguish between different types of produce...

Appendix

There is no other prophet who was as well-versed in agriculture and farming life as Yeshayahu. In the parable of the vineyard, he describes the tilling of a mountainous vineyard, and at the end of perek 28 describes the labors involved in tilling a field. In his comparison of the lifestyle of a farmer with the empty life of city-dwellers, the prophet proves that the advantage resides with the farmer who succeeds at his work through wisdom and logic. To the naked eye, the farmer seems primitive and one-dimensional. However, the prophet understands the true craftsmanship and skill involved in the farmer’s work.

Yeshayahu begins with a description of the various types of plowing: “*Is the plowman never done with plowing to sow, with the opening and harrowing of his ground?*”—a plow for opening, a plow for harrowing, and a plow for planting. Afterwards, he describes the planting of: “*the black cumin, and scatter the cumin,*

and put in the wheat in rows and the barley in the appointed place and the spelt.”

It seems that these were the five grains of the ancient world. He concludes by counting the different techniques of threshing: beating, crushing with horses' hooves, use of a threshing-sledge and the roller of a wagon: *“For the black cumin is not threshed with a threshing-sledge, neither is a cart-wheel turned about upon the cumin; but the black cumin is beaten out with a staff, and the cumin with a rod. Is bread corn crushed? No, he will not ever be threshing it; and though the roller of his wagon and its sharp edges move noisily, he does not crush it.”*

The threshing tools were constructed in a complicated manner. By using these threshing tools, the Jewish farmer [employed agricultural techniques more advanced than] the neighboring farmers in nearby lands and even the most advanced farmers in Egypt and Babylonia. It is possible that these tools were first created in the land of Israel during Yeshayahu's lifetime.

Yeshayahu is aware that the Jewish farmer did not rest on his laurels, but was a creative inventor with a heart open to nurturing crops and inventing agricultural tools. This wisdom, the prophet declares, was given to the Jewish farmer [from God]: *“And God does teach you”* (28:26) and the perek concludes with a call to action: *“This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts: Wonderful is His counsel, and great His wisdom.”*

This same wisdom, the order and regiment of the farmer's life, deeply contrasts the hedonistic lifestyle of the *“drunkards of Ephraim”* and *“the ballad-mongers of this people which is in Yerushalayim”* that the prophet describes earlier in the perek. For Yeshayahu, only the life of the farmer shines a ray of hope [upon the world] and demonstrates God's providence over His nation.

(Y. Felix, *Parables of Nature in the Prophecies of Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu*)