

# MATAN AL HAPEREK

## A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

### Yeshayahu Perakim 9-12

#### Perek 9 (from 9:7 through 10:4)

During Yeshayahu's lifetime, the Northern Kingdom deteriorates from its prosperous golden age during the reign of II Yeravam to periods of destructive civil wars, ephemeral and ineffective monarchies, and its ultimate destruction in the hands of Assyria. While the majority of Yeshayahu's prophecies address the Southern Kingdom of Yehuda, this prophecy is an exception and is directed solely toward the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In this prophecy, Yeshayahu exposes the process of spiritual and political deterioration, serving as the final warning before the destruction. This prophecy was most likely meant to warn Yeshayahu's audience in Yehuda that this fate could one day become their own.

- 1 The prophecy opens with a statement made by the people (7-9). Try and understand its significance based on the Assyrian entry into the Northern Kingdom described at the end of the previous perek.
- 2 The prophecy can be divided into different sections, each of which describes a different stage of the political demise: 7-9; 10-12; 13-16; 17-20; 10:1-4. Note the repeated concluding phrases. Discuss the incremental development expressed in the descriptions and the relationship between each stage.
- 3 Pesukim 17-20 include a horrifying description of civil war. What two images does the prophet mention and what does each symbolize?

## Perek 10

In Perek 10 Yeshayahu harshly and mockingly criticizes the Assyrian empire which up until this point has been described as the “rod of My anger,” namely a tool used by God to bring punishment upon the Jewish people. The prophet utilizes excerpts from Assyrian speeches in order to demonstrate the empire's haughtiness for which it will be punished with the destruction of its power and influence. Pesukim 28-33 include a vivid and imaginative description of the Assyrian invasion which begins from Ai and continues on toward Yerushalayim. This invasion ends in Assyria's utter defeat as they approach the walls of Yerushalayim.

- 4 Assyria is sent by God and is commanded to punish the nations for their sins. However, there is an essential difference between the mission the Assyrians are sent to accomplish and their actions. Discuss the two differences between the divine command and the Assyrian empire's actions described in pesukim 6-7.
- 5 The prophet integrates two quotations from the self-righteous words of the Assyrian king (8-11, 13-14). What reality do the pesukim describe? What is the source of the Assyrians' sin according to pesukim 12-13?

## Perek 11-12

While perek 10 concludes with a description of the defeat of the Assyrians upon their approach to Yerushalayim, perek 11 opens with Israel's redemption. In Pesukim 1-10 Yeshayahu presents his illustrious vision of peace. During this time, complete harmony will reign both within the animal kingdom and between animal and man. The vision hints to the world's return to its paradisiacal state prior to the sin of man. In pesukim 11-16, Yeshayahu prophesies the ingathering of the exiles from the four corners of the earth to their chosen land, a kind of second redemption from Egypt. Along with the news of the return, we are told that a peaceful relationship between Israel and Yehuda will be restored. The prophecy ends with a psalm of praise to God (perek 12) which will be recited by the returnees. With this, the first section of the book of Yeshayahu comes to a close.

6 a) The second half of the prophecy (6-9) describes a vision of world peace between animal and man. The description is comprised of pairs (as in the wolf/lamb, leopard/kid...). Can you trace the development of the harmony described by these different pairs?

b) As we have seen in other prophecies, this one also hints to the creation story. Which creation 'corruption' is reformed in pesukim 6-7? (Refer to Breishit 9:2-5 and the comment of Ramban in the next question.) What sin is being hinted to in pasuk 9?

7 Great commentators throughout the generations differ in their interpretations of this prophecy. Is it a sublime parable or a realistic description of a change in the world order? The following explanations of Rambam and Ramban represent both of these approaches.

**Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings Chapter 12:** Do not let is arise on one's heart [to think] that in the days of the Messiah the natural ways of the world will cease, or that there will be a change in the order of creation; Rather, the world will continue in its [current] manner. That which is stated in Yeshayahu, "*the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the kid*" (11:6) is a parable and riddle. It means that Israel will dwell peacefully amongst the evil people of the world, those who rule over the wolf and leopard as it states, "*the lion of the forest strikes them down, the wolf of the desert ravages them*" (Yirmiyahu 5:6). Everyone will return to the true religion and will not steal or destroy, rather they will eat what is permitted peacefully like [the nation of] Israel as it states, "*the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw*" (Yeshayahu 11:7).

**Ramban, Vayikra 26:6**—It is because of this that Scripture says, "*a babe shall play over a viper's hole,*" and similarly, "*and the cow and the bear shall graze...and the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw.*" For dangerous beasts only prey [on human beings] on account of the sin of man, because of which was decreed upon him that he be "*a pray to their teeth,*" and preying was made part of their nature so that they also prey on each other...Now at the time of the creation of the world, it is said of the beasts that He gave them the herb for food...But the beasts of the Land of Israel, when [man will be] in a state of perfection, will cease from their harmful way, and revert to their original nature with which they were endowed at the time of their creation...Therefore Scripture stated concerning the time of the redeemer who is descended of the stock of Jesse, that peace will return to the world and preying and all dangerous beasts will cease, as was their nature at first. [Translation by Rabbi Dr. Charles B. Chavel]

## Appendix

Perakim 10-12, which serve as the *haftorah* reading for the seventh day of Pesach on which the miraculous splitting of the Red Sea took place, was also chosen as the *haftorah* reading for Israel's Independence Day.

The *haftorah* opens with the enemy standing facing the walls of Yerushalayim, his hands raised in a threatening pose conveying confidence in his sure victory and is then followed by his immediate defeat in the hands of God. After this, a sublime vision describes what Yerushalayim will look like once she defeats her enemies: a Yerushalayim ruled by a wise and worthy Davidic descendent in a world full of knowledge of God. The king will serve as a guiding example for all the nations who wish to come to Yerushalayim. The prophet then describes the ingathering of the exiles and the prophecy ends with a psalm of praise thanking God for redeeming Israel. This conclusion is highly significant and teaches us about the obligation of the redeemed to praise God in recognition of the kindness bestowed upon them. Our Sages teach us:

The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to appoint Hezekiah as the Messiah... the Attribute of Justice said before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the Universe! If You did not make David the Messiah, who uttered so many hymns and psalms before You, will You appoint Chizkiya as such, who did not hymn for You in spite of all these miracles which You performed for him?' (Tractate Sanhedrin 94a)

We currently find ourselves between the holiday of Pesach, which represents our national redemption from Egypt, and days which have been memorialized in recent history marking their tremendous role in shaping the face and character of the Jewish nation. Holocaust Remembrance Day, Israel's Day of Remembrance, and Independence Day all mark the painful and triumphant transition from destruction and exile to the redemption we have merited to witness in the past generation. It is in this vain that these perakim were chosen as the *haftorah* for Israel's Independence Day. As a nation, we must never forget our obligation to thank God with our most heartfelt praises for the role He plays in our lives and for the modern redemption He has granted us.



**"And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb"**

a gold coin commissioned by the Israel Coins and Medals Corporation

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