

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 13-14

Perek 13 opens the second section of the book of Yeshayahu which continues through perek 23 and which primarily consists of prophecies addressed to Babylonia, Philistia, Moav and other non-Jewish nations. The majority of these prophecies describe destruction, while there are some prophecies of consolation included as well. The first prophecy in perakim 13-14 addresses Babylonia and predicts the fall of the Median Empire and its monarch. Perek 13 opens with a description of the gathering of God's army for war (2-5), moves to a description of those who fear war (6-18), and reveals the identity of Babylonia only at the end of the perek. Perek 14 includes a prophecy of consolation addressed to the Jewish people (1-2), is mainly dedicated to mocking the king of Babylonia (3-23), and concludes with a prophecy of destruction addressed to the Philistines (28-32).

Perek 13

- 1 Take note of the different stages of war mentioned and discuss the unique nature of the war between Media and Babylonia. Be sure to relate to the description of it as a divine war in its preparatory stage (3-6), its cosmic influence, and its universal consequences (9-11). Why do you think the war is represented this way? Focus on pesukim 9 and 11 and pay attention to Babylonia's role in relation to the Jewish people (14:1-2).
- 2 In pesukim 19-22 the prophet compares the destruction of Babylonia to the overturning of Sodom and Gomorrah. What characterized that destruction? (You can open to Devarim 29:22 for more help.) What other factors motivate this comparison and what do those factors teach us about Babylonia?

Perek 14

3 Between the prophecy of destruction addressed to Babylonia and the lamentation of its king, Yeshayahu prophesies Israel's redemption (1-3). In order to better understand the placement of this prophecy, note how it contrasts with the description of Babylonia's fate (13:19-22) and its correlation to the section which follows (14:3-4).

4 The song of scorn and mockery addressed to Babylonia can be divided into two sections:

a) The *first section* (3-11) joyously describes the fall of the king. What is the reason for the speakers' rejoice? [The speakers: Israel (3-6), the earth (7), the trees (8), the deceased kings (9-11).]

b) In the *second section* (12-21), the prophet himself turns his attention toward the king of Babylonia and mocks him. What sin is the king guilty of and what is the connection between what is said here and the sins mentioned in the first section? Note the sharp contrast between the verbs "to rise" [עלה] and "to fall" [ירד] which are repeated throughout the prophecy.

5 Yeshayahu suddenly begins discussing Assyria's fall in pesukim 24-27. How does **Rashi** understand the connection between the two prophecies?

As I have designed—For Assyria.

So shall it happen—You, Nevuchadnezzar, saw that the words of the prophet regarding Israel and Sancherev were fulfilled...and with this you should know that what I have advised regarding you will also come true.

6 The prophecy in pesukim 28-32 concerns the Philistines.

a) Who is the "*asp/serpent*" referring to in pasuk 29? Refer to II Melachim 18:8 and compare pesukim 29-30 in this perek to the prophecy in Yeshayahu 11:1,4, and 6.

b) Refer to the explanations of Rashi and Targum Yonatan to gain a better understanding of Yeshayahu's choice of imagery.

Rashi: The asp, which is more difficult than a snake, comes from the same root as the snake.

Targum Yonatan: Because the Messiah will come from the grandchildren of Yishai. (Refer to II Shmuel 17:25.)

Appendix

Two groups of images are synthesized in the opening pasuk of this prophecy. The first group consists of a “snake,” an “asp,” and a “flying saraph” (serpent), all of which are species of harmful snakes. The second group of images is related to vegetation: a “root” which sprouts branches and leaves, and “branches [פרין].” This second set of imagery draws its language from the images used in the prophetic description of Assyria’s fall and the rise of the Messiah:

“The Sovereign Lord...will hew off the tree-crowns with an ax: the tall ones shall be felled, the lofty ones cut down: the thickets of the forest shall be hacked away with iron, and the Lebanon trees shall fall in their majesty. But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Yishai, a twig shall sprout from his stock” (10:33-11:1).

If we delve for a moment into the language of the text, we find that the first set of images possesses a dual meaning. Its most obvious interpretation is as a reference to snakes, however, there is another level of meaning hinted to by Chazal (Tractate Bava Batra 17a, Shabbat 55b): “...And was she really the daughter of a snake? Was she not the daughter of Yishai?! Rather [she was] the daughter of someone who died through the counsel of the snake.” The word “snake” as a nickname for Yishai is mentioned in the text: “Amasa was the son of a man name Yithra the Israelite, who had married Avigail, daughter of Nachash and sister of Yoav’s mother Tzruya” (II Shmuel 17:25). In another place we learn that “Yishai begot Eliav his firstborn...David the seventh; their sisters were Tzruya and Avigail. The sons of Tzruya: Avishai, Yoav and Asael, three” (I Divrei Hayamim 2:13-17). “The stock [שורש] of a snake” in our perek is synonymous with “the stock of Yishai” in perek 11 that “shall become a standard to peoples” and that the “nations shall seek his counsel.”

We will continue to analyze the word “asp” [צפע] and understand that it is unique in Tanach. Different pesukim mention the “tzifoni” [צפוני], a poisonous biting snake and the tzefa may be a shorted name for this same snake. However, the word tzefa can also be derived from another pasuk in Yeshayahu [which speaks about the future of the Davidic line]: “I will fix him as a peg in a firm place on which all the substance of his father’s household shall be hung—the sprouts and the leaves [הצפעות]” (22:23-24). This context creates a parallel between “from the stock of a snake there sprouts an asp” and “a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Yishai, a twig shall sprout from his stock.” It can be taken one step further to say that a “flying saraph” is not just the name of a type of snake mentioned in Yeshayahu 30:6 but rather a reference to Yeshayahu’s inauguration wherein “seraphs stood in attendance on Him...with two he would fly” (6:2). The Messiah who fulfills Gods command on earth is thus compared to His servants in the heavens.

At first glance this prophecy addresses the Philistines and recounts their collapse under the pressure of the kings of Yehuda, here compared to snakes and asps. However, when we delve further into the meaning of this prophecy, we can understand its deeper significance. Now, in the year of King Achaz’s death, the vision of the sudden Philistine defeat and the rise of the Messiah can be realized. The Philistine defeat is the first expression of this processes’ commencement which has the potential to bring about world reform through God’s sovereignty and ultimately: “...the Mount of the Lord’s House shall stand firm above the mountains and tower above the hills and all the nations shall gaze on it with joy” (2:2).

(Excerpt from: Y. Ofer, “From the Stock of A Snake There Sprouts An Asp,” **Megadim**)

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