

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 5-6

Perek 5

During Yeshayahu's lifetime, one of the main sources of livelihood for the Kingdom of Yehuda was its lush vineyards. The prophet therefore utilizes wine-related imagery in his prophecies to attract the attention of his listeners and help them to identify with his messages. In the parable of the vineyard (1-7), Yeshayahu utilizes different rhetorical methods to convey God's deep disappointment in the nation and to inform them of the severe consequences for their behavior. The perek then continues with a series of prophecies, all beginning with the word "Ah/Woe," which fluctuate between rebuke and lament and which describe the nation's adulterated distinctions between good and bad. The end of the perek prophesies the impending arrival of the great enemy. The Assyrian foe has yet to be mentioned by name, however its ominous shadow continues to approach the Kingdom of Yehuda.

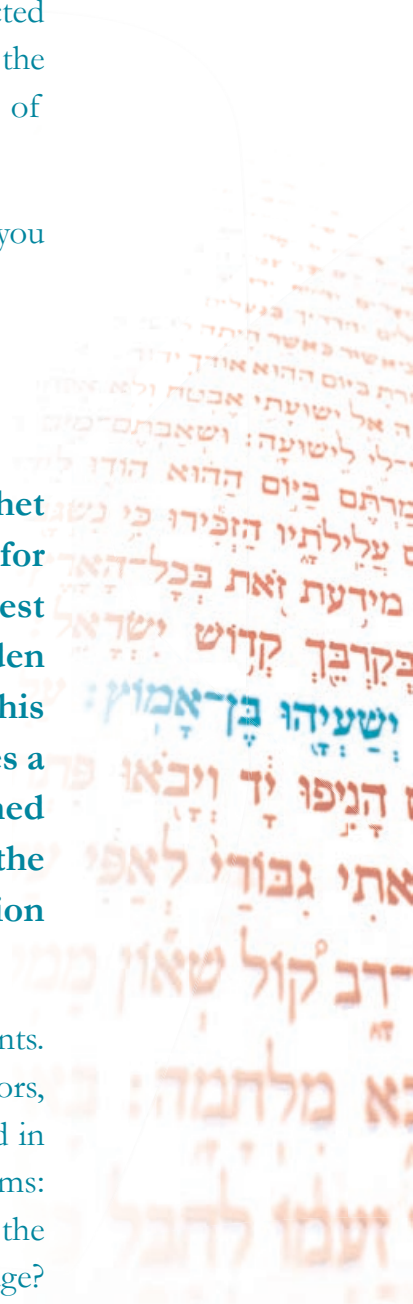
- 1 Yeshayahu attracts the attention of his listeners through the use of a parable. Pay attention to the transition from the parable to its moral [*nimshal*]. Who is the beloved [ידיד]? Who is the lover [זוד]? Who is being judged and who is the judge? When does the song turn into a rebuke?
- 2 The parable discusses God's deep disappointment in the nation and the root קו"ה—often translated as “hope”—is repeated three times. Note the different agricultural stages mentioned and the intense labor put into the vineyard's development. Is there any hope, despite the vineyard's impending fate, for a brighter future?

- 3 The prophet uses the six cries of “Ah” to rebuke the overindulgent and corrupt society of King Uziyahu’s period and threatens them with punishments exacted measure for measure. Note the appearances of vineyards and wine in the rebuke. How are wine and drunkenness used to reflect the generation’s loss of direction?
- 4 Pay attention to the superhuman qualities ascribed to the enemy. Why do you think Yeshayahu chooses not to identify the enemy by name?

Perek 6

In Perek 6, which serves as the *haftora* for Parshat Yitro, the prophet becomes part of God’s heavenly entourage. He volunteers for a mission whose unclear directive is one of the book’s greatest mysteries: “*dull that people’s mind.*” Is the prophet being sent to harden the nation’s heart? How can we understand the nature of this mission? After the prophet’s protest-cry of “*how long,*” God provides a glimmer of hope to the nation who is about to be mortally threatened by an Assyrian conquest. He promises to leave a small group of the nation alive to serve as the precious seed from which the new nation will blossom.

- 5 The pasuk that begins the perek includes a chronological description of a few events. In contrast to the mortal human king (who, according to some commentators, did not die but rather contracted leprosy), the King of all Kings is described in His full glory. Notice the elements connecting the earthly and heavenly realms: God’s servants who glorify Him, the altar, its smoke, and the movement of the doorposts. What transforms the prophet into part of the heavenly entourage? Compare this to Yirmiyahu 1:4-9.
- 6 The perek is divided into two distinct sections by the words “*I beheld*” (1) [ואראה] and “*I heard*” (8) [ואשמע]. These two sections can be structured according to the prophet’s responses which begin with the words “*I said*” (11, 8, 5) [ואומר]. What is unexpected about the prophet’s reaction “*until when?*” (11) and how does it relate to the mission accepted in pasuk 8?



- 7 How can the directive to “*dull that people’s mind*” be understood? What theological difficulty is posed by this instruction? Compare and contrast the explanations offered by Rashi and Rambam:

Rambam: (The Laws of Repentance 6:3) A person may commit a great sin or many sins causing the judgment rendered before the True Judge to be that retribution [administered to] this transgressor for these sins which he willfully and consciously committed is that his Teshuva will be held back. He will not be allowed the chance to repent from his wickedness so that he will die and be wiped out because of the sin he committed.

This is implied by God’s declaration [related] by Yeshayahu (6:10): “dull that people’s mind, etc.” Similarly [in II Divrei Hayamim] it states, “They mocked the messengers of God, scorned His words, scoffed at His prophets until the anger of God mounted up against His people until there was no remedy.” Implied [by these pesukim] is that they willingly sinned, multiplying their iniquity until it was obliged to hold back their Teshuva, [which is referred to as] the “remedy.”

For these reasons it is written in the Torah (Shemot 14:4), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart.” Since he began to sin on his own initiative and caused hardships to the Israelites who dwelled in his land...

Rashi (Yeshayahu 6:9-10): *Hear indeed*—I am telling you ‘hear indeed’ and you do not give your heart to understand and notice the miracles that I performed for you and you do not give your heart to understand Me.

Dull that people’s mind—similar to “*he became stubborn*” (Shemot 8:11)...

Lest, seeing with his eyes—they gave their hearts not to listen to the words of the prophets because they fear that the words may become favorable in their eyes and they will understand in their hearts and return to Me and this is their ‘remedy.’

- 8 *Question for further study:* The difficult task assigned to Yeshayahu to dull the hearts of the nation can be better understood against the backdrop of the events which take place in I Melachim 22. In this perek, Michaihu offers Achav one last opportunity to improve his ways by revealing God’s plan to bring Achav to his death in the upcoming battle. Try to compare what is described in I Melachim 22 to Yeshayahu’s mission.

Appendix

At the parable's climax, the vineyard's owner asks a despondent rhetorical question: "why, when I hoped." This question does not refer to the destroyed vineyard, rather the owner is addressing himself and asking why he invested so much hope and hard work into a vineyard which only brought him bitter disappointment. However, there is still a glimmer of hope for a future relationship between the vineyard and its caretaker. The vineyard is abandoned but it is not destroyed. Its fences have been razed, animals now trample it, the skies no longer provide their nourishment, and the requisite labor is not being performed. But the vineyard has not been uprooted nor replaced. Restoration and rebirth is still possible. The path which can lead toward rebirth is detailed in psalm 80. This psalm details a contrasting parable in which the nation turns to God and beseeches Him to take ownership of His vineyard once again.

- (9) You plucked up a vine from Egypt; You expelled nations and planted it.
- (10) You cleared a place for it; it took deep root and filled the land.
- (11) The mountains were covered by its shade, mighty cedars by its boughs.
- (12) Its branched reached the sea, its shoots, the river.
- (13) Why did You breach its wall so that every passerby plucks its fruit,
- (14) wild boars gnaw at it, and creature of the field feed on it?
- (15) O God of hosts, turn again, look down from heaven and see; take note of that vine,
- (16) the stock planted by Your right hand, the stem you have taken as Your own.
- (17) For it is burned by fire and cut down, perishing before Your angry blast.
- (18) Grant Your help to the man at Your right hand, the one You have taken as Your own.
- (19) We will not turn away from You; preserve our life so that we may invoke Your name.
- (20) O Lord, God of hosts, restore us; show Your favor that we may be delivered.