

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 56-57

Perek 56

In our chapter the circle of redemption expands and reaches one of its highest peaks. The prophet prophesies that the redemption of Israel and the building of the temple will be spiritual processes with universal importance: *'For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples'*. In this manner the temple reaches its complete goal, as King Shlomo said in his prayer: *'Or if a foreigner who is not of Your people Israel comes from a distant land for the sake of Your name... when he comes to pray toward this house, oh, hear in Your heavenly abode ...'*. The chapter concludes with a brief rebuke directed at the nation's leaders, who are preoccupied with themselves and their desires, and do not pay due attention to the dangers that suddenly occur to their flock (9-12).

- 1 In the beginning of the prophecy God promises that the redemption will not pass over the eunuchs, who, throughout the exile, served in the palaces of the Babylonian kings, and who are not able to have children. The redemption will also not pass over the foreigners who joined the Jewish people during exile. The promise to the eunuchs and the foreigners who attach themselves to the Lord depends on two conditions mentioned in our prophecy; while both conditions use the root 'to keep' שמ"ר: 'Who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and stays his hand from doing any evil' [In original Hebrew **שמור שבת מִחֲלָלוֹ וְשָׁמַר** 'שמור שבת מִחֲלָלוֹ וְשָׁמַר' (2). Why were these two specifically chosen as the conditions, and what is the meaning of each one of them? Read the following explanations given by **Radak** and **Abравanel**:

Radak: He specifically mentioned the subject of Shabbat here because he was speaking to the exiles; he wanted them to better their ways, and to leave exile. And the best way to start mending their ways was by keeping the Shabbat; for they were originally exiled from their land for desecrating the Shabbat. As chazal said: Jerusalem was destroyed as a result of desecrating the Shabbat... And they said: If the Jewish people keep two shabbatot, they will be redeemed immediately as it says *'who keep my sabbaths'*, and later it says: *'I will bring*

them to *My sacred mount*'. While the prophet only mentioned the mitzvah of Shabbat, the same rule applies for all of the positive mitzvot (מצוות עשה); and he chose to state the most severe of them all. Afterwards he says '*And stays his hand from doing any evil*' which is a negative mitzvah. Additionally, keeping Shabbat is an important foundation in the faith in God; for one would only keep Shabbat if he accepts that the world was created, and has a creator... For this reason God gave them [Shabbat] previous to Matan Torah... And whoever is attached to God, it is fitting that he should believe in the authenticity of Moshe and his Torah; in this way he will be attached to God to *'be as one kindred*'.

Abravanel: The prophet mentioned the mitzvah of Shabbat for he was addressing the exiles, who had no other mitzvot that were more severe than this one; at the same time he made sure to remind them not to omit all the rest, as it says: '*And stays his hand from doing any evil*'.

- 2 The foreigners who attach themselves to God and the eunuchs have a common fear. What is this fear, and why does it rise now, at the time of the redemption? Refer to the pasuk in Devraim 23:2: '*No one who testes are crushed or whose member is cut off shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord*'. Also see **Rashi's** commentary: '*The Lord will keep me apart from His people- Why should I convert? Will God not separate me from His people when He pays their reward? Let not the eunuch say: Why should I better my ways and my deeds? I am like a withered tree, for lack of remembrance.*'
- 3 Each of these groups is granted a promise of consolation, involving the temple, which will be fulfilled during the time of redemption (5 & 7). Examine what role the temple plays in each promise, and in what way does it serve as an answer to their fears?
- 4 The prophecy of the temple at the time of the redemption appears in pasuk 7. What are the two characteristics of the temple that are mentioned in this pasuk? Notice the name the prophet uses for the temple, which appears twice in this pasuk. Can you find a connection between these two characteristics?

Perek 57

At the end of the chapter we find a short consolation prophecy, which addresses the mourners of Zion. The prophecy emphasizes God's desire in Man's *teshuva* (repentance) and spiritual rectification. The desire for teshuva, in fact, stems from the vast gap between God, who

is high and elevated, to Man, who is lowly and humble. Positioned in the heart of the chapter is a long rebuke towards those in the nation who are idol-worshippers (3-13). The prophet describes the horrifying moral corruption, which is involved in their rituals: ritual prostitution, and the killing of children. Israel's turning to other Gods is also compared to prostitution and betrayal; both of them being useless acts.

5 'The righteous man perishes, and no one considers'

a) In pesukim 1-2 the prophet laments the death of the righteous. What is the connection between this lamentation and the rebuke towards the leaders, found at the end of the previous chapter? What does this lamentation teach us about the spiritual-moral state of the nation and its leaders? Note the textual similarity: 'They know not what it is to give heed' 'לא ידעו הבין' (56:11)- 'And no one gives thought' 'באין מבין' (57:1).

b) Read the following midrash (**Tosefta**, Sotah 10:2) and reflect on the connection between the death of the righteous man and the evil.

'When the righteous come to the world- good comes to the world, and calamity leaves the world... when they die calamity comes to the world and good leaves the world, as it says: 'And no one considers.'

6 Pasuk 15 expresses a deep idea in relation to God's way of ruling the world. This idea is phrased and expanded by Rabbi Yochanan in the **Talmud Bavli** (Megilla 31:1):

Rabbi Yohanan said: Wherever you find the power of God, blessed be He, you also find His gentleness mentioned. This fact is stated in the Torah, repeated in the Neviim, and stated a third time in the Ketuvim. It is written in the Torah, *'For the Lord your God, is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe'* (Devarim 10:17) and it says immediately afterwards, *'but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing'*. It is repeated in the Neviim: *'For thus said He who high aloft forever dwells, whose name is holy: I dwell on high, in holiness; yet with the contrite and the lowly in spirit- reviving the spirits of the lowly, reviving the hearts of the contrite.'* (Yeshayahu 57:15). It is stated a third time in the Ketuvim, as it is written: *'Extol him who rides upon the clouds; the Lord is His name. Exult in His presence- the father of orphans, the champion of widows, God, in His holy habitation.'* (Tehillim 68:5)

Appendix

For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

One of the peaks of Yeshayahu's prophecy lies within the description of the role of the temple as a house of prayer for all the nations. **Rav Kook** develops this lofty idea in his intensive mass on prayer and humankind (Orot Hakodesh 3: 46-50)

The fate of man is to elevate himself to the point of knowledge of His will, to the point of knowing himself, to the point where he grasps, on the highest level, the happiness of making his own will – like the will of his maker. For his will is in fact the will of his maker. And the more this realization penetrates; it reflects its reality more. Planted within Israel is this will... the light of the awe of heaven and the love of heaven, the light of the ability and the respect of speech...

Prayer is what gives life to the spirit... How great is the value of the prayers of the honest, how worthy is the cultured world that it should be yearning for pure prayer, how much does the advancement have to clear all the obstacles that lie before the manners of prayer, in order to enjoy the heavenly light which is hidden within it. And, indeed, it shall come. This is Israel's role in the world, Ya'akov's voice will be untied from its framework, and shall come to the peak of its aspiration; he will educate himself to fly to great heights, as a young chick, who begins the spring of life. All of Israel's prayers and praises, from long ago, until the time when his character will be completed, it is all one extensive mass, to execute the supreme talent of the splendor of prayer, and the strength of its life, on all souls and all deeds. The time indeed shall come, the day of redemption and salvation; I will bring them to My sacred mount and let them rejoice in My house of prayer... For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Let all that breathes praise the Lord, Hallelujah.



The Second Jewish Temple Model in the Israel Museum
Picture taken by Deror Avi

For a virtual tour of the Second Temple go to the following link:
http://www.imj.org.il/panavision/model_pre_3heb.html

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