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in the memory of Rabbi Dr. Akiba Predmesky

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 31-32

Perek 31

The harsh rebuke regarding the nation's dependence on Egyptian aid mentioned in the previous perek, is highlighted from a different angle in this perek as well (1-3): dependence on Egyptian military prowess, symbolized by its infamous horses and chariots. The second half of the perek (4-9) discusses the flip side of this situation: If the nation trusts in God instead of Egypt, Yerushalayim will be saved and the Assyrians will be destroyed in a miraculous, divine victory.

- ① “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses” (1). The objection regarding a return to Egypt is mentioned in the previous perek, however in this one Yeshayahu focuses on the dependence on Egyptian horses. This prohibition is also mentioned in Devarim 17:16. According to Yeshayahu's rebuke, what is the rationale behind this prohibition? See the explanation of **Ramban** which distinguishes between two separate prohibitions and includes pesukim from perek 31 in Yeshayahu:

It is then possible that Scripture admonishes [the king] not to increase his numbers of horses even from his own Land, or from the land of Shinar, or by way of permissible trading, in order that he should not put his trust *in his chariots, because they are many, and in his horsemen, because they are exceedingly mighty*” (Yeshayahu 31:1), but his trust shall be in the Name of the Eternal. Then he admonishes the king not to cause the people to return to Egypt, to have his servants and people there as overseers of cattle dwelling *in the cities for the chariots to the end that he should multiple horses...* (Trans. by R. Dr. Charles B. Chavel)

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מִתַּן מַתָּן

מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רענגערט
The Sadie Renner Women's Institute for Torah Studies

המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך

2 “Like flying birds, so will the Lord of Hosts protect Yerushalayim” (5).

a) The divine defense of Yerushalayim is compared to “flying birds.” This unique imagery is also used in God’s words to the nation after the Exodus from Egypt (Shemot 19:4). Try and understand how the parallel to Shemot sheds light on the symbolism of the image in Yeshayahu (also see Devarim 32:11).

b) The pasuk’s continuation includes another hint to the Exodus: “So will God, Master of Legions, protect Yerushalayim, protecting and rescuing, passing over and delivering.” Why is the significance of the Exodus in this perek and how is this related to the mention of the Exodus in the first half (1-3)?

Perek 32

In the first section of the perek (1-8), Yeshayahu maps out his vision for a perfected society: one which is physically and spiritually healthy, a society in which the external and internal appropriately reflect one another, a society without insincerity and superficiality. The second half of the perek (9-20) criticizes the exaggerated confidence of the upper class women and foretells their destruction, while also including a vision regarding the nation’s future security and settlement.

3 “The eyes of seeing people will no longer be closed and the ears of the hearing people will pay heed” (3).

a) Pesukim 3-4 mention four changes which will overtake all of mankind. What is the significance of these changes? To enrich your analysis, refer to Yeshayahu’s vision of redemption in 35:5-6.

b) Compare pesukim 3-4 to the contrasting description in Yeshayahu’s inaugural prophecy (6:10). What is the symbolic meaning of these changes? In light of this, what do you think is the connection between these changes and the societal changes described in the prophecy’s continuation (5-8)?

4 The second half of the prophecy addresses the “complacent women.” Descriptions of their complacency and confidence are woven throughout the entire prophecy.

a) What are these women criticized for and what is their punishment?

b) “Quiet” and “security” are also mentioned at the end of the prophecy (17-18), however this time in a positive context. What causes this confidence, and how is it different from the confidence mentioned in the beginning of the prophecy? Study pesukim 16-17, and note the repetition of the roots “to dwell” [שכן] and “to live” [ישב] in pesukim 16 and 18.

Appendix

"Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt"—to ask for help—this is the clearest understanding of "return," as in the language of Yeshayahu:

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many, and in horsemen, because they are exceeding mighty; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord" (31:1).

Yeshayahu says, *"That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at My mouth; to take refuge in the stronghold of Pharaoh, and to take shelter in the shadow of Egypt" (30:2).* In a clear reference to the splitting of the sea, Yeshayahu also declares, *"Now the Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses flesh, and not spirit; so when the Lord shall stretch out His hand, both he that helpeth shall stumble, and he that is helped shall fall, and they all shall perish together" (31:3).*

It is very clear from the words of the prophets that a "descent" or "return" to Egypt is not necessarily a physical journey of the entire nation or even a part of it. It is enough for a king of Israel or Yehuda to seek Egypt's protection and aid, and for the messengers to stand before Pharaoh and say in the name of the king: "I am your servant and son," etc. in order for this to constitute the grave sin of "returning to Egypt."

Therefore, not only in the Prophets, but also in the Torah itself it is explained; in the commandments to a king which contain the principle directives regarding the nature and manner of Israel's kingship: *"Only he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt" (Devarim 17:16).* There it is difficult to explain any differently... the prohibition is [against] seeking refuge and protection from Egypt through [use of] their horses and chariots...It is not referring to people returning to live in Egypt, but rather to the request for refuge and aid by the presiding King of Israel. That is a return to Egypt; a reversal of the independence [gained] when [the nation] left, and this is the explicit reason for the prohibition against possessing too many horses and chariots. The pasuk that concludes the rebuke of destruction in Devarim also seems to be referring to this: *"And the Lord shall bring thee back into Egypt in ships, by the way whereof I said unto thee: 'Thou shalt see it no more again'; and there ye shall sell yourselves unto your enemies for bondmen and for bondwoman, and no man shall buy you" (Devarim 28:68)*...a return to Egypt is the opposite of freedom from slavery—it is a renewed enslavement.

(Excerpt from Rav Yoel Bin Nun, "Derech Eretz Plishtim Mul Derech Eretz Hamidbar Yam Suf," Megadim 3, pp. 21-32)

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