

# MATAN AL HAPEREK

## A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

### Yeshayahu Perakim 33-34

#### Perek 33

Our chapter is made up of several sections, while the connection between them is somewhat unclear. The first pasuk speaks of a calamitous prophecy regarding the "ravager" and seems to be disconnected from the other sections. Pesukim (2-6) focus on the pleas and prayers for God's deliverance, followed by the glorification of God after the deliverance. A similar process is described in pesukim 7-13: the exclamations and cries of angels result in God's deliverance. The next section (14-16) compares sinners who are wary of life in Zion to the righteous who will merit dwelling there in peace (17-24). (For further study, note the parallels between this perek and the following perakim in Tehillim: 12, 15, 48.)

❶ Pesukim 14-16 include a list of ethical attributes characteristic of a person who desires to live in Zion and benefit from God's protection.

a) This section opens with the sinners' concerns regarding life in Zion: "*Who of us can dwell with the devouring fire*". From where does their fear stem? Discuss this section's juxtaposition with the description of God's might in pesukim 10-12.

b) The list of attributes is organized in three pairs. Characterize each of the pairs. How would you describe the connection between them?

c) Note the similarities between Tehillim 15 and this perek in both structure and content. What do all the characteristics (in this list) share in common? What kind of ideal personality do they portray?

❷ Life in Zion is described very differently by the sinners and the righteous. How can you explain this contrast?

## Perek 34

This perek includes a prophecy of destruction to Edom. This vision is connected to the prophecy in the following perek which envisions the nation's return to the land of Israel. It seems that this prophecy refers to the period following the destruction of the Temple, seeing that Edom is partially responsible for Jerusalem's destruction together with Babylonia (see for example Tehillim 137:7: "*Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall; how they cried, Strip her, strip her to her very foundations!*"). Edom later attempts to conquer the land of Israel.

This harsh prophecy can be divided into two parts. The first section (1-8) describes God's battle against Edom, and the second section (9-17) describes Edom's post-war fate.

3 "Its streams shall be turned to pitch and its soil to sulfur..." (9-10). Compare this description to the destruction of Sodom in Breishit 19:24-28. Why do you think Yeshayahu links the two? Also reference Devarim 29:21-22.

4 a) Pesukim 11-15 describe an unusual type of vibrant life in Edom. How does this coalesce with the destruction mentioned earlier? Discuss the contradiction between pasuk 17 and pesukim 10-11.

b) Animals appear in the first part of the chapter as well (6-7). What is the main distinction between these two groups of animals?

5 "Search and read it in the scroll of the Lord: Not one of these shall be absent, Not one shall miss its fellow" (16). Read the following explanation of **Radak**:

These words are directed towards those who will witness [the destruction of Edom]. 'Search and read it in the scroll of the Lord', it is this book. 'Read it', read of the creatures and birds mentioned in this section, for each and every one of them will reside in this city during the destruction... and my father interpreted 'the scroll of the Lord'-The Torah of Moshe. According to this interpretation 'Search' refers to the list of creatures and birds listed in *parshat Shemini* (Vayikra 11:14-18), none of which will be missing.

How do Radak and his father (R. Yosef Kimchi) each explain the phrase "the scroll of the Lord"? What additional distinction does R. Yosef Kimchi make between the animals listed at the beginning and end of the perek?

# Appendix

## Messengers of Edom's Destruction

The prophecy in chapter 34 is a pronouncement of the punishment God will bring upon His enemies and His nation's enemies. Edom, Israel's eternal enemy, symbolizes the evil kingship whose fate of destruction is decreed to last "through the ages" (10). A fate similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah awaits Edom, which is located not far from those ancient cities. The bountiful and fertile land of Edom will transform into a land of "thorns... nettles and briars"- thorns of the wilderness and wastelands.

In order to demonstrate the magnitude of the destruction, the prophet lists a wide variety of birds: Jackdaws and owls, great owls and ravens, jackals and ostriches, goat-demons and Lilith, arrow snakes and buzzards. For generations translators and commentators have had trouble identifying these birds... It seems likely that each phrase refers to a type of bird and that the list can be divided in two distinct groups: diurnal birds and nocturnal birds... "*bat ya'ana*" is certainly identifiable as a bird since the Torah identifies it as a non-kosher species of bird. Translations identify the "*bat ya'ana*" as synonymous with the *na'amit*, the ostrich, which is the largest desert bird. However, it's hard to accept this identification since the ostrich lives in the open desert and stays far away from humans and swords... Therefore, our conclusion is that the "*bat ya'ana*" should be identified as a night bird commonly found in abandoned areas. The name *bat ya'ana* is most probably connected with the sounds of song [*kol anot*] these birds make during the night. The animal referred to as the *kippod* (11) cannot be identified with the mammal of the same name [the porcupine] since we know that the porcupine is rarely found in desolate areas. Thus, once again our conclusion is that this is a night bird, similar to the *sa'ir* and the *lilith* (14)...

All of the birds mentioned above belong to the group of nocturnal birds of prey, named "liliths"...and indeed, no better group of animals could have been chosen to depict the atrocities of the destruction. Most of these birds nest in abandoned homes, and their mere appearance intensifies any atmosphere of destruction. In fact, they are quite effective for agriculture since they feed off of pests...However, according to legend and folklore, they symbolize destruction and evil; they herald destruction and tragedy. The reason for this is their peculiar appearance: a large head and eyes which seem to be spread out. In addition, the rhythm of their breath resembles the sound of a suffering or dying person. Their names are often connected with the sounds they make; for example the *tinshemet* is from the word *nasham* (to breathe). The *yanshubif* is from the word *nashaf* (to exhale), *tanim* from *tana* (to narrate), *bnot ya'ana* from *ana* (to answer), etc.

The voices and appearances of these birds engendered the belief that they herald evil. These birds became synonymous with the popular image of demons. This explains why demons were often referred to as *sa'ir* and *lilith*. Palaces, once filled with voices of laughter and licentiousness, will now be filled with the shrieks of these demonic birds. From now on, these creatures will be the loyal and eternal citizens of Edom: "They shall possess it for all time, they shall dwell there through the ages" (17).

(Y. Felix, Nature and Land in the Bible, pp.183-184)

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02-5944555 • טל': perek.matan@gmail.com

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מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רענגבורט  
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