

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 35-39

Perek 35

This perek vibrantly describes the exiles' return to the land of Israel. Different expressions of happiness are scattered throughout the perek, which describes the wilderness' flowering, its plentiful water, and the healing of man's handicaps. This process directly contrasts with the previous perek's description of Edom's utter destruction. Yeshayahu's prophecy also subtly hints to the comparison between the Exodus and the future redemption, pointing to the benefit of the latter over the former. The images in this perek build upon each other, and only in the final section (8-10) does it become clear that the happiness described is related to the exiles' return to Zion.

1 “The wilderness and the parched land shall be glad...” (1).

a) In this first section (1-3) Yeshayahu describes the flowering of the wilderness through expressions of happiness. He mentions both ‘flowering’ and a ‘rejoicing’ three times each. Why is the desert joyful and how does its happiness manifest itself?

b) The word pair “glory”/”excellency” [כבוד-הדר] is mentioned twice in pasuk 2—once in the description of the flowering and once to describe the glory and excellency of God. Discuss the connection between these two appearances of the word pair.

c) Who are the “wilderness” and the “parched land” [מדבר/ערבה]? Compare this to Yeshayahu 51:3: “For the Lord hath comforted Zion; He hath comforted all her waste places, and hath made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.”

Metzudat David: *The wilderness and the parched land*—the land of Israel, which is currently like a wilderness [מדבר] and parched land, will then be glad.

2 “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert” (5-6). Compare and contrast the two pairs of disabled individuals mentioned in these verses. What does the healing of the disabled express in relation to the broader process of redemption?

3 Try and understand the connection between the disappearance of disabilities and the outpouring of water in the section’s continuation (6b-7). See **Rashi’s** explanation:

For in the wilderness shall waters break out—because it will rejoice in the salvation and will blossom like a desert thirsty for water and springs will open up in its midst; because salvation will blossom for the despondent.

And the parched land shall become a pool—the desire for salvation will be fulfilled. The prophet is speaking in allegorical language.

4 Yeshayahu hints to a multifaceted comparison between the Exodus and the future redemption: the journey in the desert from the exile to the land of Israel, the parting of desert waters, and the protection of the sojourners from various desert dangers. Discuss the advantages of the future redemption (as described in this perek) over the Exodus from Egypt.

Perek 36-39

Perakim 36-39 parallel the narrative recounted in II Melachim 18-20 with a few minor changes. Therefore we will not learn them in depth for a second time. Our learning will focus on a section which does not appear in Melachim: Chizkiyahu’s thanksgiving after his miraculous healing (38:9-20). This thanksgiving can be divided into three sections. Pesukim 1-11 expresses Chizkiyahu’s fear of premature death, pesukim 12-17a describe his pain and suffering, and pesukim 17b-20 describe his salvation and healing.

5 Chizkiyahu’s words give expression to the tension and contrast between the world of the living and the dead. He compares the living and the dead in pesukim 18-19 and expresses the advantage of the living.

a) “For the nether-world cannot praise Thee...The living, the living, he shall praise Thee.” Refer to both Rashi and Malbim’s explanations. How do they explain the repetition “the living, the living,” and how does each understand the advantage of the living?

Rashi: *the living, the living*—[this is] the expression of living individuals, meaning when there are people living in the world—he is living and he is living—the thanksgiving emerges from them.

Malbim: The netherworld cannot praise You, because only the living can praise [You] for being alive; and he means to say that the living, because he is alive, he praises You. But a person who has disappeared into the netherworld [cannot praise You] because he is not alive. This cannot happen for two reasons: A) The thanksgiving refers to the goodness of life, and he who is not alive cannot give thanks for that which he has not received. B) The dead is not described as giving praise and thanks. This is one aspect of what is said, that only a living person gives thanks, and only because he is alive.

b) “...*the father to the children shall make known Your truth.*” Why are sons mentioned here, and what is their connection to “truth”? See the explanation of **Radak**: If he did not have children and then lived and [then] has children, he will make Your truth known like I am doing. And even if he has children, all the time that he lives with them he will teach them and make [it] known to them. If so, it is desirable for man to live long, and if he becomes ill, you should heal him of his sickness and he will praise You for the good that You have done for him and will let it be known to his children.

Appendix

"The God of ethical freedom"

“*They shall be holy unto their God*” (Vayikra 21:6)—Not only inside the Temple, but outside of the Temple as well, they should be holy unto their God. Do not desecrate God’s name, for they are the carriers of His flag and are His representatives. In their contact with the dead, cutting of their flesh [שריטה], balding of their heads [קרח], and cutting of their sideburns [פאות] they would desecrate God’s name, and the God they call out to would be known because of them as a God of limited human freedom—in life and death. God is the God of ethical freedom and His name the source of life; He lifts up man from the gates of death and frees him from the power of sin; He guides him upwards and opens the gates of life and purity before him. Because of this, “*The dead praise not the Lord*” (Tehillim 115:17), but rather the living, the living make His truth known. Praise of God does not stem from man’s weakness but from the strength of His ethical freedom. A priest who spends time with corpses, or who is marked with the signs of death and sin, namely balding, cutting, and the trimming of sideburns, this is a desecration of God’s great name. The notion of truth, which God wishes to be known for through us, would be reversed to its absolute opposite.

(Rav Hirsch, Vayikra 21:6)

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