

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 1-2

Perek 1

Perek 1 of Yeshayahu, read in synagogue as the *haftora* for Parshat Devarim, dramatically oscillates between rebuke and repentance, punishment and salvation, anger and forgiveness. This perek is surrounded by two introductory pesukim (1:1 and 2:1). Many commentators view this perek as a survey of the nation's problematic religious behavior during the reigns of the four kings mentioned in pasuk 1. This perek thus serves as a representative summary of Yeshayahu's central prophetic messages.

❶ Pasuk 1 details the period during which Yeshayahu prophesies and describes his intended audience.

a) Note the names of the kings mentioned in this pasuk, keeping in mind that these reigns span many decades. Discuss the spiritual and political vicissitudes that characterize these reigns.

b) The introductory pasuk in 2:1 turns perek 1 into its own unit. Read the comment of **Abarbanel**. What is his understanding of the nature of perek 1?

"The prophecies of Yeshayahu:" You should notice that the text does not open with *The words of Yeshayahu son of Amotz prophesied concerning Yebuda and Yerushalayim* (2:1) by way of general introduction to his prophecies. If it would have done so, the text would not have needed to note in [the introduction] to the second prophecy *The words of Yeshayahu son of Amotz prophesied concerning Yebuda and Yerushalayim* after all of the prophecies were included in the first pasuk which opens the book...Perhaps the text is using this to convey a lofty and divine idea: Yeshayahu prophesied this during the reign of Uziyahu. During the reign of Yotam he saw this vision a second time, during the reign of Achaz he envisioned it a third time, and during the reign of Chizkiyahu he saw it for a fourth time. About this it is said: *The word*

that *Yeshayahu* prophesied concerning *Yehuda* and *Yerushalayim* (2:1)...A sharp prophecy of rebuke opens the book either because it was *Yeshayahu's* first prophecy or because of the significance of its repetition during the reigns of these kings.

- 2 The perek discusses multiple topics without detailing their historical context. The commentators debate whether or not the forlorn description which appears in pesukim 6-9 is a description of a future situation which will serve as a punishment for the nation's sins or a description of the present situation in the Kingdom of *Yehuda*. Review the details of the description and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each suggestion. Which historical event might this be describing? (Compare this description to II *Divrei Hayamim* 28:5-8 and II *Melachim* 18:13.)
- 3 In 1:10-20, *Yeshayahu* strongly rebukes his audience for their fulfillment of certain commandments and their negligence to fulfill others. Make a list of the commandments the nation fulfills. Why does the prophet object to them? Based on the prophet's detailed description, why is it difficult for the nation to accept this rebuke? (Compare this description to *Amos* 5:21-25 and *Yirmiyahu* 7:21-23.)

Perek 2

The beginning of perek 2 opens with the vision of the Temple Mount. This sublime vision of world peace, the pilgrimage of the nations to *Yerushalayim*, and their unification under God's powerful reign has been a source of inspiration for prophets, visionaries and world leaders throughout the generations. This perek also includes a prophecy describing the leveling of extraordinary peaks and towering forest trees as a metaphor for the fate of the haughty and prideful. Through rebuke relevant in every generation, *Yeshayahu* identifies haughtiness as the root of all evil and identifies this trait as the source of man's rebellion against God. It is the prideful and haughty members of society who worship foreign gods, whether by bowing down to actual idols or by worshiping worldly possessions and man's cultural and technological achievements.

- 4 *Yeshayahu's* eschatological vision (2:1-4) details both the redemption of the Jewish people as well as a universal salvation of the other nations. Note the various stages described in the vision. Who initiates the ascent to the Temple Mount and what function does this holy site serve in this vision? This description echoes previous pivotal events such as the receiving of the *Torah*, the *Exodus*,

and the ascent to the Temple Mount for judgment described in Devarim 17:8-11. How do these parallels enrich your understanding of Yeshayahu's prophecy?

- 5 Yeshayahu's eschatological vision also appears in Micha 4:1-5. Compare these two prophecies. What is the correlation between them? Do they express the same idea? What could be the reason for this vision's appearance in both places?
- 6 Pesukim 5-24 describe many frightening events which include repetitive pesukim meant to emphasize the correlation between the events (9-11,17,19,21). Study the perek's use of the word "day" [יום] and take note of all the events which will take place on this specific day. Pay attention to the following guiding words: ר"ם, גא"ה, ר"ם, גב"ה, שג"ב, שח, שפ"ל. How do they express the main idea of the prophecy?
- 7 There is a correlation between the rebuke in 2:6-8 and the restrictions put on the king in Devarim 17:14-20. What is the significance of this comparison? Do you think the rebuke is directed toward the king or toward all mankind? Compare these pesukim to the description of Uziyahu's reign in II Divrei Hayamim 26.

Appendix

As mentioned in the introduction, Perek 1 of Yeshayahu is read as the *haftora* for Parshat Devarim. This Shabbat immediately precedes the fast of Tisha b'Av and is known as *Shabbat Chazon*. This name is taken from the *haftorah* which begins with the word "chazon" (=vision). One of the strongest connections between the tragic day of destruction and perek 1 of Yeshayahu is the use of the word "eicha" [איכה] in 1:21. The following midrash from **Eicha Rabba 1:1** compares three of the nation's greatest leaders and their different experiences as leaders of the Jewish people:

"How does the city sit alone" (Eicha 1:1): Three uttered prophecies using the word *eicha*: Moshe, Yeshayahu, and Yirmiyahu. Moshe said, *How can bare unaided the trouble of you?* (Devarim 1:12). Yeshayahu said *How is the faithful city become a harlot* (1:21). Yirmiyahu said *How does the city sit alone* (1:1).

Rebbe Levi said: It may be likened to a matron who has had three groomsmen: one beheld her in her happiness, a second beheld her in her infidelity, and the third beheld her in her disgrace. Similarly, Moshe beheld Israel in their glory and happiness and exclaimed, *How can bare unaided the trouble of you!* Yeshayahu beheld them in their infidelity and exclaimed *How is the faithful city become a harlot!* Yirmiyahu beheld them in their disgrace and exclaimed *How does the city sit alone!*