

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 7-9

The series of prophecies in perakim 7-9:6 accompany King Achaz during a critical political crossroads as Assyria dangerously threatens Israel's national security.

Perek 7

Perek 7 opens with two pesukim of historic introduction, however, the broader context of the dramatic meeting between King Achaz and Yeshayahu is recounted in II Melachim 16 and II Divrei Hayamim 26 in greater detail. Faced with the powerful Assyrian threat, the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim, led by King Pekach ben Remalyahu, forges an alliance with Retzin, the king of Aram, a well-established arch enemy of Israel. Together they try and create an anti-Assyrian alliance and pressure Achaz to either join the union or face replacement with a king who will. The description in Divrei Hayamim testifies to Yehuda's defeat in battles against this powerful pair which helps explain Achaz's reluctance to join them. Achaz must choose between joining the anti-Assyrian alliance or turning to Assyria for aid. However, turning to Assyria would afford the superpower a dangerous political, cultural, and religious foothold in the Kingdom of Yehuda.

Yeshayahu opens with the words *"be firm and be calm."* The prophet opposes both joining the Aramean-Ephraim alliance as well as turning to Assyria for help. Giving in to Assyria symbolizes a lack of faith in God and constitutes a grave political misstep. Despite the instruction of the prophet, the frightened Achaz turns to Assyria to save the kingdom from its enemies (II Melachim 16:16). At the end of perek 7, Yeshayahu informs Achaz that while Assyria will temporarily mollify the threat of the kingdom's present enemies, the Assyrians

will enter the land of Israel, rule over it, and eventually bring the kingdom to the brink of destruction. This perek describes the events in the Kingdom of Yehuda: the background and description of the attack on Yehuda (1-2); the first prophecy meant to convince Achaz to listen to the prophet and steer clear of impulsive decisions; Achaz's inferred refusal (3-9); following the refusal, Yeshayahu affords him another opportunity by offering him a prophetic sign and Achaz refuses (10-12); following the king's refusal, Yeshayahu delivers a prophecy predicting both salvation from the Aramean attack and the destructive Assyrian control (13-25).

- 1 What political dilemma faces Achaz? How is it described by Yeshayahu and how does he instruct Achaz to proceed?
- 2 In pasuk 10, God turns to Achaz a second time and offers him a sign. Why does the prophet offer Achaz a sign and why does the king refuse the offer? Pay close attention to Achaz's self-righteous response and compare it to Devarim 6:16.
- 3 Despite his refusal to request one, what sign does Yeshayahu offer Achaz?

See the explanation of **Malbim** on pasuk 14:

This sign did not contain a miraculous wonder or an alteration of nature. Rather it is a sign and a symbol [as in Devarim 6:8] “bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol.” Because he was commanded to name the child Immanuel, this will be a sign to remember that God is with us. So too in regard to the other signs he was given, as in naming the child Maher-shalal-chash-baz and the writing of the scroll (8), which were just symbols. The commentators who try and find something miraculous about these signs toiled for naught, because what the prophet will say, from his first to last word in the name of God, this is the true sign of his prophecies' authenticity.

Perek 8

After Achaz's refusal to heed Yeshayahu's directives, a short and cryptic series of prophecies in perek 8 describe the prophet's warnings to the Kingdom of Yehuda as they approach the difficult years of Assyrian control. The Assyrian takeover is described by four images: as a swarm of bees attacking the land from every direction (7:18-19), as a razor shaving the beards and hair of Israel's inhabitants (7:20), as a great river flooding the land (8:7), and as a vulture whose

wingspan covers the land (8:8). Between the prophecies, another son appears named Maher-shalal-chash-baz. Using his name and the symbolic act that accompanies it, Yeshayahu again prophesies the destruction of Damascus and Shomrom (8:1-4). This is followed by rebuke directed towards the inhabitants of Yehuda who supported the Aramean-Ephraim alliance. Pasuk 9 and on includes multiple short prophecies whose exact meaning is debated among the commentators.

- 4 Four sons appear throughout perakim 7-9: Shear-yashuv, Immanuel, Maher-shalal-chash-baz and Peleh-yoetz-el-gibbor-aviad-sar-shalom. Review the references to these sons throughout the unit and try to uncover the additional layer of meaning they add to the messages of Yeshayahu.
- 5 In pesukim 16-18, Yeshayahu describes his life during the dark period of Achaz's rule. See the **midrash** from Breishit Rabba 42 (Vilna edition) below. What significance does it ascribe to the role of the sons and students appearing in this perek?

...R. Yaakov said in R. Acha's name: Yeshayahu said: And I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding His face from the house of Yaakov and I will trust in Him." No hour is as grievous as that whereof it is written, "I will keep My countenance hidden" (Devarim 31:18), and since that hour I have hoped for Him, for He said to me, "it will never be lost from the mouth of their offspring" (31:21). And what did it avail him [Achaz]? "Here stand I and the children the Lord has given me as signs and portents in Israel." Were they then his children? Surely they were his disciples! This, however, teaches us that they were dear to him and so he called them his children. But as soon as he seized the synagogues and schools, all began lamenting "woe." Thus [there was woe-ויהי] in the days of Achaz...

Perek 9: 1-6

At the beginning of the perek, Yeshayahu reflects for the first time upon the great light of salvation cast after the darkness of the Assyrian conquest. He compares this tremendous joy to the joy of a successful harvest and to Gidon the judge's wondrous victory over the Midian army. The second half of this section describes the unique nature of the Davidic dynasty which will eventually replace the Assyrians. It seems that this prophecy was delivered after the

deaths of Tiglat Pileassar and Achaz amidst the great joy surrounding the inauguration of the righteous King Chizkiyahu.

- 6 a) What are the characteristics of the salvation in pesukim 1-4 and what tone do they reflect?
- b) This prophecy closes with the words: “*the zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall bring this to pass.*” This closing also appears in Yeshayahu’s prophecy in II Melachim 19:31. Review the context of that source and what it contributes to the understanding of the salvation in our perek.
- 7 a) Discuss the contrast between the two halves of this unit expressed by the word “back/shoulders” [שכמן] in pasuk 3 and 5. What is the significance of this contrast?
- b) The concept of eternity is emphasized multiple times throughout the description of the monarchy (“*without limit,*” “*now and evermore*”). What is this eternity dependent upon and why is this so? See II Shmuel 8:15 and Yirmiyahu 22:1-5 for further reference.

Appendix

So too it became Yeshayahu’s task to guard the message and to protect it, to keep it in its purity from all admixtures with alien ideas and to seal this by faithfully handing down the living tradition in the hearts of the students “bind up the message, seal the instruction with My disciples.” Thereupon he found it his duty to make the people recognize in him, his children and his pupils whom God has sat up as “signs and portents in Israel,” the contrast to “the ghosts and familiar spirits” who only “chirp and moan” and to whom—following the ways of the nations—the people enquire of the dead on behalf of the living. He testifies for the Torah and for the evidence of its promises that the ghosts and familiar spirits also clothe their words in the form of a word from God but that, born of the night, they bear no light of Truth in them, and that no dawn of fulfillment can be expected of them—“there shall be no dawn.” They do indeed beguile suffering mankind, but all too soon these become undeceived—“he shall rage and revolt against his king and his divine beings”—and then seek a Higher One—“he may turn his face upward”—and find Him not. But the people of the true word of God have always struggled through darkness to the light and have always, even in the deepest shadow of death, treasured rays of the coming dawn, “the people that walked in darkness have seen a brilliant light.”

(Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary on Vayikra 20:27)