

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 47-48

The prophecies for the gentile nations continue in perakim 47-48. Perek 47 includes a short prophecy on the destruction of the Philistine cities, which neighbored Israel to the west. Perek 48 includes a long, detailed prophecy about the destruction of Moab, which neighbored Israel to the east. The prophet describes Moab as an arrogant land, full of self-confidence, and goes on to describe at length the complete destruction of the land and its grief, while listing the names of the cities and areas which will be destroyed. In the prophecy of doom of Yirmiyahu we find selections from previous prophecies of doom about Moab.

Perek 47

- 1 The heading of the prophecy indicates that the enemy which will attack is Egypt, which is found south of Gaza (1). However, from the body of the prophecy we see that the army attacks from the North. Examine the following commentaries and see how they deal with the apparent contradiction:

Rashi: before Pharaoh struck Gaza: When Nevuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in the tenth year of Tzidkiyahu, Pharaoh's army came forth from Egypt, and the Chaldeans withdrew from Jerusalem. Pharaoh heard, invaded Gaza and returned to his land.

Radak: And the water is a parable for the Chaldean army who is from the North and will wash through the land of the Philistines, for Pharaoh attacked Gaza and Nevuchadnezzar will destroy it all.

Yehudah Elitzur: It seems that one of the main points of the perek is a sign of the conquering of Ashkelon by the Babylonians. However, when the book was written Yirmiyahu, or perhaps Baruch ben Neriah, added

the heading which announces: let the reader know that what Yirmiyahu prophesied here – that Ashkelon and the coastal region will be conquered by Nevuchadnezzar – was prophesied “before Pharaoh smote Gaza”, that is to say: in the year 609, after the great fall of Yoshiyahu at Meggido, when Egypt stood at the height of its power and its glory, when Karkhemish was still a strong fortress ready to attack across the Euphrates, and the people of Gaza shuddered in fear from the expected Egyptian conquest. At that point in time, Yirmiyahu stood in Jerusalem and stated: You have faith in Egypt, and rightfully so, for it is truly strong – and could even attack and conquer now its opponents in Philistine. Therefore, I repeat my warning: The one who will in the end conquer the coastal region and Ashkelon, etc. and will threaten the existence of Judah is the “water coming up from the north”, that is Nevuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia. (from Before Pharaoh Struck Gaza in *Yisrael veHaMikra*)

Perek 48

- 2 The first section of the prophecy lists the cities of Moab which will be destroyed (1-8). Note the names of the cities and pay attention to the way that the prophet plays on the names of the cities in a pejorative manner – Cheshbon (2), Madmen (2), Maaleh haLuchit (5), Aro’er (6). As **Rashi** writes on pasuk 2:

in Cheshbon... Madmen: These are place names, and according to their names he mentions their retribution.

- 3 Between the descriptions of the destruction of Moab, which are the central theme of the perek, we find pesukim which describe the sins of Moab. Look at the groups of pesukim listed below and determine the different sins of Moab –
- 7, 11
 - 7, 13
 - 25-26, 29, 42
 - 27

What is the common denominator between the different sins?

- 4 The prophecy of Yirmiyahu about Moab includes portions of and references to a few previous prophecies about Moab: pesukim 45-46 parallel the words of those who speak in parables in Bamidbar 21:27-29, and pasuk 45 parallels the prophecy of Bilaam about Moab in Bamidbar 24:17. Similarly, large parts of Yirmiyahu's prophecy parallel the prophecy of Yishayahu about Moab in Yishayahu 15. With what events do the earlier prophecies in Bamidbar and Yishayahu deal? Try to understand what the significance of quoting these events in the prophecy of Yirmiyahu is.

See also the words of Yirmiyahu in 28:8 and consider the commentary of **Menachem Bola**:

It seems that the two prophets were not speaking about the same calamity – Yishayahu clearly spoke of the conquest of Moab by the king of Assyria in his time, and Yirmiyahu prophesied about the conquest of Moab by Nevuchadnezzar. And it is no wonder that they use similar phrases in their prophecies for there is a single source for the prophecies of true prophets, and they all follow one prophetic tradition... This teaches us that the conquest of Moab by Nevuchadnezzar king of Babylonia will be similar to the conquest of Moab by Sichon the king of the Amorites at the time of the exodus from Egypt. (Da'at Mikra, p.580)

- 5 Metaphors which are connected to the world of grapes and wine are scattered throughout our prophecy – follow the different metaphors in pesukim 11-12, 26 and 32-33. Pay attention to the role of grapes/wine in the different places where they are mentioned and note the connection to the descriptions of the sin and punishment of Moab.

Appendix

The Prophecy about Moab and the Mesha Stele

In addition to the emphasis on geography in this prophecy, the prophecy is unique in the inordinate amount of blame which it places on Moab. “*We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud; even of his haughtiness, and his pride and his wrath...*” (Yishayahu 16:6) There is a particular emphasis on the haughtiness of Moab. Yirmiyahu phrases this in an even more extreme manner: “*We have heard the pride of Moab (he is exceedingly proud) his loftiness, and his arrogance and his pride and the haughtiness of his heart.*” (48:29). Most astonishing is the addition which Yirmiyahu makes to the description of the haughtiness of Moab “*for he has magnified himself*

against the Lord’ (48:26 and 42). When did Moab sin with haughtiness and when did they magnify themselves against the Lord?

We cannot understand these words, just as we cannot understand the long list of places and many other signs and indications which are included in the prophecy, without comparing the prophecy to the Mesha Stele. This comparison will teach us easily that the ancient prophetic traditions which Yishaya and Yirmiya quote are an indignant prophetic response to the words of Mesha in his writings.

Most important is the incomprehensible phrase “*for he has magnified himself against the Lord*” (48:26 and 42). The explicit name of the God of Israel has not been found until now in any gentile record, or any non-Israelite text, except for the Mesha Stele where it says (Lines 17-18) “And from there I took YHWH's vessels, and I presented them before Kemosh's face” Even though the prophets were apparently not comfortable with the idea of the local temple or pulpit which was found in the city of Nevo in Transjordan, it still angered them when the Moabites destroyed it in the name of Kemosh their god. They took the temple vessels to the Temple of Kemosh, and when the king of Moab engraved this on the stone monument in his kingdom for all to see, and he wrote the explicit name of God in all the haughty words he wrote, this definitely caused those who believed in God to react in a way similar to the reaction of Chizkiaya and his supporters some 100 years later, that this is “*trouble, reviling and blasphemy*” (Yishayahu 37:3). In fact it seems, Moab “*has magnified himself against the Lord*”, literally. And what is: “*We have heard the pride of Moab (he is exceedingly proud) his loftiness, and his arrogance and his pride and the haughtiness of his heart.*”? This means: that stele which speaks so haughtily: “because he (Kemosh) has delivered me from all kings, and because he has made me look down on all my enemies. (line 4)...In my days he said so. But I looked down on him and on his house, and Israel has been defeated; it has been defeated forever! (line 7)... I built Karchah.. I have built its gates and I have built its towers... I have built Beth-Bamot ... I built Bezer... I reigned... And I built Beth-Medeba... (lines 21-30) Thirteen times the haughty Moabite king repeats the word “I”. No wonder that this blasphemous monument in Dibon was an expression of arrogance and haughtiness in the eyes of the prophets of Israel. After reading this, we are no longer surprised by the special attention which Moab receives. We understand that the geographic-historic basis is important in the Mesha stele; it is a victory monument which details the conquests of a king and his building and restoration projects, and therefore it is natural that it will list the places connected with these events. A prophet who wants to match his

rebuke to the haughty contempt of Mesha, will also use a geographical character to his writing in a satirical-parodical style which is reminiscent of the monument. Approximately 15 places are mentioned on the Mesha Stele. Twelve of them are places which are located north of Arnon, in other words within the borders of Israel. In Yirmiyahu 48:28 about 19 places are listed, 15 of them located north of Arnon. The list of the places in the text is therefore parallel in its division and in its nature to the list which appears on the Mesha Stele. In addition, most of the names which are listed on the stele are also found in the words of Yirmiyahu. These are: Nevo, Kiryatayim, Chronayim, Aro'er, Dibon, Yahtza, Beit Divlatayim, Biet Me'on and Keriyot (9 out of 15).

From our standpoint, there is much interest in what is written in line 7 of the Mesha Stele: “and Israel has been defeated; it has been defeated forever!” The area of the victories of Mesha was limited to the southern Transjordan region, and Mesha had no possibility of actually affecting the kingdom of Israel. Even so, it may not be excessive boasting but rather another link in the historical enmity of hundreds of years between the two nations. It seems, therefore, that the early song of those who speak in parables; *“You are undone people of Kemosh... Cheshbon is perished...”* (Bamidbar 21:29-30) was a refrain in the mouths of the people of Israel to the great chagrin of the Moabites, who would have liked to forget their great loss in the past. Now, with the defeat of Israel, the victorious king was quick to take the words of the Israelite song to say: No longer will it be said about Moab *“You are undone people of Kemosh... Cheshbon is perished...”* rather it will be Israel which will be lost – “Israel has been defeated; it has been defeated forever!” The earlier prophecy of Yirmiyahu (48:8,36) answers back the Moabites *“the valley shall also be ruined, and the plain shall be destroyed.”* *“The abundance that he has gained has perished”* - meaning that Moab will be the one that in the end will be destroyed. Therefore, the text repeats at the end of the prophecy the whole song of those who speak in parables (48:45-46) *“For a fire has gone out of Cheshbon a flame from the midst of Sichon,... Woe to these O Moab! The people of Kemosh are perishing; for your sons are taken into captivity, and your daughters into servitude.”* The intention of the prophet is to say that the ancient lament (Bamidbar 21:27-30) is still powerful, and even more so against Moab who is destined to be destroyed. The extended war between the people of Israel and of Moab was accompanied by, as is expected in history, a war of words and generations-long hostility.

(Freely translated from Yehudah Elitzur, Masa Moab uKetovet Mesha in *Yisrael veHaMikra*)

A proposed translation of the Mesha Stele, by K. C. Hanson

(Adapted from Albright 1969:320-21)

I am Mesha, son of Kemosh[-yatti], the king of Moab, the Dhibanite. My father was king over Moab for thirty years, and I became king after my father. And I made this high-place for Kemosh in Qarcho . . . because he has delivered me from all kings, and because he has made me look down on all my enemies.

Omri was the king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab for many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land. And his son reigned in his place; and he also said, "I will oppress Moab!" In my days he said so. But I looked down on him and on his house, and Israel has been defeated; it has been defeated forever! And Omri took possession of the whole land of Medeba, and he lived there in his days and half the days of his son: forty years. But Kemosh restored it in my days.

And I built Baal-Meon, and I built a water reservoir in it. And I built Qiryaten. And the men of Gad lived in the land of Atarot from ancient times; and the king of Israel built Atarot for himself, and I fought against the city and captured it. And I killed all the people of the city as a sacrifice for Kemosh and for Moab. And I brought back the fire-hearth of his uncle from there; and I brought it before the face of Kemosh in Qerioit, and I made the men of Sharon live there, as well as the men of Maharit.

And Kemosh said to me, "Go, take Nebo from Israel." And I went in the night and fought against it from daybreak until midday, and I took it and I killed the whole population: seven thousand male subjects and aliens, and female subjects, aliens, and servant girls. For I had put it to the ban for Ashtar Kemosh. And from there I took Yahweh's vessels, and I presented them before Kemosh's face.

And the king of Israel had built Yahaz, and he stayed there throughout his campaign against me; and Kemosh drove him away before my face. And I took two hundred Moabite men, its entire division, and I led it up to Yahaz. And I have taken it in order to add it to Dhiban. I have built Qarcho, the wall of the woods, and the wall of the citadel; and I have built its gates; and I have built its towers; and I have built the king's house; and I have made the double reservoir for the spring in the innermost part of the city.



The Mesha Stele, as displayed in the Louvre Museum

(Wikipedia / Henri Sivonen)

Now the innermost part of the city had no cistern, in Qarcho, and I said to all the people, "Each one of you shall make a cistern in his house." And I cut the moat for Qarcho by using Israelite prisoners. I have built Aroer, and I constructed the military road in Arnon. I have built Beth-Bamot, for it had been destroyed. I have built Bezer, for it lay in ruins. And the men of Dhiban stood in battle formation, for all Dhiban were in subjection. And I am the king over the hundreds in the towns that I have added to the land. And I have built Beth-Medeba and Beth-Diblaten and Beth-Baal-Meon, and I brought there . . . flocks of the the land. And Hauranen, there lived . . .

Kemosh said to me, "Go down, fight against Hauranen!" I went down . . . and Kemosh restored it in my days . . .

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מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רעננערט
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