

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



This learning is dedicated in memory of our dear parents:
Yoseph & Felice Chajmovic

Perek 5

In this perek we reach the climax of the series of symbolic acts to which we were introduced in the last perek. This perek includes a difficult, long and complex symbolic act (1-4) as well as the meaning of the act (5-10). The purpose of this act is to symbolize the conquest of the city and the bitter fate of its citizens.

- 1 Yechezkel is commanded to shave his hair and divide it into three parts, symbolizing the bitter fate destined for the citizens of Jerusalem. What does each of these parts symbolize?

Study **Rashi**: *a sharp sword* – symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's sword: *smite* – the city with the sword: *round about her* - around that tile, symbolizing that the Chaldeans will capture and kill those who escape from around Jerusalem: *And the third you shall scatter to the wind* - symbolizing the exiles who would go to Egypt, and Yohanan the son of Koreah and his companions: *I will draw out a sword*





after them - that Nebuchadnezzar went and conquered Egypt and they were killed there: *and bind them in your skirts* – these are the few that will be exiled to Babylonia and will survive: *and of them again you will take* – of these few: *and burn them in the fire* – symbolizing Ahav the son of Koloya and Tzidkiyahu the son of Maasiya who were burned by the king of Babylonia.

- 2 “Thus says the Lord God: *This is Jerusalem I have set her in the midst of nations and countries are round about her*” (5). The nations surrounding Jerusalem are mentioned seven times in this prophecy (5-8, 14-15). Examine the various references and focus on the role of the nations in the description of God’s mercy toward Jerusalem and in the description of the city’s sins and punishment. What was the original mission of Jerusalem and what actually occurred?

Examine the midrash: When God was about to destroy it ... the angels said to God: Master of the Universe, is this not Jerusalem of which it says “*This is Jerusalem I have set her in the midst of nations*”? He said to them: They have rebelled against my laws and did **greater wickedness than the nations**. (Pesikta Rabbati 27)

Radak: I placed her citizens there for their own good because she is choicest of all the lands, beautiful in her heights, joy of all the earth. She is the center of civilization and therefore her air and climate are the best of all the lands. Her citizens should have taken the straight path and followed my good laws, but they rebelled against them and did greater wickedness than the nations that surround them.

- 3 The concept of following laws is repeated several times in the prophecy (6-10). Pay attention to the “measure for measure” it conceals.



Perek 6

While the previous prophecy dealt with Jerusalem and her citizens, in the prophecy of perek 6, the prophet turns to the mountains of Israel and prophesies a major calamity for them. Yechezkel specifies the sins for which the nation is being punished with destruction and exile, focusing on the sin of idolatry whose roots lay in the long years of rule of Menashe, King of Judah.

- ④ “*Son of man, turn your face toward the mountains of Israel and prophesy against them*” (2). This prophecy begins with an unusual turning toward the mountains of Israel (unique to the book of Yechezkel). Why does the prophet turn toward the mountains in his chastisement concerning idolatry? Examine the words of **Radak**:

Because they worshipped on the high mountains and on the hills to gods that they designated, and beneath every luxuriant tree in streams and valleys, He said that he (Yechezkel) should prophesy against them, as if he were speaking to them, because the high places, altars, and sun images that were built upon them would be destroyed and demolished.

Examine Vayikra 18:28, and try to offer an alternative significance to the prophetic turning to the mountains.



- 5 a) Compare the description of the sins and punishments in our perek with the description of the sins in the portion of disasters in Vayikra 26, pesukim 30-33 and 43, and focus on the linguistic and contextual similarities. Try to understand why the prophet describes the sins and punishments in language similar to that of the portion of disasters.
- b) Study the continuation of the portion of disasters in Vayikra (44-45) – How does this addition complete and mitigate the harsh prophecy of our chapter?
- 6 In the prophesies of calamity in perakim 5 & 6, the phrase “*And they will know that I God have spoken*” is repeated several times with slight variations (5:13, 15, 17; 6:7, 10, 13, 14)
- a) What is the purpose of the punishments that will be visited upon the people in these pesukim, and how will this purpose be realized through them? See especially the punishment in perek 6 pesukim 6-7, 13.
- b) According to the principle that arises from the pesukim above and from the dedicative prophecy (2:5), try to understand why Yechezkel provides so many and such detailed descriptions of the disaster that is about to come.



Appendix

“This is Jerusalem I have set her in the midst of nations”

In the prophecy of chastisement in perek 5, Jerusalem is described as having been placed by God “*in the midst of nations*” for the purpose of influencing the surrounding nations for the better. But Jerusalem was a disappointment and didn’t even perform according to the laws of the surrounding nations. The plain meaning of this description places Jerusalem in the center whether for good or bad. The Midrash expresses this view of the centrality of Jerusalem in the world:

Just as the umbilicus is situated in the center of man, so the Land of Israel is the umbilicus of the world, as it says, “*situated upon the umbilicus of the world*” (*Yehezkel 38:12*). The Land of Israel is in the center of the world; Jerusalem is in the center of the Land of Israel; the Beit haMikdash is in the center of Jerusalem; the sanctuary is in the center of the Beit HaMikdash; the Ark is in the center of the sanctuary; and the foundation stone, upon which the world was founded, is before the sanctuary. Shlomo, who was wise, was aware of the roots that came from it and spread to the whole world. He planted all kinds of trees upon them. That is why he said “*I made for myself gardens and orchards*”. (Tanhuma (Buber) Kedoshim 10)

This interpretation is based on another pasuk from the book of Yehezkel (38:12) where Jerusalem is described as “*the umbilicus of the world*” (even though apparently this is not the plain meaning of the pasuk). In this vein, **Rashi** in our perek interprets “*I have set her in the midst of nations*” – in the center of the world. **Radak** further expanded on this idea in his commentary on our pasuk as brought above.

continued >

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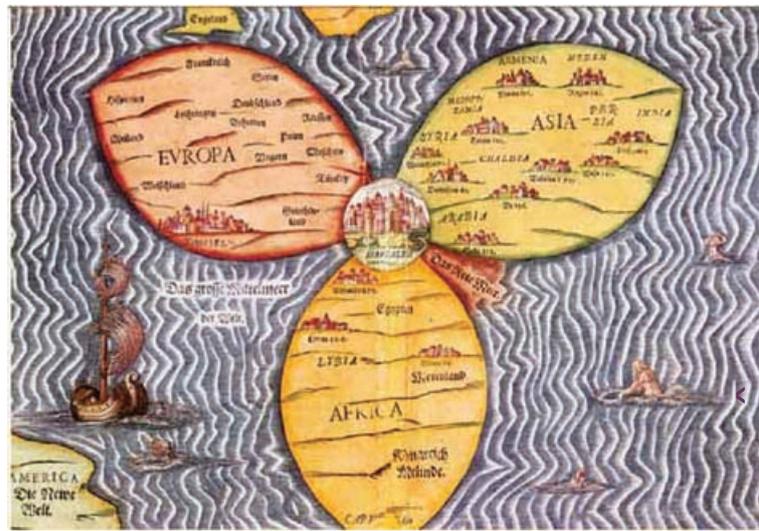
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With the passage of time, this idea whose roots lie on the spiritual and moral plane was transferred to the physical plane, and Jerusalem was described as the geographical center of the world. During the Crusades, this idea of Jerusalem as the center of the world became almost universally accepted. In the thirteenth century, Jerusalem was first placed in the center of world maps such as the Psalms Map (1250), the Abstorf Map, and the Hereford Map (1283). Thus the geographical centrality of Jerusalem crystallized into a cartographic rule. The best known of these maps is the Bunting Map, drawn by Bunting in Germany in 1585 in which the world appears as a clover, the three leaves of which are the three continents – Europe, Asia and Africa – and connecting them, as the center of the world, is Jerusalem.



The Bunting Map (Cloverleaf Map) – Germany 1585

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