

# MATAN AL HAPEREK

## A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

### Yeshayahu Perakim 21-22

#### Perek 21

This chapter is comprised of three additional prophecies regarding the gentile nations: The "Desert of the Sea Prophecy" (pesukim 1-10) foresees the fall of Babylonia; The "Dumah Prophecy" (pesukim 11-12) tells of Se'ir and is one of the most obscure prophecies in the book of Yeshayahu; The "In The Steppe Prophecy" (pesukim 13-17) tells of the defeat of the Steppe tribes and their subsequent wanderings.

- 1 **Desert of the Sea Prophecy:** Note the nature of the attack and the first image described: "*Like the gales that race through the Negev*"(1). Review the vivid account of the attack in verses 4-5 and see Rashi's comments below:

*Let the watchman watch*—Hold up the lamp.

*Eat and drink*—Amidst their eating and drinking that they called out "*Up, officers!*"

Many commentators, including Rashi, understand this prophecy as a prediction of Persia's bloodless conquest of Babylonia in the midst of their feasting (described in Daniel perek 5).

- 2 a) Yeshayahu's prophetic experiences are described here at length (3-4). What is the source of these experiences and what do they teach us about the prophet? In this context, compare Tehillim 55:4-6 with Iyov 4:13-16.
- b) Yeshayahu is commanded to appoint a sentry or to become a sentry (6-9). The prophet's role as a sentry is also mentioned in Yechezkel 33:2-7 and Chavakuk 2:1. Discuss the various roles of the sentry in each source and the impact they have on the role of the prophet.

## Perek 22

This chapter includes two critical prophecies addressed to the people of Israel. The "Valley of Vision Prophecy" describes Yerushalayim's state in the face of the Assyrian attack during the period of Chizkiyahu. The prophecy harshly denounces the nation for depending too heavily on human efforts and too little on God; for trusting in the city's fortifications and in their preparations for siege, including the building of the Shiloach pool. The second prophecy is directed toward "Shevna, in charge of the palace", who was a high ranking royal clerk who lived during the time of Yeshayahu and describes his loss of rank as a punishment for boastful behavior.

3 The first section (1-3) presents a sharp contrast between two groups of people living in Yerushalayim. What is expressed by the rise to the rooftops in pasuk 1? (See Shoftim 9:51; II Shmuel 18:24; Yeshayahu 9:3)

4 a) Pesukim 8-11 harshly criticize the city's preparations for the siege. What is the emphasis of the criticism? Notice the opposite use of the verbs "הבטה" and "ראיה" in verses 8 and 11. How is the verb "עשה" used in verse 11?

b) In pesukim 12-14 the prophet once again contrasts two extreme situations – happiness on the one hand and crying and eulogizing on the other. What kind of perspective produces the “eat and drink for tomorrow we die” attitude? What criticism is expressed regarding the nation’s conduct? Consider the connection between this criticism and the one expressed in the previous section.

5 The prophecy regarding Shevna is comprised of two sections: *Rebuke* (15-19) and *his replacement with Elyakim* (20-25).

a) “O you who have hewn your tomb on high, O you who have hollowed out for yourself an abode in the cliff” (16). What two elements describe Shevna’s tomb and how are they criticized? Recall the symbolic importance of height in Yeshayahu’s prophecies. How is his fate an expression of the “measure for measure” principle of punishment?

b) The Talmud also criticizes Shevna’s behavior:

When Sancherev came and besieged Yerushalayim, Shevna wrote a note and shot it by arrow (over the city walls to Sancherev): "Shevna and his party are willing to make peace (and submit to you), but Chizkiyahu and his party are not willing to make peace.”... He went to dig himself a grave in the burial plots of David’s household. The prophet (Yeshayahu) came and said to him: "What have you here, and whom do you have here that you have hewn out a tomb for yourself?" (Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 26a)

What is this midrash’s criticism of Shevna's grave digging? Review II Melachim 18:18. How does this reference to Elyakim and Shevna serve as important background information for the midrash?

## Appendix

At the end of the 19th century, the French archeologist Charles Clermont-Ganneau discovered an inscription on the outside of a tombstone from the First Temple period in the Silwan neighborhood located directly across from the City of David. Clermont-Ganneau uprooted the inscription and today it can be found in the British Museum in London. Clermont-Ganneau and those who followed him did not succeed in deciphering the inscription. The mystery was finally solved in the mid-20th century by the Israeli archeologist Nahman Avigad:

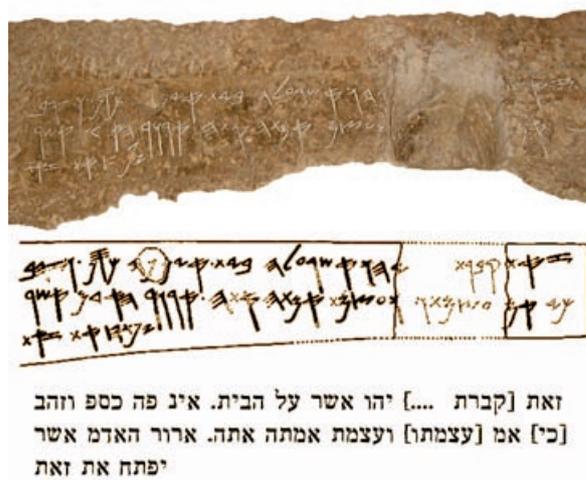
"זאת קברת... יהו אשר על הבית. אין פה כסף וזהב כי אם עצמתו ועצמת אמתה אתה. ארור האדם אשר יפתח את זאת"

("This is buried... *yehu* controller of the house. There is no silver or gold here but only his bones and the bones of his maidservant...Cursed be the one who opens this.)

The inscription describes the burial place of a high-ranking officer of the Judean Monarchy and curses anyone who tries to open the grave to search for gold. The name of the officer does not appear in the inscription, but Clermont-Ganneau (who identified the words "controller of the house") first suggested identifying the anonymous officer with Shevna (referred to as *Shevanyahu* in I Divrei Hayamim 15). The inscription was found by an impressive and grandiose grave, built differently than the ones that neighbor it: the grave site resides high upon the hill, protrudes from the rock, and has marks which indicate that a pyramid once stood atop it. Yeshayahu describes Shevna as a man who built himself a tomb, and monolithic tombs of the type found by the inscription must be built before the person passes away.

Based on the lettering, which is similar in shape and style to the Shiloach inscription, the Clermont-Ganneau inscription was dated to the period of Yeshayahu, strengthening the argument that this grave was in fact the grave of Shevna, rebuked by Yeshayahu for building his own tomb: *"What have you here, and whom have you here, that you have hewn out a tomb for yourself here? O you who have hewn your tomb on high, O You who have hollowed out for yourself an abode in the cliff."*

In Tractate Sanhedrin, Chazal describe Shevna as the head of the rebellious opposition in Yerushalayim. The Talmud describes his bitter fate: Shevna, who had intended to approach the king of Assyria with the majority of Yerushalayim's inhabitants to surrender, is instead captured by the Assyrians. They cruelly tie his body to the tail of their horses and drag him to his death around the city of Yerushalayim.



Photograph: Tamar Hayardeni