

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



Perek 19

The series of prophetic allegories continues, and in perek 19 the prophet Yechezkel describes the process of political deterioration in Judah in its last years using an allegory from the world of plants and animals. Unlike other allegories, the purpose of this allegory is defined at its beginning and end – it is a lamentation for the princes of Israel. The first part of the lamentation (2-9) includes an animal based allegory which describes a lioness and her cubs. The young lions represent the last kings of Judah – “*Judah is a lion cub*” (Bereshit 49:9), who are trapped by foreigners. The second part (10-14) includes an additional allegory from the world of plants, which laments the fate of Judah and Tzidkiyahu, its last king.

- 1 The two cubs are characterized by the fact that they have learned to devour man (3, 6). What is the meaning of this characterization? Examine Rashi and Radak to see the differences in their explanations:

Rashi: *it devoured men*- He robbed Israel... and according to the allegory, any beast that tasted human flesh will always provoke humans.

Radak: *and it learned to catch the prey, it devoured men* – this cub learned to catch prey until it devoured man, for the lion or cub mostly preys on animals and only occasionally on man. So Yehoachaz fought with one greater than him, meaning Egypt, as is written in Melachim, and for this reason Pharaoh Necho imprisoned him.





- 2 The description of the second cub is longer and more developed than that of the first cub. Compare the two descriptions and discuss the advantages of the second cub. Pay attention to the description of his development and capture. The description of the first cub is appropriate to be the description of Yechoachaz – see Melachim II 23:31-34. The second cub apparently represents Yehoyakim – see Divrei Hayamim II 36:5-7.
- 3 There is much similarity between the allegories in our perek and the allegory in perek 17 – both describe the end of the kingdom of Judah and use imagery from the world of plants and animals. Both describe the kings of Egypt, Babylonia and Judah. In both we have the image of the withering vine. Based on this comparison, note the differences between them in the reason for the punishment (where it is mentioned and why), and in the conclusion of the allegory. Try to explain these differences based on the different roles which the allegories play. Pay attention to the opening and closing of the allegory in perek 19 (1 and 14).

Perek 20

This is Yechezkel's third prophecy to the Elders of Israel who come to ask him for God's word (the previous prophecies were in perakim 8 and 14). In response to the Elders, Yechezkel gives a unique and broad historical survey of the nation of Israel from its beginnings until his time. This survey begins and concludes with the words of God to the elders *"As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you"* (3, 31), and includes four historical stages which are described in a set format: making a covenant with God and revelation, warning the nation, the sinning of the nation and the desire of God to wipe them out, and finally mitigation of the punishment. This description sheds new light on a few different periods in the history of the nation. In the second part of the prophecy (32-44) the prophet turns to the future and describes the redemption in a unique way.



- 4 The first part describes Israel's sojourn in Egypt (5-9). Note the novel way in which the prophet describes the character of the period of exile in Egypt in his prophecy. These descriptions are the basis for some of the midrashim about the story of the exile from Egypt in the Torah:

Mechilta De Rabbi Yishmael Pischa 5- What, then, does Scripture mean by saying: "*But they hearkened not unto Moshe*"? (Shemot 6:9) Merely that it was hard for them to part with their idols. And so it is also said: "*And I said to them: Cast away every man the detestable things of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt*" (Yechezkel 20:7); and it says further: "*But they rebelled against Me and would not hearken, etc... But I wrought for My name's sake,*" etc. (ibid. 20:8-9) This is what is meant by the passage: "*And the Lord spoke unto Moshe and unto Aharon, and gave them a charge unto the children of Israel*" (Shemot 6:13) – charging them to give up idol worship.

- 5 The second part describes the nation's travel in the desert (10-17).
- a) Yechezkel describes two categories of commandments: laws and statutes, and Shabbat. What is the purpose of each category according to the text? Try to understand why Yechezkel equates the commandment of Shabbat with all the other laws and statutes.
- b) Identify the events in the Torah which are hinted at in this section. Where and when did they occur – desecration of the Shabbat, rebellion, the punishment of not entering the land? In light of this, what is the trend in the prophetic descriptions, and can we see this as an "historical" description?
- 6 The third part deals with the lives of the generation of the children in the desert, their sins and punishments.
- a) In pasuk 23 the punishment of exile is mentioned. This punishment also appears using similar language, in the historical description presented in Tehillim 106:25-27. However, this type of punishment is not mentioned in the Torah. See the **Radak**:



And it seems to me, that is what was said (after the sin of the spies) *“The Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived on the mountain came down and smote them and crushed them [pursuing them] until Hormah.”* (Bamidbar 14:45) As well as what they said, *“The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the south, heard...and took from them a captive”* (Bamidbar 21:1)

A different explanation is given in the **Midrash Tanchuma**:

“The entire community raised an uproar and began to shout” (Bamidbar 14:1) ...The community cried on the night of Tisha B’Av. The Holy One Blessed be He said ‘you cried for no reason, I will fix this night as a time for crying for all generations’. From that time there was a decree that the Temple would be destroyed, and that Israel would be exiled amongst the nations *“Then He lifted his hand against them [in an oath] to cast them down in the wilderness, and to cast down their descendants among the nations, and to scatter them among the lands.”* (Tehillim 106: 26 - 27).

About which exile is the pasuk speaking according to each commentary?

b) A different type of difficulty arises in pasuk 25 – which “not good” laws did God give to Israel? See **Rashi**:

I delivered them into the hands of their temptation to stumble over their iniquity,... Those gifts that I legislated for them to hallow for Me every firstborn delivered them into the hands of their temptation: to pass those firstborn to the Molech. Hence the statutes that are not good.

See also pasuk 31, and Yirmiyahu’s rebuke (he was the same generation as Yechezkel) in Yirmiyahu 7:31.

- 7 Note the special character of the redemption as described in the second half of Yechezkel’s prophecy (32-44), which is like a second exodus from Egypt. Pay attention to the reason for the redemption and its results, the limited role of repentance, the way in which the redemption will come to the nation, and the nation’s reaction to the redemption. Notice as well the connection between the fear of desecrating God’s name which is interwoven in the perek and the sanctification of God’s name in the description of the redemption.



Appendix

‘A slave who is sold by his master’

Yechezkel’s prophetic-historic survey is given within the framework of a response to the Elders of Israel who came to ask him for God’s word. However, the text does not provide a connection between the frame and the content. The Midrash fills in this gap by telling us the claim of the elders who are in exile, and thus reveals to us the response to this which is hidden in the words of Yechezkel.

“*I am the Lord your God*” – why was this said, as the text has already said “*I am the Lord your God who delivered you from the Land of Egypt*”? What do we learn from another “*I am the Lord your God*”? That Israel should not say – why did God give us the commandments? So that we would do them and be rewarded. So we will not do them and not receive the reward! Similarly, the people of Israel said to Yechezkel, “*that certain men of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord and sat before me*” (20:1) they said to him: Yechezkel, a slave whose master has sold him has not left his possession? He said to them: Yes! They said to him: Since God has sold us to the nations of the world we have left his possession. He said to them: A slave who has been sold by his master on the condition that he be returned, has he left the master’s possession? “*But what enters your mind shall not come about, what you say, 'Let us be like the nations, like the families of the lands, to serve wood and stone.' As I live, says the Lord God, surely with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with poured out fury, will I reign over you.*” (Yechezkel 20:32-33) *Mighty hand* refers to the disease among the cattle, as it is written: “*Behold the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe pestilence upon your cattle which are in the field...*” *Outstretched arm* implies the sword, as it is written: “*His drawn sword in his hand, outstretched over Jerusalem.*” *And with poured out fury* refers to hunger. After I bring these three disasters upon you, one after the other, then I shall rule over you against your will. Therefore it is written again, “*I am the Lord your God*”.

(Free translation of the Sifre Bamidbar Parshat Shelach, Piska 115)

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