

# MATAN AL HAPEREK

## The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



In loving memory of my dear mother Esme Hadassah Aharonson bat Yosef Dov and Rivka Rachel Imber, who passed away on Tisha B'av 5762

### Perek 21

In Perek 21 we have a number of prophecies which are difficult to understand, and the connection between them is unclear as well. The perek opens with the fire which will burn in the forest of the Negev (1-5) and proceeds to a prophecy about the sword which will come to the Land of Israel and Jerusalem (6-12). The next prophecy continues the description of the sword which symbolizes the Babylonian army, which will cut from the North to the South (23-32). The perek ends with taking vengeance on Israel's enemies who are happy at their misfortune – Bnei Ammon. This ending parallels the beginning of the perek giving a description of the sword and fire which will finish off Bnei Ammon (33-37).

- 1 The first two prophecies in the perek (2-5 and 6-12) have parallel language and content. Explain the relationship between the two prophecies in light of the nation's claim in pasuk 5, which divides between them. Use **Rashi**:

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**Is he not an inventor of parables:** when I prophesy to them in language of parable and riddle, such as a forest and a fire consuming [trees] moist and dry.

**Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying:** Prophesy to them a clear prophecy. What I said to you, “Set your face southward,” I explain to you: “Set your face toward Jerusalem.”

Think about how the other differences between the prophecies are explained by this basic difference.

- 2 The sword which is mentioned in the second prophecy is central to the third prophecy as well (13-22), and is mentioned in the opening of the fourth prophecy (23-32). Discuss the development of the description of the sword from the second prophecy (8-10) through the fourth (24), paying attention to whose sword it is in each place.
- 3 The final prophecy completes the idea in the beginning of the perek: the sword which was unsheathed in the second prophecy (8-10) is returned to the sheath in the final prophecy (35), and the fire which burned in the first prophecy burns as well at the end of the perek (36-37). For whom is the prophecy intended in each place? See the words of the **Radak**:

**And concerning their reproach:** That they shamed and reviled Israel, and rejoiced at their exile from their land. Therefore he prophesied to them concerning their reproach that the sword which was sharpened for Israel was unsheathed for them as well... For it faced Bnei Ammon and Jerusalem and fate felled it on Jerusalem and destroyed it, and it returned to its land and did not go to Bnei Ammon. Therefore, Bnei Ammon shamed Israel in their exile.





## Perek 22

Along with the approaching destruction, comes the trial during which Jerusalem will be judged for all of its sins from time immemorial. Perek 22 is a harsh indictment against Jerusalem. It is divided into three parts: the first part (1-16) includes a detailed list of Jerusalem's different sins. The second part (17-22) describes the punishment – the destruction of the city – using imagery of silver smelting in a forge. In the third part (23-31) there is another detailed list of the sinners and sins committed in the city.

- 4 The list of the sins of Jerusalem is detailed and varied. This list parallels the prohibitions which appear in Parshat Kedoshim – Vayikra perakim 19 and 20. (Compare for example Yechezkel 22:7-8 with Vayikra 19:3, see also question 5) What is the meaning of this parallel structure and what does it teach us about the status of Jerusalem? Pay attention to the framework of the text in Vayikra 19:1-2 and 20:24, 26.
- 5 The central sin which is interwoven throughout the list is bloodshed. In pesukim 2-4 murder is mentioned in a general sense, and Jerusalem is even called a "bloody city". In the continuation, several forms of bloodshed are enumerated which derive from various moral degenerations. Trace the phrase "for shedding blood" which appears three times in the prophecy:
  - a) Who sheds blood in pasuk 6 and what is the social distortion which is presented here? In contrast, what is the source of the bloodshed in pasuk 12?
  - b) "*In thee there are men that did carry slander (Hebrew: rachil) to shed blood*" (9). The prohibition of slander appears in the Torah in Parshat Kedoshim (Vayikra 19:16) where it is connected to bloodshed as well – "*You shall not stand by [the shedding of] your fellow's blood*". What is the connection



between these two prohibitions? Use the **Ibn Ezra** on Vayikra: (Note: The word for slander in Hebrew comes from *rachil*, a peddler. A gossip is like a peddler, going door to door hawking their merchandise.)

Rachil: ...that is an informer, for the peddler copies – buys from this one and sells to that one, and if he is a gossipmonger he reveals what he has heard from one to the other.

**You shall not stand by [the shedding of] your fellow's blood:** Do not join with men who shed blood, for it is known that many have been murdered and killed for slandering, and Doeg the Edomite is a proof of the connection between slandering and bloodshed.

- 6 After the detailed listing of the sins in the indictment of Jerusalem comes the punishment. The house of Israel which has sinned is compared to the dross which is found in silver, and as a punishment it will be placed in the forge. This difficult comparison is comparable to the image in the prophecy of Yeshayahu about Jerusalem (1:21-26), where he describes the sin and punishment. Compare the role of the forge in the two prophecies, noting the severity of the prophecy of Yechezkel as compared to the prophecy of Yeshayahu.
- 7 The third part of the prophecy contains a detailed list of the sins of the city. Unlike the first list, the focus here is on the sinners and not the sins.
  - a) The list of the sinners includes the spiritual-political leaders – the priests, the ministers, the prophets and in the end reaches the simple people of the land. What is the connection between each group of leaders and their sins?
  - b) The prophecy ends with an unsuccessful search for a worthy leader to save the people (30-31). What is the main characteristic of the worthy leader, which is the opposite of that found in the current failing leadership? The description of the leader here is similar to the description of Moshe in Tehillim 106:23. See also the description in the prophecy to the false prophets earlier in 13:5.





## Appendix

In perek 21 Yechezkel mentions three types of divination which Nevuchadnezzar will need to use to decide which way to turn when he stands at the crossroads. Should he turn east and go first to Rabbat Bnei Ammon, or turn west and first attack Jerusalem. The kings of Babylonia were famous for their devotion to all types of magic and fortunetelling, so much so that they did not make even the smallest political or military move without first asking the gods through divination. Not only that, but the common custom was to repeat the fortunetelling three times to ensure the reliability of the results. The basic meaning of the verb k.l.k.l (21:26) is to shake. We hypothesize that the divination with arrows was accomplished as follows: The priest would fill the quiver with arrows without arrowheads which had notes attached to them on which were written different solutions to the question which was being posed to the gods. The quiver would be shaken strongly and the first arrow which would fall out would indicate the answer of the gods. "Terafim" appear to be idols which are used in fortunetelling. "Looking in the liver" was one of the most important methods of divination in the Ancient Near East. In ancient times, the liver was thought to be the seat of emotions and it was believed that the gods wrote the answers to the priest's questions on the liver of the sacrificed animal. From the midrash we see that this custom still existed in the times of the Rabbis: "Like that Arab who would slaughter sheep and look at the liver." (Kohelet Rabbah 12:8) (Free translation of Yaakov Klein, Olam HaTanach for Yechezkel)

The meaning of the prophecy is that God convinced the king of Babylonia to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple by controlling his magic and divination. A similar idea is expressed by the Rabbis in their description of the destruction of the second Temple:

He [the Emperor] sent against them Nero the Caesar. As he was coming he shot an arrow towards the east, and it fell in Jerusalem. He then shot one towards the west, and it again fell in Jerusalem. He shot towards all four points of the compass, and each time it fell in Jerusalem. (Gittin 56a)