

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

Michah prophesied to Israel and Judah in the second half of the eighth century BCE. He is the last of the “four prophets who prophesied at the same time” and we can see a similarity between his prophecies and those of Yishayahu, who came slightly before him. Michah is called “*the Morashtite*” from the name of his village, Moreshet, which was in the area of Beit Guvrin. Michah rebukes Judah for the social injustice which has spread among them, and the ruling classes of Judah and Israel for the oppression of the lower classes and for taking their inheritance. In addition, he foresees the destruction of Samaria by Assyria and the Assyrian domination of Judah in the time of Chizkiyahu.

Perek 1

Sefer Michah begins with a prophecy of the destruction of Samaria and the calamity which will befall Judah (2-9). At the beginning of the prophecy there is a description of the revelation of God as a witness and a judge (2-4), afterward the sins which are the grounds for the case are listed (5) and in the end the verdict is described (6-7).

1.

The description of the revelation of God as a witness and a judge (2-4) is accompanied by a disturbance in the elements of nature.

a | Similar descriptions appear in other places in Tanakh and they emphasize the universal aspect of revelation. Compare this to the description in Tehillim 97:2-4. What is the purpose of the revelation there? In light of this, what surprise awaits in the continuation of the description in pesukim 5-9? Why does God reveal Himself in the prophecy to Michah?

b | Study the linguistic connection between the description of the revelation in pesukim 3-4 and the description of the sin and punishment in pesukim 5-7: What is the function of the “high

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places” (3,5), the “pouring” (4,6) and the “fire” (4,7) in each section? What is the purpose of the disturbance in the elements of nature, in light of these comparisons?

c | In pesukim 10-12 the progress of the Assyrian enemy is tracked through six cities to the seventh city which is the central one: Jerusalem. The prophet uses plays on words to show the events which will come to some of the cities:

<p>לא יצאה <i>Lo Yatza</i> Did not come forth</p>	<p>יוֹשֶׁבֶת שַׁפִּיר <i>Yoshevet Shafir</i> Inhabitant of Shafir</p>	<p>בְּבֵית לְעֶפְרָה <i>BeVeit le'Afra</i> In Beit Le'afra</p>	<p>בֵּית גַּת <i>BeGat</i> In Gat</p>
<p>יוֹשֶׁבֶת צֶאֱנָן <i>Yoshevet Tza'anan</i> The inhabitant of Tza'anan</p>	<p>עֶרְיָה בִּשְׁמָה <i>Erya Voshet</i> In nakedness and shame</p>	<p>עָפַר הַתְּפִלְשִׁי <i>Afar hitpalashi</i> Roll in the dust</p>	<p>אֶל תְּגִידוּ <i>Al tagidu</i> Declare it not</p>

What does the rhetoric effect of the word play add to the message of the prophet?

d | Note the geographical direction of the Assyrian campaign – from the Judean plains west of Jerusalem toward Jerusalem. Contrast this with the direction of God’s travel in pesukim 3-4, which begins in Jerusalem. What is the meaning of the connection between these two journeys in opposite directions?

2.

The lament in pesukim 13-15 also includes a list of cities which are found in the area of Lachish, the central fortified city in the plains region. Michah makes a connection between its importance and its sins and downfall: *It is the beginning of sin for the daughter of Zion, for in you were found the transgressions of Israel.* (13). Notice the substitution of *Israel* for *daughter of Zion* in the pasuk. Use the words of the **Radak** to help you understand:

Lachish is a city in Judah, and was the first to learn to worship the *Baalim* from Israel, for Achav started the worship of the *Baalim*...And this is why it says the transgressions of Israel, for in Judah they did not worship the *Baalim*, and the inhabitants of Lachish learned the worship of the *Baalim* from Israel.

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Perek 2

The bulk of the chapter deals with the prophet's struggle with the wealthy landowners in Judah. It opens with a rebuke to those who steal the fields and inheritances of those weaker than them (1-5). It then shows the argument between the prophet and the wealthy oppressors who demand that he stops prophesying (6-11). The perek ends with a prophecy of consolation which envisions the return of the exiles of Israel (12-13).

3.

Woe to those who plot iniquity and work evil (1)

Central to perek 2 we find a rebuke of the wealthy people who cruelly oppress the weaker classes in various ways. Follow the development and intensification in the descriptions of the dispossession of the people in pesukim 1-2 and 8-9:1.

a | What do the wealthy pillage and who is dispossessed in each pasuk? What are the social and psychological roots of the process of dispossession (1-2)?

b | Envy of the field of another is an explicit prohibition which appears in the Ten Commandments. How can we understand the reason for this prohibition in light of Michah's prophecy? Read the **Rambam in Sefer HaMitzvot** ("Do not envy" 266):

The Mekhilta says, "Here it says 'Do not envy [lo tachmod] your neighbor's house,' and later it says, 'Do not desire [lo titaveh] your neighbor's house.' This makes the desire and the envy separate prohibitions." It also says there, "How do we know that a person's desire will lead him to envy? Since the Torah says 'Do not desire' [lo titaveh] and 'Do not be envious' [lo tachmod].

How do we know that if he is envious he will ultimately commit robbery? Since the Torah says, "They envied fields and robbed them." The explanation of this passage is as follows: If one sees a fine object that belongs to his brother, and allows his thoughts to gain control over him, and develops a desire for it, he transgresses God's statement (exalted be He), "Do not desire" [lo titaveh] Then his love for the object will become stronger and he will carry out a plan to acquire it ... Should he reach his goal, when he acquires it, he also transgresses the prohibition, "Do not be envious," ...If, however, the owner, because of his love for the object, refuses to sell or trade it, then his great desire for it will cause him to take it by force and violence. At that point he also transgresses the prohibition, "Do not commit robbery." Think about this in relation to the story of Achav and Navot.

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4.

As part of the prophecy, the prophet argues with the wealthy people who demand that he stop prophesying (6).

a | The prophecy which they are trying to prevent is compared to the dripping of a liquid (*hatafa* can mean both to preach and to drip). What is the meaning of this image of prophecy? See also the appearance of this image in the beginning of the blessing of Moshe in Devarim 32:2 and Yishayahu 55:10-11.

b | The image of dripping is mentioned again in the answer of the prophet to the people at the end of the section (11). What is the ironic meaning of the image in this pasuk, and how does it separate between a true prophet and a false one? Try to define the role of the “*hatafa*” of the prophet according to Michah and according to those who oppose him.

5.

The pesukim which end the prophecy (12-13) present two images of the future redemption using a metaphor of a shepherd and his flock.

a | Compare the two pesukim – what is the action of the shepherd in each image, and what is his relationship to his flock? What is the relationship between the two images, and what ways of redemption does each represent?

b | What is missing in each image when examining them independently? Why does the prophet bring both images?

APPENDIX

1.

***And they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage* (2:2)**

Michah's rebuke is mostly directed at the upper classes that oppress the simple farmers and cause poverty. In the collection of aggadot which deal with the story of the destruction in the Talmud Bavli we find a shocking story, which exemplifies the depths to which the moral oppression of others descended and which led to the destruction. The story is based on a pasuk from Michah - ***And they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage***, and explains the redundancy in the pasuk about taking the wife and heritage of another:

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: 'What is signified by the verse, *And they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage*? A certain man once conceived a desire for the wife of his master, he being a carpenter's apprentice. Once his master wanted to borrow some money from him. He said to him: "Send your wife to me and I will lend her the money." So he sent his wife to him, and she stayed three days with him. He then went

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to him before her. "Where is my wife whom I sent to you?" he asked. He replied: "I sent her away at once, but I heard that the youngsters played with her on the road." "What shall I do?" he said. "If you listen to my advice," he replied, "divorce her." "But," he said, "she has a large marriage settlement." Said the other: "I will lend you money to give her for her Ketubah." So he went and divorced her and the other went and married her. When the time for payment arrived and he was not able to pay him, he said: "Come and work off your debt with me." So they used to sit and eat and drink while he waited on them, and tears used to fall from his eyes and drop into their cups. From that hour the doom was sealed... (Gittin 58a)

2.



► An image from the Lachish Reliefs, which were found in the palace of Sanherib in the city of Nineveh which was the capital of Assyria. They show the siege and destruction of the city of Lachish.

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מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רעננערט

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