

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

Perek 5

Following the prophecies of consolation and the description of the End of Days in Perek 4, Perek 5 includes four prophecies of consolation about the future. The four prophecies speak of: the renewal of the Davidic dynasty (1-3), the peace which will come forth from Beit-Lechem in the times of the Messiah (4-5), the "remnant of Yaakov" which is found among the gentile nations (6-8) and the destruction of idolatry in Israel (9-14).

1.

"And you, Beit-lechem Efrata-you should have been the lowest of the clans of Judah" The perek opens with a prophecy about the emergence of the 'ruler' – the future king of the kingdom of Israel. The background to the prophecy is the disappointing performance of Chizkiyahu the king of Judah in the days of Michah.

a | The character of the ruler is based on David's beginnings in the book of Shmuel. See Shmuel I 16:11 and 17:12. How do these characteristics contribute to the character of the ruler? Note the development of his character from the beginning in pasuk 1 to the role of leadership of the shepherd exhibited in pasuk 3.

b | A similar prophecy appears in Yishayahu, Michah's contemporary. This prophecy talks about *"and there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Yishai"* (Yishayahu 11:1-5). Compare the two prophecies and discuss what emphasis is placed in each prophecy on the role of the future king. Pay attention as well to the nature of the leadership which is described in pesukim 4-5 in Yishayahu.

Michah 5-7

2.

“And the remnant of Yaakov shall be in the midst of many peoples”(6)

The state of the nation as a *“remnant of Yaakov”* among the other nations is described in this section using two images from nature – the dew and the lion. They are similarly phrased, although different from one another. What characterizes the relationship of Israel to the nations in the first image, and what is the relationship in the second image? How can we explain the seeming contradiction between the two?

Perek 6

The developed economic situation in Judah caused the increase of trade routes in Judah, and with that came fraud and deceit. Foreign influence on the kingdom of Judah is noticeable in its idolatrous rituals and in social and economic spheres. This perek includes two rebukes of the people, which are constructed as if they are legal actions of God against His people. In the beginning of the perek (1-7), God calls His people to justice for their ingratitude for the good that they have been granted. In the end of the perek there is a rebuke to the merchants of the city who are influenced by the distorted social order which was created by Omri and Achav (9-16). In contrast to these two rebukes, in the center of the perek we find God making a claim against man (8), which summarizes the ethics of the prophets. The Rabbis commented on this: *“Michah came and reduced them to three [principles], as it is written, It has been told to you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord does require of you: only to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly before your God.”*(Makkot 24a).

3.

The claims against the people are divided into two sentences which open with the words *“My people”*: the first refers to the exodus from Egypt (3) and the second to the entrance to the Land of Israel (5).

a | The first kindness which is mentioned is taking the nation of Israel out of Egypt. Why do you think three messengers are mentioned here?

b | The second kindness is saving the nation from the plot of Balak king of Moav. The comparison between the plot of Balak and the plot of Pharaoh is already indicated in the Torah: compare Shmot 1:8-10 about Pharaoh to Bamidbar 22:2-6 about Balak. In what ways does each king attempt to deal with the growth of the nation? How does God save the people in each case?

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Michah 5-7

4.

“With what shall I come before the Lord, bow before the Most High God?”(6)

The prophet places the demands of the God of Israel from man in contrast to the demands of the pagan world.

a | See the first half of the section (6-7). What are the necessary actions to please God according to what is written here, and what is their purpose?

b | How are the demands of God characterized in pasuk 8? Try to understand the contrasts between the two approaches in terms of the question of the purpose of the demands.

Perek 7

In the beginning of the perek (1-7) Michah laments the gloomy situation of society in his time. He describes a discouraging social situation, where there is rampant corruption and no man is honest and faithful. From the general description of the evil, the prophet turns to describe the corruption in public life, and then he focuses on friends and family. The intimate relationships between people are replaced by deep suspicion and mistrust. The book ends with two prayers: a prayer to renew the kingdom of Israel to its former glory, as in the days of the Exodus from Egypt (14-17), and a prayer for the forgiveness of the sins of Israel (18-20).

5.

The description of the crumbling society opens with a description of its shortcomings (1-2). Afterward the evil in society is described (3-6).

“Woe is to me, for I am as the last of the figs, like the gleanings of the vintage” (1) This is a unique image of a man who is looking to collect good fruit and cannot find any. How does this image help us to understand the process which the society in Michah’s time underwent, and what does it teach us about it? Compare this to the mention of grapes and figs in the prophecy of the end of days in Michah (4:4). To understand the image more precisely use **Y. Felix**:

The *“aspei kayitz”* (last of the summer fruits) are the figs of the end of the summer...which will never ripen. The *“bikkurot”* (first ripe fruit), are the largest, choicest figs, the opposite of the *“aspei kayitz”*, just as the *“olelot habatzir”* (grape gleanings) are the opposite of the *“eshkol”* (cluster), and they indicate the grapes which developed after the harvest. The cluster has many grapes which are good to eat while the gleanings have isolated grapes which are usually sour. The prophet compares the nation of Israel to the vine or fig tree which has already been harvested of its good produce, and what is left are the pathetic remains of the past glory, in the form of shriveled and immature fruit...

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Michah 5-7

6.

“Who is a God like You, Who forgives iniquity and passes over the transgression” (18)

Michah’s prayer which ends his book is based on the special attributes of God which are listed in the thirteen attributes which were told to Moshe after the sin of the Golden Calf (Shemot 34:6-7). In Michah’s prayer, two of the attributes are missing, and two additional images have been added for the forgiveness of sins: *He shall hide our iniquities*, and *You shall cast into the depths of the sea all their sins*. In light of these changes, what is the basis for forgiveness in the prophecy of Michah? Pay attention to the opening and closing attributes in the prayer.

APPENDIX – Between Michah and Yishayahu

The prophet Michah the Morashtite prophesied in a similar style to Yishayahu. Perakim 4-5 in his book are dedicated to the Messiah as well and according to most of the commentators this is the same prophecy from two prophets of the same school. Michah the Morashtite was active between the times of the kings Yotam and Chizkiyahu, at exactly the same time as Yishayahu and slightly after him as well. He too was part of the spiritual leadership of the prophets who attempted to correct the corruption of Judah. The prophecies of Yishayahu and Michah are very similar, especially their descriptions of the End of Days and of the Messiah. However, Yishayahu was from Jerusalem and close to the royal house, and this may explain his despair at finding a flesh-and-blood king who could rule humbly. In contrast, Michah the Morashtite grew up in a rural area, outside of Jerusalem, and therefore he might have been able to more easily believe that the image of a future kingdom of David could be realized in the present. One hundred years later, the elders of Jerusalem would stand in the Temple and remember that there already was a prophet in Judah who threatened in a clearer and blunter style than Yishayahu – *“Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed like a field...”* and he was not hurt, but rather Chizkiyahu listened to him, turned to God and repented. The elders did not mention Yishayahu. The comparison between the prophets teaches us that even in the world of true prophets who prophesy at the same time and on the same topic there can be subtle and deep differences. These differences can lead to fundamental disagreement for the sake of Heaven. As is the way of *Batei midrash* (houses of study), here too, internal denominations can live side by side in deep disagreement about the character of the Messiah.

(Free translation from *“Yishayahu – KiTzipporim Afot”* Rav Y. Bin-nun and Rav B. Lau, p. 291)

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