

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

Perek 5

Zechariah's prophetic visions continue in these perakim. The two visions in perek 5 are similar in style and content, and they describe items which are in the air and are going from place to place. In the first vision (1-4), Zechariah sees a "flying scroll", which God sends out across the land. The second vision (5-11) is more complicated and enigmatic. It is comprised of three stages. It describes an ephah (a type of measure) with a woman inside it symbolizing evil, which is carried through the air to the Land of Shinar, another name for Babylonia. The two visions symbolize the eradication of evil in the new state, and the distancing of evil from Jerusalem and Israel. The visions of Yechezkel which described the destruction of the Temple and the exile are the background to these visions. Here, too, we can use allusions and parallel texts in Tanakh to understand the symbolic meaning of these enigmatic visions.

1.

The vision of the flying scroll (1-4): *And I returned, and I lifted my eyes and saw - and behold! - there was a flying scroll. And he said to me, "What do you see?"*

a | What details does Zechariah see in the scroll and what is their symbolic meaning? Remember the prophecy about the House of God at the end of perek 4 (8-10) and see the midrash in **Vayikra Rabbah 6:**

Let not a false oath be to you a light thing, for lo, Zechariah saw it... R Aibu said: Even the hide of an elephant, or the hide of a camel is not of that measure, yet you say, *This is the curse that goes forth*, etc. Whence did it go forth? From the entrance of the hall, as we have learnt in a mishna: The entrance of the hall [of the sanctuary] was forty cubits in height and twenty cubits in width.

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b | What doesn't he see? Compare this to the prophecy of Yechezkel in 2:9-10 and see the **Radak**:

And the prophet saw the scroll and did not see what was written on it (unlike Yechezkel) until the angel explained it to him, because the prophecy was becoming weaker. Therefore Zechariah's prophecies were difficult to interpret and with Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi the prophecy ended.

2.

The vision of the *ephah* (5-11): Immediately after the appearance of the flying scroll, Zechariah sees another object going out across the land and flying through the air – an ephah (5-6).

a | What could the symbolic significance of the ephah be? See Devarim 25:13-16 and Amos 8:4-8. What is the connection to the previous vision? See also **Rashi**:

And he said, "This is [the punishment of those] whose eye [gazes] over the entire land" -And, after I saw it, he said, "This is the measure by which punishment was meted out to those whose eyes were over the entire land, to rob and to oppress, to make the ephah smaller and to make the shekel larger; and punishment was meted out to them, a measure for a measure".

b | In the second stage (7-8) two more items are revealed to Zechariah – a woman and a talent of lead - and a dramatic scene unfolds before his eyes: the woman is thrown into the ephah and the talent of lead is thrown in to entrap the woman inside it. **Rashi**:

And he said, "This is Wickedness." - This woman that you see in the midst of the ephah is the character of the way of wickedness, [the way] in which the wicked deport themselves. And behold, now they are placed in its midst to be punished in the midst of that very measure that they meted out, a measure for a measure.

c | In the third stage (9-11), two women come out to carry the ephah to the Land of Shinar, to build it as a permanent base there. The two symbolic women are mentioned in Yechezkel's prophecy of doom and rebuke as well (Yechezkel 23:1-4). What do the two women take from place to place and what is the direction of their movement in the two prophecies? Try to explain the meaning of Zechariah's prophecy in light of Yechezkel's prophecy.

d | The angel uses the rare ancient name of Babylonia here. Explain the symbolism of Shinar in the prophecy based on the first (and practically only) use of it in the story of the tower in Breshit 11, especially pesukim 1-4 there.

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Perek 6

The first part of the perek (1-8) describes the last vision which Zechariah saw – the vision of the chariots. This vision parallels the first vision which he saw, the vision of the horses which symbolize God’s messengers on Earth. The second part (9-15) also includes a symbolic act, but here Zechariah himself is commanded to do it – to make crowns which symbolize the joint rule of Yehoshua, the high priest, and Zerubavel, the political leader – the *tzemach*, the scion of the House of David.

3.

How are the first and last prophecies connected? Compare the actions of the horses in the first vision and in the last vision. Pay special attention to the direction of their movement (1:10-11 and 6:5-7) and the results (1:11-15 and 6:8). Use the **Radak**:

Then he cried out to me – He cried out to me with a loud voice, and said to me, “Behold these that go toward the north country have quieted my spirit in the north country”; i.e., These black horses which went forth to Babylonia to destroy it have caused a quieting of my spirit by doing so.

Have quieted my spirit – My wrath which I had against them, because they did evil to Israel, more than they should have, as it is said, “I was a little displeased and they helped to do harm.”

4.

The vision of the horses harnessed to chariots as messengers of God going out on a journey is very similar to the vision of the chariot which opens the book of Yechezkel (1), and describes the Holy Spirit leaving Jerusalem to Babylonia. In light of this, what is the symbolic meaning of the horse and chariot journey in our prophecy?

5.

The prophecy of the crowns ends with a quote from Sefer Devarim: “and it shall come to pass if you hearken ...” which is generally used to open a speech of rebuke. What is its role here? See **Rabbi Y. Bin Nun**:

The final pasuk in this prophecy is therefore a conclusion of the condition upon which all of the visions are dependent, both the wonders and the salvation. “...and it (all of this) shall come to pass if you hearken to the voice of the Lord your God ...” (6:15). This formula,

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which is usually used as an opening, like all conditional clauses, and is used as the opening of the rebuke in Sefer Devarim, is used here as a warning sign at the conclusion. All the prophecies and promises which were mentioned by Chaggai and Zechariah are dependent on the behavior of Israel – if they will listen to the voice of God. The potential for salvation and miracles is in God's hands, but the realization is in the hands of mankind!

APPENDIX – "This is Wickedness" the evil desires for idolatry and for illicit relationships in the time of the Second Temple

Zechariah's vision of the ephah is the basis for a wonderful, well-known story which appears in the Talmud, which describes in symbolic language the beginnings of the period of the Second Temple and connects the actions of Ezra and Nechemiah and the men of the Great Assembly with Zechariah's prophecy. The dramatic and colorful description reflects the change which took place in Judaism during the Second Temple, with the removal of the evil desire for idolatry from the nation.

*And [they] cried with a great [loud] voice unto the Lord, their God. What did they cry? — Woe, woe, it is he who has destroyed the Sanctuary, burnt the Temple, killed all the righteous, driven all Israel into exile, and is still dancing around among us! You have surely given him to us so that we may receive reward through him. We want neither him, nor reward through him! Thereupon a tablet fell down from heaven for them, whereupon the word 'truth' was inscribed. (R. Hanina said: One may learn therefrom that the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, is truth). They ordered a fast of three days and three nights, whereupon he was surrendered to them. He came forth from the Holy of Holies like a young fiery lion. Thereupon the Prophet said to Israel: This is the evil desire of idolatry, as it is said: *And he said: This is wickedness.* As they took hold of him a hair of his beard fell out, he raised his voice and it went [was audible] four hundred parasangs. Thereupon they said: How shall we act? Perhaps, God forbid, they might have mercy upon him from heaven! — The prophet said unto them: Cast him into a leaden pot, closing its opening with lead. Because lead absorbs the voice, as it is said: *And he said: This is wickedness. And he cast her down into the midst of the measure, and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof.* They said: Since this is a time of Grace, let us pray for mercy for the Tempter to evil. They prayed for mercy, and he was handed over to them. He said to them: Realize that if you kill him, the world goes down. They imprisoned him for three days, then looked in the whole land of Israel for a fresh egg and could not find it. Thereupon they said: What shall we do now? Shall we kill him? The world would then go down. Shall we beg for half-mercy? They do not grant 'halves' in heaven. They put out his eyes and let him go. It helped inasmuch as he no more entices men to commit incest. (Massechet Yoma 69b)*

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