

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

Perakim 9-14 form an independent unit in Sefer Zechariah. Unlike perakim 1-8 which dealt with the building of the Temple during the return to Zion, these perakim mostly deal with visions of salvation for the End of Days. There is no mention of the time period in which they were given, and no mention, as well, of the names of the leaders which were so prominent in the first section of the book – Zerubavel and Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak.

Perek 9

The first unit in the perek includes a prophecy about the cities of the enemy to the North (1-8). At the center of the perek we find a wonderful and unique vision of the future arrival of the king to Jerusalem, bringing peace to the entire world (9-10). The perek ends with the redemption of the nation and the ingathering of the exiles, and tells of the blessing and prosperity which will come to Israel (11-17).

1.

The first prophecy (1-8) lists the cities of the nations which border Israel from the North to the South, and describes the rule of God over them. It begins with Hadrach, Damascus and Hamat (1-2), continues with Tyre and Sidon (2-3) and ends with the cities of the Philistines: Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod (4-8). How is the rule of God described in each group of cities? Examine the development in the description of the three groups of cities in terms of the level of detail, the seriousness and the way they are dealt with.

Zechariah 9-10

2.

“And I will remove his blood from his mouth, and his detestable things from between his teeth...”

Discuss the unique way of dealing with the cities of the Philistines on different levels. Note the difference between the expectations of the Philistines based on the fate of Tyre and what really happened (5). This description shows a unique spiritual perspective for dealing with evil, a concept which was developed extensively in the Kabbala and Chassidut. See for example, **Likutei Moharan Tanina Torah 76:**

For Israel raises and lifts all the low and fallen places, as the Rabbis have said (Megillah 6), in the future the theaters and circuses will be used for learning Torah in public, as it says, *“And it, too, shall remain to our God”* (Zechariah 9:7).

3.

After the description of the rule of God over the surrounding cities the prophet turns to speak about Jerusalem and describes the arrival of the savior king (9-10). The description of the king here is surprising and unique:

a. Discuss the difference between the reaction of the daughter of Zion to the arrival of her king and the description of the king himself. The king is described in two pairs of descriptions: just and victorious, and humble and riding upon a donkey. What is the connection between the two pairs? Note that in Hebrew the word victorious (*nosha*) is in the passive form. See **Rabbi Eliezer MiBalgantzi’s** commentary on this:

Not on a horse and chariot and with horsemen, but with a donkey. And not a big strong donkey, but a colt, the foal of a donkey.

b. What is the meaning of these characteristics according to pasuk 10? Think about the symbolism of horses and wealth in connection with royalty in the section of the Torah which deals with the laws of the king (Devarim 17:16, 20). In summary: What is the nature of kingship and salvation in our prophecy?

4.

“And he shall speak peace to the nations, and his dominion shall be sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.” (10)

The mention of his reign *“from sea to sea”* reminds us of the kingdom of Shlomo, his forefather, who also reigned in a period of peace. As it says in Tehillim 72:8, a perek which describes the kingdom of Shlomo: *“And may he reign from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.”* How is the figure of the future king a correction for Shlomo HaMelech?

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Zechariah 9-10

Perek 10

The perek begins with the nation crying out to ask for rain from God, and not from the pagan gods (1-2). The bulk of the chapter is devoted to a prophecy of the victory of the house of Yehudah and the house of Yosef, which are compared to a war horse which defeats its enemies (3-7). In the last section (8-12) the ingathering of the exiles and the defeat of the superpowers, Assyria and Egypt, are described.

5.

“My wrath is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the goats.” The prophecy begins with an image from the world of sheep and grazing. The leaders of the nations are compared to the heads of the flock and to the shepherds who have injured the flock and will now be punished by the owners of the sheep. Note the use of the root p.k.d. twice in the prophecy, once meaning to punish and once to remember. How is the “remembering” of the flock by God expressed? Pay attention to the change in the people’s nature in the parable.

6.

In this prophecy there are allusions to the prophecy in perek 9 – a horse, a battle bow, horsemen (9:9-10, 10:3-5). Discuss the difference in the attitude to these elements in the two prophecies. Think about what brought about the change in attitude to them in our prophecy. Pay attention to the context of the two prophecies, and to who is active in each one.

APPENDIX – “Humble and riding upon a donkey”

The extraordinary figure of the poor king, who rides a donkey and not a royal horse, puzzled the commentators throughout the generations and was explained as being connected to the Messiah in different ways:

R. Alexandri said: R. Yehoshua b. Levi pointed out a contradiction. It is written, *in its time* [will the Messiah come], whilst it is also written, *I [the Lord] will hasten it!* — if they are worthy, I will hasten it: if not, [he will come] at the due time. R. Alexandri said: R. Yehoshua opposed two verses: it is written, *And behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven* (Rashi: quickly) whilst [elsewhere] it is written, *[behold, thy king cometh unto thee ...] lowly, and riding upon an donkey!* (Rashi: like a poor man who comes lazily on his donkey) — if they are meritorious, [he will come] with the clouds of heaven; if not, lowly and riding upon a donkey. King Shapur said to Shmuel, ‘You maintain that the Messiah will come upon a donkey: I will rather send him my finest horse.’ He replied, ‘Have you one of a white color?’ (Sanhedrin 98a)

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Zechariah 9-10

As a result of Shmuel's statement in the Gemara, the perception that the Messiah will come on a white donkey became prevalent. However, upon examination of the Talmudic manuscripts we see that this is a result of an error in the text. In the print version it says "one of a white color" (*bar chivar gavnei*) but the original text says – *car hazar gavnin*, which in Persian means: Do you have a donkey of a thousand hues? In other words, we are not speaking of a regular, simple donkey but a magnificent and unique one, and that is Shmuel's answer to King Shapur. (See Rabbi Dr. M. Sabato, *Ktav Yad Teimani leMassechet Sanhedrin*, p. 142).

Another symbolic meaning for the donkey appears in a midrash which connects between the donkey of the Messiah and the donkey of Moshe – the two redeemers:

R Brachia said in the name of R Yitzchak: The final redeemer will be as the first one was. By the first redeemer it says, "And Moshe took his wife and his sons, and set them upon a donkey" (Shemot 4), and similarly by the final redeemer it says, "humble, and riding a donkey" (Zechariah 9).

There is importance to this tradition in Christianity as well. In the New Testament Jesus is described as coming to Jerusalem on a donkey. It could be that we see a reaction to this in some of the Jewish commentaries to this prophecy. For example, **Rashi** writes:

Behold! Your king shall come to you: It is impossible to interpret this except as referring to the King Messiah, as it is stated: "and his rule shall be from sea to sea." We do not find that Israel had such a ruler during the days of the Second Temple.

The arrival of the Messiah to Jerusalem is illustrated in many Haggadot, and because of this prophecy by Zechariah, the Messiah is generally shown riding on a donkey with Eliyahu the prophet following him, blowing a shofar and announcing the arrival of the redeemer.



► The Washington Haggadah, Florence, 1478 (Ashkenazic)

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