

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

Perek 11

The different prophecies in this perek have a common theme – the use of the shepherd and his flock in their imagery. The first part (1-3) describes the difficult sounds and visions of the fire and destruction. Afterward two symbolic acts are described, each one of them an unfavorable description of different types of shepherds. In the first act (4-14), God commands the prophet to herd the “flock of slaughter”, a flock which is intended for slaughter. The prophet herds the sheep and then abandons them; this is symbolized by the cutting off of the two shepherd’s crooks. In the end he receives his reward and throws it to the “keeper of the treasury”. In the second act the prophet is commanded to act as a “foolish shepherd” as a symbol of the corrupt rule. The prophecies in this perek and in the following perek are full of hints and obscure symbols. The commentators explained these hints in different ways, but even so it is difficult to understand their meaning.

1.

“Open your doors, O Lebanon, and let the fire consume your cedars.” (1)

After the general call to Lebanon, there are four similar calls: the anguished cries of the cypresses and oaks, together with the calls of the shepherds and the young lions, who are all mourning the destruction.

To whom is this prophecy directed? Pay attention to the connection between this prophecy to the end of the previous prophecy, and contrast that with its connection to the prophecy which follows. How do these connections affect our understanding of this prophecy? See the Gemara in **Yoma 39b**:

Our Rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘For the Lord’] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-colored strap become white; nor did the westernmost light shine; and the doors of the Heichal (Temple)

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would open by themselves, until R. Yochanan b. Zakkai rebuked them, saying: Heichal, Heichal, why will you be the alarmer yourself? I know about you that you will be destroyed, for Zechariah ben Ido has already prophesied concerning you: *Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars.*

In contrast, see the interpretation of the **Radak**:

...But it is more consistent to interpret in connection with the subject immediately preceding, of the destruction of the kings of the nations. This was the opinion of Jonathon, who has rendered the words “*You nations, open your gates.*”

2.

“*So said the Lord, my God: Tend the flock of slaughter*” (4)

The prophet takes two crooks in order to herd the sheep.

a. Follow the stages of the sheep from the earlier shepherds (4-5) through the actions of the new shepherd, and examine the decline which takes place.

b. The most extreme symbolic act is the cutting off of the two shepherd’s crooks: what does this symbolize (10,14)? This symbolic act reminds us of Yechezkel’s symbolic act (37:16-17). What reversal takes place in God’s attitude to Judah and Israel between the two prophecies?

Perek 12

This perek describes the war of the nations on Jerusalem and Judah in the End of Days. In the first section the enemy’s failed attempt at placing a siege on Jerusalem is described (2-9). The second section describes the great mourning which will be in Jerusalem after the war (10-14). The perek is divided into sections which open with the words “*On that day*”, and which list the various events in the End of Days. The background to this prophecy is other prophecies of the End of Days – the rescue of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army in the days of Chizkiyahu, the vision of the war of Gog and Magog, and others.

3.

The prophecy begins with two unique images of the siege which will be placed on Jerusalem (2, 3). Examine the shared style and content of the two images: How will the nations who place the siege be punished and what is the connection between the punishment and the siege?

4.

In the next stage the horses and their riders are struck with blindness. A similar occurrence takes place in another story – Melachim II 6:14-18. What does the blindness symbolize on the

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one hand and the opening of their eyes on the other hand in each of the stories (see especially pesukim 16-17 in Melachim)? Remember as well the symbolic meaning of the horse and rider in the earlier prophecies of Zechariah (9:10 and 10:5).

5.

The prophet alternately refers to Jerusalem and Judah a number of times (2, 5, 6, 7). Follow these references and examine the relationship between Judah and Jerusalem in each stage:

a. What is the relationship between Jerusalem and Judah in the first stage (2)? See the **Ibn Ezra: and also on Judah** – The nations will force the Jews who live in their land, who are far from Jerusalem and have not been redeemed to come with them to place a siege on Jerusalem. In light of this commentary, what is the meaning of the eye opening upon the house of Judah in pasuk 4? Remember the role of the plague of darkness in Egypt.

b. Pasuk 6 includes a reference to the attitude of Judah toward “*all the nations round about*”, which parallels the attitude of Jerusalem to “*all the nations round about*” in pesukim 2-3, and is different from it. How does this image fit with the role of Judah in the prophecy?

c. “*And the Lord shall first save the tents of Judah*” (7). In the final stage, the fact that Judah will be saved before Jerusalem is mentioned. What is the reason that Judah will be first and why is this important in this war? Pay attention to the difference in the phrases: “*the tents of Judah*” vs. “*the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem*”. See also the **Ibn Ezra:**

Before saving Jerusalem, God will save the tents of Judah, which are outside the city with the camps of the enemy. As it states earlier, “*And upon the house of Judah I will open My eyes, and all the horses of the peoples I will smite with blindness.*” And why will I save the tents of Judah first? “*So that it shall not increase*” – so that the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not be able to boast that they are inside the city with the anointed one, and they will not boast to Judah that they were saved by their hand.

6.

The war ends with bitter mourning, described in pesukim 10-14. See the two explanations brought by **Rashi:**

And they shall look to me because of those who have been thrust through [with swords], and they shall mourn over it - As a man mourns over his only son. And our Sages expounded this in tractate Sukkah (52a) as referring to the Messiah, son of Yosef, who was slain.

Who is the slain one whom they are mourning according to each explanation? Why is the mourning so great? How is this connected to the war?

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APPENDIX - “like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the Valley of Megiddon.”

The Valley of Megiddo is in the western section of the Jezreel Valley and is named after the city of Megiddo, the main city which was found there during the time of the Tanakh. There were three main roadways through the Valley of Megiddo. For this reason the Valley of Megiddo was of strategic importance and a natural battlefield. In the year 609 BCE Yoshiyahu wanted to stop Pharaoh-Necho’s campaign northward through the Valley of Megiddo to help the Assyrians who were in the area of the Euphrates. In Zechariah’s prophecy the Valley of Megiddo is mentioned as the place where the armies of the nations who are enemies of Judah will be destroyed when they rise against Judah in the End of Days. It tells of the mourning in Jerusalem for those lost in this war. The Targum (translation) of Yonatan ben Uzziel connects these two events, and his explanation of this pasuk is thought according to the Gemara (**Megillah 3a**) to be one of the great secrets revealed in his translation of the Tanakh:

The Targum of the Prophets was composed by Yonatan ben Uzziel under the guidance of Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi, and the land of Israel [thereupon] quaked over an area of four hundred parasangs by four hundred parasangs, and a Bat Kol came forth and exclaimed, Who is this that has revealed My secrets to mankind? Yonatan ben Uzziel thereupon arose and said, It is I who have revealed Thy secrets to mankind. It is fully known to Thee that I have not done this for my own honor or for the honor of my father’s house, but for Thy honor I have done it, that dissension may not increase in Israel... [For instance,] it is written, In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon, and R. Yosef [commenting on this] said: Were it not for the targum of this verse, we should not know what it means.[It runs as follows]: ‘On that day shall there be great mourning in Jerusalem like the mourning of Ahab son of Omri who was killed by Hadadrimmon son of Rimmon in Ramot Gilead and like the mourning of Yoshiyah son of Ammon who was killed by Pharaoh-Necho in the plain of Megiddo’.

Zechariah’s prophecy about the Valley of Megiddo has an important place in Christian tradition as well, which describes the final battle which will take place between the forces of good and evil in the End of Days at “Armageddon” in light of Zechariah’s vision. This name appears in the Greek version of the New Testament, and is used in most languages in the Christian world, including English. The word Armageddon has since returned to Hebrew. As in many cases in which the name of a place is taken from the original language to other languages, a geographic title, in this case a mountain (*har*), is “swallowed up” into the word so that *har megiddon* became Armageddon.

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