

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 52-53

Perek 52

'*Arise, shake off the dust*' (1), the prophet calls Zion to arise from the slumber of the exile and destruction, and to exchange her clothes of mourning and exile- for robes of majesty (1-6). In the course of the chapter it becomes clear that the exile of Israel is actually the exile of the shechina '*What therefore do I gain here?- declares the Lord- For My people has been carried off for nothing, their mockers howl- declares the Lord- and constantly, unceasingly, My name is reviled.*' (5) The sages say that 'Wheresoever they were exiled- the shechina went with them'. In pesukim 7-12 two descriptions of redemption appear before us. One expresses the happiness of the redemption through the simile of a messenger who returns to the city from the battle field, and announces the salvation. The second describes how the departure from exile is the complete opposite of leaving for exile. From this second comparison we learn that the second redemption will be even greater than that of Egypt.

- 1 In Eicha 4:15 we find a similar call to that which appears in our chapter 'Turn, turn away, touch naught unclean as you depart from there.' (11) What is the meaning of the call in each source, and in what manner does the call in our chapter rectify the one in Eicha?
- 2 In pasuk 12 the prophet continues to describe the departure from exile, while comparing the redemption from Egypt to the future redemption. Identify the points that demonstrate how the future redemption is much greater than that of Egypt. Study the following comments in the midrash of the **Mechilta** and the commentary of **Maharal**:

*'And you shall eat it hurriedly...*Abba Channan said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: It is the haste of the shechinah. Even though there is no proof, there is a hint, '*Hark! My beloved! There he comes, leaping over mountains, bounding*

over hills.'... Could this mean that the future redemption will also be in haste? Therefore the scriptures say *'For you will not depart in haste, nor will you leave in flight; for the Lord is marching before you'*. (Mechilta D'Rabbi Yishmael, Masechta D'Pischa 7)

'The explanation of this matter is that the first redemption was not an eternal redemption, for they would only have been redeemed for a period of time. The redemption is similar to the light of lightning which is seen in the heaven for only a brief moment and then disappears. The first redemption was not something everlasting, and therefore, their departure was hurried. For everything that does not exist eternally passes by quickly; but the future redemption is an eternal redemption, without any changes, and therefore, is not done in haste.' (Maharal, Netzach Yisrael, 47)

In pasuk 7 the messenger and his message are described, while pasuk 8 describes the response of the *'watchmen'*. Follow the manner in which the rumor spreads in pesukim 9-10. To better understand the connection between the messenger who returns hastily from the war and the watchman who overlooks the city from within, see II Shmuel 18:19-28.

Perek 53

Included in our chapter is a very unique prophecy, which begins at the end of chapter 52; and which deals with the fate of the servant of God. The prophecy opens with a description of the dramatic change in the state of the servant; from the low point of disgrace and suffering to success (52:13-15). Afterwards the nations are quoted describing the change that took place in their perception of the servant, and the cause of his suffering (53:1-6). The prophecy concludes with a divine promise that the servant will receive a reward for all of the suffering he went through (11-12).

- 3 The root "to bear/to carry" [in original Hebrew נשא] is central in our prophecy. It appears in the opening (52:13), in the middle (53:4) and at the end (53:12). What is the relation between the first appearance and the two others; and how do they express the main idea of the prophecy?
- 4 The prophecy opens with a description of the dramatic change in the situation of the servant of God. In the past his situation was lowly, and this situation is described at length by the nations: *'We accounted him plagued, smitten and afflicted*

by God'. What is the source of the affliction according to this pasuk? In what way were the nations wrong, and in what way were they right- regarding the servant's affliction (5)?

- 5 As with other prophecies in Yeshayahu that deal with the servant of God, here too, we are not sure whether the servant refers to an actual person or whether he is symbolic of the entire nation of Israel. Try to decide who the servant is in the chapter. Focus on the context of the prophecy in the book, and notice the semantic relationship between the end of the previous prophecy (52:10) and the beginning of this one (53:1).
- 6 In conclusion, what is the meaning and the object of the exile according to our prophecy?

Appendix

The Jewish- Christian argument regarding the prophecy of 'Indeed, My servant shall prosper'.

The mysterious identity of the servant of God in chapters 52-53 engaged the medieval commentators. The **Abравanel** begins his explanation of our chapter in the following manner:

The first question is who this prophecy was written about; for the Christian scholars interpreted it as referring to the one who was hung in Jerusalem towards the end of the second temple, and who according to them was the son of God, who became corporeal in the womb of the maiden... Still, Yonatan ben Uziel translated this to be the future Messiah; and this is also chazal's opinion in many midrashim... However, Rashi and Radak ... interpreted the entire prophecy to be speaking about Israel.

The Christian interpretation saw the prophecy of the servant of God as a description of Jesus, and it is from this source that they developed their perception regarding the purpose of his suffering. This perception constituted one of Christianity's theological pillars, and therefore was dealt with in many disputes that the Christians held against the Jewish people in the Middle Ages. One of the most famous disputes held between Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages is the one between Ramban

and the apostate Pablo Christiani, referred to as "Friar Paul", who wanted to prove the truth of Christianity through chazal's sources. We'll bring a small part of the dispute, which is relevant to our chapters:

'Friar Paul claimed: "Behold the passage in Isaiah, chapter 53, tells of the death of the messiah and how he was to fall into the hands of his enemies and how he was placed alongside the wicked, as happened to Jesus. Do you believe that this section speaks of the messiah?"

I said to him: "In terms of the true meaning of the section, it speaks only of the people of Israel, which the prophets regularly call 'Israel My servant' or 'Jacob My servant.'

I said to him: "It is true that the rabbis in the aggadah explain it as referring to the messiah. However, they never said that he would be killed at the hands of his enemies.

For you will find in no book of the Jews, neither in the Talmud nor in the Midrash, that the messiah, the descendant of David, would be killed or would be turned over to his enemies or would be buried among the wicked. Indeed even the messiah whom you made for yourself was not buried. I shall explain for you this section properly and clearly, if you wish. There is no indication that the messiah would be killed, as happened to your messiah. They, however, did not wish to hear.' (Translation: http://israel613.com/books/RAMBAN_DISPUTE_E.pdf)

The dispute ended with the victory of Ramban, and as a result Ramban wrote his extended and detailed explanation to chapter 53. (It appears in the book 'The writings of Ramban', after the dispute).

