

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



Perek 17

In this prophecy Yechezkel uses parables from the world of plants and animals to describe the events at the end of the Kingdom of Judah: the exile of Yehoyachin, the crowning of Tzidkiyahu and his rebellion in Babylonia (1-10). In the continuation of the perek the prophet rebukes the Kingdom of Judah for breaking the covenant with Nevuchadnezzar (15-20) and foresees serious repercussions to the revolt of Tzidkiyahu against the king of Babylonia. The prophecy ends with words of consolation which tell of the return to Zion (22-24).

- 1 Examine the historical events connected to the end of the Kingdom of Judah which are the background to the parable: Melachim II 24:8-20, 25:1-7.
 - a) The first eagle in the parable (3) symbolizes Nevuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia, while the second eagle (7) symbolizes Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Note the differences in the prophet's description of each of them.
 - b) The exile of Yehoyachin is described in pasuk 4 and the coronation of Tzidkiyahu is described in pasuk 5. What are the differences between the kings according to the parable? Think about how the symbols in the parable express the change in the kingdom of Judah as a result of the exile. Note the comparison of the kingdom of Tzidkiyahu to a vine: in the parable (5-6) and in the explanation of the parable (14).





- 2 Tzidkiyahu's sin is described twice in the perek: 15-16 and 19-20. Discuss the different aspects which are emphasized in each of the descriptions.
- 3 In the end of the perek (22-24) we find words of consolation for the future. God's actions in this section parallel the actions of Nevuchadnezzar in the beginning of the perek. However, the motive differs considerably in each of these actions. Compare the different actions and think about how the different motives are expressed in them. Use the **Radak**:

From him I will pluck a tender branch to plant it in its place... for its own good will I pluck it, for to plant it in its own land I shall pluck it.

Perek 18

The question of intergenerational reward and punishment disturbed the generation of the destruction, and created a feeling of despair and hopelessness because of the sins of the previous generations. This prevented them from trying to correct their ways and repent. The parable here is rooted in folk sayings, and expresses the widespread perception among the people: *"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?"* (2). The prophet counters this by saying: *"Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine; the soul that sins, it shall die."* (4) The personal responsibility and free choice of each person are the fundamental principles which are the basis for this perek.

- 4 The first section of the perek (1-20) deals with the question of intergenerational reward and punishment. It is constructed with a frame (pesukim 1-4 and 20) which negates the people's claim. The internal section demonstrates the principle of personal reward by showing a dynasty of three generations: the righteous grandfather (5-9), the evil father (10-13)



and the righteous grandson (14-19). Examine the first description and pay attention to the actions which the prophet chooses to describe the righteousness of the man. What characterizes these actions?

- 5 At the beginning and the end of the first section the prophet presents the ways of divine providence: *“the soul that sins, it shall die”* (4, 20) to oppose the people’s saying - *“The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?”* Why does the prophet dispute the people?

See **Rashi**:

So is the way of the Holy One, blessed be He: the fathers sin and the children are punished, for the kings of Israel sinned for many years before they were exiled, and we too need not be concerned that we shall be punished for our iniquities.

A different direction is taken by the people at the end of the book of Eicha (5: 7): *“Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.”* How can we explain the prophet’s opposition to the people in light of the tone of despair in Eicha? (See also the context of the words in Eicha).

- 6 While the first section of the perek deals with man’s connection to his fathers, the second section emphasizes personal reward and punishment for man himself. Pay attention to the phrase used by God which repeats twice (23, 32), and to the argument between Him and the nation (25, 29). Follow the verb sh.u.v. (to return) which is a key word in this perek. What is the principle of the doctrine of reward and punishment which is presented in this section, and why is the nation so opposed to this doctrine?
- 7 The principle of reward and punishment in Yechezkel’s prophecy seems to contradict the principle as presented in the ten commandments in the Torah (Shmot 20:4): *“for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the*



iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me". This contradiction was given several answers by the Rabbis and commentators. Study the following answers and pay attention to the fundamental difference between the explanations given in the first pair of sources and those given in the second pair:

Sanhedrin 27b - Are not children then to be put to death for the sins committed by their parents? Is it not written, *Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children?* — There the reference is to children who follow their parents' footsteps.

Radak – And when he says that the son shall not carry the sin of the father – it speaks of a son who is grown and receives reward and punishment for himself. But minor children die at the sin of their fathers and are rewarded for the merit of their fathers. Grown children who are sinners will not be helped by the merit of their fathers, just as righteous men are not hurt by the sins of their fathers.

Makkot 24a – R Yossi bar Chanina said: Four decrees were made by Moshe Rabbeinu for Israel, four prophets came and cancelled them... Moshe said: "*Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children*", along came Yechezkel and cancelled it: "*the soul that sins, it shall die*".

Malbim – In the Ten Commandments we explain that this refers only to the sin of idolatry as it is written: "*You shall not bow down unto them, nor serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children... of them that hate Me*" And it has already been explained in *The Guide to the Perplexed* that we do not find "hot wrath and jealousy and hatred" unless it is connected to the sin of idolatry. Only in the sin of idolatry will there be jealousy and the root will be destroyed along with the branches, and not in other sins. And it is known that in the time of Yechezkel the inclination for idolatry was cancelled, for it was the Men of the Great Assembly who cancelled it.

For expanded content and answers to questions:  מתן על הפרק • perek.matan@gmail.com

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program

© כל הזכויות שמורות. מתן על הפרק. מתן ירושלים • טל': 02-5944555


מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש סודי רינלט
The Sodie Rennett Women's Institute for Torah Studies
המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך



Appendix

The tension between the doctrine of reward and punishment in the Torah and that in the prophecies of Yechezkel is resolved in different ways. A unique and comprehensive interpretation is given by Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook ztz"l. Rav Kook saw this difference as part of the process of deep change which took place among the people as a result of the destruction and the exile.

In the course of events when the nation is together, the connection between the passing generations is strong... Yechezkel, at the time of the collapse of the nation, saw that separating the spiritual interdependence of the people was appropriate. The fact that by stopping the connection with the past would unfortunately also cause the loss of some benefits was inevitable... This was what the situation demanded, and when a righteous man decrees it to be so, the heavens support the decree... This new path is paved continuously through the life of the nation – that each individual stands responsible for the completion of his own soul, and these individual fragments will ultimately be gathered together to return to be one unit.

(Free translation of Igrot HaReayah 1:283)

For expanded content and answers to questions:  מתן על הפרק" • perek.matan@gmail.com

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program

© כל הזכויות שמורות. מתן על הפרק. מתן ירושלים • טל': 02-5944555


מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רינגברט
The Sodie Rennet Women's Institute for Torah Studies
המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך