

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



Perek 34

Perek 34 is dedicated to harsh criticism of the leaders of Israel, who are compared to shepherds who misuse their positions. Instead of taking care of their sheep they take advantage of them for their own use. The perek is full of descriptions taken from the world of shepherding and describes in detail the supposed role of the leader as shepherd and the neglect which was the reality. There are two main sections to the perek: the first section (1-16) deals with the neglect of the shepherds/leaders, and with God taking over for them and correcting their wrongdoings. The second section (17-25) contains criticism of the conduct within the flock and the lack of justice in it. It foresees the correction of these wrongs through a just trial by God and the appointment of David as prince over them. The perek ends with a blessing that will come to the people, which includes peace and agricultural prosperity. This blessing is based on the blessing in Vayikra 26.

- ❶ “*Son of man, prophesy concerning the shepherds of Israel*” (1) The first part of the perek deals with the shepherds’ neglect and the correction of this neglect (1-16).
- a) In pesukim 3-4 there is harsh criticism of the shepherds because of the misuse of their positions. What characterizes this misuse? Pay attention to the structural parallel between the two pesukim, and discuss the two sides of the misuse which is described in them.





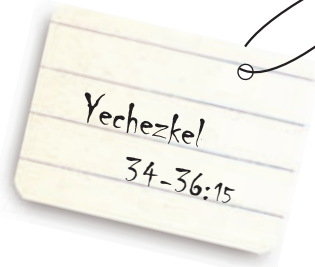
b) In pesukim 5-6 an additional result of the misuse is described – how does this develop from the misuse as described in pesukim 3-4?

c) In pesukim 11-16 God must fill the places of the failed shepherds. Pesukim 11-15 are a reverse parallel of pesukim 5-6, but they are much more detailed. What is the metaphor explicit in them for the distribution of the sheep and for not seeking them?

- 2 The second half of the prophecy (17-24) has a different type of criticism: to whom is the criticism directed (17-21)? Compare the similarities and differences between the criticism here and the criticism in the first section, especially in pasuk 21 and pesukim 4-5.
- 3 How will God correct the damage? Who will become the shepherd of the nation (23-24)? Who was chosen to be shepherd in the previous section (11-12, 15)? Try to explain the reason for the difference. See Shmuel I 17:34-36 to understand the allegory and its explanation.

Perek 35-36:15

After the prophecy about the shepherds we find two parallel prophecies: the first (perek 35) is directed at Mount Se'ir, the homeland of Edom, and predicts its destruction and desolation (in Hebrew: *shemama* – a word which appears seven times in the prophecy). The second prophecy (36:1-15) is directed at the desolated mountains of Israel, and foresees their rebirth, blossoming and resettlement by the nation of Israel.



- 4 This prophecy about Edom belongs in the section of prophecies to the nations in our book. Why was this placed in the section which deals with consolation to Israel? Pay attention to the contrast between the prophecy about Mount Se'ir and the prophecy about the mountains of Israel found in perek 36. Use this **Radak** as well:

The prophecy about the downfall of Mount Se'ir was placed next to the prophecy of the salvation of Israel because the time of the salvation of Israel will be the time of the downfall of Edom, as it is written, “*And saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mountain of Esav*” (Ovadia 1:21).

- 5 The two main passages in the prophecy (5-9; 10-15) describe two stages in the relationship of Edom to Israel – the time of the destruction and the time after it. These two passages have similar constructions of cause and effect (“Because...therefore...”) and both end with “and you/they shall know that I am the Lord.” Study these two passages. What are the roots of the unique prophetic anger at Edom? In this context, see Ovadia 1:10 about Edom.

- 6 “*Now you, son of man, prophesy concerning the mountains of Israel*” (36:1)

a) The prophecy in the first section of perek 36 (1-15) parallels the prophecy about Edom: explore the verbal and contextual similarities between the two prophecies (35:10, 12 and 36:2) and the deep contrast between them.

b) This prophecy is a reversal of the prophecy of doom in perek 6. In both prophecies the prophet turns to the “mountains of Israel” and refers to them as living beings. What is the significance of the reference to the mountains of Israel here? Compare to Vayikra 26:34-35. Based on this description – what does the promise of yielding fruit in pasuk 8 mean? See the Gemara in **Massechet Sanhedrin 98a**:



Rabbi Abba said: you have no more obvious sign of the end of days than that of Yechezkel: *‘But you, over mountains of Israel, shall yield your produce and bear your fruit for My Nation Israel, for their return is near’*

Rashi in situ: *no more obvious sign* - When the Land of Israel yields its fruit bountifully, then the end will be near, and you have no more obvious sign of the end of days than that.

Appendix

The Leader as a Shepherd

The job of a shepherd was considered a responsible and honorable job even hundreds of years after most of the nation was working in agriculture. Spiritual and political leadership, and even the leadership of God Himself is described in terms of shepherding. It could be that this special esteem for the position of the shepherd came from the fact that shepherding took place mostly in the desert and plains. The shepherd, being alone in these harsh surroundings, had to deal with difficult and dangerous conditions, had to have good navigation skills and a sense of direction, had to know how to overcome periods of drought, had to protect his flock from predators on two and four legs, and needed to worry always about every goat, sheep, kid and lamb. He had to make sure that they were well fed, while keeping good relations with the other shepherds, making sure that there was a fair division of the grazing land. Only a shepherd who had all of these qualities could properly perform his job and protect all of his sheep for long periods of time in the harsh conditions of the desert and plains.

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מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רעננה
The Sodie Rennett Women's Institute for Torah Studies

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המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך



“A song of David. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” In these words of King David we hear the words of the prophets who see God as the ideal shepherd who takes care of all of his flock’s needs, and as the prototype for the kind of leaders they would wish to see in the nation.

(Free translation of Nogah HaReuveni, Midbar veRo’eh beMoresheet Yisrael, pp. 31-37)

A beautiful expression of the connection between the job of a shepherd and the role of a leader is found in this Midrash in **Shemot Rabbah 2:2**:

“The Lord tries the righteous” (Tehillim 11:5). How so? In shepherding the flock. He tested David with the sheep, and found him a good shepherd, as it is said, (“He chose David, His servant,) and took him from the sheepfolds” (Tehillim 78:70). David used to hold back the older sheep, and take out the youngest ones first to graze so that they would have the tender grass; then he would take the little ones out to graze next so that they could graze on the medium grass, and after them he would take out the bigger ones to eat the grass of the field. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: A person who knows to tend the flock, caring for each according to his abilities, shall come and be the shepherd of my people. That is the meaning of Tehillim 78:71: “From behind the nursing ewes He brought him, to shepherd Yaacov His people and Yisrael His heritage.”

Also Moshe was tested with sheep, as our Rabbis said: Moshe was tending the flock of Yitro in the wilderness when a little kid escaped from him. He ran after it until it reached a shady place. When it reached the shady place there was a pool of water and the kid stopped to drink. When Moshe approached it, he said, "I did not know you ran away because of thirst, you must be weary." So he placed the kid on his shoulder and walked away. Thereupon God said: "Because you have mercy in leading a flesh and blood flock of sheep, you will surely tend my flock, Israel." And so it says “And Moshe was a shepherd.”

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