

Bellows Family

## MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

Chaggai is the first prophet of the three prophets of the Second Temple – Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi – who are called the “latter prophets”. The prophecies of Chaggai which are included in the book were all said in the second year of Daryavesh’s reign, eighteen years after the decree of Koresh (520 BCE), in the very short time period of 4 months (from the first of Elul to the 24<sup>th</sup> of Kislev).

The prophecies mainly revolve around the building of the Second Temple. The picture that arises from these prophecies is gloomy, due to the difference between the enthusiasm and great vision and the expectation of redemption which those who returned to Zion felt, and the harsh reality with which they were dealing. Chaggai is faced with the problems of the people’s despair and their lack of motivation to rebuild the Temple, and seeks to give them hope and desire despite the difficult reality in the Land of Israel. His prophecies turn to the people and their leaders - Zerubavel ben Shealtiel, the governor appointed by the Persian government, and Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak the high priest.

The book comprises four prophecies which can be divided into two pairs. In the first pair, which includes the first prophecy (perek 1) and the second prophecy (2:1-9), Chaggai deals with the problems which thwarted the building of the Temple and seeks to inspire the nation to build. The third (2:10-19) and fourth (2:20-23) prophecies were said on the same day and they parallel the first two prophecies. We will further explore this comparison through the following questions.

### 1.

“... *This people has said, ‘The time has not come - the time for the house of the Lord to be built.’*” (1:2) In his first prophecy Chaggai deals with the initial problem preventing the building of the Temple.

**a** | Examine the words of the prophet. What is the root of the people’s claim that now is not

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the time to build the Temple? (Note especially pesukim 4, 6 and 9).

**b |** How does the prophet deal with this claim and reverse it? Note the use of the word “time” (*et*) in the words of the people (2) and the words of the prophet (4). Pay attention to the double meaning of the word “house” (*bayit*) which appears seven times in the prophecy (note especially pesukim 4 and 9). See also **Rashi**:

All this is because of the desolation of My house.

*and you bring in little*: because of the iniquity of the cessation of [the offerings of] the first fruits.

*You eat without being satiated*: because of the iniquity of the cessation of the meal-offerings.

*You drink without getting your fill*: for the taste of wine was taken away because the libations ceased.

*You dress, and it has no warmth*: because of the iniquity of the cessation of wearing the priestly garments.

*And he who profits, profits into a bundle with holes*: Any profit that you make becomes less and less, like one who puts his money into a cloth bundle with holes.

See also **Metzudot**:

*and I will accept it* – even if it is small it will please me and I will be honored by it.

### 2.

Chaggai’s harsh first prophecy awakened the people and their leaders and motivated them to begin preparing to build the Temple (1:12-14). However, these preparations raised another problem which Chaggai dealt with in his second prophecy (2:1-9).

**a |** Like in the first prophecy, Chaggai opens by quoting the people’s claim (3). What is the cause of the hard feelings of the people? Pay attention as well to the timing of the prophecy – 21 Tishrei, the seventh day of Sukkot.


**b |** Follow the two stages of the words of the prophet: what is the principle and immediate argument which the prophet expresses and what is the underlying concept (4-5)? In the second stage the prophet moves to a more spiritual plane (6-9). How does this more spiritual stage complete the first stage?

### 3.

The next two prophecies were given on 24 Kislev, the day of the laying of the foundations of the Temple. In the third prophecy (2:10-19), Chaggai turns to the priests, who are entrusted with teaching Torah and Halakha, and asks them questions of law which deal with ritual purity and impurity. What is the fundamental difference between the power of purity and the power of impurity which Chaggai points out? How does this lesson serve as a basis to Chaggai’s claims against the people? See **Rav Y. Bin-Nun**:

The laziness of those who returned from the exile and their obsession with their personal problems brings the rebuke of the prophet upon them. He uses a Halakhic parable – impurity

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spreads more easily than holiness or purity. The pure which comes in contact with the impure becomes impure, and does not cause the impure to become pure. Therefore, this teaches us that the appearance of holiness in the world demands effort and action by the people, and does not appear from heaven without this effort and action. If man does not make an effort, only impurity will spread. Therefore, all the sacrifices given on the altar when there is no Temple are impure, because the people have chosen not to build the Temple, and they are waiting for it to appear on its own, perhaps from heaven.

**a** | The phrase “pay attention” (*simu levavchem*) appears three times in the second section of the prophecy (2:15 and 18), and twice in the first prophecy (1:5, 7). What is its role and context in each prophecy and how does it reflect the change which occurred between the two prophecies?


### 4.

While the previous prophecy was directed at the priests, headed by Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak, Chaggai’s final prophecy, which was also made on 24 Kislev, is directed at Zerubavel ben Shealtiel. It describes two opposite actions taken after the shaking. This prophecy is a continuation of the second prophecy, about the shaking on 21 Tishrei (2:6-8). Compare the descriptions of the shaking – what is its purpose in each prophecy and how does its influence widen in our prophecy?

### APPENDIX – Between Yechoniah and Zerubavel

Chaggai’s prophecy about Zerubavel alludes in its language and content to Yirmiyahu’s prophecy (22:24, 30) about Yechoniah, king of Judah, which was given seventy years previously. The connection between the two prophecies is strengthened in light of the fact that upon examining Yechoniah’s dynasty we find that Zerubavel is a descendant of Yechoniah.

Yirmiyahu 22	Chaggai 2
<p>24 - As I live, <b>says the Lord</b>, though Coniah the son of Yehoyakim, king of Judah, be a <b>signet</b> on My right hand, from there I will remove you...</p> <p>30 - So said the Lord: Inscribe this man childless, a man who will not prosper in his days, for no man of his seed shall prosper, <b>sitting on the throne</b> of David or ruling anymore in Judah.</p>	<p>22-24 - And I will overthrow <b>the throne of the kingdoms</b>, ... On that day, <b>says the Lord</b> of Hosts, I will take you, O Zerubavel the son of Shealtiel, My servant; <b>says the Lord</b>, and I <b>will make you as a signet</b>; for I have chosen you, <b>says the Lord</b> of Hosts.</p>

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While in the prophecy of Yirmiyahu Yechoniah's fate is sealed decisively and with an oath "As I live, says the Lord", and he is sentenced to be childless, in Chaggai's prophecy, which alludes to the prophecy of Yirmiyahu, it seems that his fate is reversed: Zerubavel continues in his way and is destined to rule over Judah. This surprising turn-around in Yechoniah's and his descendant's fate was explained in a number of the midrashim of Chazal as being connected it to his having repented. The Gemara in **Sanhedrin** (37b-38a) suggests:


R. Yochanan said: Exile atones for everything, for it is written, *Thus says the Lord, write you this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days, for no man of his seed shall prosper sitting upon the throne of David and ruling any more in Judah.* Whereas after he [the king] was exiled, it is written, *And the sons of Yechoniah, — the same is Assir — Shealtiel his son* etc. [He was called] Assir because his mother conceived him in prison. Shealtiel because God did not plant him in the way that others are planted. We know by tradition that a woman cannot conceive in a standing position, yet she did conceive standing. Another interpretation: Shealtiel, because God obtained [of the Heavenly court] absolution from His oath. Zerubavel [was so called] because he was sown in Babylon. But [his real name was] Nechemiah the son of Chachaliah.

The midrash expands and describes Yechoniah's repentance in the jail in Babylonia:

What did Nevuchadnezzar do? He seized him (i.e. Yechoniah) and confined him to prison, and whoever, in his days, was imprisoned, never came out, in accordance with the text, *He opened not the house of his prisoners* (Yeshayahu 14:17). Yechoniah was exiled and the Great Sanhedrin went into exile with him, as it is written, *Is this man Coniah a despised broken image (etzef): Is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? Wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they know not... Thus says the Lord: Write you this man childless.* (Yirmiyahu 22:28) which R Abba b. Kahana interpreted: like the bone (etzem) of the skull which when broken is fit for nothing, etc. It was like this until the Holy One, blessed be He, asked (sha'al el) his Heavenly court and they absolved Him (as it were) from His vow.

At that very hour the Great Sanhedrin sat and said: *Shall, in our days, the royal house of David cease, of who it is written, His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me* (Tehillim 89:37)? What shall we do? Let us win the favor of the queen's hairdresser, so that the hairdresser will persuade the queen, and the queen the king. They went and obtained the good will of the queen's hairdresser, who sought the favor of the queen, and the queen that of the king...When Nevuchadnezzar came to have marital relations with her, she said to him: You are king. Is not Yechoniah, too, a king? You desire your sexual satisfaction. Does not Yechoniah, too, desire his sexual satisfaction? Nevuchadnezzar thereupon ordered that Yechoniah be given his wife. And how did they lower her into the dungeon to him? R Shabtai

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said: They lowered her down to him over the bars, whilst the Rabbis said: They opened the ceiling and let her down to him. When he was about to have marital relations with her, she said to him: "I have seen a discharge, the color of a red lily" and he then withdrew from her... The Holy One, blessed be He, then said: "In Jerusalem you did not observe the precept relating to issues, but now you are fulfilling it, as it is said, *As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant I send forth your prisoners out of the pit* (Zechariah 9:11) [which means] You have remembered the blood at Sinai and for this do "I send forth your prisoners". R Shabtai said: He (Yechoniah) did not move from there before the Holy One blessed be He, pardoned him all his sins. At that time He said, "*You are all fair, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you.*" A miracle was done for him, and while standing up his wife became pregnant with Shealtiel, though a woman never becomes pregnant standing. As it says, *And the sons of Yechoniah: Assir (the captive) Shealtiel his son.* (Divrei Hayamim I 3:17) : "The captive" for the Holy One, blessed be He, imprisoned himself by an oath about him. Shealtiel because The Holy One, blessed be He, asked (sha'al el) his Heavenly court and they absolved Him (as it were) from His vow. (**Vayikra Rabbah** 19:6)

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