

# MATAN AL HAPEREK

## The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



### Perek 15

Perek 15 begins a series of prophetic parables that concern the history of Jerusalem and its fate. The focus of perek 15 is a parable that compares the nation of Israel to a grapevine. This comparison is common in the Tanach (see for example: the parable of the vineyard in Yeshayahu 5:7 and Tehillim 80:9), however, the comparison usually focuses on the grapes while the prophecy here mentions only the vine and not the fruit.

- 1 "In what way is the vine-tree more than all trees - the vine branch among the trees of the forest?" (2) In what way is the vine unique among the trees of the forest? What does the prophet wish to emphasize about the uniqueness of the nation? Pay attention to the following commentators:

**Radak:** The meaning of the parable: Israel is compared to the grapevine that is more fragile and weak than all the trees. It is said about Israel that you are the least of all the nations. When a good fruit is produced, it produces wine that makes God and men happy. Now this tree has no purpose other than its fruit ... and (without its fruit) it is but a branch in the forest, good for nothing except the fire.





**Rabbi Yigal Ariel:** The prophet refers to the branch of the grapevine and its possible uses. He searches for an advantage of the grapevine and finds it useful only as firewood. It seems that the sting of the parable is in what is not mentioned. The grapevine is a producer of abundant good; it produces a fruit filled with sweet juice and brings more joy to God and men than any other tree. But these are not present here because the grapevine has neglected its power and its primary attribute – to grow praiseworthy fruit – and entered into an arena in which it has no particular strength... The nation of Israel cannot flaunt feathers that are not his ... Glory will come only when he returns to himself and depends on his Lord and produces his moral and spiritual fruit. (Y. Ariel, *A New Heart: Studies in Sefer Yechezkel*)

## Perek 16

The central theme of this perek is the parable of the foundling. The prophet recounts the history of the nation of Israel and its convoluted relationship with God with a dramatic, harsh and unique simile. The prophecy begins with a description of the creation of the nation that is compared to a foundling abandoned in a field at birth (3-5). God then passes over her, takes her in, marries her and cares for her (6-14). However, her status and her beauty lead her to betray Him and to commit adultery with any available partner. She even gives them of the gifts that God has given her (16-34). As a punishment, God deprives her of all that He gave her, returns her to her position of origin and punishes her harshly (35-43). This harsh prophecy concludes with the promise of a renewal of the covenant between God and Israel (59-63).

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





- 2 God twice passes over the foundling in the field. The first time is at her birth (6), and the second, after she has grown up (8). Focus on the differences in God's reaction to the appearance of the foundling. Try to understand why two stages were necessary, and why God did not adopt her the first time. What is your opinion about the parallel between the description here and the stages of the redemption from Egypt – the growth in population and the development of the nation during the enslavement (Shemot 1:12) and God's revelation at a later stage (Shemot 2:23-25; 3:7-10)?
- 3 The sins of the foundling are described in two stages (16-22, 23-34). What characterizes the sin at each stage? Pay attention to the concept of 'taking' that is repeated in the first stage and to the summary of this stage (22). Compare this to the description of the adoption and care in the first part (8-14). In the second stage, pay attention to the repeated mention of adultery and to the multiplicity of the names of the neighboring nations that are mentioned in these pesukim. Consider to what sins the prophet is referring in each stage.
- 4 In pesukim 44-59 the text draws a parallel between the behavior of the daughter and the actions of her family who represent the cultures that surround Israel: her parents – Amorites and Hittites; her sisters – Samaria and Sodom. This description takes us back to the description of the origins of the foundling in the earlier description (see pesukim 3; 44-45).



a) Below is a diagram of the chiastic structure of the parable. Study it and focus on the contribution it makes to the central idea of the prophecy:

A1 – Her birth to the Amorite and Hittite and her abandonment (3-4)

B1 – Her growing up in the field naked and bare (5-7)

C1 – God adopts her, clothes her and cares for her (8-13)

C2 – She betrays God and gives His gifts to idolatry (16-22)

B2 – She is returned to her original state – naked and bare (36-39)

A2 – Comparison of her behavior to that of her parents, the Amorite and Hittite (43-45)

b) In light of this chiastic structure, consider the significance of the parable of the foundling and what it teaches about the nature of the nation and about the relationship between its inborn traits and its upbringing and education.

## Appendix

### “And I said to you, with your blood live”

The parable of the foundling begins with a touching picture of the foundling, abandoned naked and bare in the field, being given no care, polluted in the blood of her birth: *“and you were cast on the open field in the loathsomeness of your body on the day you were born.”* (5) At this difficult time, God passes over her and sees her. However, at this stage, before He takes her in and adopts her, He twice says to her *“with your blood live.”* Throughout the generations, this unique phrase was subject to many different interpretations. The most well-known is the interpretation by





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Rabbi Matteya ben Heresh, familiar to us from the Passover Haggadah, which sees this verse representing the period prior to the redemption from Egypt.

Rabbi Matteya ben Heresh said, He said, *“And I passed by you and saw you, and behold your time was the time of love,”* – the time had come to [fulfill] the oath made to Avraham that his children would be redeemed. However, they lacked [the merit of] mitzvot which would make them worthy of redemption, as it says, *“your breasts fashioned and your hair grown, but you were naked and bare”* – bare of all mitzvot. God gave them two mitzvot to perform so that they would be redeemed – the mitzvah of Passover and the mitzvah of circumcision, as it says: *“And I passed by you and saw you polluted with your blood.”* (**Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael, Masechta d’Pischa 5**)

However, the simple meaning of the phrase is as explained by **Radak** who sees in the words *“with your blood live”* promise and hope:

*“And I saw you polluted with your blood”* – repulsive in the blood of birth. The [meaning of] the parable is that they were dirtied by mud, the material from which they made the bricks, and they had no time to clean themselves because they were forced to make bricks every day with no rest. *“With your blood live”* – You will not see yourselves die from this hard labor, but rather, despite all this pollution, dirt and hard labor you will live and multiply like the plants of the field.

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