

# MATAN AL HAPEREK

## The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



### Perek 23

Perek 23 surveys the history of the nation of Israel from the exile in Egypt until the time of the prophet, in a way similar to the historical surveys in perakim 16 and 20. This survey is based on an allegory which describes two sisters – Judah and Israel. The ancient connection to Egypt recurs throughout the perek, along with the influence of political ties and idol worship from foreign lands. In this perek we find some of the most shocking and horrendous descriptions in this book of the sins and punishments of the people. The perek opens with an introduction which describes two young women in Egypt (1-4), after which it turns to a description of the way that Israel has prostituted itself with Assyria and the punishment for that (5-10), followed by a description of the harlotry of Judah with Assyria and Babylonia (11-21), and its future punishment (22-35). In the last section of the perek (36-49) the prophet summarizes the abominations in the temple, the harlotry and the punishments.





- 1 The allegory opens by introducing two women, the daughters of one mother, who symbolize Israel and Judah. The prophet names one Oholah and the other Oholibah. What is the symbolic meaning of these names? Pay attention to the juxtaposition of their names and the names of their capital cities at the end of pasuk 4. See **Rashi**:

**and their names:** The original ones. Samaria is the one I nickname Oholah, for from the beginning she became a tent (אהל) for the calves of Yerovam and for Achav's temple of Baal. Although Samaria was not built until the days of Omri, He calls the kings of Israel by its name, because as soon as it was built, it became the capital.

**Oholibah:** Because My tent (אהלי) was in her (בה), and My sanctuary.

- 2 The first sin mentioned in the perek is the acts of harlotry in Egypt "*in their youth*" (3).

The sins of Israel in Egypt are also mentioned in the historical survey in 20:8. What does this harlotry symbolize?

**Radak: And they committed harlotry** - We have already explained that all language of harlotry mentioned in connection with the nation of Israel is idolatry, and even though this figurative language refers to prostitution all of the language is meant in a figurative way. He compares her to a harlot but the explanation of the allegory refers to various types of idolatry...that they taught them their abominable ways.

What is the additional meaning of the allegory of the sin of harlotry in this perek?



- 3 The sins of harlotry in Egypt play a central role in the perek: see pesukim 8, 19 and 21. What is the role of Egypt in the development of the characters of Ohalah and Oholibah? Use **Rashi** (8):

**for they had lain with her, etc.:** And since then, “*they poured out their harlotry upon her*” - her promiscuous spirit entered her from the days of her youth.

- 4 The fall of both kingdoms is described in a similar way – in both cases the sister dotes upon one of the kingdoms and ends up being punished by it. See these descriptions in the allegory and compare them to the historical descriptions in Sefer Melachim:

a) Ohalah dotes on the handsome Assyrians (5-7). This description hints at the treaty between the kingdom of Israel and Assyria – see Melachim II 15:19. In the next stage, Ohalah prostitutes herself with Egypt (8) – see Melachim II 17:4. In the end she is punished by her lovers, the Assyrians (9-10).

b) Ohalibah follows the handsome Babylonians (14-17) – see Melachim II 20:12-13, and afterwards prostitutes herself with Egypt (18-20), and in the end is punished by the Babylonians who were her lovers (22-32) – see Melachim II 24:1, 20.

c) In conclusion: What is the shared characteristic of the two sister kingdoms which brought to their destruction? How is this revealed throughout the perek? See also pasuk 35 which serves as a summary.

- 5 "And her sister Ohalibah saw this, yet she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she..."(11) In what way is Ohalibah's sin greater than Ohalah's? Consider the number of lovers (12, 14) and the type of involvement (14-16). A parallel prophecy to that of Yechezkel's about Ohalah and Ohalibah appears in Yirmiyahu 3:6-11. In what way is the sin of the kingdom of Judah more severe according to this prophecy?



- 6 There is a striking similarity between the historical survey in our perek and the historical survey in perek 16 - the allegory of the foundling, the historical framework and the allegory of the adulterous woman and her punishment. There are, however, several differences which highlight the uniqueness of the survey in our perek – compare the two perakim and focus on the following points: how does each perek open and what is the source of the corruption? What is the focus of the sin in perek 16 and what is the focus of the sin here? How does perek 16 end and how does perek 23 end?

## Appendix

### "Samaria lifts up her voice" / R Shlomo ibn Gevirol

Yechezkel's difficult prophecy is the basis for the liturgical hymn of R Shlomo ibn Gevirol. In this hymn, ibn Gevirol gives voice to Oholah and Oholibah in a conversation in which they acknowledge that their troubles are a result of their sins which have brought them to their current dire situation. Their conversation is argumentative, discussing who has the greater troubles. Unlike the prophecy, at the end of the hymn there is some comfort, when the poet turns to God to ask Him to forgive His nation. This hymn appears in the lamentations for the day of Tisha B'Av and is said in all the different Jewish communities. It is found in the earliest prayer books, such as in the Machzor of Worms from the 13th century and in a remnant of a Spanish Machzor from before the expulsion from Spain. (From the website of "Hazmana LePiyut")

#### Samaria lifts up her voice

Samaria lifts up her voice, "My iniquities have found me out! My children have gone from me to another land."

And Oholibah cries, "My palaces are burnt down!" and Zion says: "The Lord has forsaken me!"



"It is not for you Oholibah to regard your pain as mine; can you compare your misfortune and sickness to my sickness and misfortune? I, rebellious Oholah dealt treacherously in my stubbornness; my sin rose up against me, and my rebelliousness testified against me, and at the end of the time, I paid my debts; (for) Tiglath Pileser consumed my fruits, and he stripped me of my valuables and took away my ornaments; he carried away my captivity to Chalah and Chabor, (therefore) be silent Oholibah, and weep not as I do; I was driven afar, and I had enough! This is my fortune! Your years were prolonged, but not mine!"

Oholibah replies, "I, too, was perverse and like (you) Oholah, I betrayed my friend of my youth! Be silent, Oholah, for I do recall my sorrows; you wandered about but once, I, many times; twice I was captured by the Chaldees, and as a wretched captive I went down to Babylon, and the Temple wherein I was glorified was burnt down; and when after seventy years in Babylon I was remembered (by God), and did return to Zion once more, and founded the Temple a (second) time, even then I did not stay long before Edom took me away, and I almost perished, and my multitudes were scattered over all the lands."

O thou who has compassion on the poor, have pity on their destitution, and behold their desolation, and the length of their exile; be not exceedingly angry, but see their humiliation, and remember not their iniquity and their folly for ever; O heal now their hurt, and comfort (them in) their mourning, for thou art their hope and their strength.

Renew our days as the days of old, according to thy declaration: "The Lord builds up Jerusalem!"

(According to the translation of Rabbi Abraham Rosenfeld)