The Megilla is read on the eleventh, on the twelfth, on the thirteenth, on the fourteenth, or on the fifteenth of the month of Adar, not earlier and not later.5 The mishna explains the circumstances when the Megilla is read on each of these days. Cities [kerākiyōn]' that have been surrounded by a wall since the days of Joshua, son of Nun, read the Megilla on the fourteenth of Adar, whereas villages and large towns that have not been walled since the days of Joshua, son of Nun, read it on the fourteenth. However, the Sages stated that the villages may advance their reading to the day of assembly, i.e., Monday or Thursday, when the rabbinical courts are in session and the Torah is read publicly, and the villagers therefore come to the larger towns.6

How so? If the fourteenth occurs on Monday, the villages and large towns read it on that day, and the walled cities read it on the next day, the fifteenth. If the fourteenth occurs on Tuesday or Wednesday, the villages advance their reading to the day of assembly, i.e., Monday, the twelfth or thirteenth of Adar; the large towns read it on that day, i.e., the fourteenth of Adar, and the walled towns read it on the next day, the fifteenth.

If the fourteenth occurs on Thursday, the villages and large towns read it on that day, the fourteenth, and the walled cities read it on the next day. If the fourteenth occurs on Shabbat eve, the villages advance their reading to the day of assembly, i.e., Thursday, the thirteenth of Adar; and the large towns and the walled cities read it on that day, i.e., the fourteenth of Adar. Even the walled cities read the Megilla on the fourteenth rather than on the fifteenth, as they do not read it on Shabbat.

If the fourteenth occurs on Shabbat, both the villages and large towns advance their reading to the day of assembly, i.e., Thursday, the twelfth of Adar; and the walled cities read it on the day after Purim, the fifteenth. If the fourteenth occurs on Sunday, the villages advance their reading to the day of assembly, i.e., Thursday, the eleventh of Adar; and the large towns read it on that day, i.e., the fourteenth of Adar; and the walled cities read it on the next day, the fifteenth.

5. Time of reading nowadays – In cities that were walled during the days of Joshua, son of Nun, even if they are not surrounded by a wall today, the Megilla is read on the fourteenth of Adar. In all other places, it is read on the fourteenth of Adar (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 688:3).

6. LANGUAGE – Note: kerākiyōn is a large city, and usually walled. Some maintain that the word derives from the Greek καρακή, kārakē, which also refers to a place that is fortified with beams. Others suggest that it is of Semitic origin, perhaps Assyrian, and that perhaps it is related to the word kerākiyōn meaning circuit or circumference, indicating that the city is surrounded by a wall.

NOTES

The earliest authorities ask: Why does the mishna state: The Megilla is read, and not: We read the Megilla? The Ritva explains that the mishna uses this formulation because the obligation applies to each individual is not to read the Megilla, but rather to hear the Megilla being read. Some suggest that this wording is used to teach that there is no obligation to read the Megilla on all of these days; rather, the Megilla is read in each location on only one of these days (Rabah Duddah; Seif Emet).

This phrase literally means not less and not more. The commentators understand it is referring here to the number of days on which the Megilla is read (Ritva). The author of the Roke’a notes that there is an allusion to this in the fact that the word Purim appears five times in the book of Esther, corresponding to the five days established by the Sages for reading the Megilla. The author of Rishon leZayyaron writes that the key elements here are the words: Not later. If the Megilla was not read in its proper time, there is no possibility of making it up afterward.

The days of Purim – The Ranbah asks: Why did the Sages establish the holiday of Purim in such a way that it is celebrated by different sets of Jews on different days rather than by everyone on the same day? He explains that the story of Purim took place after the Jews had already begun their return to Zion. The Jews who returned were, however, still dwelling in towns and villages without walls. They, and others living in similar conditions, were in the greatest danger due to Haman’s decree. When these communities were saved from their enemies, they took the initiative to establish a holiday for themselves on the fourteenth of Adar, the day they were able to rest securely. When the Sages formally established Purim as a national holiday, they affirmed its celebration on the fourteenth for those communities who had begun to celebrate it then, and added a day of celebration on the fifteenth for those in walled cities, in commemoration of the day when the Jews of Shushan had rested from battling their enemies.
From where do we derive this halakha— Judaism?

From the introductory mishna in Pirkei Avot, we learn that the Sages were lenient and allowed the villagers to read the Megilla early, even if the derivation is explained in a baraita, not all of the baraitot were well known, and therefore it is appropriate to ask and to provide an answer from the baraita.

The Rashba quotes Tosafot as answering that the Gemara’s astonishment is based on the fact that the Sages asked for a source for the halakha concerning the days on which the Megilla is read but did not ask for a source for the halakha in the next clause in the mishna, which states that the villages advance their reading to the day of assembly. The fact that they did not ask for a source for the second halakha indicates that they knew that the earlier Sages had allowed the villagers to read the Megilla early, in which case the question about the source for the first clause is unnecessary, as the answer is the same.

Some write that the question: From where do we derive this halakha, usually refers to something that is not explicitly written in the Bible but is alluded to in the text. Here, the Gemara asks: Why search for an allusion in the Bible for something that is a rabbinic enactment?

The members of the Great Assembly— Judaism?

The exact role and composition of the group known as the members of the Great Assembly is unclear. According to the introductory mishna in Pirke Avot, the members of the Great Assembly received the oral tradition from the prophets and served as a link in a chain of transmission of the Torah going back to Moses at Mount Sinai. The assembly served as the religious leadership during the Second Temple period. The last of the prophets, including Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, are identified as being part of this group, together with Mordecai of Megillat Esther.

Halakha— Judaism?

One court may not annull another court issued a decree, made an enactment, or established a practice, and it spread throughout the Jewish people, another court cannot cancel the enactment of the first court, unless the latter court is superior in wisdom and in number. Even if the reason for the edict no longer applies, it is not automatically annulled; rather, it must be actively annulled by a court. In the case of earlier and later courts that both consist of seventy-one judges, superiority in number means that the number of Sages who are not members of the court who accept the court’s ruling exceeds the number who originally accepted the ruling of the previous court (Rambam Sefer Shofetim, Hilkhot Mannim 2:2).

Rav Shemuel bar Abba said that Rabbi Yohanan said: It is alluded to when the verse states: “To confirm these days of Purim in their times” (Esther 9:31). The phrase “in their times” indicates that they enacted many times for them and not only two days.

The Gemara objects: This verse is necessary for its own purpose, to teach that the days of Purim must be observed at the proper times. The Gemara responds: If so, let the verse say: To confirm these days of Purim in its time. What is the significance of the term “their times,” in the plural? It indicates that many times were established for the reading of the Megilla.

Rav Shemuel bar Abba originally came from Babylonia, where he studied with Shmuel, but he appears to have arrived in Eretz Yisrael at a relatively young age, and there was among the students of Rabbi Hanina. His principal teacher, however, was Rabbi Yohanan, to whom he attended with great affection. Much has been said in praise of his great righteousness and also of his extensive wisdom. The Sages applied the verse “There is no bread to the wise” (Ecclesiastes 9:11) to Rav Shemuel not only due to his poverty, but also due to the fact that although he was certainly one of the leading authorities of his generation, Rabbi Yohanan did not succeed in ordaining him.

It is mentioned that Rav Shemuel bar Abba married the daughters of his first teacher, Shmuel, after they had been taken captive and were subsequently redeemed in Eretz Yisrael. He married the second one after the first one had passed away. The students of Rabbi Yohanan were his colleagues, and the Sages of the next generation report words of Torah in his name. His son, Rav Amram, was also a Torah scholar who reported words of Torah in his father’s name.
The Gemara asks: If so, say that the plural term indicates many times, and the Megilla may be read even earlier than the eleventh of Adar. The Gemara rejects this argument: The compound plural “their times,” should be understood as similar to the simple plural term, their time. Just as the term their time can be understood to refer to two days, indicating that each location reads the Megilla in its respective time on the fourteenth or the fifteenth of Adar, so too, their times should be understood as referring to only two additional days when the Megilla may be read.

The Gemara objects: And say that these two added days are the twelfth and the thirteenth of Adar. How is it derived that the Megilla may be read on the eleventh as well? The Gemara answers: It is as Rav Shmuel bar Yitzhak said in a different context: The thirteenth of Adar is a time of assembly for all, as it was on that day that the Jews assembled to fight their enemies, and the main miracle was performed on that day. Consequently, there is no need for a special derivation to include it as a day that is fit for reading the Megilla. Here too, since the thirteenth of Adar is a time of assembly for all, there is no need for a special derivation to include it among the days when the Megilla may be read.

Having cited and discussed the opinion of Rav Shemen bar Abba, the Gemara cites another answer to the question of where the verses allude to the permissibility of reading the Megilla on the days enumerated in the mishna. And Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said: These dates are alluded to when the verse states: “As the days on which the Jews rested from their enemies” (Esther 9:22). The term “days” is referring to the two days that are explicitly mentioned in the previous verse, i.e., the fourteenth and the fifteenth. The term “as the days” comes to include two additional days, i.e., the eleventh and twelfth of Adar.

The Gemara asks: And say that the two additional days are the twelfth and thirteenth of Adar. How is it derived that the Megilla may be read on the eleventh as well? In answer to this question, Rav Shmuel bar Yitzhak said: The thirteenth of Adar is a time of assembly for all, and there is no need for a special derivation to include it as a day fit for reading. The Gemara objects: Say that these additional days are the sixteenth and seventeenth of Adar. This suggestion is rejected: It is written: “And it shall not pass.”

Since two derivations were offered for the same matter, the Gemara asks: What is the reason that Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani did not state that the days enumerated in the mishna are fit for reading the Megilla based upon the term “in their times,” in accordance with the opinion of Rav Shemen bar Abba? The Gemara answers: He does not learn anything from the distinction between the terms time, their time, and their times. Therefore, the verse indicates only that there are two days when the Megilla may be read.

The Gemara asks: And what is the reason that Rav Shemen bar Abba did not state that the days enumerated in the mishna are fit for reading the Megilla based upon the term “as the days,” in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani? The Gemara answers: He could have said to you: That verse is written as a reference to future generations, and it indicates that just as the Jews rested on these days at that time, they shall rest and celebrate on these days for all generations.
Rabbi Akiva the unattributed – Ḥakkaṭa Ḥebron 6b: Rashi explains that many unattributed mishnayot reflect the opinion of Rabbi Akiva. Alternatively, most unattributed statements of tanna'im were formulated by his students, as explained in tractate Sanhedrin (8a). Some suggest that this term simply means that Rabbi Akiva’s opinion is cited in this particular mishna anonymously (Arakki; Ritva).

In accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Akiva even nowadays — Ḥakkaṭa Ḥebron 6b: Rashi proves this from the fact that Rabbi Akiva lived after the destruction of the Temple. Note, however, the Rashba, who challenges this assertion, as Rabbi Akiva was also alive when the Temple was still standing, and furthermore, the Sages had much to say about halakhot that were no longer practiced in their day.

Since people look (mistaknin) to it — Ḥakkaṭa Ḥebron 6b: According to some, the concern is that people may come to set the date of Passover according to the date on which the Megilla is read (Rashi; Rid). Others explain that the poor look to the time when the Megilla is read and expect to receive the Purim gifts for the needy at the same time. They may become distraught if the Megilla is read and the gifts are not distributed (R; fled).

Rabbeinu Eliayyim explains in similar fashion: If the money is distributed when the Megilla is read in advance of the holiday, the poor might come to squander it and not have any money left with which to celebrate on Purim itself. Rav Hai Gaon’s version of the text read mistaknin, they endanger themselves. He explains that nowadays, when the Jews are subject to persecution, it is better not to add to the days of Purim, so as not to intensify the danger. This is also indicated in the Jerusalem Talmud.

According to a derabbinic baraita, Rabbeinu Eliayyim explains in similar fashion: If the money is distributed when the Megilla is read in advance of the holiday, the poor might come to squander it and not have any money left with which to celebrate on Purim itself. Rav Hai Gaon’s version of the text read mistaknin, they endanger themselves. He explains that nowadays, when the Jews are subject to persecution, it is better not to add to the days of Purim, so as not to intensify the danger. This is also indicated in the Jerusalem Talmud.

Notes

With regard to the mishna’s ruling that the Megilla may be read on the day of assembly, Rabba bar bar Hana said that Rabbi Yohanan said: ‘This is the statement of Rabbi Akiva the unattributed.’ Most unattributed statements of tanna’im were formulated by Rabbi Akiva’s students and reflect his opinions. As, he derives halakhah based on the distinction that he draws between the terms time, their time, and their times. However, the Sages say: One may read the Megilla only in its designated time, i.e., the fourteenth of Adar.

The Gemara raises an objection based upon the following baraita. Rabbi Yehuda said: When is one permitted to read the Megilla from the eleventh to the fifteenth of Adar? One may read on these dates at a time when the years are established properly and the Jewish people dwell securely in their own land. However, nowadays, since people look to the reading of the Megilla and use it to calculate when Passover begins, one may read the Megilla only in its designated time, so as not to cause confusion with regard to the date of Passover, which is exactly one month from the day after Purim.

The Gemara analyzes this baraita: In accordance with whose opinion did Rabbi Yehuda issue his ruling? If we say that it is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Akiva, whose opinion is expressed in the mishna, there is a difficulty, as Rabbi Akiva holds that even nowadays this ordinance applies. According to Rabbi Akiva, it is permitted for residents of villages to read the Megilla on the day of assembly even nowadays, as he did not limit his ruling to times when the Jewish people dwell securely in their land.

Rather, is it not in accordance with the opinion of the Sages, who disagreed with Rabbi Akiva? And, nevertheless, at least when the years are established properly and the Jewish people dwell securely in their land, the Megilla is read even prior to the fourteenth, as the Sages disagree only about the halakha nowadays. This contradicts the statement of Rabbi Yohanan, who holds that the Megilla could never be read earlier than the fourteenth of Adar. The Gemara concludes: The refutation of the opinion of Rabbi Yohanan is indeed a conclusive refutation.

There are those who say a different version of the previous passage. Rabba bar bar Hana said that Rabbi Yohanan said: This is the statement of Rabbi Akiva, the unattributed. However, the Sages said: Nowadays, since people look to the reading of the Megilla and use it to calculate when Passover begins, one may read the Megilla only in its designated time.

The Gemara comments: This is also taught in a baraita: Rabbi Yehuda said: When is one permitted to read the Megilla from the eleventh to the fifteenth of Adar? At a time when the years are established properly and the Jewish people dwell securely in their own land. However, nowadays, since people look to the reading of the Megilla and use it to calculate when Passover begins, one may read the Megilla only in its designated time. According to this version, Rabbi Yehuda’s statement is consistent with the opinion of the Sages, as cited by Rabbi Yohanan.

The Gemara adds: Rav Ashi poses a difficulty based on an apparent contradiction between the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda in the aforementioned baraita and a ruling cited in a mishna in the name of Rabbi Yehuda.

Halakha

Reading the Megilla early on the day of assembly – Ḥakkaṭa Ḥebron 6b: The enactment that the villages advance their reading of the Megilla to the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth of Adar applies only when Israel is sovereign in its land. Today, however, the Megilla is read only on its designated days, the fourteenth and the fifteenth of Adar. This ruling is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, as the Gemara follows his opinion (Rambam Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Megilla 1:9).
The Gemara explains the apparent contradiction: And did Rabbi Yehuda actually say that nowadays, since people look to the reading of the Megilla and use it to calculate when Passover begins, one may read the Megilla only in its designated time? The Gemara raises a contradiction from a mishna (3a): Rabbi Yehuda said: When is one permitted to read the Megilla from the eleventh of Adar? In a place where the villagers generally enter town on Monday and Thursday, one may read the Megilla only in its designated time, the fourteenth of Adar.

The mishna indicates that, at least in a place where the villagers enter town on Monday and Thursday, one may read the Megilla from the eleventh of Adar even nowadays. And due to this contradiction, Rav Ashi establishes the baraita in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yosei bar Yehuda.

The Gemara expresses surprise: Because Rav Ashi poses a difficulty due to the apparent contradiction between the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda in the baraita and the opinion cited in a mishna in the name of Rabbi Yehuda, he establishes the baraita in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yosei bar Yehuda? How could he have emended the text just because he had a difficulty that he did not know how to resolve?

The Gemara explains: Rav Ashi heard that there were those who taught the baraita in the name of Rabbi Yehuda, and there were those who taught it in the name of Rabbi Yosei bar Yehuda. And since he had a difficulty with the apparent contradiction between one ruling of Rabbi Yehuda and another ruling of Rabbi Yehuda, he said: The one who taught it in the name of Rabbi Yehuda is not precise, whereas the one who taught it in the name of Rabbi Yosei bar Yehuda is precise, and in this way he eliminated the contradiction.

We learned in the mishna: Cities that have been surrounded by a wall since the days of Joshua, son of Nun, read the Megilla on the fifteenth of Adar. The Gemara asks: From where are these matters derived, as they are not stated explicitly in the Megilla? Rava said: It is as the verse states: “Therefore the Jews of the villages, who dwell in the unwalled towns, make the fourteenth day of the month of Adar a day of gladness and feasting” (Esther 9:19). From the fact that the unwalled towns celebrate Purim on the fourteenth, it may be derived that the walled cities celebrate Purim on the fifteenth.

The Gemara challenges this answer: Say that the unwalled towns celebrate Purim on the fourteenth, as indicated in the verse, and the walled cities do not celebrate it at all. The Gemara expresses astonishment: And are they not Jews? And furthermore: It is written that the kingdom of Ahasuerus was “from Hodu until Cush” (Esther 1:1), and the celebration of Purim was accepted in all of the countries of his kingdom (Esther 9:20–23).

Rather, the following challenge may be raised: Say that the unwalled towns celebrate Purim on the fourteenth and the walled cities celebrate it on the fourteenth and on the fifteenth, as it is written: “That they should keep the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day of the same, in every year” (Esther 9:21). This verse can be understood to mean that there are places where Purim is celebrated on both days.
The Gemara rejects this argument: If it had been written in the verse: The fourteenth day and [we] the fifteenth, it would be as you originally said. However, now that it is written: The fourteenth day and [we’re] the fifteenth day, the particle et used here to denote the accusative comes and interrupts, indicating that the two days are distinct. Therefore, residents of these locations celebrate Purim on the fourteenth, and residents of those locations celebrate it on the fifteenth.

The Gemara suggests: Say that residents of unwalled towns celebrate Purim on the fourteenth, as stated in the verse, and with regard to residents of walled cities, if they wish they may celebrate it on the fourteenth, and if they wish they may celebrate it on the fifteenth. The Gemara responds: The verse states: “In their times” (Esther 9:31), indicating that the time when the residents of this place celebrate Purim is not the time when the residents of that place celebrate Purim.

The Gemara raises another challenge: Say that the walled cities should celebrate Purim on the thirteenth of Adar and not on the fourteenth. The Gemara answers: It stands to reason that the residents of walled cities, who do not celebrate Purim on the fourteenth, celebrate it as it is celebrated in Shushan, and it is explicitly stated that Purim was celebrated in Shushan on the fifteenth.

The Gemara comments: We found a source for observing the holiday of Purim on the fourteenth of Adar in unwalled towns and on the fifteenth of Adar in walled cities; from where do we derive that remembering the story of Purim through the reading of the Megilla takes place on these days? The Gemara explains that the verse states: “That these days should be remembered and observed” (Esther 9:28), from which it is derived that remembering is compared to observing.

The Gemara notes that the mishna is not in accordance with the opinion of this tanna, as it is taught in the Tosefta (1:1) that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korba says: Cities that have been surrounded by a wall since the days of Ahasuerus read the Megilla on the fourteenth. According to the Tosefta, the status of walled cities is determined based upon whether they were walled in the time of Ahasuerus rather than the time of Joshua.

The Gemara asks: What is the reason for the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korha? The Gemara explains that the Megilla is read on the fourteenth in cities that are like Shushan. Just as Shushan is a city that was surrounded by a wall since the days of Ahasuerus, and one reads the Megilla there on the fourteenth, so too every city that was walled since the days of Ahasuerus reads the Megilla on the fourteenth.

The Gemara asks: What is the reason for the opinion of the tanna of our mishna? The Gemara explains: It is derived through a verbal analogy between one instance of the word unwalled and another instance of the word unwalled. It is written here: “Therefore the Jews of the villages, who dwell in the unwalled towns” (Esther 9:19), and it is written there, in Moses’ statement to Joshua before the Jewish people entered Eretz Yisrael: “All these cities were fortified with high walls, gates and bars; besides unwalled towns, a great many” (Deuteronomy 3:5). Just as there, in Deuteronomy, the reference is to a city that was surrounded by a wall from the days of Joshua, son of Nun, so too here it is referring to a city that was surrounded by a wall from the days of Joshua, son of Nun.

The Gemara continues: Granted that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korha did not state his explanation in accordance with the opinion of the tanna of our mishna because he did not hold that a verbal analogy can be established between one verse that employs the word unwalled and the other verse that employs the word unwalled. However, what is the reason that the tanna of our mishna did not state his explanation in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korha?
Rava said, and some say it unattributed to any particular Sage: Shushan is different since the miracle occurred in it on the fifteenth of Adar, and therefore Purim is celebrated on that day. However, other cities are only considered walled cities and read the Megilla on the fifteenth of Adar if they were walled since the days of Joshua.46

The Gemara asks: Granted, according to the tanna of our mishna, this is the meaning of what is written: “And these days should be remembered and observed throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city” (Esther 9:28). The phrase “every province [medina]”47 is expressed in the verse using repetition, so that it reads literally: Every province and province, and therefore contains a superfluous usage of the word province, is meant to distinguish between cities that were surrounded by a wall since the days of Joshua, son of Nun, where the Megilla is read on the fifteenth, and a city that was surrounded by a wall since the days of Ahasuerus, where the Megilla is read on the fourteenth.

The phrase “every city,” which is similarly expressed through repetition and contains a superfluous usage of the word city, also serves to distinguish between Shushan and other cities, as Purim is celebrated in Shushan on the fifteenth despite the fact that it was not walled since the time of Joshua. However, according to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korha, granted that the phrase “every province” comes to distinguish between Shushan and other cities that were not walled since the days of Ahasuerus; but what does the phrase “every city” come to teach?

The Gemara explains that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korha could have said to you: According to the tanna of our mishna, does it work out well? Since he holds that it is derived from the verbal analogy between one verse that employs the word unwalled and the other verse that employs the word unwalled, why do I need the phrase “every province”? Rather, the verse comes for a midrashic exposition, and it comes to indicate that the halakha is in accordance with the ruling issued by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. As Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: A walled city, and all settlements adjacent to it, and all settlements that can be seen with it, i.e., that can be seen from the walled city, are considered like the walled city, and the Megilla is read there on the fifteenth.

He holds that it is derived from the verbal analogy between one usage of the word unwalled and the other usage of the word unwalled – בְּשׁוּשַׁן. This indicates that the book of Esther may be interpreted by way of the hemicratic rules used for the Torah, such as verbal analogy. This idea is found in the Jerusalem Talmud as well (see Riva).

Since the miracle occurred in it – בְּשׁוּשַׁן. Rashi and others explain that a miracle was performed there during the battles and the people celebrated there on the fifteenth. Others suggest that the central part of the Purim miracle, i.e., all of the actions involving Esther and Mordecai, took place in Shushan, and it is therefore fitting that it should receive special honor and be treated as a walled city for future generations (Rabbeinu Yehonatan, Ture Even).

Every province – בַּמְדִינָתָן. The Rashba explains that according to the tanna of the mishna, the words “every family,” which are expressed in the verse in the repetitive phrase: Every family and family, is used in order to distinguish between villages that read on the fourteenth and other villages that advance their reading to the day of assembly, or those that are annexed to the walled cities for the purpose of Megilla reading.
HALAKHA

Like from Hamtan to Tiberias — אֲמָרָיו יִרְמֵי: Hamtan, also called Hamat or Harsha, is a city that was built around the hot springs of Tiberias. Although it was close to Tiberias, it was a separate settlement. It was also the seat of one of the priests who governed there. Ancient Tiberias was built south of modern-day Tiberias, and the distance between ancient Tiberias and Hamtan was about 1,000-1,200 m.

The Gemara asks: Up to what distance is considered adjacent?10 Rabbi Yirmeya said, and some say that it was Rabbi Hyya bar Abba who said: The limit is like the distance from the town of Hamtan to Tiberias,11 a mile. The Gemara asks: Let him say simply that the limit is a mile why did he have to mention those places? The Gemara answers that the formulation of the answer teaches us this: How much distance comprises the measure of a mile? It is like the distance from Hamtan to Tiberias.

Background

Roman bath ruins at Hamat Gader and map of area surrounding Geder and Hamtan

BACKGROUND

The Seer said — וְלֵימָא רַשַּׁאי: Rabbi Yirmeya said, and some say that it was Rabbi Hyya bar Abba who said: The Seers, i.e., the prophets, were the ones who said12 that the letters mem, nun, tzadi, peh, and kaf [mantzepakh],13 have a different form when they appear at the end of a word.

NOTES

The Gemara asks: And how can you understand it that way? Isn’t it written: “These are the commandments” that the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel in Mount Sinai (Leviticus 27:34), which indicates that a prophet is not permitted to initiate or change any matter of halakha from now on? Consequently, how could the prophets establish new forms for the letters? And furthermore, didn’t Rav Hisda say: The letters mem and samekh in the tablets of the covenant given at Sinai were restored by a miracle?14

NOTES

The Gemara answers: Yes, two forms of these letters did exist at that time, but the people did not know which one of them was to be used in the middle of the word and which at the end of the word, and the Seers came and established that the open forms are to be used in the middle of the word and the closed forms at the end of the word.

The Gemara asks: Ultimately, however, doesn’t the phrase “these are the commandments” (Leviticus 27:34) indicate that a prophet is not permitted to initiate any matter of halakha from now on? Rather, it may be suggested that the final letters already existed at the time of the giving of the Torah, but over the course of time the people forgot them, and the prophets then came and reestablished them.

Perek 1

Said by way of a miracle — וְלֵימָא רַשַּׁאי: The letters appearing on the tablets of the covenant were engraved into the stone, and there is a tradition that the engraving went completely through the tablet. Most letters are not closed, and therefore the portions of the stone that remained after the engraving were attached to the rest of the stone. However, since the letter samekh is closed, the part of the stone inside the letter could only have remained in place by way of a miracle, as it was not attached to the rest of the tablet. The same is true of the letter mem when it appears at the end of the word. This statement of Rav Hisda indicates that the form of the mem as it appears at the end of a word was already established at Sinai.