

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 3-4

Perek 3

Perek 3 details prophecies relating to the repentance of both the northern and southern kingdoms, specifically criticizing the nation's insincere repentance during the reign of king Yoshiyahu. The continuation of the perek includes a vision of consolation including mention of the ingathering of the exiles, a perfected spiritual atmosphere, and the unification of the kingdom. The prophecies in this perek echo the rebuke in perek 2 through the use of similar phrases and imagery.

❶ “If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, may he return unto her again?” (pasuk 1). The prophecies in pesukim 1-5 and 6-10 compare the sins of Yehuda and Yisrael to adultery, utilizing the same image of adultery invoked in perek 2.

a) These two prophecies are based on the laws of divorce recorded in Devarim 24:1-4. Review the pesukim in Devarim. How is the case described in Yirmiyahu's prophecy more severe than the one described in the Torah?

b) How does the prophet's conclusion compare to the conclusion of the Torah law? Review the sources below and note the various interpretations of the words “return to Me” (pasuk 1).

Talmud Bavli, Massechet Yomah 86b: Rebbe Yochanan said: The greatness of repentance [lies in the fact] that it can override a Torah prohibition, as it says: “If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, may he return unto her again? Will not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers (literally, friends); and would you yet return to Me?”

Rashi (commentary on the Talmud): “But you have played the harlot with many lovers (literally, friends)—with many lovers, and nevertheless—return to Me.”

Abarbanel: If a man sends away his wife and she becomes another man's—if it is the case that he is the one who sent her, since she went and became another man's, would it be appropriate for him to return to her again? No, because the land is greatly polluted by such an indecent act, and even more so in our case where you, Israel, committed adultery, meaning you left on your own and God did not send you! You were also promiscuous with not one lover but multiple lovers! This refers to the false gods that you worshipped. How can you return to Me and [expect] Me to save you?

2 Yirmiyahu compares the two kingdoms of Yisrael and Yehuda and concludes that “*backsliding Israel has proved herself more righteous than treacherous Yehuda*” (11).

a) Why are Yehuda's sins more severe than those of Yisrael? Refer to pesukim 8-10.

b) Refer to pasuk 5 and the explanation of **Radak** on the pasuk for a deeper understanding of Yehuda's insincere repentance:

‘Did you not just now cry unto Me: ‘My father’—from the recent “now” when King Yoshiyahu repented and the people of Yehuda repented with him. They were forced to, as he says explicitly, “and yet for all this her treacherous sister Yehuda has not returned to Me with her whole heart, but feignedly.” “Will He bear grudge forever?”—Thus they would say, and the prophet would say to them, “Behold, you have spoken, but have done evil things, and have had your way.”

According to this explanation, how does the nation understand the nature of repentance? Use the following quote from the Mishna (Yoma 8:9) to help you answer this: “One who says ‘I will sin and repent, [and] sin and repent’ does not receive the opportunity to repent.”

3 The vision of redemption in pesukim 14-18 echoes a prophecy of Yeshayahu (perek 2). The climax of Yirmiyahu's prophecy describes a surprising change in the status of the Ark.

a) According to the following commentators, how does this stage suit the context of the prophecy?

Radak: Even though you reproduced and populated the land, the nations who will come to fight against you will not be jealous, and you will have to go out to war with the Ark of God with you.

Metzudat David: They will no longer say, ‘we will go before the Ark to pray’ because the sheer size of the nation will prevent them all from coming—the area will not fit them.

b) Yirmiyahu's vision in 31:30-33 sheds additional light on our understanding of the prophecy regarding the Ark. Note the similar structures and content of both prophecies. How does this comparison help clarify the significance of the Ark's nullification?

Perek 4

In this perek, Yirmiyahu envisions the sights and sounds of Yehuda's future destruction: the arrival of the enemy from the north which is compared to a lion (5-8, 12-13), the helpless response of Yerushalayim's leaders (9), and the destruction and abandonment of the land of Israel in the wake of the enemy takeover (23-29). Interwoven throughout these descriptions, are Yirmiyahu's pained reactions to the shocking images of his own prophecy.

- 4 In pasuk 10, Yirmiyahu responds to both the description of the destruction in pesukim 5-8 and to the description of the leadership in pasuk 9. What is his basic accusation and in what capacity is he speaking?
- 5 In pesukim 19-21, Yirmiyahu responds to the images and sounds in pesukim 5-6. What does this reaction demonstrate regarding Yirmiyahu's personal reality?

To summarize: How do these reactions depict both Yirmiyahu's personal nature and his relationship with the nation and God? Consider the idea offered by the midrash:

There were three kinds of prophets: One demanded the honor of the father and son; one demanded the honor of the father and not that of the son; and one demanded the honor of the son and not that of the father. Yirmiyahu demanded the honor of the father and of the son... [Mechilta of Rebbe Yishmael 12:1]

- 6 Pesukim 23-26 describe various aspects of Israel's destruction. Note the incremental development of the description and try to understand its significance by comparing it to the world's creation in the first perek of Breishit. For additional help, review **Malbim's** explanation:

The vision begins by depicting the destruction of the entire reality and every creature brought into being during the six days of creation. He first describes the general destruction of the heavens and the earth...and then begins to organize the destruction which will rid the earth of all the creatures created from day three and onward...Perhaps with this, the order accords with the larger purpose [of creation]—After man, the purpose of all creation...it moves backwards, from the creation on the sixth day to the creation on the third day...

Appendix

...In years with little rain, this is not an uncommon phenomenon, especially in the fields of Anatot which suffer the most. Wild thorns, some of which are native to this border region between the mountains and the desert, thrive with little rain... Even more so, due to these terrible conditions, the cultivated plants are damaged or destroyed, clearing the area for unimpeded dispersion of these thorns.

Now we can better understand Yirmiyahu's agricultural metaphor...in 4:3: *"For thus said the Lord to the men of Yehuda and to Yerushalayim: break up for you a fallow ground, and sow not among thorns."*

For the farmers of Yerushalayim and the surrounding area, and specifically for the farmers from Anatot, this metaphor is much more than a [figure] of speech. It reminds them of their daily agricultural toil, of both their hopes and their disappointments. ..What does this metaphor depict?

By the summer's end, the fields are filled with thorns, especially after a winter with little rainfall which enables the thorns to thrive in the fields and kill the growing produce. The farmer who suffices with a simple plowshare to plant his seeds before the rainfall, will have intensified his troubles. The plowing he has done in the fields of thorns will have assisted in planting them, and his produce seeds will be planted inside the same furrows the thorns have claimed as their own. Therefore, a farmer who wants to see his produce blossom and his fields ridded of thorns, must burn his fields before the young fruits have blossomed. This must take place in the summertime, during the height of the growing season.

This is what Yirmiyahu's cry refers to at the beginning of perek 4: *"If you will return, O Israel, said the Lord, yea, return to Me; and if you will put away your detestable things out of My sight, and will not waver. [And will swear: 'As the Lord liveth' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness; then shall the nations bless themselves by Him, and in Him shall they glory. For thus said the Lord to the men of Yehuda and to Yerushalayim: break up for you a fallow ground, and sow not among thorns."]*

It is the nation's responsibility to repent for its sins before it is too late...In order to impart [this message] to the nation, Yirmiyahu borrows imagery from the world of agriculture; if the [nation] does not [repent], the horrific punishment Yirmiyahu describes in the coming pesukim will arrive. If evil continues to proliferate like thorns in a field, there will be no hope for restoration and the destruction will come with force.

(Noga Reuveni, *Or Chadash Al Sefer Yirmiyahu*)

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