

# MATAN AL HAPEREK

## A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

### Yirmiyahu Perakim 13-14

#### Perek 13

The perek opens with God's command to Yirmiyahu to perform a symbolic act (1-11). Many biblical prophets were instructed to perform physical tasks in order to visually convey God's messages to the nation (eg. Yirmiyahu 32:1-15, Yechezkel 4, Hoshea 1). After completing the three stages of the action, God appears to Yirmiyahu and explains its significance. The perek continues with a description of the arrival of the "enemy from the north" who will reach as far as Israel's southern Negev region. Yirmiyahu urges the nation's leaders, who have betrayed their public positions and turned to idol worship, to be humbled by the severe punishment they will soon receive.

① “Go, and get for yourself a linen belt” (1). The symbolic act Yirmiyahu is commanded to perform has two parts. The first part is comprised of three separate instructions (1-2, 3-5, 6-7), and the second part (8-11) explains the message conveyed by the action.

a) In pasuk 9, God compares the destruction of the belt to the destruction of the “*pride* [גאון] of Yebuda and the pride of Yerushalayim.” What is the connection between the two? (To further understand the connection between them, see the explanation of Malbim in section B.)

b) In pasuk 11, God likens his relationship with the nation to the connection between a man and his belt. What similarities do the two relationships share in common? Consider the explanation of **Malbim**:

Just as a belt is fitted to one's waist, so too God sits close and watches over [the nation] with divine providence and without any intermediary. Just as a belt symbolizes strength and the linen symbolizes respect and honor, so too

God brings the nation praise, recognition, and honor. They reflect His strength by illustrating His ability to alter the rules of engagement, and His glory is illustrated through His acts of Divine providence. Just as He commands [Yirmiyahu] to always situate the belt on his hips, so too God will always be attached to them.

c) The first stage of the symbolic act can be divided into two actions: the purchase of the belt and the wearing of it. However, the moral explained by God only discusses the latter. What do you think is the deeper significance of the purchase?

2 “*But if ye will not bear it, my soul shall weep in secret...*” (17). At the heart of a vision of painful exile, Yirmiyahu unexpectedly turns to his internal, emotional experience

a) Try to find the linguistic and thematic connections between this emotional outburst and the prophecy surrounding it. Consider the explanation of

**Radak:**

*But if you will not bear it*—The prophet is saying that if you do not listen, this is the prophecy I am delivering from the mouth of God. *My soul shall weep in secret*—Because I see your fate, and the secret weeping of my soul is [my] worry. *For your pride*—because of your pride, you will not humble yourself and listen to the word of God.

b) The Midrash explains this pasuk differently by changing the identity of the speaker. Discuss the significance of the clandestine weeping according to this explanation, and note the complex attitude towards the Temple's destruction.

The officer of the angels approached God, fell before Him, and said: ‘Master of the Universe, I will cry but You shall not cry!’ God said to him: ‘If you will not permit Me to cry, I will enter a place you are prohibited from entering and cry there,’ as it says, ‘*But if ye will not bear it, my soul shall weep in secret for your pride, etc*’ (Yirmiyahu 13:17). God said to the administering angels, ‘Let us go together and see what the enemies did to My Temple.’ Immediately, God went with the angels and with Yirmiyahu at the lead. When God saw the Temple he said, ‘This is certainly My home and My residence which the enemies came upon and did to it as they wished.’ At that same time God cried and said, ‘I am pained for My Temple. Where are My children? Where are My priests? Where is My beloved? What can I do for you? I warned you, but you did not repent.’

[Midrash Eicha Rabbah Petichta 24]



## Perek 14

Perek 14 opens with a horrifying description of a drought that strikes the kingdom of Yehuda and describes the dire situation of both the humans and animals in the kingdom (1-6). The prophet describes the hopeless state of the nation in pasuk 18: *“If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword! And if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine! For both the prophet and the priest are gone about to a land, and knew it not.”* The severe drought motivates the people to turn to God in prayer, to admit their sins, and beg for forgiveness (7-9, 19-22). Yirmiyahu attempts to defend the nation, however, the gates of heaven have already been closed.

- 3 The report of the drought includes four illustrations of the drought's impact: two describing the impact on man (3-4) and two describing the impact on the animals (5-6). What distinguishes the human reaction from the animal reaction? Note the word which repeats itself in the description of man's reaction. How does this word characterize man?
- 4 In pesukim 7-9, the nation prays to God for forgiveness and for His sympathy. The nation asks two rhetorical questions (“*Why...Why*”), each of which includes a set of images. What is the difference between these images and what aspect of God's rule does the nation wish to see altered?
- 5 Pesukim 11-16 record a conversation between God and Yirmiyahu in which Yirmiyahu, in attempt to defend the nation, blames the false prophets for the nation's sins. Why does God refuse to accept his claim? Consider the following explanation. Which explanation best suits the simple meaning of the text?

**Metzudat David:** They should know that they are false prophets, because I never sent them or commanded them to perform any demonstrations... This being so, they do not have any power to perform any signs or miracles.

**Radak:** They had to distinguish between true prophets and false prophets. A true prophet brings them Moshe's Torah, while false prophets...[speak] words which negate Torah.

# Appendix

## The Battle Against the False Prophets

Yerushalayim and Babylonia are filled with prophets who mold the minds of the native populations. Their prophecies do not reveal the future and cannot be immediately explicated. They are similar to op-eds. The prophet, like the columnist, stands firmly by his/her worldview and tries to convince the readers/listeners that their worldview is accurate. Contemporary journalism confronts us with many writers who, in fact, try and present the exact opposite of reality.

The prophet's words burn deep inside of him. There is no space between his external understanding (whether intellectual or emotional) and his internal awareness from which his prophecy stems. Yirmiyahu, who experiences a tremendous amount of confrontation with the false prophets, attempts to analyze the characteristics of divine prophecy...Prophets of high stature constantly call upon the nation to adhere to advice which diametrically opposes Yirmiyahu's messages. Yirmiyahu feels lost and unsure of the truth. In perek 14, Yirmiyahu breaks down before God in distress:

*Then said I: 'Ah, Lord God! behold, the prophets say unto them: Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place.' Then the Lord said unto me: 'The prophets prophesy lies in My name; I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spoke I unto them; they prophesy unto you a lying vision, and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their own heart. Therefore thus saith the Lord: As for the prophets that prophesy in My name, and I sent them not, yet they say: Sword and famine shall not be in this land, by sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed (14:13-15).*

Yirmiyahu painfully recounts the [misleading] advice of the [false] prophets who keep calling for a rebellion against Babylonia. God responds by saying that their words are false. After all, this is what [Yirmiyahu] himself has been telling [the nation] day in and day out. However, the messages of the [false] prophets have begun to sink in, causing Yirmiyahu to doubt his own words.



[Rabbi Binyamin Lau,  
**Jeremiah**, (Y. Wruble, Trans.)  
Yedioth Ahronoth Books and  
Chemed Books: Tel-Aviv, pp.  
188-189]

*“And their nobles send their lads for water:  
they come to the pits and find no water” (14:3).*

The image to the left is of a water pit in the Kina Stream, which would have been completely dried out during the drought described in perek 14.

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