

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 15-16

Perek 15

In this week's perakim, we once again encounter Yirmiyahu's personal life and the duality which troubles his tortured soul. In the first section of this perek (1-9), Yirmiyahu responds to God's refusal to accept his prayers which was discussed in perek 14. God tells Yirmiyahu that even if the greatest leaders of past generations would stand before Him in prayer, they would be able to save the nation. The perek continues to describe the many facets of the exile: plagues, death by the sword, famine, and captivity. In the second section of the perek (10-21), Yirmiyahu laments the suffering, mockery, and isolation he has endured and gives expression to the anguish caused by his life's mission. God response to this outcry encourages Yirmiyahu to continue marching forward despite his desperation.

1 “Then said the Lord unto me: 'Though Moshe and Shmuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people; cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth'” (1). The beginning of this prophecy mentions three past leaders of Israel: Moshe, Shmuel, and later in pasuk 4, Menashe.

a) Compare and contrast the role of Moshe in the sin of the golden calf (Shemot 32:11-14) with the role of Shmuel at Even ha-Ezer (I Shmuel 7:8-9). How does this comparison relate to the prophecy in Yirmiyahu?

b) Moshe and Shmuel are also mentioned as a pair in Tehillim 99:6-8. How does this reference help clarify the point made in Yirmiyahu's prophecy? How does **Rashi's** explanation (quoted below) elaborate on the comparison between these two leaders? How does he differentiate between Moshe and Shmuel on one hand, and Yirmiyahu on the other?

Moshe and Shmuel—both of them needed to ask [God] to forgive the nation. First, they ensured that the nation repented, and then they prayed on the nation's behalf. It did not occur to them to try and abate My anger until the [nation] had been straightened out. Moshe—*“Put every man his sword on his thigh... he ground it to powder, and strewed it upon the water”* and only after, *“and now I will go up unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make atonement for your sin.”*

Shmuel at Mizpah: *“Then the children of Israel did put away the Baalim”* and only then, *“Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray for you unto the Lord.”*

However, you are unable to make the nation return to Me, therefore, do not pray on their behalf.

c) *“And I will cause them to be a horror among all the kingdoms of the earth, because of Menashe the son of Chizkiyah king of Yebuda, for that which he did in Yerushalayim.”* Menashe's sins leave an indelible mark which even Moshe and Shmuel cannot erase. What was so terrible about Menashe's sins? Refer to II Melachim 21:16, 23:24-27.

2 Pesukim 16-17 describe two opposing realities experienced by Yirmiyahu after becoming a prophet. Based on these pesukim, how would you characterize Yirmiyahu? How can you explain the contradiction between the two experiences?

3 In pesukim 18-21, Yirmiyahu's exasperation reaches a climax. He makes a strong statement to which God responds.

a) What is Yirmiyahu's central claim? Pay attention to the imagery in pasuk 18. How does God relate to Yirmiyahu's complaint? In His response, God uses the phrase *“you will stand before Me”* [לפני תעמוד]. Refer to 15:1 and I Melachim 17:1 for a clearer understanding of this phrase in relation to the role of a prophet. How does God's response shed light on the intention behind Yirmiyahu's claim?

b) God's response in pasuk 20 is parallel to the main message of Yirmiyahu's inaugural prophecy (1:18). Why is there a need to revert back to those earlier ideas, and how does this regression serve as a response to Yirmiyahu's words in pesukim 15-18? Pasuk 19 adds an additional element which is not included in the inaugural prophecy: *“If you bring forth the precious out of the vile, you will be as My mouth.”* What does this add to the message conveyed in the inaugural prophecy, and why is it mentioned now?

Perek 16

This perek continues the portrayal of Yirmiyahu as a man struggling with his divinely ordained fate to live a life which reflects his tragic prophecies. The perek opens with an unbearable and unusual commandment: Yirmiyahu is forbidden to marry and create a family; The instruction to disconnect from general society is meant to symbolize the future destruction which is described in great detail by the continuation of the perek.

4 In pasuk 2, Yirmiyahu is forbidden to marry and have children. God describes the rationale behind each prohibition in chiasmic form. (Chiasm is the reversal of the order of words in the second of two parallel phrases.)

a) Yirmiyahu is not the only prophet whose marital status is turned into a broader prophetic symbol. For further understanding, refer to Hoshea 1:2 and Yechezkel 24:18. How does the commandment given to each prophet relate to the content of their prophecies?

b) What is the significance of the diminished happiness described in pesukim 8-9?

c) Yirmiyahu and many other prophets ascribe symbolic importance to both marriage and its nullification. For example, refer back to 2:2 and 3:1. What additional layer of meaning does this add to the prohibition placed on Yirmiyahu?

5 Why is Yirmiyahu prohibited to have children, and what does this prohibition symbolize? Refer to pesukim 2-7 and to the midrash quoted below:

When the world is engulfed in pain and destruction, man is forbidden to engage in procreation, because when God is involved in destroying the world, man should not be building it. This is what Yosef did. Until the years of famine arrived, Yosef was with his wife, as it says, “*And unto Yosef were born two sons*” When? “*Before the year of famine came*”...Noach did the same. When he enters the ark it is written, “*And Noach went in, and his sons*” and only afterwards, “*and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark.*” When he exits it is written that, “*Go forth from the ark, you, and your wife, and your sons, and your sons' wives.*” From here we learn that Noach and his sons were forbidden from engaging in marital relations.” (Midrash Tanchuma 58:11)

6 In the middle of this prophecy of destruction, pesukim 14-15 suddenly shift to a description of the redemption which will succeed the exile, a redemption which will outshine the glorious exodus from Egypt. Why are these pesukim placed in the midst of such a negative prophecy? Note the harsh ending of pasuk 13 and compare it to the similar idea and phraseology in Devarim 4:26-31. Consider **Rashi's** explanation on pasuk 14:

Therefore—the language of an oath; even though you have betrayed Me, I vow that I will redeem you with My own hands.

Appendix

“I sat not in the assembly of them that make merry, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of Your hand; for You have filled me with indignation” (15:17)

This pasuk has been explained in many different ways. We have brought you three different explanations: Radak, who explains the pasuk according to its context, a midrash from Eicha Rabbah which applies the loneliness to the national level, and an excerpt from The Ways of the Righteous which understands the pasuk as a moral imperative.

Radak: [*Your words were to me a joy and the rejoicing of] my heart*—It means to say *the rejoicing of my mind*. But I did not experience another type of joy, a physical joy, in their company and their assembly when they rejoiced, this I did not experience. I did not even engage them as company, rather I sat alone...*Because of Your hand*—meaning because of your hand of prophecy, as it says, “*The hand of the Lord was on me*” (Yechezkel 37:1).

Eicha Rabbah, Petichta 3: Rebbe Aba the son of Kehana opened, “*I sat not in the assembly of them that make merry; I sat alone because of Your hand; for You have filled me with indignation*”—The people of Israel said before God, “Master of the Universe, in all of my days I have never entered the gentile’s theater or circus to become merry and rejoice.” *I sat alone because of Your hand*—The hand of Pharaoh reached me, and I did not sit alone. The hand of Sancherev reached me, and I did not sit alone. However, when Your hand reached me, I sat alone. *How does she sit alone?!*

The Ways of the Righteous, The Gate of Happiness: This trait [happiness] comes to man when his heart is serene and when he is rid of any ill feelings. A person who achieves his goals without being saddened by any other factors, will always be happy, his face will be illuminated, his radiance will shine, his physical body will be healthy, and old age will not hurry to overcome him. As it is written, “*A merry heart is a good medicine; but a broken spirit dries the bones*” (Proverbs 17:22). From this happiness comes laughter, however, it is not appropriate for an enlightened person to laugh often. For frivolous thoughts accompany laughter, as it is written, “*For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool; this also is vanity*” (Kohelet 7:6)...It is inappropriate for an upstanding person to behave frivolously in the presence of others, because it is said that someone who is usually foolish loses his fear [of God]. When a person is in the midst of frivolity, he does not think about his fear of God. Therefore, a person should forbid himself from laughter and should not acquire for himself a frivolous teacher or friend, as it is written, “*I sat not in the assembly of them that make merry, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of Your hand; for You have filled me with indignation*” (Yirmiyahu 15:17).

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