

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 19-20

Perek 19-20:6

One of Yirmiyahu's harshest prophecies of rebuke appears in this perek, addressing the worshippers of Baal in the Valley of Ben-hinnom who sacrifice their children in the name of divine worship. The prophecy opens with God's commandment to Yirmiyahu to buy a "jug of potter's ware," a symbolic act similar to the purchase of the belt (perek 13) and the shattering of the earthenware (perek 18). Yirmiyahu is commanded to first share his prophecy with the elders and priests of the nation, and then repeat it in front of the nation in the courtyard of the Temple. Pashchur the son of Immer, who is both a priest in the Temple and a false prophet, reacts with vehemence to the prophecy: Pashchur beats Yirmiyahu and then jails him overnight. Upon his release from jail, Yirmiyahu pronounces a severe prophecy of destruction about Pashchur himself.

- 1 "Go buy a jug of potter's ware" (19:1).
 - a) What do both the name (בקבוק) and characteristics of the jug symbolize? Consider pesukim 7 and 10-11.
 - b) The prophecy of the jug resembles the 'potter's prophecy' in the previous perek. In both prophecies, the vessel symbolizes the nation's fate. How does the parable in our perek contrast with the parable in the 'potter's prophecy,' and what do you think is significant about these differences?
- 2 "I am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of all who hear about it will tingle" (19:3). This threatening phrase appears in two other places in Tanach: in the prophecy describing the destruction of Eli's household and the Tabernacle in Shiloh (I Shmuel 3:11) and in the prophecy describing the destruction of the Kingdom of Yehuda (II Melachim 21:12). Why is this phrase used in these specific

prophecies? What do they share in common? Review the prophecy in perek 7:12-15 (“*the temple of the Lord*”). What is Yirmiyahu’s central argument, and how does it contribute to your understanding of the prophecy in perek 19?

- 3 Discuss the relationship between the grave sins detailed in pesukim 4-5 and their punishment in pesukim 6, 7, 9 and 11.

Perek 20:7-18

While the previous perek discusses Yirmiyahu’s actions and prophetic messages, this one gives the reader insight into Yirmiyahu’s emotional reality. His prophecy, which rages uncontrollably inside of him, cannot be suppressed and brings Yirmiyahu great pain and suffering. The first section of the prophecy ends on a brighter note of thanksgiving (7-13); however, in the prophecy’s continuation, Yirmiyahu regrets his entering the world and curses the day he was born (14-18).

- 4 In your study of the pesukim, discuss Yirmiyahu’s ambivalent relationship with God. Note his complaint in pasuk 7 in comparison to the praise in pasuk 13. Also note the harsh phrasing of pesukim 7-8 and the paradoxical description of God’s strength in pesukim 7 and 11. Consider the significance of the various phrases of mockery and contempt repeated in pesukim 7-8 and 11-12.
- 5 “*But [His word] was like a raging fire in my heart*” (9). This phrase is one of the most vivid descriptions of the prophetic experience in all of Tanach, which describes prophecy as an inescapable fate.

Radak: *But [His word] was like a raging fire in my heart*—that I tried with all my might to release. Similarly, if a fire would be shut up in my bones, I would use all of my might to release it—so too with the word of God. *I could not hold it in*—I could not hold it in, and I could not stand it, as if it were fire. Against my will, I release [the prophecies] from my lips and pronounce them.

Can you suggest a different understanding of this image?

- 6 “*Accursed be the day that I was born.*” In pesukim 14-18, Yirmiyahu speaks about the pain his existence causes him. Compare his words in pesukim 17-18 to God’s message in Yirmiyahu’s inaugural prophecy (1:5). How do Yirmiyahu’s expressions of regret in our perek shed light on the meaning of this statement in perek 1?

Appendix

Uri Tzvi Greenberg (1896-1981) was one of Israel's most acclaimed poets. His exceptional poem "With My God, the Smith" ["עם אלי הנפח"], describes the poet, in this case himself, as a kind of prophet whose lines of poetry are forced upon him by God and bring him constant suffering. This image is based on the image of the prophetic experience as described in perek 20: "But [His word] was like a raging fire in my heart, shut up in my bones, I could not hold it in, I was helpless." The image of God as a smith and the poet as clay in His hands, is inspired by perek 18 of Yirmiyahu.

With My God, the Smith

Like chapters of prophecy my days burn, in all the revelations,
And my body between them's a block of metal for smelting,
And over me stands my god, the Smith, who hits hard:
Each wound that Time has opened in me opens its mouth to him
And pours forth in a shower of sparks the intrinsic fire.
This is my just lot - until dusk on the road.
And when I return to throw my beaten block on a bed,
My mouth is an open wound,
And naked I speak with my god:
You worked hard.
Now it is night; come let us both rest.

(Translation taken from www.saveisrael.com)