

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 21-22

Perek 21

Perakim 21-22 is comprised of a unit of prophecies rebuking the kings of Yehuda for their sinful behavior. These prophecies, which are not organized in chronological order, were received at different points in Yirmiyahu's life and relate to a number of different kings. Tzidkiyahu, the last king to rule Yehuda before the destruction of the Temple, sends a group of messengers to Yirmiyahu in order to receive words of comfort. The prophecy in perek 21 is a response to the arrival of that group. Yirmiyahu sends the messengers back to Tzidkiyahu, who had refused to believe in Yirmiyahu's prophecies until that point, with a prophecy depicting Yerushalayim's destruction. The perek continues with a rebuke of Tzidkiyahu's corrupt justice system which is partly responsible for the destruction of the kingdom.

- 1 Throughout biblical history, God miraculously saves the nation from threatening enemies. Tzidkiyahu, aware of his cultural past and especially impressed with God's conquest of the Assyrian army during the reign of Chizkiyahu, sends messengers to Yirmiyahu hoping that he will prophesy another miracle. Review II Melachim 19:1-7. Discuss the similarities between Chizkiyahu's request during the Assyrian siege and Tzidkiyahu's request during the Babylonian siege. Make sure to include discussion of the monarch's context, the nature of the request, and its phrasing.
- 2 In light of the similarities shared by the two stories, the dissimilar responses are puzzling. Discuss the differences between the two groups of messengers and their requests: the nature of the group, the claims in the requests, and the differences between the two reactions. Note God's role in the scenario presented in both responses. Can you now explain why the prophets respond differently?

Perek 22

The unit of prophecies discussing the kings of Yehuda continues into this perek as well. Four kings reigned in Yehuda after Yoshiyahu. Yehoachaz, the son of Yoshiyahu, who in this prophecy is named “*Shalum*”, rules Yehuda for three months before being exiled by Pharoah Necho. Yehoyakim, the son of Yoshiyahu, rules for eleven years. His son, Yehoyachin, rules for three months and is then exiled with his mother by the Babylonian king. Tzidkiyahu, the son of Yoshiyahu, serves as the final king of Yehuda. The perek begins with general words of rebuke addressed to the king of Yehuda (1-9). This is followed by a prophecy of destruction about *Shulam* (Yehoachaz) (1-12), Yehoyakim (13-19), and Yehoyachin (24-30). In these prophecies, Yirmiyahu paints a picture of the ideal kingship, which stands in stark contrast to the immoral nature of the kings mentioned.

- 3 According to the first prophecy in the perek addressed to the “King of Yehuda,” what is the role of a king?
- 4 The relationship between the kings of Yehuda and the family of David is mentioned multiple times in this unit: 21:12, 22:2, 4. How does the mention of David, the progenitor of the monarchical line, sharpen the prophecy’s criticism of the kings? Consider II Shmuel 8:15 and compare it to Breishit 18:19 (the first two times the phrase “*righteousness and justice*”—“צדקה ומשפט”—is mentioned). This phrase continues to follow the house of David. See for example, I Melachim 10:9.
- 5 Discuss the commonalities shared by the conditions of monarchy mentioned in this perek (4-5) and the prophecy regarding Shabbat observance in perek 17. Upon which commandment does each prophecy focus? Note the role played by the city gates in both prophecies. Consider this following excerpt from the Biblical Encyclopedia’s (האנציקלופדיה המקראית) entry on “Gates:”

In ancient cities, the gate was the only real open space which most [scholars] believe was positioned on a small, elevated mound [of land]. The city streets were narrow and packed. Naturally, the central gathering place for institutions of justice and commerce was by the city gates and in the area surrounding them.

6 Pesukim 13-19 describe the despicable moral character of Yehoyakim's reign. This description sharply contrasts with the presentation of the ideal kingship at the beginning of the perek.

a) Review pesukim 13-17 to gain a better understanding of the severity of Yehoyakim's sins. Note the incremental rise in the severity of the accusations.

b) Yirmiyahu compares Yehoyakim's rule to the rule of his father, Yoshiyahu, and to the kings of Davidic descent. According to Yirmiyahu and Yehoyakim, what values should make a king's priority list? Take **Radak's** explanation into account as well:

Did your father not eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness—I would not fault you for your pleasures, if you would do justice and righteousness. Your father Yoshiyahu ate and drank in accustom with monarchical norms and derived pleasure from them. Because he did justice and righteousness, [life] was good until the end of his days. However, you derive pleasure from the good of this world through evil ways. The buildings which you derive pleasure from are built upon exploitations and not upon righteousness and justice...

7 Both prophecies in this perek relate to the exile of the kings from Israel: Shalum (10-12) and Yechoniya (24-30). Which point is stressed in Yirmiyahu's description of the two exiles? What lesson is Yirmiyahu trying to teach the nation? [For further guidance, refer to the prophecy in 29:4-6).

Appendix

“Woe unto him that builds his house by unrighteousness” (22:13)

“...One of the harshest prophecies delivered by Yirmiyahu to Yehoyakim is found in 22:13-19, *“Woe to him that builds his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by injustice; that uses his neighbor's service without wages, and gives him not his hire. That who said: 'I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers.'”*

I believe that Yehoyakim’s palace, the one who’s construction is strongly disparaged by the prophet, was revealed in the archeological digs at Ramat Rachel...We did not expect this when we began excavating in what was then beyond Jerusalem’s city limits, midway between Jerusalem and Bet Lechem. We did not expect that one of Yehuda’s kings would build a fortress and palace. The identification of the site was not the critical issue for us, but rather the surprising fact that the king built one of the most impressive palaces of its kind on this site.

...We found the handle of a jar inscribed with a Hebrew seal with the words, “To Elyakim lad of Yochan.”...In his time, Albright had already suggested that this same ‘Yochan’ could be identified with ‘Yochinu’ mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions. We know him as Yehoyachin, King of Yehuda and son of Yehoyakim, who ruled for only three months before being exiled to Babylonia. We used this seal to identify the final period of history during which this palace was in use. It was in the days of Yehoyachin...I have suggested to identify the palace mentioned in Yirmiyahu 22 with the palace found at Ramat Rachel, based firstly but not solely, on the date of its construction...Yirmiyahu sees the palace being built outside of the city and says, ‘Just as you have built your palace outside of the city, so too will be your fate which will throw you out of the city gates.’... The prophet blames the king for his undeterred building efforts. During one of the most difficult periods in Israel’s history, he unabashedly gathers slave laborers and builds himself an ostentatious palace.

(Based on Aharoni’s, *Iyunim be-Sefer Yirmiyahu*)



Stone column capitols engraved
◀ with unique etchings and borders
found in the palace of Ramat Rachel.

Photo: Oded Lipshitz

(מתוך אתר “מסע אחר”)

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