

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 43-44

Perek 43:8-13

These pesukim describe the first prophecy of Yirmiyahu in Egypt. Yirmiyahu is commanded in his prophecy to perform an action which will symbolize the "laying of the cornerstone" of Nevuchadrezzar's rule over Egypt.

① *"And I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt... He shall also break the monuments of Bet-Shemesh that is in the land of Egypt; ..."* (12-13)

a) In his prophecy of doom, Yirmiyahu mentions twice the burning of the houses of the gods in Egypt, and in between he prophesies the breaking of the monuments in Beit Shemesh. [Beit Shemesh is identified as the city of Ohn, which is also called Helio Polis – the city of the sun. This city was of great importance in the Egyptian religion and in the Egyptian administration.] Why does Yirmiyahu emphasize this in his prophecy of doom about Egypt? See the commentary of the **Abarbanel**:

And the Holy One Blessed be He informed the prophet of the destiny of the gods of Egypt so that Israel would know and not turn to them for then they too would be totally destroyed.

b) A surprising interpretation as to the nature of these monuments is given by **Rashi** based on the Targum Yonatan on Yishayahu's prophecy in 19:18. According to Rashi, these are not monuments to the pagan gods of Egypt, but rather monuments to God:

the monuments of Bet-shemesh: The altars that those who had converted in the days of Chizkiya had made there - Sancheriv's captives whom he brought from Cush and from Egypt before Jerusalem on the day of his downfall, as it is stated "On that day there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt speaking the language of Canaan and swearing to the Lord of Hosts one of which will

be called ‘the city of Heres’” (Yishayahu 19.18)...Yonatan translated the word *heres* in two ways: From the language of "Who commands the sun (*cheres*), and it rises not" (Iyov 9:7) and from the language of destruction and devastation (*heres*). And from where did Yonatan learn this? From the prophecy of Yirmiyahu in Tachpanches, "*He shall also break the monuments of Bet-shemesh that is in the land of Egypt*"

How does this commentary expand the circle of those affected by the calamity and broaden the meaning of the prophecy?

Perek 44

In Perek 44 we see that despite the fact that Yirmiyahu's prophecies of the destruction of Judah have come true, the people have not learned their lesson and have continued to worship idols. This causes a harsh confrontation between Yirmiyahu and the Judeans who are now in Egypt. Yirmiyahu chastises the men and their wives for their sin of idolatry, while reminding them of the process which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah. He warns them that calamity will continue to befall them (1-14). The people react to this speech by reinterpreting history such that the cause of the fall of Judah and the destruction was that the people *ceased* worshipping idols in the time of Yoshiyahu, and therefore they conclude that they must return to idolatry (15-19). The confrontation ends with a prophecy of doom for the Jews living in Egypt (20-30). On this harsh note we conclude the last prophecy of Yirmiyahu to Israel in our book, from here on the book brings prophecies for the gentile nations and historical descriptions.

- 2 Perek 44 opens with a prophecy to the Jews who left Judah for Egypt, in which Yirmiyahu chastises them for their sin of idolatry. The prophecy is divided into three parts: a description of the past (1-6), rebuke about the current situation (7-10) and a prophecy of doom for the future (11-14).

a) Discuss the link between the past and the present in the prophecy, and the conclusion which comes out of this for the future.

b) Compare the description of the punishment in pesukim 2 and 6 to that in pesukim 7, 8 and 11-14. In which is the future punishment more severe?

3 “Then all the men ... answered Yirmiyahu, saying: 'As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you.'” (15-16)

The people reject Yirmiyahu's rebuke and present a different explanation for the spiritual-historical process which caused the destruction. Their claims are based on a serious theological problem which bothered the generation of the destruction. In order to understand this problem, read the description of Yoshiyahu's actions in Melachim II 23:4-7 and 25-26. What is the conclusion which the people reached based on this theological problem, and what is the answer to this problem given by Sefer Melachim (23:26-27) and by Sefer Yirmiyahu (21-23)?

4 a) In pesukim 16-17 the people contrast their words and Yirmiyahu's. Discuss the tension between the two “words” and the justification which the people bring to prove that they are correct.

b) In the continuation of his words to the people (24-30), Yirmiyahu describes the future calamity which will befall the people, a calamity which will prove that his prophecy is correct (as we have seen in other places in the book). Throughout these pesukim, the prophet uses terms which are connected to vows and oaths e.g. *bakama* (establishment), *shevua beshem* (swearing by the Name), *chai Hashem* (the Lord God lives). Follow these vows and oaths and pay attention to the different contexts and the way that Yirmiyahu uses the terms differently for vows to God and vows to idolatry. What is the decisive argument expressed in this way?

5 The wives of Judah, who play a central role in the confrontation with Yirmiyahu, are mentioned several times in our perek. Follow these references throughout the perek (9, 15, 20, 24-25) and discuss their role in the confrontation. Pay attention particularly to pasuk 19, using the commentary of Menachem Bola in **Da'at Mikra**:

Where it says *lemilechet hashamaim* it should read *lemalkat hashamaim* – the intention is the queen of heaven. And the text changed the reading of the word to show disapproval. The intention seems to be that they meant the planet Venus, which was an Assyrian goddess called Ashtar, who was the head goddess of the Assyrian gods...In the prayers of the Assyrians and Babylonians she is called “the queen”.

Appendix

“Behold, I will give Pharaoh Chofra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of them that seek his life...” (44:30)

Pharaoh Chofra (known in English as Apries) was the fourth king in the twenty-sixth dynasty and the son of Psammetichus II. In the time of Chofra, Egypt was active in the politics of the Near East and tried to cause the neighboring lands to rebel against Nevuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia. Because of this policy, Chofra helped Tzidkiyahu king of Judah to confront Babylonia during the siege of Jerusalem. The involvement of the Egyptian army caused a temporary retreat by the Babylonians. However, this victory was short-lived. The Egyptian army was driven back to its country in the same year that they came, and Jerusalem was captured and destroyed. Chofra tried to enlist Sidon and Tyre, but was unsuccessful. His failures were even more widespread: the Libyans, his neighbors to the west, asked for his help to rebel against the Greeks. However, in their travels west, the Egyptian army met with a fiasco and as a result the army rebelled against their king. One of the commanders of Pharaoh Chofra's army, Yachmas, declared himself to be the pharaoh and forced the king to share the throne. In the third year of this shared kingdom, Chofra went to war against Yachmas but was defeated in the battle and killed. This is the death to which Yirmiyahu refers in our pasuk.

In a fragmented Babylonian text we read of Babylonian king Nevuchadnezzar's war campaign to Egypt: “In the thirty seventh year Nevuchadnezzar king of Babylonia marched to Egypt to war...Yachmas of the Egyptians mobilized his army...he called for his help...” The year is 567 B.C.E., and the king appears to be Yachmas II, who earlier dethroned Pharaoh Chofra. Josephus tells us that in the twenty-third year of Nevuchadnezzar “he infiltrated Egypt to suppress it and killed the ruling king, and replaced him with another king, and he took the Jews who were in the land in captivity again and took them to Babylonia.”

(Free translation from Yair Hoffman and Refael Givon, Olam HaTanach on Sefer Yirmiyahu)