

Dedicated in loving memory of Anna Rosenfeld, z'l

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 45-46

Perek 45

The prophecy in our perek is dated to the fourth year of Yehoyakim. This year was a turning point in Yirmiyahu's prophecies. This was the year that Nevuchadnezzar rose to power, and the year in which Yirmiyahu was commanded to write down his prophecies in a book (See perakim 25 and 36). The prophecy in perek 45 is given during the reading of the prophecies to Baruch ben Neriah (this reading is described in perek 36). During the reading Yirmiyahu suddenly turns to Baruch the scribe and prophesies about him.

- 1 The perek is dedicated to the story of Baruch ben Neriah, Yirmiyahu's scribe. Examine Baruch ben Neriah's appearances throughout the book, especially his character and his relationship with Yirmiyahu. Pay special attention to his role in imparting Yirmiyahu's prophecies to the people: 32:12, 36:4-19 (especially 18), 43:3-2.
- 2 The prophecy is a reaction to Baruch's complaint, which is not explicit in the text. What do you think the complaint could be based on the context that the prophecy is given in?

Examine the following midrash from **Mechilta de Rabbi Yishmael** and think about how the Rabbis explain the connection between Baruch ben Neriah's words (3) and the answer of God (4-5):

You will also find it so in the case of Baruch ben Neriah who was complaining before God. It is said, *'You said: Woe is me for the Lord has added sorrow to my pain'* (Yir. 45:3) – I have been treated differently than the other disciples of the prophets. Yehoshua served Moshe, and the Holy Spirit rested upon him.

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מתן מן

מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רעננברג
The Sadie Renner Women's Institute for Torah Studies

המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך

Elisha served Eliyahu, and the Holy Spirit rested upon him. But I, why have I been treated differently that the other disciples of the prophets? *‘I am weary with my groaning and I find no rest’* (Yir 45:3) Rest here is nothing other than prophecy as it was said *‘and the spirit rested upon them...and they prophesied’* (Bem 11:26). And it says, *‘the spirit of Eliyahu has rested upon Elisha’* (Mel II 2:15). And it says, *‘The spirit of the Lord will rest upon him’* (Yishayahu 11:2). Come and see what God replies to him: *‘thus you shall say to him, thus says the Lord, behold, that which I have built I will tear down... but you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them’* (Yirmiyahu 45:4-5). The *great things* mentioned here is none other than prophecy as it is said, *‘Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha has done.’* (Mel II 6:4) And it says, *‘call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you treat things and hidden things that you do not know’* (Yir 33:3) He said, *‘Baruch ben Neriah! There is no vineyard, what need is there of a fence? There is no flock, what need is there for a shepherd?’* (Yir 45:5). Thus you find everywhere that the prophets prophesy only for the sake of Israel.

Perek 46

Perek 46 opens the section of the book which deals with Yirmiyahu’s prophecies to the gentiles. Two prophecies of doom about Egypt in different eras are included in the perek: the first prophecy was given in the fourth year of Yehoyakim and foresees the fall of the Egyptian army to the Babylonian army at Karkhemish, near the Euphrates river (1-12). The second prophecy in the perek is not dated, although it takes place after the first prophecy, and describes the rise to power of Nevuchadnezzar over Egypt itself, the occupation of the country and the exile of a portion of the population (13-26). The perek ends with consolation for Israel –

“But fear not, O Yaakov My servant, neither be dismayed, O Israel; for, lo, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity...” (27)

- 3 A description of the fall of Egypt appears in two parallel sections: 3-6 and 7-10.

a) *“Make ready buckler and shield, and draw near to battle.”* (3) Compare what is described in pesukim 3-4 to pesukim 5-6, paying particular attention to the derision which is derived from the comparison.

b) “*Who is this like the Nile that rises up, like the rivers whose waters toss themselves?*”(7) While the earlier mention described only the physical preparations and the loss – this description adds another dimension. Explore this dimension of preparation for the war and its results. Pay attention to the repetition of the verb a.l.eh (rising up) during the prophecy in its different contexts, and to the two symbols of Egyptian pride in the prophecy – the Nile and horses.

- 4 “*The sound thereof shall go like the serpent's*” (22) – The collapse of Egypt before the armies of Nevuchadnezzar is described in the second prophecy. Within the prophecy we see a unique image, in which the cries of Egypt as it is destroyed are compared to a serpent. Think about the conflict in the pasuk between the strength of the sound which we are expecting and the sound made by a snake. What do you think is the meaning of this image?

Examine the **midrash** and pay attention to the meaning of the affinity which the midrash creates between Egypt and the serpent, taking into consideration the background story of the punishment of the serpent in the garden of Eden:

We learn from this that when the Holy One Blessed be He told the serpent that “*upon your belly shall you go*” and took away his legs, his voice cried out from one end of the world to the other.

- 5 “*But fear not, O Yaakov My servant, neither be dismayed, O Israel*” The prophecy about Egypt ends with a prophecy of consolation for Israel, a prophecy which also appears in perek 30:10-11. Examine the following commentaries and see to whom the prophecy turns, and why it was placed here according to each commentary:

Rashi: You fear not - The righteous men who were in Egypt, who were exiled there against their will.

Metzudat David: He came to console the people of the exile in Babylonia, to tell them that they should not give up hope of redemption when they see that Egypt was exiled to a place near them and returned quickly. For they were exiled to a place far from them and still have not returned, and therefore they feared that they would remain in exile. (See also his commentary on the previous pasuk: And afterwards - after 40 years she shall return to her land without exile, as in the days before.)

Appendix

Baruch Ben Neriah

In perek 36 Baruch ben Neriah's name is mentioned as the scribe for Yirmiyahu, his prophet and master. Baruch is also the person into whose hands Yirmiyahu gave the deed of purchase for the field in Anatot in perek 32. The book of Yirmiyahu is different from the books of Yishayahu and Yechezkel because it also has biographical stories about the life of the prophet; we can see clearly in the book, and at times it is hinted at, that he is a person who actively writes. This phenomenon is unique in the spiritual life of Israel and the cultural lives of ancient people in general.

Baruch ben Neriah the scribe is the only transcriber of prophetic material who is identified by name. He breaks through the anonymity which normally surrounds the scribes, who transcribe the books of the Torah, the knowledge and prophecy in general and the words of the latter prophets in particular.

Who was Baruch ben Neriah?

Baruch ben Neriah was from a family of fine lineage who were ministers and clerks, and was trained to be a scribe... We can assume that the secular title of scribe which Baruch ben Neriah carried, came before he volunteered to accompany Yirmiyahu and suffer along with him. Baruch ben Neriah fulfills the task of "servant" to the prophet in a way similar to how Yehoshua served Moshe and Elisha served Eliyahu, but the value of Baruch to the future generations focusses mostly on the fact that he was a scribe who copied down the visions of his master and prophet and preserved these visions for other students and the generations to come...

One expression of emotion by Baruch himself is brought in the prophecy to him and is noteworthy: *"You said, 'Woe is to me now, for the Lord has added grief to my pain. I have become weary with my sighing, but I have found no rest.'"* And God answers this by saying: *"And you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek, ...and I will give you your soul as prey in all the places where you will go."* (45:3,5) Targum Yonatan explains *"but I have found no rest"* as *"and I have found no prophecy"*. The Rabbis, the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim 2:32, Rabeinu Yitzchak, the Abarbanel and others, find resentment in Baruch's words that he did not merit prophecy and reach a level comparable to the students of other prophets, such as Yehoshua, Moshe's servant and Elisha, Eliyahu's student. The early rabbis relied in their interpretation on the hint of the spirit of prophecy found in such texts as *"and the spirit rested upon them...and they prophesied"* (Bem 11:26). The Rabbis of the Aggadah explore the psychology of Baruch and even give the story a happy ending in the Aggadot which tell of his exile to Babylonia, his long life there and his return to Jerusalem in the time of Koresh.

But even according to the simple meaning of the text, Baruch ben Neriah played a valuable role. Baruch ben Neriah and his fellow student-scribes are the ones who preserved the spiritual legacy of Israel in the crisis of the destruction and the exile to Babylonia. If it were not for Baruch ben Neriah we would only have small excerpts from the words of Yirmiyahu. Baruch was a young man when he joined Yirmiyahu. We can tell according to the dates in the book that Baruch was a faithful student to Yirmiyahu for the second half of his career, which would be about twenty years. This phenomenon of a great prophet with a great student, who is a scribe as well, had a lot of influence on imparting the prophecies of Yirmiyahu to future generations.

(Free translation of Baruch ben Neriah the Scribe, Cham"i Gavriyahu)

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