

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 51-52

Perek 51

The prophecies about Babylonia, which continue in perek 51, are the final prophecies in the book of Yirmiyahu. Described in these prophecies is God's revenge on Babylonia and its gods which will bring to its total destruction. The perek ends with God's command to write a book of prophecies about Babylonia and to throw it into the Euphrates River, an act which symbolizes the "sinking" of this great empire.

1 "Nevuchadrezzar the king of Babylonia has devoured me, ... , like a crocodile he has swallowed me up, he has filled his belly with my delicacies..." In pesukim 34-35 Zion mourns its destruction by Nevuchadrezzar king of Babylonia, who is compared to a crocodile, and receives an answer from God which heralds His revenge on Babylonia.

a) Examine the relationship between Nevuchadrezzar's actions as described in pesukim 34-35 and the punishment which Babylonia will receive as described in pesukim 36-37 and compare this as well to the punishment of Bel, the Babylonian god Mordoch, as described in pasuk 44.

b) The second half of pasuk 44 alludes to the apocalyptic prophecy found in Yishayahu 2:2 "And it shall come to pass in the end of days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." Pay attention to the connections between the pesukim – and think about the differences between the prophecy of Yirmiyahu and the prophecy of Yishayahu. (See also the Appendix on this topic.)

2 Yirmiyahu's prophecies about Babylonia conclude with a special command to write them in a book and throw them into the waters of the Euphrates River. (59-64)

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מתן מ"מ

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

המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך

a) In the beginning of the section a date is noted: the fourth year of King Tzidkiyahu's reign (59). Two additional important events happened in this year: an international convention in Jerusalem to plan the rebellion against Babylonia, which Yirmiyahu condemned (Perek 27), and a confrontation between Chananya ben Azur and Yirmiyahu (Perek 28). Examine the tension created between the prophecies of Yirmiyahu in perakim 27-28 and the prophecy here, and try to explain this based on Yirmiyahu's complex relationship with Babylonia.

b) What is the symbolic meaning of this act? Note also the time and place. An interesting explanation to this act is suggested by **H. Gavriyahu**:

It is customary that a vassal appears before his lord from time to time to bring him a gift. Tzidkiyahu was called for a mandatory appearance before his lord, the king of Babylonia. As was customary on this occasion, they would read the document in which the vassal pledged allegiance to his king, and the curses which he and his descendants, his home and his country would receive if he violated this oath. Yirmiyahu made sure that when this ceremony would take place in the palace, there would be a secret counter-ceremony taking place by the Euphrates River, which would be an embodiment of cancelling the curses on the land of Judah and transferring them to Babylonia...The book of curses on Babylonia does not act independently, it is dependent on the sin and the punishment. Since Babylonia sinned – God will pay them back for their sins.

(Free translation, H. Gavriyahu, Yirmiyahu's Prophecies about the Gentiles)

Perek 52

Perek 52 which concludes our book does not include any prophecies by Yirmiyahu, rather it is a summary of his prophecies, and describes the realization of his different prophecies of destruction. The perek opens with a description of Tzidkiyahu's bitter fate, and afterwards the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is described, the looting of the Temple, and the murder and exile of the residents of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Perek 25 in Melachim II is the parallel source to our perek, and parts of it are mentioned as well in perek 39 of Yirmiyahu. Here, as well as in the parallel source in Melachim, the book ends with a spark of hope – the “lifting of the head” of Yehoyachin in the 37th year of his exile.

- 3 The time of the destruction: The date brought here (12) contradicts the date brought in the parallel perek - Melachim II 25:8. Examine the **Tosefta** (Taanit 3) and see how the Rabbis dealt with this contradiction:

On the ninth of the month the city was breached a second time, the first time was on the seventh. If we say the seventh of the month, why do we say the ninth and if we say the ninth of the month, why do we say the seventh of the month? Rather, on the seventh of the month the gentiles conquered the Temple and took the pillars, the laver, and the copper wagons, and were “crowing” over them on the seventh, eighth and ninth until the end of the day...As evening fell, they lit the fires and it burned until sunset on the tenth.

- 4 In pesukim 17-23 there is an extensive list of the loot taken by the Babylonians from the Temple vessels.

a) Why is so much text dedicated to this list of the vessels which were taken? Remember the central role of the vessels in the Temple in the debate between Yirmiyahu and the false prophets in perek 27:16-22, and in perek 28:2-6.

b) The most important vessels – the Menorah, the altar, the table of the showbread and the ark - are not listed in the list of the items which were taken. There is a fascinating early source on this in **Maccabees II 2:2-5**:

...and that the prophet after giving them the law instructed those that were being exiled not to forget the commandments of the Lord, nor to be led astray in their thoughts upon seeing the gold and silver statues and their adornments...It was also in the writing that the prophet, having received instruction from heaven, ordered that they should follow with the tent and the ark, and that he went out to the mountain where Moshe had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. And Yirmiyahu came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense, and he sealed up the entrance.

- 5 The perek concludes with the description of the “lifting up of the head of Yehoyachin” by Evil-Merodach. Compare Evil-Merodach’s actions with those of Pharaoh in Bereshit (40:20-21; 41: 14, 39-44). What is the meaning of the similarity of the actions and why is this description given at the end of the book?

Appendix

“And I will punish Bel in Babylonia, and I will take out of his mouth that which he has swallowed up”

In Yirmiyahu’s prophecy about Babylonia, we find mention of the punishment of the primary Babylonian god, Bel, saying that that which he has swallowed up will come out of his mouth. As we have seen, this pasuk hints at the description of the looting of Jerusalem in pasuk 34: *“Nevuchadrezzar the king of Babylonia has devoured me, he has crushed me, he has made me an empty vessel; like a crocodile he has swallowed me up, he has filled his belly with my delicacies...”* But the contrast between Babylonia and Jerusalem is not limited to the angle of the looting of the riches of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. This contrast has a deeper aspect – on the spiritual level. Pagan Babylonia, the city of Bel, wants to build itself from the ruins of Jerusalem, the city of God. That is what Yirmiyahu means when he continues: *“and the nations shall not flow together any more to him”* (44). This refers to Yishayahu’s prophecy about the Temple mount saying that the gentile nations will flow to there. It is interesting to note that Yishayahu’s prophecy deals as well with the pagan arrogance of Babylonia: it contrasts between the story of the Tower of Babel, in which the people tried to build a tower which would reach to the heavens, and to make a name for themselves, and shows a mirror image of this – in the Temple mount.

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The Rabbis in the midrash were aware of this deep spiritual meaning to the confrontation. They connected pesukim 34 and 44 in our perek and brought spiritual meaning to them:

Nevuchadnezzar tried to entice Daniel, saying to him, 'Will you not bow down to the image, for it is strong and real? Come and see what it can do.' He said to him, 'and you will bow down to it of yourself.' What did that wicked king do? He took the plate of the High Priest and put it in the mouth of the image, and then he brought together all manner of musicians who played hymns to it, and it responded, '*I am the Lord your God.*' When Daniel saw this, he said: 'Will you permit me to go up to it and kiss your image on the mouth?' 'Why on the mouth?' he said to him. 'Because,' he replied, 'it speaks so excellently.' He thereupon gave him permission. Going up to it, he adjured the plate saying, 'I am flesh and blood, and I am the messenger of the Holy One, blessed be He; I bid you take good heed that the name of heaven should not be profaned through you, and command you to follow me.' He then approached to kiss it and took that which it had swallowed out of its mouth. When he came down the various musicians assembled and played hymns before it, but it made no response; and straightaway the wind blew down the image. When the heathen saw the wonders and mighty deeds that God had wrought with Chananya and his companions, they took their idols and broke them, and made them into bells which they hung on their dogs and their asses, and when they tinkled they said, 'You see now to what we used to bow down' to fulfill what is said, '*Bel bows down, Nevo stoops*; *their idols are upon the beasts and upon the cattle*' (Yishayahu 46:1)

(Shir HaShirim Rabbah 7)

Chazak Chazak v'Nitchazek!

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