

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 41-42

Perek 41

The appointing of Gedalya as governor over Judah gave hope for a renewal of life after the destruction. With the assassination of Gedalya by Yishmael ben Netanya and his men, this hope was cut off, and the destruction and the exile became an indisputable fact. Gedalya refuses to hear the warnings of Yochanan ben Kareach and his soldiers (in perek 40) and is caught in the trap set for him by Yishmael ben Netanya and his men, who murder him in Mitzpa during the Rosh HaShana meal. In addition to this foul murder, there is a massacre of the pilgrims to Jerusalem who came from the Shomron area. Gedalya's murder has an immediate effect on the small Jewish population remaining in Israel, who are hesitant to stay in Israel and want to emigrate to Egypt because they are afraid of the Babylonians taking revenge on them.

- 1 a) Think about two motives for Yishmael ben Netanya's actions: Look into his origins (pasuk 1), and the information which was given to him about Gedalyahu in the previous perek (40:14) and in our perek (41:10).
b) Note the conflict between the character of Yishmael, in terms of the context of the time and place in which the conflict occurs with Gedalyahu, and the description of his actions in pasuk 6, and the character of Gedalyahu, as he is described in perek 40.
- 2 4-9: The day after the assassination of Gedalyahu and his men at Mitzpa, another massacre is performed by Yishmael. Pay attention to the complex description of the people in pasuk 5: on the one hand they are mourning the destruction; on the other hand they are bringing offerings to the house of God. See **Rashi's** comments and the **Radak's** development of his idea.

Rashi: When they left home, they were unaware of the destruction of the Temple, and en route they heard of it, and rent their clothing and shaved their beards.

Radak: And it is surprising, that from the fifth month when the Temple was destroyed until the seventh month – how could they not have heard in Shilo and in Shechem and in Shomron that Jerusalem was taken and the Temple was destroyed and the people of Israel were exiled? We must explain that they had heard that Jerusalem was taken and that Israel was exiled, but they thought that since Nevuzzaradan had left a meager number of people in the land he had left the Temple as well, that he had not destroyed and burnt all of it or even some of it, so that those remaining in the land would be able to bring their sacrifices. And when they heard en route that the house of God had been burnt they tore their clothes, and they heard as well that the Babylonian king had appointed Gedalya as governor in the land and they were coming to him.

- 3 Two war stories in Jewish history are the background to perek 41: The war of Asa and Basha – which is explicitly mentioned in pasuk 9 (See Melachim I 15:16) and the war of the House of Shaul against the House of David – which is hinted at in the meeting between Yishmael and Yochanan by the pool in Givon (*'by the great pool of waters that are in Givon'*). Compare the story in our perek (12-15) to the story of the meeting between Avner, the captain of Ish Boshet's army, and Yoav, the captain of David's army, in Shmuel II 2:12-17. What is the background to the civil wars in Melachim and in Shmuel? How does this comparison color the actions of Yishmael?

Perek 42-43:7

After the assassination, those remaining in Judah are at a loss as to what to do. In their distress, they turn to Yirmiyahu, and ask to hear the word of God from him. Yirmiyahu encourages them to stay in Israel and to continue Gedalyahu's work to rebuild the nation. He warns them not to go to Egypt, despite their fear of revenge by the Babylonians for murdering the governor whom they had placed in the land. But their fear of revenge overcomes their commitment to God and the remaining people, under the leadership of Yochanan ben Kareach and his officers, decide to go to Egypt and request refuge there.

4 'And they said to Yirmiyahu the prophet, 'Let our supplication now fall before you, and pray in our behalf to the Lord your God...for we remain few out of many...' (2)

a) As opposed to the period before the destruction, when the nation spurned Yirmiyahu's words, here they come to request God's word from him. Explore the deep change which has occurred in the nation's attitude toward Yirmiyahu, and think what about what has caused this change.

b) Pay attention to the delay in Yirmiyahu's reaction (7). What does this teach us about his prophecy in particular, and about the prophecies of true prophets in general? Remember Yirmiyahu's silence in response to Chananya ben Azur's speech, and his delayed response to Chananya. (28:6-12)

5 Yirmiyahu urges Yochanan and his people to stay in Israel and warns them against going to Egypt. Think about the source of the fundamental importance of staying in the land (pesukim 10-11). Pay attention to the conflict between rebuilding and rehabilitating the land and the act of leaving to Egypt. What is the symbolic religious significance of going to Egypt (refer to Devarim 17:16)?

6 Two political mistakes in the story are responsible for eliminating any chance of rehabilitation: Gedalya's mistake in underestimating Yochanan's warning and Yochanan's mistake about discounting Yirmiyahu's prophecy. Note the similarities in language and content in their reactions (40:16, 43:2). What do you think was the motive for each mistake?

Appendix

The Murder of Gedalyahu: An Anatomy of Self-Destruction

The three heroes of this story of self-destruction are: the murderer (Yishmael ben Netanya), the victim (Gedalya ben Achikam) and the successor (Yochanan ben Kareach). The murderer is driven by a combination of pathetic ambition and zealous devotion to a political way which may have had some logic before the destruction, but is now completely unrealistic. His short-range thinking does not allow him to anticipate the immediate results of the murder (a retaliation by the officers of the army) or the damage to generations to come (causing an end to the rebuilding of the land and the return to the land, the loss of the strength of leadership and the increase in people leaving Israel for the exile). His complete lack of moral restraint prevents him from understanding that political murder, which dramatically breaks the taboo of the sanctity of human life, will cause a horrible chain reaction of bloodshed.

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

המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך

The victim was forewarned of the threat on his life and the destruction of his lifework, but his moral-political innocence was his undoing, and the undoing of all the people who were murdered along with him. The Rabbis, with supreme moral sensitivity, blame him for the terrible results of this oversight: "But owing to the fact that he should have taken note of the advice of Yochanan ben Kareach and did not do so Scripture regards him as though he had killed them (the 70 pilgrims whose bodies were thrown in the pit)." (Niddah 61a) from here Rava derives a rule: "As to slander, though one should not believe it one should nevertheless take note of it."

The successor, on whose shoulders rested the fate of the remainder of the people left in the land and of the captives after the murder of Gedalya, is panicked by the act of terror of his rival. He is smart enough to ask for the word of God from Yirmiyahu, but not strong enough to listen to it. His cowardice, weakness and lack of faith make him a part of the self-destruction, which has in addition self-exile. Thus Yochanan ben Kareach fulfills his rival Yishmael ben Netanya's policy of leaving the land, but instead of taking the "remainder of Judah" to the land of Ammon he brings them to Egypt.

In the two-thousand year exile we have become "the compassionate sons of compassionate ones" who are unable to murder. But with the return to our land, we again have the tools, and the ability to shed blood. "The Fast of Gedalyahu" is designed to allow us to stand face-to-face with the horrors of the past, so that we can draw strength to prevent them in the present.

(Uriel Simon, The Murder of Gedalyahu: An Anatomy of Self-Destruction, in Bakesh Shalom veRadfehu pp. 224-225)



Hebrew stamp: "(Belonging) to Ya'azanyahu servant of the king"

Found at Tel Al-Nitzva, identified with Mizpa from scripture.

Dated end of the First Temple period.

From the collection of the Archeology Wing at the Israel Museum, courtesy of the Israel Museum

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