

This week's learning is in memory of a devoted and beloved father,
Zoltan Sternberg, who passed away 2 Shvat, 5763

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 25-26

Perek 25

Our perek is the first perek in Yirmiyahu which opens with the date on which the prophecy was said. During the prophecy, Yirmiyahu summarizes twenty-three years during which he tried in vain to cause the nation to repent and change their ways. Because the people refused to listen to the prophecies they will be punished by the King of Babylonia, who will destroy the land and enslave the people.

In the second half of the perek (15-38) the calamity spreads past the borders of Israel. The prophecy describes the "wine cup of fury" which God will give to the nations to bring them to their destruction. It seems that the prophetic vision in these pesukim symbolizes the domination of the Babylonian Empire over the nations and kingdoms mentioned in the prophecy.

- 1 In our perek the enemy from the North is identified for the first time as the Babylonian Empire, and its rule is limited to a period of seventy years (11-12) (See the appendix as well). What is the meaning of this time period? See Yishayahu 23:15-17; and Tehillim 90:10.
- 2 God calls Nebuchadnezzar "*my servant*" (9) and describes him as the one who is destined to carry out His plan. On the other hand, he describes the harsh punishment which will be given to him after seventy years, measure for measure (12-14). What do you think is the meaning of this complicated relationship with the Babylonian King? Consider the pesukim which deal with the king of Assyria in Yishayahu 10:5-20.

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program

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מתן מן

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The Sadie Renner Women's Institute for Torah Studies

המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך

3 "Take this wine cup of fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it." (15) In this portion of the prophecy we see mentioned (for the first time in the book) a prophecy by Yirmiyahu about the gentile nations. Already in his inaugural prophecy we are told that this will be one of Yirmiyahu's tasks.

a) Follow the placement of Judah in the list of nations (18) and its mention in the continuation of the prophecy (29, 30). What is the place of Judah in the calamity which will befall the world?

b) Pay attention to the strange name of the last king and the way in which he is mentioned: "*And the king of Sheshach shall drink after them.*"(26) See the **Radak's** comments:

And the king of Sheshach – the king of Babylonia, and Yonatan translated as such, and Sheshach is Bavel (Babylonia) in Atba"sh writing.*

*Atba"sh writing – a code in which each letter is represented by the parallel letter from the end of the alphabet, e.g. alef is represented by tav, bet is represented by shin etc.

4 The calamity befalling the gentile nations is symbolized by the drinking of a cup of poisoned wine. Study pesukim 16, 27 and consider why the image of drinking wine was chosen to symbolize the calamity about to befall the nations. Another level of meaning to this symbolic action is found by comparing the drinking in our perek (pesukim 27,29) and in Parshat Sotah (Bamidbar 5:19, 21). Focus on the verb *lehinakot* (to be free) and the description of the *nefila* (falling away). What do you think is the meaning of the similarity between the two acts?

Perek 26

Our perek goes back to deal with Yirmiyahu's prophecy about the Temple, a prophecy which first appeared in perek 7, this time from a different angle. While perek 7 focused on the content of the prophecy, our perek focuses on the story of Yirmiyahu being put on trial for the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple (described in brief in pesukim 1-6), and on the rescue of Yirmiyahu from death as a result of his pronouncements. The Priests make a serious accusation against Yirmiyahu, but his

response does not directly answer their accusation, and so he brings a second explanation to prove his innocence. The story presents to us the nation's distorted perception of holiness in relation to Jerusalem.

- 5 a) Consider pesukim 9, 11 and try to define the accusation which is made against Yirmiyahu – pay attention to the perception of holiness of Jerusalem which is the basis for the accusation.
- b) Yirmiyahu's defense is built from a few arguments: What is the focus of the opening and closing argument (12,15), and how does this argument answer the accusation against him? In pasuk 13 the prophet raises another argument. How does this argument contribute to Yirmiyahu's defense?
- 6 There are different groups involved in the trial process – the priests, the prophets, the princes and the nation. Unlike the role of the prophets and the priests who stand before Yirmiyahu accusing him and demanding his death, and unlike the princes whose job it is to act as judges, the role of the nation is unclear. Follow the nation's position in pesukim 7-9, 11-12, 16. Pay attention to the fluctuations in the public opinion throughout the story and think about what is causing these fluctuations.
- 7 After Yirmiyahu is acquitted by the princes and the nation, two precedents are remembered of prophets who gave calamitous prophecies about Jerusalem: the case of Micha HaMorashti (18-19) and the case of Oriyahu ben Shmayahu (20-23). What is the difference between these two precedents, and how can we explain that they are brought side by side? See the answer of the Tosefta, and also the explanation of the Malbim, and consider the identification of the speakers and the role in the story of each precedent:

Tosefta Sotah 9:5 – '*Micha HaMorashti prophesied in the time of Chizkiyahu king of Judah...*' was what the good among them said. The evil among them said: '*And there was also a man who prophesied in the name of the Lord by the name of Oriyahu ben Shmayahu*' ... this section is a mix of statements, the one who said this did not say that.

Malbim (20) And there was also a man who prophesied – the author of this text is telling us that the argument of the elders of the nation was not helpful in saving Yirmiyahu from death, because at the same time Oriyah was prophesying similarly to Yirmiyahu, and he too prophesied in the name of the Lord, and even so he was killed by the king.

Appendix

The Battle of Karkemish

The prophecy in perek 25 opens with the date on which the prophecy was said: *"in the fourth year of Yeboyakim the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylonia"*. This year is mentioned in a few other places in the book (for example Yirmiyahu 46:2). That year was a turning point in the ancient world in general, and specifically in the history of the nation of Israel. From the year 609 B.C.E. an ongoing campaign was being fought between Egypt and Assyria on one side and Babylonia, the up and coming empire, on the other.

The balance of power in the North was evenly matched and it was difficult to know who would be victorious. Four years after the campaign began, in the year 605 B.C.E., a young Babylonian king came into power – Nebuchadnezzar. In the same year in the battle of Karkemish on the banks of the Euphrates River (today in Turkish territory), a decisive victory was won by the army of Nebuchadnezzar over the armies of Assyria and Egypt, effectively ending their rule. This event is described in short in Melachim II 24:7 *"And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land; for the king of Babylon had taken, from the Brook of Egypt unto the river Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt."* This victory cleared the way for Nebuchadnezzar to begin his campaign to expand the Babylonian empire, as he successfully sought to subjugate a large part of the world and rule over it for the next few decades.

With this background, we now understand the role of our prophecy: after twenty-three years of prophecy during which Yirmiyahu warned the people about the calamities about to befall them – the reality becomes clear and the "enemy from the north" is identified as the king of Babylonia, Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar is serving as the messenger of God, who will come and exact punishment from the nation because it has refused to listen to the prophecies for many years. Yirmiyahu prophesies destruction to the nations and the kingdoms at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, but in the same prophecy he speaks of the end of the great empire.