

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 5-6

Perek 5

Tragically, the hope for national repentance voiced by Yirmiyahu in earlier prophecies does not bear any fruits. Severe immorality and betrayal of God have seeped into every layer of society, from the simplest of men to the loftiest of leaders. Yerushalayim's destruction quickly approaches...

❶ “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem...” (1). Instead of relying on repentance to save the city of Yerushalayim, Yirmiyahu suggests another possibility: the deeds of the righteous.

a) A similar suggestion is raised by Avraham in the story of Sodom's destruction (Breishit 18:23-32). After comparing the relevant pesukim, which city do you think is worse off?

b) “And the Lord said: 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will forgive all the place for their sake'” (Breishit 18:26).

Ibn Ezra: *within the city*—In public, they fear God, as in “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem.”

What commonality shared by the story of Sodom and our prophecy is Ibn Ezra pointing out, and why does the city's salvation depend on this specific condition?

❷ “Who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, an everlasting ordinance, which it cannot pass” (22). In pesukim 21-23, Yirmiyahu rebukes the nation for its disobedience and describes God's might as well as his dominion over the sea. What is the sea's role in this rebuke? Relate to the comparison of the nation to the sea and to the double meaning of the word “ordinance” [חוק].

❸ Pasuk 24 discusses an additional law of nature: the rainfall cycle. How does the criticism in this pasuk differ from the criticism in the previous pesukim? Additionally, note the punishment mentioned in pasuk 25.

Perek 6

Yirmiyahu's attempts to reform the nation through prophetic warnings are unsuccessful. In a continuation to the description of the destruction in perek 4, this perek also discusses the destruction set to arrive from the north. Yirmiyahu's hopes for national improvement have dwindled. Calls for repentance have been replaced with intensified emphasis on God's wrath and the impending destruction.

④ “To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear?” (10). Yirmiyahu expresses his frustration with a nation unwilling to listen to the word of God.

a) Pasuk 11 also describes the experience of prophecy. How is this pasuk related—“measure for measure”—to the previous one?

b) A similar description of the prophetic experience appears in 20:8-9: “For as often as I speak, I cry out, I cry: ‘Violence and spoil’; because the word of the Lord is made a reproach unto me, and a derision, all the day. And if I say: ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name’, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I weary myself to hold it in, but cannot.” What do both of these sources teach us about the nature of prophecy?

⑤ In pesukim 16-17, the prophet makes two suggestions which are both rejected. Which two sources of information are supposed to serve as guides for the nation? How does the second suggestion differ from the first? [See Yechezkel 33:2-3] Note the relationship between each suggestion and its result.

⑥ “To what purpose is to Me the frankincense that cometh from Sheba, and the sweet cane, from a far country?” (20). Yirmiyahu criticizes the nation's misuse of sacrifices in the Temple.

a) Why does Yirmiyahu mention incenses first? Consider the connection between incense sacrifices and the sacrifices mentioned afterward, and the explanation of

Radak:

They would be brought from faraway lands for [use in] incense sacrifices [קטורת], because they did not grow in the land of Israel. Or, he mentions two [frankincense and cane] but this is the ruling for all types of incense. The incense was used to 'authorize' the sacrifice. However, if I do not desire the sacrifice, why should you toil to bring the ‘authorization’?

b) What is the reason for Yirmiyahu's fierce opposition to sacrifices? Discuss the connection between this pasuk (20) and the preceding one.

Appendix

“Your burnt-offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing unto Me”

In pagan temples, the priest safeguards the life and death of the gods. However, according to Jewish belief, ritual worship does not benefit God, nor does God’s ‘fate’ depend on man’s actions in any way. The laws of Jewish ritual worship are Divine commandments which reveal God’s kindness. God does not need [the sacrifices]; they are simply a gift from God to man, intended to be used as a symbol and a method through which God’s knowledge, which was given to man, is preserved. It is a way to sanctify His name and remember His covenant.

Because of this, the inherent value of ritual worship is not absolute but rather conditional...If this value is removed by man, [the sacrifice] is transformed into an empty vessel, shattered earthenware...Ritual worship is not man’s kindness with God nor God’s kindness with man...Yirmiyahu’s demand suits the entire tone of his prophecy: no burnt-offerings, but rather words of promise. The contrast: external acts of worship in comparison to authentic belief and fulfillment of the Torah...If Yirmiyahu says that God does not desire the offerings of the nation, it is because their actions are unworthy... And if he says that their burnt-offerings do not please God because they have disobeyed Him...he is insinuating that if their actions would be worthy, God would desire their burnt-offerings.

[Y. Kaufmann, *Toldot Haemuna Hayisraelit*, Volume 3]

מִתַּן מַתָּן

מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רענגרט
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