

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 11-12

Perek 11:1-17

The prophecy in this chapter is the product of three combined prophecies delivered on three different occasions. The combination of these prophecies reflects the deterioration of the nation's spiritual state. The first section (1-5) describes a covenant that engendered hopeful expectations. The second and third sections (6-8, 9-13) describe the nation's failure to fulfill their commitment. After the description of the punishment in the third section (11-13), Yirmiyahu requests permission to pray on behalf of the nation. However, God refuses his request.

- ① “*Hear ye the words of this covenant*” (2). The rebuke in this prophecy climaxes with the nation's abrogation of their covenant with God. The prophecy alludes to past covenants undertaken by the nation and integrates them into the rebuke.

a) Which covenant is alluded to in pesukim 4-5?

b) Review the covenant forged on the plains of Moav (Devarim 27:9-26) and note the similarities shared between this episode and our prophecy. Consider the contrast between the role of the nation in the covenant in Devarim and Yirmiyahu's reaction to God's command in our prophecy (5). What role does Yirmiyahu fill in this section?

c) II Melachim 23:1-3 describes the revitalization of a former covenant undertaken during the reign of Yoshiyahu, which also coincided with the beginning of Yirmiyahu's prophetic career. It seems likely that this event served as the historical blueprint for this prophecy. What is the connection between the nation's historical covenants and Yoshiyahu's covenant?

- 2 In pesukim 6-8, Yirmiyahu is once again commanded to remind the inhabitants of Yehudah about the content of the covenant. In contrast to the first reminder, which detailed the nation's acceptance of the covenant, here the purpose of the reminder is different. What is its purpose?
- 3 Pesukim 9-13 mention both rebuke and punishment. Note the description of the sin: "*A conspiracy [קשר] is found among the men of Yehuda, and among the inhabitants of Yerushalayim.*" Refer to II Melachim 17:4 to gain a better understanding of the meaning of a "conspiracy." In light of this, what is the particular severity of this sin? Consider the explanation of **Radak**:

And the Lord said unto me: 'A conspiracy is found'—It seems to me that... this prophecy was said during the days of Yehoyakim. This is why it says "*a conspiracy is found,*" meaning they rebelled against me after they repented during the days of Yoshiyahu. They reverted to the sins of their forefathers Amnon, Menashe and Achaz.

Perek 11:18 - 12

The following pesukim reveal painful details of Yirmiyahu's tortured life by describing the mistreatment and harassment he suffered at the hands of his family and neighbors. The first section (11:18-23) describes the evil committed by the people of Anatot and the punishment they received as a result of their behavior. In the second section (12:1-6), Yirmiyahu joins the ranks alongside great leaders, prophets, and composers of Tehillim who have questioned the ways of God, wondering why the sinners succeed while the righteous consistently suffer.

The perek continues with two prophecies in which God speaks about the destruction of the Temple and the land of Israel as an event which has already taken place. God's distress over the nation's betrayal, is interwoven with expression of His deep love for them and His pain at the sight of the destruction.

4 Review pesukim 19-20. What did the people of Anatot want to do to Yirmiyahu? How does their punishment fit the crime (22-23)?

5 “Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?” God responds to Yirmiyahu’s theological challenge with two parables (5).

a) What can be concluded from these parables? (In other words, what is the *kal v’chomer* [‘the stronger case’] that can be inferred from God’s response?)

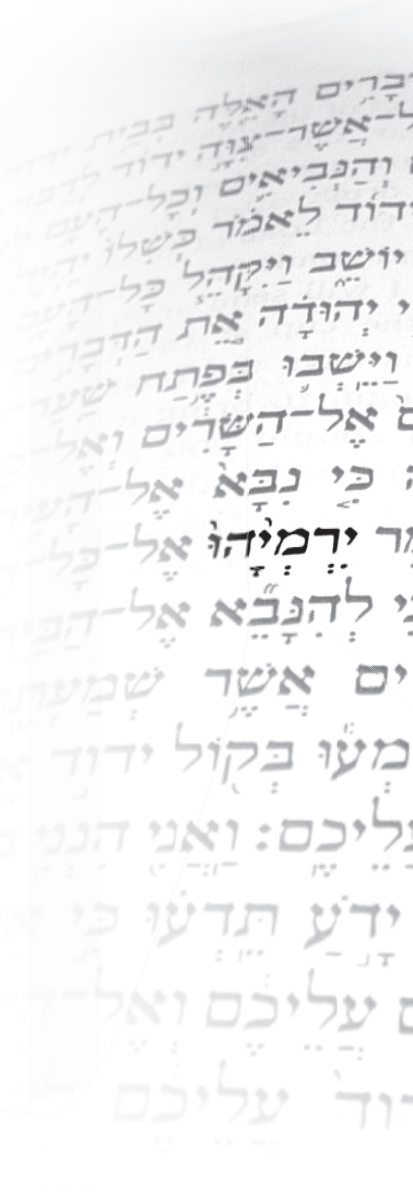
b) According to God’s response, what is the purpose of Yirmiyahu’s suffering? Refer back to Yirmiyahu’s inaugural prophecy (1:17-19). How is this purpose alluded to in the initial prophecy? Consider the explanation of **Radak**:

I see that you are weakened and weary from My mission, and that you and your spirit need strengthening. For I see that if you have run with footmen like yourself—these are the people of Anatot, members of your family, and in the same realm of greatness, and they have exhausted you and threatened to murder you. How can you contend with horses? When you will go to Yerushalayim, where there are important officers and the king, how will you act among them? You need to be fortified, so that you will not fear them, and so that you will be able to speak of My mission without fear. He also adds: ‘*in a land of peace you are secure* [בוטח]’—meaning ‘you rely [בוטח] on the people of Anatot, which could have been a peaceful land for you...’ “*How will you do in the thickets of Jordan*”—meaning, in a place where the thickets of Jordan are prideful. This is a metaphor for the officers of Yehuda and Yerushalayim.

6 “I have forsaken My house, I have cast off My heritage...” (7)

a) What names are used to refer to the nation throughout this harsh prophecy of destruction (7-12)? Note a similar phenomenon in 11:15-16. What does this teach us about the relationship between God and His nation? The use of lamentation form in pesukim 7-12, further reflects the complexity of God’s relationship with His wayward nation. Think about the parallel between God’s complex relationship with the nation and Yirmiyahu’s relationship with the people of Anatot. Does this section offer an additional response to Yirmiyahu’s theological challenge?

b) In light of the difficult picture of the nation depicted in these pesukim, explain God’s address to the other nations in pesukim 14-17.



Appendix

“What has My beloved to do in My house?” (11:15)

In this perek, the widespread image of Israel as God's beloved is turned on its head: the Beloved is no longer welcomed in the house of God. The following midrash describes a thought-provoking conversation between Avraham and God addressing the destruction of the nation. This conversation echoes their earlier conversation in Breishit 18 before the destruction of Sodom and Gemorrah.

On the eve of the ninth of Av, Avraham entered the Holy of Holies, took God's hand, and began having a discussion with Him. God asked him, "Why has My beloved to do in My house?" (11:15) [Avraham] said, "My Master, where are the people?" God replied: They have sinned and have been exiled among the nations. He replied, "There were no righteous among them?" God replied, "*She has been lewd*" (ibid). Avraham responds, "You should have focused on the good among them." God replied, "The majority [of the people] were evil," as it says, "*She has been lewd with many*" (ibid). Avraham said, "You should have looked at their circumcised flesh." God replied, "I swear! They do not fulfill that commandment," as it says, "*the holy flesh is passed from you*" (ibid). Not only this, but they would rejoice at the sight of each other falling!" It says, "*When you do evil, then you rejoice*" (ibid) and "*He that is glad at calamity will not go unpunished*" (Mishlei 17:5). [Eicha Rabbah 20:1]

