

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 48-49

Perek 48

In contrast to the majority of the prophecies that we've encountered up until now, in which the prophet argues with the idol worshippers outside the nation of Israel; in these chapters the prophet deals with other difficulties from within Israel. In the first prophecy of the chapter (1-11) the prophet addresses the Babylonian exiles with a harsh rebuke for being unfaithful to God, for refusing to heed to the prophets' words and for their devotion to idols. In the second section of the chapter the prophet once more addresses Israel, in a similar style; however, this time with slightly more placating tones. He also details the supremacy of God over the idols. God is the one and only ruler and creator of the world; he is also the God of history and its solitary controller. Therefore, it is God who sent Cyrus to fulfill His will by conquering Babylonia, and it is he who announced it in advance. The chapter ends with a call to the exiles to listen to God's command and to leave Babylonia happily, in order to announce their redemption throughout the nations.

- 1 In these chapters past and future events are mentioned numerous times. The new prophecies, similar to those which tell of the rise of Cyrus, are told in advance by God to demonstrate the truth of the prophecies and the superiority of God. See Yeshayahu 41:21-24; 43:9-10. Notice that the prophecy's targeted recipients are different in the various prophecies. Who are the recipients in the previous chapters, and who are the recipients in our chapter? Discuss what this implies about Israel's spiritual state in exile.
- 2 In pesukim 9-11 the prophet announces to Israel that despite their negative character and undesirable deeds, which resemble those of the nations surrounding them, God will not destroy them. Examine the relationship between the revelation of God's name in the world and His decisions regarding Israel. Compare the beginning of pasuk 9 *'For the sake of My name'*, to the mentioning of the names of Israel and God in the beginning of the prophecy (1-2).

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מִן מֵתָן

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The Sadie Renner Women's Institute for Torah Studies

המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך

Perek 49

Encompassed in this chapter is the second of the seven consolation prophecies 'Zion says, the Lord has forsaken me' (14-23). It describes a dialogue between Zion, who is in despair, resembling a neglected wife and a bereaved mother, and God, who consoles her and describes the strength of their connection. God then promises to return the children to their borders, by means of the nations within whom they dwelled; and tells of the reversal of Israel's image in the eyes of the nations. The chapter opens with the prophecy regarding the servant of God (1-13), who is mentioned several times throughout these chapters, and in it the servant presents himself and describes the different stages of the process he has undergone; starting with God's selection of him while still in the womb and protecting him, through his despair from the efforts he put in, and finally the national and international destiny thrust upon him by God.

3 'The Lord appointed me before I was born, He named me while I was in my mother's womb'(1). It's unclear who's speaking in this pasuk. According to most commentators it is Yeshayahu himself (**Radak**: And these are the prophet's words about himself); while according to some, it refers to the people of Israel. Study the prophecy and reflect on its interpretation according to each opinion. Note the textual basis for each of these opinions (focus on pesukim 1, 3, 6).

a) 'Zion says, The Lord has forsaken me'(14). Many family-related similes are interwoven in our chapter. Zion compares her bond with God to a married woman whose husband left her and has forgotten her (14). God, on the other hand, compares His relationship with Zion- to that of a mother's relationship with her young child (15). What is the relationship between these two similes, and in what way is the second preferred over the first? Does the second simile offer an answer to Zion's claim?

b) God returns to the simile of husband and wife in pasuk 16. In what way does this contribute to the previous one in regards to the relationship between God and Zion? (see Shir HaShirim 8:6)

c) Reflect on the relationship between the various characters that appear in the prophecy (God, Zion and the people of Israel).

- 4 In pesukim 17-23 the prophet describes the return of the exiles to the land of Israel, and depicts the revolution that will occur to Zion, from destruction and desolation to a land teeming with life. Zion responds to this in shock and amazement (21). Where does this amazement stem from and how does God respond to it (22-23)? Notice the role the nations have, in relation to Israel, in God's response (23). What does this prophecy teach us about the object of the exile?

Appendix

The seven consolation prophecies

After Tisha B'Av we begin reading the series of the seven consolation prophecies. These seven prophecies are all taken from Yeshayahu's wonderful consolation prophecies. The first prophecy is the one that opens the section of consolation prophecies in Yeshayahu- in chapter 40: '*Comfort, oh comfort my people*' (נחמו נחמו עמי), giving the Shabbat its name *Shabbat Nachamu*. The second one is '*Zion says, the Lord has forsaken me*' taken from chapter 49. An interesting commentary on the consolation prophecies appears in the midrash, quoted in **Sefer Abudraham**. The prophecies are interwoven into the midrash in the form of a dialogue between God and Israel:

...And it says in the midrash... for they ruled that the first of the consolation haftarot should be '*Comfort, oh comfort my people*'; meaning that God said to the prophets '*Comfort, oh comfort my people*'. Israel responds to that: '*Zion says, The Lord has forsaken me*'; meaning that she will not be consoled by that consolation. As it says: '*Awake, awake, clothe yourself with splendor. O arm of the Lord! Awake as in days of old, as in former ages*'. And in some places the following one is said (instead of 'Awake, Awake'): '*Unhappy, storm-tossed one, un comforted!*'; meaning that the prophets come before God repeatedly and tell Him that Israel will not be comforted by their consolation. In response to this God says '*I, I am He who comforts you!*' As it says: 'Shout, O barren one, you who bore no child!'. As it says: '*Arise, shine, for your light has dawned*'. To this Israel responds '*I greatly rejoice in the Lord*'; meaning that now I have what to rejoice about '*My whole being exults in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of triumph*'...