

This week's learning guide is in memory of Rebbitzin Byrdie Predmesky whose Yartzeit falls on the 5th of Ellul.

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MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yeshayahu Perakim 50-51

Perek 50

The first prophecy of the chapter (1-3) deals with a similar topic to that of the prophecy regarding Zion in the previous chapter. There, the prophet addressed Zion, the lonely and bereaved mother, and promised that her children would return to her. Here, the prophet addresses the children, and calls for them to return. To some extent this prophecy is the reverse of the other, and completes it. There, Zion felt that she was abandoned; and God encouraged her, and reassured her that he hadn't forgotten her, nor had he left her. In our chapter, it seems it is the nation which has left and forgotten God; and they are rebuked for this. The prophet emphasizes that the exile is temporary; and that if the nation were only to heed God's words, they would be able to change the decree. The second section of the chapter (4-11) continues to deal with those who disagree with and oppose the prophecy. The servant of God describes his devotion to spreading the prophecies of consolation and redemption, despite the humiliations and disgraces that he suffered at the hands of his antagonists.

- 1 The first prophecy compares the situation of Israel in exile to children who have been pushed away by their father for two possible reasons: The bill of divorce and the passing of children over to the creditor.
 - a) 'The bill of divorce' (=Get) which is meant to 'dismiss' (to divorce) is based on the pesukim in Devarim 24:1-4. What are the reasons for divorce mentioned there?
 - b) Passing the children over to the 'creditor' is mentioned in II Melachim 4:1. Under what circumstances is this act performed?

c) In the continuation of pasuk 1 God rejects both reasons, and gives an alternative explanation. Examine the two fundamental differences between the reasons that were rejected by God (Who assumes responsibility for each situation, and is there an option and capability to change it?). ? In what way are the two cases similar, and in what way are they different?

2 A similar prophecy to ours appears in Yirmiyahu 3:8. Discuss the contradiction between the two prophecies. The commentators dealt with this contradiction and offered a variety of explanations. See the following explanation of **Radak**:

"The commentators explained that Yirmiyahu spoke about the ten tribes, to whom God gave a 'bill of divorce' that kings would no longer come from them... However, He did not give Yehuda a 'bill of divorce'; rather, like a husband who sends away his wife, but does not give her a 'bill of divorce'... So too, Yehuda is destined to return the kingship to himself. We may also interpret this based on the fact that the ten tribes did not return when the exiles returned from Babylonia... and their exile has lasted for a long period, and it is as if they were given a bill of divorce; while the people of Yehuda returned to their land at the conclusion of seventy years...!"

Based on the context, explain the difference between the prophecies in Yirmiyahu and our chapter. Who does Yirmiyahu address and what is the object of his prophecy? On the other hand, who does Yeshayahu address and what is his object (2)?

See the following midrashic explanation offered by the Talmud Bavli:

'Shmuel said: Ten people came and sat before him. He said to them: Repent. They replied: A servant who has been sold by his owner and a wife who has been divorced by her husband- do either of them owe the other anything any longer? God then said to the prophet: go and tell them *'Where is the bill of divorce of your mother whom I dismissed? And which of My creditors was it to whom I sold you off? You were only sold off for your sins, and your mother dismissed for your crimes.'* [Masechet Sanhedrin 105a]

Perek 51

The first prophecy in this chapter is made up of three sections which are related to one another. All three open with a call to Israel to listen, and hear; and they all encourage Israel to trust in God's eternal salvation. The first section opens with- *'You who pursue justice, you who see the Lord'*, and addresses the children of Avraham who taught his descendants to pursue charity and justice. The second section speaks to *'My people and... my nation'*, and deals with spreading the light and

Torah amongst all the nations: *'For teaching shall go forth from Me'*. In the third section the prophet returns to Israel and emphasizes their special place at this stage; for at this point the Torah is only dear to *them*. In the continuation of the chapter the prophet wishes, on the one hand, to arouse God's mercy and redemption *'Awake , awake, clothe yourself with splendor. O arm of the Lord.'*; and on the other hand, to encourage Yerushalayim and uplift her from her lowliness *'Rouse, rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem!'*

3 In pesukim 1-3 the prophet calls the Babylonian exiles to lift their spirits, and to look to their past fathers and mothers- Avraham and Sarah. How does this serve as an encouragement for the exiles, in their state? See Breishit 12:1-3. From where did Avraham and Sarah come, and what promises did they receive? In your opinion, in what way does the simile of excavating- "The rock you were hewn from", "The quarry you were dug from", contribute to this idea?

4 An interesting parallel description of Avraham, to that which appears in our chapter, is found in Yechezkel 33:24. These are the two sole appearances within the Neviim of Avraham as an individual, and not as part of the forefathers. Both cases talk about the remaining people in Israel, or those who are ascending to Israel, which is in a state of destruction after exile. Both cases draw encouragement from the story of Avraham depicted as "the one" who succeeded, and multiplied despite his aloneness. However, the manner in which the prophet relates to Avraham is entirely different. Here, Yeshayahu himself makes the comparison; while Yechezkel firmly rejects the comparison. What would you say is the reason for this? Note the object of the comparison in each source, and the reason for Avraham's success in each prophecy.

5 *'Rouse, rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem, you who from the Lord's hand have drunk the cup of His wrath'* (17-23). The cup of wine of *'wrath'*(poisoned) is the main motif of our prophecy. Yerushalayim is compared to a drunken woman who has fallen, therefore, the prophet calls her to rise and awaken (17).

a) What does the drinking of wine symbolize in our chapter? How does this action affect Yerushalayim and her children, physically and mentally ?

b) We're familiar with a similar picture of a parent cast drunken, in the story of Noach (Breishit 9:20-24), who drank his wine and became drunk in his tent. However, there, his two sons cared for his dignity in his sad state. How does this story express Yerushalayim's tragic situation in our prophecy?

c) In the second section of our chapter (21-23) God offers a double consolation to Zion, since she was stricken twice (19). What is the double consolation?

Appendix

Kol Dodi Dofek

In our chapters, the prophet emphasizes God's commitment to the redemption of Israel on the one hand; and Israel's responsibility not to miss the opportunity, on the other hand. We hear the prophet's call to awaken God's arm, and the call to Yerushalayim to awaken and rise from her ashes. Through the prophecies we learn of bitter, internal arguments between the prophet and those who fear God and listen to the prophecy of redemption; and those who oppose it. The divine rebuke, steeped in sadness and disappointment, echoes in our ears until today: *'Why, when I came, was no one there, why, when I called, would none respond?'* In his deeply penetrating mass, Rabbi Soloveitchik deals, at length, with the fear of missing the opportunity at the time of redemption:

'Miraculous grace places upon man an absolute responsibility to fulfill the larger imperative that calls out from the miracle. A transcendental imperative always accompanies miraculous activity. "Command the children of Israel" (e.g., Numbers 5:2, 28:1, 34:2, 35:2). Woe unto the beneficiary of a miracle who does not recognize it for what it is, and whose ear is deaf to the echo of the imperative that arises out of this metahistorical event. Pity the one who benefits from the miracles of the Master of the Universe but the spark of faith is not kindled in him, and his conscience is not stirred by the sight of this singular event. When a miracle does not find its appropriate echo in actual deeds, a lofty vision dissipates and is squandered, whereupon Divine Justice indicts the ungrateful recipient of the miracle... Judaism has been careful about not missing the appointed hour. It has a very sensitive time awareness; any delay is considered sinful. Man may sometimes lose his entire world for but one sin – that of tarrying. "But he lingered" (Genesis 19:16)... What is the essence of the story of the Song of Songs, if not the description of a paradoxical and tragic hesitation on the part of the love-intoxicated, anxiety-stricken Lover, when the opportunity, couched in majestic awe, presented itself? What is it, if not the deferral of a great and sublime opportunity pregnant with a possibility of which she dreamed, for which she fought, which she sought, and for which she had searched with all the fervor of her soul?... The beloved continued to beckon, and as His beckoning became more persistent, so too did the insanity that chilled and tainted the Lover. So long as the whispering of the Beloved split the hush of the night, so did the heart of the Lover harden... The Lover did not respond to the voice of the Beloved... The opportunity was lost, and the vision of an exalted life died. True, after a brief delay the Love awoke from her slumber and jumped in haste from her bed to greet the Beloved... But the leap came too late. The Beloved had stopped beckoning and disappeared into the darkness of the night...

The beloved has not shown the Lover any favoritism, but He has compassion for her. The Beloved beckoned for only a short moment that night and disappeared, yet with us He has exhibited extraordinary patience... Hopefully, we will not miss the opportunity!!

[Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Kol Dodi Dofek. Translated by David Z. Gordon]

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