

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 27-28

Perek 27

After Tzidkiyahu's rise to the throne, the countries in the area attempt to reorganize against the Babylonian Empire. The smaller countries rely on the strength of the Egyptian superpower, and their representatives meet in Jerusalem to oppose the spreading Babylonian occupation. The prophecies to the kings of the gentile nations, to the king of Judah and to the nation which are found in our perek were given in light of this gathering. From the perek we see that the false prophets found among both the Jews and the gentiles are encouraging opposition to the Babylonian Empire, and Yirmiyahu stands alone, warning against opposition and accompanying his words with symbolic visual aids – bonds and bars - which are meant to strengthen the message to the kings that they must accept the bondage of Babylonia and not listen to the words of the false prophets.

- 1 The first and longest prophecy in the perek (4-11) is directed to the gentile kings:
 - a) The root “e-v-d” – (the root which signifies slave/slavery or serving/servant) is repeated eight times in the prophecy and is involved in all of its main ideas. Follow the different usages and connections: the commandment to submit to the Babylonian king and the reason for that; the punishment for those who rebel against the Babylonian rule and the reward for those who will submit to its yoke.
 - b) Refer to pesukim 5 and 9 and see how the prophet adjusts his choice of concepts for the gentiles.

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מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רעננברג
The Sadie Rennerl Women's Institute for Torah Studies

המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך

- 2 In pesukim 12-15, the prophet turns to Tzidkiyahu. Compare his words about the false prophets in Israel (14-15) with his words about the prophets and diviners of the gentiles (9-10). What is added here to the description of their sin and punishment, and why?
- 3 In the third prophecy (16-22), in which Yirmiyahu turns to the priests and the nation, he speaks out sharply against the false prophecies about the return of the Temple vessels. Why does Yirmiyahu focus specifically on this false prophecy? Think about what the return of the Temple vessels signifies and how this contradicts Yirmiyahu's prophecy about the fate of the kingdom of Judah and the exiles in Babylonia. See also Yirmiyahu 28:3-4.

Perek 28

In Perek 28 we have a continuation of the description of Yirmiyahu's struggle with the false prophets in the time of the king Tzidkiyahu. Central to the perek is the direct confrontation between Yirmiyahu and one of the false prophets – Chananya ben Azur, who publicly contradicted the prophecies of Yirmiyahu. Throughout the story the character of the false prophet is described and contrasted with the unique character of the true prophet.

- 4 The words of Chananya are directed to the priests and the nation and are directly connected to Yirmiyahu's prophecy about the Temple vessels at the end of perek 27. In Chananya's prophecy about breaking the yoke of the king of Babylonia we hear echoes of Yishayahu's prophecy which was said in a similar situation – the rising of the Assyrian Empire over Jerusalem “O My people that dwell in Zion, be not afraid of Assyria, though he smite thee with the rod...And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall depart from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck...”(Yishayahu 10:24-27) How does this similarity affect the way we see Chananya's character? Use these descriptions from the Talmuds:

Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 11:5 – He who prophesizes something which was not actually said to him is such as Chananya ben Azor...Chananya ben Azor was a true prophet. But he would plagiarize - he heard what Yirmiyahu prophesized in the upper market, and would go down to the lower market and prophesize...

Bavli Sanhedrin 89a - Now Yirmiyahu stood in the upper market place, and said, *Thus says the Lord of Hosts, Behold, I will break the bow of Elam.* Thereupon, Chananya the son of Azur drew an a minori conclusion (*kal vachomer*); If Elam, which only came to assist Babylonia, yet the Holy one, blessed be He, said, Behold, I will break the bow of Elam; then how much more so the Babylonians themselves! So he went to the lower market place and proclaimed, Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel saying, I have broken the yoke of the kingdom of Babylonia.

- 5 Even though Chananya publicly contradicted Yirmiyahu, Yirmiyahu does not confront him directly, but rather reacts in a surprising way: *'Amen! the Lord do so! the Lord perform your words which you have prophesied, to bring back the vessels of the Lord's house, and all them that are carried away captive, from Babylonia unto this place.'* (6) What do you think this reaction expresses?
- 6 Further on, Yirmiyahu qualifies his words and refers to the criterion which appears in Devarim 18:21-22 as the method to distinguish a true prophet from a false one. Compare the pesukim in Devarim to the words of Yirmiyahu to Chananya, and pay attention - to the distinction that Yirmiyahu makes between prophecies of doom and prophecies of peace. Consider – what is the idea at the basis of this distinction, and what is the role of prophecies of doom if they can be cancelled? Use the Talmud Yerushalmi to understand this:

Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 11:5 –Yirmiyahu said to him: “you say, *'In two years I shall bring back...*’but I say to you that Nebuchadnezzar is going to come and take the rest of the people now here to Babylonia: *'They shall be carried to Babylonia and remain there'* etc. He said to him, “Give some sort of sign to confirm what you have said”. He said to him, “I prophesy doom, and I cannot give a sign to confirm what I say, for the Holy One, blessed be He, may form a plan to bring evil, but then reverse it. But you prophesy good so you give a sign.” He replied, “No! You are the one who has to bring a sign.” He said to him, “If so, I shall give a sign and a wonder through that very person himself [Chananya].” In that year he died; *'Therefore thus says the Lord: Behold, I will cast you from the face of the earth. This very year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord. And so it was, in that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Chananya died.'*

Appendix

“...Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylonia, and serve him and his people, and live.” (27:12)

(Wikipedia / Cgoodwin)



Yoke – a harness for working cattle. A yoke is generally made from two poles, the upper, wider one resting on the neck of the animal, and the poles are connected by pegs. The yoke is attached to straps, reins and other harness equipment to pull a cart or plow or the like.

Yokes were made of wood, as iron would have caused great suffering to the animals.

The false prophets – “Then said the prophet Yirmiya to Chananya the prophet, Hear now, Chananya: The Lord has not sent you; but you make these people trust in a lie...” (28:15)

After Chananya took the bar off of Yirmiyahu’s neck and broke it and said to the people that thus God will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar from the neck of the nations in two years, Yirmiyahu remained silent. Only afterwards, when God sends him to Chananya, does he go and say to him what he must.

Every time I reach this pasuk I am shocked anew and learn anew. Yirmiyahu, amongst all the prophets, is the one who knows that he was chosen in the womb for his role. He feels that God has touched him on the mouth and thus qualified him to speak the words of God. He has heard from the mouth of God himself that he was entrusted with the nations and kingdoms, meaning that he would be told from time to time God’s judgment which was to come upon the nations. And not just that, the yoke which Chananya broke, Yirmiyahu had placed on his neck at the command of God as a sign that the nations that are now enslaved to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylonia are there by the will of God. And despite all this, he is silent when the yoke is broken, and he walks away. Why does he walk away? Because despite everything, he does not understand the meaning. Chananya speaks authoritatively, as someone who

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understands, but he, Yirmiyahu, does not understand the meaning. **True, God spoke to him shortly before, but now it is a different time. History keeps happening, and the definition of history is that no time is the same as the next. God is active in history, and God is not a mechanism... He is a living God. God has will for the current human world, but the human world is gifted with will as well... It can change now, and God can change His will toward it... we cannot depend on our knowledge. We must listen anew.**

Chananya is not a liar. He speaks the truth as he knows it. He has been rightfully called a caricature of Yishayahu, even more so, he parrots Yishayahu. Yishayahu spoke of the will of God to break the yoke of Assyria from the neck of Judah. From this Chananya deduces that God promised to break the yoke of Babylonia, for it appears to be a parallel situation. But the situation is not parallel. When Yishayahu expressed his idea, Israel was destined for a historical role... In the generation of Yoshiyahu the historical conditions changed...but Chananya is not aware of this, in his eyes God is like a man who is loyal to his beliefs, who is tied to the promise which he gave to Yishayahu, he promised to protect "*this city*". Because of this, now in this historical reality, which is completely different, the false prophets put words in the mouth of God, saying he should give Israel true peace "*in this place*". **Chananya does not know that such a thing exists, that there are different historical realities, and that there is fault in the world that because of it one's role may be taken away. Indeed, he does not know as well that there is repentance in the world and that with repentance we are given opportunities that did not exist even a minute ago.**

(Free translation of Martin Buber, Darko shel Mikra)