

MATAN AL HAPEREK

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Yirmiyahu Perakim 33-34

Perek 33

The section of the prophecies of consolation in Yirmiyahu ends in perek 33, with a prophecy which foretells the return of Judah and Israel and the revival of Jerusalem (1-13). This prophecy is given in the court of the guard, and appears to be a continuation to the prophecy of Yirmiyahu about the purchase of the field of Chanamel and the message of consolation which follows that. The second half of the prophecy deals with the eternal covenant between God and the house of Levi and the house of David. In contrast to the people's understanding, this covenant will not be broken with the destruction of the Temple, rather will continue eternally (14-26).

- 1 The prophecy opens with an appeal to Yirmiyahu – “*Call unto Me, and I will answer you*” (3). This is in contrast to what God said earlier to Yirmiyahu: “*Therefore pray not for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them... for I will not bear you.*” (7:16). What do you think caused this turn-around in God's words to Yirmiyahu? Pay attention to the circumstances in which each of the commandments was made.
- 2 The nation's understanding, which is quoted in pasuk 10 (“*whereof you say*”), stands in contrast to the future promised by God in pasuk 11. Pay attention to the guiding word in pasuk 10, as opposed to the guiding word in pasuk 11 (both appear five times in each pasuk). Contrast the different perception of the destruction and the exile in the eyes of the people and in the eyes of God. See also God's words in the previous prophecy to Yirmiyahu in the court of the guard – 32:36-37.

- 3 a) Refer to pesukim 17-26. Why do you think that the prophecy promising that the covenant between God and the political leadership and between God and the spiritual leadership will be eternal appears specifically at the point in time where we are experiencing destruction and exile? Pay attention to the nation's understanding as it appears in pasuk 24. What do you think is the basis for their claim?
- b) Explore the similarity between the promise to David and the promise to the priests. In both covenants a unique phrase appears which points to the fact that they are both based on the same principle – see also the phrase which appears in Bamidbar 18:19 and Divrei HaYamim II 13:5. In addition, see the Midrash below, which speaks of the similarities between the House of Aharon and the House of David.

Perek 34

The historical background to the prophecy is described in the first pesukim in perek 34 (1-2): the siege on Jerusalem in the tenth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign. Immediately afterwards we see a personal prophecy of calamity for Tzidkiyahu which is mixed with a small amount of consolation (3-5). The main section of the perek tells us how during the siege, about a year and a half before the destruction, the people of Jerusalem made a covenant agreeing to free their slaves. When the siege was removed due to the victory of Pharaoh over the Babylonians (which turned out to be a temporary respite), the people of Jerusalem took back their slaves, thus breaking the covenant. Yirmiyahu rebukes the nation strongly for this act, prophesying that the destruction will come because of this infringement.

- 4 What do you think the religious and practical motives were that brought the people of Jerusalem to free the slaves at the height of the siege? Pay attention to the fact that the slaves' activities were very limited during the siege (especially those who worked in agriculture), and think about the cost of upkeep of a slave, and the level of motivation a slave would have to fight the enemy.

5 In the background of this prophesy of the covenant in the time of Tzidkiyahu are two earlier covenants: the Covenant at Sinai and the Covenant Between the Parts (*Brit bein haBetarim*).

a) In pasuk 13 the prophet links the covenant of Sinai and the exodus from Egypt – “*the house of bondage*”. What is the meaning of mentioning the exodus from Egypt specifically in this prophesy? Note the argument for the freeing of the slaves given in the portion of the Jubilee (VaYikra 25:42). Based on this, can you see “measure for measure” behavior in the punishment of enslavement to Babylonia which is placed on the nation in our prophesy?

b) During the prophesy we see several phrases and descriptions which bring to mind the Covenant Between the Parts: compare pesukim 18-19 to Bereshit 15:9-10, 17 (these are the only uses of the verb *batar* (to divide) in the Tanach). What does the passing between the parts symbolize in Bereshit? Refer to the words of the **Radak** in answering this question:

This hinted at the making of the covenant, just as those making a covenant pass between the parts to establish the covenant.

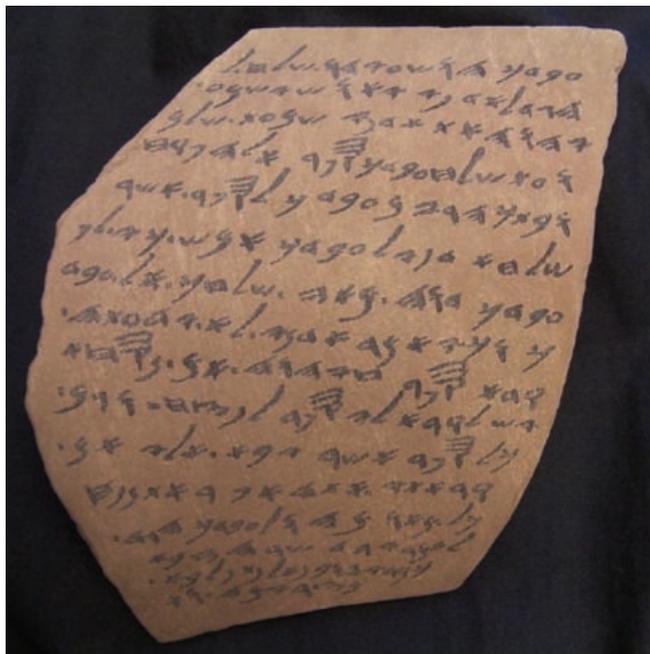
c) What is the connection between the Covenant Between the Parts, the mention of the exodus from Egypt, the Covenant at Sinai and the freeing of the slaves? See Bereshit 15:13-14.

d) The root sh.u.v is a guiding word in the prophesy, and is used in a few different meanings in the course of the prophesy. Follow this root throughout the prophesy – in the description of the covenant, the sin and the punishment. Note how it comprises the central theme of the prophesy.

Appendix

Then Yirmiyahu the prophet spoke all these words unto Tzidkiyahu king of Judah in Jerusalem, when the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and against Azekah; for these alone remained of the cities of Judah as fortified cities. (34:6-7)

Yirmiyahu concludes his prophecy and the scripture “throws” us back into reality. We are in the midst of the days of the most difficult battle which Jerusalem has ever known. All of the other cities have already fallen, only Lachish and Azekah remain of all the fortified cities in the plains of Judah. *“when the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and against Azekah; for these alone remained of the cities of Judah as fortified cities”* (34:7). In a very surprising way, this pasuk came to life 85 years ago, in 1935, when the British archeologists at Tel Lachish found in a guard room in the gate of the city, in the archeological level which corresponded to the days of the Babylonian conquest, an archive of about 20 letters written in ink on shards of pottery which became known as the “Lachish letters”. This was an unprecedented find which included the “post office” of those difficult days. Most of the letters were sent by a clerk or lowly official by the name of Hoshayahu who lived outside of Lachish, to his master Ya’ush who lived in Lachish. The letters are written in ancient Hebrew letters using Scriptural language and without the letters which represent vowel sounds. Some of them document the last days of Judah.



continued >

Letters of Lachish - Shard 3

(NenyaAleks / ויקיפדיה)

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מתן מרחיב

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המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך

On shard 4, lines 10-13 the clerk writes to his master: “And know that we guard the bonfires of Lachish according to the signals which my master has given, for we do not see Azekah.” It seems that Hoshayahu was sitting at an outlook between Lachish and Azekah and following the agreed upon signals which were being “broadcast” from the two cities under siege – the signals from the bonfires (at night) and smoke (during the day). And although from our pesukim in Yirmiyahu we read that both Lachish and Azekah are still holding on before the Babylonian siege, from the letter from Lachish, which was written a few days later, we are told that Azekah has already fallen – “for we do not see Azekah.” And only the bonfire of Lachish is still visible. The Babylonian army, like all large armies, preferred to arrive from the sea, which is safer and easier. Its ships anchored at Ashkelon, which the Babylonians had conquered many years before. From the shore the Babylonians reached the plains of Judah. All of the outposts along the way were defensive outposts for the Babylonian army. According to Yirmiyahu, we learn that only Azekah and Lachish remained from all the strongholds and cities outside of Jerusalem. The connection between the Lachish Letters and the pesukim in Yirmiyahu shows the war of the Babylonians in Judah in a clear and caustic light. The invasion has proceeded toward Jerusalem unimpeded. Despite the large coalition of local nations, once again the daughter of Zion has remained to face the great ruler from the north alone. This would explain the pasuk from Eichah “*all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies*” (1:2)

Freely translated from: *Yirmiyahu – The Fate of a Prophet* by Rabbi Beni Lau (pp.205-206)



◀ The Gate of the City of Lachish
(ויקיפדיה / Hanay)