

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



Perek 11

Perek 11 concludes Yechezkel's prophetic journey to Jerusalem. Two frequent expressions of the people of Jerusalem are quoted in this perek. The first (1-13) expresses the pride of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their confidence in the fact that the Temple would not be destroyed. The second (14-21) expresses their feelings of superiority over the exiles in Babylonia. In His words, God refutes these two positions and the false theological thinking upon which they are based.

- 1 “It is not near; build houses; it is the pot, and we are the meat.” (3) What is the meaning of the simile of the pot and the meat as it relates to the city and its inhabitants? What perception does it reflect? The prophet accepts the language of the statement, “So have you said O House of Israel,” (5) but he changes the significance of the simile (7). According to the prophet, what will be the role of the city?
- 2 “Distance yourselves from the Lord. This land is given to us as a possession.” (15) The second expression commonly used by the people is divided into two parts. The first part relates to the fate of the exiles, and the second part relates to their own destiny.





a) How do the inhabitants of Jerusalem understand the relationship between God, the nation and the land?

Pay attention to the linguistic similarity between God's response – also divided into two parts – and the people's expression. Consider the different understanding of the relationship between God and His land that emerges from God's response. For a broader view, see the **Malbim**:

As opposed to what they said – *"Distance yourselves from the Lord,"* – he answers that in spite of all, God is still close to them. *"Although I have sent them far away among the nations and although I have dispersed them to many countries."* In spite of that, they are not far from Me. *"I have become a minor sanctuary for them"* and My Shechinah will be present among them even there, although it will not be revealed to them by means of miracles and signs as in the great Temple. It will be veiled, and My Providence will quietly watch over them. In place of the Temple, there will be synagogues and study halls. As our sages teach – *"I have become a minor sanctuary for them"* – these are the synagogues and study halls.

b) In the second part (17-21), God responds to the argument concerning the inheritance of the land. Who will inherit the land? What are the criteria for the inheritance? Focus on the parallels in structure and in language between the promise of redemption here and the promise of redemption from Egypt in Shemot 6:6-8.

c) Consider how God's abandoning the city strengthens His reaction to the second expression.



Perek 12:1-20

With the conclusion of his prophetic journey, Yechezkel returns to Babylonia and is commanded to perform two symbolic acts before the exiles. The first act (1-16) symbolizes going into exile. The second act symbolizes the concern and waste that will prevail in the land.

- 3 The two symbolic acts performed by Yechezkel before the people in this perek parallel the two acts performed in perek 4 – the tracing on the tile that symbolized the siege (1-3), and the eating of the bread that symbolized the famine that would prevail in the city (9-17). Compare the two sets of acts. Focus on the increased severity in this perek.
- 4 Vision and eyes feature prominently in the description of the first symbolic act. Focus on the significance of the repetition of the vision motif in pesukim 3-7 in view of the harsh saying in pasuk 2: “*that have eyes to see and see not.*”
- 5 In pesukim 8-16 God places in Yechezkel’s mouth the explanation of these acts before the people. The prophet focuses on the image of the prince, and he directs his words to Tzidkiyahu. Follow the description of the fate of the prince and compare it to the fate of Tzidkiyahu as described in Yirmiyahu 39:4-7. Consider the significance of the prince’s lack of vision. Also note **Rashi**’s words here:

Dig for yourself through the wall – Symbolic of Tzidkiyahu who went out through a tunnel into a cave because he was afraid to go out in the open because of the Chaldeans: *Concerning the prince is this burden* – Concerning King Tzidkiyahu I am showing this burden, an expression denoting prophecy: *He will cover his face* – Because of shame that he is fleeing from the city at night: *But he will not see it* – Because in Riblah in the land of Chammat he called him to account and blinded his eyes and then brought him to Babylonia.



Appendix

“I have become a minor sanctuary for them”

In perek 11 pesukim 15-16 it is written:

"Son of man! Your brothers, your brothers, your kinsmen and the entire house of Israel, all of it, to whom the dwellers of Jerusalem said, 'Distance yourselves from the Lord; the land has been given to us as an inheritance.' Therefore, say; So said the Lord God: Although I have removed them far off among the nations and although I have scattered them in the lands, I have become a minor sanctuary for them in the lands where they have come.

Before us is a concise statement of the ideology of the opportunistic inhabitants of Jerusalem. It would not be comfortable for them if the exiles were to return; they cling to the advantages that accrued to them as a result of Yehoyachin's exile. Therefore they create an ideology to suit their purpose – “Distance yourselves from the Lord” – which at that time could have been considered reasonable, as the dwelling of the glory of the Lord of Israel was in Jerusalem, and so the prophets also taught. However, the inhabitants of Jerusalem added a “logical” and useful conclusion. Whoever left Israel, automatically left the realm of God and was exiled from the house of the influence and worship of the Lord of Israel. Therefore he was obligated to assimilate into the place where he was. At the same time, Israel remained a legacy for those who lived there. They were the masters of the land; they were the true Jewish People. The others should “Distance yourselves from the Lord.”

While this ideology is basically theological, it also contains political elements. The “real politik” nature of the ideology is not hard to discern although it is only hinted at: what is done cannot be undone; the kingdom of Babylonia is stronger than Judea; we cannot overthrow the rule of Nebuchadnezzar; we have no choice but to accept the new reality and to find our place within it. It seems that this viewpoint also contained an opportunistic aspect. Many of those who remained gained the property and status of those who were exiled. The new reality was not bad for them, and it is not surprising that they were willing to accept it.

... However, the prophet decrees, “although I have removed them far off among the nations, and although I have scattered them in the lands, I have become a minor sanctuary for them in the lands where they have come.” Here every word is



important... It is my humble opinion that this text must be understood according to Bamidbar 18:20, which concerns the priestly gifts.

“God said to Aharon: You will not inherit in their land; you will not receive a portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance within the Children of Israel.”

God is their portion and their inheritance - their compensation, if you will, for a portion [of the land]. This means that there is something that the priests are denied, and the compensation for this denial is their special relationship with God. They will not receive an inheritance and a portion in the land, but in exchange – *“I am your portion and your inheritance.”*

This is also the case here in sefer Yechezkel. The prophet says, *“I have become a minor sanctuary for them,”* and here, too, there is an instance of denial and compensation. The denial: here it is impossible to conduct a normal national and religious life. However, in place of the Temple that cannot be built here, *“I have become a minor sanctuary for them.”* This is the compensation. In truth, God is not really a portion... The prophet says that it is impossible to build a Temple in Babylonia, but there is compensation - *“I have become a minor sanctuary for them.”* This was an important new idea for those times – that also in Babylonia the relationship with the Lord of Israel could be continued. This is a surprising exchange for the absent Temple. However, the prophet here adds a word, and that word is very important – a minor sanctuary. Do not think that this indicates normalization – that from now on, instead of the Temple, there will be a relationship with God in the exile. (This was the thinking of the elders of Israel and not only in the time of Yechezkel). That is why the prophet added the word “minor” to “sanctuary.” Following this, in pesukim 17-19 the prophet states:

“Therefore, say; So said the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples, and I will assemble you from the lands in which you have been scattered, and I shall give you the land of Israel. And they will come over there, and they will remove all its detestations and all its abominations from it. And I shall give them one heart, and a new spirit I shall place within them, and I shall remove the heart of stone from their flesh, and I shall give them a heart of flesh.”

Perfection will exist only on the land of Israel. Here – a minor sanctuary. There – *“they will be My people, and I shall be their God.”*

(Y. Elitzur, Two Prophets and Four Parties)

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