

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

THE BOOK OF YIRMIYAHU
Rav David Sabato

Dedicated in memory of
Matt Eisenfeld z"l and Sara Duker z"l.
Though their lives were tragically cut short in the bombing of Bus 18 in
Jerusalem, their memory continues to inspire.
Am Yisrael would have benefitted so much from their contributions.
Yehi zikhram barukh. –
Yael and Reuven Ziegler

**Shiur 20: "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord" –
Three Prophecies regarding the Future**

INTRODUCTION

At the center of the unit of prophecies of consolation in chapters 30-33 stand three prophecies about the future (31:26-39), which together outline a utopian vision of the end of days. Utopian visions of this sort appear in several prophetic books, and such a vision appears also at the beginning of the book of *Yirmiyahu* (chap. 3). Later in this *shiur*, we will consider the connection between that prophecy and the prophecies in our chapter.

We are dealing here with three independent units (vv. 26-29, 30-36, and 37-39), which do, however, display great similarity. First of all, they all open with the same wording: "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord." The structure of the prophecies is also similar, each one contrasting the previous situation to the situation in the future: "No... (past), but... (future)." In these prophecies, Yirmiyahu foresees the changes that will take place at the time of the redemption. These changes will take place on three planes: The first prophecy deals with Israel's being replanted in their land, the second prophecy deals with a new covenant and its consequences, and the third prophecy addresses the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Let us now examine each prophecy by itself, and then afterwards we will clarify the common denominator between them.

THE FIRST PROPHECY: ISRAEL'S BEING REPLANTED IN THEIR LAND

(26) **Behold, days are coming, says the Lord**, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Yehuda with the seed of man and with the seed of beast.

(27) And it shall come to pass that just as I have watched (*shakadeti*) over them, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to break down, and to destroy, and to afflict, so will I watch (*eshkod*) over them, to build, and to plant, says the Lord.

(28) In those days, they shall say **no more**: The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.

(29) **But** every one shall die for his own iniquity; and every man that eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

The first prophecy opens with the redemption of the house of Israel and the house of Yehuda, in continuation of the previous prophecy in the chapter that foresaw the future reunification of the kingdoms. The second prophecy opens in similar manner: "When I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Yehuda" (30).¹

The prophecy is divided into two parts. Verses 26-27 deal with the replanting of Israel in their land by way of a fascinating image: "With the seed of man and with the seed of beast." What is the meaning of this unique image? Rashi explains: "Both the good and the foolish among them, I will sow them all to be My seed." According to this explanation, "man" and "beast" are metaphors for different kinds of people.² But Targum Yonatan writes: "I will preserve the house of Israel and the house of Yehuda, multiplying the number of people and granting success with their flocks." In other words, there is a double blessing here – an increase in people and success with the flocks, which denotes economic prosperity. As the Radak notes, this blessing brings to mind blessing formulas found in the Torah: "Man and beast, as in: 'Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts' (*Devarim* 28:4). And He says: 'I will sow,' that is, He will bestow His blessing upon them and multiply them, and there will be no miscarriage among them."³ It seems that the image of sowing was chosen in order to symbolize the new and deep connection to the land, as arises also from the next verse, which speaks of building and planting. Later we will consider the connection between this image and the continuation of the prophecy.

The next verse relates back to the prophecy of consecration, both in its use of the word *shakadeti* – corresponding to, "For I will hasten (*shoked*) My word to perform it" (1:12) – and in its use of the six verbs: "To root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." In the prophecy of consecration, the emphasis was placed on hastening the

¹ The combination of the house of Israel and the house of Yehuda appears eight times in Yirmeyahu's prophecies – both in the context of their sins and punishments and in the context of their redemption.

² Rashi's interpretation is based on the *gemara* in *Sota* 22a: "If he learned neither Scripture nor Mishna, concerning him Scripture declares: 'I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast.'"

³ As stated, according to the reading of the Targum cited in the text (*be-ansha... be-be'ira*), the implication of the verse is an increase of people and success regarding the flocks. However, the Targum is cited by several commentaries with a slight change: "*ke-ansha... ke-be'ira*"). The interchange of the letter *bet* and the letter *kaf* is exceedingly common in manuscripts, but here it has exegetical significance. According to this reading, the subject is the people, and there are two images for their success, man and beast (see Radak).

calamity, whereas in the present prophecy, after the calamity, we are dealing with hastening the building and redemption: "As I have watched (*shakadeti*) over them... so will I watch (*eshkod*) over them to build and to plant."

The next section seems to shift to a different topic – the theological issue of reward and punishment. But it is clear already from the opening words of the section that it is connected to the beginning of the prophecy: "In **those** days" relates back to "Behold, days are coming." We will first discuss the nature of the change, and then we will return to the issue of the context.

The prophet cites what was apparently a common adage in his day: "They shall say no more: The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." Indeed, also in the book of *Eikha*, whose authorship is attributed to Yirmiyahu, we find the argument in the people's lamentation after the destruction of the Temple (*Eikha* 5:7): "Our fathers have sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities." A precise citation appears in Yechezkel's prophecy (18:2-4): "What mean you, that you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: **The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?** As I live, says the Lord God, you shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine; the soul that sins, it shall die." Like Yirmiyahu, Yechezkel opposes the proverb and presents an alternative understanding, based on the principle of personal responsibility and recompense: "The soul that sins, it shall die."⁴

How are we to understand the words of Yirmiyahu? Surely the principle of collective punishment, according to which a person is liable to be punished for the sins of his father, is explicit in the Torah itself: "Punishing the iniquity of the fathers on the children" (*Shemot* 34:7)!⁵ Two solutions may be offered to this tension. One solution is proposed by the Radak:

"They shall say no more: The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." This is a metaphor for sin, as it is stated: "Our fathers have sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities" (*Eikha* 5:7). This is true, for among the attributes of the Creator (may He be blessed) it says: "Punishing the iniquity of the fathers on the children" (*Shemot* 34:7). And this applies when they continue in the same course as their fathers (see *Berakhot* 7a). Then the sins of the fathers join with sins of the children, and the children are punished for the iniquity of their fathers together with their own iniquities. This applies only to the sin of idol worship and the like, a great sin. And God promised Israel that in the future, their hearts will be

⁴ There is, however, a certain difference between the two prophecies. Whereas Yirmeyahu views his idea of personal reward and punishment as a change that will take place in the future, Yechezkel appears to be relating to current reality. See also the next note.

⁵ The relationship between collective and personal reward and punishment in the Bible is a broad and complex issue. For a detailed overview of early and more recent solutions to this issue, see Prof. Meir Weiss, "*Mi-Ba'ayot Torat Ha-Gemul Ha-Mikra'it*," in his collection of essays, *Mikra'ot Ke-Kavanatam*.

whole with God (see *Devarim* 30:10), and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God (see *Yeshayahu* 11:9), and sinners will become fewer. And even the sinners in that time will not commit a great sin, as even in their case punishment will tarry, as it is stated: "And the sinner being a hundred years old shall be deemed accursed" (*Yeshayahu* 65:20). And certainly a son will not be punished for the sin of his father, even if he sins like his father. Therefore, **every man that eats sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge.**

According to the Radak, no change will occur in the principles governing reward and punishment, and the principle of collective punishment – "punishing the iniquity of the fathers on the children" – will apply even in the future. The change will take place in man. Since people will no longer commit great sins, there will no longer be a need to punish children for the iniquities of their fathers. According to the Radak, then, our prophecy should be understood in light of the next prophecy, which speaks of a new covenant in the hearts of people, although nothing was said yet about this matter.

R. Yosef Kara proposes a different solution:

"They shall say no more: The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." This means: The fathers will not sin any more, relying on this and saying: The child will bear the iniquity of the father (see *Yechezkel* 18:19), as I will not apply this attribute in future generations. For who caused them until now to continue to sin? For the father would rely on his child, saying: I will continue to sin and my child will bear my iniquity. **From now on, this attribute will not apply for future generations**, but rather: "Every man that eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge."

R. Yosef Kara explains that the verse describes a change in the ways of God's governance. The old arrangement had caused the fathers not to fear sinning, since the punishment would only be brought upon their children.⁶ This explanation seems to be closer to the plain meaning of the text. What this

⁶ An argument similar to that of R. Yosef Kara arises from the amusing parable based on our verse found in *Teshuvot Ha-Ge'onim* (Harkavy, no. 362):

R. Yochanan added: R. Meir had three hundred parables of foxes, of which we have only one left... It once happened that a fox, about to be devoured by a lion, pleaded: "What [meat] is there on me to fill you? Come along, and I will show you a fat man whom you can devour and be filled with." At that spot there was a covered pit, beyond which a man sat praying. When the lion saw him, he said to the fox: "I fear this man's prayer. [I hope] you are not entrapping me." The fox said to him: "You need not fear, nor need your posterity fear. It is the posterity of your posterity upon whom punishment will fall. Now satisfy your hunger. There is lots of time before your posterity's posterity." The lion was persuaded and leaped over the pit, but [miscalculated and] fell into it. The fox came over, stood at the edge of the pit, and stared gleefully at the lion. The lion said to him: "Did you not say: No punishment will befall you [nor your posterity], but the posterity of your posterity will be seized for it?" The fox said to him: "But there is a charge of iniquity against the father of your father. On account of that charge, you are now seized." The lion said to him: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge!" The fox said to him: "Why did you not think of this before?"

means is that each person is made responsible for his own actions and unable to pass that responsibility on to other people or to future generations.

Yet another explanation may be offered for this change. The change was necessary for the rehabilitation of the nation, for without it there would have been no hope for a new beginning and "sowing" in the land, and the burden of the sins of the previous generations would have continued to accompany the people at all times. A similar idea emerges later in the chapter (34-35):

Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who stirs up the sea that its waves roar; the Lord of hosts is His name: If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall **cease** from being a nation before Me forever.

In this prophecy the laws of nature are compared to the existence of the people. Just as the laws of heaven and earth that were established by God at the beginning of creation will not be discontinued, Israel's covenant with God will similarly not cease. Attention should be paid to the allusions in this prophecy to God's words in His covenant with Noach in the aftermath of the flood (*Bereishit* 8:21-22):

And the Lord smelled the sweet savor; and the Lord said in His heart: I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth; **neither will I again** smite any more everything living, as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night **shall not cease**.

The flood is the story of the first destruction in the world, and there is therefore an interesting similarity between the two events. However, closer examination of God's words teaches that this permanence of the laws of nature began only after the flood. After the flood, God decides to change His manner of governing the world to include also the attribute of mercy, in order to enable the world's rehabilitation and new beginning without concern about past precedents. In this respect, the flood constitutes a model for destruction and redemption.⁷

⁷ This idea in a slightly different formulation closes the unit of prophecies of consolation (33:25-26): "Thus says the Lord: If I have not appointed My covenant with day and night, the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I cast away the seed of Yaakov and David My servant, and not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. No, for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them."

The relationship between the laws of nature and the relationship between God and man from a different direction appears in 5:22-24: "Do you not fear Me? says the Lord; will you not tremble at My presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it, and though its waves toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people has a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart: Let us now fear the Lord our God, who gives rain, both the former and the later, in its season, who keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest." Here emphasis is placed, on the one hand, on the

THE SECOND PROPHECY: THE NEW COVENANT

(30) **Behold, days are coming, says the Lord**, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Yehuda.

(31) **Not** according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant of Mine they broke, although I was their master, says the Lord.

(32) **But** this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My Torah in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

(33) And they shall teach **no** more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying: Know the Lord; **for** they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The second prophecy focuses on the "new covenant" that God will make with His people. This covenant is contrasted with the covenant that was entered into with Israel when they left Egypt, the covenant of Sinai.⁸ It seems that this covenant will replace the covenant of Sinai.

As is well known, this prophecy was the basis for the Christian idea in the New Testament regarding the replacement of the old covenant with Israel

power of the laws that place limits on the mighty elements of nature in contrast to the sins of Israel, who violate the laws with their rebellious hearts, and on the other hand, on the lack of gratitude to God for keeping the laws of nature that were intended for man's welfare.

⁸ We find such a contrast in another prophecy in the book (23:7-8; 16:4-16): "Therefore, **behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when they shall no more say**: As the Lord lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but: As the Lord lives, who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries into which I have driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land." Here, too, Yirmeyahu uses similar wording to contrast the remembrance of the exodus from Egypt to the remembrance of the future redemption, which will overshadow the earlier redemption. The *baraita* in *Berakhot* 12b explains this as follows: "Ben Zoma said to the Sages: Will the exodus from Egypt be mentioned in the days of the Messiah? Was it not already said: 'Therefore, behold, day are coming, says the Lord, when they shall no more say: As the Lord lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, As the Lord lives, who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country and from all countries into which I have driven them?' They replied: **This does not mean that the mention of the exodus from Egypt shall be obliterated, but that the [deliverance from] subjection to the other kingdoms shall take the first place and the exodus from Egypt shall become secondary.** Similarly you read: 'Your name shall not be called any more Yaakov, but Israel shall be your name' (*Bereishit* 35:10). **This does not mean that the name Yaakov shall be obliterated, but that Israel shall be the principal name and Yaakov a secondary one.**" Regarding the expression: "Not A, but B," in the Bible, which sometimes means: Not as much A as B, see at length, R. Elchanan Samet, *Iyyunim Be-Parashat Ha-Shavua*. The Radak in the continuation proposes a similar argument in explanation of our prophecy.

with the new covenant made with the Christian people, "Israel in spirit." The Radak deals with this argument in his commentary:⁹

"Behold, days are coming." "A new covenant" – what is new about it is that it will be fulfilled; it will not be broken, as was broken the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. The uncircumcised who err about this and say that the prophet prophesied about a new Torah that would exist, unlike the Torah that was given at Mount Sinai, as it is stated: "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers" (v.31), this being the new Torah that that man [Jesus] made for them – the answer to them is: Surely he explained what it is: "Not according to the covenant... which covenant of Mine they broke" (v.31); but this covenant, they will not break, for I will put My Torah into their hearts, and write it on their hearts (v. 32), so that they never forget it. The entire matter is like what is explained below, that the covenant will not be renewed, but rather fulfilled.

As the Radak emphasizes, the difference between the covenants relates not to the contents or the addressee, but to the manner in which it will be made and its consequences. The prophet contrasts the old covenant that was broken by the people and the new covenant that apparently will not be broken because it will be engraved on the hearts of the people.

Indeed, Yirmiyahu emphasizes many times in his prophecies the continuity of the covenants in the annals of the nation. This prophecy should be compared to the prophecy concerning the renewal of the covenant in chap. 11. As we noted in the *shiur* dealing with that chapter, the historical background of the prophecy is Yoshiyahu's attempt to renew the covenant of Sinai and to wipe out idol worship from among the people. This attempt was at first enthusiastically received, and Yirmiyahu saw it as a true hope for change, but it became clear over time that the people did not identify with the covenant; he was left alone after his hope was dashed. Here the prophet describes a new covenant, whose uniqueness lies in the fact that it will not fail, as did the previous attempts at innovation. This requires a fundamental change, and not just some cosmetic change – just like in the previous prophecy. The change will involve moving the covenant from the stone to the heart – internalizing the covenant.

This idea complements the idea in the prophecy concerning the end of days in chap. 3. As was noted at the beginning of the *shiur*, there are certain striking parallels between the chapters, and this parallel is found also in the prophecies concerning the end of days in the two collections. The structure

⁹ The Radak lived in Provence in the 12th-13th centuries and often engaged in disputation with the Christian interpretation of the Bible. The Radak devoted a separate tract to this, *Sefer Ha-Berit*, and his commentaries to the Bible, and especially his commentary to *Tehillim*, contain many polemics against Christian interpretations of particular verses. The passage cited in the text is taken from the HaKeter edition, which is based on authoritative manuscripts of the Radak's commentary. The standard printed version was censored, and parts of the commentary were corrupted because of their critique of Christianity.

and style of that prophecy is similar to the structure of the prophecies in our chapter – the contrast between past and future:

(16) And it shall come to pass, when you multiply and increase in the land, in those days, says the Lord, **they shall say no more**: The ark of the covenant of the Lord, nor shall it come to mind, nor shall they remember it; nor shall they miss it; nor shall that be done any more.

(17) **At that time**, they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem; nor shall they walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart.

Here too we are dealing with a change in the future – regarding the ark and regarding the heart. The ark is the dwelling place of the tablets of the law, and Yirmiyahu prophesies about the spreading of holiness throughout all of Jerusalem. Here too, instead of writing the covenant on the tablets of the covenant that are made of stone, the covenant will be written anew on the tablet of the heart (see also *Yirmiyahu* 17:1: "The sin of Yehuda is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond; it **is graven upon the tablet of their heart**, and upon the horns of your altars").

This idea is connected to one of the general motifs in the book of *Yirmiyahu* regarding the internalization of holiness and opposition to the formal, mechanical conception of holiness, as in the prophecy concerning the Temple of God and against sacrifices in chapter 7 and elsewhere. Standing out against this in many places in the book of *Yirmiyahu* is prayer and moral deeds as a condition for holiness. As we have seen, the underlying problem with the tablets of the covenant and ark is their remoteness from the people, which allows people to escape from them. The removal of the ark and the transfer of its contents inwards into the hearts of the people will create the desired change and turn the covenant into an eternal covenant. From this perspective, Yirmiyahu continues the Torah's tendency in the book of *Devarim*. This is what it says after the Ten Commandments in the book of *Devarim* in the *Shema* passage (6:4-6):

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. **And these words**, which I command you this day, shall be **in your heart...** And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates.

The final purpose of the Ten Commandments is that they should be part of a person's life; they should rest constantly on his heart and be engraved on the doorposts of his house. Yirmiyahu takes this idea one step further and seeks to write them on the people's hearts!

Verse 33 creates another contrast between the past and the future:

And they shall teach **no more** every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying: Know the Lord;

For they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord.

This opposition stems from the previous contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant. In the natural world, an external factor is needed to teach and awaken a person to know God. But in the future, this will not be necessary, for the knowledge and desire will flow from the person himself.¹⁰ Here too we see a similarity to the *Shema* passage – corresponding to the educational command, "And you shall teach them to your children," Yirmiyahu envisions a situation in which man will not require external instruction.

The section concludes with: "**For** I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more." In this way, a connection is made between the future change in the covenant and in the hearts of people and the focus of the previous prophecy – the change in the ways that God offers forgiveness for the burden of sins and the ability to open a clean slate without the negative baggage of previous generations, casting personal responsibility on a person and allowing him to be "sown" anew, to grow and to expose his positive, inner powers, and engrave the covenant on his heart.

THE THIRD PROPHECY: THE REBUILDING OF JERUSALEM

(37) **Behold, days are coming, says the Lord**, when the city shall be built to the Lord from the tower of Chananel to the corner gate.

(38) And the measuring line shall go out further straight to the hill Garev, and shall turn round to go to Go'a.

(39) And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the wadi of Kidron, to the corner of the horse gate towards the east, shall be holy to the Lord; it shall **not** be plucked up, **nor** thrown down any more forever.

The last section describes the future building of the city, from one end to the other. It concludes: "It shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more forever." Here too there is an allusion to Yirmiyahu's prophecy of consecration, which describes the plucking up and throwing down, and also a parallel to the first unit in this sequence of prophecies: "As I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to break down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, **to build and to plant.**" In the first prophecy in the series, a description was given of the renewed sowing and planting that will take place in the future: the seed of man and the seed of beast, the sowing of the people in their land, which will not be uprooted forever. Now the prophecy moves on to the renewed building – the rebuilding of the ruins of Jerusalem, which will be holy to the Lord and will not be plucked up again forever.

¹⁰ This prophecy also has a parallel in Yeshayahu's prophecies concerning the end of days (11:9): "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

(Translated by David Strauss)