

THE BOOK OF YIRMIYAHU
Rav David Sabato

Shiur #03: From Love to Betrayal
Yirmiyahu's First Prophecy of Rebuke (Chapter 2)

I. INTRODUCTION

Yirmiyahu prophesied after many years during which there was no true prophecy in the kingdom of Yehuda – since the time of King Chizkiyah and the prophet Yeshayahu. During the long reign of Menashe, the son of Chizkiyahu, the prophets were persecuted and murdered, as is explicitly stated at the end of our chapter (v. 30). Yirmiyahu's prophecy was delivered shortly after King Yoshiyahu, Menashe's grandson, ascended the throne, and parallel to the process of religious repair and renewal that he led in the kingdom.

Chapter 2 records Yirmiyahu's first prophecy to Israel. The chapter is comprised of a series of sections, linked one to the next linguistically and substantively. Together they paint a difficult, varied, and penetrating picture of the moral and spiritual state of the people.

The prophecy opens with one of the most moving accounts of the early relationship between God and His people: "I remember in your favor the devotion of your youth" (2). It immediately takes a sharp turn to the difficult, spiritual reality in the days of Yirmiyahu, when the people have abandoned and betrayed their God. As we shall see below, the ideas and wording found in this opening section are woven into the entire chapter – in the prophecies of calamity and rebuke, and in the succession of different contrasts of devotion and betrayal, past happiness and present suffering, and the like.

II. "THE DEVOTION OF YOUR YOUTH": PAST DEVOTION AS THE BACKGROUND FOR THE PRESENT BETRAYAL

(2) Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying: Thus says the Lord: I remember in your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, **when you did go after Me** in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.

(3) Israel is holy to the Lord, the first-fruits of His increase; all that devour him shall be held guilty; evil shall come upon them, says the Lord.

The early days of the people are painted in nostalgic colors and are filled with longing. Yirmiyahu, like Hoshea and other prophets, likens the relationship between God and His people to the relationship between a man and his wife.¹ The prophecy is formulated as the words of a husband who turns to his wife after many years of marriage and longingly contemplates the memory of their early days together.

The memory is built from three clauses, which become increasingly more specific. Initially, in the first clause, mention is made of "the devotion [*chesed*] of your youth." In Scripture, the word *chesed* often denotes loyalty to a covenant. The second clause mentions "your love as a bride," and it becomes clear that the reference is to the covenant of marriage.² In the third, expanded clause, the matter is spelled out in detail: "When you did go out after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown"³ – devotion and

¹ There is a great similarity between the prophecies of Yirmiyahu and those of Hoshea, especially in the first half of the book. In this *shiur*, we will point out several interesting parallels between their prophecies.

² The word "love" (*ahava*) also appears occasionally in Scripture in the sense of boundless devotion and fidelity to one's love. A joint appearance that connects *chesed* and *ahava* is found, for example, in the Ten Commandments: "But showing **lovingkindness** (*chesed*) to thousands of generations of **those that love Me** (*ohava*) and keep My commandments" (*Shemot* 20:6).

³ The rare form *kelulotayikh* may be a play on the word *lekhtekh*: Despite your situation as a young bride, you went after Me in a land that was not sown.

fidelity to one's love even in a difficult and unpromising reality. Yirmiyahu's moving and nostalgic account of the period of Israel's sojourning in the wilderness is far from the harsh and negative portrayal of the period in the book of *Bamidbar*, but the distance in time changes the perspective. The sharp crises fade and dim against the background of the forty-year long period in the wilderness, which is painted here as Israel's time of glory.⁴

In the second part of this section, the style changes.⁵ This part describes the flip side of the coin – God's unique relationship towards Israel. The image used in this section is borrowed from the agricultural world: "Israel is holy to the Lord, the first-fruits of His increase." The relationship between God and Israel is likened to *teruma*, which is dedicated to God from the first fruits of the harvest.⁶ This comparison serves as a response to the first part of this section, where Jerusalem is described as having gone after God in its early days. This image of Israel as "the first" might also be intended to emphasize its status as a firstborn who enjoys enhanced privileges among the nations.⁷

⁴ Yirmiyahu returns to the period of the wilderness in several of his prophecies, and in all of them the late perspective through which he considers the events levels the differences between the various stages and paints a harmonious picture of it. The gap between the description here and the description found in the Torah led several commentators to explain Yirmiyahu's words as referring to God's devotion to Israel. Thus, for example, writes R. Yosef Kara: "I remember in your favor the devotion of your youth" – You forgot the lovingkindness that I showed you in your youth, that I redeemed you from the afflictions of Egypt, and led you through the wilderness, and provided for your needs in the wilderness for forty years. I remind you of the lovingkindness that I showed you in your youth, when you went after Me in the wilderness in a land that was not sown, and I called you, Holy."

⁵ There is a difference in the designation: Jerusalem/Israel; in the gender: male/female; and in the person: from direct address in second person to an account in third person.

⁶ *Bamidbar* 18:12: "All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the first of them which they shall offer to the Lord, them have I given you."

⁷ See, for example, Yaakov's words to Reuven: "Reuven, you are my **firstborn**, my might and the **beginning** of my strength" (*Bereishit* 49:3). The image of Israel as firstborn among the nations appears for the first time in God's words to Moshe as he was returning to Egypt: "Israel is My son, My firstborn" (*Shemot* 4:22).

This likening of Israel to *teruma* continues into the next clause: "All that devour him shall be held guilty." The metaphor is taken from the laws of *teruma* according to which a non-priest who eats of it is "guilty" and liable to death. The reference here is to the nations who "devour" – that is, destroy – Israel,⁸ who will be punished when "evil shall come upon them."

It may be argued that the very use of an image taken from the halakhic world is characteristic of the prophecy of Yirmiyahu, the priest and "handler of the Torah." In this case, the substance of the *halakha* – the laws of *teruma* – is also connected to the realm of the priests. The agricultural image of sowing and cultivating the land may be influenced by the context of the prophecy that deals entirely with "the land" – "a land that was not sown," "a plentiful land."⁹

III. THE REBUKE

Structurally, the description of Israel's youthful devotion in the wilderness serves only as a background and introduction to the essence of the passage – a prophecy of rebuke. The rebuke also opens with the words

⁸ See also *Yirmiyahu* 10:25: "For they have **devoured** Yaakov, **devoured** him and **consumed** him, and have made his habitation desolate."

⁹ With respect to this image as well, there is a similarity between the prophecy of Yirmiyahu and the prophecy of Hoshea. Hoshea prophesies (9:10): "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe fruit in the fig tree at her first season: but when they came to Ba'al-Pe'or, they dedicated themselves to that shame; and they became detestable like the thing which they loved."

Both prophets describe the encounter between God and Israel in the wilderness, and both use images from the agricultural world – Israel is likened to a fruit that ripens first. In addition, both of them use this agricultural image as background for an account of the people's sin and betrayal. For Hoshea, the fig tree symbolizes the human race, while the first ripe fruit of the fig tree symbolizes Israel – "Israel is My son, my firstborn." This image (together with the image of the "grapes in the wilderness") focuses on the juiciness of the fruit in comparison to its surroundings, which captivates the heart of those who see it. (See, for example, *Yeshaya* 28:4: "As the first ripe fig before the summer; which when one sees, while it is yet in his hand he swallows it up.") Yirmiyahu shifts the image from fruit to grain, and by emphasizing the firstfruits, he highlights its halakhic status and sanctity.

"Thus says the Lord," and its contents are the very opposite of what was found in the opening section of the chapter. Let us compare the two parts of the prophecy:

<p>(1) The word of the Lord came to me, saying.</p> <p>(2) Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying:</p>	<p>(4) Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Yaakov, and all the families of the house of Israel.</p>
<p>Thus says the Lord: I remember in your favor, the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, when you did go after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.</p> <p>(3) Israel is holy to the Lord, the first-fruits of His increase; all that devour him shall be held guilty; evil shall come upon them, says the Lord.</p>	<p>Thus says the Lord: What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity, and are become themselves worthless?</p> <p>(6) Neither did they say: Where is the Lord who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through and where no man dwelt?</p> <p>(7) And <u>I brought</u> you into a plentiful land, to eat its fruit and its bounty; but when <u>you entered</u>, you defiled My land, and made My heritage an abomination.</p>

Whereas during the days of their youth, Israel went after God in the wilderness, already their fathers distanced themselves away from God and "walked after vanity." This stands in sharp contrast to the ideal description found in the previous section.

The next verse states that Israel "did not say: Where is the Lord... who led us through the wilderness." Now the image of going in the wilderness that we saw in the previous section is presented in a different light and in a broader context. While the beginning of the chapter describes the devotion of Israel who went after God in the wilderness, here the devotion of walking in the wilderness is presented as God's devotion to Israel – it is He who took them out of the land of Egypt and led them through a land full of dangers, a land unfit for humans, and finally brought them to a plentiful land. In other words, He took them out of a very negative situation – slavery in Egypt – protected them as they passed through a land of drought and the shadow of death, and brought them into a land of bounty.

The word "land" is the guide word for this section. It repeats itself seven times, and it connects the prophecy of rebuke to the previous prophecy. Five times it appears in a negative context – coming out of Egypt and passing through the wilderness – and a sixth time in a positive context – coming to the land of Israel, the land of plenty. This is in contrast to the seventh appearance, which presents Israel's ingratitude:

(7) And I <u>brought</u> you into a plentiful land , to eat its fruit and its bounty ;	but when <u>you entered</u> , you defiled My land , and made My heritage an abomination .
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As opposed to Israel coming to a plentiful land and eating of its fruit and its bounty, Israel came to God's land and heritage, and defiled it and turned it into an abomination!

It is worthwhile examining the designations applied to the land in this section. It is first called a "plentiful (*karmel*) land," and only afterwards "My land and My heritage." In several places, the word *karmel* denotes a fruitful land, and it is used here to highlight the agricultural bounty of the land, a land

of vineyards (*keramim*) and grapes,¹⁰ and God's lovingkindness to Israel.¹¹ *Karmel* is also mentioned in contrast to wilderness,¹² a contrast that highlights the gap between the wilderness and the land of deserts and drought through which Israel passed and the plentiful land into which God brought them.

As opposed to the characteristics of the land itself, Israel's attitude to the land is described in moral-religious terms. The land is described as "God's land" in order to express the severity of Israel's actions when they defiled it and made it an abomination. They exploited the goodness to turn it into an abomination.¹³

Thus, Israel's walking in the wilderness is described from two different perspectives. Initially, it is described from the perspective of Israel, as an act of devotion and an expression of love for and faith in God. Later, it is described from God's perspective, as expression of His desire to confer good upon Israel, His protecting them from the dangers of the wilderness, and His bringing them into a bountiful land.

The rebuke is underscored by the contrast between the sections. As opposed to God, who remembers Israel's youthful devotion, Israel forgot God and "did not say: Where is the Lord." In so doing, they committed two evils. They veered from their original path – instead of "going after Me," they "walked after vanity" – and they also displayed ingratitude and defiled the good land of God to which they had been brought.

¹⁰ See *Yeshayahu* 16:10: "And gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field (*karmel*), and in the vineyards there shall be no singing."

¹¹ This phenomenon brings to mind the verses in *Devarim* 8, where the land is also mentioned seven times in a positive context: "A land of wheat and barley... for the good land which He has given you" (see also *Shemot* 3).

¹² See, for example, *Yeshayahu* 32:15: "And the wilderness shall be a fruitful field (*karmel*)."

¹³ Note the play on the words *tova* and *to'eva*, words that have a similar sound but are opposite in meaning. This underscores the deep contrast between God's will and Israel's ingratitude.

IV. THE SINS OF THE LEADERS

After the general description of Israel's ingratitude, Yirmiyahu specifies the various types of sins and sinners:

(8) The priests said not: **Where is the Lord?**
and they that handle the Torah knew Me not;
the rulers also transgressed against Me,
and the prophets prophesied by the Ba'al
and walked after things that do not profit.

This verse is a serious indictment brought against the leadership on all levels. Let us first consider the structure of the verse. The verse specifies the faults of all the types of leaders, from the lightest to the most severe, dividing them into two groups. "The priests and they that handle the Torah" sinned in what they did not do: They did not say and they did not know. In contrast, "the leaders and the prophets" sinned in what they did: The leaders of the people sinned and rebelled against God, and the prophets prophesied by the Ba'al, and thus in practice they followed idols (referred to here as "things that do not profit").

Between verse 8 and verses 5-6 there is a chiasmic parallelism which creates a framework for the unit:

... They have walked after vanity...
Neither did they say, Where is the Lord?

The priest said not, Where is the Lord...
And walked after things that do not profit.

This literary structure expresses the relationship between the sins of the people, spelled out in verses 5-6, and the sins of the leadership. It teaches that the sins of the people were rooted in the actions of their leaders, who

should have known better "where is the Lord" and taught it to the nation as a whole, but they shirked their duty.

IV. THE QUARREL WITH AND REBUKE AGAINST THE PEOPLE

Let us examine the next verses:

(9) Wherefore I will yet plead with you, says the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead.

(10) For pass over the isles of Kitiyyim and see,
and send to Kedar **and consider diligently**,
and see if **there has been such a thing**.

(11) Has a nation changed their gods, even though they are not gods;
but My people have changed its glory for that which does not profit.

(12) Be astonished, O heavens, **at this**,
and be horribly afraid, **be greatly appalled**, says the Lord.

(12) For My people have committed two evils:
they have **forsaken** Me, the fountain of living waters,
and have hewn them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no
water.

This part of the prophecy develops the rebuke of the people that already characterized Yirmiyahu's prophecy of consecration. For example, regarding the evils committed by Israel, we read in chapter 1 (v. 16): "And I will utter My judgments against them regarding all their **wickedness** (*ra'atam*) in that **they have forsaken Me**." Our prophecy states: "For My people have committed two **evils** (*ra'ot*); **they have forsaken Me**."¹⁴

¹⁴ The word *riv* is used in a legal context in the sense of "claim." See, for example, *Yirmiyahu* 25:31: "For the Lord has a **claim** (*riv*) against the nations, He will enter into **judgment** (*nishpat*) with all flesh."

Structurally, this section is divided into two parallel parts. First, the prophet emphasizes the irrationality of Israel's action – that it does not meet any human standard. To this end, he sends them to the ends of the earth – the islands of the Kitiyyim (apparently, Cyprus) across the sea in the west, and the deserts of Kedar in the east – to teach them that no nation has ever changed their god, owing to the fundamental, human sense of loyalty. The absurdity lies in the fact that the nations did not change their gods even though they are not true gods, whereas Israel changed the true God ("its glory") for other gods, which "do not profit." Therefore, the prophet clarifies, we are dealing here not only with infidelity, but also with illogical behavior. The absurdity of the action comes into sharper focus with the next image, taken from the world of agriculture: forsaking a fountain of living waters, a well with abundant water (a common image for the relationship between man and God in the prophecies of Yirmiyahu), and hewing out cisterns meant only to collect rain water, which in reality are broken and cracked cisterns that cannot hold water at all.¹⁵

The phrase, "Be astonished, O heavens," which is a play on words (*shomu shamayim*), can be understood in two ways: It may be understood as describing the heavens' astonishment and wonder, and also their sorrow and grief over the senseless betrayal perpetrated by the people. But the root of the word "*shomu*" may be related to the word "*shemama*" (desolation). A similar ambiguity is found in the expression "*charvu me'od*" (be greatly appalled), which can be understood as relating to the destruction, but also to the drought. According to the second explanation, since the heavens are the source of rainwater, the prophet calls upon them to dry up and not to cause it to rain. The cessation of rain is the accepted punishment in the Torah and in the Prophets for betraying the covenant (see, for example, *Devarim* 11), but here it is connected to the act of betrayal itself in the sense of "measure for measure." The people of Israel abandoned their source of water and hewed

¹⁵ The phrase "broken cisterns" (*borot nishbarim*) highlights the contrast by way of a play on words. Not only do they merely collect rain water (and are not a "fountain of living waters"), but even the water that they collect they do not manage to hold because they are cracked.

out cisterns for collecting rainwater, and their punishment is that the heavens will not send down their rain.

V. "WHY IS HE BECOME A PREY?" – ISRAEL'S LOWLY STATE

The chapter continues with a description of the devastation and desolation prevailing in the land (14-16):

(14) Is Israel a servant? Is he a home-born slave? Why is he become a prey?

(15) The young lions roared upon him and gave tongue, and they made his land waste; his cities are burned without inhabitant.

(16) Also the children of Nof and Tachpanches have broken the crown of your head.

It is not clear what historical event is being described here. The commentators suggest that these verses describe the early period of Yirmiyahu's prophecy, at the beginning of Yoshiyahu's reforms, when idol worship was still prevalent in the country. Babylonia is not mentioned here, but only Assyria and Egypt: "And now what have you to do on the road to Egypt... to Assyria." But we are dealing with a time of war: "Why is he become a prey?"¹⁶

The section closes with a rebuke of the people:

¹⁶ Y. Hoffman, in his commentary in the *Mikra Le-Yisrael* series, assumes that the chapter is not uniform and that it includes prophecies delivered during different periods until the year 605. He explains the descriptions of the devastation and desolation as referring to the campaign of Pharaoh Necho in the year 609. M. Bula in his commentary in the *Da'at Mikra* series suggests that there is an allusion here to some historical event not known to us from outside historical sources, and he tries to reconstruct it as follows: In the wake of the collapse of Assyria, the neighboring kingdoms tried to invade Yehuda. In his distress, Yoshiyahu turned to Assyria in a call for its assistance, and when no help was forthcoming, he turned to Egypt, which had begun to involve itself in international politics.

(17) Have you not done this to yourself, in that you have forsaken the Lord your God, when He led you on the way?

(18) And now, what have you to do on the road to Egypt, to drink the water of Shechor? Or what have you to do on the road to Assyria, to drink the water of the River?

In these verses of rebuke, the prophet castigates the people for asking for help from the two major powers – Egypt in the south and Assyria in the north (see also later in the chapter, verses 36-37). Why does he oppose such action? First, this is a sensible political argument: How can you continue to rely on powers which have turned out to be a broken reed in the face of the evils that they have brought upon you (as noted above, verse 16)? However, there seems to be another layer to this critique. It should be noted that the word "*derekh*" (road, way) is repeated here three times, and through it the prophet contrasts two different "ways": Israel walking in the way of God and their choosing to walk in the way of Egypt and Assyria. In this manner, our verse is connected to the beginning of the prophecy: "When you did go after Me in the wilderness... who led us through the wilderness." Choosing to enter into a pact with the regional powers is likened to forsaking Israel's covenant with God.

The expression "the road to Egypt" is a loaded phrase in this context, for in several places Israel is forbidden to return to Egypt (see, for example, *Devarim* 17:16). Going back to Egypt is a breach of Israel's covenant with God, as reflected first and foremost in the exodus from Egypt and in their distancing themselves from "the road to Egypt." When they go back on this road, the people of Israel effectively retrace their steps and cancel the way in which God took them out of Egypt, as described at the beginning of the chapter.

"*Derekh*" is not only a geographical course; it also expresses a way of life and a manner of conduct. This aspect of the road is clarified through the image of drinking water, to which the prophet likens Israel's reliance on the powers. Water symbolizes the economic might of these powers: "The water of

Shechor," the Nile, symbolizes Egypt's power, and "the water of the River," the Euphrates, symbolizes the power of the Assyrian empire. Drinking water has an additional meaning in our prophecy. Earlier, forsaking God had been likened to abandoning a fountain of living waters, whereas here trust in the regional powers is likened to drinking their water. It turns out that relying on those powers is not only a political covenant, but also symbolizes the abandonment of God's way and of the spiritual and moral fidelity to the covenant that He made with Israel. Drinking foreign water expresses the spiritual, cultural change overtaking the people of Israel. Instead of drinking living water from their own fountain, they have forsaken it and gone to graze in the fields of others and to drink their water.

The circle with the prophecy at the beginning of the chapter is closed here in yet another way. Yirmiyahu relates to the wilderness in many places. This is the way Yehuda Felix explains this phenomenon in his book "*Teva Va-Nof Ba-Tanakh*":

More than all the other prophets of Israel, Yirmiyahu is permeated by the consciousness of the wilderness. Fear of the destruction of the land and turning it into a desert is a nightmare for him, and he repeatedly returns to it, describes it, and warns against it. Raised in the village of Anatot on the edge of the Judean desert, the prophet had first-hand knowledge of the sights and terrors of the desert. Yirmiyahu's attitude to the desert is ambivalent: He recognizes the serious reality of desert life and fears the destruction of the land and its becoming a desert wasteland. On the other hand, the desert reminds him of a heroic and romantic chapter in the history of Israel in the wilderness. From his village Anatot, he sees the awesome Judean desert in the east and the green landscape of the Judean mountains covered with vineyards and fields in the west. The prophet is overcome by the nightmare of the desert spreading westward, overpowering the fields and orchards, and turning them into pasture land, and eventually into a desert wasteland.

A prominent example of this phenomenon is found in our prophecy. The prophet opens with the contrast between the land of Egypt and the land of deserts, "a land of **drought** and the shadow of death, ... a land that no man passed through, **and where no man dwelt**," and the land of Israel, the plentiful land, where God brought them. In our verses, in contrast, the land of Israel is described in a manner diametrically opposite the idyll presented at the beginning of the chapter: "And they made his land waste; his cities **are burned without inhabitant**." Now God's land is the land of drought where no man dwells. When Israel entered the land and defiled it, they reversed the state of the land. They are in fact in the land of Israel, but their situation is similar to their terrible situation at the beginning, before they set out on their journey and before they were taken out from Egypt and the wilderness. This teaches that the determining factor is not geographical location but behavior. The punishment is a direct result of sin; since they rejected the good that God bestowed upon them when He took them out of the wilderness and settled them in the land of Israel and they followed in the path of Egypt and Assyria both politically and spiritually, their land will turn into a wilderness, thereby cancelling the significance of their going to the land of Israel.

VI. ISRAEL'S BETRAYAL

In verses 20-25, Yirmiyahu describes the people's sin with a series of images from human, animal, and plant life. The feature that stands at the focus of the criticism in all of these images is Israel's treachery in all its aspects.

The prophet moves quickly from one image to the next. The people of Israel are first likened to an animal that refuses to bend to authority and refuses to work:

(20) For long ago I broke your yoke, and burst your bands;
and you did say, I will not transgress.

This verse emphasizes the people's obstinacy from ancient times. Like a recalcitrant beast that breaks its yoke and bands and refuses to work or move, the people cast off the yoke of the covenant and the Torah and openly declared their refusal to serve their God.

Following this image, the prophet shifts to the image of a harlot, which is reminiscent of descriptions of idol worship:

(20) When upon every high hill and under every green tree you did sprawl, playing the harlot.

In the next verse, Yirmiyahu utilizes an agricultural image:

(21) And I had planted you a noble vine, an entirely right seed; how then are you turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine to Me?

This metaphor is based on the parable of the vine *Yeshayahu* 5 and parallels it in substance and style.¹⁷ A comparison between the two underscores the meaning of the vine in Yirmiyahu's prophecy. Yeshaya intended to emphasize by way of this metaphor the moral ill that had spread among the people and the contrast between the investment in and the great expectation of the people and the grim moral outcome in practice: "And he looked that it should bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth bad grapes..." (*Yeshayahu* 5:2); "And He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry" (v. 7). In contrast, Yirmiyahu in his short parable of the vineyard emphasizes the contrast between God's expectation of Israel, who are designated "an entirely right seed," and what

¹⁷ The two metaphors describe the relationship between God and the people like the relationship between the vintner and his vineyard; they describe the vintner's hopes and expectations at the outset and his disappointment with the results. The wording is similar as well. In *Yeshayahu*, it says: "And he planted it with the choicest vine [*sorek*]," and in *Yirmiyahu* it says: "And I had planted you a noble vine [*sorek*]."

actually grew: "A strange vine." In this way, Yirmiyahu expresses his critique of his people who have alienated themselves from their God. This parable contrasts with the image in the first section of the prophecy of Israel as the first-fruits of God's increase that are dedicated to Him.

The parable of the vine is immediately followed by a strong and developed image, which once again likens Israel to an animal:

(23) How can you say: I am not polluted, I have not gone after the Be'alim? See your way in the valley, know what you have done; you are a restive young camel doubling back on her tracks,

(24) a wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffs up the wind in her desire; in her lust who can turn her away? All they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her.

In these verses, the prophet opens with an image that likens Israel to a female camel that rushes to get to the male. The second image presented here is that of a wild ass (here, a female), which symbolizes a free-spirited animal that cannot be tamed or restrained. Its unbridled lust for males is used as a metaphor for the people's desire to practice idolatry. The ass snuffs up the wind to catch the scent of the males and wails after them. This image goes beyond the earlier ones in that it depicts abandonment that is not directed at anything in particular; it is wantonness for its own sake, as a way of life.

In this section, we find once again terms denoting walking and a road, terms that had been used at the beginning of the prophecy as an expression of sin. Even the reference to the wilderness – "a wild ass used to the wilderness" – is not by chance. The beginning of the prophecy describes how Israel went through the wilderness to the land, and now the process is reversed: Israel turns into a wild ass that goes to the wilderness in order to satisfy its lusts.

The last section of the chapter contains several images that describe betrayal in human relationships. The prophet first likens Israel's betrayal to the shame of a thief who was caught in the act:

(26) As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets.

The prophet presents here, in addition to the people, a list of leaders who have transgressed – a list that parallels the list appearing in the beginning of the chapter (v. 8). Later, the prophet returns to the image of a thief from a different direction:

(34) Also in your skirts is **found** the lifeblood of the innocent poor: whom you did not **find** in the act of breaking in.

These words are apparently directed to the days of Menashe, about whom we read (II *Melakhim* 21:16): “Moreover, Menashe shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.”

The image of being found while breaking in is based on the law found in *Shemot* 22:1: “If a thief be found breaking in and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed on his account.” Here, for the first time in the chapter, the description of the evil committed by the people is not limited to their relationship with God, but is also found on the moral plain in interpersonal relationships. The people are accused of acts of murder. They try to hide their guilt, but to no avail; the blood is found on the skirts of their clothing. The victim's blood, as it were, lands on the killer's clothing and testifies to his actions. The blood appears here as sort of a witness that cries out for revenge, like in the story of the murder of Hevel, where God calls out to Kayin: “The voice of your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground” (*Bereishit* 4:10).

Attention should be paid to the difference between the verse in *Shemot* and the prophetic interpretation of it here. In *Shemot*, the blood is the blood of the thief who was found breaking in and killed. Here, on the other hand, Israel is likened to a thief who was caught and arrested. Though the assertion "whom you did not find in the act of breaking in" refers to Israel, the blood mentioned at the beginning of the verse, "Also in your skirts is found the lifeblood of the innocent poor," clearly refers to the blood of murder victims. Thus, the overall meaning of the verse is that when a thief is killed while breaking in, it is not treated as murder, but here the killing was not during the act of breaking in and therefore it has no justification.

Earlier, there is another description of acts of murder – this time, the murder of prophets:

(29) Why will you contend with Me? You all have transgressed against Me, says the Lord.

(30) In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction; your own sword has devoured your prophets.

Smiting the people was meant to teach them a lesson, but it was all in vain, for instead of learning from their punishment, they killed the prophets who rebuked them; they did not understand the meaning of the afflictions. Instead of struggling with the root of the problem, they killed the prophets who warned about it.

Verses 31-32 are verses of lament, full of pain and longing, in which God laments Israel's forgetting and abandonment:

(31) O generation, see the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness to Israel? A land of darkness? Why do My people say: We are free; we will come no more to You?

(32) Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.

These verses of lamentation contain motifs that repeat themselves throughout the chapter and highlight the reversal that transpired in their regard. Instead of "going after Me in the wilderness" – "Have I been a wilderness to Israel?" The people relate to their God as a wilderness from which they must distance themselves and as a "land of darkness" (similar to what was stated above regarding the wilderness: "A land of drought, and of the shadow of death").

At the beginning of the chapter, it says that God remembered Israel's youthful devotion in the wilderness: "I remember in your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride"; here, Israel has forgotten its ornaments and attire, its bridal jewelry, for days without number, in stark contrast to nature: "Can a maid **forget** her ornaments, or a **bride** her attire... to seek **love**."

(Translated by David Strauss)