

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

THE BOOK OF YIRMIYAHU
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Shiur #06: "The Temple of the Lord, Are These" (Chapter 7)

I. Introduction

In the previous lecture, we discussed the eschatological prophecy of Yirmiyahu in chapter 3. For the time being, we will skip chapters 4-6, which deal primarily with the impending calamity (at some point in the future, we will return to some of the prophecies included in these chapters), and move on to chapter 7.

This chapter includes two harsh prophecies of rebuke. One deals with the proper attitude towards the Temple (1-15), and the second deals with the status of the sacrifices.¹ In both prophecies, Yirmiyahu shatters the conventional religious conceptions of his day in relation to the Temple and the sacrificial service. In this *shiur*, we will consider the first prophecy concerning the Temple. As we shall see, there is a clear conceptual link between this prophecy and the prophecy regarding the end of days in chapter 3, and together with the prophecy that immediately follows it, they express some of the most important and fundamental ideas in Yirmiyahu's prophecy. (Chapter 7 has a parallel later in the book, in chapter 26, and our next *shiur* will be dedicated to a study of that chapter.)

II. The Structure of the Prophecy

In this case, achieving a deep understanding of the prophecy requires that we first clarify its structure and its meaning. The prophecy opens with a short introduction (1-2), which is immediately followed by the words of God. They open with: "Amend your ways and doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place" (3). Later in the prophecy (5-7), this message is repeated in almost exactly the same words: "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings... I will cause you to dwell in this place." At the same time, it is evident that the verse in the middle – between the command and the condition – expresses a different idea: "Trust not in lying words...", and an examination of the rest of the prophecy indicates that this verse too has a parallel: "Behold, you trust in lying words..." (8).

Thus, it appears that the body of the prophecy is made up of two parts: Two generalizations (3-4) and the spelling out of their details (5-7; 8-11).

¹ Verses 16-20 appear to complement the first prophecy, but we will not relate to them in this *shiur*.

Verses 12-15 continue with a comparison between Shilo and Jerusalem, and describe its future ramifications.

This is the structure of the prophecy according to this proposal:

<p>Amend your ways and your doings,</p>	<p>For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute justice between a man and his neighbor; if you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood <u>in this place</u>, neither walk after other gods to your hurt;</p>
<p>And I will cause you to dwell in this place.</p>	<p>Then I will cause you to dwell <u>in this place</u>, in the land that I gave to your fathers, forever and ever.</p>
<p>Trust not in lying words,</p>	<p>Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense to the Ba'al, and walk after gods whom you know not,</p>
<p>Saying: The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these.</p>	<p>and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say: We are delivered; that you may do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I Myself have seen it, says the Lord.</p>

This doubled arrangement of verses is followed by a comparison that is drawn between Shilo and Jerusalem:

(12) But go now to My place which was in Shilo, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel.

(13) And now, because you have done all these deeds, says the Lord, and though I spoke to you, from morning till night, but you did not listen; and I called you, but you did not answer.

(14) Therefore will I do to this house, which is called by My name, and in which you trust, and the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shilo.

(15) And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, the whole seed of Ephraim.

Now that we have clarified the structure of the chapter, let us examine it in detail, point by point.

III. Introduction (1-2)

Let us consider first the two introductory verses:

- (1) The word that came to Yirmiyahu from the Lord, saying:
- (2) Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say: Hear the word of the Lord, all Yehuda, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord.

The prophecy opens with an unusual command to Yirmiyahu to stand at the gate of the Temple, and in that specific place proclaim the word of God.

Of course, it may be that the goal of this command was to proclaim these words in a central place, and the Temple gates certainly fit that bill, but it would appear from the continuation that the command is connected to the content of the prophecy, which deals with what is happening inside God's house and with the proper and improper way to serve God there. For this reason, the prophecy is addressed directly to the people who come to worship God at the gates of the Temple. Already at this stage, we can see this prophecy as a way of contending with the acts of worship performed in the Temple.²

IV. Two Generalizations and their Specification

As stated, the prophecy opens with two general statements that contrast the proper attitude toward the Temple, a necessary condition for its continued existence, and the "lying words," which represent an incorrect perception regarding the Temple and are liable to lead to its destruction.³ The first general statement (3) relates to the moral conditions for the continued existence of the Temple:

Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.⁴

² This is the first prophecy in the book that opens with the words: "The word that came to Yirmiyahu from the Lord, saying." Afterwards, there are another 11 such prophecies. The Radak notes this in his commentary: "'The word' – It says here: 'The word that came to Yirmiyahu,' which is not stated in the previous passages, but only: 'Thus says the Lord.' This is because He said this prophecy to him at the gate of the house of the Lord. Therefore, it says: 'The word that came' – to tell us that that which he stood at the gate of the house of the Lord, he was told to do this by God." In two other places later in the book, Yirmiyahu is commanded to deliver his prophecy at the gate (17:19; 19:20), and there too there is a clear connection between the place and the prophecy stated there.

³ The prophecy itself opens with the words: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel." This is the first time that this designation is found in the book, although it is repeated many times afterwards. It is interesting to note that of the 41 instances of this designation in Scripture, 35 of them are found in the book of *Yirmiyahu*.

⁴ Later in this *shiur*, we will explain the different meanings of the term "this place" in the prophecy.

The second general statement (4) does not provide positive guidance, but rather negates the "lying words," which were apparently uttered by false prophets:

Trust not in lying words, saying: The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, are these.

Thus, already at the beginning of the prophecy, we encounter two conflicting perceptions regarding the fate of Jerusalem. The first highlights the Temple's dependence upon human actions, while the second makes the fate of Jerusalem absolutely certain and unconditional, by virtue of the fact that it is the Temple of the Lord. The threefold repetition of the phrase "the Temple of the Lord" apparently reflects the mantra sounded by the false prophets and the common folk, which Yirmiyahu argues against and ridicules.⁵

As we saw when we analyzed the structure of the chapter, the prophet begins in verse 5 to spell out in greater detail the general statements with which he opened. Now, the mending of ways mentioned in verse 4 is explained in verse 5 as a condition: "For if you thoroughly amend your ways..." which refers primarily to interpersonal relations (executing justice, preventing oppression and bloodshed) and only secondarily to relations between man and God (worshipping other gods).⁶

The result of the fulfillment of the condition appears in verse 6, where the place mentioned in verse 3 – "And I will cause you to dwell in **this place**" – is explained as referring to the entire land of Israel:

Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, forever and ever.

The prophet does not deny that from the very outset the land was **given** to the people for all time, but he emphasizes that the people's **dwelling** in it is conditioned on their spiritual state.

In the section in which the matter is spelled out in greater detail, the phrase "in this place" appears twice. The first time is in connection with bloodshed:⁷ "And shed not innocent blood in this place." The second time is in the context of the result: "Then I will cause you to dwell in this place."

In the background, we hear the echo of the passage relating to a murderer in the book of *Bamidbar* chapter 35 (which was already alluded to in chapter 3), which conditions living in the land of Israel upon atonement for the

⁵ Threefold repetition of a word or a phrase is characteristic of Yirmiyahu's style (see, for example, 6:14; 22:29).

⁶ Attention should be paid to the striking contrast in the framework of the section between its opening: "For if you thoroughly amend (*heitev teitivu*)" and its conclusion: "to your hurt (*le-*ra**)."

⁷ Or perhaps in connection with the three interpersonal offenses, bloodshed being the last of them.

blood shed upon it, which is liable to pollute the land and even cause the *Shekhina* to depart.

Shedding "innocent blood" apparently alludes to the actions of Menashe, as reported in II *Melakhim* 21:16: "Moreover, Menashe shed very much innocent blood until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." Indeed, later in the book of *Melakhim*, this is mentioned as the cause of the destruction (24:4):

And also for the innocent blood that he shed, for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon.

As stated, verses 7-11 spell out in greater detail the negative message sounded in verse 4. However, in addition to the specification, these verses also contain certain striking changes. Corresponding to "Trust not in lying words" (v. 4), it says in verse 7:

Behold, **you trust in lying words**, that cannot profit.

Notice that this verse contains not only a general warning; it includes a concrete accusation that the people have put their trust in lying words, which are deemed to be something that cannot profit.

In the following verses, it becomes clear that "lying words" refers to the idea that one can commit all of the gravest sins – both between man and his fellow and between man and God – and afterwards stand before God in the Temple and thus be saved from punishment or calamity. Because of the people's trust in these "lying words," "this house," which was originally intended to bring the people purity and holiness, leads absurdly to the opposite outcome: It has become a den of robbers,⁸ which encourages sin. From this perspective, the reversal of the role of the Temple is similar to the reversal of the role of repentance in chapter 3, which, from the people's perspective, allows for sin based on the idea that "I will sin, and later I will repent."

These sins parallel in part the deeds mentioned in the first part, but they are built mainly on the Ten Commandments, and they refer to them in the opposite order. They open with a triad taken from interpersonal relations, "Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery," and then move on to the commandments dealing with man's relationship to God: "And swear falsely, and burn incense to the Ba'al, and walk after other gods whom you know not." The reversal of the order may stem from a technical reason – as demonstrated by M. Zeidel: Earlier sources are cited in Scripture by later sources in a chiasmic form. But it is possible that this reversal reflects the

⁸ *Paritz* (translated here as robber) means criminal, and a den of *paritzim* is a cave to which criminals flee for fear of the authorities. The image used here for the people who come to worship in the house of God – a band of criminals hiding in a cave – is particularly harsh and shocking. It should be noted that the term *paritz* is occasionally used specifically for a killer, as in *Yechezkel* 18:10, "A son that is a *paritz*, a shedder of blood," and this fits in with the centrality of the sin of bloodshed in prophecy.

desire to set interpersonal relations at the center of the prophecy, as we saw in the first part.

There is also an internal connection between these two triads, which reflect dishonesty and infidelity both in relations between man and his fellow and in relations between man and God.

To conclude this section, it should be noted that in the section of the details, there is a deviation from the general description which characterizes the beginning of the chapter, for in the framework of that description the criticism focuses on the lying words identified with the statement "the Temple of the Lord," whereas here, in the details, it focuses on the sins of the people standing before God in the Temple.

We must understand, then, what the prophecy's attitude toward the expression "the Temple of the Lord" is in itself.

V. The Argument Concerning the Essence of the Temple: "The Temple of the Lord" or "The House which is Called by My Name"

Close study of the section containing the details of the prophecy reveals that the expression "the Temple of the Lord" does not appear there at all. Corresponding to the people's threefold repetition of the expression "the Temple of the Lord," the prophet repeats three times the words: "The house, which is called by My name" (10, 11, 14). This appears to be a veiled argument against the conception reflected in the words "the Temple of the Lord." The expression "the Temple of the Lord" reflects the perception that the Temple is God's house and palace. The prophet, on the other hand, emphasizes that the Temple is not God's house, but rather the house upon which He rests His name. This idea appears many times in the book of *Devarim* (e.g., 12:5: "The place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put His name there").

The tension between these two attitudes towards the Temple appears in full intensity in the prayer offered by Shelomo at the dedication of the Temple (I *Melakhim* 8:27-29):

(27) For will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built.

(28) Have consideration, therefore, to the prayer of your servant and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to hearken to the cry and to the prayer, which your servant prays before you to day.

(29) That Your eyes may be open toward the house night and day, **towards the place of which You have said, My name shall be there;** that You may hearken to the prayer which your servant shall make toward this place.

Shelomo opens by presenting the absurdity of building a house for God, whom the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain. What is the

solution to this absurdity, which is presented precisely at the time of the dedication of the Temple? Later in his words, Shelomo describes the Temple as the place towards which God's eyes are open and where His name is found. He seems to be saying that while the Temple is the site of special providence and of the revelation of the *Shekhina*, it is not actually God's house. The house that Shelomo built was not meant for God, but rather for man to pray there to God and to ask that He hearken to his prayers. It follows from this that its sanctity is not absolute, but conditional.

There is a close connection between the erroneous theological view regarding the character of the Temple and the moral and religious corruption found therein. The idea of unconditional sanctity turns the Temple from a place of holiness, atonement, and repair into a place of refuge for sinners and killers: "Is this house a den of robbers?"

It should be noted that the people's trust in the protection offered by the Temple is not without foundation. The perception of a holy place as a place of refuge was common in the ancient world and is found even in the Torah. However, as opposed to idolatrous perceptions, which recognize the absolute sanctity of an altar, and thus the boundless protection that it offers, the Torah restricts it and establishes that a holy place provides no refuge to an intentional killer: "But if a man came presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die" (*Shemot* 21:14). Here too we find the fundamental concept of Jewish faith that sanctity does not stand above or contradict morality; the sanctity of the Temple does not set aside the sanctity of human life.⁹

VI. The Difference Between Shilo and Jerusalem

The prophecy closes with a comparison between Shilo, the earlier site of the *Mishkan*, and Jerusalem. This comparison is intended to illustrate the central argument advanced in this prophecy concerning the conditional sanctity of the Temple:

(12) But go now to **My place** which was in Shilo, **where I set My name** at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel.

(13) And now, because you have done all these deeds, says the Lord, and though I spoke to you, from morning till night, but you did not listen; and I called you, but you did not answer.

(14) Therefore will I do **to this house, which is called by My name**, and in which you trust, and the place which I gave to you and to our fathers, as I have done to Shilo.

(15) And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, the whole seed of Ephraim.

⁹ This point was noted by M.D. Cassuto in his commentary to *Shemot* (Jerusalem, 5748), p. 188.

The destruction of Shilo is presented here as a precedent for the destruction of the Temple, and its mention emphasizes the impermanence and conditional existence of the house of God in Jerusalem. Yirmiyahu is careful to refer to the two places with the same designation in order to teach us that there is no difference between them: "My place... where I set My name."¹⁰ It seems that here too Yirmiyahu goes out against a perception that was widespread among the people in his day. That approach sought to explain the destruction of the *Mishkan* in Shilo by arguing that Shilo was only a temporary abode, which God had rejected, and setting it against Jerusalem, the site of God's permanent house – the Temple.

A similar idea emerges from *Tehilim* 78, which was written before the destruction. It describes the destruction of Shilo as an expression of God's disgust for Ephraim and Yosef and, in contrast, God's choosing of David and Jerusalem. This is a wide-ranging historical psalm that reviews the history of the Jewish People from the exodus from Egypt until the days of David, and toward the end it describes the destruction of Shilo and the capture of the ark. This is the only explicit Scriptural source, apart from our prophecy, that mentions the destruction of Shilo (verses 58-60):

For they provoked Him to anger with their high places and moved Him to jealousy with their carved idols. When God heard this, He was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel, so that He forsook the tabernacle of Shilo, the tent where He made His dwelling among men; and delivered His strength into captivity and His glory into the enemy's hand.

In the continuation (verses 67-68), the psalm compares the rejection of the *Mishkan* in Shilo which was in the kingdom of Israel and to Ephraim, and the selection of Jerusalem, which is linked to the selection of David and Yehuda:

And He rejected the tent of Yosef and chose not the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Yehuda, Mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like the high heavens, **like the earth which He has established forever.**

Note the distinction between the *Mishkan* in Shilo, which is called the tent of Yosef, and the Temple in Jerusalem ("Mount Zion"), which is crowned as the eternal Temple, "like the earth which He has established forever."

The festive and uplifting conclusion of the psalm, which ends at the height of the days of the kingdom of David and Shelomo, is overshadowed by the next psalm, which constitutes a sharp and difficult contrast to it. Psalm 79 was written after the destruction and it describes the deep despair and

¹⁰ The term "do" appears four times in this section and serves as another link between the two places. The first and fourth instances of this term relate to God's destruction of Shilo, the second instance relates to the people's sin, and the third instance relates to God's future destruction of Jerusalem.

disappointment that was experienced after the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. Let us cite its opening verses (1-5):

A psalm of Asaf.

O God, heathen nations are come into Your inheritance; Your holy Temple they have defiled; they have laid Jerusalem in heaps.

The dead bodies of Your servants they have given to be food to the birds of the sky, the flesh of Your pious ones to the beasts of the earth.

Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them.

We are become a taunt to our neighbors, a scorn and derision to those round about us.

How long, Lord? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

In retrospect, it turns out that even the Temple in Jerusalem, which had been called "Your holy Temple" and which the people had thought would stand forever, was destroyed and defiled, and with it God's pious ones were slaughtered, as prophesied by Yirmiyahu.¹¹

VII. "This Place": The Connection Between the Temple and the Land

The prophecy closes with another negative historical precedent (15) – the destruction and exile of the kingdom of Israel:

And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, the whole seed of Ephraim.

The connection between the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the kingdom from the land is made throughout the prophecy and is reflected in the use of the word "place." In verse 3, it says: "And I will cause you to dwell in **this place**," and it seems that the reference is to the Temple, where these words were uttered. In the verse of explanation (5), it says: "And shed not innocent blood in **this place**," and it seems that the reference is once again to the Temple. However, in verse 7, it says: "Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, forever in **this place**." In this verse, the reference is to all of the land of Israel.

The intermingling of the Temple and the land of Israel is reflected also in the use of the word "dwell" in the prophecy. The word is used twice in reference to the people, "I will cause to dwell" (3, 7), even though the word is generally used to describe the resting of the *Shekhina* among the people, and this is the meaning of the third instance of this word in the prophecy (12): "Where I set My name at first." This wording creates a connection between the resting of God's name in the Temple and the dwelling of Israel in their land. In contrast to the people, who trust in the eternity of the Temple, the house of God, and as a result also their dwelling in the land, Yirmiyahu

¹¹ There is a striking linguistic and substantive connection between this psalm and the prophecies of Yirmiyahu. We shall address this point in one of the future *shiurim*.

reverses the picture: The defilement of the Temple, the heart of the people in their land, through the desecration of morality and the holy, will lead not only to the destruction of the Temple, but also to the exile of Israel from the land which they have defiled and from which the *Shekhina* has departed.

The prophecy ends with the conclusion: "And now," since Israel have sinned and have not listened to the words of the prophet – since they have violated the condition – the result will follow. Here the prophet links the fate of the Temple (part 2) with the fate of the land (part 1) and compares respectively the fate of Jerusalem to that of Shilo and the fate of the kingdom of Yehuda to that of Israel. Yirmiyahu says that the fate of the Temple and of Israel is one and the same, just as the people had thought, but the connection between them is the opposite. The sins of the people in their land will bring about the destruction of the Temple, which is a "litmus test" for their sins, and also to their exile from their land.

VIII. Jerusalem and the Temple: The Difference Between Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu

The prophecy about the Temple of the Lord in chapter 7 is connected to the prophecy regarding the ark in chapter 3, which we studied in the previous *shiur*. The capture of the ark of the covenant at the battle of Even-Ha-Ezer against the Pelishtim is connected to the destruction of Shilo, which is not explicitly mentioned in the book of *Shemuel*, but clearly emerges from the continuation of the story, when the ark is not returned from Sedeh-Pelishtim to Shilo. It stands to reason that the prophetic critique in the two chapters is also similar. The problem at the time of the *Mishkan* in Shilo lay in relating to the ark and the *Mishkan* as objects of intrinsic sanctity independent of the spiritual state of the people. It is much easier for the individual and the people to remove moral and social responsibility from their own shoulders and lay it upon a holy site or object, which serve as a sort of "insurance policy" that calms the hearts of the people and fills them with trust in their continued existence.

In the previous *shiur*, we discussed the difference between Yeshayahu's prophecy and that of Yirmiyahu regarding the mountain of the house of the Lord. A similar difference exists regarding our prophecy. The perception of the eternity of Jerusalem and the immunity of the Temple is very developed in Yeshayahu's prophecies; it stands to reason that it was reinforced among the people in the wake of his prophecy regarding the deliverance of Jerusalem and the eternity of the house of David, which was realized in wondrous manner with the fall of the Assyrian army outside the walls of Jerusalem (II *Melakhim* 19:34):

For I will defend the city, to save it, for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake.

However, in the context of Yeshayahu's prophecies, the strengthening of the spiritual status of Jerusalem was intended to turn Jerusalem into a symbol of the kingdom of God, standing against the Assyrian empire, which

symbolizes the arrogance of man. Yirmiyahu touches upon this very point from the opposite direction. The selection of Jerusalem does not mean its absolute preference over Shilo (although it certainly has essential priority over Shilo, as stated by Yeshayahu); that which happened to Shilo could happen to Jerusalem as well, if it acts in the same manner and chooses to sanctify some object or place over internalizing holiness and Torah into the life of the people.

It is possible that it was precisely the prophecy of Yeshayahu in the days of Chizkiyahu which, after having achieved its short-term goal, was interpreted in the long-term contrary to its original intention, leading the people to its misconception regarding Jerusalem as an invulnerable city.

Yirmiyahu's prophecy was intended to balance the one-sided impression left by the prophecy of Yeshaya for a century. There is no substantial dispute between the prophets, but in every generation, the prophet must emphasize a different element that is appropriate for his period and which contends with his generation's religious, social, and moral failures.

(Translated by David Strauss)