

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION  
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)  
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**Sefer Melakhim: The Book of Kings**  
**By Rav Alex Israel**

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**This week of Torah learning at the Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash of  
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**Shiur #06: Chapter 6<sup>1</sup> – The Mikdash**  
**By Rabbi Alex Israel**

The crowning glory of Shlomo's empire is undoubtedly the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*. In *Sefer Melakhim*, the center stage of the Shlomo narrative is filled by three chapters (6-8) that detail the building and dedication of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*. This testifies to its predominant role.

**EXPANDED DIMENSIONS**

One of the aspects of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* that makes an immediate impression is its large dimensions, especially in comparison with its predecessor, the *Mishkan*. Its length and breadth (60 cubits x 20 cubits) are double that of the *Mishkan*. The added entrance hall adds a further 10 cubits to the length of the structure. Its height (30 cubits) is triple that of the *Mishkan*. This is a building of sizeable proportions.

*Some of the "keilim,"* the utensils or ritual furniture of the *Mishkan*, also find themselves enlarged or multiplied in Shlomo's *Mikdash*. For example:

1. Ten *menorot*, five on each side of the *heichal* (7:49), rather than the single *menora* in the *Mishkan*.
2. Ten tables for the showbread (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 4:8).
3. Ten washbasins (*kiyorim*) (*Melakhim* 7:38).

In each of these cases, there is a tenfold increase! The *Meshekh Chokhma* (*Shemot* ch. 28) tries to get to grips with the technical details. He makes a simple mathematical calculation: To achieve the equivalent illumination that was produced by a single *menora* in the *Mishkan*, ten *menorot* were needed in the *Mikdash*!<sup>2</sup> This is a very practical explanation for the increase in illumination.

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<sup>1</sup> *Melakhim* chapter 6 is the *haftara* for *Parashat Teruma*. For VBM *shiurim* on the *haftara*, see: Rav Moshe Lichtenstein: <http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/haftara/19teruma.htm>

Rav Yehuda Shaviv: <http://www.vbm-torah.org/haftora.html>

<sup>2</sup> The *Mishkan* was 10x30x10=3,000. The *Mikdash* was 20x60x30=36,000, a multiple of 12!

*Yalkut Shimoni*<sup>3</sup> give a more symbolic understanding. He explains that the ten basins and ten tables are a reflection of the increased needs of a more populous nation in the realms of rainfall (water, represented by the basin) and grain (the table held bread). In this *midrash*, the guiding principle is that a larger nation requires the representation of a larger *Mikdash*. The ten *menorot* hold 70 lights corresponding to the Seventy Nations of the world, expressing Israel's strategic superiority over the neighboring countries.

But possibly, we are trying too hard. In a previous *shiur*, we discussed the imperial grandeur of Shlomo's kingdom, in which everything is on a larger scale, luxurious and striking. The *Mikdash* is a prime example. The permanence of the structure, built of stone, wood, and the finest decorative materials, amply demonstrates the shift in national fortunes and the transition from a nomadic wilderness people to a regional powerbroker.

However it would appear that this sense of expansion is not limited to the material realm. It manifests itself in further areas. Whereas in the Torah, the prescription against using hewn stone is applied exclusively to the altar, the *mizbe'ach* (see *Shemot* 20:22), in the *Mikdash* it seems that this law was expanded:

When the house was built, only finished stones cut at the quarry were used, so that no hammer or axe or any iron tool was heard in the house when it was being built. (*Melakhim* I 6:7)

It is not only regarding the *mizbe'ach* that this law is applied, but regarding the entire building site!

## **YETZIAT MITZRAYIM**

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites left the land of Egypt, in the month of Ziv – that is, the second month – in the fourth year of his reign over Israel, Shlomo built the house to God. (6:1)

The starting date for the "project" of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* is anchored here in a reference to the Exodus from Egypt. In *Sefer Melakhim*, The standard protocol would call for a significant event to be listed in reference to the years of the King's reign. Why is a pointer to *Yetziat Mitzrayim* suitable or at all relevant?

It is interesting that the consciousness of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* appears prominently throughout these chapters. It is mentioned repeatedly in the chapter that describes the ceremonial dedication of the *Mikdash* (see 8:9,16,21,51,53,65). It is clear that Shlomo views the building of the *Mikdash* as the culmination and completion of a long journey that began with the nation leaving Egypt. What is the nature of this linkage between the Exodus and the *Mikdash*?

Recall that Moshe was instructed at the Burning Bush: "When you take the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain" (*Shemot* 3:12),

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indicating that the purpose of our national freedom is nothing but the service of God. Later, at the crossing of the *Yam Suf*, the nation sang:

You will bring them and plant them in your holy mountain,  
The place for You to dwell in, O Lord,  
The *Mikdash*, O Lord, which Your hands established.  
The Lord will reign forever and ever. (*Shemot* 15:17-18)

What do we observe in these *pesukim*? First, we identify a clear plan, indicating that a *Mikdash* – a sanctuary – is the stage designated immediately following our entry into the Land. But second, pay attention to the phrase "*makhon le-shivtekha*," "The place for You to dwell in." This language is repeatedly quoted by Shlomo in his prayer:

I have built for you a stately house, a place where you may dwell forever - *makhon leshivtekha olamim*" (*Melakhim* I 8:13; see also 8:39, 43, 49)

This phrase from *Shemot* is used no less than four times in Shlomo's speech! Pay attention too, to the use of "forever" as a reference to God's eternal reign, or residence in the *Mikdash*. Our conclusion is that that the situation predicted and charted by *Shirat Ha-Yam* has found its realization in Shlomo. At this moment in time, Israel has indeed reached the "holy mountain." This represents a culmination point of Jewish History.

This sense of a flowering of our national purpose is echoed in many later sources.<sup>4</sup> The Ramban, Nachmanides, discusses the historical process heralded by *Yetziat Mizrayim*:

The Exile is not complete [ended] until they return to their land and to the [spiritual] level of their forefathers. Now, when they left Egypt, even though they had left the House of Slavery, they were still considered to be in a state of exile, for they were in a foreign land, wandering in the wilderness. However, when they reached Mt. Sinai and set up the *Mishkan* and God returned to them, establishing his *Shekhina* amongst them, THEN they returned to the [spiritual] level of their forefathers, i.e., the presence of God upon their tents.... And THEN they were considered to be redeemed. (Introduction to *Shemot*)

The Ramban says that with the establishment of a *Mishkan*, the *Shekhina* was present and evident - "the presence of God over their tents;" yet this could not be the fullest state of national realization, of the nation's foundational maturation, since they still had to "return to their land." Now, with the sense of national stability realized in the Shlomo era, the building of the *Mikdash* makes the establishment of the

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<sup>4</sup> Rambam (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 1:1) discusses three national *mitzvot*: to appoint a king, to eradicate Amalek, and to build the Temple. Many have postulated that this essentially prescribes the establishment of an administrative system (the king) followed by the removal of an evil regime (Amalek) followed by the establishment of a religious focal point for national service (the Temple). Again, the sense is that the *Mikdash* symbolizes a national completion of sorts, a fulfillment of our national prerequisites, and hence the nation moves to a new and more mature stage.

*Shekhina* into a tangible reality. At this point in history, the process of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* comes to its fruition, its culmination.

Possibly, this magical number of 480 (the number of years since the Exodus),<sup>5</sup> forty years multiplied by twelve (the tribes of Israel), expresses that perfect sense of national accomplishment.

One can view *Yetziat Mitzrayim* as the birth of the nation. If the process that began with the Exodus ends now, then we are witness to a critical watershed here. The early stage of development, the foundational period of becoming a nation, has reached its completion. We now move towards a state of national maturity, adulthood.

### **YERACH (THE MONTH OF) ZIV, BUL AND EITANIM. A NEW CALENDAR?**

One further feature of our *perek* is several references to names of months that we do not ordinarily recognize.

The month of ZIV, that is the second month. (6:2)

In the fourth year the house was founded in the month of ZIV, and in the eleventh year, in the month of BUL, that is the eighth month, the house was completed. (6:37-38)

And all of Israel were gathered to King Shlomo in the month of *EITANIM* (*yerach ha-eitanim*)... that is the seventh month. (8:2)

Three months are specified by name: *Ziv*, *Bul* and *Eitanim*. It is likely that Shlomo had names for all the months of the year and it would appear that Shlomo is instigating a new calendar of sorts. Unfortunately, this episode is the sole place that these month names appear, and with this lean evidence, it is impossible to reconstruct the names of the other nine months. Interestingly, the text here realizes

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<sup>5</sup> Some have seen this number as too perfect and neat and assume that it is an invention of the author of *Sefer Melakhim*. Josephus (*Antiquities* 8:3) speaks of 591 years from the Exodus to the Temple, although this is probably a result of mistaken analysis of the years, including an excessive assessment of the length of the period of the Judges by putting all the historical records there end-to-end. 480 years DOES seem to be a correct historical approximation or estimation of this era. See the Malbim, who notes that *Chazal* say that the Temple existed for 410 years. If this is followed by 70 years of exile, then the computation is even neater: 480 years from Egypt to the First Temple and 480 years from First Temple to the Second Temple! The Malbim says that "these periods were preordained by God."

In general, there is an interesting question as how to relate to the number 40 as it expresses itself in the Book of Judges: "And the land was quiet for 40 years." Does it indicate 40 years precisely, or simply the period of a generation? Let us recall that when we talk about (the form number) 40 as it relates to the 40 years in the wilderness, the 40 days in Noah's ark, the 40 days Moshe spent on Mount Sinai, or the reigns of David and Shlomo, which lasted 40 years, we see no reason to take those numbers at anything other than face value. Sometimes, things in life may simply be multiples of 40!

that we are unlikely to recognize the names and therefore translates them into the traditional month numbers, familiar from the Torah and elsewhere in Tanakh.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the Torah, months are assigned numbers rather than names. Immediately prior to the Exodus, we received the instruction:

This month shall be the leading month for you. It is the first of the year."  
(*Shemot* 12:1)

This designates the calendar as starting from Nissan. Why does the calendar start at Nissan, and why does it consist of a simple numerical ordering of unnamed months? It is quite simple. The objective is that our entire history reflects the indelible mark of the Exodus. The memory of the formative event is branded into the very mechanism in which we mark time. (Just like the Creation is the foundation of the week structure, and in Hebrew, the days of the week bear numbers rather than names.) The numerical months of calendar clearly testify to the Exodus. And this pushes the question; why does Shlomo suddenly develop these names?

Some academics hear resonances of Phoenician month names in this text, and they suggest some foreign influence or intent, possibly as a result of Shlomo's alliance with Hiram.<sup>7</sup> They even suggest that since much of the architecture of the *Mikdash* is Tyrian (see 7:13), they used a double date system so that all cultures would have access to the calendar. This approach however is unconvincing. First, it is only the month *Ziv* that matches the Phoenician calendar. They have no *Eitanim*. But furthermore, kings like Achav were far closer to Phoenician culture. They even worshipped their Gods. But they didn't move to change the names of the months.

I would prefer a more spiritual explanation. These are Jewish names. Shlomo is attempting to reframe the months of the year in the same manner in which he tries to redraw the boundaries of the Tribes to reflect new realities. The numerical system of names points us back directly to the Exodus; it marks time from the birth of the Jewish People as a nation. (Similarly, the Ramban<sup>8</sup> suggests that we currently use the month names of Nissan, Iyar, Sivan, etc., which are of Babylonian origin, to recall the Babylonian exile and the manner in which we returned to our land. In that case, the more recent Babylonian experience displaces the more distant Egyptian redemption.) If Shlomo perceives his era as closing the chapter of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and opening a new era of a strong nation state and a stable monarchy, then it is possible that he sought to update these months as well. New names indicate a sense of a new historical stage. The sense, then, is that the designation of months according to *Yetziat Mizrayim* has been superseded; new names thus emerge. The feeling is most certainly one of closing a chapter and opening a new one.

### **KERUVIM (6:23-28)**

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<sup>6</sup> An identical phenomenon may be found in *Megillat Esther* where all the Babylonian names of months such as Nissan, Iyar, or Adar are translated into the numerical month system. See, for example, *Esther* 2:16; 3:7,13; 8:9, 12. The assumption is that the new names – the Babylonian or Persian names of the months (Nissan, Iyar, and Tammuz are not names of Jewish origin!) need to be "translated" to the Hebrew system of numbering.

<sup>7</sup> See *Olam Ha-Tanakh*.

<sup>8</sup> Commentary to *Shemot* 12:2

If we are indeed moving to a new era, a new stage of Jewish History, I believe that Shlomo uses yet a further symbolic medium to communicate this concept. Let us study the *keruvim* of Shlomo's *Mikdash*.

The *keruvim* symbolize God's presence. God is described as "seated on the *keruvim*" (*Tehillim* 80:2, 99:1). In *Sefer Yechezkel*, the *keruvim* surround God and are a central feature of his enigmatic "Chariot" (see *Yechezkel* ch.10).

There is no object that actualizes the manifestation of God's presence more than the *aron* – "the Ark of the God upon which His name rests, the name of the Lord of Hosts who dwells on the *keruvim*." (*Shmuel* II 6:2)

At the epicenter of the *Mishkan* in the wilderness is the *Kodesh Kodashim* that houses the *aron*. Of course, the *aron*, unlike the *menora* and the *mizbe'ach*, has no Temple service. It does not have a particular ritual that it performs in the daily *avoda*, the Temple service. Yet, it serves a crucial function. God tells Moshe:

I will meet with you there and I will speak to you from above the *kapporet*, from between the two cherubs... all that I will command you to *Bnei Yisrael*." (*Shemot* 25:22)

The ark is an object that is designed to travel; it has carrying rods or handles. Unlike the handles of the other *keilim* of the *Mishkan*, the handles or poles of the *aron* may never be removed (*Shemot* 25:15). Many commentaries<sup>9</sup> view this as a sign of the constant need for the *aron* to be moveable, portable, transient. In fact, one of the most enduring images of the *aron* is the *passuk* that we recite when opening our "*aron kodesh*" in the synagogue:

And it was when the ark traveled, Moses said:  
"Arise, O Lord! Scatter your enemies; may Your foes flee before You!"  
And when [the ark] rested, he would say:  
"Return, O Lord, to the myriads and thousands of Israel." (*Bamidbar* 10:35-36)

There is a corollary between the movement of the *aron* and the travels of God. We may take this a stage further: the transient nature of the *aron* is an expression of God's boundlessness.

Shlomo Ha-Melekh did not alter the *aron*. He constructed and designed many new *keilim* for his *Mikdash*, but the *aron* is unchangeable. In his *Kodesh Kodashim*, however, he creates two wooden *keruvim* overlaid in gold, huge *keruvim* that tower over the *aron*, with a wingspans of 10 *amot* each. These *keruvim* extend from wall to wall in the *Kodesh Kodashim*, where the *Keruvim* stand on the floor (Rashi).

How can we explain this? I think it is clear that Shlomo is expressing the notion that the *keruvim* that had previously been mobile are now fixed in place, permanent and non-transient. This reflects the fact that God, who had formerly

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<sup>9</sup> See *Sefer Ha-chinukh*, Chizkuni and R. Hirsch, who develops this point in a philosophical vein.

"moved about in a tent and Tabernacle"<sup>10</sup> without a permanent home or place, now has an established address, an allocated residence, a *Mikdash*. The *keruvim* reflect the fact that God has come to rest in Jerusalem.

One further addition to Shlomo's *Mikdash* is the paneling of the floor (6:15). In the *Mishkan*, there was no floor; the floor was the desert sand! Once again, we see the shift to permanence represented by the *Mikdash*.

## INWARDS OR OUTWARDS?

Parenthetically, let me add that *Chazal* observe a further difference between the *keruvim* of Moshe and the *Mishkan* and those of Shlomo in the *Mikdash*.

To which direction do the *keruvim* face? In *Shemot*, we read that they stand, "their faces towards each other" (25:20), but in Shlomo's *Mikdash*, "they faced the House [Temple]" (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 3:13). The Talmud attempts to resolve the dissonance between the two images and emerges with a resolution:

When Israel acts in accordance with God's will [they turn to one another]; when Israel fails to act in accordance with God's will [they turn away from one another]." (*Bava Batra* 99a)

This tradition assumes that the *keruvim* were somehow miraculous, and that both sets of *Keruvim* – both in the *Mishkan* AND the *Mikdash* – shared the property of facing each other at times and facing forward at others. This mobility on the part of the *keruvim* was a function of, and predicated upon the spiritual state of *Am Yisrael* - whether they worshipped God faithfully or not.<sup>11</sup>

We might suggest a different possibility – following the text more rigidly – that the *keruvim* of the *Mishkan* and the *Mikdash* actually functioned differently. In the *Mishkan*, the *keruvim* faced one another, and in Shlomo's *Mikdash* they faced outwards. This shift in the facial orientation of the *keruvim* may hint to a deeper shift in the texture of Shlomo's *Mikdash*. The *Mishkan* was essentially internally directed, intended for service WITHIN the Jewish people. In the wilderness, we were a detached and isolated society. In contrast, the *keruvim* of Shlomo, the vehicles of the *Shekhina*, were directed in an outwards trajectory. They, like the Temple, faced the outside world. The *Mikdash* aimed to make an impression on a wider population, to spread the name of God beyond the Jewish People.

## WINDOWS

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<sup>10</sup> See *Shmuel* II 7:6-7 and the entire chapter there.

<sup>11</sup> There are fascinating philosophical readings of this midrashic resolution of the textual problem in *Nefesh Ha-Chaim* (1:8) and the Netziv's *Ha-Amek Davar* (*Shemot* 25:22).

This tradition of the *keruvim* as a spiritual barometer of the state of the relationship between *Am Yisrael* and God is reflected in the following aggadic text (which is unlikely fully accurate according to historical conditions): "R. Katina said: Whenever Israel came up [to the Temple] for the festival, the curtain [of the sanctuary] would be removed for them and the *keruvim*, whose bodies were intertwined, were shown to them. Then [the onlookers] would be thus addressed: Look! You are beloved before God as the love between man and woman" (*Yoma* 54a)

Another detail of our chapter echoes this theme. Our chapter is abundant in technical specifications and architectural jargon.<sup>12</sup> One particularly difficult term relates to the windows of the *Mikdash*, termed "*chalonei shekufim atumim*" (6:4). What does this phrase indicate? In ancient Hebrew, a *chalon* is an empty window, basically an open aperture in the wall.<sup>13</sup> But the other phrases elude a clear explanation.

One approach is that "*shekufim*" is from the word "to look through;"<sup>14</sup> in other words, these openings were transparent. But they were also "*atumim*," sealed. In simple language, Shlomo installed an unusually advanced and expensive technology in the Temple - something that we today would call windows! I believe that this is the *peshat* reading of the text (as suggested by Abarbanel and the *Metzudot*.)

However, the *midrash* makes a different statement here (see also *Menachot* 66b):

R. Chanina said: The *Beit Ha-Mikdash* had windows through which light would extend to the world, as it states: "He made for the house *chalonei shekufim atumim*" – they were narrow inside but wide on the outside to radiate light to the world"<sup>15</sup> (*Vayikra Rabba* 31:7)

## CONCLUDING QUESTION

I would like to leave you with a question to think about for next week. It relates to a strange insertion into chapter 6 and the unusual structure of the entire *Mikdash* "unit."

If we chart out the pattern, we find the following:

- 6:1-10 – The structure of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*
- 6:11-13 – Communication from God
- 6:14-38 – The decoration of the *Mikdash*
- 7:1-12 – Royal buildings
- 7:13-51 – The metalwork for the *Mikdash*
- Ch.8 – The dedication ceremony of the *Mikdash*

It appears that the description of the *Mikdash* is interrupted by two "insertions." The first is a statement by God, words of encouragement which conceal a warning:

This house that you are building – if you follow my laws and observe my judgments and faithfully keep my *mitzvot*, I will fulfill for you the promise that I gave to your father David: I will reside amongst the Children of Israel and will never forsake my people, Israel. (6:11-13)

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<sup>12</sup> A comprehensive list of all the terms may be found in the appendices to *Da'at Mikra*; see volume 2, appendix section pp. 77-78. The practical meaning of many of these phrases is unknown to us.

<sup>13</sup> "*Chalon*" has a *dagesh* in the *lamed*, indicating an emphasis on the letter, as if it were doubled. Thus, "*chalon*" comes from the word "*chala*" meaning a "space" or "empty place." In Modern Hebrew, the term for "Outer Space" is "*chala*."

<sup>14</sup> For example, *Bereishit* 18:16; 26:8.

<sup>15</sup> See the Ralbag, who protests that, in fact, this architectural design admits light to a greater extent!

Why does this prophecy disrupt the flow of the details of the Temple construction?

More problematic is the strange placement of the section that describes the royal buildings. This section represents an awkwardly out of place intrusion into the smooth flow of the detailed building plan of the *Mikdash*. Couldn't this section have been placed a different point of the story? What statement is made by its appearance specifically here?

We will take up these problems in our next *shiur*.