

THE BOOK OF YIRMIYAHU
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Shiur #01
“Before I Formed You In The Belly I Knew You” –
Yirmeyahu’s Prophecy of Consecration (1:4-19) [Part I]

I. Introduction: Prophecies of Consecration in the Bible

After the lengthy introduction to the book in verses 1-3, which we discussed in the [introductory shiur](#), we come to the first prophecy given to Yirmeyahu. The fact that this prophecy is found at the beginning of the book does not in itself prove that it was his first prophecy chronologically.¹ Nevertheless, in this case, the contents of the prophecy indicate that this was indeed Yirmeyahu’s first prophecy, as in it he is consecrated as a prophet.

Yirmeyahu's consecration as a prophet is not a unique phenomenon. A prophet's mission in the Bible often opens with the story of his consecration as a prophet. Stories of this type are told about the greatest prophets: Moshe is consecrated as a prophet at the burning bush (*Shemot* 3-4); Shmuel is consecrated as a prophet when he is a child serving God and lying down in God's sanctuary (I *Shmuel* 3); Yeshayahu is consecrated as a prophet through the majestic vision of God "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the Temple" (*Yeshayahu* 6); and Yechezkel becomes a prophet when he sees visions of God, in the form of a chariot, by the river Kevar (*Yechezkel* 1). Of course, these consecration stories differ, but there are certain elements shared by most of these stories.² We will note three of them:

1. Especially striking in these stories is the transition from the ordinary human sphere, where the person is found before he becomes a prophet, to the prophetic-missionary sphere. Until he is consecrated for prophecy, the prophet is described as an ordinary person, but from the moment that he is touched by the hand of God, he becomes a different person. The prophetic mission overwhelms him, as it were, and becomes his exclusive purpose.

¹ For example, there are commentators who view Yeshayahu's prophecy in chapter 6 as his consecration prophecy. In the book of *Yirmeyahu*, the location of the prophecy is less significant because the structure of the book is not fully clear, as we will see in future *shiurim*; in any event, it is clear that the chronological order is not the central organizing principle of the book.

² A broad discussion of the features of consecration prophecies can be found in U. Simon, *Keria Sifrutit Ba-Mikra – Sippurei Ha-Nevi'im* (Jerusalem 5757), in his chapter on the consecration of Shemuel, pp. 57-62.

2. Regarding some of the prophets, we find that the prophet is suited from the outset for his mission. Sometimes this suitability is evident already from the time of the prophet's birth (e.g., Moshe, Shmuel, Shimshon, and Yirmeya); in other cases, this becomes evident from the prophet's later actions (e.g., in the words of Gid'on to the angel, protesting the fate of his people, and in Elisha's clinging to Eliyahu, who casts his cloak upon him).

3. Usually, the prophet does not immediately accept his prophetic mission; several stages pass, during which time the prophet's worries and fears with respect to the mission are revealed, before he accepts the task. There are many examples of this. Moshe enters into a long conversation with God, in the course of which he several times refuses his prophetic mission. Only at the end does he agree to accept it, almost without a choice. Shmuel does not immediately identify his prophecy, and only after several attempts does he understand who is speaking to him. Similarly, Yeshayahu and Yirmeyahu initially express their opposition and inability to serve as prophets.

Despite these similarities between the various consecrations, each has its own unique stamp that accords with the special mission and personal style of the prophet being consecrated. For this reason, a comparison of the various prophecies of consecration can help identify the unique signature of each prophet. In the following sections, we will examine the unique character of the story of Yirmeyahu's dedication in comparison to the other stories (especially in comparison to the two great prophets that preceded him, Moshe and Yeshayahu). Through this comparison, we will clarify the unique characteristics of Yirmeyahu's prophecies.

The uniqueness of Yirmeyahu's prophecy of consecration lies in the fact that it serves as an introduction and entranceway to the prophecies in the entire book. All the ideas expressed in this prophecy are the seeds out of which Yirmeyahu's main prophecies grow and develop over the course of his life.

II. Yirmeyahu's Consecration

Yirmeyahu's first prophecy is divided into two parts: the consecration (4-10) and the signs and the main points of his prophecy of doom (11-19).

This division is clearly evident from the identical opening phrase found in each part, "And the word of the Lord came to me saying," and from the different issues treated in each part. An examination of the verses makes it clear that the first part describes Yirmeyahu's consecration as a prophet, whereas the second part focuses on a description of Yirmeyahu's prophetic mission. In this *shiur*, we will study Yirmeyahu's prophecy of consecration, and in the next *shiur* we will examine the second part of the chapter dealing with his mission.

Yirmeyahu's prophecy of consecration can be divided into three parts. We will first outline the various stages and then examine each one more carefully:

v.5: The selection of Yirmeyahu from the womb.
vv. 6-8: Yirmeyahu's reaction and God's response.
vv. 9-10: The content of the mission.

We will open our study with God's first words to Yirmeyahu. God's remarks are worded in solemn language and describe the deep and personal connection that exists between God and Yirmeyahu, a connection which began even before Yirmeyahu was born:

(5) **Before** I formed you in the belly I knew **you**,
and **before** you came out of the womb I consecrated **you**,
and I ordained **you** a prophet to the nations.

The verse is comprised of three clauses, each of which closes with the same group of letters and sounds: *-tikha*. The first clause speaks of "knowing," which in Scripture indicates closeness and contact between two parties. In the second clause, this general knowledge is translated into a more specific connection – "consecration."³ The third and concluding clause spells out the nature of this consecration – transforming Yirmeyahu into a prophet to the nations.⁴

As noted above, an allusion to prophecy during pregnancy and childbirth is found in the context of a number of prophets. But Yirmeyahu is the only prophet who was told that he had been consecrated as a prophet

³ It is possible that this consecration is connected to Yirmeyahu's being a priest, who is also consecrated from the womb for the service of God.

⁴ Yirmeyahu's consecration as a prophet "to the nations" is, of course, difficult to understand (see also v. 10: "over the nations and over the kingdoms"). Several explanations have been suggested. *Sifrei Devarim* (175) explains "nations" here as a reference to Israel: "The Lord your God will raise for you [a prophet] – and not for the nations. How do I understand: 'I consecrated you as a prophet to the nations'? Where he acts in the manner of the nations." According to the plain sense of the text, however, the word "nations" here includes both Israel and the other nations of the world. Regardless, we must still understand why the universal dimension is emphasized already in Yirmeyahu's prophecy of consecration. While it is true that at the end of the book of *Yirmeyahu*, a special section is dedicated to prophecies about the nations (chapters 46-51), we find this phenomenon among other prophets as well. This unique designation is apparently connected to the unique historical reality in which Yirmeyahu prophesied, as noted by Avraham Melamed (*Yirmeyahu, Perek 1, Le-Ba'ayot Ha-Hakdasha Ve-Hamar'ot Ha-Nevu'iyim* [Jerusalem 5715], p. 25):

Prophecy to the nations is an essential matter in the eyes of the true prophets and one of the points that distinguish them from the false prophets. According to Yirmeyahu (25:5), the universal mission of a prophet stems from the idea of God as God of the entire universe. Moreover, the connection between the history of Israel and the history of the East became stronger in the days of Yirmeyahu, and therefore his prophecies about the nations became a more real and current issue.

More than any other prophet, Yirmeyahu emphasizes that the God of Israel is the God of the entire universe and that the nations must conduct themselves in accordance with His commands. See, for example, his demand from the kings of the nations who came to Jerusalem (chap. 27, especially vv. 5-6): "I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by My great power, and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper in My eyes. And now have I given all these lands to the hand of Nevukhadnetzar, the king of Babylon, My servant, and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him."

already in the womb.⁵ (We will address the unique consecration of Yirmeyahu later in this *shiur*.⁶)

Reacting to God's declaration, Yirmeyahu raises doubts about his skills and ability to fulfill the prophetic mission:

(6) Then said I, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I know not how to speak; for I am a child."

In response to God's remark about His knowledge of Yirmeyahu, Yirmeyahu answers that he himself "knows not"⁷ how to speak. Hesitancy and even outright refusal to accept the prophetic mission are typical reactions to prophecies of consecration. They reflect the understanding of true prophecy

⁵ While the birth of Moshe also has a unique and miraculous dimension, there is no indication in that story that he will later become a prophet. The same is true about the birth of Shemuel. As for Shimshon, the angel says that he will be a nazirite to God "from the belly" (*Shofetim* 13:5) – similar to Yirmeyahu – but he says nothing about his becoming a prophet. The only example that is perhaps similar to Yirmeyahu is found in the words of Yeshayahu (49:1): "The Lord has called me from the belly; from the bowels of my mother has He made mention of my name." But there these words appear as a metaphor in the words of the prophet, whereas here God says these words to Yirmeyahu in his consecration prophecy.

⁶ The Rambam discusses this verse in his chapters on prophecy in his *Guide of the Perplexed*. In chapter 32, the Rambam presents three opinions regarding the nature of prophecy, the third opinion being "the opinion of our Torah," which sets two conditions for prophecy: Human perfection and preparation to receive prophecy and God's desire to bestow prophecy on a person. The Rambam writes as follows:

But with regard to one of the ignorant among the common people, this is not possible according to us, I mean, that He should turn one of them into a prophet, except as it is possible that He should turn an ass or a frog into a prophet. It is our fundamental principle that there must be training and perfection, whereupon the possibility arises to which the power of the deity becomes attached. You should not be led astray by His saying: "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came out of the womb I consecrated you." For this is the state of every prophet: he must have a natural preparedness in his original natural disposition.

Our verse, which describes inborn prophetic capacity that does not require preparation or training, appears to pose a problem for the Rambam's view. The Rambam explains that this verse means that in order for a person to be fit for prophecy, he must be born with the traits and abilities that will allow for the necessary training (as he explains at length in chapter 36). According to the Rambam, this verse teaches us about the prophets in general; it is not unique to Yirmeyahu.

In this context, we will not address the difference between the Rambam's teachings about prophecy and that which emerges from the plain reading of the verses. We will suffice with the objection raised by the Radak:

It may be asked: But surely all the prophets and the righteous people, and so too the wicked, God knew and recognized them before they were created! But this teaches that his father and his mother were careful about sanctity and purity during the period of his mother's pregnancy so that he should be a sanctified prophet. But the great sage, R. Moshe bar Maimon, wrote that this is the state of every prophet: he must have a natural preparedness in his original natural disposition, so that he can prepare himself for prophecy with training. According to him, it may be asked: Why was this not said about any other prophet but Yirmeyahu?

To this objection, it may be added that the wording of the verse clearly indicates that it describes a special selection that is connected to the relationship between God and man, not simply to preparation and natural ability.

⁷ The cry "Ah," which appears four times in the book of *Yirmeyahu*, expresses sorrow and pain, and usually also opposition to the word of God.

as a difficult and agonizing mission that does not always succeed and is not always rewarded. The similarity to Moshe's refusal to accept his mission at the burning bush is especially striking in these verses. Like Moshe, Yirmeyahu attributes his refusal to his defective rhetorical skills:

And Moshe said to the Lord, "O my Lord, **I am not an eloquent man**, neither yesterday nor the day before, nor since you have spoken to Your servant, but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." (*Shemot* 4:10)

However, despite the similarity, the reasoning in the two cases is different. Yirmeyahu attributes his speech difficulties to his young age, claiming, "For I am a child,"⁸ a phrase that means, "I have not yet learned how to speak." In contrast, the eighty-year old Moshe asserts a more fundamental and absolute argument, attributing his difficulty to a congenital defect – he is slow of speech and of a slow tongue.

God's response to Yirmeyahu is divided into two sentences, both of which open with the negative *al* (not), followed by a reasoned explanation [7-8]:

(7) But the Lord said to me:
Say **not**, I am a child;
for you shall go to all to whom I shall send you,
and whatever I command you shall speak.
(8) Do **not** be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.

God's response opens with Yirmeyahu's closing argument and negates it: "Say not, I am a child." Since God will command Yirmeyahu where to go

⁸ The commentators offer several explanations for the connection between age and rhetorical ability. The Radak writes:

"I know not how to speak" – that is, words of rebuke; "for I am a child (*na'ar*)" – so how should I rebuke a nation... It is possible that *na'ar* means an attendant, so that even if he is advanced in years, he is called a *na'ar*, as it is stated: "And his attendant, Yehoshua the son of Nun, was a *na'ar*." And Yirmeyahu was an attendant for another prophet of his day or for a sage. And he means to say: It is fitting that you assign this mission to someone greater than me, and not to me.

According to Radak's first and simpler explanation, Yirmeyahu contrasts his youth to the nation that he must address. According to the second explanation, the problem is Yirmeyahu's inferior status as a *na'ar* and attendant, which will not allow the public to listen to what he says.

Rashi attributes the problem to the timing of the rebuke:

I am not worthy of rebuking them. Moshe rebuked the people shortly before his death, after he had already become important in their eyes through the miracles that he had performed for them. But I am at the beginning of my mission; how can I rebuke them?

(It should be noted that Rashi's comparison between Moshe's rebuke and Yirmeyahu's rebuke touches upon an important and fundamental point in the chapter, which will be clarified below.)

According to the Abravanel, a complaint is directed here toward God in response to the previous declaration; the prophetic spirit mentioned in God's words finds no expression in his rhetorical ability: "How can you say that you bestowed knowledge and rebuke upon me, when I know not how to speak or to arrange my words in a wise manner?"

and what to say, his lack of independent speaking skills is irrelevant. (Here too there is a similarity to Moshe's consecration: "Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say"; *Shemot* 4:12.) But the negation in the second sentence, "Do not be afraid of them," is difficult to understand. Why does God allay Yirmeyahu's fears? He said nothing about being afraid!

The question is intensified when we notice that this phenomenon is also found in the stories of the three patriarchs. Regarding Avraham, we find: "Fear not, Avram, I am your shield" (*Bereishit* 15:1); regarding Yitzchak: "Fear not, for I am with you" (*Bereishit* 26:24); and regarding Yaakov: "Fear not to go down to Egypt" (*Bereishit* 46:3). In all three cases, God exposes the fear in the heart of each of the patriarchs, even though that fear was given no clear expression beforehand. In the cases of Avraham and Yaakov, the cause of the fear is not even stated beforehand (prompting the commentators to offer different explanations).

The parallelism with the patriarchs leads us to assume that in the case of Yirmeyahu, the situation is the same. Behind Yirmeyahu's explicit argument, which relates to his rhetorical ability, lies a deep fear of the reactions of those who will hear his prophecies of rebuke. In fact, this fear is not unfounded; later in the book, we are witness to the persecution which Yirmeyahu suffers. The story of Yirmeyahu's life is a succession of attempted harassments on the part of his neighbors and enemies in response to his prophecies, and sometimes even his life is in jeopardy. Thus, for example, in chapter 26, Yirmeyahu is apprehended and brought to trial for his prophecies about God's sanctuary. At stake is the death penalty, from which he is saved only at the last moment:

Nevertheless, the hand of Achikam the son of Shafan was with Yirmeyahu, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death. (v. 24)

In chapter 38, Yirmeyahu is thrown into a mire-filled pit because of his prophecies concerning the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, and there too he is saved only at the last minute. Therefore, already in his prophecy of consecration, together with the assignment of his mission, God promises to protect and rescue him from his enemies: "For I am with you to deliver you." This promise will be repeated in greater detail later in the book (15:20-21).

III. "And He Touched My Mouth" – The Difference Between Yeshayahu and Yirmeyahu

In the second stage of the consecration, God adds a symbolic action to His words: "Then the Lord put out His hand, and touched my mouth" (1:9). This appears to be the physical-symbolic expression of the transfer of God's words to Yirmeyahu, which will later emerge from his mouth as prophecy. To determine the precise meaning of this action, it should be compared to a similar action that takes place at the time of Yeshayahu's consecration:

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having a live coal **in his hand... and he touched it to my mouth.** (*Yeshayahu* 6:6-7)

In both cases, the prophet is "touched" by God on his mouth as a symbol of the beginning of his prophecy. There is, however, a difference between the two stories. In the verses in the book of *Yeshayahu*, the angel touches Yeshayahu's mouth with a coal from the altar, apparently in order to purify Yeshayahu's unclean lips in anticipation of later receiving the word of God. In our verses, in contrast, God Himself touches Yirmeyahu's mouth. This is the actual act of consecration – from now on, prophecy is placed on his lips, and all he does is communicate what God had placed in his mouth.⁹

Putting prophecy into the prophet's mouth, almost literally, is found also in Moshe's prophecy of consecration. In the book of *Shemot*, God describes the relationship between Him and Moshe and Aharon:

And you shall put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth. (*Shemot* 4:15)

With regard to the question of touching a mouth, we can identify the uniqueness of the prophecy of Yirmeyahu against the backdrop of the prophecy of Yeshayahu.

One of the primary messages in the prophecy of Yeshayahu is man's lowliness in the face of God's greatness. Yeshayahu sees human pride as the root of all the sins of his day, and he contrasts it with the greatness of God, as is summed up in 2:11: "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted on that day." This fundamental principle is already expressed in his prophecy of consecration. Yeshayahu sees God as a king, sitting upon a throne high and uplifted. It is possible that this very situation, which highlights the fundamental gap between man and his Creator, causes him to feel that he has "unclean lips" in the presence of God, and he thus feels unfit to carry out his mission. The consecration is meant to allow him to overcome the gap and purify him in anticipation of his mission. Hence, it is not God who touches the burning coal to his mouth, but only a seraph, God's agent, while God Himself sits on His throne, high and uplifted.

With regard to Yirmeyahu, in contrast, the problem is just the opposite. The fear here is of the confrontation that Yirmeyahu will have with the people (similar to Moshe's fear in *Shemot* 4:1: "But they will not believe me"). Therefore, God's reaction at Yirmeyahu's consecration is also the opposite: God Himself must accompany him and place words in his mouth so that he should be able to appear before the people in the name of God.¹⁰

⁹ A similar description of prophecy as the word of God contained within the prophet is found later in the book: "But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with containing myself, and I cannot" (20:9).

¹⁰ This difference is also apparent in the different styles of the prophecies. Yeshaya's consecration prophecy is part of a shocking and impressive prophetic vision, in the course of

In light of this unique aspect, we can understand the meaning of Yirmeyahu's being consecrated as a prophet from the womb. Perhaps the consecration is meant to teach about the profound closeness between Yirmeyahu and his Father in Heaven, a relationship that began already before his birth, and thus to allay Yirmeyahu's great fear about prophesying to the people, as well as to emphasize his lack of choice to accept his prophecy. This is the fate that accompanies Yirmeyahu from his birth.

As mentioned briefly above, a consecration prophecy sometimes constitutes an expression of the prophecies that he will present in the future. This is evident in the consecration prophecy under discussion. Thus, in one of the most shocking phrases in the book, Yirmeyahu states (20:14-18):

Cursed be the day on which I was born; let not the day on which my mother bore me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, "A man child is born to you; making him very glad." And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, and repented not; and let him hear a cry in the morning, and in alarm at noontide; because he slew me not from the womb, so that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb always great. Why did I **come out of the womb** to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

Yirmeyahu laments his fate here using formulations that are reminiscent of the words of Iyov. He curses the day of his birth and his leaving his mother's womb, for his entry into the world led perforce to his life of suffering as a prophet. In a certain sense, it is precisely to counter this argument that God tells him already in his consecration prophecy that his prophetic mission is his fate and destiny from the very beginning of his creation, even before he emerged from his mother's womb. Despite the difficulties associated with it, there is no way that he can escape it.

IV. Destruction and Construction: The Foundations of Yirmeyahu's Prophecy

Verse 10 spells out for the first time the contents of Yirmeyahu's prophecy:

(10) See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant.

The beginning of the verse includes the address of his prophecy, the nations and the kingdoms, in continuation of what was already said in v. 5,

which an account is given of a revelation of God, casting fears upon the prophet. This phenomenon is also found in the consecration prophecies of Moshe and Yechezkel. Yirmeyahu's consecration prophecy, on the other hand, has the character of an intimate dialogue between God and the prophet. The prophetic visions themselves are described in the second part and it seems that they are not related to the revelation of God.

where Yirmeyahu is defined as "a prophet to the nations." The verse continues with six verbs divided into three pairs. Four of these verbs indicate destruction and two building. From here we see that Yirmeyahu's prophecy will be primarily devoted to destruction and calamity, and secondarily to building, but even the destruction is necessary for the building.¹¹ Here too, the prophetic seed found in the prophecy of consecration will sprout and develop in the continuation of the book. The idea of rooting out and planting appears in the prophecy about the potter's house (18:7-10), in Yirmeyahu's prophecy of consolation (31:27), and elsewhere.

Perhaps here lies another difference between Yeshayahu's prophecy of consecration and that of Yirmeyahu. In his consecration prophecy, Yeshayahu prophesies about the remnant of the people:

And if one tenth remain in it, then that shall again be consumed; but like a terebinth and like an oak, whose stump remains when they cast their leaves, so the holy seed is its immovable stump. (*Yeshayahu* 6:13)

A tree stump symbolizes the remnant from which the people will grow anew. Yeshayahu's prophecy of destruction is founded on the idea of the people's renewal in its former place.

In contrast to the model of renewal found in the prophecy of Yeshayahu, in Yirmeyahu's consecration prophecy we find a different image from the plant world: "to root out... and to plant." Here the plant is totally uprooted and then replanted. As opposed to Yeshayahu, Yirmeyahu prophesies about total destruction, which will require replanting and a new beginning.¹²

Thus, Yirmeyahu's consecration prophecy contains the main features of his prophecy which will be developed over the course of the book: the fear of the people and the danger to his life that will be aroused by his prophecies; the sense of frustration in the face of the word of God found within him; and the content of his prophecy, which focuses primarily on destruction, but also on replanting.

V. The Difference Between Moshe and Yirmeyahu

¹¹ The six verbs are divided into three pairs based on two images. To root out, to destroy, and to plant are connected to the plant world (see, for example, below, 45:4: "That which I have planted, I root out"; *Yechezkel* 19:12: "But she was rooted up in fury, she was cast down to the ground"). To pull down, to throw down, and to build are connected to the world of building (*Yechezkel* 13:14: "So I will break down the wall"). The two images seem to continue the two addresses to which Yirmeyahu's prophecy is directed: the nations and the kingdoms. The planting symbolizes the nations, since they are living, organic creatures, as opposed to kingdoms, which are likened to inanimate stone. God's relationship to the world is expressed in two ways: as the world's gardener and as its architect.

¹² This point was noted by Y. Felix in his article: "*Mishlei Teva Ve-Chakla'ut Bi-Nevu'ot Yirmeyahu Ve-Yeshayahu*", <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/tanach/achronim/mishley-2.htm>.

As we have seen so far, the consecration prophecy of Yirmeyahu exhibits striking similarity to that of Moshe, master of the prophets.¹³ This similarity was noted by R. Yehuda ben R. Shimon (*Pesikta De-Rav Kahana* 13):

R. Yuda ben R. Shimon opened: "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like you" (*Devarim* 18:18). And it is written: "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like Moshe" (*Devarim* 34:10). And you say: "Like you." Rather, like you in rebukes.

You find that everything written regarding him is written regarding him. This one prophesied for forty years, and that one prophesied for forty years. This one prophesied about Yehuda and Israel, and that one prophesied about Yehuda and Israel. This one was opposed by the members of his tribe, and that one was opposed by the members of his tribe. This one was cast into the Nile, and that one was cast into a pit. This one was saved by a maidservant, and that one was saved by a servant. This one came with words of rebuke, and that one came with words of rebuke. Therefore, the verse has to say: "The words of Yirmeyahu" (*Yirmeyahu* 1:1)

As noted above, the similarity between Yirmeyahu and Moshe is also evident in the way that they each opposed their prophetic mission. Both explain that their opposition is based on their lack of rhetorical skills. Both also contend with their people's lack of faith in their words of prophecy. There is, however, a major difference between the two prophets. Moshe is the prophet of redemption. He was sent to deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt and to bring them to *Eretz Yisrael*, a land flowing with milk and honey. Yirmeyahu, on the other hand, was sent to prophesy about the opposite course of events – exile from *Eretz Yisrael* and subjugation to Babylonia. The people's lack of faith in Moshe's prophecy reflected a lack of faith in the message of redemption, whereas regarding Yirmeyahu, the people's lack of faith is in relation to the impending calamity, as reflected in the false prophets who speak of a peaceful future.¹⁴

R. Yehuda ben R. Shimon notes the connection between Moshe and Yirmeyahu in the realm of rebuke, basing his statement on the passage concerning a prophet in *Devarim* 18. In order to understand his words, let us first see the verses in their context:

For these nations, which you shall dispossess, hearken to soothsayers, and to diviners; but as for you, the lord your God has not permitted you so to do... **I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like you, and will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him.** (vv. 14, 18)

¹³ According to the Sefardi custom, Yirmeyahu 1 is the *haftara* for *Parashat Shemot*, which includes the consecration of Moshe at the burning bush, because of the great similarity between the two consecrations.

¹⁴ Moshe also had to deal with a powerful group that challenged his prophetic abilities - the magicians of Egypt – but unlike the false prophets, they expressed a lack of faith in his message of redemption.

In light of this passage, let us go back and reread Yirmeyahu's prophecy of consecration:

And whatever I command you, you shall speak... And the Lord said to me: Behold, **I have put My words in your mouth.**¹⁵

Yirmeyahu is presented in this linguistic parallel and in R. Yehuda's exposition as a direct continuation of Moshe. He is the prophet in whose mouth God put His words, and it is he who is commanded to speak all that he has been commanded. The parallel to the passage in *Devarim* reveals another thread that runs the entire length of Yirmeyahu's life and prophecies. The primary confrontation in the passage concerning a prophet in *Devarim* is between the true prophet, the heir of Moshe, who speaks the words that God put in his mouth, and the false prophet, who says "that which I have not commanded him to speak" (*Devarim* 18:20). Yirmeyahu's consecration prophecy thus alludes to his difficult struggle with the false prophets.¹⁶ Yirmeyahu continues the line of true prophets that began with Moshe. He acts and speaks as he was commanded by God, despite the fact that this brings him no benefit and is not pleasant for him. He does this because his sole fidelity is to the word of God in his mouth.

(Translated by David Strauss)

¹⁵ This correspondence is also mentioned in the commentary of R. Yosef Kara, who connects it to the beginning of the consecration prophecy:

"Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you" – before I gave you form, "I knew you"; in the days of Moshe, when I said to him: "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like you," "behold, I have put My words in your mouth." And similarly, it was said to Moshe: "And I will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him."

¹⁶ The clearest connection is linked to the story of the confrontation between Yirmeyahu and Chananya the son of Azur in chapter 28. *Sifrei Devarim* 178 expounds the verse (*Devarim* 18:21): "And if you say in your heart: How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken":

In the future, you will say: How shall we know? Yirmeyahu said: "Behold, the vessels of the house of God are going to Babylonia," and Chananya said: "Behold, the vessels of the house of God are coming back from Babylonia." And I do not know to whom to listen. Therefore, the verse states: "Know that when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken." What is the thing which the Lord has spoken? That which [the prophet] says and it comes to pass.