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ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

THE BOOK OF YIRMIYAHU
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SHIUR #05: YIRMIYAHU'S PROPHECY OF THE END OF DAYS (3:14-18)

I. INTRODUCTION: THE PROPHECIES OF REPENTANCE IN THE CHAPTER: FROM WIFE TO CHILD

As we saw in the previous *shiur*, the unit that begins in chapter 3 and ends with the first two verses in chapter 4 comprises a collection of short prophecies that were delivered during different periods. The common denominator between them is their focus on repentance. In the middle of this collection, we find a unique prophecy of consolation, which presents Yirmiyahu's vision of the end of days. Today's *shiur* will focus on this prophecy.

The previous prophecies, beginning in chapter 2, focused on the betrayal that characterized Israel's relationship to God. It is not surprising that the most common and fitting image for the relationship described in these prophecies is that of a woman who plays the harlot while she is married to her husband. In contrast, the primary image in the verses under discussion in this *shiur* is that of the relationship between a father and his children.

The nature of the restoration of that relationship also changes in this prophecy. In the previous prophecies, restoring the relationship is described as illogical, and even contrary to halakhic principles: "Shall he return to her again?" (3:1). This is because the covenant had been broken, and in the natural way of things it cannot be put back together again. In contrast, in the prophecies recorded later in the chapter, the restoration of the relationship is described as something natural and obvious. A child can never dissolve his relationship with his father. These prophecies therefore emphasize the clear expectation of the child's return: "Turn, o faithless children, says the Lord" (3:14).

II. THE BOUNDARIES OF THE PROPHECY REGARDING THE END OF DAYS

The prophecy of consolation appearing in verses 14-18 fits in with the prophecies appearing before and after it. It begins in verse 14: "Turn, o faithless children, says the Lord." This is similar to what was stated earlier in v. 12: "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: Return you faithless Israel, says the Lord." This call to return is then repeated later in the chapter (v. 20): "Return, faithless children, and I will heal your backslidings." At the same time, this prophecy goes beyond the boundaries of consolation and outlines the process of redemption and the end of days, and it is therefore

fitting to call it Yirmiyahu's vision of the end of days. The phrase "in those days" appears twice over the course of the prophecy (16, 18). In addition, there is one instance of the phrase "at that time" (17), which appears another few times in the book in accounts of the end of the days.

Eschatological prophecies were delivered by various prophets in different styles. In general, they are stamped with the seal of their prophecies and reflect their primary messages. It is therefore fitting to examine this prophecy in light of Yirmiyahu's other prophecies. It is similarly appropriate to compare the eschatological prophecies of the different prophets, which frequently reveals similarities, but also highlights the unique aspects of each prophet. At the end of this *shiur*, we will examine the relationship between Yirmiyahu's prophecy and Yeshayahu's vision of the end of days.

II. THE STAGES OF THE REDEMPTION

The vision recorded in the verses under discussion is built in several stages. The starting point of the entire process is repentance: "Turn, O faithless (*shovavim*) children, says the Lord; for I have taken you to Myself." The word *shovavim* is used here in a double sense: it refers to sinners, but also those who are able to easily return (*la-shuv*).

The human initiative to engage in a process of repentance is followed by God's response in the form of an ingathering of the exiles: "And I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion" (3:14). The words "I will take you" and "I will bring you" echo the wording used in connection with the redemption from Egypt in God's oration in *Shemot* 6, which describes the return from the exile to the land of Israel. But it is precisely this comparison that highlights the uniqueness of our prophecy, for it provides an unusual description of the ingathering of the exiles that seems to involve only a restricted and partial return to the land. The *Amora'im* disagree about the meaning of this verse:

"And I will take you one of a city, and two of a family." Resh Lakish said: This is meant literally. R. Yochanan said: Their Master is not pleased that you say so of them. But [say thus:] "One of a city" [means that his virtues] shall benefit an entire city; and "two of a family" will benefit the entire family. (*Sanhedrin* 111a)

According to Resh Lakish, we have here with a pessimistic description of the ingathering of the exiles, which will be very partial. R. Yochanan, on the other hand, reads the sentence in a different way; in his opinion, because of a few individuals, entire cities and families will be saved.

R. Yosef Kara offers another interpretation:

And the plain sense of the text is that I will gather you, **one of a city and two of a family** – for you will be scattered in all the places into which I will drive you (see *Yirmiyahu* 8:3), and you will remain among them in small numbers, **and I will bring you to Zion**, and there you will multiply

and increase. And the context points to the resolution, for it is written afterwards: "And it shall come to pass, when you multiply and increase in the land" (16).

The explanations of R. Yochanan and Rabbi Yosef Kara notwithstanding, the verse seems to be saying that only a few people will return, because redemption depends on repentance. From this perspective, there is a striking similarity between Yirmiyahu's prophecy and Yeshayahu's prophecy regarding the remnant, which describes the tenth that will remain after the destruction (*Yeshayahu* 6:13).

The third stage (15) moves on to the selection of leaders:

And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

The term "shepherds" designating leaders alludes to what was stated in the previous chapter: "The rulers (lit., shepherds) transgressed against Me" (2:8). The corrupt leaders who brought harm to the people will be replaced by a new and improved leadership; in contrast to the priests who "knew Me not," these shepherds will lead their flocks based on the knowledge of God.

IV. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE ARK – A RIDDLE AND ITS RESOLUTION

In verses 16-17, we reach the most important stage in the process, and in this *shiur* we will focus primarily upon these verses. The stage opens with a description of the time: "And it shall come to pass, when you multiply and increase in the land, in those days, says the Lord." This verse describes a situation in which the remnant that will return from the exile, one of a city and two of a family, will begin to multiply and increase in the land. This wording alludes to the blessing that God bestowed upon Adam in *Bereishit* 1: "Increase and multiply, and replenish the earth." The same phrase is also found at the beginning of the book of *Shemot* (1:7): "And the children of Israel increased, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them." All three places describe the beginning of a new creation: the creation of the world, the creation of a nation, and the renewed Jewish settlement of the land of Israel following their exile.

Immediately after the process of the increase of Israel's numbers, there is a dramatic turn, the essence of which involves a blatant negation of the ark and the relationship to it. Whereas the previous stages accord with many other accounts of the redemption in the Torah and the Prophets, this stage is unique to Yirmiyahu and is not mentioned by any of the other prophets. It is not clear what the problem that Yirmiyahu finds with the ark is, nor why this will happen "in those days." In order to clarify the meaning of this passage, let us first examine its structure:

And it shall come to pass, when you	At that time they shall call Jerusalem
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<p>multiply and increase in the land, in those days, says the Lord, they shall say no more, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord," nor shall it come to mind; nor shall they remember it; nor shall they miss it; nor shall that be done any more.</p>	<p>the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem; nor shall they walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart.</p>
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The passage is divided into parts. First, it negates the ark with five negatives (16) "in those days," and then it shifts to a description of the positive situation that will prevail in Jerusalem "at that time" in the wake of that change. Nevertheless, the nature and meaning of the change remains unclear, and any proposed explanation must take into account both elements.

To clarify the matter, let us turn to the commentaries. The Radak writes:

(16) **"And it shall come to pass... they shall say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord,' nor shall it come to mind."** In other words, even though you will increase and multiply in the land, the nations will not envy you, coming to fight you, so that you will have to go out to war against them, **and the ark** of God with you. For it was their custom to take the ark out to war, but in those days they will not need to do this, because they will not wage war any more. And for this reason he says: **"They shall say no more... nor shall it come to mind, nor shall they remember it; nor shall they miss it; nor shall that be done any more"** – that is, that thing, to take it out to war. And so too Yonatan renders: **"Nor shall that be done any more** – and they will not fight another battle with it. **"At that time"** – needless to say the nations shall not come to fight against **Jerusalem**, but rather **they shall call it the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord**, to serve Him, and not to fight.

The Radak understands that the ark symbolizes going out to war. Not mentioning the ark reflects the state of peace that will prevail in the future. Thus, the Radak connects the change in the status of the ark to the increase in numbers mentioned in the beginning of the verse. Despite the population growth, there will be no envy or war, and the nations will go up to Jerusalem to serve God, and not to wage battle.

The difficulty with this explanation is that war and peace are not mentioned in this passage. In fact, the absence of any mention of peace and war in this prophecy stands out against the parallel prophecy in *Yeshayahu 2*, where it is stated explicitly: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares." Here there is no mention of anything like that.

The *Metzudot* suggests a different understanding:

"They shall say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord'" – In other words, they shall say no more one to the other, "Let us go before

the ark to pray there," because owing to the increase among the people, they will not all be able to go there, because the place will not have room for them. **"Nor shall it come to mind"** – it will not enter anybody's mind, not even an individual, to go there, because it will be very difficult to go there, because of the pressing crowd. **"Nor shall they remember it"** – no one will remember the ark to go there. And similarly: **"Nor shall they miss it."**

"Nor shall that be done any more" – no other arks will be made, so that everyone could come before one of them. As it says below that the *Shekhina* will rest in all of Jerusalem and there prayer will be received. **"The throne of the Lord"** – in other words, there too the *Shekhina* will rest.

The *Metzudot* notes that a contrast is established here between the ark and Jerusalem. In his opinion, the contrast teaches that the growth in numbers will lead to intense crowding before the ark, thus necessitating an expansion of the resting of the *Shekhina*. This account is thus intended to illustrate the population growth mentioned in the beginning of the verse.

The plain sense of the prophecy, however, indicates that the prophet views the ark itself in a fundamentally negative light, and he expresses this negativity with respect to the ark with five consecutive negative clauses.

In continuation of the words of the *Metzudot*, it should be noted that as opposed to the negation of the ark ("They shall say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord'"), the importance of Jerusalem is enhanced: "They shall call Jerusalem, the throne of the Lord." The replacement is clear. Fundamentally, it is the ark that is perceived as the footstool or throne of God, "who sits upon the *keruvim*," as is stated in several verses. However, this explanation sharpens the question: What is so wrong with the ark that it will be removed from the Temple in the end of days?

Some suggest that the background of this prophecy is Menashe's removal of the ark from the Temple so that he could put the idol of the ashera in its place (II *Melakhim* 21:4).¹ *Tosefta Sota* 13:1 attributes the removal of the ark to Yoshiyahu, who ruled during the time of Yirmiyahu, as part of the repair process that he undertook:

And when the ark was stored away, other things were stored away with it. And who stored it away? King Yoshiyahu. What did he see? Since he saw that it says in the Torah, "The Lord shall bring you and the king whom you shall set over you" (*Devarim* 28:36), he appointed Levites and they stored [the ark] away, as it is stated: "And he said to the Levites who taught all Israel, who were holy to the Lord, 'Put the holy ark in the house which Shelomo the son of David king of Israel did build; you need

¹ See M. Horn, "Siluk Aron Ha-Berit," *Yediot Ha-Chevra Le-Chakirat Eretz Yisrael Ve-Atikoteha*, 25 (5721), pp. 211-223. For a slightly different understanding of the events, according to which Menashe stored the ark away in order to protect it, see Y. Elitzur, <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/tanach/achronim/jer3eli-1.htm>.

no longer carry it upon your shoulders" (II *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 35:3). He said to them: Store it away, so that it not go into exile like all the other vessels, as it is stated: "Serve now the Lord your God, and His people Israel" (ibid.). The Levites immediately stored it away.

The removal of the ark in the days of Yirmiyahu serves as the backdrop of our prophecy, although it still does not explain Yirmiyahu's strong opposition to the very existence and mention of the ark.

It appears that the key to understanding this is alluded to in the words of Rashi, who sends us to the story of the capture of the ark in the book of *Shemuel* (chapters 4-6):

Nor shall that be done any more – that which was done to it already in Shilo, when they took it out to war against the Pelishtim in the days of Eli.

Indeed, an examination of that story reveals that the ark was called there "the ark of the covenant of the Lord, who sits upon the *keruvim*" (I *Shemuel* 4:3-4):

And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord smitten us to day before the Pelishtim? Let us fetch **the ark of the covenant of the Lord** out of Shilo to us, so that when it comes among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." So the people sent to Shilo, that they might bring from there **the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who sits upon the *keruvim***; and the two sons of Eli, Chofni and Pinchas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

The attitude toward the ark that is expressed in these verses is strikingly problematic. The question (justifiably) raised by the people in the aftermath of their defeat, "Why has the Lord smitten us today?" (5), is not answered. The proposed solution is not repentance and a mending of their ways, but rather a magical solution – taking the ark out to battle. The words of the people manifest a problematic blurring between the ark and the source of its strength; the hope that "when it comes among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies" is expressed with respect to the ark itself.

As we know, the outcome of that war as described in the book of *Shemuel* (I *Shemuel* 4:5-11) was just the opposite:

And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth trembled. And when the Pelishtim heard the shout, they said, "What is the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews?" And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. And the Pelishtim were afraid, for they said, "God is come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us, for there has not been such a thing before now. Woe to us! Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smote

Egypt with all the plagues in the wilderness. Strengthen yourselves and act like men, O Pelishtim, lest you fall slaves to the Hebrews, as they have been slaves to you; quit yourselves like men, and fight!" And the Pelishtim fought, and Israel was beaten, and they fled every man to his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Chofni and Pinchas, were slain.

Scripture draws a comparison between the attitude of the people of Israel and the attitude of the heathen Pelishtim to the same ark, thus teaching that the people saw the ark as sort of a magical pagan artifact that can work miracles irrespective of their situation and their actions. In practice, of course, just the opposite occurs. It is precisely the ark's arrival in the camp that encourages the Pelishtim to act like men and fight, and thus to achieve a decisive victory in battle. It turns out that not only did the ark not help Israel in the war, but it actually led to their rout. Shemuel repaired the situation after the ark was returned from captivity; it remained in Kiryat-Ye'arim and not among the people. Only then did Shemuel succeed in restoring the hearts of the people to God (7:2-4):

And it came to pass, while the ark remained in Kiryat-Ye'arim, that the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel sighed after the Lord. And Shemuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtarot from among you, and direct your hearts to the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Pelishtim." Then the children of Israel put away the Be'alim and the Ashtarot and served the Lord only.

As in the story in the book of *Shemuel*, in the vision of Yirmiyahu, an ideal situation is described in which the ark is not found among the people. Like Shemuel, Yirmeyau too views the situation positively and points to the advantage that it offers: Now, without an ark, the people can concentrate on the substance of their connection to God and on the process of repentance, and not turn to the external dimensions of holiness that are expressed in the Divine revelation hovering over the ark. Therefore, the city of Jerusalem with its inhabitances will replace the ark, and in contrast to the statement, "the ark of the covenant of the Lord," they will call Jerusalem, "the throne of the Lord."

This change will lead to another change – the people's focus on the ark will come to an end and be forgotten from the heart, and instead of focusing on the ark, all of the nations will focus on Jerusalem and gather to it, to the name of the Lord.² The reason for the change seems to be that the holiness in

² It is possible that use of the phrase "to the name of the Lord" is meant to refine the religious perception of the deity; we are not dealing with God Himself, but with His name, His revelation and the resting of His *Shekhina*. See also the words of Shelomo in his prayer (I *Melakhim* 8:27-29), where he contrasts the perception that sees the Temple as the abode of God Himself to the perception that sees it merely as the site of His name.

the new reality will be open, impacting upon and available to all, even the gentile nations.

Another, sharper difference between the two periods is alluded to in the word "more" (*od*), which appears three times in the prophecy. In the first part, it appears twice in connection with the ark, at the beginning and at the end of the list of negations: "They shall say no **more**... nor shall that be done any **more**." It thus highlights the contrast between the earlier attitude toward the ark and the future attitude in its regard. The word appears a third time at the end of the second part: "Nor shall they walk any **more** after the stubbornness of their evil heart." The plain meaning of these words is that in contrast to their walking after the stubbornness of their evil heart up until now, from this moment they will go after Jerusalem and gather to it, to the name of the Lord. However, the use of the word "more" and the contrast between the two parts allude to a correspondence between a positive attitude toward the ark and walking after the stubbornness of their hearts, a point that, as stated, clearly emerges from the story of the war against the Pelishtim in the book of *Shemuel*.

V. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PROPHECY ABOUT THE ARK AND THE PROPHECY OF A "NEW COVENANT"

Yirmiyahu's vision of the end of days fits in well with the overall picture of the book and its broader prophetic tendency. One can identify a clear link between Yirmiyahu's vision of the end of days and his prophecy about a new covenant in chapter 31 (30-33; we will deal with this prophecy at length in its place):

Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Yehuda: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant of Mine they broke, although I was their master, says the Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put My Torah in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people, and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord;" for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Some common points to both prophecies:

1. Both prophecies speak of some future time: "Behold, days are coming" – "In those days."
2. The structure of the two prophecies is very similar. Both start with a negation of the past: "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers..." – "They shall say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord,'" and then shift to a positive alternative.
3. Both prophecies emphasize broad knowledge of God in the future: "For

they shall all know Me" – "And all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord," and both of them revolve around the idea of a covenant – the ark of the covenant of the Lord and the new covenant.

It seems that the two prophecies are complementary and that they are directed essentially to the same idea. The prophecy in chapter 31 negates the earlier covenant that was made at the time of the Exodus from Egypt and then breached by the people. This covenant apparently alludes to the covenant at Sinai and the tablets in the ark. This covenant will be replaced in the future by a covenant inscribed on the people's hearts. This is a process of internalizing the covenant – taking a physical, external symbol and planting it in the heart of each and every individual. A similar process is described in the prophecy that we have been discussing in this *shiur*, which relates to transferring the holiness from the physical ark, the home of the tablets of the law, to the entire city of Jerusalem and to the people themselves. In both cases, this process will lead to the spreading of the knowledge of God among people, young and old, Jew and gentile.

It is interesting that the image of writing on the heart appears in another place in the book of *Yirmiyahu*, but there along with the word "tablet" (*lu'ach*) (17:1):

The sin of Yehuda is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon **the tablet of their heart** and upon the horns of your altars.

These verses state that the tablet of the heart can replace the tablets of the covenant for the purpose of maintaining the deep covenant between God and His people. As we shall see over the course of our study, this spiritual principle underlies other prophecies of *Yirmiyahu* as well.³

V. THE VISION OF THE END OF DAYS: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YESHAYAHU AND YIRMIYAHU

Yeshayahu's prophecy of the end of days (2) echoes what is stated in our prophecy. At the center of both prophecies stands the image of the nations going up to Jerusalem to know God. Even the wording of the prophecies is similar: "And all the nations shall flow into it" – "And all the nations shall be gathered." However the way of attaining this situation is different for the two prophets. The root of sin in the prophecies of Yeshayahu is man's pride, and therefore: "In the end of days, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the **top** of the mountains and shall be exalted **above** the hills." And thus: "And all the nations shall flow into it." When man's haughtiness is bowed down and God alone is exalted, all the nations shall flow to know God on the mountain of God's house. In the period of *Yirmiyahu*, the problem was just the opposite: There was an excessive glorification of the ark as a vessel enjoying intrinsic meaning and holiness. *Yirmiyahu* stands up

³ We will deal with this issue in the future, when we discuss *Yirmeyahu's* attitude toward sacrifices and prayer.

resolutely against this idea in many of his prophecies, the most famous of which is his prophecy in chapter 7 against those who proclaim, "The Temple of the Lord," and put their trust in it despite their evil deeds. In Yirmiyahu's generation, the Temple becomes a place of escape from moral repair – "a den of thieves." Thus, calling out in the name of the ark is liable to free a person from internal obligation and allow him to follow the evil stubbornness of his heart. Therefore, only when the ark will be forgotten and in its place holiness will spread out below – toward Jerusalem and into the hearts of people – will all the nations gather to the name of God, to Jerusalem.

The shift to abstract holiness obligates a person to follow God in a personal and independent manner. From this perspective, our prophecy is a continuation of the first part of the chapter, in which Yirmiyahu criticized the response of the people, which served as a tool to continue to sin and shirk responsibility. Like the repentance of the people there, the ark as described in our prophecy serves as an escape from the internal process that the people must undergo. In both cases, the prophet contends with these perceptions and attempts to turn the people's repentance into a deep and authentic internal process.

(Translated by David Strauss)