



SEFER YIRMIYAHU

2019-2020 Shiur
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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

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The Kingdom Splits (Melachim I:12)

1. And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king.
2. And it was when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of this when he was yet in Egypt where he had fled from the presence of King Solomon, and Jeroboam had settled in Egypt.
3. And they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spoke to Rehoboam saying,
4. "Your father made our yoke hard. Now you lighten your father's hard work and his heavy yoke which he placed upon us, and we shall serve you."
5. And he said to them "Go away for three days, then return again to me." And the people departed.
6. And King Rehoboam took counsel with the elders who had attended Solomon his father while he was yet alive saying: "What counsel do you give me to reply to this people?"
7. And they spoke to him saying, "If you will be a servant to this people today, and you will minister to them and you will respond to them and speak kind words to them, then they will be your servants for all times.
8. But He disregarded the counsel of the elders who advised him, and he took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and who were attending him.
9. And he said to them: "What do you advise that we reply to this people who have spoken to me saying, 'Lighten the burden which your father has placed upon us'?"
10. And the young men that had grown up with him spoke to him saying: "So shall you say to this people who have spoken to you saying, 'Your father has made our yoke heavy, and you make it lighter for us,' thus shall you speak to them, My little finger is thicker than my father's loins.
11. And now, where my father did burden you with a heavy yoke, I shall add to your yoke; my father flogged you with whips, but I will flog you with scorpions."
12. Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had spoken, saying, "Return to me on the third day."
13. The king replied to the people harshly, and he disregarded the counsel of the elders which they had advised him.
14. And he spoke to them as the counsel of the young men saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, and I shall add to your yoke; my father flogged you with whips, and I shall flog you with scorpions."
15. The king did not listen to the people, for it was something brought about by the Lord, in order to fulfill His word that the Lord had spoken through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.
16. And all of Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, and they replied to the king saying: "What share do we have in David? And no heritage in Jesse's son. To your homes, O Israel! Now see your house, David," and the Israelites went to their homes.
17. [As regards] the children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam ruled over them.
18. And King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was in charge of the tax, and all of Israel pelted him with stones, and he died, and King Rehoboam exerted himself to get up into his chariot to flee to Jerusalem.
19. So Israel revolted against the House of David until this day.
20. And it came to be when all of Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, that they sent and called him to the assembly, and they made him king over all Israel; there was none that followed the House of David except the tribe of Judah alone.
21. And Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, and he assembled all the House of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen warriors, to wage war with the House of Israel, to return the kingdom to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon.
22. And the word of God was to Shemiah, the man of God, saying,
23. "Speak to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, King of Judah, and to all of the house of Judah and Benjamin, and the rest of the people, saying,

24. "Thus said the Lord: 'You shall not go up and you shall not war with your brothers, the children of Israel; return each man to his home for this thing has been brought about by Me.' " And they heeded the word of the Lord, and they returned to go [home], in accordance with the word of the Lord.

25. And Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountain of Ephraim and lived there, and he went from there and built the city of Penuel.

26. Jeroboam then said to himself, "Now, the kingdom may return to the House of David.

27. When this people goes up to offer sacrifices in the Temple of the Lord, in Jerusalem, the hearts of this people will turn to their master to Rehoboam the king of Judah, and they shall kill me and return to Rehoboam, the king of Judah."

28. The king took counsel and made two golden calves, and he said to them, saying, "It is far for you to go up to Jerusalem; here are your gods, O Israel that have brought you up from the land of Egypt."

29. And he placed one in Beth El and the other he placed in Dan.

30. And this thing became a sin, and the people went before the one even until Dan.

31. And he made the house of high places (i.e. houses of altars) and he made priests of some of the people who were not of the sons of Levi.

32. And Jeroboam made a festival in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month like the festival which was in Judah, and he brought up offerings on the altar; so he did in Beth El to slaughter the calves which he had made, and he placed in Beth El the priests of the high places which he had made.

33. And he brought up offerings on the altar which he has made in Beth El on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month that he had fabricated from his heart, and he made a festival for the children of Israel, and he went up to the altar to burn the incense.



TEN LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL

- Asher
- Dan
- Ephraim
- Gad
- Yissachar
- Menasheh
- Naphtali
- Reuven
- Shimon
- Zevulun

SOUTHERN KINGDOM

- Judah
- Binyamin

The Kingdom Of Yehuda

Yirmiyahu prophesied during one of the most tempestuous periods in ancient times. He began to prophesy in the thirteenth year of Yoshiyahu's reign (as stated below 25:3) in 627 BCE. That year was a turning point in world history. In 626, Ashurbanipal, the last great king of Assyria, died. Following his death, the mighty kingdom of Assyria, which had dominated the ancient Near East for nearly a century, began to disintegrate and lose its power. In 625, Nevupolasar, founder of the new kingdom of the Kasdim, ascended the royal throne of Babylonia and began trying to expand the borders of his kingdom and assume the place of Assyria as ruler of the Near East. In 612, the city of Ninveh, the capital city of Assyria, was captured by the Babylonians, but the Egyptians came to Assyria's assistance. In the decisive battle between Babylonia and Egypt in Karkamish in 605, Nevuchadnetzar, the son of Nevupolasar, struck out against Pharaoh Nekho and forced him to return to his country. This victory assured Babylonia rule over the entire western part of the Assyrian kingdom up to the river of Egypt, which included the kingdom of Yehuda.

This historical event had a direct bearing on the kingdom of Yehuda. After long years of subjugation to the kingdom of Assyria, there was now a possibility of the renewal of the sovereignty of the kingdom of Yehuda and its neighbors. This opportunity was exploited by Yoshiyahu, who expanded his realm to the north in areas that had been Assyrian provinces, towards the territory of Efrayim, Samaria, and Megiddo, which in the past had been part of the kingdom of Israel. At the same time that he was engaged in his military and territorial buildup, in the eighteenth year of his reign (622 BCE), following the discovery of a Torah scroll in the Sanctuary, Yoshiyahu undertook a broad and comprehensive process of religious repair in the kingdom of Yehuda. He destroyed the private altars and sites of idol worship, and he renewed the covenant between Israel and God (II *Melakhim* 22-23). Through these two processes, Yoshiyahu wishes to restore the kingdom of Yehuda to its days of glory in the political and religious spheres – to the days of David and Shelomo.

However, geopolitical events did not allow the renewed kingdom of Yehuda to remain at peace. A fierce struggle broke out between the new Babylonian kingdom and the kingdom of Egypt. The kingdom of Yehuda, which sat between the two powers, was unwillingly dragged into the great military confrontation that surrounded it. Another tragic event was Yoshiyahu's fall at the battle of Megiddo into the hands of Pharaoh Nekho (in 609 BCE). This event paved the way for the shocks that subsequently befell Yehuda, as its rulers changed their political allegiances from time to time. This led to a long series of subjugations and rebellions, up until the destruction of the Temple. As stated, Yoshiyahu was killed by the Egyptians; his son Yehoachaz was crowned by Pharaoh, but three months later he was exiled to Egypt, apparently because he adopted a pro-Babylonian position. Following his exile, the Egyptians crowned Yehoyakim, his elder brother, who represented the pro-Egyptian line, and at the same time they levied a heavy tax on Yehuda. Even this did not stabilize the kingdom; in that same year (605), Egypt was beaten by Nevuchadnetzar at the battle in Karkamish, and from that point on the scale was tipped in favor of Babylonia, Yehuda becoming a Babylonian protectorate.

In the time of Yehoyakim, Yoshiyahu's repair process dissipated and there began a religious and moral decline, which deepened until the destruction, as is apparent from the prophecies of Yirmiyahu. In 600, Yehoyakim rebelled against Babylonia, despite Yirmiyahu's warning not to do so, apparently due to another war between Babylonia and Egypt. His son Yehoyakhin ruled in his place (for only three months), surrendered to the Babylonian army that had laid siege against Jerusalem, and went into exile together with many of the residents of Jerusalem – princes, soldiers, and weapons manufacturers.

Yehoyakhin's uncle, Matanya, the son of Yoshiyahu, was crowned by Nevuchadnetzar, and he changed his name to Tzidkiyahu. Despite the oath to the king of Babylonia, and despite the repeated entreaties of Yirmiyahu, Tzidkiyahu, the last king of Yehuda, rebelled against Babylonia. This revolt ended with the final destruction of Yehuda, Jerusalem, and the Temple. Thus, the independence of the kingdom of Yehuda came to an end and the period of the Babylonian exile began.

Historical Context His Prophecies

At the end of the introduction, the verses state that Yirmiyahu began to prophesy in the days of Yoshiyahu. But the verse specifies two different points in time regarding the end of his prophecy:

To the end of the eleventh year of Tzidkiyahu the son of Yoshiyahu king of Yehuda, **to** the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

The term “to” (*ad*) appears here twice. The first is the usual way of marking time in the introductions to the books of the Prophets, and, as stated, it relates to the days of King Tzidkiyahu. But the second appearance is unique to Yirmiyahu, marking the central event that occurred in his day – the exile of Jerusalem. This ending is meant to highlight the fact that Yirmiyahu is the prophet of destruction, and his prophetic mission therefore ends with the exile of Jerusalem.

Yirmiyahu Among The Books Of The Prophets

The famous *baraita* in tractate *Bava Batra* (14b) discusses the order of the books of Scripture and the identities of their authors.

The order of the Prophets: *Yehoshua, Shofetim, Shemuel, Melakhim, Yirmiyahu, Yechezkel, Yeshayahu,* and *Shneim Asar*.

According to the order of Scripture as we know it, the book of *Yirmiyahu* actually follows the book of *Yeshayahu*, reflecting their chronological order. But according to the tradition of the Babylonian Amoraim, the book of *Yirmiyahu* comes before the book of *Yeshayahu*.¹ The *gemara* raises an objection against this order:

But surely *Yeshaya* was earlier than *Yirmiyahu* and *Yechezkel*. Let then *Yeshayahu* be placed first? Because the book of *Melakhim* ends with a record of destruction and *Yirmiyahu* is entirely destruction, and *Yechezkel* commences with destruction and ends with consolation, and *Yeshayahu* is entirely consolation; therefore, we put destruction next to destruction and consolation next to consolation.

According to the Babylonian Talmud, it is preferable to put the book of *Yirmiyahu* first and juxtapose it to the book of *Melakhim* owing to the similarity between their respective contents: a description of the destruction. A tradition brought in this Talmudic passage states that Yirmiyahu also authored the book of *Melakhim*, thus reinforcing the connection between them.²

It is also worth noting the contrast that the *gemara* notes between the books of *Yeshayahu* and *Yirmiyahu*: *Yeshayahu* is characterized as a book that is “entirely consolation,” while the book of *Yirmiyahu* is “entirely destruction.” This characterization certainly does not accurately reflect the contents of the books; in the book of *Yeshayahu* there are prophecies of rebuke and calamity, and in the book of *Yirmiyahu* there are also prophecies of consolation. But it does express the general trend of each book and the fundamental contrast between them.

To understand the significance of the contrast, we must expand the comparison between the books. The two prophets prophesied in similar periods. Yeshayahu lived during the time of the ascent of, the mighty empire of Assyria, whose boundaries reached the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and breached the sphere of influence of the ancient kingdom of Egypt. In its aspiration for power, the kingdom of Assyria also struck the territory of

¹ The Radak relates to this difference in his introduction to the book of *Yirmeyahu*: “We find this book in the order of the prophets after the book of *Yeshayahu*. And so too I wrote its commentary after the commentary to *Yeshayahu*, and this despite the fact that they are not arranged in this manner in the words of our Rabbis, of blessed memory... Nevertheless, in all of the reliable manuscripts that I saw written in Spain over many years, they are arranged chronologically: *Yeshayahu* comes before *Yirmeyahu*, just as the former’s time came before the latter’s time. And so too *Yirmeyahu* comes before *Yechezkel*.” The Abravanel expresses a similar position in his introduction to the book. It stands to reason that the order found in the *baraita* reflects a Babylonian tradition, whereas the order familiar to us, the chronological order, is based on a tradition from *Eretz Yisrael*. See also the introduction of Amos Chakham to the *Da’at Mikra* edition of the book of *Yeshayahu*.

² This tradition is reinforced by, among other things, various striking parallels between the end of the book of *Melakhim* and the book of *Yirmeyahu*.

the tribes of the kingdom of Israel. It put an end to the land of Efrayim and was about to conquer Yehuda as well. In the days of Yirmiyahu, a similar historical event took place. The kingdom of Babylonia inherited the kingdom of Assyria. It too aspired to be a mighty empire, it too took on Egypt, and in its aspiration for power it struck the kingdom of Yehuda and put an end to it.

The similar background to the prophecies of Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu highlights the fundamental difference between them. Yeshaya is the great prophet of salvation. It was he who counseled Chizkiyahu in the days of Sancheriv not to surrender, and he prophesied the fall of the Assyrian army at the walls of Jerusalem, which would bring about the miraculous rescue of the city. Yirmiyahu, on the other hand, demanded that the kings in the days of Nevuchadnetzar totally surrender to the Babylonian power, and he prophesied the fall of the city and its king into the hands of the Babylonians and the exile of Yehuda. Another interesting difference between the two prophets, connected to the difference mentioned above, relates to the role of the prophets' families in their prophecies. In the case of Yeshayahu, his sons are a sign for Israel (chapters 7-8), whereas in the case of Yirmiyahu, it is precisely his childlessness that foretells the destruction of Jerusalem and the calamity that will befall it (chapter 16). This is a tragic element in the life of Yirmiyahu, one of many, that reflects the fate of his people. We will further clarify the significance of these fundamental differences between the two great prophets over the course of our study.

Introductory Verses

As is common in the books of the Prophets, the book of *Yirmiyahu* opens with an introduction that briefly relates to the prophet and his period. The introduction to the book of *Yirmiyahu* is exceptionally long - three verses - and it is the most detailed in the books of the Prophets. The long introduction to the book reveals several important facts about Yirmiyahu. These serve us as a sort of portal, through which we enter the special world of Yirmiyahu and his book.

The words of Yirmiyahu the son of Chilkiyahu, of the priests who were in Anatot in the land of Binyamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Yoshiyahu the son of Amon king of Yehuda, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Yehoyakim the son of Yehoshiyahu king of Yehuda, to the end of the eleventh year of Tzidkiyahu the son of Yoshiyahu king of Yehuda, to the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month. (*Yirmiyahu* 1:1-3)

The first verse provides several biographical details about Yirmiyahu and is typical of the verses that open the books of the Prophets. The opening word, “*Divrei*” (“the words of”), is relatively exceptional in the books of the Prophets. It appears, in addition to here in the book of *Yirmiyahu*, only in the book of *Amos*. All the other books of the Prophets open with different words that denote prophecy. For example, the book of *Yeshayahu* opens with the phrase: “**The vision of Yeshayahu, the son of Amotz.**” The book of *Hoshea* opens with the words: “**The word of the Lord that came to Hoshea, the son of Be’eri.**” And the book of *Chavakuk* opens with: “**The burden which Chavakuk the prophet did see.**”

Indeed, even with regard to Yirmiyahu, it immediately says in the following verse: “To whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Yoshiyahu.” It is thus reasonable to conclude that we have here a generalization followed by a specification. The words of Yirmiyahu referred to in verse 1 are prophecies, the word of God that came to him, as mentioned in verse 2. However, the distinction between the “words of Yirmiyahu” and the “word of the Lord” suggests the possibility that we are actually dealing here with two different “words.” The Radak proposes an interesting interpretation in this vein:

It opens with the word “*Divrei*” (“the words of”) because the book includes words of prophecy that [Yirmiyahu] prophesied about Israel and about the nations, and also words about himself, what happened to him with his prophecy with Israel... Similarly, Amos relates about himself: “Amos has conspired against you” (*Amos* 7:10), and the entire matter as it is written. Similarly, Yirmiyahu relates at the beginning of his book about himself: “Before I formed you in the belly” (*Yirmiyahu* 1:5), and the entire matter. And similarly in his book, he relates of the evil done to him.

According to the Radak, “the words of Yirmiyahu” refer to the biographical details that are integrated into the book in addition to the substance of the prophecies included therein. Indeed, one of the striking features that distinguish the book of *Yirmiyahu* from the other books of the Prophets is the combination of his life story and biography together with his prophecies. There is no other prophet whose biography and the background of his prophecies are related in such great detail. Familiarity with Yirmiyahu’s place and background is especially vital for understanding his prophecies. Only in their light can we understand the great tension between his mission and his life and surroundings that can be felt in many places throughout the book, as we shall see later in our study. On the substantive level, apart from the many prophecies, the book inseparably incorporates stories, prayers, lamentations, and short poems of a personal nature.

The verses that follow note two biographical facts about Yirmiyahu:

1. “**Of the priests who were in Anatot in the land of Binyamin.**” Yirmiyahu traces his ancestry to a priestly family.³ One of the priestly functions, as stated in the Torah, is to teach God’s Torah to the people: “They shall teach Yaakov your judgments and Israel your Torah” (*Devarim* 33:10). Yirmiyahu’s preoccupation with the Torah and Halakha is clear from his many references to the Torah’s commandments in his prophecies, as we shall see already in his first prophecy of rebuke (chapters 2-3) and in other places.

³ The Radak, in the name of his father, R. Yosef Kimchi, writes that Chilkiyahu, the father of Yirmeyahu, was the High Priest in the days of Yoshiyahu who found the Torah scroll. There is, however, no proof for this assertion, as the name Chilkiyahu was a common name in this period. In fact, it is precisely Yirmeyahu’s distance from the Temple, owing to his residing in Anatot, that weakens this possibility.

2. **“Who were in Anatot.”** Anatot was a priestly city near Wadi Perat.⁴ Anatot is identified today in close proximity to the village of Anata, about seven kilometers northeast of Jerusalem.⁵ Even this biographical detail left its mark on the prophecies of Yirmiyahu, who is also called “Yirmiyahu of Anatot” (*Yirmiyahu* 29:27). The wadi’s landscapes, its flora and fauna, are reflected in Yirmiyahu’s prophecies and his varied images. His prophecies reflect familiarity with the world of shepherds, and it is even possible that he himself was a shepherd in his youth.⁶

The unique location of Anatot – at the edge of the desert, overlooking the Judean desert to the east - is also reflected in some of Yirmiyahu’s prophecies that deal with the tension between the desert and populated areas. Anatot is located on the border from a political perspective as well – it is in “the land of Binyamin,” near the border of the destroyed kingdom of Efrayim. The prophecies of Yirmiyahu relate in several places to the union of the kingdoms and of the return of the people of Efrayim to Yehuda. Anatot itself is mentioned several times in the book; the people of Anatot pursue Yirmiyahu (11:21, 12:6), and he wishes to redeem his uncle Chanamel’s field found in Anatot (32:9).

The Structure of the Book

Unlike the other prophetic books, the principles of whose arrangement are relatively clear and generally based on chronological order, the structure of the book of *Yirmiyahu* is not entirely evident. Although a date is given for some of the prophecies, the overall arrangement of the book provides no indication of chronological order. Nevertheless, we can point to some fundamental units in the book that are distinguished by their style and the content of the prophecies contained within them. I will define them briefly:

1. Chapters 1-25: Prophecies of rebuke: This is the largest unit in the book, but also the vaguest in terms of its structure and contents. It is primarily composed of prophecies of rebuke from different periods, and almost no narratives. What this means is that prophecies mentioned in this unit sometimes reappear in their literary and historical contexts later in the book. (The most striking example of this phenomenon is the prophecies in chapter 7 and chapter 26).

2. Chapters 26-29: Yirmiyahu’s prophecies and stories of confrontation with the false prophets: In these chapters, there are several stories about prophecies of rebuke that Yirmiyahu delivered in public and which led to a public confrontation between him and various parties, who at times tortured him: the priests, false prophets, and others. The struggle between Yirmiyahu and the false prophets appears throughout the book, but its essence is concentrated in these chapters.

3. Chapters 35-44: Stories and prophecies from the days of Yehoyakim to the destruction: Yirmiyahu’s prophecies to Israel end with a unit of chapters that are arranged for the most part in chronological order, beginning in the days of Yehoyakim and continuing until the destruction and the arrival of the remnant of the survivors in Egypt. In these chapters, Yirmiyahu’s prophecies are integrated in the historical narrative.

4. Chapters 30-33: A book of prophecies of consolation: This unit of chapters contains Yirmiyahu’s prophecies of consolation, which were delivered during different periods and relate to both the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Yehuda.

5. Chapters 46-51: Prophecies about the nations: Like other prophetic books, the book of *Yirmiyahu* has a unit of prophecies about the nations, and it is this unit with which the book closes.⁷

⁴ In *Yehoshua* 21:18, Anatot is mentioned as one of the cities given to the priests.

⁵ Some doubt this identification and propose instead Ras-al-Charuba, which is located nearby.

⁶ An interesting attempt to explain many of Yirmeyahu’s prophecies in light of the scenery of Anatot and Wadi Perat is found in N. Hareuveni, “*Or Chadash al Sefer Yirmeyahu*.” A similar approach is found in Y. Felix’s articles about *Yirmeyahu* in his book, “*Teva Va-Aretz Ba-Tanakh*.”

⁷ Chapter 52 is not part of Yirmeyahu’s prophecies and serves as sort of an “historical appendix” to the book that describes the destruction of Jerusalem as foretold by Yirmeyahu. It parallels the end of the book of *Melakhim*.