



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Matot-Masei / פרשת מטות-מסעי

Connected to the Center

This week's haftorah, the second of the special haftorot for the three weeks, is Yirmiyahu's first prophecy of rebuke. The axis upon which this rebuke turns is that God has showered the Jewish people with His love and blessings and instead of loyalty and love the Jewish people betrayed God for foreign deities. One example of this phenomenon is the Jewish people's lack of appreciation for the Land of Israel. Yirmiyahu describes the Land's beauty and bounty and how the people took the blessing without attributing it to God.¹

The theme of the Jewish people not appreciating the gift of the Land is amplified as the rebuke reaches its crescendo. Yirmiyahu highlights not just the Land's qualities, but also the Jewish people's success in expanding their settlements in the Land:²

Now where are your gods that you have made for yourself; let them get up if they will save you at the time of your misfortune, for as many as your cities were your gods, O Judea.

God allowed the Jewish people to flourish in the Land. New cities and settlements were being created, there was constant growth and expansion. However, instead of attributing their success to the One true God, each city developed its own religion, establishing its own deity and house of worship.

This rebuke reflects a natural tendency of human beings. As we are more successful, and grow and expand our operations, we often forget our initial motivation and core values. New, young and vibrant cities can be seen an amazing success story for the Jewish people. And, yet, without a strong centrifugal force towards the center, people will forget about their core values and why they are in the Land in the first place. All throughout Sefer Devarim, Moshe warns the Jewish people that as they enjoy economic and political success that there is a danger of forgetting God.³

¹ See, for example, Yirmiyahu 2:7.

² Ibid, 2:28. Translation adapted from Chabad.org.

³ See, for example, Devarim 8:10-11.



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What is the solution to this problem? How can the Jewish people enjoy success, growth and expansion without forgetting God? In the next chapter, we find Yirmiyahu telling the people:⁴

And it shall be, when you multiply and are fruitful in the land in those days...At that time, they will call Yerushalayim The Throne of the Lord, and all nations shall gather to it in the name of the Lord, to Yerushalayim, and they shall no longer follow the idea of their evil heart.

Yes, there is a way to multiply and be fruitful and still remain true and loyal to God. It is through the strengthening of the center – of Yerushalayim. If the people of the new cities, new organizations, and initiatives are constantly traveling back to Yerushalayim (as they should at least three times a year) and are thinking about it and realize that the Beit HaMikdash is the source of their strength and success, then they will be able to expand and grow in a true and blessed fashion.

This is true in every area of our life. Many of us are involved in many projects and endeavors, be it family, work, shul, learning, etc. While these are all positive projects, there is always the danger that we will forget the core reasons as to why we are engaged in these things in the first place. To this end, the more we remember our connection to “Yerushalayim, the Throne of God,” the more we will be true to our ideals even when we are not physically present in God’s city.

⁴ Yirmiyahu 3:16-17.