

*Shabbat-B'Shabbato -  
Parshat Bechukotai  
(Abroad: Parshat Behar-Bechukotai)  
27 Iyar 5775 (16 May 2015)*

**AS SHABBAT APPROACHES**

**The Temple Above and the Temple Below - by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg, Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne**

This week's Torah portion contains a detailed description of the curses of the exile. "And I will make your cities into ruins... And I will make the land desolate, and your enemies who dwell there will be desolate... And I will scatter you among the nations, and the swords will be taken out of their sheaths" [Vayikra 26:31-33]. Not only will the land be destroyed but also the Temple. "And I will make your Temple desolate, and I will not enjoy the scent of your sacrifices" [26:31]. The simple interpretation of the passage is that the Temple will be profaned. But if that is so then it should have been written explicitly: something like, "I will profane your Temple." The answer is that a verse in the middle of the description of the exile shows us that the seeds of redemption have already been planted. With respect to the curse of the land, the Ramban writes, "The fact that we are told that 'your enemies who dwell there will be desolate' is good news, since it means that our land will refuse to accept our enemies. This too is a great vision and a promise for us - there is no other land such as this, which is good and broad but remains desolate. Ever since we left it, the land has refused to accept any other nation. They all try to rejuvenate it, but they cannot succeed."

In his poetic style, the Ramban prayed when he saw the ruins of Jerusalem. "You have made me as one who gave birth and whose son died in her bosom, and the milk in her breasts causes her pain, so that she nurses puppies instead.

But in spite of this, your suitors despise you and your enemies find desolation in you. They remembered you from afar, and they glorified the holy city, saying, it was given to us as a heritage. But when they come and find all the desirable things, they flee as if from an enemy even though nobody is chasing them. It is because they are not suitable for you, and you are not suitable for them."

Even though it appears as if G-d has forsaken Yisrael and expelled them from His home, He still maintains the home for when His "wife" will return, and He does not allow a strange wife to enter the home.

The same is true of the Temple. It is written in the Torah, as quoted above, "I will make the Temple desolate," and not that the Temple will lose its sanctity, to teach us that "the sanctity remains even though the site is desolate" [Megillah 3]. This text served as a source for the Rambam for his ruling that the sanctity of Jerusalem will never be cancelled. "And why do I say that in the Temple and in Jerusalem the initial holiness remains for the future... It is because the sanctity of the Temple and of Jerusalem stem from the presence of the Shechina, and the Shechina will not leave. As is written, 'I will make the Temple desolate.' And the sages said that this means that even though the area is desolate its sanctity remains." {Hilchot Beit Habaichira, Chapter 6}.

This is also true with respect to Bnei Yisrael. The Temple "dwells with them in the midst of their impurity" [Vayikra 16:16]. Even though the nation is impure, the Shechina remains in their midst (Yoma 58). "For G-d will not abandon His nation, and He will not leave His heritage" [Tehillim 94:14].

The root of this matter can be seen as a hint in this week's Haftarah. "Just like the Throne of Glory, exalted from the very beginning, so is the site of our Temple" [Yirmiyahu

17:12]. It is written, "The Temple above is pointed towards the Temple down below" [Tanchuma Vayakhel]. The sanctity of the Temple and of Jerusalem does not start below but from above, and therefore it will never be cancelled.

And that is why, right after the verse, "like the Throne of Glory," the prophet continues with, "G-d is a purifying bath of water for Yisrael" [17:13]. As long as the heavenly Temple remains above, we hope and are confident that G-d will not abandon His people and He will not leave His heritage.