



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Re'ei / ראה

SERMON TITLE:

Is Jerusalem mentioned in the Bible?!

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ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
Emil W. Herman ☞
who loved and supported Torah learning.

Re'ei

Is Jerusalem mentioned in the Bible?!

There is an age old debate over who Jerusalem belongs to, the Muslims claims that Jerusalem is their holy city and the Jews claim that Jerusalem belongs to the Jewish nation.

One of the arguments that the Jews use frequently to prove that the Muslims have no ownership whatsoever over Jerusalem is that Jerusalem is not mentioned even once in the Koran—whereas, not to compare, but the Tanach mentions Jerusalem close to 700 times. And if so, Jerusalem definitely belongs to the Jews.

Now that may be a nice argument, but it's not entirely true. Yes, Jerusalem is mentioned in the Prophets and Scriptures hundreds of times, from the first time in Chapter 10 in the Book of Joshua to the last verse of the Tanach.

But in the Torah itself—what is called the Five Books of Moses—Jerusalem is not mentioned even once.

We actually do find a hint of Jerusalem in the Torah portion of Lecha Lecha, where it mentions “Malki-Tzedek, King of Shaleim” going out to meet Avraham—and there, Onkelos renders “Malki-Tzedek, King of Shaleim” as “Malka D'Yerushalayim,” the King of Jerusalem (Bereishis 14:18). But explicitly in the Torah, Jerusalem is not mentioned.

Now back to our Torah portion of Re'ei.

In our Parshah this week, we read that the one place that is permissible for the bringing of sacrifices is “in the place that G-d will choose to rest His Name there, there shall you bring... your burnt offerings.” And Rashi says that this means Jerusalem—and the Torah repeats it six times! But the Torah doesn't mention the name of the place—rather, it says that it will be “in the place that G-d will choose.”

Only hundreds of years later, when King David came to Jerusalem, then it became clear that “the place that G-d will choose” is Jerusalem. As the verse (Chronicles II:5:6) says, “From the day upon which I took out My nation from the land of Egypt, I did not choose a city to build there a house for My Name... and I chose Jerusalem.”

So the obvious question is, why does the Torah not explicitly state that “the place that G-d will choose” is Jerusalem?

The city of Beer Sheva is mentioned in the Torah. The city of Chevron appears in the Torah. Even Beis Lechem (Bethlehem) is found in the Torah. But Jerusalem of all cities—the holiest city to the Jewish Nation—is specifically *not* mentioned in the Torah!

Especially when the Midrash says that Jerusalem was already known as the Jewish Nation's holiest site—the place where Avraham built his altar for Akeidas Yitzchak, the Binding of Isaac, the place of Jacob's Dream, the place where Noach built his altar when he exited the Ark, and so on (Rambam, Laws of the Holy Temple 2:2).

All the commentators agree that from the dawn of history, the Jewish Nation knew that Jerusalem was “the place that G-d will choose.” And so, why does the Torah not state this explicitly?

In his famous *Moreh Nevuchim*, the *Guide to the Perplexed* (3:45), Maimonides quotes several explanations.

One explanation for Jerusalem not being explicitly mentioned in the Torah is so that the nations of the world shouldn't hear that this is the holiest place for the Jewish Nation, and then they too start fighting over it and specifically want to take it from the Jewish people. And so it would be better if this fact were not known.

Another explanation is “so that every tribe wouldn't ask for the city to be in its territory and thus conquer it, and giving it a name of divisiveness and squabble.” In other words, if the Jewish Nation would hear that Jerusalem is their holiest city, the tribes would start fighting among themselves, with each wanting Jerusalem on their turf and fighting over who Jerusalem belongs to. And so it would be better to leave it as “the place that G-d will choose.”

Some commentators explain that we find something similar with Avraham Avinu, our Patriarch Abraham, when G-d commanded him, “Go forth from your land” but didn't tell him where exactly to go—only telling him, “to the place which I will show you.” Why? So that Avraham would seek out the place and push himself to find it, and thus it would be more valuable in his eyes. Similarly with our subject at hand, G-d wanted Jerusalem to be sought after by the various tribes of the Jewish Nation and thus try to argue for their own merit that they deserve it.

The Rebbe explains that the inner reason the Torah doesn't explicitly state that “the place that G-d shall choose” is Jerusalem is because, in truth, every place to which G-d leads a Jew and where that Jew busies himself or herself with Torah and mitzvos, then that very place is “the place that G-d shall choose.”

And as the Baal Shem Tov teaches on the verse, “to cause His Name to dwell there,” it is incumbent on the Jew to know that his travels from place to place are not of his own accord but rather, he or she is being led from Above, with the intention “to cause His Name to dwell there”—to publicize spirituality in the place he or she ends up. (Hayom Yom, Elul 18.)

And in that place, the Jew needs to bring “your burnt offerings and your sacrifices” (Re'ei 12:6).

Now the Olah, the Burnt Offering, is the sacrifice that is given entirely to G-d. The entire animal is completely burnt upon the Mizbayach, the altar. As for the Zevach, the “sacrifice,” that refers to the Shlamim, or the Peace Offering. This type of sacrifice would be partially burnt on the Mizbayach, partially distributed to the Kohanim, and partially distributed to the person or people

who brought the sacrifice (It's called a peace offering cuz everyone gets a piece and that keeps the peace!)

And it's the same thing with mitzvos. There are two types of mitzvos.

You have the “mitzvos she'bein adam lamakom,” the “mitzvos between man and the Omnipresent One,” which means the ritual mitzvos. These can be compared to the Olah, the Burnt Offering—like the mitzvah of tefilah, prayer, or putting on tefillin. The other doesn't benefit from my praying (unless, of course, I'm praying for them, but that's not what I meant) or my putting on tefillin. It's “entirely for G-d.”

And then you have the “mitzvos she'bein adam lachaveiro,” the “mitzvos between man and his fellow,” or the ethical mitzvos—like charity (tzedakah), because with these mitzvos and these actions that benefit another Jew, I connect to G-d.

And on this the Rebbe says that when a Jew carries out his or her mission and makes a spiritual temple of the place where G-d has placed him or her, “bringing olos and zevachim” there, then he or she is fulfilling both the ritual mitzvos and the ethical mitzvos.

And that is the true preparation for G-d to bring us “to the place that G-d shall choose”—to Jerusalem and the building of the Third Temple, may it be built speedily in our days, amen! (From sicha of Av 20, 5736, Sichos Kodosh Vol. II, pg. 620.)

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