

## היכל

### אבנר רמו

In the Book of Samuel we hear God telling David through the Prophet Nathan:

**כי לא ישבתי בבית, למיום העלתי את-בני ישראל ממצרים ועד היום הזה; ואהיה מתהלך באהל ובמשכן.**

“for I have not dwelt in a house since the day that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle” (2 Sam 7:6; See also: 1 Ch 17:5).

The Psalmist wrote:

**שמע אלהים ויתעבר; וימאס מאד בישראל.  
ויטש משכן שלו; אהל שכן באדם.**

“God heard, and was wroth, and He greatly abhorred Israel;  
And He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He had made to dwell among men”  
(Ps 78:59-60).

However, already in the Book of Judges we read about: **כל-ימי היות בית-האלהים בשילה** - “all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh” (Jud 18:31; see also: 1 Sam 1:24).

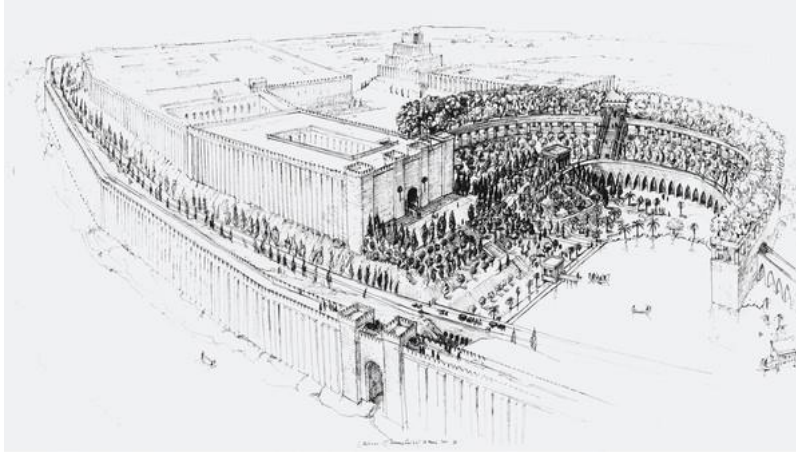
Yet in the Book of Samuel we also find:

**ונר אלהים טרם יכבה, ושמואל שכב בהיכל יהוה, אשר-שם ארון אלהים.**

“And the lamp of God was not yet gone out, and Samuel was laid down to sleep in the temple of YHWH, where the ark of God was” (1 Sam 3:3; see also: 1 Sam 1:9).

This is the first time that we encounter the word **היכל** (*heichal*) - “temple” (English translation) or “shrine” (Greek translation) in the Bible. While this word appears also once in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of Samuel” (2 Sam 22:7), it is rather odd that in the same book God did not tell David that he dwelled also in a **היכל** (*heichal*). We may therefore suspect that the word **היכל** (*heichal*) did not appear in the original text of the Book of Samuel.

In the ancient Sumerian language *E-KAL* meant: “a big house.” In Ugaritic *hkl* meant “a palace”, and in the Akkadian languages *ekallu* meant “a palace” and/or “a temple.”



**Reconstruction drawing of Sennacherib's palace and garden at Nineveh.  
Drawing by Terry Ball.**

In the book of the Prophet Jonah, who was sent to tell the inhabitants of the Assyrian capital Nineveh, about the pending destruction (it was destroyed and abandoned in 612 BC), we find: **וּתְבוּאָה אֵלַיךְ תִּפְלַתִּי אֶל-הַיְכָל קֹדֶשׁךָ** - “and my prayer came in to You, into Your holy temple” (Jon 2:8; see also: Jon 2:5). In another vision about Nineveh, the Prophet Nahum says: **וְהַיְכָל נִמְוָג; וְשַׁעַר הַנְּהָרוֹת נִפְתָּחוּ**; - “The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved” (Nah 2:7).

In the Book of Isaiah we read about: **הַיְכָל מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל** - “the palace of the king of Babylon” (Is 39:7; see also: 2 Ki 20:18; 2 Ch 36:7).

It should be noted that while the Prophet Amos (c. first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC) was also familiar with the word **הַיְכָל** (*heichal*; Am 8:3), he did not refer to the palaces of nations that were not Mesopotamian (e.g. the Arameans, Edomites, Moab, or Egypt) as **הַיְכָלוֹת** but as **אַרְמוֹת** (*armonoth*) - “palaces” (Am 1:4, 12; 2:2; 3:9; see also: Jer 49:27).

We read that in Samaria was **בֵּית-מֶלֶךְ (הַמֶּלֶךְ) אַרְמוֹן** - “the palace of the king's household” (2 Ki 15:25). Yet we also read in the Book of Kings about: **בֵּיזְרְעֵאל-אֶצֶל הַיְכָל אַחָאָב מֶלֶךְ שֹׁמְרוֹן** - “in Jezreel, by the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria” (1 Ki 21:1). It appears that even the Greek translator of the Book of Kings found it hard to believe that in Jezreel the house of Ahab, the King of Samaria, who said to Naboth: **תִּנְהַלֵּי אֶת-כַּרְמִי וְיֵהִי-לִי לֶגֶן-יֵרֶק, כִּי הוּא קָרוֹב אֶצֶל בֵּיתִי** - “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near to my house” (1 Ki 21:2), was a palace and he wrote here: “threshing floor.”

In the Aramaic portions of the Books of Ezra and Daniel the word: **הַיְכָל** (*heichal*) appears fourteen times, sometimes as: “the king's palace”, and sometimes as “God's shrine.” In the Hebrew part of the Book of Daniel we also encounter once: **הַיְכָל הַמֶּלֶךְ** - “the king's palace”

(Dan 1:4), and in the Hebrew part of the Book Ezra we find three times: **היכל יהוה** - “*YHWH’s shrine*” (Ezr 3:6, 10; 4:1).

Except for the peculiar entry in the Book of Samuel (1 Sam 3:3) the earliest biblical mention of: **היכל יהוה** - “*YHWH’s shrine*” relates to the time of King Hezekiah (2 Ki 18:16; see also: 2 Ch 29:16), who reigned in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century - early 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. Yet, although his contemporary Prophet - Isaiah was familiar with the word **היכל** (*heichal*), the term: **היכל יהוה** - “*YHWH’s shrine*” does not appear in his book.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of Kings the term: **היכל יהוה** - “*YHWH’s shrine*” is also mentioned in relation to the reigns of Kings Josiah (c. 639-609 BC) and Jehoiachin (c. 597 BC). This term also appears in the Books of their contemporary Prophets: Jeremiah (Jer 7:4; 24:1) and Ezekiel (Eze 8:16), who prophesied in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century - early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Of all the other Prophets, only the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BC prophets - Haggai (Hag 2:15, 18), and Zechariah (6:12, 13, 14, 15) mention the term **היכל יהוה** - “*YHWH’s shrine*.”

While the Psalmist mentions the word: **היכל** (*heichal*) thirteen times, the term: **היכל יהוה** - “*YHWH’s shrine*” is not mentioned in his book even once.

There is no mention of the word **היכל** (*heichal*) in the Pentateuch or in the Books of Joshua and Judges (or in the 1<sup>st</sup> Book of Chronicles). After reviewing the biblical books where the word **היכל** (*heichal*) does appear, we may conclude that the entry of this Mesopotamian word into Hebrew was mediated through the Aramaic language, probably only after the first quarter of the first millennium BC.

In the Book of Kings the description of the building of God’s house contains the word **היכל** (*heichal*) six times.

In the first verse of the Book of Kings that contain the word **היכל** (*heichal*) we read:  
**והאולם על-פני היכל הבית-עשרים אמה ארכו, על-פני רחב הבית; עשר באמה רחבו, על-פני הבית.** []

“**And the porch before the temple of the house, twenty cubits was the length thereof, according to the breadth of the house; and ten cubits was the breadth thereof before the house**” (1 Ki 6:3).

Logic suggests that either the word **ארך** - “length” is missing here, or the last three words of this verse are superfluous.

When the Chronicler repeats this information he writes:

**והאולם אשר על-פני [] הארך על-פני רחב-הבית, אמות עשרים**  
“**And the porch that was before [the house], the length of it, according to the breadth of the house, was twenty cubits**” (2 Ch 3:4).

Here, both the Greek (and English) translators believed that the word **הבית** - “the house” is missing. It is also suggested that the Chronicler did not mention in this verse the **היכל** (*heichal*) because it did not appear in the version of the Book of Kings that he used as his reference book.

In fact one could omit the word **היכל** (*heichal*) from verse 1 Ki 6:3 without affecting the information conveyed.

Two verses later we read:

**ויבן על-קיר הבית יצוע (יציע) סביב, את-קירות הבית סביב, להיכל ולדביר; ויעש צלעות סביב.**

**“And against the wall of the house he built a side-structure round about, against the walls of the house round about, (both) of the temple and of the sanctuary; and he made side-chambers round about”** (1 Ki 6:5).

The Greek translator wrote: “And he placed beams on the wall of the house, all around the shrine and the dabir, and he made sides all around.” It is suggested that the Greek translator realized that a dittography occurred in this verse and he deleted the marked words from his translation. The Chronicler does not repeat this information and we do not know if in his version of the Book of Kings, this verse indeed did not contain the word **היכל** (*heichal*), or even if this whole verse actually appeared in his copy of the Book of Kings. Notwithstanding, the information given in the first part of this verse makes the information of the words: **“against the walls of the house round about, (both) of the temple and of the sanctuary”** redundant.

Fourteen verses later we read:

**ודביר בתוך-הבית מפנימה הכין, לתתן שם את-ארון ברית יהוה ולפני הדביר עשרים אמה ארך ועשרים אמה רחב**

**“And he prepared the Sanctuary in the midst of the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of YHWH.**

**And before the Sanctuary (which was) twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth”** (1 Ki 6:19-20).

The Greek translator apparently assumed that here the word **לפני** - “before” is superfluous and omitted it. Therefore it appears that he believed that in Salomon’s house of God (which according to 1 Ki 6:2 or 2 Ch 3:3 was 60 cubits long and 20 cubits wide), the dabir, which had the shape of a square with sides measuring 20 cubits, was positioned adjacent to the back wall of the house. Similar information is given by the Chronicler who refers to this dabir as: **בית-קדש הקדשים** - “the house of holy of holies” (2 Ch 3:8).

Two verses earlier we read:

**וארבעים באמה היה הבית-הוא, ההיכל לפני []**

**“And the house, [that is], the temple before [the Sanctuary], was forty cubits long”** (1 Ki 6:17).

The Greek translator wrote: “And the shrine was forty cubits in front of the dabir”, an addition which apparently resulted from his understanding of God’s house plan.

As the information of this verse is not given by the Chronicler, we do not know if the word **היכל** (*heichal*) appeared in this verse in his copy of the Book of Kings. Yet again we can omit the word **היכל** (*heichal*) from this verse without affecting its content.

Similarly, we can peel off the word **היכל** (*heichal*) from verses 1 Ki 6:33; 1 Ki 7:21 (see also: 2 Ch 3:17); and 1 Ki 7:50 (see also: 2 Ch 4:22), without reducing their content.

The ability to omit from the account of the building of God's house that appears in the Book of Kings, the word **היכל** (*heichal*) without affecting the quality of the description, suggests that this word is not an essential element of the narrative and could in fact had been inserted by a scribe who lived years later, in a period when this Akkadian word was already integrated into the Hebrew language.

The description of the future building of God's house, in the Book of Ezekiel (Eze 40:5- 42:20) indicates that the writer of this book was familiar with the description of the building of Solomon's God house. Yet the presence of the word **היכל** (*heichal*) in Ezekiel's description of the building of Gods house (Eze 41:1, 4, 15, 20, 21, 23, 25; 42:8) suggests that in the copy of the Book of Kings that was read by the writer of the Book of Ezekiel the ward **היכל** (*heichal*) was already included.