YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Prophets vs. Empires: A Survey of Nevi’im Acharonim**

**Rav Yoel Bin-Nun**

**Shiur #23: Yeshayahu, Hoshea, and Mikha in the Time of Chizkiyahu (12)**

**Why did Chizkiyahu not offer praise? – Appendix**

***Destruction of Lachish or salvation of Jerusalem?***

As noted in the previous *shiur*,Sancheriv had a new palace built and decorated it with a relief depicting his great victory at Lachish. His defeat in Jerusalem was given only scant and partial attention: “And Chizkiyahu of Yehuda, who did not submit to my yoke – I shut him up in Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage…” (Sancheriv’s inscription).

God delivered Jerusalem “like birds hovering… He will deliver it as He protects it; He will rescue it as He passes over…” (*Yeshayahu* 31:5), and Chizkiyahu should have sung a great song of praise over the deliverance of the “city of God” – the way that he alone knew how to pray and sing. But profound pain over the masses of soldiers who had fallen, and a sense of guilt over the great number of Jews who had been exiled from Lachish and the cities of the lowlands, left him with no strength to sing and give praise.

Worse still, those who had supported Chizkiyahu now fell silent, while the party that had supported the assimilationist policy of Achaz made themselves heard once again. Since the time of Yotam and Achaz, two groups with two opposing worldviews had existed in Jerusalem: those who were faithful to God and His prophets, the officials who supported Yotam and Chizkiyahu; and those who favored integration into the ruling Assyrian culture, who supported Achaz and Menashe. Chizkiyahu’s weakness, his inability to sing in praise of God, handed the rudder to the supporters of Achaz – and his successor’s youth further tipped the scales. Menashe, son of Chizkiyahu, was only twelve years old[[1]](#footnote-1) when his father died and he ascended the throne, and he was guided by the ministers surrounding him.

However, there were other voices in Jerusalem as well. Like the song concealed in the prophecies of Yeshayahu,[[2]](#footnote-2) there is also a wondrous psalm in *Tehillim* (87) which, with the knowledge we have today, can be understood as a love song for the “city of God” that was saved by Him.

Songs of love for Jerusalem have been written from the time of King David until today. What is so unique about the song by the “sons of Korach,” whose “foundation is in the holy mountains” (*Tehillim* 87:1) and that has inspired generations of lovers of Jerusalem?

One of the verses of the psalm contains the key to the background of the psalm; generations of commentators were unable to decipher the code, but it has now been clearly revealed thanks to the discovery of inscriptions:

I will make mention of Rahav and Babylonia among those who know Me; behold Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia.... (87:4)

The mention of “Ethiopia” (Kush) together with “Philistia and Tyre” points to a very specific period.

During the reign of Chizkiyahu, Egypt was ruled by the “Black Pharaohs” of Ethiopia.[[3]](#footnote-3) One of them was “Tirhaqa king of Ethiopia,”[[4]](#footnote-4) who came up from Egypt with a military force against Sancheriv during the time of the Assyrian siege on Jerusalem. The rebels against Assyria in Tyre and Philistia were relying on Egyptian backing, and Merodach Baladan,[[5]](#footnote-5) the rebel from Babylonia,[[6]](#footnote-6) sent emissaries to Chizkiyahu. It was Chizkiyahu who was “one born there, and he shall establish it…”[[7]](#footnote-7); it was under his leadership and by virtue of his prayers[[8]](#footnote-8) that the “city of God” was saved.

What we have, then, is a song of praise over the deliverance of Jerusalem from the hand of Sancheriv, who was the arrogant world-power, “Rahav,”[[9]](#footnote-9) at the time – as is apparent to anyone who reads Ravshakeh’s speeches delivered at the walls of Jerusalem.[[10]](#footnote-10)

A psalm of the sons of Korach; a song:

Its foundation is in the holy mountains.

The Lord loves the gates of Tzion more than all the dwellings of Yaakov.

Glorious things are spoken of you [in the words of the prophets], O city of God, selah.

I will make mention of [= judge] Rahav [Sancheriv] and Babylonia [Merodakh-Baladan] via those who know Me [the prophets; Yeshayahu].

Behold Philistia and Tyre [which rebel against Assyria] with Ethiopia;

this one [the Ethiopian Pharaoh] was born there [and will not bring deliverance].

But of Tzion it shall be said of a man, and this man was born in her [Chizkiyahu]; and he shall establish her [by the power of] the Most High.

[For] the Lord shall count those written of the peoples[[11]](#footnote-11) [for judgment]:

“This one [Sancheriv] was born there [in Nineveh] [and there he shall be judged],” selah.

And they shall sing, and as they dance[[12]](#footnote-12) [over the deliverance of the city];

all my thoughts [hope] are in You. (*Tehillim* 87)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. *Melakhim* II 21:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See previous *shiur*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In *Yeshayahu – Ke-Tzipporim Afot*, which I co-authored with R. Benny Lau, on p. 203, we summarize the events that provided the background to *Yeshayahu* 20, where the prophet goes “naked and barefoot for three years, as a sign and a wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia”; see references there. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Melakhim* II 19:9; *Yeshayahu* 37:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Melakhim* II 20; *Yeshayahu* 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See *Ke-Tzipporim Afot*, pp. 217-221. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As Yeshayahu prophesizes (9:5-6): “For a child shall be born to us… upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to establish it….” See *Ke-Tzipporim Afot*, p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Melakhim* II 19; *Yeshayahu* 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Most of the commentators identify “Rahav” with Egypt, in accordance with *Yeshayahu* 30:7, but some time later, in *Yeshayahu* 51:9, it becomes Babylonia. In Chapter 87 of *Tehillim*, Egypt is referred to as “Kush” and Babylonia is mentioned by name; hence, “Rahav” is Sancheriv, king of Assyria, whose words are full of “*rahav*” – self-aggrandizement – both in Tahakh and in his own inscriptions. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Melakhim* II 18 – 19; *Yeshayahu* 36 – 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “… every one that is written for life in Jerusalem” (*Yeshayahu* 4:3); and see other instances of “writing” in *Yeshayahu* – 8:1; 30:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. “You shall have song as on the night when a feast is sanctified, and gladness of heart, as when one goes with the pipe to come to the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel” (*Yeshayahu* 30:29). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)