YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l

By Debbie and David Sable

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**Lecture 318: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CXXVII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (CIV)**

### The conquest of Babylonia and the death of Sargon

The coalition created by Merodakh Baladan collapsed.[[1]](#footnote-1) Sargon the king of Ashur conquered Babylon, and from henceforth called himself king of Ashur, governor of Babylon. Sargon was an Assyrian king who was pro-Babylonian and a worshipper of the Babylonian gods. Sancheriv adopted the opposite policy and destroyed the temples and palaces in Babylon, and with Sargon's death even transferred the capital to Nineveh. Kaufman[[2]](#footnote-2) claims that the "burden of Babylon" in *Yeshaya* 13-14 was actually directed at Ashur, this based on the cruelty of the Assyrian kings. This was in contrast to the nature of the Babylonian kings who were considered men of the sword who dealt with magnificent buildings and temples. Thus, the burden of Babylon can be attributed to Sargon in his fall and death.

On the other hand, the Rambam in his *Guide of the Perplexed* II, 29 understands that the burden of Babylon is directed at Ashur, with the kingdom of Nevuchadnetzar who arose after Ashur and destroyed Jerusalem being included in the burden of Babylon. The argument is that the prophecy repeats itself over the course of history: "the great and terrible day of the Lord" (*Yoel* 3:4; *Malakhi* 3:23).

### Chizkiyahu's preparation for a revolt with the ascent of Sancheriv

A great question arises: At what stage of his reign did Chizkiyahu become interested in rebelling against Ashur? Clearly, owing to the smallness of the country, it would be impossible to undertake such a significant step against a superpower alone. Thus, Chizkiyahu entered into an alliance with Egypt against the king of Ashur. It is reasonable to assume that this process took shape over the course of many years, and now it became evident when Chizkiyahu joined the rebellion.

The text in II *Melakhim* 18:7-8 indicates that as part of the rebellion against Ashur Chizkiyahu "smote the Pelishtim unto Gaza and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city" (II *Melakhim* 18:8). The Pelishtim always controlled their cities along the Via Maris, and sat in an area that was exceedingly critical for any power that wanted to control the region. Passage along the Via Maris allowed the superpowers to move north and south and thus to draw very near to the rival power against which they were interested in fighting.

Therefore, it is very understandable that Chizkiyahu's strike against the Pelishtim was part of the rebellion against Ashur whose interest it was that the coastal strip and the Via Maris be open to it should it decide to attack Egypt.

Sancheriv's Annals describe how Chizkiyahu brought about an upheaval in Ekron and how the people of Ekron ousted their king who was chained by way of an oath and a curse to Ashur, and handed him over to Chizkiyahu the Jew. It is reasonable to assume that Chizkiyahu also encouraged the nomads of the tribe of Shimon to take control of the area along the Egyptian border in order to replace the Assyrian control with Jewish presence and Egyptian support.

### THE FORTIFICATION And expansion of Jerusalem

A significant part of the preparations for the revolt involved the fortification of Jerusalem. This step was taken in preparation for the possibility of an Assyrian invasion of the kingdom of Yehuda after the fall of the kingdom of Israel. The fortification of the capital city was a very significant step against the Assyrian enemy.

Both the biblical text and archaeological research indicate that Chizkiyahu did two things in this context. First, he expanded the city and fortified it with new walls. Second, he dug out a water channel that would bring water from the spring located outside the city to the Shiloach pool in the southern portion of the City of David, in order to allow the residents of the city easy access to water during a siege.

In the archaeological study of Jerusalem, one of the most fascinating issues that was debated over a very long period relates to the boundaries of the city during the First Temple period. On this question there was a great dispute between those who restricted the city to the Eastern Hill – the City of David and the Temple Mount north of it (from the days of Shelomo and on); and those who understood that over the course of the First Temple period the city of expanded in the direction of the Western Hill.

The boundaries of the Western Hill are the Ben Hinnom valley to the west and to the south, and the middle valley, which became known as the Tyropoeon valley during the Second Temple period, to the east. The boundary to the north is the Transversal valley (the Arav or Tzolev valley) that runs from the area of the Jaffe Gate east along David Street and Shalshelet Street until it meets the Tyropoeon valley. That is to say, this area includes within the walls of Ottoman Jerusalem that which is called the Armenian quarter in the southwest and the Jewish quarter in the southeast, and outside the walls, that which is called today Mount Zion, the southern and western boundaries of which is the Ben Hinnom valley.

The discovery of a wall from the First Temple period in the excavations conducted by Prof. Avigad in the northern part of the Jewish quarter resolved the decades long dispute and proved that the Jerusalem of the eighth century B.C.E. was settled both on the Eastern Hill and on the Western Hill. Prof. Avigad[[3]](#footnote-3) also identified the Western Hill with a suburb found outside the borders of the City of David, the Mishneh – the second quarter. For example, it is reported about Chulda the prophetess, wife of Shalum, keeper of the wardrobe: "Now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the second quarter [Mishneh]" (II *Melakhim* 22:14).

Mishneh means "second quarter," a secondary outgrowth of a mother city. Reference is made to the Mishneh in *Tzefanya*:

And in that day, says the Lord, Hark! A cry from the fish gate, and a wailing from the second quarter [Mishneh], and a great crashing from the hills. Wail, you the inhabitants of the Makhtesh, for all the merchant people are undone; all they that were laden with silver are cut off. (*Tzefanya* 1:10-11)

The fact that people like Chulda the prophetess and her husband who was a high official in the king's court sat in the Mishneh, indicate that this was an upper class residential quarter.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Makhtesh, on the other hand, was probably a commercial and industrial quarter, and it was probably located in the central valley (later known as the Tyropoeon valley).

According to the verses in Nechemya there seems to be a connection or geographic proximity between the fish gate and the second quarter. Among the communal leaders who lived in Jerusalem in the days of Nechemya was "Yehuda the son of Hassenuah over the second city" (*Nechemya* 11:9). It is possible that Yehuda son of Hassenuah was in charge of the quarter's affairs. As we have seen, the second quarter, owing to its size and population, was an important borough in itself, and therefore it merited a minister who was in charge of it.

According to this understanding, the Mishneh was the second quarter in the development of the city, after the ancient core in the City of David, and this explains its name, but it was not secondary in importance. This was a prestigious well-to-do quarter of Jerusalem.

The large area and population of this district earned it a special name and even high-ranking officials, a special city minister and a special priest who were in charge of the people living there. Prof. Avigad compares the process of the city's expansion to similar urban development in our time – when a crowded city is no longer capable of absorbing new residents and people settle outside the city walls in better conditions. This is similar to the process by which the first Jewish neighborhoods were established outside the Old City walls of Jerusalem in the 19th century.

Avigad assumes that the increased and accelerated expansion of biblical Jerusalem over an area several times larger than its original area was caused largely by the influx of refugees coming from the kingdom of Israel in the aftermath of Ashur's conquest of the Shomeron in 721 B.C.E, and after Sancheriv's campaign in 701 B.C.E.

This is an interesting suggestion, even though there is no mention in Scripture of a transfer of the inhabitants of the kingdom of Israel to Yehuda and Jerusalem in the wake of the destruction of the kingdom. Avigad tries to find an allusion to the unification of the city, e.g., in *Tehilim*:

Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem; Jerusalem, you are built as a city that is united together. (*Tehilim* 122:2-3)

At this stage, one wall connects the two parts of the city - the original eastern section, the City of David; and the Mishneh on the Western Hill. This verse can be interpreted differently both with regard to the period and with regard to the location. It may be suggested that King Shelomo, with the construction of the house of the king and the house of God on the heights of the Eastern Hill – the City of David - joined the city of the monarchy of the house of David – the City of David – to the site of the Temple – the site of God's kingdom. This is the meaning of a city that has been united together.

### Dating the wall

The pottery connected to the wall is from the 8th century B.C.E. Prof. Avigad relates to the tombs discovered by Prof. Mazar west of the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount and dated by him to the 8th century B.C.E. The area could not have been surrounded by a wall while it was being used for burial. He therefore assumes that that the city's expansion began at the beginning of the 8th century B.C.E., but the new part of the city was encompassed by a wall only at the end of the 8th century B.C.E.

It is clear from the archaeological excavations that the wall destroys houses that were built during this period. In this context, Avigad cites the words of the prophet Yeshaya:

And you saw the breaches of the city of David, that they were many; and you gathered together the waters of the lower pool. And you numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall; you made also a basin between the two walls for the water of the old pool- but you looked not unto Him that had done this, neither had you respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago. (*Yeshayahu* 22:9-11)

The prophet refers to Chizkiyahu's preparations for the imminent danger presented by Ashur and the fear of a siege by Sancheriv.

Scripture in *Divrei ha-Yamim* relates to the defensive measures taken by Chizkiyahu in Jerusalem, mentioning among other things the construction of a wall: "And he took courage, and built up all the wall that was broken down, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and strengthened Milo in the City of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 32:5). It is reasonable to assume that "the wall that was broken down" refers to the wall that was breached in the days of Amatzyahu king of Yehuda by Yoash king of Israel: "And he [Yoash] broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Efrayim unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits" (II *Melakhim* 14:13). According to the names of the gates, we appear to be dealing with the northern wall of the city, its length being four hundred cubits. In *Divrei ha-Yamim* it is stated: "Moreover Uziyahu built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the Turning, and fortified them" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:9). That is to say, he built towers, but there is no mention of the building of a wall. Only in the days of Chizkiyahu was this breach in the northern wall of the city closed. Avigad identifies this wall with the "broad wall" mentioned in *Nechemya*: "And they restored Jerusalem even unto the broad wall" (*Nechemya* 3:8), in the description of the restoration of the wall of Jerusalem from the end of the First Temple period. This identification is based on the broad width of the wall – 7 meters, and on the topographical reality and the need to circumvent a small wadi that leads into the Arav valley.

Two lines of wall adjacent one to the other were found there. This situation accords precisely with the verses in *Divrei ha-Yamim* according to which the breached wall was built and outside it another wall was erected. In addition to the broad wall in the northern part of the Western Hill, another wall was uncovered to the east of the ancient wall of the City of David that is also dated to the 8th century B.C.E. This wall expands the area of the City of David to the east. This can also be assigned to the period of Chizkiyahu. This wall creates an expanse referred to in Scripture as "between the two walls." For example, regarding King Tzidkiyahu's flight from Jerusalem it says: "Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war [fled] by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden - now the Chaldeans were against the city round about - and the king went by the way of the Arava" (II *Melakhim* 25:4)

If we attribute the two walls, the one in the northern part of the Western Hill, and the other east of the wall of the City of David, to the days of Chizkiyahu, we would then be dealing with a very significant expansion and fortification of the city of Jerusalem. The assumption is that these actions were meant to prepare Jerusalem for the possibility that the army of Ashur would invade the kingdom of Yehuda and lay siege to Jerusalem.

When Chizkiyahu joins Egypt in an alliance against Ashur, he takes into account the possibility that this step might have many significant ramifications for the kingdom, and he prepares for the day after.

In the next *shiur* we will continue our examination of the reign of Chizkiyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. This issue is discussed at length by Rabbis Yoel Bin-Nun and Beni Lau in their book *Yeshayahu ke-Tziporim Afot* in the chapter dealing with the conquest of Babylon and the death of Sargon. We have summarized their position in concise manner. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In his book *Toledot ha-Emuna ha-Yisre'elit*, III, p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In his book, *Ha-Ir ha-Elyona shel Yerushalayim*, pp. 54-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Our opinion accords with that of Dr. Barkai in his article: "*Ha-Mishneh Rova Amidim shel Yerushalayim be-Shilhei Yemei ha-Bayit ha-Rishon*, *Mechkerei Yehuda ve-Shomeron* 9, pp. 57ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)