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 319: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CXXIX) – The Prohibition of Bamot (CV)**

### Supplying water to the city during the Siege

In the previous *shiur* we expanded upon the expansion and fortification of Jerusalem as part of Chizkiyahu's preparations for the revolt against Ashur. A second element in the fortification of Jerusalem involved ensuring a convenient water supply for the residents of the city in the event of a siege.

Generally speaking, the springs that constitute the primary water source of a city flow through the bed of a stream. The walls of the city are usually built about a third of the way up the slope of the hill that descends to the stream, in order to retain control from within the walls over the area outside the city. Clearly a city cannot survive during a siege without water. Water was stored in private water cisterns, in the courtyards of houses, and in public pools.

In dry years, the primary source of water for the residents of a city was a spring that flowed outside the city walls. Thus, in ancient cities in Eretz Israel, great efforts were made to ensure the supply of water to the city during a siege.

Different methods were developed. The ancients were very knowledgeable about the quality of the rocks in their environment. They knew that deep in the ground there is a layer of rock that is impervious to water, and therefore some of the ancient waterworks involved digging shafts or tunnels inside the city in order to reach the level of groundwater (thus, for example, in the cities of Chatzor and Gezer). In other places they dug underground tunnels from the spring into the city, while, on the one hand, concealing the source of the water outside the city, and, other hand, creating a convenient way for the residents to access the water (by means of stairs, passageways, drawing water through shafts or the like).

It seems that King Chizkiyahu as well prepared the city of Jerusalem for the possibility of an Assyrian siege, and took steps to ensure a steady supply of water to the city should such a siege materialize. The verses in both *Melakhim* and *Divrei ha-Yamim* note his actions with regard to water in the sections in which they summarize Chizkiyahu's reign. This in itself is exceedingly significant and attests to the importance that the prophets attached to these works.

In *Melakhim*:

Now the rest of the acts of Chizkiyahu, and all his might, and how he made the pool, and the conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Yehuda. (II *Melakhim* 20:20)

And in *Divrei ha-Yamim* it says:

This same Chizkiyahu also stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gichon, and brought them straight down on the west side of the City of David. And Chizkiyahu prospered in all his works. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 32:30)

From these two sources we learn the following:

The king directed the water into the city. He built a pool and a conduit. He stopped the upper spring of the waters of the Gichon, and brought them straight down on the west side of the City of David.

The king prospered in everything that he did. In addition, it is stated in *Divrei ha-Yamim*: "So there was gathered much people together, and they stopped all the fountains, and the brook that flowed through the midst of the land, saying: Why should the kings of Ashur come, and find much water?" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 32:4). On the face of it, this verse implies that not only was the upper spring of the Gichon stopped, but rather all the fountains and the brook that flowed through the midst of the land were also stopped. In addition, the verse explains the reason for these measures – in order to withhold this water that was found outside the city walls from the kings of Ashur who were liable to lay siege on Jerusalem.

Let us try to explain Chizkiyahu's enterprise. Stopping the springs outside the city – "the upper spring of the waters of Gichon," "the brook that flowed through the midst of the land," "the fountains"; the reference might be to additional fountains or water sources located close to the city. For example, south of the City of David there is a place called Ein Rogel, today called Bir Ayub. Today it is a well. Was it once a spring and then at some later stage it turned into a well?

In any event we are dealing with a source of fresh water close to the city, south of it, south of the place where the Ben Hinnom valley meets the Kidron valley. The verse may be referring to water pools, cisterns or reservoirs that were built over the years outside the city.

### What is the "upper spring of the waters of Gichon"?

The Gichon spring has been clearly identified at the foot of the City of David, east of the city, in the Kidron Valley. But what is the "upper spring of the waters of Gichon"?

It might be that when the water was conducted to the city, the waters of the Gichon spring were diverted from their original source to the east of the City of David to the southern part of the city through a tunnel. Thus, in practice, the waters of the Gichon flowed from the southern end of the tunnel. While the place from which the waters of the Gichon had originally flowed was still called "the upper spring of the waters of the Gichon," the place where they encountered the water in the southern part of the city was called the lower Gichon.

In several places, *Chazal* mention the Shiloach spring.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Shiloach is identified in the area of the end of the tunnel, towards which the waters of the Gichon were directed. It is interesting to note that Targum Yonatan renders Gichon as Shilocha/Shiloach, and therefore it is very reasonable to suggest that the upper spring of the waters of the Gichon is the original source of the Gichon spring, access to which from the outside was now cut off.

### What is "the brook that flowed through the midst of the land"?

The argument is that before the digging of the tunnel, the spring water flowed freely southward into the Kidron Valley, and only when the water was redirected into the city through the tunnel did the water stop flowing into the Kidron Valley. According to this understanding, the redirection of the water into the city by way of the tunnel diverted the water from its regular flow into the Kidron Valley, the direct result of which was the stoppage of "the brook that flowed through the midst of the land."

Another possible understanding of the matter is that already in the time of the Patriarchs (the Middle Bronze Age) a water channel was dug from the Gichon spring that brought water to the southern end of the City of David – the Shiloach pool, and along the length of the channel there were several openings. According to some opinions these openings were essentially windows in the tunnel through which it was possible to irrigate agricultural plots in the Kidron Valley. Since the course of this channel in some places was outside the city wall, it may have been called "the brook that flowed through the midst of the land," and its irrigation openings may have been called "fountains."

In any event, these measures were designed to prevent the water from reaching the kings of Ashur. Let us now examine Chizkiyahu's actions that were meant to bring the water into the city. Scripture refers to a "conduit" and to a "pool."

### What is the conduit?

The conduit is conventionally identified with the project called Chizkiyahu's Tunnel – from the Gichon spring to the east of the City of David to the pool at the southern tip of the city. The tunnel is 513 meters longs (320 meters as the crow flies). According to the opposite directions of digging it can be determined that this tunnel was hewn by two sets of workers, one starting at the spring in the north, and the other at the pool in the south. It is also possible to point to the place where the two groups met. Some explain the tunnel's convoluted course as stemming from the nature of the rocks that had to be removed or from a natural crack along which the tunnel was dug. Near the southern end, an inscription in ancient Hebrew script engraved on the wall of the tunnel was discovered in 1880. The inscription describes how the tunnel was dug out from the two ends until the diggers met in the middle. The very meeting of the two groups 2700 years ago teaches us how skilled the ancients were in digging in rock, that they found the way to meet in the depths of the earth.

### What is the pool?

The simple understanding is that we are dealing with the pool located at the southern tip of the City of David. This pool is called the El Chamra pool, and it is identified with 'the Shelach pool by the king's garden." This is what the pool is called in the description of Nechemya's restoration of the walls that had been built at the end of the First Temple period. This is what we read in *Nechemya*:

And the fountain gate repaired Shalun the son of Kol Chozeh, the ruler of the district of Mitzpa; he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the bolts thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Shelach by the king's garden, even unto the stairs that go down from the city of David. (*Nechemya* 3:15)

According to both the context in the description of the wall as a whole, and the things that are mentioned near the pool, this pool in the southern portion of the city can be identified with the Shiloach pool. So too in the earlier account of Nechemya's night tour: "Then I went on to the fountain gate and to the king's pool; but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass" (*Nechemya* 2:14).

The prophet Yeshayahu refers to pools in two places. In chapter 22:

And you saw the breaches of the city of David, that they were many; and you gathered together the water 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)

It is very reasonable to explain the "gathering of the water of the lower pool" as we explained above, that the water was collected in the lower pool so that there would be plenty of water for the residents of the city in the event of a siege. It is logical to identify this pool with the Shiloach pool in the king's garden in the southern portion of the City of David.

In chapter 7, the prophet is commanded to go out to meet Achaz together with his son She'ar Yashuv: "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, in the highway of the fullers' field" (*Yeshayahu* 7:3). It may be suggested that the upper pool was located along the upper, more northern, part of the stream, while the lower pool was found at the lower, southern end. Our suggestion is that along the middle stream – the Tyropoeon valley, or the Valley of the Cheesemakers, as it was known in the Second Temple period – in the northern portion was found the upper pool,[[2]](#footnote-2) and at the southern end of the City of David, where the middle stream meets the Kidron valley, was found the lower pool.

As for verse 11: "You made also a basin between the two walls for the water of the old pool," it is possible to identify this basin with high certainty with the Shiloach pool by the king's garden. There was a pool there that was called "the old pool." This old pool became "a basin between the two walls," the reference being to the two eastern walls of the City of David at their southern end. Here the prophet rebukes the king and the people for trusting in the power of their weapons rather than in God's help.

In *Pesachim* 4:9, this incident is listed among the things regarding which the Sages did not agree with Chizkiyahu – that he stopped the water of the upper pool. Rashi in *Pesachim* explains: "He should have trusted in the Holy One, blessed is He, who said: 'For I will defend this city to save it' (II *Melakhim* 19:34; *Yeshayahu* 37:35)" (Rashi, *Pesachim* 56a).

On the other hand, in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, this incident is listed among Chizkiyahu's doings that earned God's approval:

As it is stated: "This same Chizkiyahu also stopped… and Chizkiyahu prospered in all his works." (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 32:37)

The contradiction between these two sources can be explained as follows. The Mishna in *Pesachim*:The Sages did not agree with the king's action because the king did not consult with a prophet or try to determine God's wishes regarding the issue. This understanding accords with the words of the prophet Yeshayahu cited earlier: "But you looked not unto Him that had done this, neither had you respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago." This reservation also includes the covenant with Egypt – which Chizkiyahu entered into in sharp opposition to the prophet's opinion – as well as the fortifications made in Jerusalem without asking the prophet.

*Avot de-Rabbi Natan* relates to Jerusalem's fortification in itself, to the fact that following Chizkiyahu's actions Jerusalem was properly fortified, and this earned God's approval.

We expanded somewhat on Chizkiyahu's activity in Jerusalem in order to explain that his participation in the revolt against Ashur and his alliance with Egypt were accompanied by military and state preparations to strengthen, fortify and expand the capital city, by building walls and by ensuring a steady water supply for the city in the event of a siege, and keeping it from Ashur.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. For example, in connection with the water libation on Sukkot: "How was the water libation [performed]? A golden flagon holding three logs was filled from the Shiloach" (*Sukkot* 4:9). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Perhaps in the area of the Struthion Pool northwest of the Temple Mount. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)