YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture 325: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CXXXV) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXI)**

In the previous *shiur* we discussed Sancheriv's campaign in the plain of Yehuda and Chizkiyahu's surrender to him, which involved the payment of a heavy tax from the treasures of the house of God. It stands to reason that this levy did not satisfy Sancheriv. He also wanted to conquer and subjugate Jerusalem, as was the customary practice in parallel wars in other countries, where the conquest of the capital city symbolized the surrender of the conquered kingdom.

### Campaign from the north

Paralleling the account of Sancheriv's campaign in the plain of Yehuda and his conquest of various cities, the prophet Yeshaya appears to describe another campaign from another direction. He mentions various cities in the tribal territory of Binyamin, north of Jerusalem and in close proximity to it, from the Jordan Valley to the eastern portion of Binyamin's territory and from there to the main road coming from the north near Rama. The prophet does not attribute this campaign to a particular king or to a specified period of time. There are grounds for assigning the prophecy to the days of Sancheriv and trying to understand the relationship between it and the campaign in the plain of Yehuda. The prophet Yeshayahu says as follows:

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts: O My people that dwells in Zion, be not afraid of Ashur, though he smite you with the rod, and lift up his staff against you, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall be accomplished, and Mine anger shall be to their destruction. And the Lord of hosts shall stir up against him a scourge, as in the slaughter of Midyan at the Rock of Orev; and as His rod was over the sea, so shall He lift it up after the manner of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall depart from off your shoulder, and his yoke from off your neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed by reason of fatness. He is come to Ayat, he is passed through Migron; at Michmas he lays up his baggage; they are gone over the pass; they have taken up their lodging at Geva; voice, O daughter of Gallim! Hearken, O Layish! O you poor Anatot! Madmena is in mad flight; the inhabitants of Gevim flee to cover. This very day shall he halt at Nov, shaking his hand at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.

Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, shall lop the boughs with terror; and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the lofty shall be laid low. And He shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one. (*Yeshayahu* 10:24-34)

Prof. Mazar[[1]](#footnote-1) considered identifying this campaign with Assyrian battalions coming from the Shomeron. It is reasonable to assume that Sancheriv's army planned to invade the kingdom of Yehuda from both sides. On the one hand, along the coast and the plain of Yehuda, in the region of Peleshet, in order to neutralize any threat from the Egyptian army that would likely advance from Egypt toward Gaza. On the other hand, there was an interest in conquering Jerusalem itself, the capital city. Indeed, the cities mentioned in the campaign are located north and northeast of Jerusalem. They include: Ai, Migron, Michmash, Geva, Ramah, Giv'at Shaul, Layish, Anatot and Nov.

Nov is mentioned as the city closest to Jerusalem, from where the army of Ashur raises its hand against Jerusalem and threatens it. The city of Nov has been identified near Jerusalem and to its north. Some have suggested that Nov be identified with Tel Shu'afat. Others identify it with Mount Scopus.

Paralleling the troops of Ashur coming from the north, Sancheriv, king of Ashur, sends a distinguished delegation to Jerusalem, composed of the most senior ministers of the kingdom, amid a heavy military presence, as Scripture attests:

And the king of Ashur sent Tartan and Rav-Saris and Rav Shakeh from Lachish to the king, Chizkiyahu, with a great army into Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they were come up, they came and stood by the channel of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the launderers' field. (II *Melakhim* 18:17)

It stands to reason that after Sancheriv received from Chizkiyahu the gold and silver that he had cast upon him, this did not satisfy him, and he decided to do away with the kingdom of Yehuda and demand from Chizkiyahu full surrender and opening the gates of Jerusalem before him.

Among the roles listed in Scripture, Tartan is the title given to the chief commander in the army of Ashur (in Assyrian inscriptions he is usually listed second to the king); Rav-Saris is the title of the head of the eunuchs, one of the most distinguished positions in the Assyrian kingdom; Ravshakeh is also the title of a senior minister in the Assyrian kingdom.[[2]](#footnote-2) His ability to speak Hebrew seems to have turned him into a spokesman for the entire kingdom, even though here he is listed third.

### the Channel of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the Launderers' field

The delegation reaches a place in Jerusalem known as "the channel of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the launderers' field." It is very reasonable to assume that we should search for this place on the northern side of the city:

The designation "upper pool" assumes that there is also a "lower pool." Such a pool is mentioned by the prophet:

And you saw the breaches of the city of David, that they were many; and you gathered together the waters of the lower pool. (*Yeshayahu* 22:9)

It is reasonable to say that the upper and lower pool are two pools in the same stream, one located in a topographically higher place and one in a lower place. Based on the context of *Yeshayahu* 22:9, the lower pool should be identified in the southern end of the City of David with today's Shiloach Pool.

According to this proposal, the lower pool is located in the "central valley," known in the days of the Second Temple as the Tyropoeon Valley – the Valley of the Cheesemakers, that runs from north of the Damascus Gate, through Ha-Gai Street in the Old City, the Givati parking lot, and continuing southward until the Shiloach Pool in the south. This valley which divided the ancient city into two hills, the eastern hill, at the north of which was the Temple Mount, and at the south of which was the City of David, and the western hill, which included the Jewish and Armenian quarters inside the Old City and Mount Zion, south of it. The approximate location of the upper pool is to the north of the Old City.

The upper pool is already mentioned in the days of King Achaz, when the king of Aram and Pekach ben Remalyahu, the king of Israel, waged war against Jerusalem (*Yeshayahu* 7:1). There the prophet is commanded to leave the city. It is believed that the pool was in the northern part of the city, because the main streams of the city flow southward. So too the verses imply that the beginning of the channel was in speaking distance of the walls of the city.

A channel apparently went out from that pool southward toward the city.

### The camp of ashur

 Josephus, in his account of the Roman siege of the city of Jerusalem at the end of the Second Temple period, twice mentions by name the camp of Ashur, which apparently relates to the Assyrian camp established by the great army that came to Jerusalem along with the senior delegation in the days of King Sancheriv. The very fact that it is mentioned by Josephus indicates how important the place was in its day, and how its location was remembered and preserved centuries later.

 The following conclusions follow from the two mentions of the "camp of Ashur" in the writings of Josephus:

 It is clear to all that his description of the Roman siege at the end of the Second Temple period includes the three walls of the city: the northernmost wall, the third wall, runs about six hundred meters north of the northern Ottoman wall of the present-day city. From the Russian Compound in the northwest through the American consulate on Damascus Road to the Damascus Gate and until the northeastern corner north of the Rockefeller Museum.

 From the first mention it may be concluded that the camp of Ashur was between the third wall and the second wall, within or without the range of arrows shot from the second wall, that is to say, at a distance of 100-400 meters from it, and not at the northeastern corner because an expanse of land separated between the camp and the Kidron Valley. The northern section of the second wall runs, apparently, in the area of today's Damascus Gate.

The point of reference close to the Assyrian camp is "Herod's tomb." This tomb is commonly identified today with the remains of a magnificent building from that period, apparently a mausoleum located north of the present-day Damascus Gate. Prior to this discovery, it was thought that the Assyrian camp was located northwest of the city in the vicinity of the modern-day Russian Compound. In the wake of this proposed identification, the Assyrian camp should apparently be located to the east of this tomb, on the northeastern hill several hundred meters north of Mount Moriya.

Military logic dictates that the great army that arrived in Jerusalem camped outside the ancient walls of the city, and that it established a military camp there, as the Assyria army used to do during its military campaigns. Such a camp is portrayed in the Assyrian reliefs that document the conquest of Lachish in the days of Sancheriv. As for the location of the Assyrian camp, tactical considerations dictate that the camp be located:

1. Near the place where the primary attack to breach the wall was planned to take place.

2. Close to the city, but outside the firing range of the city's defenders.

3. In a place where the camp will not be at a lower altitude than the wall.

4. In a relatively wide and flat area where the task force and its service units could be set up.

With respect to the considerations for the location of the original Assyrian camp where the great army that had arrived in Jerusalem could be stationed, two hills north of the city accord with the requirements, the northwestern hill and the northeastern hill. Based on what we have seen, it is very likely that "the Ascamp of Ashur" from the end of the Second Temple period was located on the northeastern hill, northwest of the Damascus Gate, perhaps in the area of the A-Sahira cemetery.

It is also reasonable to assume that when Titus came to conquer Jerusalem, he chose to place his forces in the same place after he succeeded in breaching the third wall.

There may be an additional consideration to locate the camp on the northeastern hill, and not on the northwestern hill, despite the fact that the latter is higher and wider. On the northeastern hill, the Assyrian army would stand opposite the royal acropolis, opposite the house of God and the house of the king, and this location would pose a more direct threat to the governmental center, the palace of King Chizkiyahu who had rebelled against Ashur, and this place would be more appropriate for negotiations with Chizkiyahu's army.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The disadvantage of the proposed location of the Assyrian camp on the northeastern hill is the fact that the site is relatively low which would make breaching the city walls more difficult. Some scholars, therefore, maintain that it is far more logical to locate the camp on the northwestern hill, with its topographical domination over the likely route that would advance the army to the house of God and the house of the king.[[4]](#footnote-4)

### Proposed identifications of the location of the channel of the upper pool

On the assumption that there is a connection between the Assyrian camp and the channel of the upper pool, there are three different proposals for the location of the channel of the upper pool. We will consider the proposals from east to west. All the proposals assume that the channel of the upper pool is located north of the ancient city.

1. The eastern proposal

One proposed site of the channel of the upper pool is in the northeast, very close to the present-day Lion's Gate (Santa Anna), where we find a dam that forms a pool carved in the riverbed that descends from the Flower Gate to the northeastern portion of the Temple Mount. The water that collects in that pool can flow to the south along graduated steps. The archaeological finds that were found there are dated to the end of the First Temple period. The proponents of the eastern site base their position on the phrase, "the highway of the launderers' field," for Josephus describes a site to the northeast of the city, near the third wall, and north of the present-day Rockefeller Museum, as the monument of the launderers. It should be noted that the site is located outside the ancient city wall, but close enough that people on the wall would have been able to hear what was shouted from there.[[5]](#footnote-5)

2. The middle proposal

 The second proposed site is also in the north but more to the west. In this riverbed, which descends to the south from the Damascus Gate toward the Temple Mount and the City of David, and was known in the days of the Second Temple as the Tyropoeon Valley (the Valley of the Cheesemakers), a water tunnel was discovered that enters the northwestern portion of Moriya. Some date this tunnel to the First Temple period. At a later date, at the end of the Second Temple period, a pool was carved out in the riverbed, called Satrotion (which means a small bird in Greek). Today these finds are in the northern part of the "Kotel tunnels," south of the Monastery of the Sisters of Zion, near the northwestern corner of the Temple Mount. It is possible that at this site there was a pool already in the time of the First Temple, which can be identified with the lower pool that is mentioned in *Yeshayahu* 22:9.[[6]](#footnote-6)

3. The western proposal

This proposal locates the upper pool in the area of Chizkiyahu's pool in the Christian quarter of the Old City, with the channel of the upper pool running from the Mamilla pool to the east, and alongside it there was a dirt road that can be identified with the "highway of the launderers' field." In contrast to the eastern and the middle proposals, according to which the Assyrian camp was located on the northeastern hill, according to the western proposal, the Assyrian camp was set up on the northwestern hill. This proposal is supported by, among other things, findings uncovered in the excavations led by David Amit in the Mamilla compound, which include the remnants of a water tunnel and a paved dirt road, both of which are dated to the end of the First Temple period.[[7]](#footnote-7)

As stated, according to all three proposals, the location in close proximity to the Assyrian camp would have allowed those standing on the wall to hear the words that were shouted from there.

Of the three proposals, we are most convinced by the middle proposal, principally based on the understanding that the upper and lower pools refer to pools located in the same stream (the "middle stream" – the Tyropoeon - the Valley of the Cheesemakers of the Second Temple period), the one being located in a topographically higher place (the upper, more northern, pool), and the other being found in a topographically lower place (the lower pool, at the southern tip of the City of David). We have attached to this *shiur* a map which includes the three proposed sites of the channel of the upper pool.

In this *shiur* we dealt with the Assyrian campaign that arrived from the north, and with the location of the Assyrian camp and the channel of the upper pool. In the next *shiur* we will discuss the words of Ravshakeh to those defending the walls of Jerusalem and their significance.

(Translated by David Strauss)



1. B. Mazar, *Masa Sancheriv*, in *Historiyah Tzeva'it shel Eretz Israel*, Jerusalem 1964, p. 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The word Ravshakeh means chief butler in Akkadian. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Thus far we have brought the justifications for the location of the Assyrian camp based on the position of David Ussishkin, as they were analyzed in his article, "*Mif'alei ha-Mayim shel Yerushalayim bi-Yemei Chizkiyahu*," *Katedra* 70, pp. 3-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This is the position of David Amit in his article, "*Aspakat ha-Mayim le-Ir ha-Elyona bi-Yemei ha-Bayit ha-Rishon u-bi-Yemei ha-Bayit ha-Sheni le-Or ha-Chafirot sheleyad Bereikhat Mamilla*," *Chiddushim be-Archiologiya shel Yerushalayim u-Sevivoteha* 3, pp. 94-108. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This position is supported by Dan Bahat in his article, "*Ta'alat ha-Bereikha ha-Elyona u-Mikumah*," *Eretz Israel* 1989, pp. 253-255. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This position was presented by David Ussishkin in the article mentioned in note 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This position was supported by David Amit as is explained in his article mentioned in note 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)