YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**MIKDASH**

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**Lecture 332: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CXLII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (CXVIII)**

In this *shiur* we will begin to examine the reign of King Menasheh.

### The description Of Menasheh's reign in the Book of *Melakhim* and in The other Books of the Prophets

The book of *Melakhim* describes the reign of Menasheh and judges it in an exceedingly harsh manner:

Menasheh was twelve years old when he began to reign; and he reigned five and fifty years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Cheftzi-Ba. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the nations, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. For he built again the high places which Chizkiyahu his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Ba'al, and made an Ashera, as did Achav king of Israel, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of the Lord, whereof the Lord said: In Jerusalem will I put My name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. And he made his son to pass through the fire, and practiced soothsaying, and used enchantments, and appointed them that divined by a ghost or a familiar spirit: he wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him. And he set the graven image of Ashera, that he had made, in the house of which the Lord said to David and to Shelomo his son: In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put My name for ever; neither will I cause the feet of Israel to wander any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; if only they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moshe commanded them. But they hearkened not; and Menasheh seduced them to do that which is evil more than did the nations, whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel. And the Lord spoke by His servants the prophets, saying: Because Menasheh king of Yehuda has done these abominations, and has done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, that were before him, and has made Yehuda also to sin with his idols. 

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Behold, I bring such evil upon Jerusalem and Yehuda, that whoever hears of it, both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Shomeron, and the plummet of the house of Achav; and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. And I will cast off the remnant of My inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; because they have done that which is evil in My sight, and have provoked Me, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even to this day. Moreover Menasheh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Yehuda to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Now the rest of the acts of Menasheh, and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Yehuda. And Menasheh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uza; and Amon his son reigned in his stead. (II *Melakhim* 21:1-18)

Scripture enumerates Menasheh's sins:

1. He rebuilt the *bamot* that had been destroyed by his father Chizkiyahu.
2. Idol worship – he erected altars to Ba'al, and made an Ashera.
3. He built altars to all of the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of God. That is to say, not only was idol worship renewed throughout the kingdom, but it was found even in the courts of the house of God themselves. In addition, Scripture attests that he set up the Ashera in the house of God.
4. He reintroduced the service of Molekh and passed his own son through the fire, and he also practiced soothsaying, used enchantments, and appointed those who divine by way of a ghost or a familiar spirit.
5. In addition, he shed innocent blood.

Menasheh's actions continue in great measure the actions of his grandfather Achaz, who also introduced idol worship into the house of God, and was the first to worship the Molekh in Jerusalem.

This reality raises a question regarding the influence of his father Chizkiyahu on his actions: Did the revolution wrought by Chizkiyahu have an effect on his son Menasheh? The answer is an outright no. To a great degree, Menasheh behaved in a manner opposite that of his father Chizkiyahu. Whereas Chizkiyahu tried to be like David and Shelomo in many of his actions, both on the national level and on the religious level, through the eradication of idol worship, the dedication of the house of God, and the bringing of the Paschal offering together with representatives of the kingdom of Israel; Menasheh, in his deeds, in the spiritual field and in everything connected to service in the Temple and observance of the *mitzvot,* denied and uprooted all faith in God and brought in to the house of God itself components of actual idol worship.

Scripture implies that Menasheh's actions led to the negation of the selection of Jerusalem:

And he set the graven image of Ashera, that he had made, in the house of which the Lord said to David and to Shelomo his son: In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put My name for ever. (II *Melakhim* 21:7)

The Divine selection of Jerusalem that took place in the days of David and Shelomo ends, as it were, here. As it were, the great severity of Menasheh's actions led to the negation of God's direct connection to Jerusalem as the city that He chose to put His name in forever.

In addition, there is once again an explicit prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, comparing what will happen there to what already happened in the Shomeron:

And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Shomeron, and the plummet of the house of Achav; and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. (II *Melakhim* 21:12)

While the first prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, the prophecy of Mikha, was delivered in the wake of the moral corruption of the kingdom's leadership, here the prophecy appears to have been said against the background of idol worship in general and in the house of God in particular (even though mention is later made of bloodshed). Thus, it turns out that one generation after the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem, there is a new prophecy concerning the destruction of the city.

Scripture refers directly to the responsibility borne by King Menasheh himself: "Because Menasheh king of Yehuda has done these abominations, and has done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, that were before him, and has made Yehuda also to sin with his idols" (II *Melakhim* 21:11). But in the continuation it says: "Because they have done that which is evil in My sight, and have provoked Me, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even to this day" (II *Melakhim* 21:15) - all the people share the responsibility.

Was it Menasheh who influenced the entire nation through his personal example of wrongdoing? Or did all the people on their own choose to do all the evil deeds that he did? We do not know the answer to this question, but it is clear that the entire kingdom, the king and the common people, all sinned, and therefore the prophecy of destruction relates to the entire kingdom.

A very interesting formulation is used here: "And the Lord spoke [*vayedaber*]by His servants the prophets, saying" (II *Melakhim* 21:10). The phrase "and the Lord spoke" is common in the Torah, but not in the books of the Prophets. In the parallel verse in *Divrei ha-Yamim* it says: "And the Lord spoke to Menasheh, and to his people; but they gave no heed" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 33:10). Similarly in the summation of Menasheh's reign in *Divrei ha-Yamim* it says: "Now the rest of the acts of Menasheh, and his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers that spoke to him in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, behold, they are written among the acts of the kings of Israel" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 33:18). From here it is clear that several prophets prophesied to Menasheh.

The Radak (II *Melakhim* 21:10) cites the author of *Seder Olam Rabba* in chapter 20, who says that the prophets Yoel, Nachum and Chabakuk prophesied during the days of Menasheh, but because Menasheh was not a fit king, they were not associated with his name.

In any event, despite the prophetic revelation to Menasheh by way of a number of prophets, he did not listen to them, but instead committed exceedingly serious offenses, which were the major cause of the destruction of the city and of the house of God.

### Bloodshed

The text emphasizes: "Moreover Menasheh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Yehuda to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (II *Melakhim* 21:16). It is possible that the prophet Yirmeyahu relates to the actions of King Menasheh:

Why will you contend with Me? You all have transgressed against Me, says the Lord. In vain have I smitten your children, they received no correction; your sword has devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion. (*Yirmeyahu* 2:29-30)

Scripture refers once again to Menasheh's actions relating to bloodshed in a description of the days of Yehoyakim:

Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Yehuda, to remove them out of His sight, for the sins of Menasheh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and the Lord would not pardon. (II *Melakhim* 24:3-4)

Scripture refers to the sin of bloodshed as one of the major reasons for the destruction of the First Temple and the city of Jerusalem. The Rambam writes regarding the severity of this transgression:

Although there are other sins that are more serious than murder, they do not present as serious a danger to society as murder does. Even idol worship - and needless to say, incest or the violation of the Sabbath - are not considered as severe as murder. For these sins involve man's relationship with God, while murder also involves man's relationship with his fellow man. Whoever commits this sin is an utterly wicked person. All the *mitzvot* that he performs throughout his lifetime cannot outweigh this sin and save him from judgment. (*Hilkhot Rotze'ach u-Shemirat ha-Nefesh* 4:9)

In addition to the mass killing of innocent people, Yirmeyahu speaks of the killing of prophets. *Chazal* even expounded (*Yevamot* 49b; *Sanhedrin* 101b) that Menasheh killed Yeshayahu.[[1]](#footnote-1)

### The exile to Ashur and Repentance

The parallel account in *Divrei ha-Yamim* adds several fundamental issues regarding the period and person of Menasheh:

And the Lord spoke to Menasheh, and to his people; but they gave no heed. Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Ashur, who took Menasheh with hooks, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in distress, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And he prayed to Him; and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Menasheh knew that the Lord He was God. Now after this he built an outer wall to the city of David, on the west side of Gichon, in the valley, even to the entrance at the fish gate; and he compassed about Ofel, and raised it up a very great height; and he put captains of the army in all the fortified cities of Yehuda. And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he built up the altar of the Lord, and offered thereon sacrifices of peace-offerings and of thanksgiving, and commanded Yehuda to serve the Lord, the God of Israel. Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, but only to the Lord their God. Now the rest of the acts of Menasheh, and his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers that spoke to him in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, behold, they are written among the acts of the kings of Israel. His prayer also, and how [God] was entreated of him, and all his sin and his transgression, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up the Asherim and the graven images, before he humbled himself; behold, they are written in the history of the seers. So Menasheh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house; and Amon his son reigned in his stead. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 33:10-20)

First Scripture uses a formulation that is found primarily in the Torah, but is rare in the books of the Prophets: "And the Lord spoke to Menasheh, and to his people; but they gave no heed" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 33:10). That is to say, we have here a Divine statement that God communicated by way of His servants the prophets to Menasheh and the people, but they did not listen.

The verse emphasizes that it was God who brought the captains of the host of the king of Ashur who captured Menasheh and brought him to Babylon. Scripture does not relate to the details of the incident, its reasons, precise date, or context.

It is possible that in the days of the kings who ruled in Ashur after Sancheriv, when the Assyrian empire was at the height of its power and expansion, there were fights throughout the empire against Ashur, and Menasheh was suspected of involvement in such a rebellion or even of being an ally of Egypt or of Babylon against Ashur. The author of *Seder Olam Rabba* in chapter 23 says that this incident took place in the twenty-second year of Menasheh's reign.

It turns out that the king of Ashur sometimes sat in Babylon as well. King Menasheh's exile specifically to that place is apparently the beginning of the fulfillment of Yeshayahu's prophecy to Chizkiyahu: "And of your sons that shall issue from you, whom you shall beget, shall they take away; and they shall be officers in the palace of the king of Babylon" (*Yeshayahu* 39:7).

According to the verses, it seems that Menasheh underwent much torture, following which he pleaded with God in prayer and supplication. God heard Menasheh's prayer and brought him back to Jerusalem, and "then Menasheh knew that the Lord He was God." This formulation is similar to what was said by the people who had assembled at Mount Carmel:

And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said: The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God. (I *Melakhim* 18:39)

Here Scripture notes that Menasheh repented, a process that included the removal of the alien gods and the statue from the house of God, and the removal of all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of God and in Jerusalem and casting them outside the city.

The king does not content himself with deeds that come to repair his sins. Rather he turns to the entire kingdom of Yehuda and commands the people to serve God. On the other hand he does not remove the *bamot*; after Chizkiyahu had removed all of the *bamot* in his kingdom, the people once again go back to offering sacrifices to God at the *bamot.*

### The idol worship of the people

On the one hand, according to the book of *Melakhim*, there is no mention of Menasheh's being taken to Babylon, his return to his kingdom, and his great repentance. On the other hand, according to *Divrei ha-Yamim*, Menasheh was taken to Babylon, then returned to his kingdom, where he returned to God and repaired all of his actions, while eradicating the idol worship that he had introduced into Jerusalem and the house of God.

It is interesting that the Tannaim disagree about whether Menasheh has a portion in the World-to-Come. The Mishna in *Sanhedrin* (10b) lists Menasheh among the three kings and four ordinary people who do not have a portion in the World-to-Come, whereas Rabbi Yehuda maintains that he has a portion in the World-to-Come. Those who disagree with him argued that, according to our chapter in *Divrei ha-Yamim*, Menasheh was returned to his kingdom, but he was not returned to life in the World-to-Come (*Tosefta Sanhedrin,* end of chapter 12).

In principle, it is possible to argue that the dispute depends on the question of whether Menasheh repented, as is described in *Divrei* *ha-Yamim*, or not, as is described in *Melakhim*. Among the Amoraim, there is one who says that whoever says that Menasheh has no part in the World-to-Come, weakens the hands of penitent sinners (*Sanhedrin* 103b).

It is clear that Menasheh's actions were extremely grave. The Gemara in *Zevachim* 61b says that Menasheh and his actions caused the removal of the fire that had descended from heaven to the altar. As the Midrash puts it: "When Menasheh set up an image in the Sanctuary, the *Shekhina* removed itself" (*Yalkut ha-Mekhiri* to *Tehilim* 22). *Chazal* assert in several places that regarding the First Temple as well, when the Babylonians burned and destroyed the Temple, they destroyed a house that was already destroyed, and burned a house that was already burning. That is to say, the Temple had already been destroyed, and not by external enemies, but rather by the deeds of the people of Israel from within.

This idol worship, which is referred to explicitly by the Prophets and by *Chazal*, is confirmed by the archaeological findings with the enormous quantities of figurines (mostly of women) that were found in many sites of First Temple Period Jerusalem, and match the period of Menasheh. By no means does this justify the actions of Menasheh; it merely shows the extent to which the people were immersed in idol worship.

This reality teaches that Chizkiyahu's great revolution did not influence the people for very long, and that already one generation after Chizkiyahu*,* with his son Menasheh, idol worship returned in full force to the house of God in Jerusalem and throughout the kingdom of Yehuda.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Menasheh's mother was Cheftzi-Ba (II *Melakhim* 21:1). *Chazal* expounded in *Berakhot* 10a and in *Yerushalmi*, *Sanhedrin* 10:2, that Cheftzi-Ba was the daughter of the prophet Yeshayahu. It is possible that Yeshayahu alludes to her in his prophecy: "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, neither shall your land any more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called, My delight is in her [*Cheftzi-Ba*], and your land, Espoused; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be espoused." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)