YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

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**This shiur is dedicated *le-zekher nishmot***

**Amelia Ray and Morris Ray
by their children Patti Ray and Allen Ray**

**on the occasion of their twelfth *yahrtzeits***

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**Lecture 334: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(CXLIV) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXX)**

### the Reign of Amon

Menashe's son and heir was Amon. This is the way the book of *Melakhim* describes his reign:

Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign; and he reigned two years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Meshulemet the daughter of Charutz of Yotva. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Menashe his father. And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them. And he forsook the Lord, the God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the Lord. And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and put the king to death in his own house. But the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Yoshiyahu his son king in his stead. Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Yehuda. And he was buried in his sepulcher in the garden of Uza; and Yoshiyahu his son reigned in his stead. (II *Melakhim* 21:19-26)

Scripture emphasizes the evil that Amon did as a direct continuation of his father's actions, his worshipping idols and forsaking God.

The parallel text in *Divrei* *ha-Yamim* (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 33:21-25) emphasizes that Amon worshipped all of the idols that his father Menashe had fashioned, that is to say, he sinned against God more so than any of his predecessors.

*Chazal* in the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 103b expound the relationship between the idolatry of Achaz, Menashe, and Amon: Achaz set up an idol in the upper floor of his house, Menashe set it up in the Sanctuary, whereas Amon brought it into the Holy of Holies, which demonstrates how much more wicked Amon was than any of the kings who came before him.

It is reasonable to assume that even if Menashe repented, nevertheless the sheer number of idols that he worshipped left its mark for generations, and that Amon continued in the ways of his father before he repented.

We will now begin to examine the period of King Yoshiyahu.

### The Beginning of Yoshiyahu's reign

It is important to note that two prophets prophesied during the period of Yoshiyahu:

The prophet Yirmeyahu:

To whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Yoshiyahu the son of Amon, king of Yehuda, in the thirteenth year of his reign. (*Yirmeyahu* 1:2).

And also the prophetess Chulda:

So Chilkiyahu the priest, and Achikam, and Akhbor, and Shafan, and Asaya, went to Chulda the prophetess, the wife of Shalum the son of Tikva, the son of Charchas, keeper of the wardrobe; now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the second quarter, and they spoke with her. (II *Melakhim* 22:14)

The reign of Yoshiyahu is described primarily in the books of II *Melakhim* 22-23:1-30, and II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 34-35.

Yoshiyahu is one of the most righteous kings in all his actions and in everything connected to the spiritual reform of the kingdom, with regard to the eradication of the idolatry that remained in Jerusalem and all of the kingdom of Yehuda (and in parts of the kingdom of Israel); with regard to his finding the book of the Law in the house of God and with regard to his most serious relationship with the words of the prophets Yirmeyahu and Chulda; with regard to his prayer to God in the house of God together with the inhabitants of Jerusalem; with regard to the removal of all of the *bamot* for the service of the God of Israel, including the *bamot* that Shelomo had built for idol-worship (which even the righteous Chizkiyahu did not destroy); with regard to the making of a great covenant between God and His people, in the wake of finding the book of the Law; and with regard to the observance of Pesach together with representatives of the kingdom of Israel.

All of these things are actions with spiritual and national significance of the highest order, things which were meant to repair the kingdom from the inside in the aftermath of the days of Menashe, his grandfather, and Amon, his father.

On the other hand, Yoshiyahu repeats certain actions, for which, as we showed in previous *shiurim*, Chizkiyahu was criticized. When Yoshiyahugoes to Megido to fight Pharaoh Nekho, he does not consult first with a prophet whether or not to do so, and in this he acts improperly and so he finds there his death, as is stated in *Divrei ha-Yamim*:

Nevertheless Yoshiyahu would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not to the words of Nekho, from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 35:22)

We see once again with regard to this righteous king that the king's mission is to reform his kingdom spiritually, and not to assume responsibility for the political reality of the Middle East.

### The CORONATION OF yOSHIYAHU

Yoshiyahu ascends the throne at a very young age, when he is only eight.

It is reasonable to assume that such a dramatic change in the leadership of the kingdom in comparison to the days of his father Amon and his grandfather Menashe, who had such a decisive influence on the kingdom in the decades preceding his reign (55 years of Menashe and 2 years of Yoshiyahu), and the fact that he became king at such a young age, could happen only if the king was accompanied by a prophet from the beginning of his reign. Scripture does not explicitly relate to this fact. What is related is that Yoshiyahu was made the king by "*am ha'aretz*," the people of the land.

"*Am ha'aretz*" is a designation for the great people in the kingdom of Yehuda, which included the heads of families and large landowners, who enjoyed special standing at the time of the appointment of the king. For example, at the coronation of King Yoash the son of Achazyahu, the *am ha'aretz* blew the trumpets which turned Yoash into the king (II *Melakhim* 11:14) So too at the coronation of Uziyahu when he was sixteen (II *Melakhim* 14:21); there they are called "*am Yehuda*," the people of Yehuda. Scripture emphasizes that Yotam the son of King Uziyahu was over the household, judging the people of the land (II *Melakhim* 15:5).

### The order of the central events that occurred during Yoshiyahu's reign

The narrative in *Divrei ha-Yamim* allows us to accurately establish the time line of the major events that took place during the reign of Yoshiyahu.

In the eighth year of his reign, when he was sixteen years old, he began to seek after the God of David his father. We are dealing with a conscious desire on the part of Yoshiyahu to return to and renew the royal model established by David in the national and spiritual realms.

In the twelfth year of his reign, he began to purify the land of idolatry, both in Yehuda and Jerusalem, and in the cities of Menashe and Efrayim, Shimon and Naftali.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, Yoshiyahu sent emissaries to repair the house of God. While he was removing the money that had been brought to the house of God, Chilkiyahu the priest found the book of the Law of God given to Moshe. When he heard what was written in the book, the king ordered his emissaries to inquire of God on his behalf and on behalf of all those who remained in Yehuda and in Israel.

The king's emissaries reached the prophetess Chulda who repeated a most severe prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem, promising that this will happen only after Yoshiyahu's death.

In the wake of the prophetess's answer, the king made a renewed covenant in the house of God between all of the people and God. In continuation of the renewed covenant with God, a great celebration of Pesach was conducted in Jerusalem.

Both the covenant and the celebration of Pesach were, in a certain sense, a direct continuation of the finding of the book of the Law in the house of God, and both of them took place in the eighteenth year of Yoshiyahu's reign.

At the end, Scripture describes Yoshiyahu's journey to Megiddo to stop the king of Egypt, Pharaoh Nekho, in his campaign to fight the king of Ashur at the Euphrates. It was there that Yoshiyahu met his death.

We began this study by presenting the framework of the main events that took place during Yoshiyahu's reign in their chronological order. We will now examine each one of these issues that were mentioned.

Very impressive is the fact that already at the beginning of his reign he began to seek after the God of David his father. It is reasonable to assume that Scripture refers here to both the study of Torah and following God's commandments. May it be inferred from here that until the age of sixteen (that is, from the age of eight, when he began to rule until the eighth year of his reign) he was under the influence of Amon's officers? This is a reasonable possibility. The wording in *Melakhim* might support this understanding:

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moshe; neither after him arose there any like him. (II *Melakhim* 23:25).

 The phrase "turned [or returned] to the Lord" can be understood to mean that Yoshiyahu's seeking after God was part of a process of spiritual repair that began during the eighth year of his reign.

Scripture describes Yoshiyahu as an ideal king who fulfills God's will in all senses and in all areas. There is no doubt that all his actions afterwards - the eradication of idolatry, his rending his garments in the wake of the discovery of the book of the Law, his turning to Chulda the prophetess, his prayer to God, his making a new covenant and the grand celebration of Pesach in the house of God – all of these are clear expressions of a king who wishes to serve God with all of his heart.

 A great question is how at such an early age, after his father Amon and his grandfather Menashe had done the most horrendous things in Jerusalem and in the house of God (Molekh, altars for the worship of idols in the Temple itself, the shedding of innocent blood), a young man manages to aspire to walk in the path of God, as did his great-grandfather Chizkiyahu. Is it possible that at the beginning of his journey the king was accompanied by anonymous prophets? This is a reasonable and logical possibility, seeing that Yoshiyah began to seek after God in the eighth year of his reign.

### The cleansing of Jerusalem and the kingdoms of Yehuda and Israel from idolatry

In the twelfth year of his reign, Yoshiyahu began to purify Yehuda and Jerusalem from the *bamot* and the *asherot* and the graven images and the molten images.

We are dealing here with the purification of Yehuda and Jerusalem from *bamot*, the reference apparently being both to *bamot* that were dedicated to the service of the God of Israel and to *bamot* at which people worshipped idolatry.

Both types of *bamot* had been eradicated two generations earlier by Chizkiyahu, and therefore their apparently large-scale presence indicates that the generations of Menashe and Amon had succeeded to entirely undo Chizkiyahu's enterprise, on the assumption that according to II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 29, Chizkiyahu eradicated the idol worship of his father Achaz's kingdom at the beginning of his twenty-nine year reign.

When we add the fifty-five years of Menashe's reign and the two years of Amon's kingdom, it turns out that after eighty six years, worship at *bamot* and idolatry of various types returned to rule in Jerusalem and in the entire kingdom of Yehuda. But in addition to the purification, Scripture describes how Yoshiyahu shattered the altars to Ba'al, and turned the graven images into dust, and broke all of the accoutrements of idol worship into very small pieces, and strewed them upon the graves of those who had worshipped them.

In addition to the fact that both the idolatry and the graves were an unclean place, there might be here a fulfillment of the rebuke in *Vayikra*:

And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your sun-pillars, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols; and My soul shall abhor you. (*Vayikra* 26:30)

It is reasonable to assume that for this reason, the eradication of idolatry from the house of God on the part of several kings who preceded Yoshiyahu took place in the Kidron Valley. Thus we find with Asa, who cut down the abominable image that his mother Maakha had made for the Ashera (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 15:16). And so too we find with Chizkiyahu who removed the impurity that during the days of Achaz was in the sanctuary of God and in the courtyard of the house of God (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 29:16; 30:14).

The destruction of the idols took place in the Kidron Valley both because of its proximity to the Temple Mount and the City of David, and because, according to *Chazal*, the idol worship would be taken to the Dead Sea. But it is also reasonable to assume that since there are dozens of magnificent tombs dated to the First Temple period on the eastern slope of the Kidron Valley, on the slope of the village of Shiloach, they destroyed the idols in a place that was already defiled by graves.

It is possible that this is what Yirmeyahu was referring to in his prophecy: "And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields unto the brook Kidron, unto the corner of the horse gate toward the east, shall be holy unto the Lord; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more forever" (*Yirmeyahu* 31:39), when he describes the future rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The parallel verse in *Melakhim* reads as follows:

And he brought out the Ashera from the house of the Lord, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the common people. (II *Melakhim* 23:6)

Explicit mention is made here of the Kidron Valley and the graves of the common people. In addition, Scripture emphasizes that the bones of the priests who worshipped idols were burned on their altars, and in that way Yehuda and Jerusalem were cleansed.

But Yoshiyahu did not content himself with the eradication of idol worship from and purification of Jerusalem and all of the kingdom of Yehuda. Scripture emphasizes:

And so did he in the cities of Menashe and Efrayim and Shimon, even unto Naftali, with their axes round about. And he broke down the altars, and beat the Asherim and the graven images into powder, and hewed down all the sun-images throughout all the land of Israel, and returned to Jerusalem. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 34:6-7)

It turns out that Yoshiyahu cleansed the entire land of Israel, including the territories of the tribes that were in the kingdom of Israel.

Although there was no longer a kingdom of Israel, it is reasonable to assume that Jewish residents remained within the borders of the former kingdom of Israel, for when Chizkiyahu celebrated Pesach at the beginning of his reign he included representatives of the kingdom of Israel.

According to *Chazal* in the Gemara in *Megilla* 14b, Yirmeyahu went and brought back the ten tribes and Yoshiyahu the son of Amon ruled over them as king. It is possible that with the disintegration of the Assyrian kingdom and its weakened grip on the lands that it had conquered, including the kingdom of Israel, Yoshiyahu in practice ruled over the region of the kingdom of Israel.

It is interesting to note that following the discovery of the book of the Law and the renewal of the covenant between God and the people of Israel, Scripture states:

And Yoshiyahu took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were found in Israel to serve, even to serve the Lord their God. All his days they departed not from following the Lord, the God of their fathers. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 34:33)

In other words, in the wake of the covenant Yoshiyahu completed the cleansing of the land from idolatry. It appears from the verse that in the wake of the covenant what remained of the tribes of Israel were included together with the kingdom of Yehuda. The very making of the covenant greatly intensified the desire to complete the eradication of idolatry that Yoshiyahu had begun in the twelfth year of his reign.

It is interesting to note that the parallel text in II *Melakhim* 22 does not relate to all the stages that preceded the repair of the house of God and the discovery of the book of the Law.

After the covenant is made, a very detailed description is given of the eradication of idolatry from the house of God and from all parts of Jerusalem and even from the altar in Beit-El. It is not by chance that the eradication of the idolatry precedes the account of the celebration of Pesach.

Next week we will continue to examine the reign of Yoshiyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)