YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**MIKDASH**

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**Lecture 341: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(CXLXI) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXXVII)**

In this *shiur* we wish to examine what happened to the ark in the days of Yoshiyahu.[[1]](#footnote-1) The prophet Yirmeyahu said:

And it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the Lord, they shall say no more: The ark of the covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind; neither shall they make mention of it; neither shall they miss it; neither shall it be made any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem; neither shall they walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart. (*Yirmeyahu* 3:16-17)[[2]](#footnote-2)

The prophet speaks out against those who say, "the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord," and think that the safest place for the ark is the Temple. The prophet explains that the Temple is not secure because its very existence depends upon the deeds of the people. The prophet explicitly states that the house and Temple of the Lord cannot serve as an insurance policy. If God's house is to continue to stand, the people must repent and mend their ways.

From the fact that the ark is not mentioned in the list of Nevuzaradan's plunder, it may be inferred that the ark was no longer in the Temple at that time. It is reasonable to assume that the ark was removed at some point during the days of the Menashe or Yoshiyahu.

In *Divrei ha-Yamim* it says as follows:

And he said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, that were holy unto the Lord: Put the holy ark in the house which Shelomo the son of David king of Israel did build; there shall no more be a burden upon your shoulders; now serve the Lord your God, and His people Israel. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 35:3)

During the time of the celebration of Pesach, which was essentially a renewal of the covenant between God and the Jewish people, in the days of Yoshiyahu, the king asked that the ark be brought to the Temple. According to the simplest understanding this means that at that time the ark was ordinarily not found there.

Haran[[3]](#footnote-3) is of the opinion that Menashe removed the ark from the Temple because he erected in its place a statue of the Ashera. It would appear that Menashe stored the ark away. While it is true that Menashe practiced idolatry in the extreme, he remained loyal to the Assyrian empire.

We mentioned in a previous *shiur* that Menashe dug out a new royal tomb in the garden of Uza, and not in the area between the City of David and the house of God, the place where the kings of Yehuda from the days of David until the time of Chizkiyahu were buried, and it served also the kings who followed him.

Josephus Flavius (*Antiquities* *of the Jews* XIII, 249) describes how Yochanan Hyrcanus the son of Shimon the Hasmonean, in his distress, ordered the removal of treasures from the tombs of the kings of the house of David in the amount of three thousand talents of silver. It is reasonable to assume that Menashe transferred the contents of the tombs of the Davidic kings to the new royal tombs in the garden of Uza. It is likely that the transfer included all the treasures that were found there.

Menashe undoubtedly remembered the miraculous salvation that took place in Jerusalem in the days of Chizkiyahu, and understood that Jerusalem was not safe from conquest. Therefore he transferred the treasures of his ancestors and hid them away deep in the rock of Jerusalem.

It is very possible that in those secret underground chambers, Menashe dug out a special section for the ark of the covenant. He was of the opinion that the ark of the covenant – that precious and magnificent vessel that enjoyed such a distinguished place in Israel's conscience – had to be protected.

Yirmeyahu's prophecy reflects the position that the safest place for the ark was in the Temple of God, while the prophet himself warns that the Temple is by no means safe and secure, and in fact the ark was rightfully stored away so that it not fall into the hands of enemy looters.

In this regard, the position of the prophet Yirmeyahu was identical to that of King Yoshiyahu. Yoshiyahu commanded the Levites to bring the ark in honor of the festive Pesach that would be celebrated with all of Israel. There the king says: "There shall no more be a burden on your shoulder" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 35:3), meaning that they would no longer carry a burden on their shoulder; when they return the ark to the place where it had been stored away, they would no longer have to carry it on their shoulders, that is to say, to move it, because at the site where it was stored away, there it would be kept forever. "Who stored it away? Yoshiyahu stored it away" (*Horayot* 12a.) In fact, after that Pesach that was celebrated by Yoshiyahu and all of Israel, there is no further mention of the ark.

It is reasonable to assume that the "Levites who taught all Israel" were members of the first generation who knew the secret site of the ark and the other treasures of the Temple in the caves that were dug out by Menashe, and that from then on the secret was passed down from one generation to the next by way of a select few.

 It turns out that Menashe, Yoshiyahu and the prophet Yirmeyahu were all in agreement that the ark should be hidden away. Menashe, who was one of the wickedest kings, Yoshiyahu, who was one of the most righteous kings, and the prophet Yirmeyahu. Menashe wanted to save the valuable historical treasure, whereas Yoshiyahu and Yirmeyahu thought that it was the people's responsibility to protect the arc of testimony which contained the two tablets of the covenant which attested to the revelation and to the covenant that God made between Himself and the people.

In actuality nobody believed that the ark and the Temple, owing to their sanctity, could protect themselves. Spiritually Yirmeyahu did not come to deny the value of the holy vessels and the Temple, but rather to emphasize that the goal of Israel, the chosen people, was to elevate all of humanity from pagan ignorance to faith in one God.

The prophet Yirmeyahu closes the circle that opened with God's promise to the patriarch Avraham when he entered the land of Israel, "And in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (*Bereishit* 12:3) with the prophecy: "And all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem" (*Yirmeyahu* 3:17).

The foundation of all this is the two tablets of the covenant that testify to the central event in the history of Israel, which illuminates the path leading from Avraham to the end of days.

It should be noted that this period of Menashe and Yoshiyahu was a period during which various things, in addition to the ark, were hidden away. This includes the mounds that were erected in the southwestern portion of Jerusalem, apparently over the *bamot* built by the priests who were banished from the Temple in the days of Menashe, as we saw in [*shiur* 143](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/why-are-there-two-keruvim-holy-holies).

So too in the Israelite temple at Tel Arad, which was active during the First Temple period, a new wall was carefully built over it in the time of Yoshiyahu, with caution taken not to damage the temple itself. Thus it turns out that during this period of time, in addition to the hiding away of the ark of the covenant, so too the *bamot* dedicated to the service of God that were built in the days of Menashe and the Temple dedicated to the service of God that operated during the period of the Monarachy were also hidden away.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. This *shiur* is based on the article of Yehuda Elitzur, "*Pulmus Aron ha-Berit be-Yemei Yoshiyahu*," in his book *Yisrael ve-ha-Mikra*, pp. 230-235. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Some connect this prophecy to the prophecy in *Yirmeyahu* 7:4-12: "Trust you not in lying words… and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel." [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. M. Haran, "*Siluk Aron ha-Berit*," *Yediot ha-Chevra le-Chakirat Eretz Yisrael* 25 (1961), pp. 211-223. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)