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ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**MIKDASH**

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**Lecture 342: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(CXLXII) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXXVIII)**

In this *shiur*, we wish to complete our study of Yehoshiyahu's rule. We will deal first with Yoshiyahu's journey to Megido, where he died. We will then present a brief summary of his reign.

KINg YOSHIYAHU'S GOING OUT TO MEET THE KING OF eGYPT

After all this, when Yoshiyahu had prepared the Temple, Nekho king of Egypt went up to fight against Karkemish by the Euphrates; and Yoshiyahu went out against him. But he sent ambassadors to him, saying: What have I to do with you, you king of Yehuda? I come not against you this day, but against the house wherewith I have war; and God has given command to speed me; forbear you from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy you not. Nevertheless Yoshiyahu would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Nekho, from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megido. And the archers shot at king Yoshiyahu; and the king said to his servants: Have me away; for I am sore wounded. So his servants took him out of the chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had, and brought him to Jerusalem; and he died, and was buried in the sepulchers of his fathers. And all Yehuda and Jerusalem mourned for Yoshiyahu. And Yirmeyahu lamented for Yoshiyahu; and all the singing men and singing women spoke of Yoshiyahu in their lamentations, to this day; and they made them an ordinance in Israel; and, behold, they are written in the lamentations. Now the rest of the acts of Yoshiyahu, and his good deeds, according to that which is written in the Law of the Lord, and his acts, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Yehuda. (II *Divrei ha-Divrei ha-Yamim* 35:20-27)

Par'o Nekho (so he is called in II *Melakhim* 23:29) has been identified with the son of Psammetchus I, founder of the dynasty. With the weakening of the Assyrian rule, he tried to re-establish Egypt as the dominant power in the region. He ruled from about 22 years to about 6 years before the destruction of the first Temple.

Toward the end of Par'o Nekho's days, the prophet Yirmeyahu prophesied about him in the framework of his prophecies concerning the nations:

Of Egypt: concerning the army of Par'o Nekho king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Karkemish, which Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon smote in the fourth year of Yehoyakim the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda. (*Yirmeyahu* 46:2)

In the days of Yoshiyahu, Par'o Nekho was on his way to fight at Karkemish on the Euphrates. He apparently feared the rapid spread of Babylon and he set out with his army on a long journey north to help the Assyrians in their war against Babylon.

A seal of Par'o Nekho's was found in an excavation undertaken in Karkemish, the capital of a small kingdom located on the banks of an upper tributary of the Euphrates River, about a hundred km. northeast of Aleppo. Egypt and Ashur wished to conquer it because of its strategic position.[[1]](#footnote-1) Yoshiyahu set out against Par'o Nekho, apparently with a great army, in the valley of Megido, in order to block the road going up to the Euphrates River. It is not clear what prompted Yoshiyahu to take this step:

1. One possibility is the desire to weaken Egypt and thus to prevent it from becoming a greater power in the region. Yoshiyahu apparently feared that an Egyptian victory in this campaign would lead to the spread of the Egyptian king's hegemony all the way to Charan, which would put the kingdom of Yehuda under Egyptian rule.

2. Another possibility is the desire to prevent Egypt from assisting Ashur against Babylon, based on an interest in the total destruction of Ashur.

The text does not spell anything out in this regard. Par'o Nekho sends emissaries to Yoshiyahu, and they make it clear to him that there is no conflict between them. Despite the words of these emissaries, Yoshiyahu continues with his preparations to fight Par'o Nekho, and changes into clothing that is fit for battle.

Yoshiyahu shows no interest in seeking the prophet's advice concerning this campaign. As *Chazal* said: "Why was Yoshiyahu punished? Because he should have consulted with Yirmeyahu, but he failed to do so" (*Ta'anit* 22b).

It may be surmised that had Yoshiyahu succeeded in defeating Par'o Nekho, he might have taken over the entire area northeast of Egypt and southwest of Ashur, that is to say, the entire area between "the river of Egypt" and "the Euphrates," the borders of the Land of Israel as promised in the Torah, and the borders of the kingdom of David and Shelomo.

As it turned out, however, Yoshiyahu's death interrupted this process. The king of Egypt continued in his journey northward toward Charan. Four years later he was defeated at Karkamish at the hands of Nevuchadnetzar, king of Babylon, who in the meantime inherited his father Nabopolassar. This opened the door to Babylon's taking over all of the kingdoms in the region, including the kingdom of Yehuda, from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt.

 The question arises as to why Yoshiyahu was shot by Par'o Nekho; surely Scripture testifies to his righteousness and does not attribute to him any sins whatsoever. Rav Medan suggests that apparently a covenant had been made between Yoshiyahu and Psammetchus, and the oath that accompanied that covenant, like any oath, included the names of the gods of the two parties who entered into the alliance. Par'o Nekho saw Yoshiyahu's action as a breach of the covenant and the oath, and therefore warned Yoshiyahu that his own God would harm him as a result.

Such a covenant of patronage was probably made between Yoshiyahu and Egypt during the time of a foreign invasion from the north at the end of the first half of Yoshiyahu's rule. This invasion threatened to destroy all of the inhabitants of Yehuda, and is alluded to by the prophet Yirmeyahu:

For the noise of the horsemen and bowmen the whole city flees; they go into the thickets, and climb up upon the rocks; every city is forsaken, and not a man dwells therein. (*Yirmeyahu* 4:29)

Yirmeyahu (in a manner similar to Yeshayahu's fierce opposition to the covenant that Chizkiyahu made with Par'o, the king of Egypt) came out strongly against the covenant made with Egypt:

The children also of Nof and Tachpanches feed upon the crown of your head… How greatly do you cheapen yourself to change your way? You shall be ashamed of Egypt also, as you were ashamed of Ashur. From him also shall you go forth, with your hands upon your head; for the Lord has rejected them in whom you did trust, and you shall not prosper in them. (*Yirmeyahu* 2:16-37)

In this case, Yehoshiyahu breached the covenant in order to stem the expansionist ambitions of Egypt, and in the breach of the covenant he found his death.

Another possible reason for Yoshiyahu's death raised by Rav Medan is the fact that according to the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim* Yoshiyahu's religious revolution began in the twelfth year of his reign in the year of Ashurbanipal's death, and YIrmeyahu, who began to prophesy in the thirteenth year of Yoshiyahu's reign, expresses his dissatisfaction with the quiet and tolerant religious revolution that at this stage uprooted with great difficulty only the manifest impurity. Only in his eighteenth year, after the discovery of the book of the Law and after the sounding of the words of Chulda the prophetess, did the revolution turn into a much more fundamental process, at which time idolatry was finally eradicated from the land. This revolution did not succeed in becoming deeply rooted over the course of the thirteen remaining years of Yoshiyahu's rule, and thus it turned out that his son Yehoyakim went back to the sins of Menashe and Amon, and Yoshiyahu's grand enterprise collapsed with nobody to continue it.

Rav Medan uses these two sins to explain the untimely death of King Yoshiyahu.

### a SUMMARY OF yOSHIYAHU'S REIGN

Without a doubt Yoshiyahu was one of the greatest kings of Yehuda, and one of the most righteous kings among them. In his kingdom, he tried to serve as a superior model of what a king of the house of David should be in his various fields of activity:

- In the realm of Torah and *mitzvot*, in his seeking out of the God of his father David (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 34:3).

- In his doing what is good and right in the eyes of God and his walking in all the ways of his father David (as in II *Melakhim* 22:2).

- In the eradication of idolatry from the Temple, from the kingdom of Yehuda, and from the kingdom of Israel.

- In his renewal of the covenant between the king, the people, and God, and his celebration of Pesach together with representatives of the kingdom of Israel, in a manner that was not done since the days of the *Shofetim* and Shemuel.

- In his renewal of the service in the Temple following its purification. Here too Scripture refers to the days of David and Shelomo: "And prepare you after your fathers' houses by your courses, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Shelomo his son"; "And the singers the sons of Asaf were in their place, according to the commandment of David" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 35:4:15)

- From the political point of view with the disintegration of the Assyrian regime, Yoshiyah took control of all the lands of the kingdom of Israel (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 34:33), and purified them of idolatry.

- All of this he did while executing justice and righteousness in the manner of David and Shelomo (*Yirmeyahu* 22:11-16)

In the verses that conclude the description of his kingdom, Scripture states:

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)

Despite all of his great actions, the great range of his deeds, and the novelty of his activity, the actions of King Yoshiyahu could not cancel the decree of destruction that had already been issued. "Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of His Great wrath, wherewith His anger was kindled against Yehuda, because of all the provocations wherewith Menashe had provoked Him" (II *Melakhim* 23:26). Even the prophet Yirmeyahu emphasizes this principle: "And I will cause them to be a horror among all the kingdoms of the earth, because of Menashe the son of Chizkiyahu king of Yehuda, for that which he did in Jerusalem" (*Yirmeyahu* 15:4). And similarly in the continuation: "Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Yehuda, to remove them out of His sight, for the sins of Menashe, 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).

Beyond his greatness and outstanding righteousness, both in the book of *Melakhim* and in *Divrei ha-Yamim*, there is one action on the part of Yoshiyahu that is criticized, namely, the king's going out to Megido in order to fight against Egypt.

Beyond the act itself that led to the king's mortal wound on the battlefield at the very beginning of the campaign, the great difficulty lies in the fact that he did not consult a prophet. Throughout his entire career, and especially in light of his family's heritage from the time of Menashe and Amon, Yoshiyahu listens to the various prophets in connection with all his actions, both in the tremendous spiritual revolution that he led, in the eradication of idolatry, and in the renewal of the covenant and celebration of Pesach. After all these tremendous reforms, how could he have gone out to fight against Egypt without consulting with a prophet? This is a very difficult question and we do not have a satisfactory answer.

In the end, beyond the death of Yoshiyahu in Megido, in the twenty-two years that remained until the destruction of the Temple, the sins of Menashe and of Amon returned with even greater intensity, and this decided the fate of Jerusalem. Thus, despite the great deeds that Yoshiyahu performed in all areas, his sons did not follow in his path and his grand enterprise went down the drain and failed to stop the destruction of the city and the Temple.

In the next *shiur*, we will discuss the reigns of the sons of Yoshiyahu – Yehoachaz and Yehoyakim.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. So suggests Rav Yaakov Medan in his article on Yoshiyahu in his book, *"HaMikra'ot ha-Mechudashim, Iyyunim bi-Nevi'im uvi-Khtuvim*," pp. 534 and on. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)