YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**MIKDASH**

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**Lecture 343: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(CXLXIII) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXXIX)**

After dedicating several *shiurim* to consider King Yoshiyahu and to understand his great work in everything connected to the many different components of the worship of God – a most comprehensive eradication of all the idolatry in the house of God, in Jerusalem, in the entire kingdom of Yehuda, and in the kingdom of Israel, a renewal of the covenant between the people of Israel and God through the celebration of Pesach together with representatives of the kingdom of Israel, and hiding away the ark and the *bamot* that were used in the service of God by the priests of God in the days of Menashe – we saw that his life came to an end in Megido, when he tried to stop Par'o Nekho, but was killed.

Despite the great correction and repair in relation to the days of his grandfather Menashe and his father Amon, in the end Yoshiyahu's great enterprise did not succeed to take root in the hearts of the people. Thus it happened that twenty-two years after his death, the Temple was destroyed. The reigns of Yehoachaz, Yehoyakim, and Tzidkiyahu did not allow for the repairs initiated by Yoshiyahu to continue. On the contrary, Yehoyakim returned in great measure to the sins of Menashe, but with one very significant difference, namely, the fact that the house of God remained open.

### YehoaChaz

With the death of Yoshiyahu, Scripture states: "And the people of the land took Yehoachaz the son of Yoshiyahu, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead" (II *Melakhim* 23:30). According to what is stated in *Yirmeyahu* 22, it may be surmised that Yehoachaz is Shalum, the youngest son of Yoshiyahu (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 3:15). The name Yehoachaz means that God will strengthen and support the person bearing that name.

Even though the late king's son was not ordinarily anointed when he rose to the throne in his father's place, Yehoachaz was in fact anointed, because of the disagreement with his brother Yehoyakim. Scripture does not explain why the younger son was given preference over his older brother.

It is possible that there is an allusion to the days of Yehoachaz in *Yechezkel* 29:1-7. Technically, the kingdom of Ashur began to disintegrate in the days of Yoshiyahu. The harsh consequences of the battle at Megido, the death of Yoshiyahu and the changing international powers, were that Egypt and Babylon contended for power in the region, and this led to quick and significant political changes. The kings of Yehuda had to be able to maneuver, to adapt themselves to new circumstances, and to arrive at important political decisions.

The first fateful decision was when the leaders – "the people of the land"- chose Yehoachaz and not Yehoyakim to be Yoshiyahu's successor. They may have thought that Yehoachaz was more likely to continue Yoshiyahu's policies and oppose Egypt's political ambitions.

It is reasonable to assume that Yehoachaz's mother, Chamutal, the daughter of Yirmeyahu of Livna, may have served in an important position in the days of her father, and that she was involved in this appointment. The prophet Yechezkel apparently alludes to this: "And say: How was your mother a lioness; among lions she couched, in the midst of the young lions she reared her whelps" (*Yechezkel* 19:2).

Very little is written about the reign of Yehoachaz. He ruled for all of three months and did evil in the eyes of God as did his fathers. Of course, this refers not to Yoshiyahu, but to his earlier ancestors – Achaz, Menashe and Amon.

It is possible that Yechezkel alludes to his actions in his lament:

And she brought up one of her whelps, he became a young lion; and he learned to catch the prey, he devoured men. (*Yechezkel* 19:3)

Scripture states that Par'o Nekho apprehended him in Rivla in the land of Chamat, so that he not reign in Jerusalem, and that he imposed upon the land a fine of a hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold. It would appear that when he returned from Karkamish, and after he took control of the entire expanse from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates, he deposed Yehoachaz from the throne and appointed his older brother Elyakim to rule as king in his place.

Scripture emphasizes that Par'o Nekho appointed Yehoyakim as king in place of Yoshiyahu his father. What this means is that from his perspective, since he never recognized the kingship of Yehoachaz, Elyakim was considered as ruling directly in place of his father Yoshiyahu.

He changed Elyakim's name to Yehoyakim. The significance of this name change is that it expresses the fact that the new king was subordinate to Par'o Nekho.

Par'o Nekcho took Yehoachaz in captivity to Egypt, and there he died. Yechezkel alludes to this when he says:

Then the nations assembled against him, he was taken in their pit; and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt. (*Yechezkel* 19:4)

On the assumption that Shalum is Yehoachaz, Yirmeyahu said of him:

Weep you not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goes away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus says the Lord touching Shalum the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda, who reigned instead of Yoshiyahu his father, and who went forth out of this place: He shall not return there anymore. (*Yirmeyahu* 22:10-11)

It stands to reason that Yehoyakim did not pay the monetary fine that Par'o Nekho imposed on Yehuda from the royal treasury or from the treasury of the house of God, but rather he collected the money from the people of the land, from those very officials who had a part in the appointment of Yehoachaz his brother.

### Yehoyakim

Scripture in II *Melakhim* 23:36 and on briefly describes the reign of Yehoyakim. He did evil in the eyes of God, and in his days Nevuchadnetzar, king of Babylon, came up. Yehoyakim became his servant for three years, and then he rebelled against him. Thus, for the first time, a king of Babylon invaded the kingdom of Yehuda.

Politically, the rule of Egypt in the region lasted for four years. In the fourth year of Yehoyakim's rule, Nevuchadnetzar defeated Par'o Nekho at Karkamish on the Euphrates and took from him all the lands that he conquered after the first battle at Karkamish. Scripture emphasizes at the end of its account of the reign of Yehoyakim:

And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land; for the king of Babylon had taken, from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt. (II *Melakhim* 24:7)

This reality is described in detail by Yirmeyahu:

The word of the Lord which came to Yirmeyahu the prophet concerning the nations. Of Egypt: concerning the army of Par'o Nekho king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Karkamish, which Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon smote in the fourth year of Yehoyakim the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda. Make ready buckler and shield, and draw near to battle. Harness the horses, and mount, you horsemen, and stand forth with your helmets; furbish the spears, put on the coats of mail. Wherefore do I see them dismayed and turned backward? and their mighty ones are beaten down, and they are fled apace, and look not back; terror is on every side, says the Lord. The swift cannot flee away, nor the mighty man escape; in the north by the river Euphrates have they stumbled and fallen. Who is this like the Nile that rises up, like the rivers whose waters toss themselves? Egypt is like the Nile that rises up, and like the rivers whose waters toss themselves; and he says: I will rise up, I will cover the earth, I will destroy the city and the inhabitants thereof. Prance, you horses, and rush madly, you chariots; and let the mighty men go forth: Cush and Put, that handle the shield, and the Ludim, that handle and bend the bow. For the Lord God of hosts shall have on that day a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Him of His adversaries; and the sword shall devour and be satiated, and shall be made drunk with their blood; for the Lord God of hosts has a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates. Go up into Gil'ad, and take balm, O virgin daughter of Egypt; in vain do you use many medicines; there is no cure for you. The nations have heard of your shame, and the earth is full of your cry; for the mighty man has stumbled against the mighty, they are fallen both of them together.

The word that the Lord spoke to Yirmeyahu the prophet, how that Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon should come and smite the land of Egypt. Declare you in Egypt, and announce in Migdol, and announce in Nof and in Tachpanches; say you: Stand forth, and prepare you, for the sword has devoured round about you. (*Yirmeyahu* 46:1-14)

This prophecy was apparently delivered close to the time of the battle at Karkamish. The prophecy is explicitly directed at Par'o Nekho, but it is intended no less for the people of the kingdom of Yehuda.

The well-trained and well-equipped Egyptian army will be hit hard by the Chaldeans. Egypt, the power that many times struck the kingdom of Yehuda, is told that it too will in the end be brought down, as Yirmeyahu prophesied at the beginning of his career: "All that devour him [Israel] shall be held guilty, evil shall come upon them, says the Lord" (*Yirmeyahu* 2:3). In addition to trust and faith in God, the kingdom of Yehuda is supposed to learn from this not to rely on Egypt – "the staff of a bruised reed" (a phrase that was used by Ravshakeh to ridicule Yechizkiyahu in II *Melakhim* 18:21).

Despite this prophecy, the last kings of Yehuda – Yehoyakim, Yehoyakhin and Tzidkiyahu – chose to continue to rely on Egypt. Yirmeyahu (in chapter 25, in the fourth year of Yehoyakim's reign, the first year of Nevuchadnetzar's rule) emphasizes in his prophecies that the best path is of course to engage in full repentance and mend their ways, and not political maneuverings.

In the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*, as well, the reign of Yehoyakim is described in extreme brevity.

### Chronology of events

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Regarding the chronology, it is stated in the beginning of the book of *Daniel*:

In the third year of the reign of Yehoyakim king of Yehuda came Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon to Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Yehoyakim king of Yehuda into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God; and he carried them into the land of Shinar to the house of his god, and the vessels he brought into the treasure-house of his god. (*Daniel* 1:1-2)

On the other hand, it is stated explicitly in *Yirmeyahu* 22:2 that Nevuchadnetzar began his reign in the fourth year of Yehoyakim's rule. *Seder Olam Rabba* in chapter 25 explains that the reference is to the third year of his rebellion, and in the parallel passage in II *Melakhim* 24:2 it is stated explicitly that when Yehoyakim rebelled against Nevuchadnetzar, he sent against him bands of the Chaldeans, Arameans, Moavites, and Amonites, and sent them against Yehuda to destroy it.

Here in *Divrei ha-Yamim* it says: "Against him came up Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 36:6). Nowhere, however, is it stated explicitly that Yehoyakim was actually brought to Babylon. The Midrash in *Vayikra Rabba* 19, 6 expounds that Nevuchadnetzar killed him after conducting a public trial for him for his having broken the covenant that he had made with him.

The prophet Yirmeyahu prophesied about him: "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem"(*Yirmeyahu* 22:19), and later: "He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David; and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost"(*Yirmeyahu* 36L30). So Scripture testifies about him in *Divrei ha-Yamim*: "Nevuchadnetzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon"(*Divrei ha-Yamim* 36:7). That is to say, Nevuchadnetzar took as plunder some of the vessels of the house of God, and brought them to the treasure house of his god.

It turns out that the most detailed description of what happened during the days of Yehoyakim is found in the book of *Yirmeyahu.* Some of the prophecies are detailed and dated, and some belong to the period of Yehoyakim even though the date is not explicit. In order to understand what actually happened in his time, let us examine the central prophecies of Yirmeyahu.

From the political point of view, Yehoyakim's reign can be divided into two parts:[[1]](#footnote-1) four years of servitude to Egypt at the beginning of his reign, and three years of servitude to Babylon in the continuation of his reign.

### Servitude to Egypt

Par'o Nekho imposed a heavy monetary fine on the land of Yehuda – a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. Yehoyakim treated the people as a tyrant. He built himself magnificent buildings, thereby adding to the heavy burden imposed on the people (*Yirmeyahu* 22:13-19).

Contrary to the just leadership of Yoshiyahu, the prophet turns to Yehoyakim and says to him:

But your eyes and your heart are not but for your covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. (*Yirmeyahu* 22:17)

Already at the beginning of the reign of Yehoyakim, there was no longer strict observance of the execution of justice or of the prohibition of idolatry in the kingdom of Yehuda. The prophet describes entire families who serve the queen of heaven. In general, it may be said that from the days of Yehoyakim onwards the kingdom of Yehuda began to deteriorate religiously, morally and socially. This deterioration continued until the destruction of the Temple and the kingdom.

Yehoyakim himself persecuted the true prophets and killed the prophet Uriya the son of Shemayahu of Kiryat Ye'arim (*Yirmeyahu* 26:20-23).

The people followed in the path of Yehoyakim. Most of Yirmeyahu's complaints about his being persecuted by members of his own people are from this period of time.

Egypt's rule over Eretz Israel lasted four years until Par'o Nekho was defeated by Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon at Karkamish on the Euphrates (*Yirmeyahu* 22:1-12). He and the remnant of his army were forced to escape to Egypt with the Babylonian army chasing after them. Nevuchadnetzar did not continue his military campaign because he heard that his father Nevopaleser had died and he hurried home to inherit his throne. Independence returned to the land of Yehuda for a short period of time.

### Servitude to Babylon

 After the rout of Egypt, Yehuda and the neighboring peoples united in order to prevent Nevuchadnetzar from conquering the lands west of the Euphrates. But Yirmeyahu warned them not to oppose Babylon, but rather to surrender to it, because there is a Divine decree that Babylon will rule over the entire world for seventy years (*Yirmeyahu* 25:11-12). If they fail to subjugate themselves to Babylon, they will be destroyed.

 About eighteen years before the destruction of the Temple, Nevuchadnetzar came to the land of Yehuda and placed a siege on Ashkelon. In the wake of this a great fear settled on all the surrounding nations that Nevuchadnetzar would subjugate them as well.

 A fast was proclaimed in Jerusalem and the Jews from the land of Yehuda went up to the Temple (*Yirmeyahu* 36). On the command of Yirmeyahu Barukh the son of Neriya, his scribe, read his prophecies of doom from a scroll before the people who had gathered in the Temple. Despite the complaints on the part of the people and some of the officers, Yehoyakim tore up the scroll and burned it.

 It is not exactly clear what the circumstances were, but Yehoyakim surrendered to Babylon and served it for three years (II *Melakhim* 24:1), and once again the kingdom of Yehuda lost its independence. After three years, Yehoyakim rebelled against Nevuchadnetzar. This rebellion took place after Nevuchadnetzar's attack on Egypt failed and he was forced to return to his own land.

 In the meantime Nevuchadnetzar sent to the kingdom of Yehuda bands comprised of people from the surrounding nations, Aram, Moav, and Amon, and also Babylonian bands, until Nevuchadnetzar would have the time to punish Yehuda.

 It is not exactly clear what happened to Yehoyakim. He died in battle against the foreign bands about eleven years before the destruction of the Temple.

 In this *shiur* we presented a general account of the reign of Yehoyakim. In the coming *shiurim* we will delve more deeply into his reign, based on the prophecies of Yirmeyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. In this part of the *shiur* we present a synopsis of the words of Menachem Bula in his introduction to his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to the book of *Yirmeyahu.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)