YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**MIKDASH**

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**Lecture 344: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(CXLXIV) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXXX)**

In this *shiur* we would like to look at the kingdom of Yehoyakim through the prophecies of Yirmeyahu.

Chapter 26 is dated to the beginning of the reign of Yehoyakim. The prophet is commanded to deliver his prophecy in the Temple. This chapter in many ways parallels the prophecy in *Yirmeyahu* 7:1-20. While it is true that in chapter 7, the time of the prophecy is not noted, it stands to reason that it too was delivered at the beginning of the Yehoyakim's reign.

Both prophecies note the fact that the people of the kingdom of Yehuda are found in the Temple. It is possible that they had arrived at that time in the Temple to celebrate one of the pilgrimage festivals or that they came because of a fast decreed by the king in the wake of some trouble that had arisen. It would seem that this is stated explicitly: "And say: We are delivered" (*Yirmeyahu* 7:10). It seems that the people of Yehuda believed that their entering the Temple, their prostrating themselves there before God, and their prayers will save them from the calamity that is threatening them, and it is against this backdrop that Yirmeyahu delivers his prophecy.

Chapter 26 appears to be an abridgement of chapter 7 in which the prophet spells out the sins of the people in detail. In order to obtain a comprehensive picture, we will consider both prophecies in their entirety, and then briefly describe their contents:

Let us begin with chapter 7:

The word that came to Yirmeyahu from the Lord, saying: Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say: Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Yehuda that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust you not in lying words, saying: The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, are these. Nay, but if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if you thoroughly execute justice between a man and his neighbor; if you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt, then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and offer to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you have not known, and come and stand before Me in this house, whereupon My name is called, and say: We are delivered, that you may do all these abominations? Is this house, whereupon My name is called, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says the Lord.

For go you now to My place which was in Shilo, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because you have done all these works, says the Lord, and I spoke to you, speaking betimes and often, but you heard not, and I called you, but you answered not; therefore will I do to the house, whereupon My name is called, wherein you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shilo. And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Efrayim.

Therefore pray not you for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you. See you not what they do in the cities of Yehuda and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me. Do they provoke Me? says the Lord; do they not provoke themselves, to the confusion of their own faces?

Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, Mine anger and My fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the land; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched. (*Yirmeyahu* 7:1-20)

Now chapter 26:

In the beginning of the reign of Yehoyakim the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda, came this word from the Lord, saying: Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Yehuda, which come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them; diminish not a word. It may be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way; that I may repent Me of the evil, which I purpose to do to them because of the evil of their doings. And you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord: If you will not hearken to Me, to walk in My law, which I have set before you, to hearken to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I send to you, even sending them betimes and often, but you have not hearkened; then will I make this house like Shilo, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.

So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Yirmeyahu speaking these words in the house of the Lord. Now it came to pass, when Yirmeyahu had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold on him, saying: You shall surely die. Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying: This house shall be like Shilo, and this city shall be desolate, without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Yirmeyahu in the house of the Lord. When the princes of Yehuda heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the Lord; and they sat in the entry of the new gate of the Lord's house.

Then spoke the priests and the prophets to the princes and to all the people, saying: This man is worthy of death; for he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears.

Then spoke Yirmeyahu to all the princes and to all the people, saying: The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that you have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and hearken to the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent Him of the evil that He has pronounced against you. But as for me, behold, I am in your hand; do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know you for certain that, if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof; for of a truth the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears.

Then said the princes and all the people to the priests and to the prophets: This man is not worthy of death; for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God. Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spoke to all the assembly of the people, saying: Mikha the Morashtite prophesied in the days of Chizkiyahu king of Yehuda; and he spoke to all the people of Yehuda, saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts: Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Chizkiyahu king of Yehuda and all Yehuda put him at all to death? did he not fear the Lord, and entreat the favor of the Lord, and the Lord repented Him of the evil which He had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our own souls. And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the Lord, Uriya the son of Shemaaya of Kiryat-Ye'arim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Yirmeyahu; and when Yehoyakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Uriya heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; and Yehoyakim the king sent men into Egypt, Elnatan the son of Akhbor, and certain men with him, into Egypt; and they fetched forth Uriya out of Egypt, and brought him to Yehoyakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the children of the people. Nevertheless the hand of Achikam the son of Shafan was with Yirmeyahu, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death. (*Yirmeyahu* 26)[[1]](#footnote-1)

Let us begin our examination of chapter 7:

The prophet turns to all the people of Yehuda who have entered through the gates of the house of God to bow down before God, and he tells them that the Divine Presence will only rest in the Temple if the people mend their ways (execute justice between man and his fellow, refrain from oppressing the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, not spill innocent blood, and not go after other gods).

The prophet emphasizes twice in this passage: "And I will cause you to dwell in this place." He implores those who have arrived in the Temple not to rely on the words of the false prophets who promise that the Temple of the Lord will never be destroyed. In order that God will rest His presence in that place, the people must mend their ways, both in their relationships between man and his fellow and in their relationships between man and God. They rely on those who say that the Temple will protect them, but these false words will not help them.

In the continuation of the prophecy Yirmeyahu directs the people to the *Mishkan* in Shilo, which he describes as follows: "Shilo, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel." He prophesies: "Therefore I will do to the house, whereupon My name is called, wherein you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shilo."

### The significance of the mentioning of the destruction of Shilo

Why does the prophet refer them specifically to Shilo? It seems that it is not by chance that the prophet refers the people of the kingdom of Yehuda who have come to prostrate themselves in the house of God to Shilo. It is not only that before the Temple was built, the *Mishkan* stood in Shilo for 369 years (according to *Seder Olam*), and therefore it is the most significant structure that preceded the house of God. We would like to suggest that the reference to the destruction of Shilo has a deeper meaning.

Scripture in I *Shemuel* 4 describes the attitude of Chofni and Pinchas to the ark of the Lord. After the first battle of Even ha-Ezer in which Israel was routed and four thousand people were killed, the elders of Israel suggest that the ark of the covenant be taken out to the battlefield: "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shilo to us, that He may come among us, and save us out of the hand of our enemy" (I *Shemuel* 4:3). Indeed, Chofni and Pinchas take the ark and bring it to the camp. The assumption that underlies the bringing of the ark to the camp is that the ark is some kind of a "secret weapon" and "insurance policy." The people believed that the very bringing of the ark to the camp would decide the battle and bring them victory.

Now, at the beginning of the reign of Yehoyakim, the prophet Yirmeyahu refers the people to the destruction of Shilo in order to tell them that they are guilty of the very same sin. The belief that the false prophets spread among the people about "the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord" indicates that the Temple was perceived by the people as some sort of "insurance policy," a blind trust in a time of danger. The Temple would protect them because its very existence indicates that God is with them.

Moreover, those people of the kingdom of Yehuda who bowed down before God in the house of God also believed that there was no connection between their evil ways and the Divine Presence that rested in the house of God. It was precisely against such a view that Yirmeyahu railed – the people cannot turn the house of God into a den of robbers and continue to believe that God will rest among them.

In addition to this blind trust, it is possible that the prophet referred the people to "God's place in Shilo" because the conduct of Eli's sons in the *Mishkan* involved grave sins both toward God and especially to their fellow man, and now in the days of Yehoyakim the people of the kingdom of Yehuda are committing sins that are very similar to those that led to the destruction of Shilo.

What brought the people of the kingdom of Yehuda in the generation of Yirmeyahu to relate to the house of God as some kind of insurance policy? Can it be the words of Shelomo at the time of the building of the Temple: "I have surely built you a house of habitation, a place for You to dwell in forever" (I *Melakhim* 8:13)? God, however, revealed Himself to Shelomo and told him: "But if you shall turn away from following Me, you or your children, and not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for My name, will I cast out of My sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a by word among all peoples" (I *Melakhim* 9:6-7). But the people of the kingdom did not relate to this prophecy.

Is it possible that following the threats of Sancheriv and Ravshakeh against Jerusalem in the days of Chizkiyahu, the prophet Yeshayahu's answer: "For I will defend this city to save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake" (II *Melakhim* 19:34; *Yeshayahu* 37:35), gave them the feeling and trust that no matter what will happen, God will defend Jerusalem? Did they think that Yeshayahu's prophecy was still valid in their time?

It is interesting that from the prophecy of Yirmeyahu we can learn about the destruction of Shilo. The destruction of Shilo is not mentioned at all in the book of *Shemuel.* It is possible that the deep reason for the absence of any mention of the destruction of the city lies in the fact that throughout the period of the *Shofetim,* Shilo did not play a significant spiritual role. It was to Mikha's idol, which was located very close to the *Mishkan* in Shilo, that everyone came, and even after the destruction of Shilo, Scripture does not note in an orderly fashion the transfer of the *Mishkan* to Nov, and afterwards to the great *bama* in Givon.

Clear evidence for the destruction of Shilo was found in the excavations at Tel Shilo, where it is possible to point to a burnt layer that corresponds to the period during which the city is said to have been destroyed. In addition to the prophecy of Yirmeyahu, the destruction of Shilo is mentioned also in the book of *Tehilim*:

And He forsook the Tabernacle of Shilo, the tent which He had made to dwell among men. And delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the adversary's hand. He gave His people over also to the sword; and was wroth with His inheritance. Fire devoured their young men; and their virgins had no marriage-song. Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation. (*Tehilim* 78:60-64)

It is interesting that it is said about Shilo: "Where I caused My name to dwell at the first." Apparently this refers to what is stated many times in the book of *Devarim*: "The place which the Lord your God shall choose." According to this, we can say that Shilo is defined as a place that God will choose.

According to the plain sense of the verses, however, there is no indication of a Divine choice of Shilo. The verse in Yehoshua 18 describes how Yehoshua and the people of Israel went to Shilo without consulting the *Urim* and the *Tumim,* without the instructions of a prophet, without any revelation, but simply based on the consideration of joining the site of the resting of the *Shekhina* at that time to the tribal territory of the leader during that period, the territory of Efrayim. Thus, the wording of the prophet: "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled themselves together at Shilo, and set up the tent of meeting there; and the land was subdued before them" (*Yehoshua* 18:1). They went to Shilo, without any reference to a Divine choosing of the place.

*Chazal* did, however, relate to Shilo, as a place that was chosen by God. It may be suggested that during the time that the *Shekhina* rested in Shilo, Scripture did not relate to it as a place that was chosen by God. But after it was destroyed, both the prophet Yirmeyahu and the book of *Tehilim* related to it in this fashion. It is possible to explain that even though Scripture makes no explicit mention of a Divine choosing of the place, the very fact that the *Shekhina* rested in the place for 369 years teaches that God did in fact choose the place.

### A repair of Israel's ways – a condition for the continued existence of the temple

Let us return to the words of Yirmeyahu, who asserts: "Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and offer to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you have not known, and come and stand before Me in this house, whereupon My name is called, and say: We are delivered, that you may do all these abominations?" The prophet describes how all these grave phenomena – stealing, murder, adultery, swearing falsely, offering to Baal – directly lead to the removal of the *Shekhina.*

God does not want to rest His name in a place where all of these abominations are being committed. Here we find the prophetic conception that the very existence of the house of God is a direct result of doing the will of God and observing His Torah and commandments.

In the next *shiur*, we will examine the principle that we saw in the words of Yirmiyahu in the words of the rest of the prophets.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. We have cited here the two prophecies in full. We will be referring to them also in the coming *shiurim.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)