YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**MIKDASH**

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**Lecture 347: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(CLVII) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXXXIII)**

At the beginning of Yehoyakim's reign, the prophet Yirmeyahu is commanded to make for himself bands and bars and put them on his neck, and walk about with them in the streets of Jerusalem, and thus signal to Yehuda and the other peoples in the region that they must bear the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, for thus was it decreed from heaven:

In the beginning of the reign of Yehoyakim the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda, came this word to Yirmeyahu from the Lord, saying: Thus says the Lord to me: Make you bands and bars, and put them upon your neck… saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Thus shall you say to your masters: I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the face of the earth, by My great power and by My outstretched arm; and I give it to whom it seems right to Me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nevuchadnetzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field also have I given him to serve him. And all the nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the time of his own land come; and then many nations and great kings shall make him their bondman. And it shall come to pass, that the nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I visit, says the Lord, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand. But as for you, hearken you not to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreams, nor to your soothsayers, nor to your sorcerers, that speak to you, saying: You shall not serve the king of Babylon; for they prophesy a lie unto you… But the nation that shall bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, that nation will I let remain in their own land, says the Lord; and they shall till it, and dwell therein. (*Yirmeyahu* 27:1-11)

### The beginning of the Reign of Yehoyakim

The phrase, "in the beginning of the reign of Yehoyakim," does not necessarily indicate that the event described here occurred immediately upon Yehoyakim's rise to the throne. It is certainly possible that we are dealing with the early years of his reign. Proof of this may be adduced from what is stated in the next chapter of *Yirmeyahu*: "And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Tzidkiya king of Yehuda, in the fourth year, in the fifth month, that Chananya the son of Asur the prophet, who was of Giv'on, spoke to me in the house of the Lord, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying" (*Yirmeyahu* 28:1). There is no contradiction between the fact that the prophecy was delivered in the fourth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign and the fact that Scripture relates to this as the beginning of Tzidkiyahu's reign.

On the other hand, some of the *Rishonim* (Rashi, Radak, Mahari Kara) explain that the command given to Yirmeyahu to make bars and bands and place them upon his neck was indeed given in the first year of Yehoyakim's reign. Rashi emphasizes: "Three years before it was prophesied about King Nevuchadnetzar that he would rule as king."[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Radak on *Yirmeyahu* 27:1 explains as follows:

"At the beginning of the reign" – This prophecy was said to Yirmeyahu during the first year of Yehoyakim's reign. God said to him that when Tzidkiyahu rules after the reigns of Yehoyakim and Yehoyakhin, Yirmeyahu should make bars and bands and send them to the kings mentioned there by way of the messengers coming to Jerusalem to Tzidkiyahu, and he should instruct them to tell the kings their masters to send them to Tzidkiyahu and tell them all the things mentioned in the passage. Yirmeyahu also told them: "And I spoke to Tzidkiyahu king of Yehuda according to all these words." For it appears that these kings sent to Tzidkiyahu that he should join with them and that they should all rebel against the king of Babylon. Therefore God commanded Yirmeyahu to say to these messengers after the words of their masters are finished: "And I spoke to Tzidkiyahu king of Yehuda according to all these words, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon." …And the fact that this prophecy was delivered to him at the beginning of Yehoyakim's reign, and the prophecy was only for eleven years later, was so that Yehoyakim should know that Nevuchadnetzar would eventually rule, so that Yehoyakim not put his trust in the king of Egypt who had appointed him king.

It follows from the Radak's words that already during the first year of Yehoyakim's reign, Yirmeyahu was commanded to make bars and bands, and Yirmeyahu placed them on his neck for fifteen years until the reign of Tzidkiyahu. In verse 3 it says: "And send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moav, and to the king of the children of Amon, and to the king of Tzor, and to the king of Tzidon, by the hand of the messengers that come to Jerusalem to Tzidkiyahu king of Yehuda." This grave step, in which a prophet actually went about for years with bars and bands upon his neck, was meant to demonstrate to the people of Yehuda that the king of Babylon will eventually rule over them, and they will be subjugated to him.

When the representatives of the five kings come to Tzidkiyahu the king of Yehuda, Yirmeyahu gives bars and bands to them as well, and he places his yoke on his neck until the fourth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign, when Chananya the son of Azur came and broke the yoke, as is stated explicitly in Yirmeyahu 28:1 and 10, in a prophecy that was delivered in the fourth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign in the fifth month. Chananya the prophet takes the bar from upon Yirmeyahu's neck and breaks it and says to all the people: "Even so will I break the yoke of Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon from off the neck of all the nations within two full years" (*Yirmeyahu* 28:11).

### The demand to submit to Babylon

Let us examine the harsh tidings:

And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nevuchadnetzar the king of Babylon, My servant… and it shall come to pass, that the nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I visit, says the Lord, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand. 

God chooses Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon to be his servant (as is explained in *Yirmiyahu* 25:9). No explanation is given as to why it is the king of Babylon in particular who is chosen. It is clear that anyone who rebels against Nevuchadnetzar will be considered as if he rebelled against the explicit will of God, and he will be punished accordingly (*Yirmeyahu* 25:30-38). It is important to emphasize that the prophet's demand of King Yehoyakim to submit to Babylon is exceedingly dramatic and constitutes a very great innovation on the prophetic level.

In the days of King Chizkiyahu, the dominant world power was Ashur, and to the prophet's great chagrin, Chizkiyahu chose to rebel against it while forging an alliance with Egypt, Babylon and other powers. After Sancheriv invaded Yehuda and encircled Jerusalem, the king repented and prayed to God and turned to the prophet Yeshayahu, and in the end the prophet declared (*Yeshayahu* 37:35): "For I will defend this city to save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake." A prophet comes and states that despite Ashur's invasion of Yehuda and the very heavy tax that Chizkiyahu was required to pay, in the wake of the king's repentance and prayer, God will defend and deliver Jerusalem.

It is very possible that the false prophets drew heavily on Yeshayahu's prophecy and understood it as an insurance policy that God will certainly continue to defend Jerusalem. The prophet Yirmeyahu turns to the people and says to them: "But as for you, hearken you not to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreams, nor to your soothsayers, nor to your sorcerers, that speak to you, saying: You shall not serve the king of Babylon; for they prophesy a lie unto you to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out and you should perish."

Later in the chapter, when from verse 12 and on the prophet already relates explicitly to Tzidkiyahu, he repeats the demand to submit to Babylon, and warns once again: "For they prophesy a lie to you. For I have not sent them, says the Lord, and they prophesy falsely in My name; that I might drive you out, and that you might perish, you, and the prophets that prophesy to you"(*Yirmeyahu* 27:14-15). It is possible, as stated, that the lie that these prophets prophesy relies on the sense of security that they received from Yeshayahu's prophecy, according to which God will defend Jerusalem.

The demand to submit to Babylon is in many ways the very opposite of Yeshayahu's prophecy. Not only will God not defend the kingdom of Yehuda, but in order for it to survive and continue to exist it must submit to the enemy.[[2]](#footnote-2) It is not by chance that in the continuation of his prophecy in the days of Tzidkiyahu when the prophet leaves Jerusalem to go to the land of Binyamin, they will search for the prophet and suspect him of collaborating with the Kasdim. The prophet tries to deny this accusation. In that chapter he is brought before the officers who beat the prophet and incarcerate him in the house of Yehonatan the scribe which was turned into a jail, and he remains there for many days (*Yirmeyahu* 37:12 and on).

In any event it appears from chapter 27 that from the beginning of the reign of Yehoyakim until the fourth year of the reign of Tzidkiyahu, the prophet went about with bars and bands on his neck. The words of the prophet emphasize that God created the world and rules over it, and now God has decreed that all the lands should be given over to Nevuchandnetzar king of Babylon. God presents him as His servant who is required to do exactly as ordered by his master. This comes to express that all nations will be subjugated to Nevuchadnetzar, and there will be no way to escape his rule. In addition the prophet promises that they will serve the king of Babylon for three generations. It is true that all the nations will be forced to serve the king of Babylon, but even though he subjugated so many nations and lands, when the time comes he himself will be subjugated to many important nations.

Those nations who will not serve the king of Babylon God will punish with the sword, with hunger, and with the plague. But the nations that will place their necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, God will leave them in their land, they will work it and continue to dwell in it.

As stated, everything that we have described here takes place at the beginning of Yehoyakim's reign, whether this means immediately upon his rising to the throne, or it means in the early years of his kingdom.

As we have mentioned elsewhere, Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon defeated Par'o Nekho at Karkamish and pursued after him. After Egypt's rout, Yehuda and the neighboring peoples united to prevent Nevuchadnetzar from conquering the lands west of the Euphrates River. But as we have seen, the prophet Yirmeyahu warned them not to oppose Babylon, but rather to submit, and if they fail to submit, they are doomed to destruction.

Upon his ascent to the throne, Nevuchadnetzar besieged Ashkelon, thereby casting great fear on the people of the region, lest Nevuchadnetzar go after them as well.

Scripture attests: "In his days Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon came up, and Yehoyakim became his servant three years; then he turned and rebelled against him" (II *Melakhim* 24:1). Scripture does not spell out the background or the precise timing of Yehoyakim's submission to Babylon, nor does it clarify the circumstances – with or without a fight.

On the other hand, from here we learn that the fourth year of Yehoyakim's reign was the first year of Nevuchadnetzar's reign. Beginning with the next *shiur* we will examine several prophesies delivered by the prophet in the fourth year of Yehoyakim's reign, at the beginning of Nevuchadnetzar's reign. We will see that in contrast to the fear that was cast upon the surrounding nations, King Yehoyakim related to the words of Yirmeyahu with great contempt (*Yirmeyahu* 36).

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. It is explicitly stated in *Yirmeyahu* 25:1 that the fourth year of the reign of Yehoyakim son of Yoshiyahu king of Yehuda was the first year of the reign of Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. If the Jewish people would merit prophets in our time, and those prophets would direct us, in order to survive, to surrender to Iran and all of our enemies that surround us, how would we relate to such prophets? [↑](#footnote-ref-2)