YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**MIKDASH**

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**Lecture 348: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(CLVIII) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXXXIV)**

Thus far we have dealt with the prophecies of Yirmeyahu that were delivered at the beginning of King Yehoyakim's reign. From the beginning of his reign and for the first four years of his rule, Egypt is in control of the Land of Israel.

### Egypt's defeat At the hands of babylon at Karkamish

In the fourth year of his reign Par'o Nekho is defeated by Nevuchadnetzar, king of Babylon, at Karkamish along the Euphrates River: "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" (*Yirmeyahu* 46:1-2 and on).

The prophet informs the people of the kingdom of Yehuda that Egypt, which had fought the army of Yehuda near Megido and killed Yehoshiyahu, exiled Yehoachaz, and took control of the land of Yehuda, would be held accountable for the injustice it had committed against Yehuda. This is a fulfillment of Yirmeyahu's own prophecy: "All that devour shall be held guilty, evil shall come upon them, says the Lord" (*Yirmeyahu* 2:3).

Even though the Egyptian army was well equipped, the prophet foresees that it would be beaten by the stronger Kasdim. Par'o Nekho thought that his armies would cover the world, as is explicitly stated in the continuation: "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" (*YIrmeyahu* 46:8). But eventually Egypt will be defeated and the Babylonian soldiers will reach them all and kill them.

In the end, the prophecy recorded in II *Melakhim* 24:7 was fulfilled: "And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land; for the king of Babylon had taken from the Brook of Egypt unto the river Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt." This prophecy comes to teach the people of the kingdom of Yehuda that even if the enemies of Israel fulfill a Divine mission with their very oppression of Israel, they will eventually suffer punishment for their evil actions.

### an attempt to unite against Babylon and the severe calamity that befell the kingdom of Yehuda and the peoples nearby

With the death of Nevopalaser, Nevuchadnetzar his son abandons the revolt of Yehuda and returns to his own country to inherit the throne. For a short time independence returns to Judea.

Par'o Nekho was defeated near Karkamish on the bank of the Euphrates River at the hand of Nevuchadnetzar about eighteen years before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The kings of Yehuda and the surrounding countries feared that Babylon would now seek to take over the lands that had been under Egyptian rule for four years, and therefore they tried to unite, so that they could fight together against Babylon should the latter come to subjugate them. It would appear that it was Yehoyakim who led this course of action. Yirmeyahu the prophet suggests to them that they abandon their plan and accept upon themselves the yoke of Nevuchadnetzar the king of Babylon.

The prophet delivers a harsh message to them: "Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, says the Lord, and I will send to Nevuchadnetzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual desolations" (*Yirmeyahu* 25:9). After the prophets spells out in great detail all of the nations to whom his prophecy is directed (*Yirmeyahu* 25) and the punishment that will befall each and every nation, he continues:

Then took I the cup of the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to drink, to whom the Lord had sent me… Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Drink you, and be drunken, and spew, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you. And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at your hand to drink, then shall you say to them: Thus says the Lord of hosts: You shall surely drink. For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city whereupon My name is called, and should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished; for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, says the Lord of hosts.

Therefore prophesy you against them all these words, and say to them… A noise is come even to the end of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with the nations, He does plead with all flesh; as for the wicked, He has given them to the sword, says the Lord.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great storm shall be raised up from the uttermost parts of the earth. And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the face of the ground. Wail, you shepherds, and cry; and wallow yourselves in the dust, you leaders of the flock; for the days of your slaughter are fully come, and I will break you in pieces, and you shall fall like a precious vessel. And the shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the leaders of the flock to escape. Hark! the cry of the shepherds, and the wailing of the leaders of the flock! For the Lord despoils their pasture. And the peaceable folds are brought to silence because of the fierce anger of the Lord. (*Yirmeyahu* 25:17-37)

God has a quarrel with all the nations. He will judge all of the world and deliver the wicked to be killed by the sword.

The punishment will indeed begin from Jerusalem and from the Temple, but it will spread to all the nations of the world. And after all these peoples will be exiled from their lands, where they had toiled in peace, their voices will no longer be heard there and there will be silence in the world.

The kingdom of Yehuda will be destroyed because of idol worship, but here in the chapter there is no detailing of the sins of the other nations. They are called wicked. In the collection of prophecies concerning the nations (chapters 46-51), Yirmeyahu spells out some of the sins on account of which they will have to drink from the cup of wrath: the pride of Moav (*Yirmeyahu* 48), the confidence of Amon in their many treasures, the malicious heart of Edom and the exaggerated self-confidence of Babylon.

The prophet ends this chapter with an account of the intensity of the destruction that Nevuchadnetzar will bring to the other lands if they do not submit to him. God will roar like a lion and like they that tread the grapes: "A noise is come even to the end of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with the nations, He does plead with all flesh; as for the wicked, he has given them to the sword, says the Lord" (*Yirmeyahu* 25:31). Even among the fallen of the nations, those who are called the fallen of the Lord will not be brought to burial and will be like dung on the face of the earth. What we saw in the kingdom of Yehuda regarding those who worshipped the Molekh and regarding all the bodies of the heads of the government and the people that will be removed from their graves and remain as carcasses for the beasts of the earth – thus it will also be for the nations who will be destroyed by Nevuchadnetzar the king of Babylon.

It is important to note that this prophecy was delivered in the fourth year of King Yehoyakim, which was the first year of the reign of Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon. It is interesting to note that several prophecies are dated to this time, which, more than anything else, symbolizes the fulfillment of Yirmeyahu's prophesy regarding the ascent of Babylon. But at the same time it also symbolizes the end of the kingdom of Yehuda which will take place in another eighteen years. Therefore, noting this date is very significant. After all, it is not by chance that the prophet notes at the beginning of the chapter that:

From the thirteenth year of Yoshiyahu the son of Amon, king of Yehuda, even unto this day, these three and twenty years, the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken to you, speaking betimes and often; but you have not hearkened. And the Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets, sending them betimes and often, but you have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear, saying: Return you now everyone from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord has given to you and to your fathers, for ever and ever; and go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke Me not with the work of your hands, and I will do you no hurt. Yet you have not hearkened to Me, says the Lord; that you might provoke Me with the work of your hands to your own hurt. (*Yirmeyahu* 25:3-7)

Why does the prophet in this context note the twenty-three years of his prophecy and the other prophets who were sent by God? He very clearly emphasizes the fact that the people did not listen (the phrase "you have not hearkened" is repeated four times in these verses), because he understands that despite all of his own efforts and all the efforts of the other prophets to bring the people of Yehuda to repent, they failed in their mission, and in the end the destruction is at hand. That which Yirmeyahu feared for so many years is now actually going to happen, and the prophet emphasizes: "And I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Yirmeyahu has prophesied against all the nations" (*Yirmeyahu* 25:13).

We shall begin now to examine chapter 36, which was also stated in the fourth year of the reign of King Yehoyakim:

Take you a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, and against Yehuda, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Yoshiyahu, even to this day. It may be that the house of Yehuda will hear all the evil which I purpose to do to them; that they may return every man from his evil way, and I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

Then Yirmeyahu called Barukh the son of Neriya; and Barukh wrote from the mouth of Yirmeyahu all the words of the Lord, which He had spoken to him, upon a roll of a book. And Yirmeyahu commanded Baruch, saying: I am detained, I cannot go into the house of the Lord; therefore go you, and read in the roll, which you have written from my mouth, the words of the Lord in the ears of the people in the Lord's house upon a fast-day; and also you shall read them in the ears of all Yehuda that come out of their cities. It may be they will present their supplication before the Lord, and will return everyone from his evil way; for great is the anger and the fury that the Lord has pronounced against this people. And Barukh the son of Neriya did according to all that Yirmeyahu the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the Lord in the Lord's house. (*Yirmeyahu* 36:2-8)

In order to understand the chapter we must note several things that preceded this prophecy. In the beginning of Yehoyakim's reign (as is stated in chapters 7 and 26, and as we explained in previous *shiurim*), Yirmeyahu prophesied: "Then will I make this house like Shilo, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth" (*Yirmeyahu* 26:6). When he said these harsh words in the Temple, the prophet was rescued by Achikam the son of Shafan (*Yirmeyahu* 26:24), but it would appear that in the wake of this prophecy, Yirmeyahu was forbidden to enter the Temple, as stated in our chapter: "And Yirmeyahu commanded Baruch, saying: I am detained, I cannot go into the house of the Lord" (*Yirmeyahu* 36:5).

We mentioned that in the wake of the victory of Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon over Par'o Nekho at Karkamish, all the kingdoms feared being taken over by the Kasdim and therefore they tried to unite and fight against the king of Babylon (as we saw in chapter 25). Yirmeyahu warns the people of the kingdom of Yehuda and its allies not to fight against the Kasdim but rather to submit to them and serve them for seventy years.

Yirmeyahu is commanded to write down all of the prophecies of calamity that he delivered from the days of Yoshiyahu and until that time. Therefore the detained Yirmeyahu invites Baruch the son of Neriya the scribe to come to him, and he dictates to him the prophecies of calamity as he was commanded to do, in order that Baruch should read them before the people in the Temple.

The scroll relates to Israel and to the nations. The goal is perhaps that the people of the kingdom of Yehuda should repent from their wicked ways and then God will be able to pardon their sins and transgressions. If indeed they will listen to Yirmeyahu's rebukes and to the punishments that await them, they might truly repent and their supplications before God will then be accepted with favor; "for great is the anger and the fury that the Lord has pronounced against the people."

In the next shiur, we will continue to examine the rest of chapter 36 and see the ramifications of Barukh's reading of Yirmeyahu's words in the Temple on the people and on their leaders, and Yehoyakim's very harsh attitude toward Yirmeyahu's prophecy.

(Translated by David Strauss)