YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**MIKDASH**

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

**Lecture 349: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(CLIX) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXXXV)**

In the [previous *shiur*](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/lecture-348-history-divine-service-altars-clviii-%E2%80%93-prohibition-bamot-cxxxiv)we provided the background to the writing of the book that was dictated by the prophet Yirmeyahu to Barukh the son of Neriya. Barukh the son of Neriya was commanded to read the book in the ears of the people of the kingdom of Yehuda in the house of God on a fast day:

Now it came to pass in the fifth year of Yehoyakim the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda, in the ninth month, that they proclaimed a fast before the Lord, all the people in Jerusalem, and all the people that came from the cities of Yehuda unto Jerusalem. Then did Barukh read in the book the words of Yirmeyahu in the house of the Lord, in the chamber of Gemaryahu the son of Shafan the scribe, in the upper court, at the entry of the new gate of the Lord's house, in the ears of all the people. And when Mikhayahu the son of Gemaryahu, the son of Shafan, had heard out of the book all the words of the Lord, he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's chamber; and, lo, all the princes sat there, even Elishama the scribe, and Delayahu the son of Shemayahu, and Elnatan the son of Akhbor, and Gemaryahu the son of Shafan, and Tzidkiyahu the son of Chananyahu, and all the princes. Then Mikhayahu declared to them all the words that he had heard, when Barukh read the book in the ears of the people. Therefore all the princes sent Yehudi the son of Netanyahu, the son of Shelemyahu, the son of Kushi, to Barukh, saying: Take in your hand the scroll wherein you have read in the ears of the people, and come. So Barukh the son of Neriya took the scroll in his hand, and came unto them. And they said to him: Sit down now, and read it in our ears. So Barukh read it in their ears. And they asked Barukh, saying: Tell us now: How did you write all these words at his mouth? Then Barukh answered them: He pronounced all these words to me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book.

Then said the princes to Barukh: Go, hide you, you and Yirmeyahu, and let no man know where you are. And they went in to the king into the court; but they had deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe; and they told all the words in the ears of the king. So the king sent Yehudi to fetch the scroll; and he took it out of the chamber of Elishama the scribe. And Yehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes that stood beside the king. Now the king was sitting in the winter-house in the ninth month; and the brazier was burning before him. And it came to pass, when Yehudi had read three or four columns, that he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier. Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. Moreover Elnatan and Delayahu and Gemaryahu had entreated the king not to burn the scroll; but he would not hear them. And the king commanded Yerachmiel the king's son, and Serayahu the son of Azriel, and Shelemyahu the son of Avdiel, to take Barukh the scribe and Yirmeyahu the prophet; but the Lord hid them.

Then the word of the Lord came to Yirmeyahu, after that the king had burned the scroll, and the words which Barukh wrote at the mouth of Yirmeyahu, saying: Take you again another scroll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Yehoyakim the king of Yehuda has burned. And concerning Yehoyakim king of Yehuda you shall say: Thus says the Lord: You have burned this scroll, saying: Why have you written therein, saying: The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from there man and beast?

Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Yehoyakim king of Yehuda: 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. And I will visit upon him and his seed and his servants their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Yehuda, all the evil that I have pronounced against them, but they hearkened not.

Then took Yirmeyahu another scroll, and gave it to Barukh the scribe, the son of Neriya; who wrote therein from the mouth of Yirmeyahu all the words of the book which Yehoyakim king of Yehuda had burned in the fire; and there were added besides to them many like words. (*Yirmeyahu* 36:9-32)

Scripture records the date of the fast that was held in the house of God in Jerusalem: in the fifth year of Yehoyakim the son of Yoshiyahu the king of Yehuda in the ninth month. The reference is to the month of Kislev, about seventeen years before the destruction of the first Temple.

According to external sources, Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon conquered and destroyed the city of Ashkelon. This conquest brought the people of the kingdom of Yehuda to greatly fear the possibility that Nevuchadnetzar would conquer from there the entire kingdom of Yehuda. Therefore, they went up from all across the land to the house of God for an assembly of fast and prayer.

Barukh ben Neriya carries out Yirmeyahu's instructions and reads his words in the house of God in the chamber of Gamaryahu the son of Shafan the scribe in the ears of all the people.

### Gamaryahu the son of Shafan

We are familiar with the Shafan family from previous prophecies: Chilkiyahu the priest entrusted him with the Torah scroll that was found in the Temple. Shafan read the book before Yoshiyahu. Shafan was part of the delegation that went to the prophetess Chulda to ask her what to do with the Torah scroll that was found in the house of God.

Achikam the son of Shafan defended the prophet Yirmiyahu against those who wanted to condemn him to death after he informed the people of the kingdom of Yehuda that the fate of the house of God would be like that of the *Mishkan* in Shilo (as stated explicitly in *Yirmeyahu* 26:24: "Nevertheless the hand of Achikam the son of Shafan was with Yirmeyhau, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death").

Gamaryahu was one of the ministers of King Yehoyakim, and he was familiar with the art of writing, and therefore played an important administrative role. The Shafan family, across the generations, was a family of scribes who protected the prophet Yirmiyahu.

In the excavations carried out by the Shilo expedition in Area G of the City of David, some fifty clay seals were uncovered, containing various names of people, possibly of officials in the kingdom of Yehuda. One of the names on one of those seals is the name of Gamaryahu the son of Shafan who is mentioned in our chapter. The clay seals were preserved because the fires that burned at the time of the destruction of the Temple hardened the clay and made their preservation possible. The excavations conducted by Ayelet Mazar in the area of the impressive eleventh century B.C.E. structure uncovered two seals of ministers in the kingdom of Tzidkiyahu who are mentioned in *Yirmeyahu* 38:1 – Gedalyahu the son of Pashchur and Yukhal the son of Shelamyanu.

The verse at the beginning of chapter 38 reads: "Thus says the Lord: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it." These ministers together with other ministers turn to the king, and ask that the prophet Yirmeyahu be put to death because he weakens the hands of the men of war that remain in the city and the hands of the all the people. "For this man seeks not the welfare of this people, but the hurt" (*Yirmeyahu* 38:4).

It is very exciting to receive "warm regards" from three well-known and influential figures who enjoyed high standing in the kingdoms of Yehoyakim and Tzidkiyahu – Gamaryahu the son of Shafan, who supported the prophet Yirmeyahu, and Gedalyahu the son of Pashchur and Yukhal the son of Shelamyahu, who wished to kill Yirmeyahu.

The chamber of Gamaryahu the son of Shafan was located in the house of God, in the upper courtyard at the entry of the new gate of the house of God.

### The upper courtyard at the entry of the new gate of the house of GOd

Based on the clear description of an upper courtyard it is reasonable to assume that there was also a lower courtyard. The location of the upper courtyard is not spelled out, but it may be presumed that it was found in the more elevated section of Mount Moriya, perhaps even north of the house of God. Scripture also refers to the entry of the new gate of the house of God. It is written in II *Melakhim* 2:15, 35 that King Yotam built the upper gate of the house of God. So too the prophet Yechezkel states: "And, behold, six men came from the way of the upper gate, which lies toward the north" (*Yechezkel* 9:2).

Our book mentions the action of Pashchur the priest, who beat the prophet Yirmeyahu and put him in the stocks that were in the upper gate of Binyamin, which was in the house of God (*Yirmeyahu* 20:2). Here too we find a combination of the gate of Binyamin – the gate that leads northward to the territory of Binyamin – and the upper gate. Once again, topographically, it is reasonable to assume that we are dealing with the area north of the house of God.

On the other hand, with respect to the coronation of King Yehoash, Scripture states: "And he took the captains of hundreds, and the nobles, and the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and brought down the king from the house of the Lord; and they came through the upper gate to the king's house, and set the king upon the throne of the kingdom" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 23:20).

King Yehoash was coronated in the house of God, and there Yehoyada the priest made a covenant with the king, between him and all the people and the king, to be the people of God. The verse notes here that Yehoyada took the ministers, the officials and all the people, "and brought down the king from the house of the Lord; and they came through the upper gate to the king's house." This verse requires examination. According to the commonly accepted view, the king's house from the time of Shelomo until the days of Chizkiyahu was located south of the house of God in the area north of the City of David (in the area of today's Davidson Center and the Ophel excavations). Topographically, this area is lower than the house of God, and ostensibly the expression, "and he brought down the king from the house of the Lord," is very logical and understandable.

On the other hand, if, topographically, the more elevated area is north of the house of God, and so too it is reasonable that the gate of Binyamin was north of the house of God, it is not very reasonable that they brought the king down from the north through the upper gate to the king's house located to the south of the house of God. It would have been much simpler to bring the king down directly from the house of God to the king's house, which is adjacent to it to the south.

Is it possible to prove from here that the king's house was located north of the house of God? As stated, this verse requires further examination. Another possibility is to suggest that the term "upper gate" refers to the more elevated section of the king's house. It is called the upper gate because it is located to the north of the king's house and to the south of the house of God. According to this, the gate is not found to the north of the house of God, but rather to the south. In this case we must explain the expression, "the upper gate of Binyamin," which one would have expected to be oriented northward.

It is interesting to note that when Nechemya describes the reconstruction and restoration of the city wall during the time of the return to Zion, he relates to the upper house of the king (*Nechemya* 3:24). In the description of the eastern wall of the City of David (verse 16 mentions the sepulchers of David, the pool that was made and the house of the mighty men, which are located in the southern part of the city), it says: "Palal the son of Uzai repaired over against the Turning, and the tower that stands out from the upper house of the king, which is by the court of the guard. After him Pedaya the son of Parosh repaired" (*Nechemya* 3:25). The next verse mentions those who dwell in the Ophel, the water gate towards the east, and the tower that stands out.

This verse as well requires close examination. Ostensibly, we are dealing with the northeastern part of the City of David facing the southern part of the Temple Mount. According to the commonly accepted view, this is the area of the house of the king. Later on, mention is made of the Ophel, the place from which people went up in the northeastern part of the City of David to the southeastern section of the house of God.

On the other hand, the text implies that there is an upper house of the king, from which it follows that there is also a lower house of the king. Is it possible that there were two different parts of the house of the king, one part south of the house of God and another part north of the house of God? This suggestion resolves all of the difficulties raised earlier.

In any case, the chamber of Gamaryahu the son of Shafan the scribe is located at the entry of the new gate of the house of God.

Mikha, the son of Gamaryahu the son of Shafan, hears all of the words of God that were read aloud from the book, and he goes down to the house of the king to the chamber of Elishama the scribe, where all of the ministers are found. He reports to them all that he heard from the book read by Barukh the son of Neriya. The ministers ask Barukh to take the scroll written by Yirmiyahu, come to them and read it in their ears. In response to what they hear, the ministers are overcome by fear and ask Barukh the son of Neriya how he wrote these words from the mouth of Yirmeyahu. He tells them that Yirmeyahu uttered the words, and he immediately recorded them in the book, apparently in the most precise manner possible.

The ministers tell Barukh the son of Neriya that he and the prophet Yirmiyahu should hide so that the king not be able to find them. These ministers apparently understand that Yirmeyahu's words are in fact true, and that the only way to save the kingdom of Yehuda is through full repentance and submission to Babylon. They certainly remember that King Yehoyakim killed the prophet Uriyahu the son of Shemayahu from Kiryat-Ye'arim. They also remember that when Yirmeyahu delivered his harsh prophecy that the fate of the Temple would be like that of Shilo, the priests and the false prophets sought to kill him.

Indeed, after King Yehoyakim hears the words that were written in the book, it is stated: "And the king commanded Yerachmiel the king's son, and Serayahu the son of Azriel, and Shelemyahu the son of Avdiel, to take Barukh the scribe and Yirmeyahu the prophet; but the Lord hid them." It is reasonable to assume that these people whom Yehoyakim sent to arrest Yirmeyahu the prophet and Barukh the scribe were in charge of internal security and among the king's most senior and trusted officials. Scripture attests to the fact that God hid Yirmeyahu and Barukh out of a desire to protect them.

From the very beginning of his prophecy, God promised Yirmeyahu: "For I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you"(*Yirmeyahu* 1:19); and later: "And I will make you to this people a fortified brazen wall; and they shall fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you to save you and to deliver you, says the Lord. And I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you out of the hand of the terrible" (*Yirmeyahu* 15:20-21). Afterwards the ministers deposit the book itself in the chamber of Elishama the scribe (perhaps for fear that the king would burn it, or punish them for having brought him the book of doom without his permission). Indeed, Yehudi takes the book from the chamber of Elishama the Scribe and reads it in the ears of the king and of the ministers standing over him.

This month is Kislev and the king is sitting in his winter-house, a fire burning in the fireplace. As Yehudi reads from the book, every time three or four pages would be read to the king, he would cut them out with a knife and throw them into the fire until the entire prophetic book was turned into ashes.

Those who heard the book being read neither feared nor did they rend their garments. Apparently, those ministers who were overcome by fear when they heard the book being read by Barukh did not show how afraid they were, for fear of the king's response. The king's servants certainly did not rend their garments.

According to the Halakha, and so it is stated in *Mo'ed Katan* 26a, a person who sees a Torah scroll being torn must make two rents in his garment, one for the parchment and one for the writing, as it is stated: "after the king burned the scroll." The verse that lends support to this obligation to rend one's garments is taken from our chapter.

This act of Yehoyakim expresses in most extreme fashion the king's attitude toward God and His servants, the prophets. The word of God is in the world, God reveals Himself to man and tells him by way of his prophets what he must do, but the king shows his contempt for God's words. This extreme spiritual position is the exact opposite of King Yoshiyahu who tore his garment when he heard the words of the book of the law (as is explicitly stated in II *Melakhim* 22:11; II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 34:19).

The king burned the scroll despite the request of some of the ministers who were present not to burn it. In the wake of the burning of the scroll, God reveals Himself once again to Yirmeyahu and commands him to take another scroll and write in it all that was written in the first scroll that was burned by Yehoyakim, king of Yehuda. The prophet Yirmiyahu apparently makes sure to deliver the prophecy that God had sent to Yehoyakim, according to which the king of Babylon will come and destroy the land and all its inhabitants, man and beast.

The prophecy foretells that Yehoyakim will not have a royal dynasty continuing from him, and that his corpse will be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. While it is true that his son Yehoyakhin ruled as king for three months, it would appear that his reign was of no matter in the prophet's eyes, and what is more, owing to his behavior, he would not merit fitting burial. A similar prophecy had been delivered earlier: "Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Yehoyakim the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda: They shall not lament for him: Ah my brother! Or: Ah sister! They shall not lament for him: Ah Lord, or: Ah his glory. He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (*Yirmeyahu* 22:18-19). There is here punishment measure for measure: Yehoyakim showed contempt for the word of God, and God shows contempt for Yehoyakim's body.

Indeed, Yirmiyahu takes another scroll, gives it to Barukh the son of Neriya the scribe, and Neriya writes in it from the mouth of Yirmeyahu all that he had written in the scroll that Yehoyakim the king of Yehuda had burned. In this scroll, many things were added that preserve the prophecies of Yirmeyahu for all generations and in writing.

It follows from the chapter that some of the ministers related seriously to Yirmeyahu's prophecy when it was read to them from the scroll by Barukh the son of Neriya the scribe. It is possible that some of them saw in Yirmeyahu's prophecy support for their own position that they should submit to Babylon and not try to fight against it. In any event, it is clear that in actual fact, despite their attempts to influence King Yehoyakim, the king did not budge from his position.

In the next shiur, we will continue to examine the prophecies of Yirmeyahu to King Yehoyakim.

(Translated by David Strauss)