YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**MIKDASH**

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l

By Debbi and David Sable

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**Lecture 350: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(160) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (136)**

[Last year](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/lecture-349-history-divine-service-altars-clix-%E2%80%93-prohibition-bamot-cxxxv), in the closing *shiurim*,we dealt at length with the history of the kingdom of Yehoyakim as it is described in the prophecies of the prophet Yirmeyahu. We examined chapters 7 and 26 which relate to the beginning of Yehoyakim's reign, we continued with chapters 24 and 25, and in the final *shiur* we dealt with *Yirmeyahu* 36, a prophecy that was delivered by the prophet in the fifth year of Yehoyakim's reign. In this *shiur* we wish to examine *Yirmeyahu* 35 which was also delivered during the days of Yehoyakim:

The word which came to Yirmeyahu from the Lord in the days of Yehoyakim the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda, saying: Go to the house of the Rechavites, and speak to them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink. Then I took Ya'azniya the son of Yirmeyahu, the son of Chabatzinya, and his brothers, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechavites. And I brought them into the house of the Lord, into the chamber of the sons of Chaza the son of Yigdalyahu, the man of God, which was by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of Ma'aseyahu the son of Shalum, the keeper of the door. And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechavites goblets full of wine, and cups, and I said to them: Drink you wine. But they said: We will drink no wine; for Yonadav the son of Rechav our father commanded us, saying: You shall drink no wine, neither you, nor your sons, forever; neither shall you build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, nor have any; but all your days you shall dwell in tents, that you may live many days in the land wherein you sojourn. And we have hearkened to the voice of Yonadav the son of Rechav our father in all that he charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; nor to build houses for us to dwell in, neither to have vineyard, or field, or seed; but we have dwelt in tents, and have hearkened, and done according to all that Yonadav our father commanded us. But it came to pass, when Nevuchadretzar king of Babylon came up against the land, that we said: Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Arameans; so we dwell at Jerusalem.

Then came the word of the Lord to Yirmeyahu, saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Go, and say to the men of Yehuda and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Will you not receive instruction to hearken to My words? says the Lord. The words of Yonadav the son of Rechav, that he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed, and to this day they drink none, for they hearken to their father's commandment; but I have spoken to you, speaking betimes and often, and you have not hearkened to Me. I have sent also to you all My servants the prophets, sending them betimes and often, saying: Return you every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and you shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers; but you have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened to Me. Because the sons of Yonadav the son of Rechav have performed the commandment of their father which he commanded them, but this people has not hearkened to Me.

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring upon Yehuda and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them, but they have not heard, and I have called to them, but they have not answered. And to the house of the Rechavites Yirmeyahu said: Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have hearkened to the commandment of Yonadav your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he commanded you.

Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: There shall not be cut off to Yonadav the son of Rechav a man to stand before Me forever. (*Yirmeyahu* 35)

**The Time of the Prophecy**

Scripture does not spell out when during the reign of Yehoyakim this prophecy was delivered. Verse 11 states: "But it came to pass, when Nevuchadretzar king of Babylon came up against the land, that we said: Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Arameans; so we dwell at Jerusalem." Thus, the prophecy mentions a campaign led by Nevuchadnetzar, king of Babylon, against the land of Israel. If so, we can date the prophecy after one of the campaigns of the Babylonians and Aramaeans against Yehuda.

The Chaldeans conducted three campaigns against the kingdom of Yehuda, and it is not clear from the verse which campaign the Rechavites are referring to. The first campaign took place about a year or two after the battle at Karkamish near the Euphrates river. At that time Nevuchadnetzar defeated Nekho king of Egypt about eighteen years before the destruction of the Temple. Paro Nekho was forced to give up all the lands that he had conquered between the Euphrates and Egypt, and the king of Babylon took control of them and annexed them to his kingdom. The kings of those countries tried to prevent the conquest of their lands and Yirmeyahu warned them not to fight against Nevuchadnetzar (as we saw in *Yirmeyahu* 25:9-11; 27:1-3, 6-11). This was the first time that Nevuchadnetzar went up against the land of Yehuda: "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).

After the battle at Karkamish and the death of Nevuchadnetzar's father, Nevuchadnetzar returned to Babylon to inherit his father's kingdom. A year later, in the seventeenth year before the destruction of the First Temple, Nevuchadnetzar attacked Philistia and conquered Ashkelon. This, apparently, is what caused a fast to be called in the land of Yehuda for fear of the Chaldeans (as we saw in chapter 36) in the fourth year of Yehoyakim's reign.

It seems that after the Babylonian army was weakened in the war that it fought against Egypt, it was unable to suppress Yehoyakim's rebellion, even though Chaldean troops arrived from Aram, Moav and Amon: "And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldeans, and bands of the Arameans, and bands of the Moavites, and bands of the children of Amon, and sent them against Yehuda to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by the hand of His servants the prophets" (II *Melakhim* 24:2). In any event, these troops were unable to subdue Yehoyakim. It was only in the sixth year of Nevuchadnetzar's reign, the eleventh year before the destruction of the First Temple, that Nevuchadnetzar went up for a third time against the kingdom of Yehuda, came to Jerusalem, and then bound Yehoyakim in chains in order to take him back to Babylon: "Against him came up Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon, and bound him in chains, to carry him to Babylon" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 36:6).

It seems[[1]](#footnote-1) that the attempt to bring the Rechavites to drink wine took place at the end of Yehoyakim's reign, shortly before he was captured by the Chaldeans, about eleven years before the destruction of the First Temple. This was after his rule weakened and he was entirely involved in the war against the Chaldeans. This assertion is based on the following:

1. The Rechavites relate that they ran away not only from the Chaldeans, but also from the Aramaean army (see v. 11). It is unreasonable to assume that Nevuchadnetzar absorbed the Chaldeans into his army such a short time after ascending the throne.

2. In the fifth year of Yehoyakim's reign, which was the first year of Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon, Yehoyakim tried to arrest Yirmiyahu and his scribe Barukh the son of Nerya in order to execute them, "but the Lord hid them" (*Yirmeyahu* 36:26), and indeed Yirmeyahu and Barukh hid for a long time. During that period Yirmeyahu refrained from publicly prophesying in the Temple, until Yehoyakim's time passed, or his influence in the kingdom diminished. We are, therefore, inclined to date this prophecy to the end of Yehoyakim's reign.

**Who are the Rechavites?** [[2]](#footnote-2)

The verse in *Divrei ha-Yamim* asserts: "And the families of scribes that dwelt at Ya'abetz the Tiratites, the Shimatites, the Sukatites. These are the Kenites that came of Chamat, the father of the house of Rechav" (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 2:55). This chapter in *Divrei ha-Yamim* deals ostensibly with the geneaology of the descendants of Yehuda and of the kings of the house of Yehuda. Scripture lists families of scribes, the members of which were engaged in writing, copying, or the production of writing materials. And the verse states: "These are the Kenites that came of Chamat, the father of the house of Rechav." Scripture identifies the Rechavites as Kenites; or as coming from the city of Kayin, which is listed among the cities in the southeastern section of the Chevron hills in the description of the tribal territory of Yehuda (*Yehoshua* 15:57), close to today's Nabi Yakin, about 5 kms. northeast of Zif; or as coming from the city of Kina, which is mentioned in the description of the tribal territory of Yehuda (*Yehoshua* 15:24), together with the cities of the Negev in the vicinity of Arad.

But the words, "These are the Kenites that came of Chamat, the father of the house of Rechav," might be understood to mean that the Kenites returned to the Negev and settled in Beit-Rechav, apparently the place mentioned in the description of the tribal territory of Shimon (*Yehoshua* 19:8), Beit-Markavot, alongside Tziklog, on the one hand, and Chatzar-Susa, on the other. Perhaps we can explain the name of the city as based on the fact that chariots (*markavot*) were produced there by the Kenites, whose name in Aramaic and Syriac means metal-refiners, potters and smiths.

According to *Chazal* (*Mekhilta*, *massekhta de-Amalek*, 4; *Mekhilta de-Rashbi*, *Yitro* 18, 27; *Sifrei Beha'alotekha* 10, 29), the Rechavites were the descendants of Yitro, father-in-law of Moshe. The verse in *Shofetim* states: "And the children of the Kenite, Moshe's father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm-trees with the children of Yehuda into the wilderness of Yehuda, which is in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt with the people" (*Shofetim* 1:16).This family joined Yehuda and settled in the wilderness of Yehuda in the vicinity of Arad, and because of them this portion of the Negev is called the Kenite Negev (II *Shemuel* 27:10), and David called the cities Kenite cities (I *Shemuel* 30:29). It would appear that the family split up – one branch settling in the Negev near Amalek (I *Shemuel* 15:6), and another branch reaching the area of Kadesh in the Galilee, in connection with which mention is made of Chever the Kenite (*Shofetim* 4:11-17; *Shofetim* 5:24). At the beginning of the period of the *Shofetim*, a branch of the Kenite family is found in the city of dates, i.e., Jericho, and from there they turned to the area of Arad (*Shofetim* 1:16)

As for the house of Rechav, *Chazal* expounded what it says in *Divrei ha-Yamim* regarding the house of the Rechavites as relating to Yonadav the son of Rechav (II *Melakhim* 10:15). As is stated in our chapter, his descendants refrained from sowing fields, planting vineyards, drinking their wine and building houses.

**Who is Yehonadav the Son of Rekhav?**

Yehonadav the son of Rechav is a central character in our chapter. When the house of the Rechavites refuse to drink wine, they explain as follows:

But they said: We will drink no wine; for Yonadav the son of Rechav our father commanded us, saying: You shall drink no wine, neither you, nor your sons, forever; neither shall you build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, nor have any; but all your days you shall dwell in tents, that you may live many days in the land wherein you sojourn. And we have hearkened to the voice of Yonadav the son of Rechav our father in all that he charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; nor to build houses for us to dwell in, neither to have vineyard, or field, or seed; but we have dwelt in tents, and have hearkened, and done according to all that Yonadav our father commanded us. (6-10)

When Yirmeyahu suggests that the people receive instruction from the Rechavites, he mentions: "The words of Yonadav the son of Rechav, that he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed, and to this day they drink none, for they hearken to their father's commandment; but I have spoken to you, speaking betimes and often, and you have not hearkened to Me… Because the sons of Yonadav the son of Rechav have performed the commandment of their father which he commanded them, but this people has not hearkened to Me" (14-16). The prophet praises the fact that they obey the directives of their forefather Yonadav, and the prophecy with which the chapter ends concludes with the promise: "There shall not be cut off to Yonadav the son of Rechav a man to stand before Me forever" (19). In order to understand the conduct of the house of the Rechavites during the time of Yirmeyahu, which is explained by them as following the command of Yonadav the son of Rechav, we must try to understand Yonadav the son of Rechav himself, who he was and what his actions were.

Yonadav the son of Rechav lived in the time of Yehu who rebelled against the house of Achav and eradicated the worship of the Ba'al from the land, as is described in the book of *Melakhim*:

And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Yonadav the son of Rechav coming to meet him; and he saluted him, and said to him: Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart? And Yonadav answered: It is. [Yehu said:] If it be, give me your hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot. And he said: Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord. So they made him ride in his chariot. And when he came to Samaria, he smote all that remained to Achav in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke to Eliyahu.

And Yehu gathered all the people together, and said to them: Achav served Ba'al a little; but Yehu will serve him much. Now therefore call to me all the prophets of Ba'al, all his worshippers, and all his priests, let none be wanting; for I have a great sacrifice to do to Ba'al; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Yehu did it in subtlety, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Ba'al. And Yehu said: Sanctify a solemn assembly for Ba'al. And they proclaimed it. And Yehu sent through all Israel; and all the worshippers of Ba'al came, so that there was not a man left that came not. And they came into the house of Ba'al; and the house of Ba'al was filled from one end to another. And he said to him that was over the vestry: Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Ba'al. And he brought them forth vestments. And Yehu went, and Yonadav the son of Rechav, into the house of Ba'al; and he said to the worshippers of Ba'al: Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the Lord, but the worshippers of Ba'al only. And they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt-offerings. Now Yehu had appointed him fourscore men without, and said: If any of the men whom I bring into your hands escape, his life shall be for the life of him. And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt-offering, that Yehu said to the guard and to the captains: Go in, and slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Ba'al. And they brought forth the pillars that were in the house of Ba'al, and burned them. And they broke down the pillar of Ba'al, and broke down the house of Ba'al, and made it a draught-house, to this day. Thus Yehu destroyed Ba'al out of Israel. But from the sins of Yerovam the son of Nevat, wherewith he made Israel to sin, Yehu departed not from after them, the golden calves that were in Bet-El, and that were in Dan. (II *Melakhim* 10:15-29)

It is clear from this story that Yonadav the son of Rechav was included among those who fought zealously for God and His Torah. Yehu asked him whether his heart was right with Yehu's actions and his desire to totally eradicate idolatry from the kingdom of Israel. After Yonadav's positive answer, Yehu gave him his hand and helped him up into his chariot, and proposed that he come with him in his zeal for God. Yonadav went in order to take revenge from the house of Achav and from the worshippers of Ba'al. Thus, they went together, Yehu and Yonadav the son of Rechav, in Yehu's chariot to Samaria, the capital of the kings of Israel, and Yehu smote there all that remained to Achav in Samaria, until he destroyed them in accordance with what God had said to Eliyahu.

As is stated explicitly in verse 23, Yonadav the son of Rechav came together with Yehu to the house of the Ba'al and participated close-up in the total destruction of those who remained to Achav and in the comprehensive eradication of all those who worshipped the Ba'al in Samaria. God reveals Himself to Yehu in the wake of this harsh action and says to him: "Because you have done well in executing that which is right in My eyes, and have done to the house of Achav according to all that was in My heart" (II *Melakhim* 10:30). The prophet praises Yehu for destroying the house of Achav, and Yonadav the son of Rechav was a full-fledged partner to Yehu in the destruction of the house of the Ba'al in Samaria.

In this framework we will not analyze Yehu's earlier actions or the overall prophetic judgment of his conduct. We cited this passage only to better understand the character of Yonadav the son of Rechav who appears to identity completely with Yehu's actions connected to the destruction of the house of Achav and his zeal for God.

In our chapter, as mentioned above, Yonadav the son of Rechav is the character upon whom the Rechavites rely not to drink wine. It should first be emphasized that it can be learned from the story involving Yehu that Yonadav did not live out in the wilderness, cut off from civilization, nor did he live in seclusion, detached from the people. It would appear that his encounter with Yehu took place somewhere in Samaria, not far from the city of Samaria.

Secondly, there is a time gap of about two hundred and fifty years between the Rechavites in the days of Yirmeyahu and Yonadav the son of Rechav in the days of Yehu, and the Rechavites were still adhering to their forefather's instructions not to drink wine, not to build houses, not to sow fields, and not to plant vineyards, but rather to live in tents all their lives. This adherence to a two-hundred-and fifty year tradition is undoubtedly supposed to serve as a model for the entire kingdom of Yehuda in the days of King Yehoyakim.

In the next *shiur*, we will examine the spiritual significance of the ideology of the Rechavites and the direct connection between it and the zealous figure of Yonadav, who was a full and willing partner in Yehu's destruction of the house of Achav and worship of the Ba'al in Samaria.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. This is also the understanding of Menachem Bula in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to the book of *Yirmeyahu*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This issue was dealt with at length by Shmuel Abramski in his article, "*Beit ha-Rekhavim* – *Geneologiya ve-Tzivyon Chevrati be-Eretz Israel*," *Kadmoniot -* Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)