YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

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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 352: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(162) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (138)**

In this *shiur* we would like to complete our study of Yirmeyahu's prophecies concerning Yehoyakim. In the *shiurim* that we dedicated to Yirmeyahu's prophecies concerning Yehoyakim, we dealt with key issues that provide us with an overall picture of the period of his reign. The description of his reign in II *Melakhim* 23:36-24:7 is exceedingly short, and the same is true about the description in II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 36:5-8. Thanks to the account in the prophecies of Yirmeyahu, we can consider the king in a more detailed and comprehensive manner.

In this *shiur*, wewill relate to the execution of the prophet Uriyahu the son of Shemayahu of Kiryat-Ye'arim, an event that took place at the beginning of Yehoyakim's reign. We will of course relate to the prophet's assessment of \Yehoyakim in general, and afterwards we will discuss Yehoyakim's end.

### The execution of the Prophet Uriyahu the son of Shemayahu of Kiryat-Ye'arim

Chapter 26 in the book of *Yirmeyahu* records events that took place at the beginning of Yehoyakim's reign. Following the harsh prophecy of destruction that Yirmeyahu delivered in the Temple, the prophet was arrested, he was subjected to a trial, and in the end he was saved. But in the wake of these events, the prophet offers the following account:

And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the Lord, Uriyahu the son of Shemayahu 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 Uriyahu 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 Uriyahu 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. (*Yirmeyahu* 26:20-23)

The prophet Uriyahu the son of Shemayahu delivered a prophecy that was identical to Yirmeyahu's prophecy. Upon hearing his prophecy, Yehoyakim seeks to kill him. Uriyahu flees to Egypt, and Yehoyakim sends men after him. They bring him back from Egypt, and Yehoyakim executes him and casts his dead body into the graves of the children of the people. King Yehoyakim kills a prophet who had delivered the word of God and scornfully casts his corpse into the graves of the children of the people.

According to the verse in II *Melakhim* 23:6, it is possible that the grave of the children of the people was located in the Kidron stream. Not only was he not buried together with his ancestors, but Yehoyakim disgraced him even after he was dead. From Yehoyakim's perspective, Uriyahu was executed as a rebel against the king. It is possible that the Egyptians allowed Uriyahu the son of Shemayahu to be removed from Egypt and returned to the kingdom of Yehuda, in order to help Yehoyakim strengthen his kingdom in the land.

### Yehoyakim - the opposite of a righteous man

In chapter 22 Yirmeyahu relates to Yehoyakim:

Woe to him that builds his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by injustice; that uses his neighbor's service without wages, and gives him not his hire; that says: I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers, and cuts him out windows, and it is ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shall you reign, because you strive to excel in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know Me? says the Lord. But your eyes and your heart are not but for your covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. 

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* 22:13-19)

According to this prophecy, Yehoyakim seems to have built a new and magnificent palace. Prof. Yochanan Aharoni suggested that we identify Yehoyakim's palace with the royal public building dating from the First Temple period that was uncovered in Ramat Rachel in the southwestern corner of Jerusalem.

It is reasonable to assume that the building of the house by unrighteousness and of the chambers by injustice relates to the fact that Yehoyakim violated the Torah's commands: "You shall not oppress a hired servant… In the same day you shall give him his hire" (*Devarim* 24:14-15).

It may be assumed that this event took place after the king of Egypt imposed an exceedingly heavy tax on Yehoyakim: "And Par'o Nekho put him in bands at Rivla in the land of Chamat, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a fine of a hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold" (II *Melakhim* 23:33). Scripture describes the building of a palace that was majestic in its size, in its dimensions and even in its magnificent decorations. On the one hand, he fails to pay his workers in a timely fashion, while on the other hand, he insists on the highest quality of construction, in order to have large spaces, strong walls and embellished windows. The walls are even covered with cedar wood.

The prophet compares Yehoyakim to his father Yoshiyahu, and emphasizes the significant difference between them: Yoshiyahu ate and drank and did justice and righteousness, judging the cause of the poor and needy, and therefore God did well with him. In contrast to Yoshiyahu, regarding Yehoyaim it is stated: "But your eyes and your heart are not but for your covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it." The execution of judgment and righteousness is the way of God, as Yirmeyahu himself states: "But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands, and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord" (*Yirmeyahu* 9:23). "Covetousness" [*betza*] refers to profits made by way of deceit; "oppression" [*oshek*]refers to a debt owed to another person and the debtor holds on to the money and doesn't pay him; "violence" [*merutza*] is derived from the root *ratzutz*, which denotes breaking and trampling. Regarding all these matters, the prophet Yirmeyahu accuses Yehoyakim of being the opposite of his father.

Regarding "innocent blood," beyond the killing of the prophet Uriyahu the son of Shemayahu, and beyond the killing of the children in the service of the Molekh, it is possible that there were other cases in which the king brought about the death of innocent people for various different reasons.

It is possible that these difficult words that are addressed directly to Yehoyakim, should be joined to the words of the prophet at the beginning of chapter 22 which are addressed to the king of Yehuda. Scripture does not identify the king, but one of the reasonable possibilities is that the reference is to Yehoyakim:

Thus said the Lord: Go down to the house of the king of Yehuda, and speak there this word, and say: Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Yehuda, that sits upon the throne of David, you, and your servants, and your people that enter in by these gates.

Thus says the Lord: Execute you justice and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; and do no wrong, do no violence, to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. For if you do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if you will not hear these words, I swear by Myself, says the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation.

For thus says the Lord concerning the house of the king of Yehuda: You are Gil'ad unto Me, the head of Lebanon; yet surely I will make you a wilderness, cities which are not inhabited. And I will prepare destroyers against you, everyone with his weapons; and they shall cut down your choice cedars, and cast them into the fire. And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbor: Why has the Lord done thus to this great city? Then they shall answer: Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them. (*Yirmeyahu* 22:1-9)

In this prophecy, the prophet relates to the fundamental demand made of the king to do justice and righteousness, to deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, to do no wrong, to do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and to shed no innocent blood. If they do not act in this manner, the Temple will be destroyed. The prophet draws a direct connection between the execution of justice and the continued existence of the Temple, and between the violation of justice and the destruction of the Temple. This is not just sound advice to do something fitting and noble; we are dealing with a demand in which the prophet connects the repaired kingdom itself to the execution of judgment and righteousness. And so, the exceedingly harsh criticism of king Yehoyakim in our chapter stands in stark contrast to what was said about Yoshiyahu his father.

### The death of Yehoyakim

The prophet's declaration regarding Yehoyak'im's death clearly expresses the overall prophetic assessment of his reign. Yehoyakim will not be lamented, neither in the manner of an ordinary person, nor in the manner of a king. He will be buried in disgrace with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

Already in chapter 36, v. 30, Yirmyehu informed Yehoyakim that he would have none to sit upon the throne of David, and that his corpse would be cast out in the day to the heat and in the night to the frost. Other than mentioning the fact that Yehoyakim slept with his fathers, the book of *Melakhim* does not relate in any way to the location of his grave.

In this sense, just as during his lifetime Yehoyakim acted in his kingdom in a manner contrary to that of his father Yoshiyahu, so too Yehoyakim's end stands in clear contrast to Yoshiyahu's burial and the lamentations for him. Following Yoshiyahu's death in Megido, his servants carry him in a chariot and bury him in his grave in Jerusalem (II *Melakhim* 23:30). I *Divrei ha-Yamim* adds the following:

So his servants took him out of the chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had, and brought him to Jerusalem; and he died, and was buried in the sepulchers of his fathers. And all Yehuda and Jerusalem mourned for Yoshiyahu. And Yirmeyahu lamented for Yoshiyahu; and all the singing men and singing women spoke of Yoshiyahu in their lamentations, to this day; and they made them an ordinance in Israel; and, behold, they are written in the lamentations.

It is also possible that Yehoyakim was punished measure for measure. Just as in the case of Uriyahu the son of Shemayahu, the prophet from Kiryat-Ye'arim, his body was cast in disgrace in the grave of the children of the people, so too Yehoyakim will be buried in disgrace and his corpse will be cast beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

Two other books refer to Yehoyakim's end. In *Divrei ha-Yamim* we read: "Against him came up Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon. Nevuchadnetzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon"(II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 36:6-7). And at the beginning of *Daniel* we read: "In the third year of the reign of Yehoyakim king of Yehuda came Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon to Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Yehoyakim king of Yehuda into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God; and he carried them into the land of Shinar to the house of his god, and the vessels he brought into the treasure-house of his god" (*Daniel* 1:1-2)

In *Divrei ha-Yamim*, after Nevuchadnetzar captures the city and puts Yehoyakim in chains to lead him to Babylon, it does not say that Yehoyakim was actually brought to Babylon. On this campaign, Nevuchadnetzar takes as spoil some of the vessels of the house of God. At the beginning of *Daniel*, in addition to some of the vessels of the house of God, Nevuchadnetzar commands his chief officer to bring with him to Babylon some of the children of Israel, and of the royal seed, and of the nobles, and to teach them the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans (*Daniel* 1:3-4). According to this, the first exile of the people of Yehuda to Babylon took place during the reign of Yehoyakim.

It is possible, however, to reconcile the various sources. Menachem Bula[[1]](#footnote-1) suggests the following solution: After the Chaldeans besieged and captured Jerusalem (*Daniel* 1: 1-2), they put Yehoyakim to chains in order to lead him to Babylon (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 36:7), but he never arrived there, as he died on the way "beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (*Yirmeyahu* 22:19). He was not buried, but rather his corpse was cast on the field. Other Babylonian soldiers or people of Yehuda who were counted among Yehoyakim's enemies arrived some time later, and dragged his corpse into a pit, as is done with animal carcasses.

In conclusion, a fundamental note regarding the difference between the wording: "And Yehoyakim slept with his fathers" (II *Melakhim* 24:6) and the notation of the site of Yehoyakim's burial. In contrast to Menashe and Amon who were buried in the Garden of Uza (II *Melakhim* 21:18-26), and to Yoshiyahu who was buried in his own sepulcher (II *Melakhim* 23:30), Scripture does not indicate anywhere where Yehoyakim was actually buried. The idea of "sleeping with one's fathers" refers to death itself, in the sense that a person returns to the ground and there he finds himself with his fathers who are also buried in the ground. But this gives no indication of the site of the burial itself.

It is interesting that the book of *Melakhim* chose to emphasize Yehoyakim's sleeping with his fathers, that is, his very death, but nowhere does it note the location of his burial. It may be suggested that by way of this silence Scripture alludes to the fact that because of his harsh deeds Yehoyakim did not merit to be buried at all, and so beyond the description of the disgrace suffered by his corpse, there is no reference to the location of his grave.

In the next *shiur* we will begin to examine the kingdom of Yehoyakhin.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. In the summary of chapter 22 in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to the book of *Yirmeyahu.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)