YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

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**Lecture 353: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(163) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (139)**

In this *shiur* we will examine the period of the reign of Yehoyakhin. We will first briefly summarize the sources available to us regarding his kingdom.

II *Melakhim* 24 describes what happened during the days of Yehoyakhin. In addition to the fact that Yehoyakhin did all that was evil in the sight of God, in much the same way as did his father, Scripture relates to Nevuchadnetzar's siege of the city of Jerusalem, to the removal of all the treasures of the house of God and of the house of the king, and to the cutting of all the vessels of gold. So too it describes in detail the exiling of all of Jerusalem, of all the mighty men of valor, and all the craftsmen and smiths.

Yehoyakhin was eighteen years old when he began to reign; and he reigned in Jerusalem three months; and his mother's name was Nechushta the daughter of Elnatan of Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done. At that time the servants of Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it. And Yehoyakhin the king of Yehuda went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers; and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign. And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Shelomo king of Israel had made in the Temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Yehoyakhin to Babylon; and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the chief men of the land, carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths a thousand, all of them strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon. And the king of Babylon made Matanya his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Tzidkiyahu. (II *Melakhim* 24:8-16)

II *Divrei ha-Yamim* offers a very brief account:

Yehoyakhin was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem; and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. And at the return of the year king Nevuchadnetzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the Lord, and made Tzidkiyahu his brother king over Yehuda and Jerusalem. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 36:9-10)

The prophet Yirmeyahu makes a brief reference to the days of Yehoyahin who will be exiled to Babylon and will not return from there (*Yirmeyahu* 22:20-30), and shortly afterwards he delivers a brief prophecy about Yehoyakhin after he will be exiled to Babylon:

Go up to Lebanon, and cry, and lift up your voice in Bashan; and cry from Avarim, for all your lovers are destroyed. I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said: I will not hear. This has been your manner from your youth, that you hearkened not to My voice. The wind shall feed upon all your shepherds, and your lovers shall go into captivity; surely then shall you be ashamed and confounded for all your wickedness. O inhabitant of Lebanon, that are nestled in the cedars, how gracious shall you be when pangs come upon you, the pain as of a woman in travail! As I live, says the Lord, though Konyahu the son of Yehoyakim king of Yehuda were the seal upon My right hand, yet would I pluck you thence; and I will give you into the hand of them that seek your life, and into the hand of them of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. And I will cast you out, and your mother that bore you, into another country, where you were not born; and there shall you die. But to the land whereto they long to return, there shall they not return.

Is this man Konyahu a despised, broken image? Is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? Why are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they know not? O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord. 

Thus says the Lord: Write you this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Yehuda. (*Yirmeyahu* 22:20-30)

These are the main biblical sources that relate to the reign of King Yehoyakhin.

It should first be noted that Yehoyakhin's reign was exceedingly short (three months and ten days). The political reality at that time was that following Egypt's submission, Babylonia enjoyed absolute rule over the entire region. It is reasonable to assume that it was the people of Yehuda who appointed Yehoyakhin, the son of Yehoyakim, to rule as king after the death of his father.

Yehoyakhin's mother was Nechushta the daughter of Elnatan of Jerusalem. Apparently, this is Elnatan the son of Akhbor. Elnatan had been sent by King Yehoyakim to Egypt to arrest the prophet Uriyahu the son of Shemayahu and bring him back to the king so that he might execute him (*Yirmeyahu* 26:21-27). In addition, Elnatan the son of Akhbor was included among the princes who had heard the harsh words spoken by Barukh the son of Neriya in the chamber of Gemaryahu the son of Shafan in the fifth year of Yehoyakim's reign. On that occasion, Elnatan related to the prophecy with full seriousness, and together with the other princes he advised Barukh and Yirmeyahu to go into hiding. Elnatan and the princes then went to the king, read the scroll before him, and pleaded with the king that he not burn the scroll, but their words went unheeded.

It is possible that as King Yehoyakim's son, King Yehoyakhin supported strengthening the position of Egypt and undermining that of Babylon. In any event, Nevuchadnetzar apparently understood that Yehoyakhin was not fit to reign as king over the kingdom of Yehuda at that time, and so after only three months, he replaced him with Tzidkiyahu the son of Yoshiyahu. He also exiled him, together with his mother, to Babylon so that there not remain leadership in Yehuda that would continue the policy of Yehoyakhin's predecessor, Yehoyakim.

The central theme in the account in the book of *Melakhim* (and in exceedingly abridged form in the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*) is Nevuchadnetzar's siege of Jerusalem, the removal of the treasures, and the exile to Babylon of the princes, including the craftsmen and the smiths, the king and all of his family.

The prophet Yirmeyahu offers some of the background to what is described in the book of *Melakhim*, and therefore we will begin our examination of the matter there. The prophecy in *Yirmeyahu* 22 divides into two parts: In verses 20-28 the prophecy refers to the fact that Yehoyakhin will be exiled to Babylon and never return from there to the kingdom of Yehuda; whereas verses 28-30 are a prophecy concerning Yehoyakhin after he will be exiled to Babylon.

The Radak there explains:

"Go up to Lebanon" – He said to Israel: See if you have help from your lovers, namely, Ashur and Egypt, who you trusted and for whom you removed your trust from Me. Now when your destruction has arrived, cry out to them and see if they will save you. As they too were destroyed, for the king of Ashur was destroyed, and Egypt was also destroyed by Nevuchadnetzar in the days of Yehoyakim, as it is stated: "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 to the river Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt" (II *Melakhim* 24:7). Even though later during the days of Tzidkiyahu it says: "And Par'o's army was come forth out of Egypt" (*Yirmeyahu* 37:5), in the end Nevuchadnetzar was victorious and he destroyed Egypt. (Radak, *Yirmeyahu* 22:20)

The prophet ironically instructs the kingdom of Yehuda to send messengers to its allies in the Lebanese mountains, in the Bashan and in the mountains of Aravim, so that they might come and help them. But it turns out that when the messengers arrive at their destination, there is no longer anybody who can help them, for they were all destroyed by the Chaldeans. The prophet therefore encourages the messengers to cry out in grief and despair.

The prophet reiterates the fact that even before the Chaldeans arrived, he had unsuccessfully appealed to the people to repent. Already at the beginning of Yehoyakim's reign, the prophet had appealed to them not to rebel against Babylon (*Yirmeyahu* 24), but in the end the people did not listen to him. The prophet announces that the leaders of the people, the king and the princes, will be taken as captives to Babylon.

The prophet then addresses Yehoyakhin by way of an oath. He calls him Konyahu. It is possible that this was his original name, but the prophet also alludes that Yehoyakhin was like a seal on his right hand. A royal seal is one of the clearest symbols of kingship. It is the ring with which the king would sign laws and decisions. It would appear that such a seal was tied to the king's hand or arm so that he could use it immediately. Yirmeyahu therefore says that even were Konyahu a seal on his right hand, he would rip it from his hand and not use it. In other words, we have here an exceedingly harsh statement against Yehoyakhin's kingdom, which had not been approved by Yirmeyahu. He is prepared to give it up completely, and not make any use of it whatsoever, because such a seal is totally unworthy.

The prophet informs the king that he will be given over to the Chaldeans. In the wake of the Radak, we can explain the four designations by which he refers to the Chaldeans: "Into the hand of them that seek your life" – they will show no compassion; "them of whom you are afraid" – you will not have the strength to stand up to them; "into the hand of Nevuchadnetzar" – a mighty king; "and into the hands of the Chaldeans" – a strong and mighty nation. From this it may be concluded that Yehoyakhin dreaded the Chaldeans even beforehand, and apparently this is the reason that he did not put up a fight against the Chaldeans when they arrived in Jerusalem, which allowed them to enter the city.

Yirmeyahu also announces to Yehoyakhin that he and his mother will be exiled to a foreign land and they will never return to the kingdom of Yehuda.[[1]](#footnote-1) Beyond the despair following the fact that Yehoyakhin's messengers to the neighboring nations returned empty-handed because they had been conquered by the Chaldeans, the prophet also expresses in strongest fashion how despised Yehoyakhin was in God's eyes.

In Yirmeyahu's second prophecy, he addresses the remnant of the people of Yehuda after the exile of Yehoyakhin, and asks them a rhetorical question: Why were Yehoyakhin and his family cast out of the land and into a land that they knew not? He declares that Yehoyakhin will not have an heir to the throne, that "no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Yehuda." According to this prophecy, the kingdom of Yehoyakhin is of no value, and it is clear that his three month reign comes to express this in clearest fashion. These statements faithfully reflect prophecy's attitude toward the person and reign of King Yehoyakhin.

After examining Yirmeyahu's prophecies, let us return to the description of Yehoyakhin's reign in the book of II *Melakhim.* The account focuses on the exile, in addition to the siege and the removal of the treasures. A detailed description is given of the exile of the king, his family, the princes, and others who held important positions in the kingdom. This is the first detailed account of an exceedingly wide-scoped and important exile.

When Nevuchadnetzar lays siege to Jerusalem, Yehoyakhin goes out to the enemy and surrenders to him. Yehoyakhin goes out together with his mother, the wife of King Yehoyakim, Nechushta the daughter of Elnatan of Jerusalem, who in *Yirmeyahu* 24:2 is referred to as: *gevirah*, "the queen-mother," his servants, his princes and his officers, and he is taken captive by the king of Babylon.

Nevuchadnetzar removes the treasures of the house of God and the treasures of the house of the king. It is reasonable to assume that these are the treasures that King Chizkiyahu had once shown the messengers of Merodach Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon (II *Melakhim* 20:4). He cuts the gold vessels that Shelomo had made in the Temple. In II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 36:10 they are called the "goodly vessels" of the house of God. The emphasis indicates that we are dealing with a fulfillment of the prophecy of Yeshayahu: "Behold, the days come, that all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have laid up in store to this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the Lord" (II *Melakhim* 20:17).

Scripture describes the exile in a very comprehensive way: "And he carried away all of Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land" (II *Melakhim* 24:14). Even if we are not dealing with all of the residents of Jerusalem, we are certainly talking about an exceedingly large number of people, and quite possible a large part of the residents of the city. If the number refers only to the men, it is possible that together with the women and children, several tens of thousands of people were exiled from Jerusalem at that time.

As for the craftsmen and smiths, this seems to be referring to experts in the manufacture and upkeep of weapons and experts in the building of fortifications. The exile of these professionals was intended to significantly weaken the kingdom in everything related to fortifications and weapons production.

As for the chief men of the land, this appears to be referring to the elite, the upper class of the kingdom.

At the beginning of chapter 29 the prophet Yirmeyahu says:

Now these are the words of the letter that Yirmeyahu the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the residue of the elders of the captivity, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people, whom Nevuchadnetzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon, after that Yekhonya the king, and the queen-mother, and the officers, and the princes of Yehuda and Jerusalem, and the craftsmen, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem. (*Yirmeyahu* 29:1-2)

From here we learn that priests and prophets were also exiled.

It is commonly maintained that the prophet Yechezkel was exiled to Babylon in the exile of Yehoyakhin. He therefore writes at the beginning of his book:

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Yehoyakhin's captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly to Yechezkel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him. (*Yechezkel* 1:1-3)

Several times in his book, the prophet Yechezkel refers to the exile of Yehoyakhin and refers to it as "our exile." Thus in chapter 33: "And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our exile, in the twelfth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came to me, saying, The city is smitten" (*Yechezkel* 33:21). And similarly at the beginning of chapter 40: "In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was smitten, in that day, the hand of the Lord was upon me, and He brought me there" (*Yechezkel* 40:1).

Who is left in the kingdom of Yehuda, asks the prophet Yirmeyahu. The poor of the land remain, poor in both the sense of property and in the sense of professional skills. This concludes the brief account of the kingdom of Yehoyakhin, which was both very short and, with his surrender to the king of Babylon, proved to be insignificant. On the other hand, the exile which was so great in both quantity and in quality portends the end of the kingdom of Yehuda.

After the exile of Yehoyakhin, Nevuchadnetzar the king of Babylon, crowns as king Matanya, Yehoyakhin's uncle, and changes his name to Tzidkiyahu.

Next week we will begin to examine the kingdom of Tzidkiyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. It may be that these words come to refute the words of the false prophets, according to which the rule of the Chaldeans will be short. See for example the words of Chananya the son of Azur, the false prophet from Giv'on (*Yirmeyahu* 28:24). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)