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ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

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**Lecture 355: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(165) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (141)**

In the [previous *shiur*](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/lecture-354-history-divine-service-altars-164-%E2%80%93-prohibition-bamot-140), we dealt with Yirmeyahu's prophecy in chapter 24, the prophecy concerning the good and the bad figs, in which he proclaims that those who were exiled with Yehoyakhin to Babylonia will return to Eretz Israel and they will be God's nation; whereas those who remained in Eretz Israel in the kingdom of Yehuda after the exile of the craftsmen and the smiths will in the future be exiled to Babylonian, and if they fail to repent, they will have no part in the future redemption.

In this *shiur*, in order to fully understand the spiritual, political, and social realities at the beginning of Tzidkiyahu's reign, we wish to examine the central positions of various sub-groups in the people, both among those who were exiled to Babylon with Yehoyakhin with the exile of the craftsmen and the smiths, and among those who remained in the kingdom of Yehuda, with respect to the path for the future which should be adopted.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is interesting to note that both the prophet Yirmeyahu in the kingdom of Yehuda and the prophet Yechezkel in the Babylonian exile are in total agreement, each one in his own way and in his own style, in terms of how the people should behave and in relation to the various sub-groups among the people.

**Yehoyakhin the King of Yehuda, Tzidkiyahu the King of Yehuda**

It is interesting to observe that even after the exile of King Yehoyakhin to Babylonia and the crowning of Tzidkiyahu as king in the kingdom of Yehuda, both Scripture and Babylonian sources refer to Yehoyakhin as king of Yehuda and to Tzidkiyahu as king of Yehuda.

In the Babylonian Chronicle, named after Wiseman, the events are described as follows: "In the ninth year in the month of Kislev a certain king [the king of Babylonia] called out his army and marched to Hattu [a reference to Syria and Eretz Israel]. He set his camp against the city of Yehuda [Jerusalem], and on the second of Adar he took the city and captured the king. He appointed a king of his choosing there, took heavy tribute and returned to Babylonia."

So too in the Wiedner document, which gives an account of the supplies that the Babylonians provided to captive kings in Babylonia, refers to Yehoyakhin in Babylonia five years after his exile as "Yehoyakhin the king of Yehuda." There were two kings of Yehuda, the one who was captured and taken to Babylonia, and a second who was crowned as king by the king of Babylonia and lived in Yehuda.

The verses in II *Melakhim* 24:10-17 describe Yehoyakhin's surrender to Nevuchadnetzar the king of Babylonia who had placed Jerusalem under a siege, and the exile of the king, his family and all the ministers and senior officials of the kingdom of Yehuda, and the craftsmen and the smiths.

At the end of the book of *Melakhim* we read: "And it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Yehoyakhin king of Yehuda, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evil-Merodach the king of Babylonia in the year that he began to reign, did lift up the head of Yehoyakhin king of Yehuda out of prison" (II *Melakhim* 25:27). That is to say, even after thirty-seven years in exile, Yehoyakhin is called twice in these verses Yehoyakhin the king of Yehuda.

It can therefore be said, both according to the Babylonian Chronicle and according to Scripture, that what we have here is essentially two kings of Yehuda. The one was crowned by Nevuchadnetzar the king of Babylonia, he being the king of Yehuda Tzidkiyahu. The second one was exiled by Nevuchadnetzar to Babylonia, and he was Yehoyakhin. Indeed, the people of Yehuda were divided between two countries, the kingdom of Yehuda and Babylon.

Inscriptions in Early Hebrew script that mention "Elyakim the lad of Yokhan" were found in Ramat Rachel and in Tel Beit Mirsim. Prof. Albright noted that this finding seems to attest to the status enjoyed by Yehoyakhin, his standing, and his properties which this lad was appointed to safeguard.

Therefore, the main question in the wake of all of this is: Where are the people of Yehuda? Are they in Babylonia where their representatives are the Jewish aristocracy that was sent into exile along with the exile of the craftsmen and the smiths? Or are they in Eretz Israel, the poor people of the land who remained in the kingdom of Judah? Who was the true, legitimate king of the people, Yehoyakhin or Tzidkiyahu, and how did the people of that generation interpret the situation?

After the exile of Yehoyakhin, the positions of the exiled ministers were grabbed by other ministers, and it is reasonable to assume that the assets of all the exiles were seized by people in the kingdom of Yehuda. It is also likely that all those who filled the vacated positions in the kingdom and seized assets did not look forward to a quick return of those sent into exile.

We will try now to characterize the various groups.

**The First Group: The Opportunists in Jerusalem – “Get You Far from the Lord! To Us is this Land Given for a Possession”?**

The prophet Yechezkel in the Babylonian exile refers twice in his prophecies to the reality that had been created. Once:

Son of man, as for your brothers, even your brothers, the men of your kindred, and all the house of Israel, all of them, concerning whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said: Get you far from the Lord! to us is this land given for a possession. Therefore say: Thus says the Lord God: Although I have removed them far off among the nations, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet have I been to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they are come. (*Yechezkel* 22:25-16)

For this group, after having seized the senior positions and important assets of all those who were exiled with the exile of the craftsmen and the smiths, together with King Yehoyakhin and his family, it would not have been convenient if the exiles returned.

Beyond the material advantages which they achieved in the wake of the exile of the others, it is very possible that they created for themselves an ideology that was convenient for their current status and situation.

It was clear to everyone that the location of the Temple was in Jerusalem and nowhere else. Therefore, their conclusion was that those who left Eretz Israel essentially left God's rule, and were exiled from the area of the influence and service of the God of Israel. Therefore they must assimilate and blend in with the natives in the place to which they were exiled. Eretz Israel was left only to the people living there. The Jewish people are those living in the land of Israel, whereas the others, the exiles, have distanced themselves from God. What follows from this conception is that God's rule is restricted to Eretz Israel.

There is a certain connection between this spiritual outlook and the pagan idea that holiness is circumscribed by a kingdom's borders.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The people who are being criticized here by the prophet Yechezkel understood that God's rule is restricted to the land of Israel, and those who were exiled distanced themselves from Him. It is interesting that the prophet Yechezkel relates to this idea once again in chapter 33:

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, they that inhabit those waste places in the land of Israel speak, saying: Avraham was one, and he inherited the land; but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance. Therefore say to them: Thus says the Lord God. You eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes to your idols, and shed blood; and shall you possess the land? You stand upon your sword, you work abomination, and you defile everyone his neighbor's wife; and shall you possess the land?

Thus shall you say to them: Thus says the Lord God: As I live, surely they that are in the waste places shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that are in the strongholds and in the caves shall die of the pestilence. And I will make the land most desolate, and the pride of her power shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, so that none shall pass through. (*Yechezkel* 33:23-28)

The difficulty here is that those who claim "the land is given us for inheritance" are referred to as "they that inhabit those waste places." And these verses are near a verse that notes a clear date: "And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth 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). If so, it is reasonable to assume that those inhabiting the waste places who are making this claim are those who inhabited the waste places after the destruction of the Temple at the end of the days of Tzidkiyahu, and not after the exile of Yehoyakhin. However, opinions differ as to whether these verses describe the reality in Jerusalem after the exile of Yehoyakhin or after the destruction of Jerusalem in the days of Gedalyahu the son of Achikam.

The difficulty with dating this passage is because of the statement of the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "The land is given us for inheritance" (*Yechezkel* 11:15). For based on what is stated at the end of II *Melakhim*, in *Eikha* and in *Nechemya*, we know that Jerusalem was empty of inhabitants after the destruction of the city, because it was then totally destroyed. Who then are those inhabiting the waste places of Jerusalem?

And furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that whoever was cultivating such hope in Jerusalem was doing so while the kingdom, the capital city and the Temple still stood intact, rather than after the destruction. Hence, we must assume that this is what the inhabitants of Jerusalem believed during the ten years before the destruction. This, then, is the essence of Yechezkel's prophecy in chapter 11. Indeed, Yechezkel Kaufmann[[3]](#footnote-3) argues that *Yechezkel* 33:23-24 and on precede in time the previous verse which mentions the destruction of Jerusalem, and that the prophecy of "the land is given us for inheritance" was delivered during the days of the exile of Yehoyakhin.

As we have shown, the two prophecies in *Yechezkel*, in chapter 11 and in chapter 33, reflect the ideology of this group in the kingdom of Yehuda after the exile of Yehoyakhin before the destruction of the Temple.

Based on this, we may go back and reconsider Yirmeyahu's prophecy concerning the two baskets of figs (*Yirmeyahu* 24) which we dealt with in the previous *shiur*. Yirmeyahu is well acquainted with the ideology of "the land is given us for inheritance," and this prophecy is directed against the slogan: "Get you far from the Lord" (*Yechezkel* 11:15).

From here we see that Yechezkel in the Babylonian exile and Yirmeyahu in the kingdom of Yehuda, each in his own place and in his own style, deal with the same issue. They maintain that the remnant of Israel is in Babylonia and the legitimate people of Yehuda who will be restored in the future are those in the exile of Yehoyakhin in Babylonia; whereas the fate of the remnant in Jerusalem who declare that "the land is given us for inheritance" is total destruction.

**The Second Group: The Realistic Elders of Israel in Babylonia – We Will Build a Temple to the God of Israel in Babylonia**

The prophet Yechezkel reports in chapter 20: "And it came pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me" (*Yechezkel* 20:1). In general, even those living in Babylonia feel that the destruction of the Temple, the city and the land is quickly approaching and the feeling of despair in growing. The elders in Babylonia see no escape from this bleak reality, and they come to inquire of God through the prophet.

The prophet offers a comprehensive historical overview. Among other conclusions from this overview for the current situation, the prophet states that the aspiration to assimilate among the nations will not succeed and in the future salvation the people will be brought for judgment to the wilderness, where God will refine and purify His nation. The redemption will be primarily for the sake of God's name and because of the promise that had been given to Israel's forefathers.

In verse 1, the context of the inquiry of God is unclear.

For in My holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, says the Lord God, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them, serve Me in the land; there will I accept them, and there will I require your heave-offerings, and the first of your gifts, with all your holy things. With your sweet savor will I accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries wherein you have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country which I lifted up My hand to give to your fathers. And there shall you remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein you have polluted yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that you have committed. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O you house of Israel, says the Lord God. (*Yechezkel* 20:40-44)

The primary emphasis in verse 40 is on the word "there." There ("in My holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel") all of the house of Israel shall serve Me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your heave-offerings and the first of your gifts, with all your holy things. This emphasis, according to this understanding, comes to dissuade the elders of Israel of their plan. We see then that even the elders of Israel who lived in Babylonia felt that Nevuchadnetzar was an exceedingly mighty ruler, and they must reconcile themselves with the new reality, and therefore they proposed to build a Temple in Babylonia, in order to deal spiritually with the bleak reality of their exile in Babylonia.

The prophet strongly rejects this proposal. The only possible place to serve God is on the holy mountain in Jerusalem. It is impossible to offer sacrifices anywhere outside the Temple in Jerusalem. This idea was formulated for future generations by *Chazal* in the mishna that deals with the allowance and prohibition of *bamot*: "After the sanctification of Shilo, the *bamot* could again be permitted, but after the sanctification of Jerusalem there can be no such permission" (*Megila* 1:11).

Our examination has focused on Yechezkel's prophecy in Babylonia which parallels Yirmeyahu's prophecy in the kingdom of Yehuda, and we have seen that they shared the same attitude to two groups. The first group in Jerusalem, who maintained that the land was given to them for inheritance; God's rule is limited to Eretz Israel and those who were exiled to Babylonia are distanced from God. And a second group in Babylonia, who proposed building a Temple in that country.

The prophets resolutely rejected both groups. The common denominator between them was the understanding that there was no way to change reality. Each group saw the future in its own place, and therefore those remaining in the kingdom of Yehuda understood that God ruled only among them, while those in Babylonia sought to build a Temple in their new country.

In the next *shiur* we will continue our study of other sub-groups in the kingdom of Yehuda and in Babylonia to which the prophets Yirmeyahu and Yechezkel relate.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Our analysis here is based on the article of Prof. Yehuda Elitzur, "*Shenei Nevi'im Mul Arba Miflagot: Yirmeyahu ve-Yechezkel bi-Yemei Galut Yehoyakhin*," in *Sefer Yisrael ve-ha-Mikra*, pp. 219-229. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rav Yoel Bin-Nun dealt with this issue in his article: "*Nachalat Binyamin* – *Nachalat Shekhina*, in: *Lifnei Efrayim u-Vinyamin u-Menashe*, pp. 25-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Yechezkel Kaufmann, *Toledot ha-Emuna ha-Yisraelit*, III, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv 1960, p. 522. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)