YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Brum for the Refua Sheleima of

Dana Petrover (Batsheva bat Gittel Aidel Leba)

and Marvin Rosenberg (Meir Chaim ben Tzipporah Miriam)

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In memory of six friends and family,
strong pillars of the Montreal Jewish community,
who have left us in the past 7 years.
All were אוהבי עם ישראל, אוהבי ארץ ישראל, אוהבי תורת ישראל.

Joseph (Yosie) Deitcher

Avrum (Avy) Drazin

Rabbi Joseph Drazin

Leibel Frisch

Israel (Mutch) Yampolsky

Dr. Mark Wainberg

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**Lecture 366: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(176) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (152)**

The next prophecies relating to the actions of King Tzidkiyahu are from the time of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem on the 10th of Tevet in the ninth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign until the destruction of the city and the Temple on the 9th of Av in the eleventh year.

It turns out that both the prophet Yirmeyahu in the kingdom of Yehuda and the prophet Yechezkel in the exile in Babylonia relate to this same period. The prophet Yirmeyahu in the kingdom of Yehuda describes a gradual process that is connected to the kingdom of the house of David, which begins with the siege of Jerusalem, continues with the breaching of the walls of the city, and concludes with the destruction of the city and the Temple.

The prophet Yechezkel in the Babylonian exile describes the abominations of Jerusalem, focusing on impurity, the desecration of God's name, idolatry, forbidden sexual relations and bloodshed. He sees the 10th of Tevet as the date on which the destruction essentially took place. On that date the prophet's wife died, symbolizing the destruction of the Temple.

In order to correctly understand the relationship between the two prophecies delivered on parallel dates concerning the reality in Jerusalem from the days of the Babylonian siege of the city in Tammuz and until the destruction of the Temple in the month of Av, let us begin with the prophecies of Yechezkel in chapters 22-24. Chapter 22 deals with the sins and punishments of Jerusalem, chapter 23 describes the betrayal of the sisters Ohola, she being Shomeron, and Oholiva, she being Jerusalem, and chapter 24 takes place on the very day of the 10th of Tevet. The prophet relates once again to the parable of the pot and the flesh, on that same day his wife dies, and the people of Israel are informed about the destruction of the Temple.

**The Sins of Jerusalem and its Punishments (*Yechezkel* 22)**

Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Now, you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? then cause her to know all her abominations. And you shall say: Thus says the Lord God: O city that sheds blood in the midst of you, that your time may come, and that makes idols to yourself to defile you; you are become guilty in your blood that you have shed, and are defiled in your idols which you have made; and you have caused your days to draw near, and are come even to your years; therefore have I made you a reproach to the nations, and a mocking to all the countries! Those that are near, and those that are far from you, shall mock you, you defiled of name and full of tumult. Behold, the princes of Israel, every one according to his might, have been in you to shed blood. In you have they made light of father and mother; in the midst of you have they dealt by oppression with the stranger; in you have they wronged the fatherless and the widow. You have despised My holy things, and have profaned My sabbaths. In you have been talebearers to shed blood; and in you they have eaten upon the mountains; in the midst of you they have committed lewdness. In you have they uncovered their fathers' nakedness; in you have they humbled her that was unclean in her impurity. And each has committed abomination with his neighbor's wife; and each has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law; and each in you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter. In you have they taken gifts to shed blood; you have taken interest and increase, and you have greedily gained of your neighbors by oppression, and have forgotten Me, says the Lord God. Behold, therefore, I have smitten My hand at your dishonest gain which you have made, and at your blood which has been in the midst of you. Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with you? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it. And I will scatter you among the nations, and disperse you through the countries; and I will consume your filthiness out of you. And you shall be profaned in yourself, in the sight of the nations; and you shall know that I am the Lord. And the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, the house of Israel is become dross to Me; all of them are brass and tin and iron and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are the dross of silver. Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you are all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver and brass and iron and lead and tin into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger and in My fury, and I will cast you in, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall you be melted in the midst thereof; and you shall know that I the Lord have poured out My fury upon you. And the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, say to her: You are a land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls, they take treasure and precious things, they have made her widows many in the midst thereof. Her priests have done violence to My law, and have profaned My holy things; they have put no difference between the holy and the common, neither have they taught difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey: to shed blood, and to destroy souls, so as to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed for them with whited plaster, seeing falsehood, and divining lies to them, saying: Thus says the Lord God, when the Lord has not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have wronged the poor and needy, and have oppressed the stranger unlawfully. And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the breach before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none. Therefore have I poured out My indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their own way have I brought upon their heads, says the Lord God. (*Yechezkel* 22)

The chapter is divided into three sections. Verses 1-16 and 23-31 give a detailed description of the people's sins, while the middle section, verses 17-22, deals with the people's punishment. The sins that are mentioned here are in all areas of life, in matters between man and God and in matters between man and his fellow, offenses that are committed by different classes of the people, from the princes of Israel, through the prophets, the priests, the princes, and the people of the land. There is no need to say that all of these many and various misdeeds were all committed only at the end of Tzidkiyahu's reign. It is quite possible that the prophet who is heralding the utter destruction of the city is to a certain degree summarizing the types of sins that were committed in recent generations by different people in the kingdom of Yehuda.

**Jerusalem – “The Bloody City” (Verse 4)**

The designation of Jerusalem as "the bloody city" is a harsh designation that repeats itself later in the words of the prophet in chapter 24, verses 6 and 9. In our chapter alone the issue of bloodshed is repeated several times.

Interestingly, alongside bloodshed itself which is an exceedingly severe offense, some of the verses refer also to other offenses that are considered to be a type of bloodshed. In verses 3-4 bloodshed is mentioned alongside idolatry, and in some of the other verses it is mentioned alongside sins between man and his fellow (talebearing, bribery, usury, oppression and unlawful gain). Among the people accused of bloodshed are mentioned prophets of Israel (even if the reference is to the later generations), priests, and princes.

**Jerusalem – “You Defiled of Name” (Verse 5)**

Jerusalem's good name was profaned and defiled. This description is the opposite of a city that is holy and pure. This idea as well appears in many of the verses in our chapter. In verse 3: "and that makes idols to yourself to defile you," and in verse 4: "and are defiled in your idols which you have made." Here too impurity is mentioned both in connection to idolatry and in connection to sexual offenses.

**Between Man and God**

As stated above, mention is made of idolatry (vv. 3-4), despising the holy things and profaning the sabbaths (vv. 8, 26), sexual offenses (vv. 10-11), lewdness and abomination; priests who do violence to the Torah (because they fail to teach the people to distinguish between the pure and the impure), who profane the holy things, by not distinguishing between the holy and the common, or between the pure and the impure (v. 26); prophets who daub for them with white plaster,[[1]](#footnote-1) see falsehood, and divine lies to them (v. 28). As stated, mention is made not only of priests, but also of prophets and princes, as senior representatives of the various branches of government.

**Between Man and His Fellow**

 Disrespecting and making light of parents, oppressing the stranger, wronging the fatherless and the widow (v. 7), talebearing (v. 9), taking bribes, usury, greedy gain, and oppression (vv. 12-13). People oppress not only the poor, but even their neighbors. The princes destroy souls, in order to get dishonest gain (v. 27). The people of the land use oppression and exercise robbery, wrong the poor and needy, and oppress the stranger unlawfully (v. 29)

Here, too, we find a wide range of sins, and the exploitation of the weakest strata of society. All of this was done by both princes and ordinary people.

The bottom line is that when we consider the overall picture of Jerusalem on the eve of its destruction, the reality is exceedingly bleak and harsh. Major flaws are found both among government officials and among ordinary citizens. The sins described here are both communal and individual.

***Vayikra* 19-20 – The Source of a Large Part of the Sins**

An examination of the sins reveals that *Parashat Kedoshim* (*Vayikra* 19-20) is a major source of the sins mentioned in our chapter:

You shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. Turn you not to the idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am the Lord your God… You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him; the wages of a hired servant shall not abide with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; you shall not respect the person of the poor, nor favor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go up and down as a talebearer among your people; neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord… And if a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourns with you shall be to you as the home-born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (*Vayikra* 19:3-34)

And the man that lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them. And if a man lie with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have wrought corruption; their blood shall be upon them… And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness: it is a shameful thing; and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people: he has uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his iniquity… And you shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, nor of your father's sister; for he has made naked his near kin; they shall bear their iniquity. (*Vayikra* 20:11-19)

The same is true about a few verses in *Parashat Behar*:

Take you no interest of him or increase; but fear your God; that your brother may live with you. You shall not give him your money upon interest, nor give him your victuals for increase. I am the Lord your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God. (*Vayikra* 25:36-37)

The verses in the Torah, both those relating to the relationships between man and his fellow, and those relating to forbidden sexual relations, come to warn every person in Israel against committing actions that uproot holiness.

It is well-known that the Torah in *Parashat Kedoshim* contains a series of *mitzvot* that may be regarded as another expression of the Ten Commandments. The people of the kingdom of Yehuda of that time transgressed a significant portion of them. The prophet Yechezkel in his account of these sins demonstrates how they are the direct cause of the destruction of Jerusalem, because they impair the sanctity of Israel, as well as their covenant with God that was made at Mount Sinai.

**The Judgment and Punishment of Jerusalem**

While describing the abominations, the prophet already alludes to the punishment. In verse 4, in the wake of the bloodshed and idolatry, the prophet says: "Therefore have I made you a reproach to the nations, and a mocking to all the countries." The prophet foretells the difficult days that lie before Israel.

The first part of the chapter concludes as follows: "And I will scatter you among the nations, and disperse you through the countries; and I will consume your filthiness out of you. And you shall be profaned in yourself, in the sight of the nations; and you shall know that I am the Lord." On the one hand, exile and dispersal among the nations and lands, while on the other hand, the removal of the impurity from the city. "And you shall be profaned in yourself" means: You shall be profaned within yourself, in your own eyes, and the nations will see you in this state.

In the prophecy, all of Israel is the dross of silver – brass, lead, iron and tin mixed into the silver. They must be put into the furnace to be melted and refined. Since all of Israel is dross, God collects all of them into Jerusalem.

Unlike Yeshayahu who speaks of "Your silver is become dross… and I will purge away your dross as with lye, and will take away all your alloy" (*Yeshayahu* 1:22-25), that God will in the future purge away the lead so that the metal become once again pure silver, Yechezkel speaks about **melting the metal down. Just as one gathers silver in which is mixed brass, iron, lead and tin into the furnace in order to melt it down and refine it, so God will in his anger and fury gather all of them into Jerusalem and there melt them down and refine them.**

**In chapter 24 the prophet will once again employ the image of the pot which emphasizes the cooking and boiling of the bones, the hot fire under the pot consuming all the parts found in it. The meaning is clear: the wall of Jerusalem in the wake of the Babylonian siege will serve as a pot in which the residents of the city will be burned and destroyed.**

**In our chapter as well, without the prophet using the image of the pot, the meaning is the same, namely, that God will gather them all into Jerusalem for the purpose of removing their filth. Thus, at the end of the chapter the prophet says (v. 31): "**Therefore have I poured out My indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their own way have I brought upon their heads, says the Lord God." In the end all of Israel are considered dross. They are all brass, tin and iron in a furnace of silver. Therefore all of the residents of Jerusalem will be killed within the walls of Jerusalem.

In the next *shiur* we will continue to explore Yechezkel's prophecies in chapters 23 and 24.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. They embellish what they say with smooth words, like one who builds a house and plasters it in order to beautify it, but the plaster cannot protect the building from a heavy stream of rain. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)