YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

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**Lecture 376: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

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

In the previous *shiur* we described the prophet Yirmeyahu's last conversation with King Tzidkiyahu and what happened to the prophet and the city including the breach of the city wall on the ninth of Tammuz in the eleventh year of Tzidkiyahu's reign, the king's flight, his capture by the Babylonians, his being taken to Rivla, and the fulfillment of the words of the prophets regarding his very capture, the killing of his sons before his eyes, and his being blinded.

In this *shiur* we wish to examine the description of the complete destruction of the city and the Temple.

**The destruction and the exile**

The destruction is described in its stages in *Yirmeyahu* 2 (as well as in II *Melakhim* 25):

Now in the fifth month, in the tenth day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nevuchadnetzar, king of Babylon, came Nevuzaradan the captain of the guard, who stood before the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem; and he burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great man's house, burned he with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls of Jerusalem round about. Then Nevuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the poorest sort of the people, and the residue of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to the king of Babylon, and the residue of the multitude. But Nevuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen. And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the Lord, and the bases and the brazen sea that were in the house of the Lord, did the Chaldeans break in pieces, and carried all the brass of them to Babylon. The pots also, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the basins, and the pans, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away. And the cups, and the fire-pans, and the basins, and the pots, and the candlesticks, and the pans, and the bowls, that which was of gold, in gold, and that which was of silver, in silver, the captain of the guard took away. The two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve brazen bulls that were under the bases, which king Shelomo had made for the house of the Lord, the brass of all these vessels was without weight. And as for the pillars, the height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits; and a line of twelve cubits did compass it; and the thickness thereof was four fingers; it was hollow. And a capital of brass was upon it; and the height of the one capital was five cubits, with network and pomegranates upon the capital round about, all of brass; and the second pillar also had like unto these, and pomegranates. And there were ninety and six pomegranates on the outside; all the pomegranates were a hundred upon the network round about.

And the captain of the guard took Seraya the chief priest, and Tzefanya the second priest, and the three keepers of the door; and out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war; and seven men of them that saw the king's face, who were found in the city; and the scribe of the captain of the host, who mustered the people of the land; and threescore men of the people of the land, that were found in the midst of the city. And Nevuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Rivla. And the king of Babylon smote them, and put them to death at Rivla in the land of Chamat. So Yehuda was carried away captive out of his land.

This is the people whom Nevuchadretzar carried away captive: in the seventh year three thousand Jews and three and twenty; in the eighteenth year of Nevuchadretzar, from Jerusalem, eight hundred thirty and two persons; in the three and twentieth year of Nevuchadretzar Nevuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Jews seven hundred forty and five persons; all the persons were four thousand and six hundred.

And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Yehoyakhin king of Yehuda, in the twelfth month, in the five and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, lifted up the head of Yehoyakhin king of Yehuda, and brought him forth out of prison. And he spoke kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon. And he changed his prison garments, and did eat bread before him continually all the days of his life. And for his allowance, there was a continual allowance given him of the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death, all the days of his life. (*Yirmeyahu* 52:12-34)

After having described the conquest of Jerusalem, the capture of Tzidkiyahu, the burning of the king's house and the house of the people, the dismantling of the walls of Jerusalem, the exile of the rest of the people to Babylon, and the leaving of the people's poor in Jerusalem (*Yirmyahu* 39:1-10), 19:1-10), Scripture in our chapter describes the destruction of the Temple and the completion of the destruction of the city.

**The date in the month of Av**

The date of the destruction is the tenth of the month of Av, in the nineteenth year of Nevuchanetzar king of Babylon. In the parallel chapter, II *Melakhim* 25, verse 8, it is stated that the destruction took place on the seventh of Av. The contradiction can be resolved in two ways: One way is that of the Malbim who suggests that on the seventh of Av Nevuzaradan came to Jerusalem, whereas the house of the Lord was destroyed on the tenth of the month.

On the other hand, the Gemara in *Ta'anit* 29a states that on the seventh foreign forces entered the Temple, ate there and desecrated the place. On the ninth of Av close to nightfall they set fire to the Temple and it burned the entire next day. Rabbi Yochanan even says that had he lived in that generation he would have established the fast of Tish'a Be-Av on the tenth, because most of the Temple burned on that day.

**The year of Nevuchadnetzar’s reign**

In his description of the details of the destruction, the prophet spells out all the things that were burned: the house of the Lord, the house of the king, all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house. In other words, the whole of Jerusalem was burned by a great fire from the house of the Lord, which was of course the main and central element; through the king's house, which, as may be recalled, consisted of a series of grand and magnificent buildings, including the house of the forest of Lebanon, the chamber of the throne, the chamber of judgment, the house of Shelomo, the house of the daughter of Pharaoh (it is not clear whether Scripture wishes to include also the house of the king in its new location from the time of King Menashe in the Garden of Uza); to all the houses of Jerusalem, the houses of the wealthy, the houses of the notables, and the houses of the common people.

In various excavations conducted in Jerusalem at different sites (for example, in the City of David, the Burnt Room, and on the western hill north of the Broad Wall in the area of the Israelite Tower), very significant remains of a great fire were uncovered that can be clearly dated to the fire set by Nevuzaradan the captain of the guard of the king of Babylon that is described in our chapter.

**The House of the Lord and the House of the King**

It is clear that Yirmeyahu's prophecy was fulfilled in all its severity and that the Temple was utterly destroyed as was the *Mishkan* in Shilo (based on the prophecy in *Yirmeyahu* 7:14 and 26:9).

It is possible that the burning of the house of the king symbolizes the cessation of the kingdom of the house of David. In practice, the Davidic kingdom was completely discontinued. While it is true that Zerubavel the son of Shealtiel at the beginning of the period of the Return to Zion was a descendant of the house of David, the monarchy was not renewed. Only in the days of the Chashmonaim was the kingdom of Israel restored.

Another issue is the relationship between the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of the monarchy. Throughout these *shiurim* we have tried to characterize the essence of Jerusalem as the place that connects earthly kingdom to the Temple, or, put differently, kingdom of flesh and blood to the kingdom of God.

In practice, when the Temple was built, these two aspects of the city found expression in the kingdom of Shelomo. For the first time a permanent earthly kingdom, and for the first time a permanent Temple. The permanent kingdom appears in the days of Shelomo when for the first time a king's son rules after his father. And the permanent holiness is revealed when for the first time the house of God is built in a permanent place and with a permanent structure on Mount Moriya. In corresponding fashion, in the terrible destruction of Jerusalem both the house of the Lord and the house of the king are burned down together with all that they symbolize.

Later, in the days of the Return to Zion, the kingdom of the house of David was not restored, but the primary characteristic of the period was that the *Shekhina* did not rest in the Temple. In the magnificent structure of the Temple, through its various stages and generations, from the days of the Return to Zion to its destruction in the year 70 C.E. by the Romans, the holiest chamber was empty, with no arc, no *kaporet*, and no *keruvim*, and with no other expressions of the resting of the *Shekhina.*[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is therefore interesting to see the exceedingly deep connection between the kingdom of flesh and blood and the kingdom of God, between a human king "sitting on the throne of God as king," as Shelomo is described in I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 29:23, that is to say, that King Shelomo with his very kingship represents the kingdom of God in a favorable manner. The establishment of the kingdom appears simultaneously, both with respect to the kingdom of flesh and blood through the kingship of Shelomo, and with respect to the kingdom of God, through the building of the house of the Lord that takes place during Shelomo's days. The cancelling of the kingdom also takes places simultaneously, both with respect to the destruction of the house of the king and the cessation of the kingdom of the house of David, and with respect to the kingdom of God with the destruction of the house of the Lord. Based on this understanding of the deep connection between these two kingdoms, in the days of the Return to Zion the kingdom of the house of David is not renewed and the *Shekhina* does not rest in the Temple, and the Second Temple never reaches the level of the house of the Lord in the days of the First Temple.

Scripture repeats what was already related in the account of the destruction of the city (in chapter 39), the dismantling of the walls of Jerusalem, the exile of a large part of the people to Babylon, and the leaving of the poor of the land in the kingdom of Yehuda. This, in addition, to the apparently great number of dead in the city, by way of the plague, the sword and hunger in the days of the siege and with the conquest of the city.

**The spoil looted from the Temple**

In the continuation Scripture describes the spoil that was taken by the Babylonians from the Temple, in particular all the vessels and parts of the Temple made of brass. The brass pillars take up a large part of the description of the spoil. In verse 21 Scripture spells out their measurements (18 cubits high, 12 cubits in diameter), the measurements of their capitals (5 cubits), with network and pomegranates round about, 100 pomegranates on each pillar.

Mention is also made of the bases, on which rested the basins and the sea of brass, which the Chaldeans broke in pieces (its weight is estimated in the tens of tons). All of the brass was carried off to Babylon.

Mention is also made of the pots into which the ashes of the offerings were placed; the shovels, by way of which they would transfer the ashes from the altar to the pots; the snuffers, or alternatively certain musical instruments; the basins in which the blood of the sacrifices was collected and from which it was sprinkled on the altar, the blood of each offering in accordance with its own laws.

In addition, mention is made of gold vessels and silver vessels: cups, fire-pans, basins, pots, candlesticks, pans and bowls, each vessel made of gold or silver.

Nevuzaradan, the captain of the guard, takes Seraya the chief priest, and Tzefanya the second priest, and the three doorkeepers, and from the city he takes an officer that was in charge of the soldiers, and seven men who saw the king's face, and the scribe of the captain of the host, who was in charge of mustering the troops, and sixty men of the people of the land that were found near the city. All of these people he takes to Rivla, where the king beats them and kills them.

**The Exiles from Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Yehuda**

Later in the account, we are given the number of those who were exiled in each of the exiles. As for the dates, mention is made of the eighth year of Nevuchadnetzar's reign, the seventeenth year, and the twenty-third year. In order to locate these years along the timeline of the kingdom of Yehuda, let us consider certain additional data that is mentioned in II *Melakhim*:

- King Yehoyakhin was exiled in the eighth year of Nevuchadnetzar's reign, as is explicitly stated in *Melakhim*: "And the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign" (II *Melakhim* 24:12).

- At the beginning of our chapter in verses 12-13 it is explicitly stated that the destruction of the house of the Lord was in the nineteenth year of the reign of the Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon.

- From this it follows that Nevuchadnetzar's reign begin in the fourth year of king Yehoyakim. It should be mentioned that Yehoyakim ruled for eleven years, Yehoyakhin for three months and Tzidkiyahu for eleven years. And Nevuchadnetzar ruled from the fourth year of Yehoyakim, and so the destruction took place in the nineteenth year of Nevuchadnetzar's reign.

Let us go back to the years of exile mentioned in our chapter. The seventh year of Nevuchadnetzar means the seventh year of his war against Yehoyakim. At the beginning of the summer of that year people were exiled from the land of Yehuda. Therefore those people were taken captive by the Babylonians in the previous Tishrei or Cheshvan together with Yehoyakim who died on the way to Babylon.

Nevuchadnetzar's eighteenth year is apparently immediately after the capture of the city and the breach of its wall in Tammuz of the eleventh year of Tzidkiyahu's reign. Nevuchadnetzar's twenty-third year refers to five years after the conquest of Jerusalem and his war against Amon and Moav. It is possible that this exile was connected to Nevuchadnetzar's campaign against Amon and Moav. Perhaps there were people in the kingdom of Yehuda who assisted Amon and Moav in this war.

The number of exiles: in the seventh year – 3023 people from Yehuda; in the eighteenth year – 832 people from Jerusalem, and in the twenty-third year, 745 people, for a total of 4600 exiles.

There is no reference here to the exile of Yehoyakhin – the exile of the craftsmen and smiths. The details of this exile are brought in the book of *Melakhim*:

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. (II *Melakhim* 24:14-16)

In all there were 10,000 exiles, of whom 7000 were soldiers and 3000 craftsmen and smiths. And our chapter mentions 3023 exiles from that same general period. But as we have explained, we are dealing with two different periods of time. It is possible that the total number of exiles to Babylon until the conquest of Jerusalem was greater and that the numbers in our chapter are based on the number of exiles who participated in three triumphant campaigns of Nevuchadnetzar, whose numbers were recorded by the Babylonians.

**Yehoyakhin’s pardon**

The chapter ends with a description of the fate of Yehoyakhin in Babylon. The date: the thirty-seventh year to Yehoyakhin's exile, that is to say, twenty-seven years after the destruction of the Temple, on the twenty-fifth of Adar. II *Melakhim* 25:27 speaks of the twenty-seventh of Adar. Perhaps on the twenty-fifth, it was decided to free him, whereas it was on the twenty-seventh that he was actually freed.

Evil-Merodach king of Babylon lifted up the head of Yehoyakhin king of Yehuda and released him from prison. He set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon. It is reasonable to assume that the people of Yehuda who were exiled to Babylon saw in the honor that the king of Babylon showed to Yehoyakhin a sign of their impending redemption. He replaced his prison garments with honorable clothing, and Yehoyakhin was invited to appear before the king of Babylon.

One of the things that becomes clear in the concluding chapter is the fundamental fact that the words of the prophet Yirmeyahu came true in full. All of the harsh prophecies that the prophet delivered for decades consistently and persistently in the days of Yehoyakim, Yehoyakhin and Tzidkiyahu, throughout all the events that took place around him, and that he never retracted – all of them were fully fulfilled.

Beyond the great difficulty in the very reality of the destruction and exile, it is emphasized here that in such a complex reality of false prophets there is a true prophet to whom God did speak and who foretold the destruction and exile, delivering the word of God as difficult as that may be.

The chapter that concludes the book describes a reality far beyond the time of the destruction. The exiles are described here five years after the destruction, while the account of the end of the reign of Yehoyakhin is twenty-seven years after the destruction.

It is very interesting that the end of the book of Yirmeyahu which was written by the prophet and which deals with the end of the reign of Yehoyakhin, heralds the beginning of redemption. If this scion of the kingdom of the house of David is freed from prison and is raised up to an elite position in the kingdom of Babylon, there is a message of redemption with which Yirmeyahu's book actually ends, even though earlier the prophet had already said: "Thus far are the words of Yirmeyahu" (*Yirmeyahu* 51:64).

In the next *shiur* we will discuss the fate of the prophet Yirmeyahu and the kingdom of Yehuda after the destruction of the Temple.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. As is described in *Yoma* 21b. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)