YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

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In loving memory of Rabbi Dr. Barrett (Chaim Dov) Broyde ztz"l

הוֹלֵךְ תָּמִים וּפֹעֵל צֶדֶק וְדֹבֵר אֱמֶת בִּלְבָבוֹ

Steven Weiner & Lisa Wise

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**Lecture 321: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CXXXI) – The Prohibition of Bamot (CVII)**

In the [previous *shiur*](https://etzion.org.il/en/lecture-320-history-divine-service-altars-cxxx-%E2%80%93-prohibition-bamot-cvi-0) we saw the prophet Yeshayahu's exceedingly resolute attitude toward the alliance that Chizkiyahu entered into with Egypt. In *Yeshayahu* 22, among the prophet's prophecies concerning the city of Jerusalem, we find "the burden concerning the Valley of Vision." Later in the chapter (in verse 9) mention is made of the City of David, whereas in verse 10 mention is made of Jerusalem and places located in ancient Jerusalem, and thus it is clear that this chapter is directed at Jerusalem.

The chapter describes preparations for a siege, apparently King Chizkiyahu's preparations against the possible siege of Sancheriv, king of Ashur. We mentioned in previous *shiurim* that Chizkiyahu fortified the city and significantly expanded it both to the west, where he extended the city to the entire western hill (the area of the Jewish and Armenian quarters in today's Old City and the Mount Zion area south of the southern wall); and to the east, where he added a wall east of the eastern wall of the City of David, thus creating a new expanse referred to in Scripture as "between the two walls."

Why is Jerusalem called the Valley of Vision? *Chazal* in *Eikha Rabba* expound the matter as follows:

Rabbi Yochanan opened: "The burden concerning the Valley of Vision" – that all the visionaries prophesied about it, that all the visionaries arose from it. (*Eikha Rabba*, *peticha* 24)

However, the name is also expounded to the city's disgrace: "'The Valley of Vision' – where they cast the words of the visionaries to the ground."

Why is Jerusalem called a valley? So too the prophet Yirmeyahu says as he describes Jerusalem: "Behold, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley, and rock of the plain, says the Lord; you that say: Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations?" (*Yirmeyahu* 21:13). Noga Hareuveni[[1]](#footnote-1) explains this verse: The question to be asked is how can Jerusalem be called "inhabitant of the valley"? Surely it is a city surrounded by valleys with steep slopes. Also, what is the relationship between "inhabitant of the valley" and "rock of the plain"? The rock of the plain proves that the city creates a mountain that rises from the valley. If so, how can the inhabitants of the prominent rock live at the same time in a valley?

Among the various proposals the he cites, he quotes Wensen, who maintains that the word "valley" in this verse refers to one of the valleys that surround Jerusalem – Emek Refaim, or one of the tributaries of the Kidron Valley. But it is precisely the valleys that surround the city from the east, the south and the west that give it the form of a fortified mountain, and therefore we cannot accept Wensen's proposal.

Noga explains that Yirmeyahu who came every day to Jerusalem from the village of Anatot apparently passed through the ridge of Mount Scopus (in the area of Hadassah Hospital, Mount Scopus), and from that place one can see far below the plain on which the site of the Temple stands out. From there we get the impression that Jerusalem is actually located in a valley, and not on a mountain surrounded by steep valleys on three sides. Therefore he calls Jerusalem "inhabitant of the valley." On the other hand, "the rock of the plain" refers to an artificial plain, the Temple Mount on Mount Moriya. On this plain and in its vicinity we find the center and the stronghold of the people's lives, the Temple, the house of the king, the house of arms, and the entire area is called the rock of the plain in which they put their trust.

Amos Chakham in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary offers another explanation of "the Valley of Vision." He suggests that Yeshayahu calls Jerusalem a valley because the city is surrounded by mountains: "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem" (*Tehilim* 125:2).

It is interesting to consider the *Metzudat David* commentary (ad loc.):

"The Valley of Vision" – this is Jerusalem, which was the site of prophecy, and though it stood on a mountain he calls it a valley in a pejorative sense, saying that the enemies caused them to stumble in their sins, and it quickly became a valley. (*Metzudat David*, *Yeshayahu* 22:1)

It follows from this that the prophet Yeshayahu is using a rhetorical expression to describe the sad state of the city described in the chapter itself, and that he is not referring literally to its topography, but rather to the social and spiritual reality of the city. Therefore he calls Jerusalem "the Valley of Vision." The city itself merits a prophetic revelation, but it is in the state of a valley. It is low and it stands out as the rock of the plain.

The difficulty with this proposal is that the prophet chooses to use expressions that have a distinctly topographical meaning – "valley" as opposed to "plain" – and therefore the matter requires further examination.

On the one hand, we see here: "A tumultuous city, a joyous town… And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine; let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die!" (*Yeshayahu* 22:2-13). There seems to be great joy here. What is the reason for this levity? At the same time, Sancheriv's army is invading the kingdom of Yehuda and Jerusalem is busy fortifying itself. It would appear that in their opinion the fortifications were completed and the city was ready for siege, and this was a reason for joy and celebration, a great sense of security, that they were safe and protected.

When he describes the water works, the prophet says:

You made also a basin between the two walls for the water of the old pool, but you looked not unto Him that had done this, neither had you respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago. (*Yeshayahu* 22:11)

In other words, the fortification of the city was done in complete disregard of God's providence over His people and of the presence of a prophet who brings the word of God to them. Ostensibly there is nothing here but a human struggle. The people of Israel have fortified their capital city with weapons, fortifications, and water projects, and thus they hope to deal militarily and politically with the Assyrian forces that have invaded Yehuda.

Criticism is not levelled against the fortifications themselves. It is clear to all that with Ashur's invasion of Yehuda there is a very high probability and almost absolute certainty that an attempt will be made to conquer the capital city. Therefore, it is surely necessary to prepare the city for a siege in every possible way, which means weaponry, fortification of the city walls and arranging for a steady water supply to the city during a siege.

The question is to what extent was this done together with an examination of what God wants at this time; this could be done by talking to a prophet and consulting with him. There is no expectation that the people rely on a miracle, but only that they deeply understand that everything that is happening, including the arrival of the enemy, is by way of God's direct providence over His people; and that the ability to overcome the enemy does not depend only on the defensive measures that they took, but rather they must serve God and believe in Him, fear Him and keep His commandments.

The text describes that the city is tumultuous and the town joyous despite the fact that there are casualties. They are not casualties of war, but rather they have died in other ways. Some of them may have died of hunger, or plague, or other calamities that befell them in the wake of the war and the siege. Some of them may even have died from excessive eating or drinking. There was surely room to mourn their deaths, but the city's residents do not grieve, but rather they eat and drink and make merry.

Their joy stems from their exaggerated trust in the weapons, fortifications, and water projects that were meant to protect the city during the siege, and this itself brings them to levity. They do not feel at all in danger, nor do they turn to God in prayer that He deliver them from their tribulation, in radical contrast to their joy and merry-making on their rooftops.

The prophet Yeshayahu sees before his eyes the Assyrian enemy ascending the walls of the city:

For it is a day of trouble, and of trampling, and of perplexity, from the Lord, the God of hosts, in the Valley of Vision; Kir shouting, and Shoa at the mount… And it came to pass, when your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen set themselves in array at the gate, and the covering of Yehdua was laid bare, that you looked in that day to the armor in the house of the forest. (*Yeshayahu* 22:5-8)

Is "the armor in the house of the forest" a reference to "the house of the forest of Lebanon" in which Shelomo deposited three hundred shields of beaten gold (I *Melakhim* 10:16-17), which after they were taken by Sheshak the king of Egypt were replaced by Yerovam with shields of copper? These weapons might have been considered off limits, and the use of which was restricted to times of emergency.

Another question which arises from this passage is what brought the people to ignore in such a radical way the concrete danger of Sancheriv's invasion of Yehuda and siege of Jerusalem, on the one hand, and to absolutely ignore the word of God, on the other?

Are we dealing here with exaggerated self-confidence based on the fortifications, weaponry and water works that would allow them to overcome the Assyrian army in any situation? Even in an extended siege of Jerusalem? Or has reality brought them to great despair, despair from the calamity that was closing in upon them, from the Assyrian invasion and its ramifications, bringing the people up to their rooftops, saying: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die." That is to say, one who understands that the fate of the kingdom of Yehuda and Jerusalem has already been decided, reaches the opposite extreme, lust and debauchery, and total detachment from the reality surrounding him.

The prophet's criticism is exceedingly sharp:

And in that day did the Lord, the God of hosts, call to weeping, and to lamentation, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth… And the Lord of hosts revealed Himself in my ears: Surely this iniquity shall not be expiated by you till you die, says the Lord, the God of hosts. (*Yeshayahu* 22:12-14)

The response to the lack of faith, the lack of trust, the pride, and the despair is that there is no atonement for this conduct. There is here a desecration of God's name both inwardly with the contempt for and absolute disregard of the words of the prophet; and outwardly, toward the nations of the world, when the people of Israel despair and ignore the word of God in the world. Prophecy informs the wicked who go up gaily to their rooftops and live in debauchery, that they will die in their sins, this being unconnected to the fate of Jerusalem, but rather a direct result of their transgressions.

An interesting question is to whom was this prophecy directed and what was the position of King Chizkiyahu?

In *Divrei ha-Yamim*, the king appear to sound an entirely different voice:

And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the broad place at the gate of the city, and spoke encouragingly to them, saying: Be strong and of good courage, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Ashur, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there is a Greater with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Chizkiyahu king of Yehuda. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 32:6-8)

Ostensibly the king is described here as appealing to the people not to fear the king of Ashur, and to believe that God will help them and fight their wars. Scripture even notes that the people relied themselves on the words of Chizkiyahu. There might be a difference regarding this matter between Chizkiyahu and the people. Chizkiyahu believed that the people were following him, but the people's faith was not really very deep. A second possibility is to say that in the beginning Chizkiyahu made an alliance with Egypt and the surrounding powers, but after the prophet's reproach and Sancheriv's invasion, the king turned to the prophet. If Chizkiyahu did not initially accept the prophet's word, all the more so did the people not accept it.

In the end, Chizkiyahu believed the words of the prophet, repented and thus Jerusalem was miraculously saved and the destruction was averted. These are the two possibilities of understanding what happened and to whom the prophet directed his words. Practically speaking, the prophet relates both to the fortification of the city's walls and to the water works.

### "And you broke down the houses to fortify the wall."

In reference to the wall, Yeshayahu notes that in order to fortify the wall, houses had to be broken down, which indicates that there had been settlement in the area which was destroyed by the wall.

Prof. Avigad, in his excavations in the Jewish Quarter, found that the wall from the First Temple period, which he attributes to the days of Chizkiyahu, did indeed destroy the houses that preceded it, and he suggests linking the archaeological findings to the verse in our chapter: "And you numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall" (*Yeshayahu* 22:10). This identification is by no means necessary, but it is altogether possible.

In relation to the water works, it is stated: "And you gathered together the waters of the lower pool… youmade also a basin between the two walls for the water of the old pool, but you looked not unto Him that had done this, neither had you respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago" (*Yeshayahu* 22:9-11). It is very reasonable to assume that the basin between the two walls is the Shiloach pool at the southern end of the City of David, to which the water from the Gichon spring was channeled through a tunnel, referred to as Chizkiyahu's tunnel. It is very possible that the old pool was in fact an ancient pool of the City of David, in the present location of the Shiloach pool. And it is possible that the lower pool was a pool adjacent to the Gichon spring from which the water was channeled southward to the basin between the two walls.

In the next *shiur* we will continue our examination of the days of Chizkiyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. In his wonderful book, *Or Chadash al Sefer Yirmeyahu*, pp. 19-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)