YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**MIKDASH**

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**Lecture 330: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CXL) – The Prohibition of Bamot (CXVI)**

We have devoted many *shiurim* to the period of Chizkiyahu. In this *shiur* we wish to summarize what we have learned about the personality of Chizkiyahu and his primary achievements. There are two reasons why we have chosen to examine Chizkiyahu's period in such a thorough manner:

The first is that Chizkiyahu's reign is described in relatively great detail, both in the books of II *Melakhim* and II *Divrei ha-Yamim*, and in many chapters in the books of *Yeshayahu* and *Mikha*. In addition, there are Assyrian documents as well as wall reliefs that relate to Sancheriv's campaign in the kingdom of Yehuda, and there are also significant archaeological findings in Jerusalem, in Tel Lachish and in other places in the coastal plain that can be dated to the period of Chizkiyahu.

The second, which is possibly related to the first, is that Chizkiyahu was one of the greatest kings of the kingdom of Yehuda regarding many aspects of his kingdom, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that the prophets delivered many prophecies about him, as indeed much has been written about him.

The accounts are many and varied, but they are not identical. Over and beyond the fact that no two prophets prophesy in the same style (and this is indeed true about Yeshayahu and Mikha), the book of *Melakhim* was written by the prophet Yirmeyahu at the end of the First Temple period, whereas the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim* was written by Ezra the Scribe in the period of the return to Zion. Therefore, by combining all the sources, we get several different perspectives, contemporary (the prophecies of Yeshayahu and Mikha), the end of the First Temple period (*Melakhim*), and the period of the return to Zion (*Divrei ha-Yamim*).

We will bring several examples of the two points of view of Yeshayahu and Mikha, concerning seemingly identical events written in different styles.

### The Absence of Justice among the leaders in Jerusalem

In practice, when Chizkiyahu was busy establishing an alliance with Egypt, Bavel, and other countries against Ashur, he in great measure neglected social reform, the great vision brought by the prophet Yeshayahu in chap. 9:

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; and the government is upon his shoulder; and his name is called Pele-Yoetz-El-Gibbor-Av-Ad-Sar-Shalom; that the government may be increased, and of peace there be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it through justice and through righteousness from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts does perform this. (*Yeshayahu* 9:5-6)

This is a vision of repairing the kingdom with justice and righteousness. This vision did not materialize in the days of Chizkiyahu, mainly because of his preoccupation with foreign policy, leading the international campaign against Ashur. It is reasonable to assume that as a result, the person who directly impacted on the spiritual and social character of the kingdom was Shevna who was in charge of the house, the same Shevna who was later deposed from his position and replaced by Chizkiyahu with Elyakim, the son of Chilkiyahu.

As we demonstrated in previous *shiurim*, the social reality in Jerusalem at the time was very bleak. The two prophets describe this reality in different manners. The prophet Yeshayahu in chapter 1, who according to many commentators is referring to the days of Chizkiyahu, describes the situation of Jerusalem as follows:

How is the faithful city become a harlot! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards; they judge not the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come to them.

Therefore says the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: Ah, I will ease Me of My adversaries, and avenge Me of My enemies. And I will turn My hand upon you, and purge away your dross as with lye, and will take away all your alloy… For they shall be ashamed of the terebinths which you have desired, and you shall be confounded for the gardens that you have chosen. For you shall be as a terebinth whose leaf fades and as a garden that has no water. And the strong shall be as tow, and his work as a spark; and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them. (*Yeshayahu* 1:21-31)

The prophet sharply describes the terrible injustice that prevails in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a harlot, it is filled with murderers, its princes are thieves and there is no justice.

So too the prophet Mikha describes this bleak reality in chapter 3:

Hear this, I pray you, you heads of the house of Yaakov, and rulers of the house of Israel, that abhor justice, and pervert all equity; that build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money; yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say: Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us? Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. (*Mikha* 3:9-12)

For Mikha as well, the prophet's central focus is the lack of justice in Jerusalem. He refers to the heads and the rulers, the priests and the prophets. All of the country's senior leadership suffers from injustice, but along with the injustice, each of these officeholders has the feeling that he is possession of an "insurance policy" – God is among us, and therefore no evil will befall us.

It is very reasonable to assume that the feeling that God is with them was based on the fact that the Temple was standing among them. Later, during the reign of Yehoyakim, this will be stated explicitly by the prophet Yirmeyahu:

Trust you not in lying words, saying: The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, are these… Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and offer to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you have not known, and come and stand before Me in this house, whereupon My name is called, and say: We are delivered, that you may do all these abominations? Is this house, whereupon My name is called, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says the Lord…

Therefore will I do to the house, whereupon My name is called, wherein you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shilo. (*Yirmeyahu* 7:4-14)

Although, as noted earlier, this prophecy was delivered about a hundred years later by another prophet and in another context, some topics in the prophecy closely parallel Mikha's prophecy.

Here too there is a description of the terrible injustice committed by the people, and not just by the leadership, as is found by Mikha. This injustice includes bloodshed, the oppression of widows and orphans, theft, murder, adultery, false oaths, and other behaviors. Here too there is a feeling of trust in the existence of the Temple: "The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, are these." The prophecy also heralds the destruction of the Temple on account of these sins.

Mikha is the first to speak of the destruction of Zion, Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. An explicit date is given for his prophecy – the days of Chizkiyahu. As is stated in *Yirmeyahu* 26:18, Chizkiyahu believed in the prophecy of Mikha and feared God.

Both Yeshayahu and Mikha relate to the corrupt state of Jerusalem during the period of Chizkiyahu, but each one says something different. Yeshayahu speaks of repair, of the perishing of the wicked, of the destruction of the idolatry, and of the return of justice and righteousness. Mikha deals with the destruction of the Temple. Both of them appear to be relating to the same reality, but their prophecies differ in their contents and their essence.

Theoretically we can explain the two prophecies, and propose that we are dealing with two different periods of Chizkiyahu's reign, Yeshayahu describing the earlier stage, and Mikha describing a later stage. In any event, it is clear that Mikha's prophecy speaks about a situation unlike any other the entire length of the First Temple period.

The prophet who sees Jerusalem as a city of justice states that the absence of justice among its various leaders does not allow the city's continued existence. The identification of Jerusalem with justice is not just a matter of the name of the city, but also its essence, and in the absence of justice the city itself is doomed for destruction.

This is the first example of two different prophecies, in the wake of the difficult social and spiritual reality in Jerusalem during the days of Chizkiyahu.

### The vision of the end of Days[[1]](#footnote-1)

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| *Yeshayahu* 2:2-5 | *Mikha* 4:1-5 |
| And it shall come to pass in the end of days, | And it shall come to pass in the end of days, |
| that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains, | that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains, |
| and shall be exalted above the hills; | and it shall be exalted above the hills; |
| and all nations shall flow unto it. | and peoples shall flow unto it. |
| And many peoples shall go and say: | And many nations shall go and say: |
| Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, | Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, |
| to the house of the God of Yaakov; | and to the house of the God of Yaakov; |
| and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. | and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. |
| For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. | For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. |
| And He shall judge between the nations, | And He shall judge between many peoples, |
| and shall decide for many peoples; | and shall decide concerning mighty nations afar off; |
| and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, | and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, |
| and their spears into pruning hooks; | and their spears into pruning hooks; |
| nation shall not lift up sword against nation, | nation shall not lift up sword against nation, |
| neither shall they learn war any more. | neither shall they learn war any more. |
|  | But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; |
|  | and none shall make them afraid; |
|  | for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. |
|  | For let all the peoples walk each one in the name of its god, |
| O house of Yaakov, come you, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. | but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever. |

The verse in Mikha, "but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree," presents the vision of the end of days as a vision for the near future, one that is capable of being realized. It is similar to what is stated about the days of Shelomo: "And Yehuda and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Be'er-Sheva, all the days of Shelomo" (I *Melakhim* 5:5). Mikha sees before his eyes the first kingdom, the vision of the days of David and Shelomo, when these two kings united all of the tribes of Israel under one crown and expanded the borders of the kingdom, and represented before the world the ideal kingdom of Israel.

Yeshayahu foresees a return to the Garden of Eden, to utopian districts of peace far removed from political reality. He is not satisfied with the renewal of the Davidic kingdom but rather he seeks a more essential repair.

### Is Salvation divine or also human?

Regarding this question as well we see the two different attitudes of the prophets Yeshayahu and Mikha. Yeshayahu sees before him: "Then shall Ashur fall with the sword, not of man, and the sword, not of men, shall devour him" (*Yeshayahu* 31:8).

In contrast, Mikha understands that Israel must take an active stance against Ashur and shift the battle to enemy territory:

Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now shall you go forth out of the city, and shall dwell in the field, and shall come even to Babylon; there shall you be rescued; there shall the Lord redeem you from the hand of your enemies. (*Mikha* 4:10)

These positions of the two prophets are evident in other prophecies as well. Thus in *Yeshayahu* 26:

Come, my people, enter you into you chambers, and shut your doors about you; hide yourself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpassed. For, behold, the Lord comes forth out of His place to visit upon the inhabitants of the earth their iniquity…. (*Yeshayahu* 26:20-21)

Later in chapter 30:

For, O people that dwells in Zion at Jerusalem, you shall weep no more; He will surely be gracious to you at the voice of your cry, when He shall hear, He will answer you. And though the Lord give you sparing bread and scant water…. (*Yeshayahu* 30:19-20)

And in chapter 31:

For thus says the Lord to me: Like as the lion, or the young lion, growling over his prey… so will the Lord of hosts come down to fight upon mount Zion, and upon the hill thereof. As birds hovering, so will the Lord of hosts protect Jerusalem; He will deliver it as He protects it, He will rescue it as He passes over… Then shall Ashur fall with the sword, not of man, and the sword, not of men, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword… says the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem. (*Yeshayahu* 31:4-9)

In contrast, Mikha, in the continuation of the aforementioned prophecy in chapter 4, says as follows:

And now many nations are assembled against you that say: Let her be defiled, and let our eye gaze upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they His counsel; for He has gathered them as the sheaves to the threshing-floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs brass; and you shall beat in pieces many peoples; and you shall devote their gain to the Lord, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth. Now shall you gather yourself… (*Mikha* 4:11-14)

And at the beginning of the next chapter:

But you, Bet-Lechem Efrata, which are little to be among the thousands of Yehuda, out of you shall one come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from ancient days. (*Mikha* 5:1)

Rabbis Yoel Bin-Nun and Binyamin Lau note the differences in meaning regarding Micha's image of a woman whose fetus is in distress, as opposed to the powerlessness of the mother by Yeshayahu:

Like as a woman with child, that draws near the time of her delivery, is in pain and cries out in her pangs; so have we been at Your presence, O Lord. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the land… (*Yeshayahu* 26:17-18)

And similarly in chapter 37, in Chizkiyahu's appeal to Yeshayahu:

This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of contumely; for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. (*Yeshayahu* 37:3)[[2]](#footnote-2)

### Prayer for peace

Both prophets speak of the eradication of evil from the world as a prelude to peace on earth. Yeshayahu describes God's eradication of evil, where the glory of the Messianic king is the spirit of God that rests on him, while for Mikha it is military victory that will bring peace. According to Yeshayahu, God will smite the enemy and the Messianic king will judge by way of the spirit of God, whereas Mikha casts upon the king the responsibility to lead the kingdom with his own sword, to contend with the enemy with military tactics, face-to-face battles and shifting the campaign to the enemy's territory. The prophet Mikha says as follows:

And this shall be peace: when Ashur shall come into our land, and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight princes among men. And they shall waste the land of Ashur with the sword, and the land of Nimrod with the keen-edged sword; and he shall deliver us from Ashur, when he comes into our land, and when he treads within our border. (*Mikha* 5:4-5)

Yeshayahu makes several references to various different animals. He describes an absolutely idyllic relationship between a wolf and a lamb:

And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (*Yeshayahu* 11:6-7)

In addition, Yeshayahu describes the nations of the world as a predatory lion (*Yeshayahu* 5:29-30), and Israel as a sheep that God will eventually rescue after having been smitten. When Yeshayahu refers to a lion in the context of Israel, he refers to God who will roar at the enemy and deliver Israel:

For thus says the Lord to me: Like as the lion, or the young lion, growling over his prey, though a multitude of shepherds be called forth against him, will not be dismayed at their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them; so will the Lord of hosts come down to fight upon mount Zion, and upon the hill thereof. (*Yeshayahu* 31:4)

But according to Micha, the devouring lion is the cub of the lion of Yehuda who will go through, tread, and tear in pieces, and the wicked nations of the world will be the sheep for slaughter, with none to deliver them. Mikha's young lion grows up among the lions, and treads down upon the flocks of sheep:

And the remnant of Yaakov shall be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he go through, treads down and tears in pieces, and there is none to deliver. Let Your hand be lifted up above Your adversaries, and let all Your enemies be cut off. (*Mikha* 5:7-8)

### The priority assigned to the ingathering of the exiles before the arrival of the Messianic king

According to Yeshayahu, the ingathering of the exiles will take place after God will install the Messianic king in Jerusalem (*Yeshayahu* 11:10-12). The understanding that underlies this priority is that God's kingdom on earth is the real revolution from which all other changes in the world will follow – justice, righteousness, and the ingathering of the exiles. According to Yirmeyahu, on the other hand, first the exiles will be ingathered, and only then will the scion of David arise and execute justice and righteousness. The kingdom of flesh and blood will operate within the real world and the process of redemption will be directed by God, through the ingathering of the exiles, when at the end of the process, a descendant of David will ascend his throne and renew his kingdom.

For Yeshayahu there is a connection between the image of the ideal Messianic king in chapter 11 and the vision of the end of days in chapter 2. The reality of "and the wolf shall dwell with the lamb" accords with "and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their swords into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"; they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain" (*Yeshayahu* 11:9). A reality in which all the nations go up to the mountain of God.

In the next *shiur* we will complete our summary of Chizkiyahu's reign.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. In this section we follow in the footsteps of Rav Yoel Bin-Nun and Rav Binyamin Lau in their book, *Yeshayahu* – *Ke-Tziporim Afot*, pp. 293ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Of course, the prophets differ in their account of the victory: Mikha describes the great victory of the people of Israel alone, whereas Yeshayahu describes the alliance with Egypt. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)