YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

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**Lecture 333: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(CXLIII) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXIX)**

To complete our examination of the reign of King Menashe, we wish to relate in this *shiur* to three issues. The first issue: In view of the fact that Menashe worshipped idols in the house of God, how did those who were faithful to the God of Israel worship God during this period?

In addition, Scripture notes two details regarding Menashe's activity in Jerusalem: First, the building of an outer wall for the City of David (i.e., east of the ancient wall of the city). Second, the change in the location of his house and the place of his burial, the move to the garden of Uza.

With these three issues, we will complete our study of the days of King Menashe.

### The Worship of God in the days of King Menashe

An interesting question arises regarding what happened to the faithful servants of God during the time of King Menashe. The house of God is closed, it is filled with idols, and in the Ben-Hinnom valley children are being passed through fire for Molekh.

Scripture notes: "Moreover Menashe shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (II *Melakhim* 21:16). There are those who interpret this text as referring to God-fearing people who rose up against Menashe. Another interpretation may be suggested based on the archaeological findings.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the southwestern part of Jerusalem, in what is now the neighborhoods of Kiryat Yovel, Ir Gannim, Kiryat Menachem and Beit Zayit, about twenty mounds of earth, called *regamim*, were discovered.

*Regamim* are huge artificial piles of stones and earth that were built by man. In an excavation conducted by Ruth Amiran in one of the *regamim* on the way from Kiryat ha-Yovel to Ora,[[2]](#footnote-2) following the removal of a pile of huge stones, there was found below it a low seventeen sided structure. A pit was dug there to a depth of ninety centimeters; it was covered with dressed stone, and in front of the pit there was a paved area.

Fragments of coals, bulls, and stones that were blackened by fire were found in and around the pit. In close proximity to the pit were found shards of cooking utensils, and shards of bowls, jugs and jars from the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E.

Ruth Amiran understood that the uncovered structure was a *bama*, as the prophet said: "Thus says the Lord God… concerning the mountains and concerning the hills, concerning the ravines and concerning the valleys… and I will destroy your high places" (*Yechezkel* 6:3).

The question that this raised was: For what purpose was a ritual site that was no longer desired destroyed by erecting a monumental heap of stones on top of it? Surely the prophets, throughout the period of the kings of Yehuda fought against the worship that was conducted at the *bamot*. The assumption based on the vessels that were found at the excavation (the simplicity of the vessels, and the absence of foreign ritual objects) was that these *bamot* were used in the worship of the God of Israel, and not for the worship of idols.

We are familiar with two extensive campaigns that were undertaken to eradicate the *bamot*, the first in the days of Chizkiyahu and the second in the days of Yoshiyahu.

The need for additional reform in such a short span of time indicates that Chizkiyahu's actions did not have a long-term effect, and it was therefore necessary in the days of Yoshiyahu to enforce the prohibition against *bamot* in a most vigorous manner.

There were two key components to Yoshiyahu's actions:

1. The destruction of all the accoutrements of idol worship through burning, breaking, and shattering: "And the king commanded… to bring forth out of the Temple of the Lord all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the Ashera… and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron… And he brought out the Ashera from the house of the Lord… and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder…" (II *Melakhim* 23:4)

2. Defiling the ritual sites with ritual impurity, graves and the bones of the dead: "And he defiled the high places where the priests had made offerings" (II *Melakhim* 23:8); "And he defiled Tofet, which is in the valley of Ben-Hinnom" (II *Melakhim* 23:10).

The goal of defiling these places (including places where there were no buildings or structures, such as the *bamot* across Jerusalem) was to prevent the renewal of the cult and permanently eradicate it from these places. Yoshiyahu did not only destroy the worship at the *bamot* as Chizkiyahu had done. The novelty of his approach lay in his learning from Chizkiyahu's actions and taking steps to prevent the renewal of that worship and distance the people from those ritual sites.

The phenomenon of the *regamim* has been explained as follows: Since the Temple turned into a site of idol worship, those people who remained loyal to the God of Israel and wished to continue serving Him turned to the *bamot*. They did not give up on worshipping God, and turned the *bamot* that were directed to His service into an alternative to the Temple service and the pilgrimage to the house of God. Instead of burning these *bamot* as he had done with all the places where he found real idol worship, Yoshiyahu chose to bury the *bamot* under giant piles of rocks, the *regamim*.

It is possible that from Yoshiyahu's perspective the *regamim* served also as a monument that warned the later generations that the Temple was the exclusive site for worshipping God.

Since these *bamot* were used in the worship of the God of Israel, and not in idol worship, they did not compete with the Temple in Jerusalem, but rather served as a refuge for the worship of God that would one day return to its proper place in the Temple.

It turns out that these *bamot* were sort of *tashmishei mitzva*, items used in the performance of a *mitzva*. Therefore Yoshiyahu decided not to treat them with scorn, but rather to bury them. It is possible that this is the meaning of the verse that states that Yoshiyahu put down the offering at the *bamot* in the cities of Yehuda and in the places round about Jerusalem (II *Melakhim* 23:5).

It is reasonable to assume that as part of this enterprise, Yoshiyahu brought the priests who had served at the *bamot* to Jerusalem and did not withhold from them the priestly gifts. These priests certainly filled an important role in operating and maintaining the *bamot* for the worship of God in the southwestern part of Jerusalem, which constituted in the days of Menashe an alternative to worship in the house of God which had become impossible.

The *regamim* remind the later generations about the devotion of those God-fearing people who rebelled against Menashe and his idols and remained faithful to the God of Israel.

### The Construction of an outer wall for the City of David

Scripture states as follows: "Now after this he built an outer wall to the city of David, on the west side of the Gichon, in the valley, even to the entrance at the fish gate; and he compassed about Ofel, and raised it up a very great height; and he put captains of the army in all the fortified cities of Yehuda" (II *Diveri ha-Yamim* 33:14).

It turns out that Menashe built a new wall in Jerusalem, outside the City of David, that is, to the east of the original city wall. On the other hand, it is defined as being situated to the west of the Gichon, that is to say, to the west of the Gichon spring, in the valley, apparently the Kidron valley. That is to say, it was located close to the Gichon spring, but still on the slope above the Kidron valley, and outside the main city wall.

The interesting thing is that such a wall has been found that ostensibly fulfills the geographical parameters described in the verse. The wall has been preserved to a height of 7 meters, is 3 meters wide, and is clearly located a few dozen meters southwest of the Gichon spring in the southernmost area.

The archaeologists tend to attribute this wall to the days of Chizkiyahu, owing to his extensive activity in everything related to fortifying the kingdom and the city against a possible Assyrian invasion, and perhaps also because of the explicit reference to Chizkiyahu's fortification of the city with the building of a wall (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 32:5), though it would appear that the reference there is to a wall in a different location.

To us it seems quite possible and even likely that this wall be identified with the wall built by Menashe.[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is important to note that based on the discovery of the outer wall of the City of David, it turns out that between this wall and the city's main wall above it to the west is an area that can be called "*bein ha-chomatayim*," between the two walls. This fits in with what is stated in the book of *Melakhim* regarding Tzidkiyahu's flight:

Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war [fled] by night by way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden – now the Kasdim were against the city roundabout – and the king went by the way of the Arava. (II *Melakhim* 25:4)

### The Burial site of Menashe and Amon, the garden of his house, the Garden of Uza

Scripture notes that Menashe and Amon were buried in the garden of Uza (regarding Menashe it says: "And Menashe slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uza" [II *Melakhim* 21:18]). Menashe is the first king about which there is no mention of his being buried in the City of David.

All of the kings of the house of David from David until Chizkiyahu were buried in the City of David. This is what is stated in the book of *Melakhim.*[[4]](#footnote-4) Menashe was the first king to be buried elsewhere – not in the royal tombs in the City of David. Scripture emphasizes that he was buried in the garden of his house in a place called the garden of Uza. It is easy to identify the garden of Uza as the house of Menashe.

Prof. Avigad claims (and this is the accepted view among the archaeologists) that the City of David expanded to the western hill during the period of Chizkiyahu. The "western hill" is a modern term that refers to the area comprised of the Jewish and Armenian quarters of the Old City of Jerusalem and Mount Zion, in the area between the Turkish wall and the Ben-Hinnom valley. According to this understanding, it is reasonable to look for the garden of Uza in the vicinity of the western hill.

Based on this logic, Dr. Gabi Barkai[[5]](#footnote-5) suggested that the garden of Uza is located in the area of David's Tomb on Mount Zion, and that it is possible that Menashe is buried there. Accordingly, the site is not the tomb of David, but rather the site of the last kings of the house of David, Menashe and Amon.

There are also other proposals regarding the identification of the garden of Uza. In any event, it is interesting that it is precisely from the time of Menashe and on that the Davidic kings were no longer buried in the royal tombs in the City of David. Until his day, as stated in the book of *Melakhim*, all of the kings of the house of David were buried there. There might be a practical explanation for this – there was no more room in the original royal tombs. Some wish to infer from the formulation in *Divrei ha-Yamim*: "And Chizkiyahu slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the ascent of the sepulchers of the sons of David" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 32:33), that the burial in the ascent of the sepulchers of the sons of David indicates that there was no more room among the original sepulchers themselves, and therefore Scripture notes that he was buried in the ascent of the sepulchers of the sons of David.

If this is not a practical issue, we must ask why Menashe left the house of the king located above the city and below the house of God and moved to another area. Here too it would appear that all of the kings from the days of Shelomo until Chizkiyahu lived in the original house of the king, and that Menashe relocated himself, according to Gabi Barkai, to the western hill. There might be a practical explanation of this move. On the assumption that during the time of Chizkiyahu the city expanded westward to the western hill, it may be suggested that King Menashe wished to build a new house in the new part of the city, in an elevated and distinguished location. This is a very reasonable possibility.

In any event, it is interesting to note that the first king not buried in the royal tombs was the king whose actions led to the destruction of the city and the negation of its selection (based on Scripture's emphasis: "And he set the graven image of Ashera, that he had made, in the house of which the Lord said to David and to Shelomo his son: In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put My name forever" [II *Melakhim* 21:7]).

That is to say, it is clear that Menashe's decision to build his house in a location different from that of the original house of the king, and to be buried there, was his own decision based on his own considerations, whether because there was no more room in the royal tombs of the kings of the house of David in the City of David, or because he chose to build his house in the newly expanded area of the city.

In any event, there is something symbolic in the fact that the king, who, according to the words of the prophets, was responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem, did not merit to be buried in the original royal burial site which in deep ways symbolized the eternal connection between the royal house of David and Jerusalem.

In the next *shiur* we will deal with the days of Amon and begin to examine the reign of Yoshiyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Here we follow Dr. Yehuda Elitzur in his instructive article, "*Le-Mahut ha-Regamim be-Ma'arav Yerushalayim*," *Yisrael ve-ha-Mikra*, pp. 164-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ruth Amiran, "*Ha-Chafira bi-Regamim le-Ma'arava shel Yerushalayim*," *Yediot ha-Chevra le-Chakirat Eretz Yisrael ve-Atikoteha*, 18 (1954), p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ceramic evidence cannot pinpoint archaeological findings to a specific decade. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Divrei ha-Yamim* notes with regard to isolated kings that they were not buried in the royal tombs in the City of David. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In his article, "*Mekom Kevureihem shel Malkhei Beit David he-Acharonim*," *Bein Chermon le-Sinai*, pp. 75-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)