YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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MIKDASH

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Lecture 338: THe History of the Divine Service at Altars

(CXlviII) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXXIV)

In the previous *shiur* we presented Prof. Yehoshua Grintz's arguments by way of which he rejects the claims put forward by Bible critics regarding the work of King Yoshiyahu. In this *shiur* we will address Prof. Grintz's position regarding the relationship between the discovery of the book of the Law and the purification of the land of idolatry.[[1]](#footnote-1)

### The order of the events - finding the Book of the Law and Removal of idolatry from the land

Ostensibly, according to the plain reading of the Biblical text, the purification of the land and the removal of all traces of idolatry were a direct result of the discovery of the book of the Law in the house of God. The question arises: Is it possible that Yoshiyahu renewed the covenant with God when the idols were still in the house of God? There are additional questions as well:

The discovery of the book of the Law is connected to the removal of the money that had been collected by the Temple treasury. It may be presumed that the money was removed once a year, on the first of Nisan. According to the plain meaning of the verses, Yoshiyahu himself actively participated in the purification of the land ("and he put down," "and he brought out," "and he brought," "and he returned to Jerusalem"). A simple calculation indicates that there were at most two weeks between the removal of the money and Pesach.

The words of Chulda the prophetess make no mention whatsoever of *bamot*.

In the detailed account in II *Melakhim* 23:4-20 there is no hint of a connection between the described actions and the discovery of the book of the Law.

According to *Divrei ha-Yamim*, only the celebration of Pesach is connected to the finding of the book. The destruction of the idols is dated to earlier years – in Yoshiyahu's eighth year (when he was sixteen years old), he began to seek God, and in his twelfth year he destroyed all of the buildings dedicated to idolatry in his realm. The eighth year of Yoshiyahu's reign is also the first year after the death of Ashurbanapal. The twelfth year is the year following the death of his heir, Ashur Alt Alani.

In any event, as was mentioned in the previous *shiur*, the destruction of the *bamot* is not connected to the discovery of the book of the Law. The book of *Melakhim*, when it summarizes the reign of a particular king, always relates to the question whether or not the *bamot* were removed during that king's reign (the reference being to *bamot* directed to the service of God). There is no connection between this prohibition and the discovery of the book of the Law.

If indeed the book that was discovered was the book of *Devarim*, the scroll was rolled to the verse: "The Lord will bring you, and your king" (*Devarim* 28:36), in the rebuke. The view of *Chazal* accords with what is stated in II *Melakhim*, and even more so with Chulda's response in *Divrei ha-Yamim*: "Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 34:24).

Also regarding Yoshiyahu's words to Chulda: "For great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book" (II *Melakhim* 22:13), the Torah in *Devarim* commands: "Take this book of the Law, and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God" (*Devarim* 31:26)

In the book of *Shemuel* it says:

Then Shemuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord. And Shemuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. (I *Shemuel* 10:28)

It is reasonable to assume that with the construction of the Temple in the days of Shelomo, a book of the Law was placed in the Temple, and in the days of Menashe that book was found by Chilkiyahu.

### THe Discovery of the book

In the eighteenth year of his reign, Yoshiyahu sent Shafan the son of Atzalyahu, the son of Meshulam the scribe, to the house of God, to go up to Chilkiyahu the High Priest to melt the silver and remove its impurities, so that it could be used as currency, and thus finance a major repair of the house of God.

In the course of this activity, Chilkiyahu the High Priest found the book of the Law in the house of God, and he delivered the book to Shafan. The book is called: "the book of the covenant" (II *Melakhim* 23:2). The book of the Law is called by that name because of the words of the covenant included within it. This may be a reference to the words of the covenant mentioned in the rebuke in *Parashat Ki-Tavo*:

These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moshe to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moav, beside the covenant which He made with them in Chorev. (*Devarim* 28:69)

In other words, this book included various passages, perhaps the major passages in the book of *Devarim*, including the Ten Commandments and the passages of rebuke.

According to the prophetic description, it seems that the very discovery of the book was a great surprise. Did Yoshiyahu not know that the in the Holy of Holies (or at least somewhere in the Temple) there is supposed to be such a book? Is it possible that in the days of Menashe and Amon (together totaling 57 years) all copies of the Torah were removed from the Temple, and one copy remained in some side corner, which escaped attention and was now discovered?

In addition to the surprise in the very finding of the book of the Law, the understanding (which is found in *Chazal*) that the Torah scroll was rolled to the rebuke in *Parashat Ki-Tavo*, and in particular to the verse: "The Lord will bring you, and your king whom you shall set over you, to a nation that you have not known, you nor your fathers; and there shall you serve other gods, wood and stone" (*Devarim* 26:36), as a statement directed at the kingdom of Yehuda, caused Yoshiyahu great shock. This led him to rend his garments and immediately seek out God. A delegation was forthright sent to Chulda the prophetess to hear the word of God and understand the significance of the discovery of the book of the Law.

### Does the Book of *Devarim* prohibit the building of *bamot* that are dedicated to the service of the god of Israel?

Prof. Grintz continues to discuss the question of whether the book of *Devarim* prohibits sacrificial service at *bamot* and commands that the service be concentrated exclusively in Jerusalem. His answer is that it does not. The word *bama* does not appear at all in the book of *Devarim.* In all of the Torah, it appears only in *Vayikra* 26:30 and in *Bemidbar* 33:52, and in both cases, in the context of idol worship, in *Vayikra* in reference to the idolatry of Israel, and in *Bemidbar* in reference to the idolatry of the Canaanites. The first time that the word appears in the sense under discussion is in the days of Shemuel the prophet, and this continues until the end of the book of *Melakhim* and the destruction of the First Temple. In contrast, in the book of *Devarim*, the command is issued to destroy the Canaanite altars in Israel (*Devarim* 12:2-3).

After the first generation, the people of Israel built new cities and new *bamot* of their own, but the Torah does not relate directly to them, neither permitting them nor forbidding them.

### Does the book of *DevaRIM* relate to the CHOOSING OF A PLACE, AND IN PARTICULAR WITH REGARD TO THE pASCHAL oFFERING?

There is nothing novel about what is stated in the book of *Devarim* regarding the place chosen by God for His service. The idea of a chosen place is found already in the book of *Shemot* and in the book of *Vayikra.*

There is also nothing substantially new in what the book of *Devarim* says about the Paschal offering. The phrase that distinguishes the book of *Devarim*, repeating itself about twenty times, is "the place which the Lord your God shall choose," which refers to the various places which God will chose to set His name there or to dwell there.

*Vayikra* 17 prohibits all slaughter, and there is a command to offer all sacrifices as peace-offerings (only in the wilderness and according to Rabbi Yishmael in *Chullin* 16b). Thus it is clear that slaughtering the paschal offering in one's home was also prohibited, and it was necessary to offer it in the courtyard of the *Ohel Mo'ed* and to sprinkle its blood on the altar. This is stated also in the books of the Prophets, as we find in *Yirmeyahu*:

For go you now to My place which was in Shilo, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. (*Yirmeyahu* 7:12)

The source of the phrase "where I caused My name to dwell" is in the book of *Devarim.* So too we find in *Tehilim* 78:

And He forsook the tabernacle of Shilo, the tent which He had made to dwell among men… Moreover He abhorred the tent of Yosef… But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which He loved. (*Tehilim* 78:60-68)[[2]](#footnote-2)

After having presented the main points of Prof. Grintz's position, we wish to summarize the main views regarding the book of the Law that was found in the house of God by Chilkiyahu the High Priest in the course of the repairs that were made to the Temple.

### The Book of the law

In the book of *Melakhim* it is called "the book of the Law" (*Sefer ha-Torah*), and later (II *Melakhim* 23:2) it is called "the book of the covenant." This term appears in the account of the assembly at Mount Sinai:

And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people; and they said: All that the Lord has spoken will we do, and obey. And Moshe took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said: Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in agreement with all these words. (*Shemot* 24:7-8)

It is reasonable to assume that this is the basis of the names given to certain passages in the Torah, including the portion of the rebuke in the book of *Devarim*, which is called "the words of the covenant":

These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moshe to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moav, beside the covenant which He made with them in Chorev. (*Devarim* 28:69)

In II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 34:14 the book is called "the book of the Law of the Lord given by Moshe." The Abravanel explains that the reference is to an ancient Torah scroll written by Moshe himself.

Is it possible that this is the book of the Law that Moshe commanded the Levites to take and place by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord?

And it came to pass, when Moshe had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, that Moshe commanded the Levites, that bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying: Take this book of the law, and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. (*Devarim* 31:24-26)

It is interesting to see the Seforno's explanation of this verse:

He attests: I know that you will forsake God's Torah and therefore I had to put one book of the Law in a place that nobody will enter except for the High Priest once a year. This book will attest that whatever will be found written in the book of the Law found in the hands of the righteous of the generation are the very words that were told to Moshe at Sinai with nothing added or removed. In this way you will have no doubt about them. It seems that the book that was found by Chilkiyahu was the book that Moshe gave to the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of God that contained only the passage dealing with the king. In it Yehoshua wrote the covenant that he renewed with Israel in return for accepting to serve God in truth, in thought and in action. When Yoshiyahu read it and saw how far they had become from all this, he was afraid and he sought God. (*Devarim* 31:26, s.v. *ve-haya shalm bekha le-ed*)

According to the text, it is reasonable to assume that the book was in the Holy of Holies near the ark of the covenant. It is clear that the book was moved from its original and fixed place. Is this situation a consequence of the actions of King Menashe and after him King Amon in the house of God? Does this indicate that the book was hidden away in a different place? Is it possible that in the days of Menashe or Amon, God-fearing priests were afraid that it would be desecrated, and so they hid it away in one of the places where they stored the Temple funds, and from that time on, its whereabouts were no longer known?

The author of the *Metzudot* writes:

It is possible that because Achaz burned the Torah, as stated by *Chazal*, the priests were afraid that he would set his hand also against the book of the Law that rested by the side of the ark, which was written by Moshe from the mouth of God. And they took that book of the Law and hid it away from him. And after he died they searched for it but could not find it. When the High Priest was looking for the money that was brought for the repair of the Temple, he found it. (*Metzudat David*, II *Melakhim* 22:8)

Yonatan ben Uziel, in his translation of the beginning of the book of *Yechezkel*, writes:

And it was in the thirtieth years to the time that Chilkihyahu the High Priest found the book of the Law in the Temple in the courtyard under the Ulam.

After the book was found and handed over by Chilkiyahu the High Priest to Shafan the scribe, who served as the head of the ministerial committee that oversaw the repair of the Temple, Shafan read the book and then went to the king to give him an account of the work done to repair the Temple.

Shafan read the book before the king, which apparently included also the passage of the rebuke in *Devarim* in *Parashat Ki-Tavo*, which mentions the covenant that was made with Israel at Chorev, that is to say, the passage of the rebuke in *Parashat Bechukotai* in *Vayikra* 26.

The reading of the words of the covenant in the newly-found book of the Law were understood by Yoshiyahu as a sign that evil was approaching. *Chazal* in *Sifre*, *Devarim* 48, lavishly praise Shafan, saying: "Had Shafan not arose in his time, Ezra in his time, Rabbi Akiva in his time, the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel."

### Turning to the prophetess

After hearing what was written in the book of the Law, Yoshiyahu rends his garments and sends a delegation to Chulda the prophetess. The delegation is comprised of Chilkiyahu the priest, Achikam the son of Shafan, Akhbar the son of Mikhaya, Shafan the scribe, and Asiya, the king's servant. He turns to them, saying:

Go you, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Yehuda, concerning the words of this book that is found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this book, to do according to all that which is written concerning us. (II *Melakhim* 22:13)

"Inquire of the Lord" refers to a request made of a prophet to pray for the annulment of a decree. It is interesting that the king does not mention the name of the prophet. The king understands that the covenant was breached, and that the punishment awaiting those who breached it is:

Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curse that is written in this book; and the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day. (*Devarim* 29:26-27)

In the parallel passage in II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 34:22, Chilkiyahu the High Priest heads the ministerial delegation. What brought Chilkiyahu specifically to Chulda the prophetess? During this period of time there appear to have been other prophets. Yirmeyahu began to prophesy during the thirteenth year of Yoshiyahu's reign (*Yirmeyahu* 1:2), the prophet Tzefanya prophesied during the days of Yoshiyahu (*Tzefanya* 1:1). In *Yirmeyahu* 26:20 mention is made of another prophet named Uriyahu the son of Shemayahu from Kiryat ha-Ye'arim.

It is possible that Yirmeyah at that time was still young and his words were not yet accepted by most of the people. On the other hand, Rabbi Yochanan says (*Megila* 14b) that Yirmeyahu was not in Jerusalem at the time, "because he went to return the ten tribes." In that Talmudic passage, Rav expounds that Chulda was a close relative of Yirmeyahu, and he did not object to her prophesying, whereas according to Rav Sheila, Chulda was preferred, because women are tender-hearted. It would appear that Chulda was favorably received by the people, and that she had a school of her own.

Chulda dwelt in Jerusalem in the second quarter, apparently on the western hill to which the city had expanded in the days of Yirmeyahu (the area of today's Jewish and Armenian quarters and Mount Zion).

In contrast to Yoshiyahu's expectation, Chulda's answer was that the calamitous decree of evil was final and could not be annulled. It was only pushed off to after Yoshiyahu's death.

In the next *shiur* we will continue our examination of the reign of Yoshiyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Yehoshua Grintz, *Iyyunim be-Sefer Melakhim*, II, pp. 351-373. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Thus far we have presented the gist of Prof. Grintz's position with the addition of a few of our own comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)