YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**MIKDASH**

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**Lecture 339: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(CXLIX) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (CXXV)**

In the [previous *shiur*](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/lecture-338-history-divine-service-altars-cxlviii-%E2%80%93-prohibition-bamot-cxxiv), we noted that the two direct results of the discovery of the book of the Law – the eradication of idolatry and the celebration of Pesach – are two expressions of the same essence: renewal of the covenant with God. The eradication of idol worship made it possible for the connection to be exclusively with the God of Israel, and no other entity (it should be remembered that idolatry is referred to in Scripture as *zenut –* straying, prostitution, adultery), and the Paschal offering is essentially the creation of the people of Israel in relation to God, and therefore it expresses the covenant itself.

As was mentioned earlier regarding the relationship between the accounts in the book of *Melakhim* and in the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*, the book of *Melakhim* begins the story of Yoshiyahu's kingdom in the eighteenth year of his reign, with the sending of Shafan to Chilkiyahu the High Priest. The book of *Divrei ha-Yamim* describes a more gradual process:

1. In the eighth year of Yoshiyahu's reign, when he was still a boy, he begins to seek out the God of David his father.

2. In the twelfth year of his reign he begins to purify Yehuda and Jerusalem of the idolatry that was found within them.

3. In the eighteenth year of his reign, Yoshiyahu sends Shafan to Chilkiyahu the High Priest.

What happens next in both books is the discovery of the book of the Law, its being read before the king, the king's rending of his garments, the sending of a delegation to Chulda the prophetess, the renewal of the covenant with God, the completion of the eradication of idolatry from the land, and the celebration of Pesach.

It is interesting to note that when King Yoshiyahu hears Chulda's prophecy that establishes that the evil decree has been issued and cannot be annulled, he does not raise his hands and give up. On the contrary, he completes the eradication of the remaining idolatry, renews the covenant with God, and celebrates Pesach.

One of the interesting questions is from where did Yoshiyahu draw the force and courage to conduct such a dramatic revolution. In order to answer this question, we must ask by whom was Yoshiyahu trained and educated. In his early years, Yirmeyahu had just started to prophesy. The delegation that the king sent turned to Chulda the prophetess. It is possible that the prophet who inspired Yoshiyahu was Tzefanya.

### THe prophecy of Tzefanya – Parallels

In order to understand Tzefanya's influence, let us examine his prophecy and note the areas in which it is possible to assume that he had an influence.[[1]](#footnote-1) The book of *Tzefanya* opens with the note that he prophesied in the days of Yoshiyahu:

The word of the Lord which came to Tzefanya the son of Kushi, the son of Gedalya, the son of Amarya, the son of Chizkiya, in the days of Yoshiyahu the son of Amon, king of Yehuda. (*Tzefanya* 1:1)

What stands out here is the fact that the prophet's lineage is traced four generations back. It would seem that his great-great grandfather was Chizkiyahu. It is not stated explicitly that the reference is to Chizkiyahu, the king of Yehuda, but if this identification is correct, it turns out that among Chizkiyahu's descendants there were those who did not blindly follow Menashe and Amon, and among them was the prophet Tzefanya.

Later the prophet says:

For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia shall they bring My suppliants, even the daughter of My dispersed, as Mine offering. (*Tzefanya* 3:9-10)

Verse 9 brings to mind the great vision at the beginning of the book of *Yeshayahu*:

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, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say: Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Yaakov; 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. And He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (*Yeshayahu* 2:2-4)

Verse 10 is a synopsis of *Yeshayahu* 18. The appeal there in verse 1: "Ah, the land of the buzzing of wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia," is directed beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, whereas in verse 7 the prophet says: "In that time shall a present be brought to the Lord of hosts of a people tall and of glossy skin, and from a people terrible from their beginning onward; a nation that is sturdy and treads down, whose land the rivers divide, to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion."

The chapter brings to mind additional verses from *Mikha* and from *Yeshayahu*. Before we proceed and examine the details of the chapters, let us present in brief a general picture of the book.[[2]](#footnote-2)

### The prophecy of Tzefanya – an overview

Chapter 1 in Tzefanya deals with the sins of Yehuda and with the destruction of the land of Yehuda. Chapter 2 deals with an admonition to Yehuda to immediately repent, and with the calamity that was to befall the land of the Pelishtim, and afterwards with a description of the destruction of the land of the Pelishtim, and of Moav and Amon, the defeat of the Ethiopians and the destruction of Ashur. Chapter 3 describes the calamity that will befall the nations and Israel, the return of the nations and of Israel to God, and the redemption of the land of Yehuda.

The account in chapter 1 speaks of the day of the Lord that will come upon all the nations, including Yehuda. Scripture lists the sinners of Jerusalem and Yehuda, and their crimes, and afterwards it describes the destruction of Jerusalem and the land of Yehuda. The conclusion of the chapter with a description of the destruction includes: "For He will make an end, yea, a terrible end, of all them that dwell in the earth" (*Tzefanya* 1:18).

Chapter 2 is primarily a consolation to Yehuda. There is a call to repent in order to be saved from the calamity. Tzefanya prophesies about the defeat of Israel's enemies, the Pelishtim, Amon and Moav, the fall of the Ethiopians, and the destruction of Nineveh (which was a great consolation to Israel).

Chapter 3 spells out the sins of Yehuda, when on the day of judgment Yehuda will be punished together with the rest of the nations. Together with a description of the calamity, the prophet opens with a vision of the end of days when all the nations will return to God, and when the people of Israel, among whom there will be no more wicked people, will trust in God, and the remnant of Israel will dwell safely in their land without fear of enemies and enjoying the kingdom of God.

A fundamental question arises: To which events is Tzefanya referring? The main theme is the day of the Lord, the day of judgment that will come upon all the nations, including Yehuda and Jerusalem. Tzefanya apparently foresees the ascent of the Chaldeans who brought killing and destruction to all the peoples of the East. About 26 years before the destruction of the First Temple, the Chaldeans conquered Nineveh. Seven years later they defeated Pharaoh Nekho at Karkamish and took control of all the countries in the Fertile Crescent. After the rebellion of Yehoyakim (eight years later) they exiled Yehoyakim together with "the craftsmen and the smiths." Eleven years later they conquered Jerusalem and destroyed it.

Concerning the destruction of the land of the Pelishtim, Amon and Moav that is mentioned in chapter 2, in the year of the death of King Yoshiyahu, twenty-three years before the destruction of the Temple, Pharaoh Nekho conducted a campaign against Bavel and took control of all the lands beyond the Euphrates River. He fought in Aza and in Ashkelon ("The word of the Lord that came to Yirmeyahu the prophet concerning the Pelishtim, before that Pharaoh smote Gaza" [*Yirmeyahu* 47:1]). But it is possible that Tzefanya is referring to a later period, because the prophet Yechezkel, who prophesied seven years before the destruction of the Temple, prophesied about the destruction of Amon and Moav and the land of the Pelishtim (*Yechezkel* 25), which indicates that these countries still existed during this period, and that they were destroyed only after the destruction of Jerusalem. This accords with the time of the later military campaigns of the Babylonians.

### The prophecy of Tzefanya - Chapter 1

Now that we understand the general background and the structure and content of Tzefanya's prophecies, let us examine chapter 1 and try to understand how his prophecy constitutes the background to Yoshiyahu's actions:

The word of the Lord which came to Tzefanya the son of Kushi, the son of Gedalya, the son of Amarya, the son of Chizkiya, in the days of Yoshiyahu the son of Amon, king of Yehuda. I will utterly consume all things from off the face of the earth, says the Lord. I will consume man and beast, I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the face of the earth, says the Lord. And I will stretch out My hand upon Yehuda, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the idolatrous priests with the priests; And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship, that swear to the Lord and swear by Malkam; Them also that are turned back from following the Lord; and those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired after Him. Hold your peace at the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand, for the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's sons, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel. In the same day also will I punish all those that leap over the threshold that fill their master's house with violence and deceit.

And in that day, says the Lord, Hark! a cry from the fish gate, and a wailing from the second quarter, and a great crashing from the hills. Wail, you inhabitants of Makhtesh, for all the merchant people are undone; all they that were laden with silver are cut off. And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps; and I will punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart: The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil. Therefore their wealth shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation; yea, they shall build houses, but shall not inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards, but shall not drink the wine thereof. The great day of the Lord is near, it is near and hastes greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord, wherein the mighty man cries bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the horn and alarm, against the fortified cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole earth shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy; for He will make an end, yea, a terrible end, of all them that dwell in the earth.

Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O shameless nation; Before the decree bring forth the day when one passes as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek you the Lord, all you humble of the earth, that have executed His ordinance; seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation; they shall drive out Ashdod at the noonday, and Ekron shall be rooted up.

Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea-coast, the nation of the Keretim! the word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, the land of the Pelishtim; I will even destroy you, that there shall be no inhabitant. And the sea-coast shall be pastures, even meadows for shepherds, and folds for flocks. (*Tzefanya* 1:1-2-6)

Let us now explain the prophecy of Tzefanya from the beginning of Chapter 1. The matter of the consumption of all things from off the face of the earth denotes destruction and removal, and therefore the verse concludes: "And I will cut off man from off the face of the earth, says the Lord" (*Tzefanya* 1:3).

Verse 4 mentions the cutting off of the remnant of the Baal, together with the idolatrous priests and the priests (it is possible that the end of the verse alludes to Malkum the Amonite god). In verse 6, the expression, "them also that are turned back from following the Lord," is unique to Tzefanya. It is very interesting to see that that which Tzefanya describes as the work of God is a direct model for King Yoshiyahu. He himself removed from Jerusalem those who bowed down on the roofs. It is very possible that Yoshiyahu who heard the words of the prophet Tzefanya said to himself that he would assume responsibility and do this without waiting for God to do it. And this indeed is the threat later on.

Afterwards the prophet mentions various neighborhoods in the city of Jerusalem. The "second quarter" in which Chulda lived was apparently the secondary city on the western hill. This was the upper city of Jerusalem in the days of the Second Temple [the Jewish and Armenian quarters of the Old City today, and the area called Mount Zion, between the Old City walls and the Ben Hinom valley].

"The hills" - this may be a general term for the neighborhoods located north of the city's northern wall. The northern wall of the city passed south of Wadi Arav (from the area of the Tower of David to the area of the Chain Gate on the Temple Mount in the east). The archaeological finds in the areas north of this line (the northern part of today's Old City – the Muslim and Christian quarters), as well as the area north of today's Old City wall, prove that there was Jewish settlement in these areas at the end of the First Temple period. So too, the fact that magnificent burial caves from the end of the First Temple period were found north of the northern wall of the Old City reinforces the argument that there were neighborhoods outside the city wall, and that these neighborhoods were called "the Hills."

It is possible that the term "Makhtesh" refers to the eastern slope of the western hill that goes down towards the wadi that was called the Tyropoeon valley in the time of the Second Temple, which separates the City of David and the Temple Mount from the western hill of the city.

The prophet describes the great day of the Lord that was drawing near. This day is described with harsh terms: a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, a day of the horn and alarm. The prophecy concerning the day of the Lord reminds us of the prophecies of Yeshayahu, Yoel and Mikha.

In the continuation of the prophecy in chapter 2, the prophet announces that the Babylonians will destroy the Pelishtim (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron), just as they destroyed Yehuda (of course, he does not explicitly mention the *ba'alim*). Afterwards,he relates to the sea coast.

It is very interesting that the archaeological finds in the Palmachim and Yavneh areas, which are dated to the time of Yoshiyahu, prove that there was a significant Jewish presence in Philistia. In Yavne Yam there was found a pottery sherd that depicts a simple man whose superior took his garment as a pledge, and he now complains before the king that an injustice was committed against him. This teaches that it was possible to expect fair judgment from the king. The correspondence between the archeological finds from that period, and the age of the pottery and the epigraphic evidence is very consistent with the days of Yoshiyahu.

That the kingdom of Yoshiyahu was a just kingdom is attested to by the prophet Yirmeyahu in chapter 22. In *Yirmeyahu* 21:12 and on, the prophet speaks in general terms about the house of the kingdom of Judea:

O house of David, thus say the Lord: Execute justice in the morning, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest My fury go forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings. (*Yirmeyahu* 21:12)

And later:

Thus says the Lord: Execute you justice and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; and do no wrong, do no violence, to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.(*Yirmeyahu* 22:3)

Verse 13 of the prophecy is directed to King Yehoyakim:

Woe unto him that builds his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by injustice; that uses his neighbor's service without wages, and gives him not his hire; That says: I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers, and cuts him out windows, and it is ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shall you reign, because you strive to excel in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know Me? says the Lord. But your eyes and your heart are not but for your covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. (*Yirmeyahu* 22:13-17)

The text emphasizes the lack of justice during the reign of Yehoyakim, as opposed to the execution of justice and righteousness, and the judgment of the poor and the needy in the days of his father Yoshiyahu. That is to say, Yoshiyahu is the model of a kingdom in which justice and righteousness are performed. This raises the likelihood that this pottery reflects the presence of Yoshiyahu in the area of Philistia.

According to what we have seen so far, it may be argued that Tzefanya's prophecy led to the first stage in Yoshiyahu's revolution, when Yoshiyahu acted independently and did not wait for God to act, but rather he did things on his own, following the lines described by Tzefanya. After Chulda's prophecy, rather than despair in the wake of the harsh tidings according to which the evil decree was issued and cannot be annulled, he greatly increased his actions and efforts, renewed the covenant and celebrated Pesach.

In this sense, two prophets had a direct influence on Yoshiyahu's actions: Tzefanya at the first stage and Chulda at a later stage. In relation to both of them, we see the responsible and independent position adopted by Yoshiyahu.

### The prophecy of Nachum

In the books of Nachum and Habakuk, there is no indication when the prophecies were delivered. *Chazal* say that they were delivered during the days of Menashe, but they did not want to mention his name because he did not listen to the prophets. Nachum's prophecy is primarily "the burden of Nineveh" which deals with the vengeance that God will take from His enemies.

We know that Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C.E. when Yoshiyahu was the king of Yehuda, three years before his death in Megido. This fits in with the dating of *Chazal.*

In chapter 3 (Nachum 3:8-9) we find an account of the conquest of Ethiopia and Egypt by Ashur. No Amon is the Egyptian capital that was conquered by Ashur in 661 B.C.E. Nachum asserts that Nineveh will be like No Amon.

In chapter 2, the prophet says that all of the city's treasures were plundered. From this it may be established that Nachum prophesied between 661 and 613 B.C.E. The prophet prophesies that the city will never rise again, and this is, indeed, what happened. The description of the destruction of Nineveh continues until the end of chapter 1. At the beginning of chapter 2, the prophets says:

Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that brings good tidings, that announces peace! Keep your feasts, O Yehuda, perform your vows; for the wicked one shall no more pass through you; he is utterly cut off. (*Nachum* 2:1)

This prophecy parallels *Yeshaya* 52. Nachum essentially tells them not to fear celebrating holidays. It would appear that the second stage of Yoshiyahu's reforms with the covenant and the celebration of Pesach in the eighteenth year of Yoshiyahu's reign stirred up anxiety, because it reminded the people of the Pesach celebrated by Chizkiyahu. There too the king joined together with people from the kingdom of Israel in sort of an attempt to once again take control over the entire kingdom. There it led to the rebellion against Ashur, and eventually to Sancheriv's campaign. The people feared that Yoshiyahu would once again bring Ashur upon them.

Here comes Nachum's prophecy that proclaims that Ashur will not return. The kings of Ashur are no longer capable of doing what they did in the past. The burden of Nachum comes to encourage Yoshiyahu to celebrate Pesach and to say that there is no reason to fear Sancheriv's heirs. Ashurbanipal, who ruled over Ashur during the time of Yoshiyahu, brought the kingdom to its climax, which included conquests in Egypt. Nachum promises that he will not come.

Tzefanya spoke about the day of the Lord in Jerusalem. Nachum speaks about the day of the Lord in connection with Nineveh. Chapter 2 of *Nachum* comes to say that there is no reason to be afraid and that they may celebrate the holidays, and this is what Yoshiyahu does. In fact, in the eighteenth year of Yoshiyahu's reign, Ashur did not interfere because it had already begun to weaken. The prophet Chabakuk, however, already sees the rise of the Chaldeans:

For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and impetuous nation, that march through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling-places that are not theirs. (*Chabakuk* 1:6)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. This *shiur* is based on a *shiur* given by Rav Yoel Bin-Nun in Herzog College in 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. From Menachem Bula's introduction to his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to the book of *Tzefanya*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)