YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Prophets vs. Empires: A Survey of Nevi’im Acharonim**

**Rav Yoel Bin-Nun**

**Shiur #15: Yeshayahu, Hoshea, and Mikha in the time of Chizkiyahu (IV)**

**Expansion of Jerusalem in the wake of the destruction of Shomron**

The deportation of tens of thousands from Shomron to distant Assyria, and the flight of many others at their own initiative, led to a total collapse of the kingdom of Israel. As the nearest neighbor was the kingdom of Yehuda, which held no interest for Assyria at this time, it seems reasonable to posit that many of the refugees from Shomron found their way to Jerusalem after the destruction (721 B.C.E.) and contributed to the extraordinary flourishing of the city at this time.

Jerusalem expanded, especially in the direction of the upper city (northeast of the City of David), and new neighborhoods appeared. The discovery of the “broad wall” in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, and the exposure of an additional wall near the Kidron on the eastern side of Jerusalem, can give us an idea of the city’s new dimensions. However, some scholars argue that the “broad wall” was built on top of a more ancient wall, such that the expansion of the city preceded the reign of Chizkiyahu and the destruction of Shomron.[[1]](#footnote-1) Perhaps the flight of Israelites toward Jerusalem started during the civil war between Gil’ad and Shomron (in the time of Menachem and Pekach) and during the campaigns of Tiglat-Pileser, with the deportations from Gil’ad and the Galilee, during the crackdown on the rebellion of Retzin, king of Aram, and Pekach ben Remalyahu, one generation prior to the destruction of Shomron.

**Chizkiyahu’s new vision: a unified kingdom (716/5 B.C.E.)**

With the destruction of Shomron and a renewal of the ties between Jerusalem and the remnant of the kingdom of Israel, King Chizkiyahu was also inspired by a new vision: the renewal of the era of David and Shlomo in Jerusalem, uniting all the tribes of Israel. During the first ten years of his reign, Chizkiyahu engaged in the purification of Jerusalem and repairing the spiritual state of its people. He tried to avoid provoking Assyria and acted quietly, within the confines of his kingdom and with no outward indication of aspirations to expand Jerusalem. With the destruction of the kingdom of Israel and its exile, Chizkiyahu understood that Jerusalem, the house of David, and the remnant of the tribes of Israel had been thrust into a new reality. The historical schism between Efraim and Yehuda was no longer relevant. The barriers that had been set up in Mitzpa and Rama to separate the two kingdoms had been breached already in the days of Hoshea ben Ela. The old competition over dominance and leadership had dissipated after the assassination of Pekach.

In the absence of a king in Efraim, Chizkiyahu sought to extend his rule to include what was left of the tribes in the northern part of the country. The best way to bring this innovative idea to fruition, without causing a political and military crisis with the Assyrian empire, was to hold a joint Pesach celebration for everyone in Jerusalem. This was Chizkiyahu’s first act inspired by his vision of unity. There were those who proposed counting the years of his reign over all of Israel from this point – like David, who was coronated twice:[[2]](#footnote-2) first in Chevron, over Yehuda, and then in Jerusalem, over all of Israel.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This idea of two dates for the beginning of his reign is the key to decoding a difficult chapter describing Chizkiyahu’s religious revolution:

He, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them…

Now, they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the porch of the Lord, and they sanctified the house of the Lord in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they concluded…

And Yechizkiyahu rejoiced, and all the people, because of that which God had prepared for the people, for the thing was done suddenly. (*Divrei ha-Yamim* II 29:3, 17, 36)

At first glance, the order of events seems impossible. In the first year of his reign, in the first month, Chizkiyahu opened the doors of the house of God. Eight days later, they already entered the Temple; after another eight days, the Sanctuary was already purified; and only at that point, they decided to postpone Pesach for a month (as described below) because of the ritual impurity of the *kohanim* and the difficulty of the northern tribes to reach Jerusalem in time.

After the years of decay under Achaz, no revolution could change everything overnight, but it seems that the text is describing two different stages in Chizkiyahu’s reign as though they occurred concurrently: the purification during the first stage of his reign; and the Pesach celebrated after his rule expanded to include all of the tribes of Israel, some 11 years after ascending the throne in Jerusalem and about 6 years after the destruction of Shomron.[[4]](#footnote-4) This was Chizkiyahu’s great project to unify the nation.

Chapter 30 recounts the preparation for this Pesach and the efforts made to bring the remnant of the tribes of Israel from the north:

And Yechizkiyahu sent to all of Israel and Yehuda, and also wrote letters to Efraim and Menashe, that they should come to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, to observe Pesach unto the Lord God of Israel.

For the king had taken counsel, and his princes and all the congregation in Israel, to observe the Pesach in the second month.

For they could not observe it at that time, because the *kohanim* had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number, and the people had not [yet] assembled in Jerusalem.

And the matter was proper in the eyes of the king and in the eyes of all the congregation.

So they established a decree to make a proclamation throughout all of Israel, from Be’er Sheva to Dan, to come and observe Pesach unto the Lord God of Israel, in Jerusalem, for they had not observed it as written in great numbers.

So the messengers set off with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all of Israel and Yehuda, and according to the king’s command, saying: “Children of Israel – turn back to the Lord God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisrael, that He may return to the remnant that remains of you from the hand of the kings of Assyria…”

So the messengers passed from city to city through the country of Efraim and Menashe, up to Zevulun, but they mocked them and scorned them.

Nevertheless, people from Asher and Menashe, and from Zevulun, humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. (Ibid. 30:1-11)

This chapter offers a clear sense of the period that came after the Assyrian exile. The text is very precise in its description of Chizkiyahu seeking out the remnant of the tribes of Efraim and Menashe (the children of Rachel), as well as the tribes of the Galilee, with a view to bringing them back into the fold of the extended family of the house of David. From this perspective, Chizkiyahu goes beyond simply taking another step in a religious revolution; this is a transition to the next stage of his vision of redemption – a national, political revolution announced on Pesach, the first festival celebrated by the Israelite nation at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. In order to celebrate in a state of ritual purity and with appropriate pomp and multitudes, Chizkiyahu took the unusual step of postponing the time of Pesach for a month.

The verse states that “the matter was proper in the eyes of the king and in the eyes of all the congregation,” but the oral tradition of the Sages records the additional month added at Nissan as one of three actions that Chizkiyahu performed concerning which “the Sages did not accord with him.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Precedent for shifting a festival by a month had been set by Yarovam ben Nevat, when he changed the date of Sukkot and celebrated it in the eighth month – an act which earned him the title of one who uprooted the Torah.[[6]](#footnote-6) It is quite possible that Yarovam added a second Elul as an intercalated month, and thereby shifted what was counted as the seventh month in the north, to the eighth month in Yehuda.[[7]](#footnote-7) According to this hypothesis, it seems likely that a fixed discrepancy between the months in Israel and Yehuda had remained up until the time of Chizkiyahu, and it was for this reason that his messengers were initially scorned and mocked. When Chizkiyahu saw this, he decided to intercalate a month in Yehuda too, so more people from the tribes of Israel would come to Jerusalem. And indeed, masses arrived – some of them not having had a chance to undergo proper ritual purification first. All of this happened in the month of Nissan (the first month), and therefore the text records the festival as being celebrated “in the second month.”

Chizkiyahu realized that he was being granted a rare window of opportunity; if he missed it, he would lose it. He took on leadership of the nation and a revolution in its religious life in haste, and at the price of a lack of maturity and depth on the part of the people. This explains his prayer for them:

For there were many in the congregation who had not sanctified themselves; therefore, the *Leviim* were charged with slaughtering the Pesach sacrifices for everyone who was not ritually pure, to sanctify them to the Lord.

For a multitude of people, many of Efraim and Menashe, Yissakhar and Zevulun, had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Pesach, not as prescribed. For Yechizkiyahu had prayed for them, saying, “May the good Lord pardon –

Everyone who has set his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, even though he is not purified according to the purification pertaining to holy things.” (*Divrei ha-Yamim* I 30:17-19)

This is the prayer of a great leader who knows that in abrogating a commandment of the Torah as a “*hora’at sha’ah*” (temporary emergency measure), he is taking action that is extraordinary and irregular – but necessary. He was surrounded by pious people who did not grasp the potential of the moment, who held fast to the systems of familiar, safe halakha. Perhaps when Chizkiyahu said, “May the good Lord pardon,” he was also asking for mercy upon those who had parted ways with him owing to their concerns and doubts.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The dream of unifying all of Israel into a single kingdom had endured in the hearts of all the kings of Yehuda from the time that David’s palace moved from Chevron to Jerusalem. We can thus understand the great joy and singing of *hallel* (praise):

And King Yechizkiyahu and the princes commanded the *Leviim* to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaf, the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. (Ibid. 29:30; see also 30:21-22)

All of this also explains the seven additional days during which the throngs that had gathered in Jerusalem decided to celebrate these days of unification with special rejoicing. The textual description explicitly invokes the time of Shlomo:

And the whole congregation took counsel to observe an additional seven days, and they observed seven days, [for] joy…

And all the congregation of Yehuda, with the *kohanim* and the *Leviim*, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of [the tribes of] Israel and that dwelled in Yehuda, rejoiced.

So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Shlomo, son of David, king of Israel, there had not been the like in Jerusalem. (*Divrei ha-Yamim* I 30:23-26)

**“And there shall come forth a shoot from the stock of Yishai” – the prophecy about Mashiach (*Yeshayahu* 11)**

Chizkiyahu’s initiative to revive the united kingdom propelled Yeshayahu, who had waited for years for a renewal of the house of David, to the climax of his prophetic visions. Out of the collapse of the kingdom of Shomron and the exile of its inhabitants, there arose a prophecy of the renewed growth of God’s anointed king, who would emerge from the root of Yishai:

And there shall come forth a shoot from the stock of Yishai, and a twig shall grow forth out of his roots.

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him – a spirit of wisdom and understanding; a spirit of counsel and might; a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.

And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, neither decide by the hearing of his ears,

But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and he shall decide with equity for the meek of the land, and he shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.

And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

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.

And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the viper’s den.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

And it shall come to pass on that day, that the root of Yishai that stands as a banner of the peoples – him shall the nations seek, and his resting place shall be glorious. (*Yeshayahu* 11:1-10)

Yeshayahu had given up all hope regarding the earthly kingdom at the end of the reign of Uziyahu. Now, he attains wondrous heights of transcendence, describing a figure who combines the qualities of Moshe Rabbeinu and those of King Shlomo, upon whom the spirit of God would rest. This ideal king from the house of David would not be a military hero and conqueror. Instead of weapons of war, he would be girded with righteousness and faithfulness.[[9]](#footnote-9)

In the time of King Mashiach, harmony will prevail among all creations, “and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord like the waters cover the sea.” Following this wondrous vision, in the second half of the chapter, Yeshayahu describes the ingathering of the exiles:

And it shall come to pass on that day that the Lord will set His hand again a second time to recover the remnant of His people, that shall remain from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Patros, and from Kush, and from Elam, and from Shin’ar, and from Chamat, and from the islands of the sea.

And He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the dispersed of Israel, and gather together the scattered of Yehuda from the four corners of the earth.

The envy of Efraim shall depart, and those that harass Yehuda shall be cut off. Efraim shall not envy Yehuda, and Yehuda shall not vex Efraim.

And they shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Pelishtim on the west; together they shall spoil the children of the East; they shall put forth their hand upon Edom and Moav, and the children of Ammon shall obey them.

And the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, and with His scorching wind will he shake His hand over the River, and will smite it into seven streams, and cause men to march over dry-shod.

And there shall be a highway for the remnant of His people, that shall remain from Assyria, as there was for Israel on the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt. (Ibid. 11-16)

Refugees from Shomron had fled in all directions, heading southward to Egypt and Kush (Ethiopia), eastward to Eilam (Persia) and Shin’ar (Babylonia), and westward to the islands of the sea. The Pesach of Chizkiyahu, which gathered some of these scattered people together, opened to the door to prophecies of a return of all the exiles, from all four corners of the earth.

1. See Y. Meitlis, *Lachfor et ha-Tanakh: Al Mikra ve-Archeologia*, Jerusalem 2008, p. 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As proposed by R. Raviv, “*Bikesh ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu La’asot Chizkiyahu Mashiach*,” *Shema’atin* 73/74 (5743), pp. 38-47. This also explains the date given in Tanakh for Sancheriv’s campaign – the 14th year of Chizkiyahu (i.e., the 14th year since his coronation over all of Israel). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Divrei ha-Yamim* I 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Eilat Mazar, “The Other Excavations to the Temple Mount 2009-2013,” *Final Reports* vol. 1, 2015, pp. 629-638, presents two bullas discovered south of the Temple Mount from the time of Chizkiyahu, one more elaborate than the other. This represents support for the idea of a second coronation of Chizkiyahu, during the great Pesach, after the destruction of Shomron. My thanks to Nachshon Kara, a student in my course on “Kings and Prophets” at Herzog College, for pointing this out to me. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bavli *Pesachim* 56a. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “… in the month which he had devised of his own heart…” (*Melakhim* I 12:33). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This interpretation is proposed by Rav Reuven Margaliot, *Ha-Mikra ve-ha-Masora*, Jerusalem 5724, pp. 54-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. S. Lieberman, “*Ha-Pesach she-Asa Chizkiyahu ha-Melekh le-Shitat ha-Yerushalmi*,” *Sinai, Sefer ha-Yovel* (5718), pp. 80-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. As noted by Y. Kaufman, *Toldot ha-Emuna ha-Yisraelit* III, p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)