



# ישיבת הר עזיון

## Yeshivat Har Etzion – Israel Koschitzky VBM Parsha Digest, Year VII, #5 Parashat Bereishit 5785

Selected and Adapted by Rabbi Dov Karoll

### Quote from the Rosh Yeshiva

The Rebbe of Peshischa said, regarding the verse: “To the snake He said... ‘You shall eat dust all the days of your life’” (Bereishit 3:14). What is so bad about that? He has abundant sustenance. So what kind of curse is this? Rather, God says to the snake: the curse is that you will have no need for Me, as you will manage without Me – and this is the greatest curse of all – to need to live without God.

-Harav Yehuda Amital zt”l, adapted and translated from לעולם יהא אדם (paragraph 77)

### Parashat Bereishit Raising Cain and Hevel

By Rav Ezra Bick



Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-bereishit/parashat-bereishit/bereishit-raising-cain-and-hevel>

A.

The story of Cain and Hevel is one that is easily skipped over lightly when we think of the great themes of the early parshiot of the Torah. It is obvious to most of us that we should be searching for the “moral of the story” when considering these parshiot. The first part of Bereishit is primarily about God’s relationship to the natural world as Creator, a critical point for the foundations of religious belief. The story of Man in the Garden of Eden is about obedience and sin, about the relationship of man and woman, about innocence and knowledge, and we are naturally led to ponder its significance. Next week’s parasha, describing 2 societies and their sins and punishments, is crucial to understanding human society; and the figure of Noach, in all its complexities, serves as a launching point for understanding how the righteous man relates to a sinful world. The story of Cain and Hevel, though, seems to pose no particular lesson. I think most of us quickly summarize it in our minds as about murder – with the moral being that murder is bad. Since this does not appear to a very “deep” moral, we quickly continue to the next parasha.

But since this is basically the third story in the Torah, such a cursory treatment of this parasha is clearly unjustified. Our task, then, is to determine the real significance of this story and why it is here. To do this, we must first understand the character of the “hero,” Cain.

B.

Our first inclination is to catalogue Cain as a villain. After all, he is a murderer and is cursed by God. A corollary conclusion is that Hevel must be a saint. The latter conclusion is basically based on an aesthetic desire for balance, especially in a story with 2 brothers (i.e., Yitzchak and Yishmael, Yaacov and Eisav), but is also supported by the fact that God accepts his sacrifice while refusing that of Cain.

This position, at least the first half of it, is forwarded by Rashi (based on midrashim), who states that Cain’s offering was inferior in quality, indicating his irreligiosity (4:3), and that he deliberately set out to kill Hevel (4:8). Furthermore, Rashi interprets (4:15) to mean that God decreed that Cain would be killed after 7 generations as a PUNISHMENT (vengeance, nekama, in the language of the verse) for murder. By this, I believe Rashi is answering the question how could a tale of murder not end with the proper Divine punishment – death. Exile is not the appropriate punishment, especially if the main moral of the story is that murder is a sin which will not go unpunished. Rashi’s answer is that Cain indeed suffers the death penalty, even if it is delayed.

However, the simple order of the verses indicates that the actual punishment for Cain’s crime is exile and wandering (4:11-12). Only

after Cain complains that this will leave him open to being killed does God give him a mark to protect him, adding that “kol horeg Cain shivatayim yukam” (4:15). Even if this does predict that Cain will be killed (which is NOT the simple reading of the verse), it is not necessarily projected as the punishment for the crime.

But the real difficulty with the position taken by Rashi is in the hints that the Torah gives us concerning the personality of Cain and Hevel.

Adam was intimate with Chava his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have made (kaniti) a man with God.” And she continued to give birth to his brother, to Hevel; and Hevel was a shepherd, while Cain worked with the land. After many days, Cain brought an offering to God from the fruit of the land. And Hevel, he also brought from the first-born of his sheep and from their fat – and God turned to Hevel and to his offering, But did not turn to Cain and to his offering; and Cain was very troubled and his face fell. (4:1-5).

Our first point of interest is the Torah’s description of the births of the 2 brothers. The birth of Cain is described as a momentous occasion, giving rise to Chava’s exclamation, “I have made a man with God.” While this is obviously due to the fact that he is the first-born, not only to his happy parents, but to human history, it stands in stark contrast to the birth of his brother, whose birth is described as an afterthought, and who does not even merit an explanation of his name. Compare this with other cases of the births of brothers in the Torah, such as Eisav and Yaacov (25:25-26), or the list of births of Yaacov’s wife Leah (29:32-35), where each son is accorded an explanation for his name. It is safe to say that a character whose name is not explained in the Torah, especially when juxtaposed next to one whose name is explained, is a non-important character. If Hevel is the first individual to bring a proper sacrifice to God – in effect, the man who invented formal religion – we would expect more.

The comparison between the births and the names merely highlights the extremely problematic nature of Hevel’s name. “Hevel” means “nothing, vanity, wind, vapor.” Of the nearly 60 appearances of this word in Tanakh, not even 1 is in a positive context. The word is always used to describe something of no consequence, mere wind, vanity, or foolishness. The well-known repeated use of the word in Kohelet are typical of Iyov and Tehillim as well. Since names are descriptive in Tanakh, especially for a symbolic character, this would seem to indicate that we should not be viewing Hevel as a paradigm of virtue or human accomplishment. In fact, Cain’s name could well be translated as “accomplishment,” while Hevel’s name means the opposite.

Now one could argue that this does not indicate anything about the Torah’s attitude towards Cain and Hevel, but only about the attitude of their parents, who were excited about the birth of the first and more or less ignored the second. This “psychological” reading of the parasha would result in a picture of Cain as the favored first son, and Hevel as the ignored, belittled brother. Perhaps Chava was surprised to discover that she was bearing a second child (assuming that they were twins, as would appear from the fact that a second pregnancy is not mentioned), and perhaps she assumed that a second child was unnecessary, an insignificant addition – in other words, “hevel.” This perception of the psychological difficulties of Cain and Hevel could then be used to understand the strained relationship between them, and Hevel’s “overachieving” would be seen as an attempt to gain his parents’ – and perhaps God’s – approval.

This would be an interesting approach, but I have a basic methodological problem with it. If it is correct, then the moral of the story will revolve around the problems of parenting, rather than the sin of murder. I have nothing against using psychological insights to understand a parasha in the Torah, but in this case, the psychological insights, the central point of the story, is barely hinted at in the text. Not that I find to be objectionable. It does not appear to me to be logical to assume that the central message of a given parasha is buried in hints and inferences.

Perhaps these insights can help us understand how these 2 individuals related to themselves and each other, but I do not think that they answer our question of the relative evaluation of Cain and Hevel.

But there is also a further textual indication about the personalities of Cain and Hevel, and that is in the actual bringing of the offerings (vv. 3 & 4). The initiative to bring an offering to God is Cain’s. The verse stresses that “Hevel, he too, brought an offering.” Hevel is copying Cain, following along in the initiative of his older brother. Just as his birth appears an afterthought to that of Cain, so too his offering to God is apparently following the footsteps of Cain. Cain is the originator of the idea of sacrifice; he was the first to understand that if your work succeeds, it is only because God has blessed it and therefore one must show that one understands from where all blessing comes by giving a portion to the true owner and creator of all. Hevel merely imitates his brother. Cain is an “ish” (v. 1), an individual, a unique personality; Hevel is a “gam hu” (v. 4), an “also he” person. He is a “nochshlepper” – I wish I knew

how to say that in English! But I hope those of you who are not familiar with the word can guess its meaning – an “also-shlepper-along.”

### C.

I think it is safe to say that Cain was the more serious individual, more creative and more substantive. This immediately brings us to the question why his offering was not accepted by God, while that of his unoriginal brother was.

The answer to this question is found in verse 7. Unfortunately, verse 7 is among the most difficult in the Torah. It appears to be deliberately cryptic, so it is impossible to translate neutrally; that is, the translation depends on which among the many available interpretations is adopted.

For the time being, I propose to skip this question and move on to the murder itself. My attempt to somehow rehabilitate the character of Cain will surely flounder on the incontrovertible fact that he was a murderer, who killed his only brother (as well as 25% of the world’s population).

Cain said to Hevel his brother; and while they were in the field, Cain rose up on Hevel his brother, and killed him. (4:8)  
The first half of the verse is obviously incomplete. It is not only that we would want to know what Cain said, while the verse does not inform us. Grammatically, the verb “amar” (said) requires a direct object, unlike the verb “dibeir” (spoke) which could be used without one. It is possible to describe someone as “speaking,” without specifying what he said; but it is technically incomplete to say of someone that he is “saying,” without adding an object. All commentators and the midrashim suggest different contents for what Cain said, but it seems to me that the Torah’s omission here indicates that it is not important to know what specifically what was said, but only that speech preceded the act of violence. What this means is that Cain did not approach Hevel with the intention of killing him. Apparently, words led to an argument, which eventually led to Hevel being killed. This is what is known legally as manslaughter rather than premeditated murder.

This impression is reinforced by the repeated reference to Hevel as “Hevel his brother.” If this had appeared only in reference to the murder itself, I would be inclined to interpret it ironically, as emphasizing the enormity of the crime. But as it appears not in the description of the murder itself, but in the previous 2 phrases – “saying” and “rising up” – it seems to me to indicate the opposite; namely, that at every stage up to the actual murder, Cain still related to Hevel as a brother. Following this lead, I remind you of the midrash which describes how Cain did not know how to kill. (The midrash does not claim that he did not want to kill Hevel, only that he did not know how). Expanding this somewhat, perhaps Cain did not even realize that he was killing Hevel until it was too late. One must remember that no one had even died yet in human history. Cain “rose up against Hevel,” and suddenly, he had killed him.

This would explain his punishment – which is akin to “galut,” exile, the punishment in the Torah for inadvertent manslaughter rather than for murder. Of course there is no city of refuge to which Cain can be sent, but basically his lot is similar to the accidental murderer of the Torah, who is uprooted from his home and sent away.

So, what is the picture that emerges? Cain is the more talented and religiously more sophisticated elder son, who is haunted by the success of his younger brother, and quarrels with him, until, either accidentally or at least without premeditation, kills him. Have I managed to rescue the reputation of Cain? Is he to be considered a “tzaddik?” Of course not! But neither is he to be considered a symbol of a “rasha,” of evil personified. He should not be added to the list of great villains in the Torah, such as Nimrod, Eisav, or Pharo. Rather, he is an example of a tragic figure.

### D.

If this story is not about murder and its deserved punishment, then what is it about? I think the answer is that it is about brotherhood, jealousy, competition, and the roots of strife. The message may appear extremely pessimistic and depressing, but the Torah is telling us that strife, and even murder, are rooted deeply in human nature. To put it another way, human strife is primordial, a direct result of the fact that there are at least 2 human beings. The very first 2 humans quarreled, and the result was murder. They quarreled not because they were somehow a danger to each other, but because they were in competition – 1 was a farmer and 1 a shepherd. Automatically, instead of cooperating, they entered different occupations and competed – economically and eventually religiously. For this message to be understood, for us to realize that the root of great evils does not necessarily lie in an evil personality and is not the result of some terrible decadence from a naturally pure state, it is important to realize that Cain was a positive character, caught up in natural human impulses and emotions. The root of what happened here is not the corrupt nature of Cain, but the human family and human society. Man, in his desire to succeed and progress, is led to compete, and from this the road to strife is very short.

Had we met the 2 brothers before the terrible end, we may well have sympathized more with Cain, rather than with his “worthless (hevel) brother.” But in the end, that makes no difference, because fine qualities are no guarantee against an upsurge of emotions.

There is a recurring theme in some western philosophies that the natural state of man is simple morality, and evil results from some decadent process of progress and social complexity. The Torah is warning us of the opposite. There is nothing particularly pure in the noble savage, in primitive social structures. The seeds of evil are found in the simplest social structure of all, a simple family. Morality is not natural, instincts should not be trusted, and “just being yourself” is a recipe for trouble. On the contrary, morality is the product of a highly structured and difficult course of training and restraint – namely, the Torah. Human history begins in competition leading to strife and murder; it takes a great effort on the part of an individual, and all of history on the part of mankind, to reach a state of cooperation, with true moral peace and genuine brotherhood.

E.

Now to take a stab at God’s response to Cain’s despair at not being favored when bringing his offering.

First, it is crucial to notice that God precedes his response with an exclamation of surprise – “Why are you disturbed and why has your face fallen?” This would appear to be a strange question – after all, Cain has just had his offering to God rejected! Is that not a good enough reason to be disturbed? The answer is that Cain is not disturbed by the nature of his relationship with God, but by his relative standing in the competition with Hevel. Indeed, we do not know that Cain has been rejected. All the verse says is that some special sign of favor (the midrash suggests that fire came down from heaven to devour the offering) which was accorded to Hevel was absent in Cain’s case. This does not mean that God is angry at Cain, only that, for some reason which we do not know, He chose to give a special sign to Hevel. As a wild piece of speculation, perhaps Hevel is depressed by the fact that he is engaged in a relatively less valuable field of occupation – remember that Adam’s family, according to the Sages, is not permitted to eat meat, and has only a limited need for wool. (See the Netziv who considers Hevel’s occupation with things that are only luxuries rather than staples to be the source of his name as Hevel – vanity). But the reason is not really important – which is why the Torah does not even hint at it. What is important is Cain’s response, a response of jealousy derived from his choosing to measure his own value as a function of his success in competition.

God’s answer is – “If you do well, you succeed, but if you do not do well, IT will lurk on the door of sin.” I would like to suggest that this means that Cain should be concerned only with 1 thing – is he doing well, doing good, intrinsically, and be unconcerned with the competition with Hevel. If you are doing well, then that is what matters. If you are not doing good things, then your desire to succeed will be the seed of sin. The desire to produce, even to produce religious expression, such as bringing the first offering in history (surely an accomplishment), is on the one hand the secret of Man’s greatness, but if expressed for the sake of competition is on the other hand the source of sin – in this case, the second sin of history.

Rebellion against God is the first source of sin. Not realizing that one’s worth is intrinsic and trying to find value by surpassing others, our brothers, is the second source. In some ways it is the more invidious, and definitely is the more common.

Cain, of course, fails this test, and his competitiveness and lack of self-worth leads him to fratricide. Having failed to find his value in the land he toils, he is removed from it and condemned to a life of wandering. Feeling that his life is worthless now (a life of hevel), he fears that any who meet him will kill him, as one would squash a worthless creature. But the message of God still holds – if he produces, if he does good, then his life has value. God gives him a sign to protect him. Cain’s potential still holds true.

## Sefer Daniel Lesson 1: Introduction, Period and Background

By Harav Yaakov Medan

Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/ketuvim/sefer-daniel/sefer-daniel-introduction-period-and-background>



The following lectures represent the essence of a series of classes on Sefer Daniel that I gave in Alon Shevut. These social encounters were an opportunity to commemorate, through Torah study and shared faith, the memory of a young man from our community – Daniel Mandel, son of Cheryl and David – who fell in battle against terrorists in Shekhem, as the commander of a Nachal elite team, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, 5763....

"Earth – do not cover his blood, and let there be no resting place for his cry."

-Yaakov Medan

## Chapter 1: Period and Background

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the reign of Yehoyakim, king of Yehuda, Nevukhadnetzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And God delivered Yehoyakim, king of Yehuda, into his hand, with some of the vessels of the House of God, and he brought them to the land of Shin'ar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels to the treasure-house of his god. (Daniel 1:1-2)

This opening to the sefer provide historical background to the story that follows. The prophet Yirmeyahu speaks of the same period:

The word which came to Yirmeyahu concerning the entire people of Yehuda in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Yehoyahim son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda – which was the 1<sup>st</sup> year of [the reign of] Nevukhadretzar, king of Babylon. (25:1)

Comparison of these accounts raises an obvious question: If Nevukhadnetzar rose to power in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Yehoyakim, how could he have laid siege to Jerusalem in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Yehoyakim's reign? Ibn Ezra explains at length that the siege did, in fact, take place in the 4<sup>th</sup> (or 3<sup>rd</sup>) year of Yehoyakim's reign, as stated at the beginning of Sefer Daniel. To resolve the discrepancy between the 2 accounts, he explains that the 2 sources use 2 different dating systems, each with its own start of the year. Abravanel and Malbim adopt the same explanation.

I shall follow Rashi's approach, however, which is based on a beraita in Seder Olam. According to this explanation, the "3<sup>rd</sup> year" referred to in Sefer Daniel was actually the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Yehoyakim's rebellion against Nevukhadnetzar, in the 11th and final year of Yehoyakim's reign. We read in Seder Olam (chapter 25):

"In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the reign of Yehoyakim, king of Yehuda, Nevukhadnetzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it" – how can this be? Do we not already know that he [Nevukhadnetzar] began his reign only in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Yehoyakim? What this means to teach us is "in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year – of his rebellion."

A brief review of the final chapters of Melakhim II (chapters 22 onwards) will offer a better understanding of this approach to the chronology of the period.

### Independence and Loss of Independence

Yoshiyahu, the father of Yehoyakim, was the last independent king of Yehuda. During Yoshiyahu's reign, the northern kingdom of Yisrael was no longer in existence; the Ten Tribes had been exiled 3 generations earlier, in the days of Chizkiyahu. He reigned during the decline and collapse of the great Assyrian empire, which had long dominated the region, and he exploited this situation to expand the borders of the kingdom of Yehuda. Yoshiyahu conquered extensive territory around Yehuda (see Tzefania 2), aspiring to restore the original borders of the kingdom between the River of Egypt and the Euphrates. His goal was to restore the situation that existed in the period of David and Shlomo. While falling short of achieving this goal entirely, he did manage to consolidate a large, prestigious kingdom. He also attained much in the spiritual realm; he purified the Temple and the whole country of idolatry, and held a Pesach ceremony in Jerusalem. According to Chazal, Yoshiyahu even brought back a considerable number of Israelites who had been forced to leave the land with the exile of the Ten Tribes (see Arakhin 32-33; Yirmeyahu 2:6-4:2, 4:31).

Yoshiyahu's enterprise collapsed with his death in a seemingly insignificant battle against the king of Egypt at Megiddo. His demise prompted a power struggle between his 2 sons, Yehoachaz and Yehoyakim, who had 2 different mothers. This sort of family conflict is familiar to us from the stories of Yosef and his brothers in Sefer Bereishit, and indeed, the events in this context resemble quite closely the sale of Yosef. After Yoshiyahu died, Yehoachaz, the younger son, ascended the throne, as he was more popular among the people, just as Yosef, Yaakov's younger son, was especially beloved by his father. However, Yehoyakim, the elder son, joined forces with Pharaoh Nekho, king of Egypt, and delivered the kingdom of Yehuda into his hands, as a protectorate, in return for his own coronation in Jerusalem in Yehoachaz's stead.

Like Yosef, Yehoachaz was brought to Egypt and imprisoned. However, Pharaoh Nekho had no dreams, and Yehoachaz was not called upon to offer interpretations. Yehoachaz was not promoted to vizier, and he eventually died in the Egyptian prison. Thus, the kingdom of Yehuda lost its political independence; Yehoyakim and his successors were dependent on and subservient to the reigning powers (Egypt and Babylon).

The text provides the following description of the coronation of Yehoyakim (Melakhim II 23:34-35):

Pharaoh Nekho made Eliakim, son of Yoshiyahu, king instead of Yoshiyahu his father, and changed his name to Yehoyakim, and he took Yehoachaz away, and he came to Egypt, and died there. And Yehoyakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to Pharaoh's command; he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of each person according to his taxation, to give it to Pharaoh Nekho.

Yehoyakim was an evil king. He placed Yehuda under the yoke of the king of Egypt and restored the altars for human sacrifice, which his father had destroyed, in the valley of Ben-Hinnom. His reign was full of blood, violence, and corruption. The text goes so far as to compare Yehoyakim to Menasheh. Apparently, this is meant to tell us that the destruction would come because of him; there would be no more opportunities for change.

Yehoyakim was 25 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem... And he did that which was evil in the sight of God, according to all that his fathers had done. In his days Nevuchadnetzar, king of Babylon, came up, & Yehoyakim became his servant for 3 years; then he turned and rebelled against him. And God sent bands of Chaldeans against him, & bands of Arameans, & bands of Moabites, & bands of the children of Ammon, & He sent them against Yehuda, to destroy it, according to the word of God which He spoke by the hand of His servants, the prophets. It was surely at God's command that this happened to Yehuda, to remove them from before Him, for the sins of Menasheh, according to all that he had done. And also for the innocent blood which he shed, for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, & God would not forgive this. (Ibid. 23:36 – 24:4)

#### Egypt and Babylonia

In the opening verse of Yirmeyahu's prophecy, cited above, the prophet records that Nevukhadnetzar began to rule over Yehuda in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Yehoyakim's reign. The prophet goes on to foretell the fall of all the nations of the region – the Kingdom of Yehuda and the nations surrounding it – at the hands of Nevukhadnetzar, king of Babylon, for 70 years, as well as the punishment which God is destined to bring upon Babylon. In the same prophecy, Yirmeyahu mentions his book of prophecies "about all the nations" (25:13):

And I shall bring about upon this land all My words which I spoke about them, all that is written in this book, which Yirmeyahu prophesized concerning all the nations.

The collection of Yirmeyahu's prophecies concerning the nations begins in chapter 46, where we read (vv. 1-2):

In which God's word came to Yirmiyahu the prophet, concerning the nations: Concerning Egypt, concerning the army of Pharaoh Nekho, king of Egypt, which was by the Euphrates River, in Karkemish, [and] which was defeated by Nevukhadretzar, king of Babylon, in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Yehoyakim, son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda.

Once again, Yirmiyahu speaks of the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Yehoyakim. It was in this year that Nevukhadnetzar overpowered Egypt and began to rule over Eretz Yisrael.

Yoshiyahu was killed in the battle against Pharaoh Nekho as the latter was making his way to assist the Assyrians & thereby assert his candidacy to inherit the disintegrating Assyrian empire (see Melakhim II 23:29-30 and Divrei Ha-Yamim II 35:20-24). In the battle that took place that same year in the city of Charan, near the Euphrates, there was an encounter between the 2 kings who each sought to reign over Assyria: Nevopolassar, king of Babylon (father of Nevukhadnetzar), and Pharaoh Nekho, king of Egypt. Babylon was a strong kingdom, but was still far from the power that it would become under Nevukhadnetzar. Egypt appeared to stand a better chance. Yoshiyahu understood the significance of Egypt's expected victory – the extension of Egyptian patronage over Charan, which was on the other side of the Euphrates, would mean that it would rule over the entire area between the Nile and the Euphrates, including Eretz Yisrael.

The gemara (Ta'anit 22b) teaches that Yoshiyahu interpreted the verse from the blessing, "no sword shall pass through your land" (Vayikra 26:6) to mean "even a sword of peace" – that is, even the swords of other nations waging war against one another. The ramifications of warring neighbors on opposite sides of Israel would be that the victor would annex Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, Yoshiyahu set out to block Pharaoh Nekho at the vital crossing of Megiddo, at the north-eastern entryway represented by Nachal I'ron. Had he succeeded, and had the king of Egypt been forced to turn back, Yoshiyahu could have extended his rule over a considerable portion of the contested region. He could have restored the Kingdom of Israel to its borders at the pinnacle of its glory – from the Nile to the Euphrates.

Yoshiyahu could have succeeded in this mission. He had a strong army, and he had accumulated victories against the neighboring nations. However, his sins rendered him unworthy; he was killed at Megiddo, and it was Pharaoh Nekho who became the ruler of the entire region. It is possible that the battle against Yehuda, after the death of Yoshiyahu, is also related to the war of independence mentioned above. Yehoyakim rose to power with the aid of Pharaoh and subjugated his kingdom to Egypt.

Already in the days of Yoshiyahu, Yirmiyahu had spoken out in his prophecies against reliance on Egypt, which goes against reliance on God. And indeed, in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Yehoyakim, Nevukhadnetzar – having succeeded his father, Nevopolassar – defeated Pharaoh Nekho at Karkemish, on the Euphrates. The king of Egypt withdrew, with heavy losses – the usual fate of an army defeated far from

its own country – and Nevukhadnetzar now assumed control over the entire area up until the Nile:

And the king of Egypt did not emerge any more from his land, for the king of Babylon had taken – from the Wadi of Egypt up to the Euphrates River – all that had belonged to the king of Egypt. (Melakhim II 24:7)

According to these sources, this battle took place in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Yehoyakim's reign. In Yirmeyahu 36, we find a hint that Eretz Yisrael was only conquered in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of Yehoyakim's rule, & the same findings arise from Babylonian documents. The text in Melakhim, cited above, tells us that Yehoyakim surrendered to the king of Babylon, but he rebelled against him 3 years later. If the conquest began in the 5<sup>th</sup> year, Yehoyakim's attempt to establish an independent kingdom took place in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of his reign.

Yehoyakim held his own for some time, but this was a difficult period. The text records that "God sent bands of Chaldeans against him, and bands of Arameans, and bands of Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and He sent them against Yehuda, to destroy it" (Melakhim II 24:2). Nevukhadnetzar himself was busy waging war in the north and was not available to deal with the kingdom of Yehuda.

### Three Years of Independence

Let us now return to the interpretation of the Seder Olam concerning our verse about the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Yehoyakim's reign. This was not the 3<sup>rd</sup> year since his rise to non-independent power, under the patronage of Pharaoh and then under the patronage of Nevukhadnetzar. Rather, it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of his independent reign, since his rebellion against Nevukhadnetzar, king of Babylon, in his 8<sup>th</sup> year. The 3<sup>rd</sup> year, at which time Nevukhadnetzar reappeared in Yehuda, was Yehoyakim's 11<sup>th</sup> year. At that point, Yehoyakim's reign came to an end and he died (see Melakhim II 23:36).

How did Yehoyakim die? He rose to power at the age of 25 and died in the 11<sup>th</sup> year of his reign – that is, at the age of 35, a young man. This calls to mind Yirmeyahu's prophecy about him:

Like the partridge that broods over young un-hatched, so is he who attains riches but not justly. In the middle of his days he shall leave them, and in the end he will be a fool. (17:11)

Although we are told that "Yehoyakim was buried with his fathers" (Melakhim II 24:6), his early death suggests that he did not die peacefully of old age, and this is confirmed by the parallel narrative in Divrei Ha-Yamim (II 36:5-8):

Yehoyakim was 25 when he began to reign, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem, and he did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God. Nevukhadnetzar, king of Babylon, came up against him and bound him in chains to lead him to Babylon. And Nevukhadnetzar brought some of the vessels of God's House to Babylon, and he placed them in his temple in Babylon. And the rest of the deeds of Yehoyakim and the abominations which he committed, and that which was found in him – they are written in the Book of the Kings of Yisrael and Yehuda. And Yehoyakhin, his son, reigned in his stead.

This description also sits well with the verses at the beginning of Sefer Daniel, which speak of Yehoyakim being led to Babylon along with the vessels from God's House.

In order to reconcile the description in Divrei ha-Yamim with the assertion in Sefer Melakhim that Yehoyakim was buried with his fathers, we must assume that Yehoyakim died close to the gates of Jerusalem – perhaps in a fall from the chariot to which he was tied, as a prisoner, being taken to Babylon. He fell to the ground and was pounded by the chariot or the animal upon which he had been placed, and his body was thereby mutilated and dismembered, and then partly buried in Jerusalem (see also Sanhedrin 82a and 104a regarding his skull). This is suggested by the text in Yirmeyahu:

Therefore so says God to Yehoyakim, son of Yoshiyahu king of Yehuda: They shall not eulogize him – "O, my brother" or "O, my sister;" they shall not eulogize him – "O, master!" or "O, his honor!" He shall be buried as a donkey is buried, dragged and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem. (22:18-19)

Thus, Yehoyakim was not incarcerated in Babylon, to the dismay of Nevukhadnetzar, who had wanted to hold the king of Yehuda in prison. Three months later, Nevukhadnetzar went up to Jerusalem and took Yehoyakhin as a prisoner in his stead, as he wanted a live king of Yehuda visibly in his hands. Yehoyakhin remained in prison for 37 years.

Along with Yehoyakim, some of the Temple vessels were taken to Babylon. The verses at the beginning of Sefer Daniel add that children of royal descent were also taken captive. In the exile of Yehoyakhin, which took place 3 months later, the king, the craftsmen, the smiths, and all the notables of Jerusalem were exiled, along with the major vessels of the Temple. The story of Daniel refers to the first exile – the exile of Yehoyakim.

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