

THE BOOK OF YIRMIYAHU
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Shiur #24: The Scroll of Yirmiyahu (Chapter 36)

Introduction

Chapter 36 centers on an unusual hero – Yirmiyahu's scroll of prophecies. The chapter follows the evolution of the scroll. At the beginning of the chapter, Yirmiyahu is commanded to commit his prophecies to writing with the help of Barukh ben Neriya, his faithful scribe. From the moment that the prophecies are recorded, Yirmiyahu is "pushed aside;" the scroll of prophecies occupies the center stage, receiving a life of its own, rolling around Jerusalem and doing its work in different circles. Over the course of our study of the chapter, we will trace the evolution of the scroll and its impact on the people who heard or read it, and we will try to examine its significance and role. Incidentally, the chapter also provides us with a unique and fascinating window onto the process of the creation of the book of *Yirmiyahu*.

The Time of the Prophecy

The chapter begins by noting the time of the prophecy: "And it came to pass in the fourth year of Yehoyakim ben Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda...." This year is highly significant in the book of *Yirmiyahu* and a turning point in his prophecies, as is indicated by the three additional references to the year in the book. To understand the significance of the year in Yirmiyahu's prophecies, we must examine its historical context.

In 609 BCE, the Egyptian ruler Pharaoh Nekho came to assist Ashur in its struggle with Bavel, and for four years the battle between Egypt and Bavel remained undecided. In 605, Nevuchadnetzar rose to the throne in Bavel. As soon as assumed the throne, Nevuchadnetzar began to expand the boundaries of the Babylonian empire, and at the same time he routed the Egyptian army at the battle of Karkemish. This victory decided the fate of the imperial rule in Mesopotamia; in its wake, Bavel became the most powerful empire in the region after the collapse of the Assyrian Empire. The victory at Karkemish is mentioned in Yirmiyahu's prophecy concerning Egypt in chapter 46:

Against Egypt, against the army of Pharaoh Nekho, king of Egypt, which was by the river Perat in Karkemish, whom Nevukhadnetzar king of Bavel smote in the fourth year of Yehoyakim the son of Yoshiyahu king of Yehuda.

This victory was a clear proof of the validity of Yirmiyahu's prophecies over the course of twenty three years. Now it became clear to all that Bavel, the northern kingdom, was the primary enemy threatening the kingdom of Yehuda.

In chapter 25, Yirmiyahu summarizes the years of his prophecy, in the course of which he failed to influence the people to mend their ways, and he reveals for the first time the identity of the enemy from the north that was mentioned already in his prophecy of consecration:

The word that came to Yirmiyahu concerning all the people of Yehuda in the fourth year of Yehoyakim ben Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda, that was the first year of Nevukhadnetzar, king of Bavel... **From the thirteenth year of Yoshiyahu, the son of Amon king of Yehuda, and until this day**, these twenty three years, the word of the Lord has come to me, **and I have spoken to you, from morning till night; but you have not hearkened...** Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Because you have not heard My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, says the Lord, and Nevukhadnetzar the king of Bavel, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual ruins.

In our chapter as well, Yirmiyahu is commanded to summarize all of the prophecies that he delivered until that time and to record them in a book:

And it came to pass in the fourth year of Yehoyakim ben Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda, that this word came to Yirmiyahu from the Lord, saying: Take a scroll and write in it all the words which I have spoken to you about Israel, and about Yehuda, and about all the nations, **from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Yoshiyahu, and to this day. It may be that the house of Yehuda will hear all the evil** which I purpose to do to them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

Barukh ben Neriya's writing of the scroll in that year is also described in 45:1:

The word that Yirmiyahu the prophet spoke to Barukh ben Neriya when he had written these words in a book at the mouth of Yirmiyahu in the fourth year of Yehoyakim ben Yoshiyahu king of Yehuda, saying...

Thus, a literary envelope is created for chapters 37-44, which describe Yirmiyahu's activity in Jerusalem in its last days and with the surviving remnant after the destruction [chapters 46-51 are a collection of prophecies concerning the nations].

The Writing and its Meaning

After the notation of the time, we come to God's words to Yirmiyahu. In these words, Yirmiyahu is command to commit to writing his prophecies of rebuke from the beginning of his activity until the present:

Take a scroll and write in it all the words which I have spoken to you about Israel and about Yehuda, and about all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Yoshiyahu, and to this day. **It may be** that the house of Yehuda will hear all the evil which I purpose to do to them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

This act is intended to summarize, consolidate, and especially to publish and disseminate Yirmiyahu's prophecies. Over the course of twenty three years of oral prophecies, Yirmiyahu met with ongoing failure to change the ways of the people and their leaders. Perhaps now his words of prophecy, written and crystallized in a scroll, will penetrate the hearts of the people. The clear and sharp warnings in Yirmiyahu's prophecies many years ago receive now a new dimension, as they are read once again against the background of the beginning of a new and threatening era – when the threat appears tangible and clear to the people and their leadership.

The First Circle: Barukh Reads it to the People in the House of the Lord

Yirmiyahu asks Barukh ben Neriya, his faithful scribe, to record his prophecies from his mouth. But the bulk of his remarks he devotes to reading the scroll before the people, and he commands Barukh to read them to the people in the Temple on a fast day:

(4) Then Yirmiyahu **called** Barukh ben Neriya, and Barukh wrote from the mouth of Yirmiyahu all the words of the Lord, which He had spoken to him, upon a scroll. (5) And Yirmiyahu commanded Barukh, saying: I am confined; I cannot go into the house of the Lord. (6) Therefore, go you **and read** in the scroll in the ears of the people in the Lord's house upon the fast day; and also **you shall read** them in the ears of all Yehuda that come out of their cities. (7) **It may be** they will present their supplication before the Lord, and will return every one from his evil way; for great is the anger and the fury that the Lord has pronounced against this people.

Later in the story, it turns out that this day arrived about a year after the command – in the ninth month in the fifth year of Yehoyakim:

(8) And Barukh ben Neriya did according to all that Yirmiyahu the prophet commanded him, **reading** in the book the words of the Lord in the Lord's house. (9) And it came to pass in the fifth year of Yehoyakim ben Yoshiyahu king of Yehuda, in the ninth month, that **they** proclaimed a fast before the Lord to all the people in **Jerusalem**. (10) Then Barukh **read** in the book the words of Yirmiyahu in the house of the Lord, in the chamber of Gemaryahu the son of Shafan the scribe, in

the higher court, at the entry of the new gate of the Lord's house, in the ears of all the people.

Why did Yirmiyahu wait such a long time to fulfill the directive? A Babylonian chronicle indicates that Nevuchadnetzar conquered Ashkelon in the month of Kislev, and this event symbolized the beginning of the Babylonian takeover of the Land of Israel.¹ The day of fasting and mourning was therefore an appropriate opportunity to bring the people to repent.²

In the first stage, then, the scroll passes from Yirmiyahu's mouth to Barukh, his scribe. This transition is well-highlighted by the repetition of the root *kara*, "call, read," which is the main root in the chapter. Yirmiyahu calls upon Barukh and sounds his prophecy to him, and from now on Barukh is responsible for reading Yirmiyahu's prophecies to the people, and he does this when they declare a fast day. Joining the reading of the scroll to the declaration of a fast day is meant to deepen its influence on the hearts of the people. In this way, Yirmiyahu overcomes the first stumbling block that stands in his way – his being confined. It would appear that this refers to the prohibition imposed upon him against approaching the Temple, in order to prevent him from prophesying to the people, as a result of his previous activity that is described in chapter 26.³ The scroll passes that stumbling block by way

¹ We refer to the chronicle published by the Assyriologist Wiseman in 1956, which surveys Nevuchadnetzar's travels during the first eleven years of his rule: "In the first year of Nevuchadnetzar in the month of Sivan, he mustered his army and went to the Chiti-territory, he marched about unopposed in the Chiti-territory until the month of Kislev. All the kings of the Chiti-land came before him and he received their heavy tribute. He marched to the city of Ashkelon and captured it in the month of Kislev. He captured its king and plundered it and carried off spoil from it. He turned the city into a mound and heaps of ruins and then in the month of Šhevat he marched back to Bavel." Regarding this chronicle, see A. Melamet, "*Kronika Bavlit Chadasha al Masa'ot Nevuchadnetzar Le-Yehuda*," *Yedi'ot Ha-Chevra Le-Chakirat Eretz Yisrael Ve-Atikoteha* 20 (5716). It was Melamet who first proposed to interpret what is described in our chapter in light of what is stated in the chronicle. For a lengthy discussion regarding the proofs for the conquest of Ashkelon, see Y. Elitzur, "*Be-Terem Yakeh Par'o et Aza*," in his collected articles, *Yisrael Ve-Ha-Mikra* (Jerusalem, 5760), pp. 210ff.

² The doubt about the capacity to bring about true change after continued failure is expressed in the words "it may be" (*ulai*), which is repeated in God's command and in the words of Yirmiyahu. God doubts whether or not the people will listen to him: "It may be that the house of Yehuda... that they may return every man from his evil way" (3). In contrast, Yirmiyahu expresses doubt about God's acceptance of their delayed repentance: "It may be they will present their supplication before the Lord, and will return every one from his evil way" (7).

³ There are clear connections between chapters 26 and 36. There it says that the prophecy was delivered "in the beginning of the reign of Yehoyakim," and here in the fourth year of Yehoyakim. These are the only two prophecies of calamity that are delivered at the new gate of the house of the Lord; there it is addressed primarily to the people, and here essentially to the king. In both, the goal of the prophecy is "Perhaps, they will hearken and turn." The results of the two prophecies are similar: an attempt to kill the prophet, and his being saved from death. As stated, it stands to reason that Yirmiyahu's failed attempt in chapter 26 is what brought about the writing of the scroll in this chapter, so that it would allow him to reach the ears of the king.

of Barukh, and in that way it reaches the ears of the people found in the house of the Lord.⁴

The Second Circle: The Chamber of the Princes

(11) When Mikhayehu the son of Gemaryahu, the son of Shafan, had heard out of the book all the words of the Lord, (12) then he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's chamber; and, lo, all the princes sat there, Elishama the scribe, and Delayahu the son of Shemayahu, and Elnatan the son of Akhbor, and Gemaryahu the son of Shafan, and Tzidkiyahu the son of Chananyahu, and all the princes. (13) Then Mikhayehu declared to them all the words that he had heard, when Barukh read the book in the ears of the people.

Among the many people who hear the scroll of the prophecies, there is also Mikhayehu, the son of Gemaryahu, in whose chamber the scroll was read. Scripture emphasizes what was unique about Mikhayahu's hearing. In verse 10 it says: "Then Barukh read in the book **the words of Yirmiyahu...**," whereas in verse 11 it says: "When Mikhayehu had heard... out of the book **all the words of the Lord.**" The word "all" come to emphasize his full hearing of the words, missing nothing, and the words "the words of the Lord" teach that he heard the words as the words of the living God, and not merely as the words of Yirmiyahu. This excites Mikhayehu, and he goes down from the house of the Lord to the king's house, which is located south of the Temple on the lower part of Mount Zion, and he relays the words that he had heard in their entirety ("**all** the words that he had heard") in the scribe's chamber in the king's house. The word "lo" indicates that Mikhayehu was not expecting to meet all the princes there, but perhaps only his father Gemaryahu. To his surprise, all of the princes were found there at that time, and he sounded the words of Yirmiyahu's prophecy in their ears, apparently hoping that the content would influence them. It may be that this was an emergency meeting that was called in the wake of the calamity that stood at the gate:

(14) Therefore all the princes sent Yehudi the son of Netanyahu, the son of Shelemyahu, the son of Kushi, to Barukh, saying: Take in your hand the scroll in which you have read in the ears of the people, and come. So Barukh ben Neriya took the scroll in his hand, and came to them. (15) And they said to him: Sit down now, and read it in our ears. (16) So Barukh read it in their ears. Now it came to pass, when they had heard all the words, they turned to one another in fear, and said to Barukh: We will surely tell the king of all these words. (17) And they asked Barukh, saying: Tell us now: How did you write all these words at his mouth? (18) Then Barukh answered them: He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink in the book.

⁴ The words "in the ears of" appear eight times in our chapter, and in that way it emphasizes the great resonance that the scroll enjoyed. In these verses, there is a striking connection between Yirmiyahu's mouth and the people's ears: "And read in the scroll, which you have written from **my mouth**, the words of the Lord, in **the ears of** the people." Here we see the primary role of the scroll – to bridge the gap between Yirmiyahu's mouth and the ears of the people in the house of the Lord.

The princes are not content with hearing things secondhand, and so they send for Barukh to be brought before them and they ask him to read the words in their ears. In this way, the scroll penetrates the more inner circle, the circle of princes. Hearing the words firsthand from Barukh, who read straight from the scroll, leaves a deep impression on them and shocks them. But before they pass the words on to the king, they interrogate Barukh about the manner in which the scroll was written. It seems that the princes wanted to know how accurately the scroll reflects the word of God. Here Barukh describes in detail the process of the scroll's writing. The words were immediately committed to writing – from Yirmiyahu's mouth directly onto paper ("and I wrote them" – he dictated while I was writing), without delay and without intermediaries, with ink in the book, leaving no concern about emendations and modifications.⁵

The Third Circle: In the Winter House of the King

(19) Then the princes said to Barukh: Go, hide yourself, you and Yirmiyahu; and let no man know where you are. (20) And they went in to the king to the court, but they deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and recited all the words in the ears of the king.

The princes see it as their duty to report Yirmiyahu's words to the king, but unlike the speed that characterized the previous stage, what stands out here is hesitation and reluctance, arising from fear of a negative reaction on the part of King Yehoyakim.⁶ The princes therefore take a few precautions: They order Barukh and Yirmiyahu to go into hiding, and they deposit the scroll for safekeeping in a certain chamber before they go in to see the king.

(21) So the king sent Yehudi to fetch the scroll, and he took it out of the chamber of Elishama the scribe. And Yehudi read it in the ears of the king and in the ears of all the princes who stood beside the king. (22) Now the king sat in the winter house in the ninth month, and there was a fire in the brazier burning before him. (23) And it came to pass, that when Yehudi **had read** three or four leaves, he would cut it with a penknife, and cast it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier. (24) Yet they were not afraid, nor **rent** their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants who **heard** all these words. (25) Elnatan and Delayahu and Gemaryahu even pleaded with the king not to burn the scroll, but **he would not listen** to them. (26) But the king commanded Yerachme'el the king's son, and Serayahu the son of Azriel, and Shelemyahu the

⁵ This is the only instance of the word “*doyo*” in Scripture. It is interesting that *Chazal* turn Barukh's words into a *halakha* regarding the writing of a scroll like that of Esther (Mishna, *Megilla* 2b): "If [the copy from which he reads] is written with *sam*, with *sikra*, with *kumus*, or with *kankantum*, or on *neyar* or *differa*, he has not performed his obligation; it must be written in Hebrew on parchment and in ink."

⁶ It should be remembered that Yehoyakim was appointed by Pharaoh Nekho, in place of his brother Yehoachaz, and he maintained a "pro-Egyptian" policy.

son of Avde'el, to seize Barukh the scribe and Yirmiyahu the prophet; but the Lord hid them.

At this stage, it seems that things are repeating themselves. Like Mikhayehu, the princes first tell the king all that they had heard, but the king orders that the scroll be brought to him so that he can hear it firsthand, and it appears that the words left a strong impression upon him. Here, however, only the scroll is brought in to the king, the innermost circle, and Barukh remains in hiding along with Yirmiyahu. Now Yehudi, the king's emissary, is the one who reads the scroll to the king. At this point the story takes a dramatic turn. At the moment of climax, Scripture puts the narrative tension on hold, and prefaces it with a description of the scenario in which the drama is taking place. The king is in his winter house (as may be recalled, this is the month of Kislev, the heart of the winter), and he sits on his throne, in front of his fireplace, while his princes stand about him. Against the background of this impressive picture, an account is given of the king's response, quite the opposite of what we would expect. While the scroll is being read, after the reading of three or four pages, the king... tears it and casts it into the fire! This process repeats itself several times until the entire scroll goes up in flames. Verse 24 emphasizes the absurdity in this response – rather than rending garments, as a sign of mourning and repentance for what is about to happen, the king chooses to tear up the scroll and burn it. The reading (*keri'a* with an *alef*) of the scroll is replaced by its tearing (*keri'a* with an *ayin*) and burning.⁷ The response of the king and his servants is contrasted with the response of

⁷ An interesting interpretation of these verses is found in the *gemara* (*Mo'ed Katan* 26a), which learns from here that one must rend his garments when he sees a Torah scroll that was burnt: "[One rents] when a Torah scroll has been burnt. What is the source for this? As it is written: 'And it came to pass, that when Yehudi had read three or four leaves, he would cut it with a penknife, and cast it into the fire that was in the brazier.' What is the point of saying '[had read] three or four leaves'? They told [King] Yehoyakim that Yirmiyahu had written a book of *Eikha*, [and] he said to them: What is written there? [They quoted] 'How does the city sit solitary.' [The king] replied: I am the king. They then cited to him [the second verse]: 'She weeps sore in the night.' He replied [again]: I am the king. [They then cited the third verse]: 'Yehuda is gone into exile because of affliction.' [Again he replied]: I am the king. [They continued with verse four]: 'The ways of Zion do mourn.' I am the king [he replied]. [They continued with the fifth verse]: 'Her adversaries are become the head.' He asked: Who said that? [They continued with that same verse]: 'For the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions.' Forthwith, he [began to] cut out all the names of God mentioned therein and burned them in the fire; hence it is written [in the report there]: 'Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words,' which implies that the [bystanders] should have rent [their clothes]."

This exposition is based on the assumption that the scroll written by Barukh was the book of *Eikha*, which has traditionally been ascribed to Yirmiyahu. But this is not a dirge after the fact, but rather a prophecy of destruction before it occurred. According to the *gemara's* explanation, "four leaves" are four verses. Yehoyakim manages to contend with the evil tidings in the first three verses in the scroll, since they do not deal directly with his standing as the king. Only when he reaches the fourth verse, which speaks of a change in the leadership, "Her adversaries have become the head," does Yehoyakim get angry and decide to burn the names of God, who is "responsible" for his removal from office. In this lovely exposition, Yehoyakim is displayed as an opportunist who worries only about his standing as king. (The phrase "cutting names" appears in the Halakha in relation to books that were written by heretics. According to R. Yose, the names of God must be cut out from the books and buried, while the rest of the books are burned. Here Yehoyakim does the very opposite: He cuts out the names and burns them!)

the princes in the chamber, who were frightened and shocked by the words of the prophecy. Scripture also emphasizes that the king would not listen to the pleadings of several of his princes.

It may be that the image of the king sitting in his winter house before his fireplace is presented not only for the practical role of the fireplace, but to outline the image of Yehoyakim as king. It may be that the winter house mentioned here is the same house mentioned in Yirmiyahu's prophecy concerning Yehoyakim above (22:13-18):

Woe to him that builds his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by injustice; that uses his neighbor's service without wages, and gives him not for his hire; that says: I will build me a wide house with large upper chambers, and he cuts him out windows; and it is covered with rafters of cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shall you reign, because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him. Was not this to know Me? says the Lord. But you have eyes and heart only for dishonest gain, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for practicing violence. Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning Yehoyakim ben Yoshiyahu king of Yehuda: They shall not lament for him, saying: Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! They shall not lament for him, saying: Ah lord! or, Ah His glory!

In this prophecy, Yehoyakim is described as a hedonistic, corrupt, and evil king, interested solely in his honor and in his status as king, who tramples over the rights of his subjects and abuses them in order to beautify his own palace, in contrast to the ways of his ancestors, who practiced judgment and justice. The image of the corrupt king, sitting in his glorious winter house which he built on the backs of his subjects, while his princes stand round about him, matches his crude and insensitive reaction to the prophecy.

As the princes had feared, the king also tries to hurt Yirmiyahu and Barukh, but they are rescued: "But the Lord hid them." It may be that his attempt to kill Yirmiyahu and Barukh stemmed from a political fear – that they were causing the people to rebel against him. It stands to reason, however, that what stands behind his action is also a theological position that assumes that hurting the prophet who bears the prophecy will also impair the words of the prophecy themselves. Indeed, Yehoyakim already took similar action when he killed Uriyahu the prophet even after he fled to Egypt (26:20-23).⁸ (In both places, Yirmiyahu is in mortal danger because of his prophecy, but in the end he is saved.)

The chapter portrays how the scroll penetrated from the outer circles inward: At first, the "confined" Yirmiyahu reads his words before Barukh, then Barukh reads the scroll before the people, and afterwards before the princes

⁸ This conception is reflected also in Yerav'am's actions against the man of God who comes from Yehuda in I *Melakhim* 13.

in the scribe's chamber in the king's house, and then in the end Yehudi reads it to the king himself in his winter house. The scroll manages to penetrate inward by virtue of the sensitive readers who take its words to heart. In contrast to them, Yehoyakim is portrayed as an impervious and hard-hearted king, who reacts to its content with scorn and arrogance, tearing and burning it instead of his clothes. Even in the face of difficult reality, he is not prepared to reconsider his way.

However, not only does Yehoyakim's response fail to cancel the prophecy, it actually exacerbates it:

(27) Then the word of the Lord came to Yirmiyahu, after the king had burned the scroll, with the words which Barukh wrote at the mouth of Yirmiyahu, saying: (28) Take you again another scroll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Yehoyakim the king of Yehuda has burned. (29) And you shall say to Yehoyakim king of Yehuda: Thus says the Lord: You have burned the scroll, saying: Why have you written in it to say that the king of Bavel shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cut off from it both man and beast? (30) Therefore, thus says the Lord of Yehoyakim king of Yehuda: He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and to frost by night. (31) And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Yehuda, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not.

The scroll is merely the embodiment of God's eternal word; burning it does not affect it in any way. Yirmiyahu is commanded to write once again "the former words," and to them is added a harsh prophecy concerning Yehoyakim's end. For debasing God's word by burning the scroll, Yehoyakim will be punished with the disgracing of his body after his death, and even his servants who failed to protest his actions will be punished.

The Difference Between the Reading of the Scroll in the Days of Yehoyakim and the Reading of the Torah in the Days of Yoshiyahu

The account of the reading of the scroll in the ears of Yehoyakim brings to mind a similar event involving his father, Yoshiyahu (II *Melakhim* 22:8-13):

(8) And Chilkiyahu the high priest said to Shafan the scribe: I have found a book of the Torah in the house of the Lord. And Chilkiya gave the book to Shafan and he read it. (9) And Shafan the scribe came to the king, and brought back word to the king, and said: Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, who have the oversight of the house of the Lord. (10) And Shafan the scribe told the king, saying: Chilkiya the priest has given me a book. And Shafan read it before the king. (11) And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the Tora, that he rent his clothes. (12) And the

king commanded Chilkiya the priest, and Achikam the son of Shafan, and Akhbor the son of Mikhaya, and Shafan the scribe, and Asaya the king's servant, saying: (13) Go 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.

Holy books that had previously been read in the Temple and that contain words of calamity concerning Jerusalem are read before these two kings. Shafan the scribe receives the scroll from Chilkiya the priest, reads it, and then reads it before the king. Later he will be sent to Chulda the prophetess as part of the delegation that Yoshiyahu sends to seek the word of God. In our chapter, Mikhayehu, Shafan's grandson, hears the scroll⁹ and relates what he heard to the princes. Among these princes there is also Mikhayehu's father, Gemaryahu, who is Shafan's son. Gemaryahu appears again later, in verse 25, when he is counted among the princes who try to prevent Yehoyakim from burning the scroll. It seems then that we are dealing with a family that is faithful to the word of God, whose descendants also include Achikam ben Shafat, who saves Yirmiyahu from death (in chapter 26), and Gedalya ben Achikam, about whom we will learn in the coming chapters.

There is an enormous difference between the responses of the two kings. While Yoshiyahu rends his garments when they read the scroll before him, Yehoyakim abstains from rending his garments (as is emphasized by Scripture), and instead tears up the scroll itself! Yoshiyahu is shocked to the depths of his soul, and he drags his princes and the entire people after him to take dramatic action to change the decree. In contrast, Yehoyakim demonstrates terrible scorn. While his princes are shocked by the scroll and bring it before the king, the king himself holds it in contempt, tears it up, and burns it. Rather than the king influencing his princes and dragging them after him, the reverse takes place here; the king stops his princes and refuses to listen to the princes who plead with him not to burn the scroll.

There is another difference between the two kings: Yoshiyahu immediately sends a delegation to seek the word of God from the mouth of Chulda the prophetess, whereas Yehoyakim sends his emissaries to kill the prophet and prevent him from sounding the word of God.

The comparison highlights the difficult situation in the days of Yehoyakim. The king is absolutely impervious to the words of the prophet; he is not prepared to listen even after the Babylonian enemy begins to go up against Yehuda, and all of his behavior demonstrates scorn and contempt. Yehoyakim's conduct, which is described here and in other places in the book of *Yirmiyahu*, brings the people one step closer to the destruction.

⁹ The scroll which was dictated by "Yirmiyahu the son of Chilkiyahu of the priests" (1:1). Attention should be paid to the similarity between the names, even if we are not dealing with the same person.

(Translated by David Strauss)