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ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

JERUSALEM IN THE BIBLE

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Shiur #13: Topography of Ancient Jerusalem - part I
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NB: A map of biblical Jerusalem is attached to this *shiur* as a separate file: 13jeru.gif.

In the next three *shiurim*, we shall examine various aspects of the topography of Jerusalem. This will allow us, later on, to understand the connection of Jerusalem with the Tribe of Binyamin - the inheritance of the Divine Presence.

In this *shiur*, we shall focus on the significance of the location of the city by analyzing the course of the valleys that surround it and studying their development and their character.

The *shiur* as a whole is based on the assumption that each valley has spiritual character and importance [1].

Location of the Ancient City

(See attached map)

The ancient city of Jerusalem (according to archaeological remains and on the basis of its identity) is bounded by three valleys - on the eastern, western and southern sides. Its northern border is located in the region of Mount Moriah, where no topographical obstacle exists.

The eastern boundary of the city is Nachal Kidron. On the western side the boundary is a valley which, during the Second Temple Period, was called "Toiropeon," meaning "the Cheesemakers' Valley"; we shall refer to it as the "Middle Wadi." The southern border is the point where these two valleys meet. Let us now look at more details of the characteristics of each valley.

NACHAL KIDRON

A. Course

This valley emerges from the north of the Old City, in the region of the cave of Shimon ha-Tzaddik, and continues eastward and south-eastward, via Wadi Joz. From there it heads southward, between the Mount of Olives on the East and Mount Moriah on the West, and then eastward of the City of David and westward of the village of Silwan, and south-eastward via Ein Rogel, to the Dead Sea.

B. History and Use

Throughout the city's history, Nachal Kidron has represented its eastern border. We encounter this in several places in *Tanakh*:

When Shelomo instructs Shim'i ben Gera not to leave Jerusalem, he

tells him (I *Melakhim* 2:37-38), "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and dwell there; you shall not go out from there hither and thither, for it shall be on the day you go out and cross Nachal Kidron - you shall surely know that you will surely die; your blood will be upon your head."

At the time of the rebellion of Avshalom, too, we find the following description of David leaving Jerusalem (II *Shemuel* 15:23-25): "All the land wept with a loud voice, and all the people crossed over and the King crossed over Nachal Kidron, and all the people passed over towards the way of the desert... The King said to Tzadok: Take back the Ark of God to the city..."

Throughout the different periods, we find that the burning of idols from the Temple was carried out in Nachal Kidron:

In the time of Assa (I *Melakhim* 15:17): "Also Ma'akha, his mother, he removed from her throne because she had made a monstrous image for Asheira, and Assa destroyed her image and burnt it in Nachal Kidron."

Likewise, in the time of Yoshiyahu (II *Melakhim* 23:6): "He took the Asheira from the house of God out of Jerusalem, to Nachal Kidron, and burnt it in Nachal Kidron and ground it to dust, and cast the dust upon the graves of the common people" [2].

It is possible that the burning of idolatry and its removal to the Dead Sea (Mishna, *Avoda Zara* 3,3) is carried out via Nachal Kidron [3].

Eastward of Nachal Kidron we find the slopes of the Mount of Olives, which have served - from earliest antiquity - as a central burial ground on the eastern side of the city of Jerusalem. A fine cemetery has been discovered at the site, dating back to the mid-First Temple period (9th-8th centuries B.C.E.) with more than 50 graves of important people from the city. The existence of a burial site east of the wadi also proves that this was the eastern border of the country.

Nachal Kidron lies considerably low and deep; hence, all the other valleys in the Jerusalem region flow into it: in the North, Nachal Beizita (south of today's Lions' Gate); further on - the Middle Wadi; still further along - Ben Chinnom Valley. It is these wadis that form the ancient topography of the city and define its boundaries.

An ancient road passed through the wadi, leading from Jerusalem to the desert. This arises from the route taken by David in his flight from Avshalom (II *Shemuel* 15:23-25) and the flight of Tzidkiyahu in the direction of the Arava (*Yirmiyahu* 22:7).

Nachal Kidron also served an agricultural function. There is some logic to identifying the "King's Gardens," mentioned at the end of the First Temple Period, with Nachal Kidron - from the southeast to the southern end of David's City, where Nachal Kidron meets with the Toiropeon (II *Melakhim* 25:4; *Yirmiyahu* 39:4; 52:7; *Nechemya* 3:1) [4]. The expression "the terraces of Kidron" (II *Melakhim* 23:4) refers to the fields on the slopes of Nachal Kidron. The Tosefta in *Menachot* (10,5) likewise mentions that the omer offering was brought from the "Valley of Beit Makleh of Nachal Kidron."

It appears that within the wadi we may also identify the "last house" (II *Shemuel* 15:17), as well as the "house of immunity" (II *Melakhim* 15:5; II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 26:21), where the leprous Uziyahu

dwelled until his dying day.

It seems clear that the fact that the Gichon Spring rises on the eastern side of Jerusalem, and the presence of Ein Rogel on Nachal Kidron to the south of the city, are factors of extreme importance in the very selection of the city.

C. Character

The nature of Nachal Kidron is created by its location, on the eastern border of Jerusalem - close to the Temple, but outside of the city, on the edge of the desert.

The fact that it is outside the city allows it to be used for purposes that are impossible to realize in the city itself: burial, burning of idolatry, purposes related to ritual impurity, etc. The waste from the Temple is also carried out to Nachal Kidron - "waste" here referring to sanctified articles no longer required for use. This, in a certain sense, represents the opposite of the reality of Divine service and life inside the Temple, and therefore they are removed from the Temple, but to somewhere close by.

Nachal Kidron passes along the edge of the desert and flows into the Dead Sea. On one hand, the wadi separates the city from the desert. The ridge of mountains on the east of the wadi, with the Mount of Olives at their head, actually create the division between the city - whose eastern border is Nachal Kidron - and the desert on its eastern side. On the other hand, the wadi has, to some extent, the effect of connecting the city to the desert, through the road that leads to it.

The connection that is effected via the wadi is recognizable both in the reality of the waste, idolatry, and ritual impurity from the city being carried through it to the Dead Sea, and also in the manner of repair that is envisioned for the End of Days, when through the wadi there will flow the spring that emanates from God's House, to the Dead Sea and to Nachal Shittim.

In other words, there are two aspects to the wadi:

One is a symbol of a place of impurity, profanity, and death. In this sense, the wadi represents the opposite of Jerusalem; it touches on the eastern desert - and just as it bounds the city physically, so it bounds it spiritually, too.

The other significance of the wadi is that it is a place that facilitates linking and connection between Jerusalem and the desert. This connection itself has two significances. On one hand, the desert is a place to which evil and impure things are taken in order to be destroyed (idolatry, waste, and - *le-havdil* - the goat that bears the sins of the nation on Yom Kippur). On the other hand, the desert is a place that purifies, by virtue of the Temple and Jerusalem, through the water that flows in Nachal Kidron, irrigating along the way, the fields and gardens in the wadi and causing the desert to bloom.

THE MIDDLE WADI

(During the Second Temple Era - the "Toiropoon") [5]

A. Course

The wadi starts to the north of Damascus Gate. It divides the Old City along Rechov ha-Gai, continuing south-east in the direction of the Western Wall plaza, bisecting the south-western corner of the Herodian Temple Mount, and continuing via the spot where the Givati parking ground is located today. To the west of the City of David it descends on the east side of the Mount Zion slopes, and flows into Nachal Kidron to the south of David's City.

B. Identity

It is difficult to find the name of any wadi in *Tanakh* that may be identified with the Middle Wadi. In scholarly research it is identified with ha-Gai (II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 26:9; *Nechemya* 2:13; 3:13), but we find it difficult to accept this view. Our contention is that there is only one river referred to as "Gai" (valley) in Jerusalem, and this is "Gai Ben-Hinnom." Clear proof of this is to be found in the words of *Yirmiyahu* (2:23), "How can you say, 'I have not been defiled, I have not followed Ba'alim?' Behold your path in the valley (*gai*); know what you have done, you are a fickle young camel turning in your tracks."

Prof. Garsiel [6] proposes that this wadi be identified with the Charutz Valley, mentioned in *Yoel* 14:4. In this prophecy, speaking of God judging the nations, we find a description of how the nations gather in the valleys adjacent to the house of God. It is reasonable to assume that the reference here is to Nachal Kidron in the East - which is the Valley of Yehoshafat, and to the "Middle Wadi" in the west - the Charutz Valley. The prophecy describes how God sits in Zion, on the Temple Mount, and judges the nations that are gathered in the valleys below.

It is possible that Daniel, too, hints at this valley in his description of the future rebuilding of Jerusalem: "... it shall be build again, with its squares and moat ("*charutz*")..." (*Daniel* 9:23).

The first significance of the Valley of Charutz is that it originally served as a ditch (moat) around the City of David. Such a ditch may also be called a "*charutz*." Some opinions maintain that it is called "*charutz*" in the sense of "gold" (see *Mishlei* 3:14), due to its geographical proximity to the Temple and its vessels, which are made of gold. In relation to the prophecy of *Yoel*, it is clear that the term "*charutz*" is to be interpreted in the sense of "ruling judgment" ("*charitzat mishpat*" - see I *Melakhim* 20:40). Josephus interprets the name of the valley in the sense of "*charitzei chalav*" - cheeses (I *Shemuel* 17:18) - in commemoration of the cheese makers, and he translates it as "*Toiropeon*" - the "Valley of the Cheesemakers."

C. Relationship Between the Wadi and the City

Today, it is difficult to recognize the "Middle Valley" as a wadi at all, because over the generations it has been filled with great quantities of dirt and sand, to a height that is some 15m above its original level; this has blurred its definition as a wadi.

The Middle Valley was the western boundary of Jerusalem so long as the city was on the eastern hill. With the expansion of the city towards the western hill, the wadi in fact came to divide ancient Jerusalem into two separate hills - the western hill (the Jewish and Armenian quarters and Mount Zion), and the eastern hill (Mount Moriah, the Milo, and the City of David).

At the end of the Second Temple period there was a bridge that connected the upper city directly with the Temple Mount (Wilson's Arch). We have no knowledge of any special passages between the western and eastern hills during the First Temple period. It is even possible that some of the sand filling the wadi was intentionally brought there in order to ease the passage the two parts of the city. Likewise, we have no knowledge of whether, after the expansion of the city, the original western wall of David's City continued to exist or whether it was destroyed.

With the expansion of the city westward, a wall was built in two places that cut through the wadi and joined the two parts of the city. These are located in the north of the city, in the portion that is joined to the wall of Mount Moriah on the west side, as well as in the southern part of the city, in the part that joins the south-eastern part of the western hill with the south of the City of David.

D. Important Sites Along the Course of the Wadi

Several archaeological discoveries have been made on the slopes of this wadi. Let us review the finds from north to south:

1. At the beginning of the wadi's course, to the north of the Damascus Gate, some very ornate burial caves were found, dating to the end of the First Temple period (in and around the St. Etienne monastery).

2. An aqueduct that gathers the rainwater at the uppermost trough of the wadi, from Damascus Gate and southward in the direction of Citreotean Pools (from the Second Temple Period), and south-eastward towards the Temple on Mount Moriah. The aqueduct is bisected by the Herodian, western supporting wall of the Temple Mount.

3. It may possibly be identified with the "aqueduct of the upper pool" mentioned in the days of Achaz and Chizkiyahu (*Yishayahu* 7:3; *II Melakhim* 18:18; *Yishayahu* 36:2) [7].

4. Some identify the location of the "*makhtesh*" area, from the days of Yoshiyahu (*Tzefanya* 1:11) with the south-western slopes of the wadi. The association of this area with this part of the wadi is based principally on the assumption that the name "*makhtesh*" means that the place lies relatively low - a description that fits the proposed site.

5. At the southern end of the wadi, close to where it meets Nachal Kidron, there are two pools of water:

- Yechezkiyahu's pool, at the end of Yechezkiyahu's tunnel. It was built the end of the Eighth Century B.C.E., as part of Yechezkiyahu's preparations for the siege of Sancheriv. This is the pool mentioned in *II Melakhim* 20:20. As far as we are able to ascertain, this pool is the one referred to as the "lower pool" (*Yishayahu* 22:9).

- A pool further to the south, at the trough of the wadi itself, closed on the east side by a huge dam (the dam belongs to the Second Temple period, but was clearly built on the foundations of an earlier one). Until the period of Yechezkiyahu, the pool lay outside of the city. This is one of the earliest known pools in Jerusalem; it may have been established in the days of Shelomo. It is reasonable to assume that this is the "old pool" for whose water a "pond between the two walls" was

created (*Yishayahu* 22:11).

E. Character

Since this wadi cannot be identified in *Tanakh*, we can draw conclusions as to its character only on the basis of archaeological findings.

It is important to emphasize that the nature of the place changed with the expansion of the city. At first, this wadi represented the western border of the city, outside of the walls. As the city expanded westward, the place became more central, and came between the two hills that were the two parts of the city. Prof. Avigad proposes that the verse in *Tehillim* 122:13 - "The rebuilt Jerusalem is like a city that has been joined together" - must be understood against the backdrop of the westward expansion, with the inclusion of the western hill within the fortified boundaries of the city [8].

THE VALLEY OF BEN CHINOM [9]

A. Course

The wadi starts in the region of the high, western portion of Rechavya (around the Wolfson Towers), and continues eastward via Independence Park and Mamilla. From there it leads on to the foot of Jaffa Gate, southward via the Artists' Courtyard (*Chutzot ha-Yotzer*) and the Sultan's Pool, to the Cinematheque area, and from there eastward to Nachal Kidron.

B. Characteristics and history

The Ben-Hinnom valley serves as a boundary between the inheritances of the tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin (*Yehoshua* 15:7-8, 18:15-16).

As Jerusalem expanded during the course of the First Temple period (as explained above), the Ben-Hinnom valley became the southern and western boundary of Jerusalem (the presence of numerous burial caves, along with the remains of a wall on the southern side of Mount Zion, confirm that the wadi lay outside of the city).

Another significant characteristic of this wadi is that it, too, served as a burial ground at the end of the First Temple period (7th-8th centuries B.C.E.), like the other wadis surrounding the city.

Towards the end of the First Temple period, in the days of Achaz, Menasheh and Yehoyakim, the valley served as a place where the Jerusalemites would burn their children in fire, as service to Molekh (II *Melakhim* 23:10; *Yirmiyahu* 7:31-32; 19:1-15; 32:35; II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 28:3; 33:6).

Yirmiyahu (19:2) describes how he is commanded to buy a potter's earthen bottle and to shatter it in the sight of the people in the Ben-Hinnom valley, located at the "entry of the gate of Charsit." It is quite reasonable to assume that in the Ben-Hinnom valley there were potters' homes, located outside the city in accordance with the Sages' ruling that "Pottery is not made there [in Jerusalem]" (*Bava Kama* 82b) because of the pollution.

C. Character

At the end of the First Temple period, the valley lay outside of the city, on its southern and western boundary. This location facilitated the use of its slopes for purposes that were impossible to carry out within the city. Pottery making, burial, and service of Molekh co-existed here, together establishing the character of the place as connecting the impurity of death with idolatry.

The choice of this valley as a central location for Molekh worship left a deep and lasting impression on the place [10]. This place, more than any other, represents the abysmal spiritual state of Israel, influenced by the surrounding cultures, to the extent that in the days of Achaz, Menasheh, and Yehoyakim, they even burned their own children with fire. This behavior may have arisen from the perception that in a period of such great political danger, it was necessary to beg for divine mercy by sacrificing children - as practiced among the pagans.

This disgraceful act included a combination of all three prohibitions concerning which the Torah instructs a person to give up his life rather than transgress them: idolatry, murder, and sexual immorality. The aspect of sexual immorality is associated with Molekh worship according to the explanation of Abarbanel: one who offers his children to Molekh desecrates the foundation of sanctity that underlies marital relations, for he has brought children into the world for no purpose, and hence is considered as having spilled his seed.

It was the reenactment of Menashe's actions by Yehoyakim in this sphere, too, that led directly to the destruction of the Temple and of the city. The symbolic act of the prophet Yirmiyahu, in going out to the Ben-Hinnom Valley via the Gate of Charsit, to break an earthen bottle before the eyes of the people gathered there, demonstrated that this was how God was going to break the nation and the city, such that they would never be healed. In other words, the idolatry in this place was the direct cause of the destruction. The sacrifice of children to Molekh in Ben-Hinnom Valley could not be repaired in any way; there was no repentance that could turn away the punishment that the people had brought upon themselves by this act.

The prophet declares that the fate of the valley will be that the inhabitants of the city fall there by the hand of their enemies, and that their carcasses would be food for the birds of the sky and the animals of the earth (*Yirmiyahu* 19:7). In other words, it was here that the most bitter prophecy of rebuke mentioned in the Torah (*Devarim* 28:26 and elsewhere) was realized.

Rav Tykachinsky [11] explains the great severity of the punishment involved in this type of death. Regular burial has an aspect that is reminiscent of a sort of "sowing" - the chemical components of the body combine with the earth and give life to it and to themselves. The destruction of the body by fire, on the other hand, precludes this aspect of continuity. Therefore, when the prophet Yirmiyahu announces that this valley will contain the carcasses of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, strewn there as food for the birds and the animals, he is speaking of a punishment that is measure for measure. Just as the people did not allow the continuity of their existence by killing their children and burning them with fire, so they themselves would not be buried, and would not have any continuity.

The prophecy describes Yirmiyahu's sharp change of focus from the

Ben-Hinnom Valley to the House of God (*Yirmiyahu* 19:14). The House of God is described by *Chazal* as the site of the Garden of Eden, while the valley of Ben-Hinnom - the place of impurity where Molekh worship was performed - corresponds to Gehennom (Hell). The transition from the valley to the mountain is, symbolically, the ascent from Gehennom to the Garden of Eden. As punishment for the sins that were perpetrated in Gehennom, the Temple - the place of the Garden of Eden - was destroyed [12]. Thus, Jerusalem is located in between the Garden of Eden and Gehennom; its heart is the Temple - the site of the Garden of Eden, and its outer extremity is the entrance to Gehennom - the Valley of Ben-Hinnom [13].

In addition to these three main wadis, which form the contours and borders of ancient Jerusalem, mention should also be made of two smaller wadis:

Nachal Bizita - flows into Kidron north-east of Mount Moriah (it starts outside of the Flower Gate).

Nachal Arev (or Nachal Tzolev) - passes through David Street (from Jaffa Gate), and then through The Street of the Chain until it joins with the Middle Wadi in the region of today's Chain Gate. The importance of this valley lies in the fact that with the expansion of the city westward, it became the northern boundary of the western hill.

The three valleys that we have discussed - Kidron in the East, the Middle Wadi (perhaps Charutz valley) in the center, and Ben-Hinnom Valley in the West and the South - actually define the structure of two hills:

- a. the eastern hill, between Nachal Kidron and the Middle Wadi - with the City of David in the South and Mount Moriah in the North;
- b. the western hill, between the Middle Wadi and the Valley of Ben-Hinnom. It was in the direction of this hill that Jerusalem was enlarged during the course of the First Temple period (today this area is occupied by the Jewish Quarter, the Armenian Quarter, and Mount Zion, with the northern boundary of the hill at Nachal Arev, in the Region of David Street and The Street of the Chain, in the Arab Market).

Summary

To summarize this *shiur*: we have attempted to analyze the course of the valleys that delimit the ancient city of Jerusalem, and to indicate their characteristics and their inherent character.

In the next *shiur* we will address various factors characterizing the location of the city, the reasons for its choice and the stages of its development, paying attention to the spiritual significance of its expansion.

Notes:

[1] It should be noted that this subject is broad in scope; we shall devote three *shiurim* to it and include just the essentials, although there is certainly room to elaborate further. (Concerning each valley we could study its path, its name, its identity, important sites along its course, its development, etc.).

[2] This represents biblical proof of the presence of graves in Nachal Kidron. Apparently, the concept of the graves of the common people means simple graves that are not hewn into family burial caves, but rather dug in the ground on the slopes of the wadi.

[3] It is interesting that the prophecies of the time to come describe a flow of water from the Temple to the desert (Yoel 4:18; Yechezkel 47:1-12; Zekharya 14:4-11). It is reasonable to assume that the water flows out via Nachal Kidron, thereby repairing the previous situation whereby the remnants of idolatry were carried via this wadi to the Dead Sea.

[4] It is interesting that an ancient canal was discovered on the eastern slope of David's City, with windows carved along its length facing eastwards. It is possible that one of the functions of this canal was to irrigate agricultural plots along the way.

[5] The expression Middle Wadi defines the location: the wadi is in the middle of and divides the ancient city into two hills, an eastern and a western. We make use of its Greek name here even though it belongs to a much later period, because - as far as we are able to ascertain - this wadi has no clear name in *Tanakh*, other than in the vision of the End of Days.

[6] Prof. Garsiel, "The Biblical Source of the Valley of Toiropeon in Jerusalem, Mentioned by Josephus," *Beit Mikra* year 40, 5755, pp. 127-134.

[7] There are differing opinions as to the dating of the aqueduct and its identity; we shall not elaborate here.

[8] We humbly maintain that this verse refers to the connection between the city and the House of God, rather than between the eastern and western hills.

[9] The source of the name of this wadi is not clear; it may have been named after the son of a Canaanite named "Hinnom," but there is no way of ascertaining this. *Chazal* explain the name as echoing the murmuring (*nehima*) of the young children sacrificed to Molekh in the valley of Ben-Hinnom (*Yalkut Shimoni Yirmiyahu* 7, 477): "... For the voice of the infant would murmur (*nohem*) because of the fire. Another explanation: that the spectators would murmur, 'May it be delightful to you, may it be sweet to you, may it be fragrant to you.' Therefore it was called Ben-Hinnom."

[10] This subject deserves a *shiur* in its own right; we shall not elaborate here. We hinted, in the *shiur* on the Akeida, at the contrast between the Akeida and the worship of Molekh, despite their outward similarity.

[11] Rav Tykachinsky, *Gesher Ha-chaim* vol. II, p. 117 onward.

[12] Various rabbinical sources identify the location of Gehennom in Jerusalem. Thus, the *Gemara* in *Eruvin* 19a (and in *Sukka* 32b): "Rabbi Yirmiya ben Elazar said: There are three openings to Gehennom. One is in the desert, one in the sea, and one in Jerusalem. In the desert - as it is written, 'They and all that was theirs descended live to Sheol'; in the sea - as it is written, 'From the bowels of Sheol I cry out; You hear my voice'; in Jerusalem - as it is written, 'Says the Lord, Whose hearth is in Zion and Whose furnace is in Jerusalem.' And we learn from Devei Rabbi Yishmael: 'Whose hearth is in Zion' - this is Gehennom; 'and Whose furnace is in Jerusalem' - this is the entrance of Gehennom. Is there no other? Rabbi Merion said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, and some say Rabbi Merion from the house of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, 'There are two date palms in Ben-Hinnom valley, and smoke rises up from between them. This is what we learn from the words, 'the date palms of the mountain of steel are fit' - is this the entrance to Gehennom? Hence we are told, 'of Jerusalem.'"

Likewise, the Midrash in *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 29: "'Behold, a day is coming for God' - why do they come to Jerusalem? Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachmani said: because Gehennom is located in Jerusalem, and the Holy One sits and judges them, and declares them guilty, and sends them down to Gehennom. And from where do we learn that Gehennom is located in Jerusalem? As it is written, 'Says the Lord, Whose hearth is in Zion and Whose furnace is in Jerusalem.'"

[13] It is interesting that the names of the wadis that surround

Jerusalem on all sides reflect its darker side: "Kidron" - from the word "kederot" (?); "Ben-Hinnom Valley (*gai ben hinnom*)" - Gehennom; and "*Emek Refaim*" - the Valley of Dead Spirits. This may be meant to emphasize the sanctity and great worth of Jerusalem and the House of God in contrast to what is outside of the city.

Translated by Kaeren Fish