



Yoshiyahu: An Early Reformer

Ezer Diena, ediena@torontotorah.com

Dedicated by Edward and Lisa Jesin in commemoration of the yahrtzeit of Lisa's father,
Jocelyn Zuck, Yehoshua ben Yonatan z"l

1. Melachim II 21:19-26 Page 938-939 in the Artscroll Stone Tanach
2. Selections from Melachim II Chapters 22-23, Page 938-945 in the Artscroll Stone Tanach
3. Selections from Divrei Hayamim II Chapters 34-35, Page 2012-2019 in the Artscroll Stone Tanach
4. Yeshayah 57:1, Page 1052-1053 in the Artscroll Stone Tanach
5. Rashi to Yeshayah 57:1

הצדיק אבד. כגון יאשיהו:

“The righteous man perishes” – such as Yoshiyahu

6. Amos 8:9-10, Page 1366-1367 in the Artscroll Stone Tanach
7. Talmud Bavli, Moed Katan 25b (Davidson Edition translation)

כי נח נפשיה דר' יוחנן פתח עליה ר' יצחק בן אלעזר קשה היום לישראל כיום בא השמש בצהרים דכתיב (עמוס ח, ט) והיה ביום ההוא והבאתי השמש בצהרים ואמר ר' יוחנן זה יומו של יאשיהו

When Rabbi Yoḥanan passed away, Rabbi Yitzḥak ben Elazar opened his eulogy for him as follows: Today is as difficult for the Jewish people as the day that the sun set at noon, as it is written: “And it shall come to pass on that day, says the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day. And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day” (Amos 8:9–10). And Rabbi Yoḥanan said: This was the day on which King Josiah was killed (see II Chronicles 35:20–24). This demonstrates that the most righteous person of the generation is described as the sun.

8. Kinot Masoret Harav, Commentary on Kina 11 (page 292)

Why is it necessary to designate a special kina to commemorate the death of one individual when we are so involved in retelling the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, the loss of our independence, and the desolation of our entire country? Why was it that the ru'ah hakodesh, the divine spirit, told Jeremiah that the book of Lamentations would not be complete if it did not include a eulogy for King Josiah?

...As the Gemara states, “שקולה מיתתן של צדיקים כשריפת בית אלקינו”, the death of righteous individuals is equivalent to the burning of the House of our G-d” (Rosh HaShana 18b). When we lose a great scholar or leader, it is tantamount to losing the Beit HaMikdash.

The phrase, שקולה מיתתן של צדיקים כשריפת בית אלקינו can be interpreted in two ways. First, the loss of a great person is just as tragic as the loss of the Beit HaMikdash. Secondly, the tragedy of the loss of a great person is the cause of hurban. In fact, both explanations are correct and can be merged into one. The loss of a great person is just as tragic a disaster as the loss of the Beit HaMikdash, and it is only the prelude to hurban.

...[I]f King Josiah had not been killed, the Beit HaMikdash may well not have been destroyed. If Josiah had lived and continued to reign, Joachim would not have had a chance to engage in abominable practices and to convert Judah into a pagan country (see II Kings 23:37; II Chronicles 36:5). Josiah inspired the people to do teshuva, and if this movement or revival had continued, the Hurban would never have taken place. Thus Josiah's death was the direct cause of the Hurban.