YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #251: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (LXI) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (XXXVIII)**

In this *shiur* we will continue to examine Israel's worship of God during the time that the *Mishkan* stood in Nov.

### "I Am Come to Sacrifice to the Lord"

Following God's rejection of Shaul, God sends Shemuel to Yishay of Bet-Lechem to anoint his son David as king of Israel. Upon hearing these instructions, Shemuel asks God as follows:

How can I go? If Shaul hears it, he will kill me. (I *Shemuel* 16:2).[[1]](#footnote-1)

And God responds:

Take a heifer with you, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. (ibid.)

This implies that Shemuel's statement that he came to Bet-Lechem to sacrifice to God would have been an acceptable explanation of his arrival in that city. As is stated in the commentaries to this passage, during the period that the *Mishkan* stood in Giv'on, *bamot* were permitted and one could offer a sacrifice wherever one so desired. Indeed, it may have been Shemuel's practice to offer sacrifices in the places that he visited, as Scripture attests to the building of an altar in Rama:

And he went from year to year in circuit to Bet-El, and Gilgal, and Mitzpa, and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Rama; for there was his house, and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar to the Lord. (7:16-17)

It is possible that he built altars in other locations that he visited, even though this is not explicitly mentioned in the text.

This proposal stems only from the fact that God's suggestion to Shemuel serves as a cover story that would have been accepted by the people of Bet-Lechem. On the other hand, the fact that in actual practice the people of Bet-Lechem trembled at Shemuel's coming (16:3) can be understood in accordance with the view of the Ralbag, that they thought he was bringing a heifer whose neck is broken, which is brought when a murdered person's body is found outside a town and it is not known who caused his death, rather than a sacrifice offered to God.

Moreover, it should be noted that Shaul as well was anointed king at the time of a feast accompanying a sacrifice, as is explicitly stated: "For he came to day to the city; for the people are making a sacrifice today in the high place" (9:12).

In addition, when David escapes from Shaul as he flees from Nayot in Rama, David says to Yonatan as follows:

And David said to Yonatan, Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at the meal: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field until the third day at evening. If your father should miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Bet-Lechem his city; for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all his family. (20:5-6)

The Radak explains (ad loc.): "It was their customary practice for the members of a family to bring peace-offerings one day during the year. And so it is stated with regard to Elkana: "to offer to the Lord his yearly sacrifice" (1:21) (v. 7, s.v. *zevach ha-yamim*).[[2]](#footnote-2)

It follows from these various sources that it was customary to bring peace-offerings once a year, and to invite all one's family members to participate in the feast. This is also implied[[3]](#footnote-3) by the account recorded in the beginning of the book of *Shemuel* about how Elkana would offer a sacrifice every year when he went with his family on a pilgrimage to the *Mishkan*, which stood at that time in Shilo. It stands to reason that after Shilo was destroyed and *bamot* were once again permitted, the family heads would offer their annual sacrifices at the *bama* in their respective cities.

### "Sanctify Yourselves and Come With Me to the Lord"

And Shemuel did that which the Lord spoke, and came to Bet-Lechem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Come you in peace? And he said, In Peace: I am come to sacrifice to the Lord: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice (*zevach*). And he sanctified Yishay and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice (*zevach*). (16:4-5)

As part of the invitation that he extended to the people to come and participate in the sacrifice, Shemuel tells them to first sanctify themselves. The Torah states in the book of *Vaykra* that one must sanctify and purify himself before consuming sacrificial meat:

But the person that eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain to the Lord, having his uncleanness upon him, that soul shall be cut off from his people. (*Vayikra* 7:20)

It is important to emphasize that the term *zevach* can refer either to a sacrifice or to a feast. It may be suggested that Shemuel explicitly invited the elders of the town to the feast accompanying the sacrifice, whereas Yishai and his sons he also invited to stand together with him at the time of the sacrifice.

The Ralbag offers a different explanation of the fact that Shemuel sanctified only Yishai and his sons:

"And say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord." According to this, this means that when he comes to Bet-Lechem and it becomes clear to them that a corpse was not found there on the ground, he should say to the townspeople that he came to sacrifice to the Lord, and this is very reasonable, and for this reason you find that Shemuel sanctified from among the people of Bet-Lechem only Yishay and his sons so that his secret not be revealed.

The words, "And he sanctified Yishay and his sons," should be understood to mean that Shemuel commanded them to sanctify themselves, similar to what happened at Mount Sinai: "And the Lord said to Moshe, Go to the people, and sanctify them" (*Shemot* 19:10).[[4]](#footnote-4)

### David's Arrival in Nov the City of the Priests

After it becomes clear beyond all doubt that it is Shaul's intention to kill David, David flees and his first stop is Nov the city of the priests.

This is the first explicit mention in Scripture of the *Mishkan's* presence in Nov after the destruction of Shilo (which is not stated explicitly in the book of *Shemuel*, but only in *Tehilim* 78 and *Yirmeyahu* 7).

In our discussion of what happened in Nov, we wish do deal with three matters:

1. The showbread.

2. Golyat's sword.

3. Achimelekh's inquiry of God.

These matters do not relate directly to Israel's spiritual state and worship of God during this period, but they are connected to three questions relating to the essential nature of the *Mishkan* and the great *bama* in Nov. First, what is the possible non-sacred use of the showbread, and under what conditions is such use permitted? Second, what is the meaning of the connection between the sword of Golyat and the great *bama*; is the great *bama* the expected and appropriate place for storing that sword? And third, what are the parameters governing usage of the *Urim* and *Tumim*; for whom may they be used, for what questions, and to what extent does it depend on the king?

It is not our intention to expand on the chapter's background, on the chapter's significance in the framework of the relationship between Shaul and David, on David's conduct with respect to Achimelekh, or on his direct or indirect responsibility for the destruction of the city of Nov and the slaughter of Achimelekh and the eighty priests. These are matters for a separate *shiur*. We wish to deal with matters that will help us better understand various aspects of the worship of God at the *Mishkan*, in this case, at the great *bama* in Nov.

### The Non-Sacred Use of Showbread

David arrives in Nov hungry and without any weapons. He deceives Achimelekh and tells him that he has come on an urgent secret mission on behalf of the king, and therefore he could not stock up on food or weapons.

The verses record the conversation between David and Achimelekh as follows:

Now therefore what is under your hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever there is. And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread in my hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. And David answered the priest, and said to him, Of a truth women have been kept from us as always when I am on a journey, and the vessels of the young men are holy, (although it is a common journey,) how much more today where there will be hallowed bread in their vessel. So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the showbread, that was taken from before the Lord, to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away. (21:4-7)

A major question that arises here is how David could have eaten showbread. Surely it is explicitly stated (*Vayikra* 14:9): "And it shall be Aharon's and his sons'; and they shall eat it in the holy place: for it is most holy to him of the offerings of the Lord made by fire by a perpetual due."[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Ralbag and the Radak's father suggest that "the hallowed bread" refers to loaves that accompany a thanksgiving offering (see *Vayikra* 7:11-12). A portion of those loaves are eaten only by priests and their wives, but the rest may be eaten by non-priests as well, provided that they are ritually pure. This interpretation is difficult, because Scripture itself refers to the bread as showbread. Showbread falls into the category of holy of holies, and in general can be eaten only by pure priests in a holy place.

Achimelekh has no non-hallowed bread to offer, but only hallowed bread, and that with a condition that he stipulates with the young men. (It would seem that Achimelekh means to include David himself in his question, but does not mention him specifically as a show of respect). It is reasonable to assume that anyone arriving at the *Mishkan* or at the great *bama* would remove from himself all impurity.

The verse implies that the incident took place on Shabbat, because it is on Shabbat that the old showbread is removed, and replaced by fresh showbread. Let us examine Rashi's answer ad loc.[[6]](#footnote-6) As for the non-sacred use of the showbread, he writes: "When it is removed from the table and the bowls [of incense] are burned, they are close to being non-hallowed, as it is no longer subject to the prohibition of trespass, once it is permitted to the priests" (v. 6, s.v. *vehu derekh*).

Secondly, regarding David's eating of the holy showbread: "And even if it had been first consecrated on the table today, he would have had to remove it from there and feed it to him, as he was overcome by ravenous hunger and in danger." That is to say, according to this understanding, this was a situation of mortal danger (*piku'ach nefesh*),[[7]](#footnote-7) which sets aside all prohibitions.

And similarly the Radak (ad loc.):

Even if Achimelekh had no non-hallowed bread, was there nowhere in the city non-hallowed bread that David could borrow from one of the city's residents, so that Achimelekh had to give him hallowed bread? … Since [the city] was entirely inhabited by priests, and no Israelite dwelled among them, the entire city consisted of people who could eat *teruma*, and *teruma* for non-priests is a sin subject to the death penalty. And one whose life is in danger because of hunger may be fed food that is prohibited to him, if we have nothing permitted. And from among two prohibited foods, we feed him the one with the lighter prohibition. Therefore, Achimelekh gave him showbread removed from before God, as it is not subject to the prohibition of trespass after the bowls of incense are burned, and David certainly arrived before Achimelekh on a weekday.

### Golyat's Sword in the *Mishkan* at Nov

And David said to Achimelekh, And is there not here under your hand a spear or a sword? For I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business was urgent. And the priest said, The sword of Golyat the Pelishti, whom you did slay in the valley of Ela, behold it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the *efod*: if you will take that, take it: for there is no other save that here. And David said, There is none like that; give it to me. (21:9-10)

Following David's victory over Golyat, the verse states: "And David took the head of the Pelishti, and brought it to Jerusalem; and put his armor in his tent" (17:54).

The Radak (ad loc.) explains:

This refers to the rest of his weapons, but not his sword, for the sword he put in the Tent of Meeting in Nov, as it says below: "Wrapped in a cloth" (21:10).[[8]](#footnote-8) It was there as a reminder of this great miracle, and anybody who came to the Tent of Meeting in Nov to offer sacrifice or to pray would see it and remember the miracle and offer thanks to God, blessed be He, and direct his heart to Him, and magnify his trust in him. (s.v. *sam be-ohalo*)

As for the note, "behind [or: after] the *efod*," the Radak (21:10) offers two explanations:

The first:

It is possible to explain that it hung behind the place where the *efod* and the *choshen* rested.

The second:

After inquiring for him through the *efod*, that is, after he inquired for him about his way through the *efod* of the *choshen*, afterwards he said to him that he should take this sword. As Doeg said to him: "And he inquired of the Lord for him" (22:10). And so too Shaul said to Achimelekh: "And you have inquired of God for him" (22:13). And Achimelekh did not deny this, but rather said: "Did I then begin to inquire of God for him" (22:15). In my opinion, this explanation is right, but it is not the plain sense of the verse, based on its location…."[[9]](#footnote-9)

The presence of Golyat's sword at the great *bama* in Giv'on is based on the understanding that God is "a man of war" (*Shemot* 15:3), that is, victory in battle comes from God. Just as the ark is taken out to the battlefield when necessary, so the enemy's sword is placed to rest in the *Mishkan*, to publicize the miracle and to attribute thereby the great victory to God Himself.

### The Inquiry of God

*Targum Yonatan* understands that "behind the *efod*" means: "after inquiring through the *efod*." While it is true that the Radak understands the verse not in its plain sense, let us examine what he says regarding the conversation between Doeg the Edomite and Achimelekh before Shaul:

And he inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him food, and gave him the sword of Golyat the Pelishti…

Then Achimelekh answered… Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Be it far from me: let not the king impute anything to his servant, nor to all the house of my father; for your servant knew nothing of all this, less or more. (22:10-15)

The Radak explains:

To tell him the way he should go and he fled from before me. And according to the Midrash (*Shochar Tov* 52, 5): I made him king, as inquiry through the *Urim* and *Tumim* is made only for the king, the *av bet din* and one who is needed by the community (v. 13, s.v. *ve'sha'ol lo*).

This is the way R. Yosef Kara explains the words of Doeg:

This is what Doeg said to Shaul: Achimelekh made David king during your lifetime, for inquiry is made through the *Urim* and *Tuvim* only on behalf of the king and the community.

The Ralbag explains Achimelekh's answer to Shaul as follows:

Shaul thought that his inquiry of God was whether he would succeed in his rebellion against Shaul, defeating him in battle. And Achimelekh's answer was that far be it from him, as he knew nothing of this matter. Whatever he did, he did thinking that David was the most faithful of Shaul's servants and the most obedient to him. (v. 11, s.v. *Achimelekh ben Achituv*)

"Did I then begin to inquire of God for him?" That is to say, Did I then begin to inquire of God for him that you suspect me of this? Surely several times I inquired of God for him as your agent on the matter of Israel's wars, as he took Israel out to battle and brought them back. (v. 15)

In other words, relying on the words of Doeg the Edomite Shaul suspects that Achimelekh was helping David, making use of the *Urim* and *Tumim* in order to rebel against Shaul. Achimelekh answers that he knew nothing and suspected nothing of David, as he was one of Shaul's most loyal men. What is more, he had often in the past inquired of God for David before he went out to battle on behalf of Shaul, and for this reason Shaul should not be suspicious of Achimelekh's intentions. But it is clear from the text that Doeg related what happened in a way that would raise Shaul's suspicions.

Shaul's verdict follows from his understanding of David as having rebelled against him, the king, and of Achimelekh as having assisted him to realize his objective by inquiring of God on his behalf. According to the Halakha, inquiry by way of the *Urim* and *Tumim* can be made only on behalf of the king, the *av bet din*, and somebody who is needed by the community. Here, according to Shaul's suspicions, Achimelekh grants practical recognition to David's right to rule as king.

In this *shiur* we examined what took place at the great *bama* in Nov during the time that *bamot* were permitted. We examined the story of David's flight to Achimelekh the priest, and we related briefly to three issues: David's eating of the showbread, the significance of the presence of Golyat's sword in the *Mishkan*, and the significance of Achimelekh's inquiry of God. They point to the general spiritual atmosphere, including what was done at the great *bama* in Nov during the period when *bamot* were permitted. At the beginning of the *shiur*, we also discussed Shemuel's arrival to anoint David as king, to offer sacrifices to God, and to sanctify himself in anticipation of the sacrifices.

In the coming *shiurim* we will deal with the issue of Shaul's inquiry of the sorceress of Ein Dor. We will try to understand the nature of that service, its spiritual significance and what brought Shaul at the end of his life to turn to a sorceress, something that he himself had severely prohibited the rest of Israel from doing.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Unless noted otherwise, references to Biblical verses relate to I *Shemuel*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See also *Metzudat Ziyyon* and R. Yosef Kara, ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is also the understanding of Yehuda Kil in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary (I *Shemuel* 20:6). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In this framework we have not related to the meaning of the term "spirit of God," the plain meaning of which is "spirit of bravery," the meaning of the removal of the spirit of God from Shaul and its resting on David from the day that he was anointed king, the matter of the playing of music which allows for the removal of the evil spirit, or the symbolic and practical meaning of God being with Shaul or David.

So too we have not related to the words of *Chazal* in *Zevachim* 54a, that in Nayot in Rama Shaul and David were engaged in the beauty (*noyav*) of the world, which according to Rashi means that they were involved in searching for the site of the Temple in the Torah. (According to the plain sense of the verses, David comes to Shemuel, after he anointed him as king, so that he might advise him how to deal with Shaul.) The significance of this is that even before actually ascending the throne in practice, David dreamed of building the Temple and searched for its location together with the prophet Shemuel. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As for mention of five loaves, it might be (and this is the view of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi in *Yoma* 17b) that this is the portion of the High Priest from the twelve loaves of showbread. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Rashi's position is based on *Menachot* 95b. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See also *Yoma* 83a and *Yerushalmi*, *Yoma* 8:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Radak connects this expression "wrapped (*lota*) in a cloth" to "And he wrapped (*vayalet*) his face" (I *Melakhim* 19:13) and "the covering (*penei ha-lot*)"(*Yeshaya* 25:7). Ralbag explains: "Hidden and covered in a cloth." [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Regarding the *efod*, he raises another possiblity:

"Alternatively, this *efod* is not the *efod* of the *choshen*, but rather a linen *efod*, which was a garment worn by the priests and servants of God, as it says: 'Eighty five persons that did wear a linen *efod'* (22:18); and it is written: 'And David was girded with a linen *efod'* (II *Shemuel* 6:14). And this sword hung behind these garments. And this is correct." [↑](#footnote-ref-9)