YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

***MIKDASH***

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

**Lecture #286: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (XCVI) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXXII)**

After having seen the great wonders that were performed by the man of God at the altar at Bet-El, let us now expand upon the additional meanings of his prophecy and discuss the prophecy delivered by Achiya the Shilonite to Yerovam's wife.

As we have seen, the man of God prophesied about a king from the house of David – Yoshiyahu – who in the end was the great repair of the Davidic monarchy in Jerusalem, rather than the distorted cult that was just now instituted in Bet-El under the leadership of Yerovam. The actions of the man of God – the miraculous drying up of Yerovam's hand followed by its restoration to its original state and the rending of the altar – were symbolic acts that heralded the raising of the bones of the dead on the altar and the altar's destruction in the days of Yoshiyahu.

So too, the repeated emphasis on the prohibition of eating in the words of the man of God to the old prophet sitting in Bet-El, and the heavy punishment meted out against the man of God following his eating with the old prophet greatly reinforce the understanding that we are dealing here with an absolute prohibition to derive any benefit whatsoever from anything connected to the city of Bet-El which is treated here as an *ir ha-nidachat* with respect to deriving benefit from it.

Indeed, after the man of God is buried in Bet-El, the old prophet says:

For the saying which he cried by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bet-El, and against all the houses of the *bamot* which are in the cities of Shomeron, shall surely come to pass. (I *Melakhim* 13:32)

The old prophet notes that he believes that the prophecy will be fulfilled. He mentions not only the altar in Bet-El, but also the houses of the *bamot* in the cities of Shomeron.

The chapter then concludes:

After this thing Yerovam returned not from his evil way, but made again from among all the people priests of the *bamot*; whosoever would, he consecrated him, that he might be one of the priests of the *bamot*. And by this thing there was sin to the house of Yerovam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth. (I *Melakhim* 13:33-34)

The Radak (ad loc.) explains:

Even though he saw the wonder of the altar that was rent and the miracle of his hand drying up and then being restored with the prayer of the man of God, and even though he saw the death of the prophet when he defied God and heard about the miracle of the lion standing by the carcass of the prophet, not eating the carcass and not tearing apart the ass – even so he did not return from his evil way. (I *Melakhim* 13:33)

All of the miracles fail to help. Yerovam stands steadfast in his refusal to mend his ways and discontinue the service that he had introduced with all its novelties. Even the prophecy about the altar that was destroyed and even the main prophecy concerning the future fate of the altar were of no avail. Later he will continue in his refusal even after the harsh prophecy to be delivered by Achiya the Shilonite to Yerovam's wife, in which he will be informed of the cutting off of Yerovam's house. Even that prophecy does not bring Yerovam to repent and mend his ways.

### The Prophecy of Achiya the Shilonite

Let us now look in chapter 14 at the prophecy of Achiya the Shilonite to Yerovam's wife.

Following the illness of Aviya the son of Yerovam, Yerovam sends his wife to Achiya the Shilonite, who "could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age" (I *Melakhim* 14:4). It would appear that Scripture is not describing only a situation in which Achiya's advanced age has affected his vision, for his inner vision enables him to identify Yerovam's wife without her having identified herself (even though God had already told Achiya that Yerovam's wife would be coming to ask something of him). It is possible to understand based on the Midrash in *Bereishit Rabba* 65, 10, that the reason for Achiya's blindness was his having produced an evil disciple – Yerovam. In the end, Achiya "erred and signed" (in the words of the Gemara, *Sanhedrin* 102a), and he was forced to tear the kingdom away from the king that he had brought to the throne. This had far-reaching implications for the kingdom of Israel from the very beginning, and therefore it is an essential part of the message of this prophecy, as will be explained below.

After the man of God informed the altar about how it would be defiled and destroyed in the days of Yoshiyahu, more than 300 years later, Achiya the Shilonite prophesies about the cutting off of the house of Yerovam and about the death of the child. This prophecy is fulfilled already in the days of Ba'asha:

And it came to pass that, as soon as he was king, he smote all the house of Yerovam; he left not to Yerovam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him; according to the saying of the Lord, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Achiya the Shilonite; for the sins of Yerovam which he sinned, and wherewith he made Israel to sin; because of his provocation wherewith he provoked the Lord, the God of Israel. (I *Melakhim* 15:29-30)

As we have noted regarding Yoshiyahu, here too Ba'asha does not do what he does in order to fulfill the prophecy of Akhiya the Shilonite, but rather to establish his kingdom. But the action that he takes directly serves the fulfillment of Achiya's prophecy.

Let us now see the prophecy of Achiya the Shilonite:

Now the Lord had said to Ahiya, Behold, the wife of Yerovam comes to inquire of you concerning her son; for he is sick; thus and thus shall you say to her; for it will be, when she comes in, that she will feign herself to be another woman. And it was so, when Achiya heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, you wife of Yerovam; why do you feign yourself to be another? for I am sent to you with heavy tidings. Go, tell Yerovam, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted you from among the people, and made you prince over My people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to you; and yet you have not been as My servant David, who kept My commandments, and who followed Me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in My eyes; but have done evil above all that were before you, and have gone and made you other gods, and molten images, to provoke Me, and have cast Me behind your back.

Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Yerovam, and will cut off from Yerovam every man-child, and him that is shut up and him that is left at large in Israel, and will utterly sweep away the house of Yerovam, as a man sweeps away dung, till it be all gone.  Him that dies of Yerovam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dies in the field shall the fowls of the air eat; for the Lord has spoken it. Arise you therefore, get you to your house; and when your feet enter into the city, the child shall die. And all Israel shall make lamentation for him, and bury him; for he only of Yerovam shall come to the grave; because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord, the God of Israel, in the house of Yerovam. Moreover the Lord will raise Him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Yerovam that day. But what is it even then? (I *Melakhim* 14:5-14)

The prophet Achiya the Shilonite says to Yerovam's wife from the very beginning, "for I am sent to you with heavy tidings." That is to say, the prophet intends to say harsh things. Let us examine the content of his words.

**Yerovam’s Sins**

The prophet asks Yerovam's wife to deliver the prophecy to him, while spelling out for her Yerovam's sins. Yerovam did more evil than all those who came before him, that is to say, his sins are even worse than the sins committed in the period of the Judges, and certainly worse than those committed in the days of David and Shelomo. His sins include fashioning other gods and molten images.

When Scripture speaks of the two golden calves in I *Melakhim* 12, it does not go into detail about them. Two golden calves were erected, one in Dan and another in Bet-El, and they were considered a sin. Here Scripture relates to Yerovam's actions with great severity. The wording used here explicitly refers to what is stated in the Ten Commandments: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (*Shemot* 20:2), and what is stated at the end of *Parashat Yitro*: "You shall not make with Me gods of silver, or gods of gold, you shall not make to you" (*Shemot* 20:19).

The prophet refers to Yerovam's conduct with the term "to provoke Me." This relates to the words of Moshe in the book of *Devarim* concerning the golden calf fashioned in the wilderness:

And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I did neither eat bread nor drink water; because of all your sin which you sinned, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him. (*Devarim* 9:18)

And similarly:

When you shall beget children, and children's children, and you shall have been long in the land, and shall deal corruptly, and make a graven image, even the form of anything, and shall do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, to provoke Him. (*Devarim* 4:25)

The reference is to the sins of Yerovam who "sinned and caused Israel to sin." When Scripture describes the kingdom of Ba'asha who eradicated the house of Yerovam, it explicitly states:

For the sins of Yerovam which he sinned, and wherewith he made Israel to sin; because of his provocation wherewith he provoked the Lord, the God of Israel. (I *Melakhim* 15:30)

Yerovam is the first person about whom it is stated that he sinned not only for himself, but he caused Israel to sin. So too we find in tractate *Avot*: "Yerovam, the son of Nevat, sinned and caused others to sin, therefore the sin of the many was considered dependent on him" (*Avot* 5:18).

### The Punishment for the House of Yerovam and the Kingdom of Israel

The prophet lists several punishments:

* "I will cut off from Yerovam every man-child" – i.e., absolute destruction.
* "And I will utterly sweep away the house of Yerovam, as a man sweeps away dung" – removing Yerovam as one would remove dung.
* "Him that dies of Yerovam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dies in the field shall the fowls of the air eat." This is sort of a fulfillment of the curse in the rebuke in *Parashat Ki-Tavo*: "And your carcasses shall be food to all fowls of the air" (*Devarim* 28:26).
* And finally, only Aviya, the son of Yerovam, will be privileged to be brought to burial.

In addition to the exceedingly harsh punishments to be meted out against Yerovam and his entire house, we have here a severe account of what will happen to the kingdom of Israel:

For the Lord will smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; and He will root up Israel out of this good land, which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River; because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord. And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Yerovam, which he has sinned, and wherewith he has made Israel to sin.

The notification of exile is given already now in the wake of the sins of Yerovam the son of Nevat, even though this will take place only hundreds of years later. Since Yerovam sinned and caused Israel to sin, the entire nation, the entire kingdom of Israel, will go into exile in the wake of these sins.

In the end, everything that was said by Achiya the Shilonite to Yerovam's wife was fulfilled to precision with the destruction of the kingdom of Israel and its exile to Ashur.

The verses in II *Melakhim* 17:7-23 spell out all the sins that eventually led to the exile. In the end it says:

For He rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Yerovam the son of Nevat king; and Yerovam drew Israel away from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin. And the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Yerovam which he did; they departed not from them;  until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He spoke by the hand of all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away out of their own land to Ashur, to this day. (II *Melakhim* 17:21-23)

In the end, the people of Israel did not protest against their kings, but rather they followed in their ways, not veering from them. Therefore sin was attributed to the entire nation. The simple understanding is that the greatest sin was that of the golden calves in Bet-El and Dan.

The prophecy of Achiya the Shilonite is not the only prophecy that portends this difficult situation. Other prophets after him relate to this. The prophet Hoshea:

Efrayim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke; among the tribes of Israel do I make known that which shall surely be. (*Hoshea* 5:9)

The prophet Amos:

For in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him, I will also punish the altars of Bet-El, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground. And I will smite the winter-house with the summer-house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, says the Lord. (*Hoshea* 3:14-15)

And the high places of Yitzchak shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Yerovam with the sword… For thus Amos says, Yerovam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land. (*Amos* 7:9-11)

And the prophet Mikha:

Therefore I will make Shomeron a heap in the field, a place for the planting of vineyards; and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will uncover the foundations thereof. And all her graven images shall be beaten to pieces, and all her hires shall be burned with fire, and all her idols will I lay desolate; for of the hire of a harlot has she gathered them, and to the hire of a harlot shall they return. (*Mikha* 1:6-7)

We see that different prophets in different periods and in different styles, each prophesied the destruction of the kingdom of Israel and its primary ritual site in Bet-El, with all its sins and its exile.

These prophecies relate both to Yerovam the son of Nevat and to the people as a whole who ultimately adopted his path. Yerovam did not repent and mend his ways after Achiya the Shilonite's prophecy to his wife, nor did the people at large over all those years stop participating in the cult introduced by Yerovam. This is despite the fact that at various times we find God fearing people in the kingdom of Israel, like the hundreds of prophets in the days of Eliyahu and Elisha.

With this we conclude our study of Yerovam as he is described in the book of *Melakhim.* In the next *shiur* we will examine the references to Yerovam in the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*, and we will begin to consider the worship of God in the kingdom of Yehuda from the time of Rechavam to the days of Tzidkiyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)