YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #291: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CI) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXXVII)**

**The War with Achav**

In this *shiur* we will discuss the reign of Yehoshafat as it is described in the book of *Melakhim* and in the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*.

Yehoshafat appears for the first time in the book of *Melakhim* in the account of the war waged by Achav the king of Israel against Aram. Achav asks Yehoshafat to join him in the war, and Yehoshafat seeks the word of God from a prophet of God, rather than from the four hundred prophets who were encouraging Achav to go out in battle. And, indeed, the prophet Mikhayahu the son of Yimla predicts a great defeat, as he describes it in his prophetic vision: "And he said, Therefore hear you the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left" (I *Melakhim* 22:19).

After Tzidkiyahu the son of Kena'ana, one of the leaders of the prophets prophesying for Achav, strikes Mikhayahu on the cheek, Mikhayahu is handed over to Amon, the governor of the city, and to Yoash, who are instructed to put him in prison and feed him with scant bread and with scant water until Achav returns in peace from battle. Mikhayahu on his part answers that if Achav returns in peace from battle, that will be a sign that God did not speak to him. Yehoshafat then goes out to war with Achav to Ramot Gil'ad; and when the captains of the chariots of Aram identify Yehoshafat and wish to kill him, Yehoshafat cries out and is saved. In *Divrei ha-Yamim*, it is added: "And the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 18:31).

The Tosefta in *Sota* expounds:

When Yehoshafat the king of Yehuda went with Achav the king of Israel to Ramot Gil'ad, it was decreed that Yehoshafat should be killed. As it is stated: "And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Yehoshafat" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 18:31). He deserved to be killed at that time, but in reward for his cry, Scripture suspended his sentence for seven years, and they were counted towards his son. (Tosefta, *Sota* 12:2)

After the death of Achav, the text in *Melakhim* describes Yehoshafat's reign. Yehoshafat follows in the path of Asa his father and does what is right in the eyes of God, but he does not remove the *bamot*. Scripture praises him for eradicating from the land the rest of the sodomites that remained from the days of Asa.

The book of *Divrei ha-Yamim* describes Yehoshafat's reign in greater detail, speaking greatly in his praise:

And the Lord was with Yehoshafat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not the Baalim. But sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 17:3-4)

 *Chazal* in *Seder Olam Rabba*, 17, expound that Yehoshafat married the daughter of Omri, the sister of Achav. It is further described (II *Melakhim* 8) that Yehoram the son of Yehoshafat married the daughter of Achav. In this reality of marital connections with the house of Achav, seeking the God of his father and observing His commandments, and not seeking the Baalim and not following in the ways of the kings of Israel, Omri and Achav, is a matter deserving our great respect. There is, however, a contradiction between the book of *Melakhim* and the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim* with regard to the removal of the *bamot.* Regarding this point it may be suggested that the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim* understood that the eradication of idolatry should have included the removal of the *bamot.*

**Seeking God**

Scripture describes how Yehoshafat sends officers to teach in Yehuda. When he returns in peace from war to Jerusalem, Yehu the son of Chanani the seer reveals himself to him:

And Yehu the son of Chanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Yehoshafat, Should you help the wicked, and love them that hate the Lord? for this thing wrath is upon you from before the Lord. Nevertheless there are good things found in you, in that you have put away the Asherot out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 19:2-3)

From the prophetic point of view, Yehoshafat's military cooperation with Achav stirred up God's wrath against him, but two things saved him – the removal of the Asherot and his having set his heart to seek God. One of the steps that he took in this direction was appointing judges in all the cities of Yehuda.

Now therefore let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it; for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of bribes. Moreover in Jerusalem did Yehoshafat set of the Levites and the priests, and of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel, for the judgment of the Lord, and for controversies. And they returned to Jerusalem. And he charged them, saying, Thus shall you do in the fear of the Lord, faithfully, and with a whole heart. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 19:7-9)

Yehoshafat's name is intimately connected to the whole matter of justice. The king translates the Torah's command regarding the legal system into action both in Jerusalem and in the cities of Yehuda, and in this way seeks to increase truth and justice in the entire land. This is how *Midrash Tanchuma* puts it:

And even Yehoshafat, once he became established in his kingdom, did not occupy himself in matters of his kingdom, or wealth or honor, or with anything else but justice. As it is stated: "And Yehoshafat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 17:1), What is meant by "strengthened himself"? He strengthened himself and appointed judges. And it says: "And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 17:6). Was he filled with arrogance that it should say: "And his heart was lifted up"? Rather, he appointed judges over them, who know how to walk in the ways of the Lord, as it is stated: "That they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice" (*Bereishit* 18:19), and he said to the judges: See that justice is the Lord's. (*Midrash Tanchuma*, *Shofetim*, no. 2)

Scripture later describes the campaign against the people of Moav and the people of Amon who came to wage war against Yehoshafat. Yehoshafat's initial response is to turn to God: "And Yehoshafat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord; and he proclaimed a feast throughout all of Yehuda" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 20:3). Prayer and fasting are an expression of the fact that the king understands that the war is being waged by God and that the army of the kingdom of Yehuda is part of the army of God. This appeal leads to the following gathering:

And Yehuda gathered themselves together, to seek help of the Lord; even out of all the cities of Yehuda they came to seek the Lord. And Yehoshafat stood in the congregation of Yehuda and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court; and he said, O Lord, the God of our fathers, are not You alone God in heaven? and are not You ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? and in Your hand is power and might, so that none is able to withstand You. Did not You, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the seed of Avraham Your friend forever? And they dwelt therein, and have built You a sanctuary therein for Your name, saying, If evil come upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house, and before You, for Your name is in this house, and cry to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save. And now, behold, the children of Amon and Moav and Mount Seir, whom You would not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned aside from them, and destroyed them not; behold, they render unto us [evil], to come to cast us out of Your possession, which You have given us to inherit. O our God, will You not execute judgment on them? for we have no might against this great multitude that comes against us; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon You. And all Yehuda stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. **(**II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 20:4-13)

This is a very special assembly to which people come from all the cities of Yehuda to seek God in the house of God, and the king himself stands in the congregation of Yehuda and Jerusalem and turns to pray to God. This prayer also brings us back to king Shelomo's prayer:

If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, if there be blasting or mildew, locust or caterpillar; if their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there be… If Your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way You shall send them, and they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for Your name; then hear You from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 6:28-35)

The gathering in the Temple as a fulfillment of the purpose towards which Shelomo dedicated the Temple is a clear expression of belief in and dependence upon God. We do not find such a gathering of the king and the people of the cities of Yehuda and Jerusalem in the house of God, not from the time of the dedication of the Temple until now, and not afterwards. This is to the exception of the days of Chizkiyahu and Yoshiyahu, when a great celebration of Pesach was conducted in the aftermath of the eradication of idolatry from the land, and together with the representatives of the kingdom of Israel.

Yehoshafat gives clear expression to his absolute dependence on God. The entire kingdom, including the women and children, stand in the new courtyard of the house of God, hoping for God's salvation from the peoples of Amon, Moav and Mount Se'ir. With the conclusion of Yehoshafat's prayer, a prophetic spirit rests upon Yecheziel the son of Zecharyahu from the sons of Asaf, and he says as follows:

Hearken you, all Yehuda, and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you king Yehoshafat, thus says the Lord to you: Fear not you, neither be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go you down against them; behold, they come up by the ascent of Tzitz; and you shall find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Yeruel. You shall not need to fight in this battle; set yourselves, stand you still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Yehuda and Jerusalem; fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them; for the Lord is with you. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 20:15-17)

The prophecy that is delivered to them reinforces their faith that the battle is God's and that the role of the Israelite army is to stand still and witness God's salvation. Both the king and all of Yehuda and the inhabitants of Jerusalem prostrate themselves before God as a sign of their absolute acceptance of His rule and providence. Following the prayer and the prophetic vision, Yehoshafat goes out to battle, and this is a wonderful example of going to war in accordance with God's word and believing in His salvation. The Levites praise the Lord with a great voice and when they actually go out to the wilderness of Teko'a, the king stands and strengthens the people to believe in God. In consultation with the people, the king appoints people to sing to God, and they proclaim: "Give thanks to the Lord, for His mercy endures forever." Gratitude is given to God even before the arrival of His salvation.

After emerging victorious and gathering the spoil, the people assemble on the fourth day in the valley of Beracha, and there they bless God. The king and the people return to Jerusalem in joy: "And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets to the house of the Lord" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 20:28). It is more than symbolic that they go out to war from the house of God in prayer and supplication, and that they return to the house of God in joy. There is no clearer expression of the people's recognition that war is God's.

**Criticism and Praise**

Scripture summarizes the reign of Yehoshafat, and here it emphasizes: "And he walked in the way of Asa his father, and turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord. But the *bamot* were not taken away; neither as yet had the people set their hearts to the God of their fathers" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 20:32-33). That is to say, also according to *Divrei ha-Yamim*, the *bamot* dedicated to the service of the God of Israel continued, and the people did not yet reach the level of the service of God conducted entirely in the house of God.

Scripture then describes the connection between Yehoshafat the king of Yehuda and Achazya the king of Israel. From here we learn that Yehoshafat's connections to the house of Omri to whom he was related by marriage continue. In the wake of this, the prophet Eliezer the son of Dodavahu from Maresha says to him: "Because you have joined yourself with Achazyahu, the Lord has made a breach in your works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 20:37). What we have here is criticism of Yehoshafat for these connections to the house of Omri, and their influence, and their meaning.

In the end Yehoshafat is undoubtedly a king who is supported by God. He follows in the early footsteps of David, seeks God, and keeps His commandments. One of the most interesting expressions of this, beyond the teaching of Torah by the officers of Israel, the Levites and the priests, is the orderly organization of the judicial system in Jerusalem and in all the cities of Yehuda, headed by the Great Court in Jerusalem. All this while demanding that this be done in the fear of God, faithfully, and with a whole heart.

In addition, exemplary leadership is shown in regard to the war with Amon, Moav and Mount Se'ir, in which the king leads the people with prayer and prostration in the house of God, and based on the determination that he battle is God's, and at the end of which the king and the people of Yehuda and Jerusalem return to the house of God to thank Him for the victory.

The two areas in which the selection of the king finds expression – justice and war – are conducted by Yehoshafat in the clearest manner in accordance with the word of God. For this reason, he merits God's miraculous salvation.

He seeks God throughout the entire course of his reign, he remains connected to the prophets (four prophets prophesied in his day and brought him the word of God – Mikhayahu the son of Yimla, Yehu the son of Chanani the seer, Yecheziel the son of Zekharya and Eliezer the son of Dodavahu), and he accepts their rebuke and obeys their instruction.

As we have noted, there is great criticism of his entire connection to the house of Achav. Ostensibly, this is due to his desire to strengthen the peace between the two kingdoms, as the verse states: "And Yehoshafat made peace with the king of Israel" (I *Melakhim* 22:45).

Indeed, Yehoshafat collaborates with Achav in his war against Aram and with Yehoram the son of Achav in his war against Moav, and he is interested in cooperating with Achazya the son of Achav with ships to Tarshish and the renewal of international trade. In practice, however, this plan was not implemented and the prophet rebukes Yehoshafat about it.

In the end, his marrying the daughter of Achav will leave its mark on the kingdom of Yehuda in a most negative way in the days of Yehoshafat's son, Yehoram. The Tosefta in *Sota* continues:

When Asa king of Yehuda took the daughter of Omri the king of Israel as a wife for his son Yehoshafat, it was decreed against the kingdom of the house of David that it be destroyed with the house of Achav, as it is stated: "Now the downfall of Achazyahu was of God" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 22:7). And the two fell [= Achazyahu the son of Yehoram the king of Yehuda and Yoram the son of Achav the king of Israel] on the same day, one with the other. (Tosefta, *Sota* 12:3)

**Summary**

Despite the criticism voiced against Yehoshafat, most of his actions are worthy and lofty, as is emphasized by *Chazal* and in their wake also the Rambam. The Rambam in *Hilkhot Melakhim*, when he describes Yehoshafat's relationship to Torah scholars, says as follows:

Yehoshafat the king of Yehuda would follow this practice. Whenever even a student of a Torah scholar would come to him, he would rise from his throne and kiss him and address him as 'My teacher and master.' When does the above apply? When the king is alone in his palace. Then, in private, before his servants, he should behave in this fashion. (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 2:6)

In certain respects, it is also possible that the ideal figure of the messianic king as described by the Rambam in *Hilkhot Melakhim* is taken, inter alia, from the figure of Yehoshafat:

If a king will arise from the house of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its *mitzvot* as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law as David, his ancestor, will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of God, we may, with assurance, consider him the Messiah. (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 11:4)

Yehoshafat continues his father's reign and intensifies his good deeds in all his endeavors, and there is a close connection between their respective actions in their eradication of idolatry, in their profound connection to Torah and *mitzvot*, in their connection to the prophets (with certain difference between them), and in their wars.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In the next *shiur* we will discuss the reign of Yehoram.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Yehuda Kil expands on this point in his summary of the reign of Yehoshafat in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to II *Divrei ha-Yamim.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)