YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #292: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXXVIII)**

In this shiur we will discuss the service of God in the days of Yehoram the son of Yehoshafat and in the days of Achazyahu the son of Yehoram (mainly through the actions of Yehu).

### Yehoram the son of Yehoshafat

The book of *Melakhim* begins its account of the reign of Yehoram as follows:

And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Achav; for he had the daughter of Achav to wife; and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. (II *Melakhim* 8:18)

Without a doubt, Yehoram's marriage to Achav's daughter had an exceedingly bad influence on his relationship with God and on his ruling his kingdom not in accordance with the will of God. For this reason, the next verse states: "But the Lord would not destroy Yehuda, for David His servant's sake, as He promised him to give him a lamp and to his children's always" (II *Melakhim* 8:19). That is to say, it would indeed have been appropriate to destroy the kingdom of Yehuda because of Yehoram's actions, but the destruction of the kingdom was averted because of the covenant that God had made with King David. Later, Scripture gives a concise account of the war waged against Edom, after Edom revolted from under the hand of Yehuda. It then summarizes the period of Yehoram.

The reign of Yehoram is recounted in greater detail in *Divrei ha-Yamim*. Scripture explains that Yehoshafat selected Yehoram his son to rule after him because he was his firstborn. *Seder Olam Rabba*, in chapter 17, notes that Yehoshafat crowned him as king already during his lifetime, when he returned from battle, after having smitten Amon, Moav and Mount Seir. At the beginning of his reign, Yehoram killed all of his brothers and many of the princes by the sword, which indicates that there were many who opposed his appointment.

Here too an account is given of Edom's revolt, but here we also find an explanation: "Because he had forsaken the Lord, the God of his fathers" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 21:10). Yehoram's abandonment of God led directly to Edom's revolt and its consequences. Scripture immediately relates: "Moreover, he made high places in the mountains of Yehuda, and made the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go astray, and drew Yehuda away" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 21:11). The context in which this appears suggests that we are dealing here with *bamot* for idolatry, and not *bamot* dedicated to the service of the God of Israel.

Over and beyond the sins of the king himself, Yehoram causes his kingdom to sin. The prophet Eliyahu sends him a letter, saying:

Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father, Because you have not walked in the ways of Yehoshafat your father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Yehuda; but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Yehuda and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go astray, like as the house of Achav made [Israel] to go astray; and also have slain your brothers of your father's house, who were better than yourself; behold, the Lord will smite with a great plague your people, and your children, and your wives, and all your substance. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 21:12-14)

### Eliyahu’s very sending of the letter

It should first be noted that this was a novel step, seeing that until now Eliyahu the prophet prophesied only for the kingdom of Israel, and not for the kingdom of Yehuda. Second, *Seder Olam Rabba*, chapter 17) establishes that: "'A letter came to him from Eliyahu' – it had already been seven years since Eliyahu's passing." It is reasonable to assume that the letter was brought to Yehoram by one of the "sons of the prophets."

The Radak writes as follows:

This was after [Eliyahu] ascended [to heaven]. The idea is that Eliyahu revealed himself in a prophetic spirit to one of the prophets, and put in his mouth the words of this letter and told him to write them in a letter and bring the letter to Yehoram and tell him that Eliyahu was sending him this letter, so that Yehoram think that this letter came to him from heaven and submit his heart and know that he had done great evil. (Radak, II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 21:12)

What was the prophet Eliyahu's particular interest in sending a letter to King Yehoram?

The Malbim explains that since Eliyahu had prophesied the destruction of the house of Achav, and Yehoram was Achav's son-in-law, "his prophesy applied to him that he should be included in the destruction of the house of Achav, just as Achazya who was Achav's grandson died with Yehoram" (Malbim, II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 21:12)

What we have here is the completion of Eliyahu's struggle against Achav and the house of Achav, who introduced idolatry in a clear and royal manner into the kingdom of Israel. This was such a fundamental matter that Eliyahu could make a prophetic appearance through one of the other prophets. According to this understanding, Yehoram the son of Yehoshafat was seen as a direct part of the legacy of the house of Achav, both in the familial sense and also in the spiritual-national sense.

As for the contents of the letter: Yehoram's reign is presented here in contrast to the reigns of Yehoshafat and Asa. Without a doubt King Yehoshafat was one of the most righteous kings among all the kings of the house of David, both in his walking in the ways of his ancestor David, and in his listening to the prophets who prophesied, and in his faith and dedication to God, so that even the enemies of the kingdom of Yehuda knew that: "And a terror from the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Yehusa" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 17:10; and also II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 20:29)

Yehoram's kingdom is completely different from the kingdom of Yehoshafat, and contrary to it. Yehoram causes the people of the kingdom of Yehuda to stray and he worships idols. In contrast to his ancestor David, he follows in the paths of Achav and the kings of Israel. He does not listen to the prophets. God stirs up against Yehoram the spirit of the Pelishtim, and of the Arabians that were beside the Ethopians. They go up against Yehuda, apparently breach the wall of Jerusalem, carry away all the substance that was found in the house of the kings, capture his sons and his wives, and apparently (based on II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 22:1) kill all of the eldest sons, so that there remained only Yehoachaz his youngest son.

The most important factor in this change was probably Yehoram's marriage to Achav's daughter. Once again we see the direct responsibility of the king for everything taking place in his kingdom, both for the sins and for the punishment.

Beyond all the national and familial implications, the prophet also delivers an exceedingly harsh prophecy concerning King Yehoram himself:

And you shall have great sickness by disease of your bowels, until your bowels fall out by reason of the sickness, day by day… And it came to pass, that in process of time, at the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness, and he died of sore diseases. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 21:15-19)

In the end, Yehoram suffers a terrible, incurable disease. Scripture notes that he died joyless, and that a burning was not made for him as had been made for his forefathers.

This is probably a reference to a spice fire in which the king's bed and personal belongings would be burned. That which was done on behalf of Asa[[1]](#footnote-1) was not done for Yehoram.

Yehoram was buried in the City of David and not in the sepulchers of the kings. The sepulchers of the kings of the house of David was the royal burial place of the kings of the house of David in the City of David. All of the kings of the house of David from David to Chizkiyahu were buried there. Yehoram was the first king who, according to *Divrei ha-Yamim* (as opposed to *Melakhim*), was buried in the City of David, but not in the sepulchers of the kings.

Yehoram's being buried not in the sepulchers of the kings expresses the fact that he was not deemed worthy of being buried in the royal sepulchers of the kings of the house of David. From this we learn that apparently next to the royal burial ground in the southern part of the City of David there was another area for burial, which was utilized for the first time for the burial of Yehoram, and then after him for several kings of the house of David who were not buried in the in royal sepulchers (including Uziyahu and Achaz).

**Achazyahu the son of Yehoram**

Scripture notes in the book of *Melakhim* that Achazyahu reigned as king for one year, and that his mother's name was Atalyahu the daughter of Omri king of Israel: "And he walked in the way of the house of Achav, and did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Achav; for he was the son-in-law of the house of Achav" (II *Melakhim* 8:27). Achazyahu goes off to battle together with Yoram the son of Achav. Yehu, who will eventually reign as king over Israel, wants to destroy the entire house of Achav. In addition, he kills forty-two of the brothers of Achazyahu king of Yehuda (this includes also people of Yehuda and the sons of the brothers of Achazyahu). In addition to the killing of Yehoram the king of Israel, Izevel, the seventy sons of Achav and all of Achav's remaining family in Shomeron, the members of the house of David who were connected by marriage to the house of Achav were also killed, including Achazyahu king of Yehuda and Achazyahu's brothers.

In *Divrei ha-Yamim*, matters are more explicit. In referring to the deeds of Achazyahu, Scripture states:

He also walked in the ways of the house of Achav; for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Achav; for they were his counsellors after the death of his father, to his destruction. He walked also after their counsel, and went with Yehoram the son of Achav king of Israel to war against Chaza'el king of Aram at Ramot-Gil'ad; and the Arameans wounded Yoram. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 22:3-5)

The influence of the house of Achav on Achazyahu is critical. His mother Atalyahu stands at the root of his evil deeds. The people of the house of Achav are his counsellors. It turns out that he follows their advice both in relation to the internal spiritual reality of the kingdom of Yehuda and also in his foreign policy. Regarding his going out to war with Yehoram the son of Achav against Chaza'el king of Aram in Ramot-Gil'ad, and in the manner of the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim* with regard to other figures and different events, Scripture notes that beyond the personal and national plane on which human actions are carried out, Divine providence directs everything that happens:

Now the downfall of Achazyahu was of God, in that he went to Yoram; for when he was come, he went out with Yehoram against Yehu the son of Nimshi, whom the Lord had anointed to cut off the house of Achav. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 22:7)

And there Yehu finds the princes of Yehuda and the sons of the brothers of Achazyahu, and he kills them. All this is part of the fulfillment of God's providence.

The fact that Yehu the son of Nimshi's eradication of the house of Achav includes also the king of Yehuda finds expression in the killing of both Yehoram the son of Yehoshafat and Achazyahu the son of Yehoram, and it indicates the severity with which God judges their kingdom. With their adoption of the sins of the house of Achav, Yehoram and Achazyahu sinned themselves and caused the people in their kingdom to sin. This sin was the sin of idol worship, not only worship at the *bamot* that was directed at other gods, but also abandonment of the God of Israel while the Temple was standing.

In the next shiur we will deal with the reign of Yoash the son of Achazyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. "And in the thirty and ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet; his disease was exceedingly great… And they buried him in his own sepulchers, which he had hewn out for himself in the City of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odors and diverse kinds [of spices] prepared by the perfumers' art; and they made a very great burning for him" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 16:12-14). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)