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ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #293: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CIII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXXIX)**

In this *shiur* we will discuss Atalya and the crowning of Yoash as king.

**The Bed Chamber**

With the death of Achazyahu, Atalya kills all of the king's sons and rules for six years. Yehosheva, Achazyahu's sister, hides his son Yoash. During these years, Yoash and his nursemaid hide out in the "bed-chamber." What is this bed-chamber? *Midrash Shochar Tov* on *Tehilim* brings an Amoraic disagreement concerning this issue:

Another explanation: "For You do light my lamp" (*Tehilim* 18:29) – with Yoash; "The Lord my God does light my darkness" (ibid.) – with Yehoyada… R. Eliezer says: He was kept hidden in the upper story of the Temple. R. Shemuel bar Nachmani says: He was kept hidden in the compartments of the Temple.

R. Simon says: The words of R. Eliezer [that he was hidden] in the upper story of the Temple appear correct in the summer, and the words of R. Shemuel [appear correct] in the winter. And who watched over him? Yehoyada the priest and Yehosheva his wife. This is what it says: "For You do light my lamp." (*Midrash Shochar Tov* on *Tehilim* 18:23)

R. Zev Yaavetz explains all of *Tehilim* 27 as referring to Yoash.[[1]](#footnote-1) Rashi explains (ad loc.):

In the upper story of the Holy of Holies, as it is stated: "And he was with her hid in the house of the Lord six years" (II *Melakhim* 11:3). (Rashi, *Tehilim* 27:5)

David said about this: "For He conceals me in His pavilion… He hides me in the covert of His Tent" (*Tehilim* 27:5), and it is called a bed-chamber because of: "That lies between my breasts" (*Shir ha-Shirim* 1:13). (Rashi, II *Melakhim* 11:2)

The Radak explains there:

A room that was in the courtyard of the Levites or of the priests. And in the words of *Chazal*: "In the bed-chamber – in the compartments [of the Temple]. R. Yishmael says: In the upper story in the summer, where the priests and the Levites would lie. There is a Midrash that the Temple is called a bed-chamber, because of "That lies between my breasts" (*Shir ha-Shirim* 1:13). And furthermore it is written: "Also our couch is leafy" (*Shir ha-Shirim* 1:16). (Radak, II *Melakhim* 11:2)

According to the plain meaning of the verses, it is stated explicitly: "And he was with her hid in the house of the Lord six years" (II *Melakhim* 11:3), from which it follows that the bed-chamber was in the Temple compound. Of course, according to the view that Yoash was kept hidden in the Holy of Holies, the selection of the place was connected to the desire to hide him in a place where they would not search for him and find him.

Yehuda Kil in his commentary to II *Melakhim[[2]](#footnote-2)* suggests that we are dealing with a room in the royal palace that was used for the storage of beds and linen, or with a room that served as a children's room or as Yehosheva's bed-chamber.

According to another possibility we are dealing with one of the chambers in the Temple courtyard where the priests and Levites would sleep, similar to what is related about Shemuel: "And Shemuel was laid down to sleep in the Temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was" (I *Shemuel* 3:3). In any event, from among all the explanations, we find two main approaches:

Either we are dealing with an ordinary room in the royal palace, or we are dealing with a certain room in the Temple compound.

**The Crowning of Yoash as King**

All of the later events take place in the house of the Lord: The fetching of the captains over hundreds, of the Carites, and of the guard; the making of a covenant with them, and their taking an oath; all of the security arrangements take place at the gates leading to the Temple. All this was to guard Yoash and surround him from all sides when he went in and when he went out – from the southern tip of the Temple to its northern end. In this way, the Temple, the courtyard, the altar and the king were surrounded on all sides.

Afterwards the king's son was taken out from hiding place and anointed king. *Divrei ha-Yamim* describes the event in greater detail. It is clear that everything is taking place inside the Temple:

And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And he said to them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the Lord has spoken concerning the sons of David…

And all the people shall be in the courts of the house of the Lord. But let none come into the house of the Lord, save the priests, and they that minister of the Levites; they shall come in, for they are holy; but all the people shall keep the charge of the Lord. And the Levites shall compass the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand; and whoever comes into the house, let him be slain; and be you with the king when he comes in, and when he goes out. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 2:3-7)

Thus Yoash was crowned as king in the house of the Lord, and as R. Zev Yaavetz describes it:

The holy house, the center of God's Torah, served also as a place of refuge for the last survivor from the house of David, and he remained among his people to their glory and eternal pride.

Immediately following the crowning of Yoash as king, Scripture describes the response of Atalya who comes to the people in the house of the Lord.

**Atalya’s Reign and Her Removal From Office**

Atalya is the only woman who reigned as queen of Israel during the first Temple period. She stole the kingship from the house of David. Her killing of the entire royal family (with the exception of Yoash) was a continuation of the murderous behavior of her husband Yehoram, who killed his own brother in order to establish his rule. In addition to her desire to establish her own reign, it is very possible that she killed the entire royal family because she feared for her life, and for the annexation of the kingdom of Yehuda by Yehu king of Israel. After Yehu killed all of her family in Shomeron, Atalya represented what was left of the house of Ach'av, and so it is possible that she greatly feared Yehu and the kingdom of Israel.

When Atalya arrives in the house of the Lord, she sees the king standing on a platform after having been crowned as king, as the princes and all the people were rejoicing and blasting trumpets. She rends her garments, which symbolizes the rending of her kingdom, as she understands that the people have rebelled against her. She is removed from the Temple to the royal palace and there she is executed.[[3]](#footnote-3)

A covenant is then made between God, the king, and the people "that they should be the Lord's people; between the king also and the people" (II *Melakhim* 11:17). The need for a covenant at the time of Yoash's coronation can easily be understood against the background of the state of the kingdom of the house of David at that time. With the renewal of the kingdom, in addition to the crowning of the king, a renewal of the three-part covenant between the people, the king, and God, was required.

In addition to the slaughter of the royal family, during the reigns of her husband Yehoram and of her son Achazyahu, Atalya inflicted great damage to the Temple itself:

For the sons of Atalya, that wicked woman,[[4]](#footnote-4) had broken up the house of God; and also all the hallowed things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon the Ba'alim. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 24:7)

This teaches us that Atalya apparently enjoyed great governmental power already during the reigns of her husband Yehoram and her son Achazyahu. She was apparently the strongest governmental force during the years of their reigns. This great political power had a decisive impact upon the character of the house of God.

Scripture describes here how the sons of Atalya broke up the house of God, and how they bestowed all that had been consecrated to the house of the Lord upon the Ba'alim. The moment they bestowed that which had been consecrated to the house of God to the Ba'alim, all the precious metals became forbidden for pleasure, and they could no longer be used in the house of God. All this is the background for the renewal of the house of God, and for Yoash's need to renew all the money found there.

**The House of the Ba’al**

Corresponding to what was happening in the house of God, Atalya established for the first time a temple for the Ba'al:

And all the people of the land went to the house of Ba'al, and broke it down; his altars and his images broke they in pieces thoroughly, and slew Mattan the priest of Ba'al before the altars. (II *Melakhim* 11:18)

The law regarding a structure that had had been used for the worship of idols is that it must be destroyed:

But you shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and you shall cut down their Asherim. (*Shemot* 34:13)[[5]](#footnote-5)

There is also a prohibition to derive pleasure from an idol or its accessories:

The graven images of their gods shall you burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it to you, lest you be snared therein; for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. (*Devarim* 7:25)

But the people of Jerusalem did not content themselves with this. They kill Mattan the priest of Ba'al, who apparently was the chief priest serving in the house of the Ba'al. Killing him before the altars was meant to defile them as is stated explicitly in *Parashat Bechukotai*: "And I will cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols" (*Vayikra* 26:40).

Where was the house of the Ba'al? Prof. Yigal Yadin identified the house of the Ba'al with a site in Ramat Rachel, based on the fact that there is at that site an early archeological layer that corresponds to the period of Atalyahu. In addition, this is a royal communal structure found at some distance from the City of David. All this was done out of a desire that the house of the Ba'al should be far from the city. On the other hand, Yochanan Aharoni, who excavated the site, argues that this structure was the winter palace of the king Yehoyakim.

In any event, for the first time in Jerusalem of the first Temple period, a temple for the worship of the Ba'al stands in Jerusalem, corresponding to the Temple dedicated to the God of Israel.

It is clear that the reign of Atalyahu had decisive influence on the character of the Temple, on the one hand, and on the connection to idolatry, on the other. What we have here is not merely the building of *bamot* that were dedicated to the service of the God of Israel, even though these too were forbidden, but idol worship, the worship of another God, parallel to the Temple in Jerusalem.

**Summary**

The verses in *Divrei ha-Yamim* describe the renewal of the service in the Temple in the wake of Atalyahu's actions:

And Yehoyada appointed the offices of the house of the Lord under the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had distributed in the house of the Lord, to offer the burnt-offerings of the Lord, as it is written in the Law of Moshe, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the direction of David. And he set the porters at the gates of the house of the Lord, that none that was unclean in anything should enter in. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:18-19)

After the total disruption of the Temple service in the days of Yehoram and Achazyahu and in the days of Atalyahu, that service returned to its proper order.

The Radak in his commentary to *Melakhim* explains Yehoash's renewal of the money in the Temple in the course of remarks that summarize the period of Atalyahu:

"All the money of the hallowed things" – It says in *Divrei ha-Yamim*: "And it came to pass after this, that Yoash was minded to restore the house of the Lord" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 24:4), because it needed strengthening, for there it states the reason: "For the sons of Atalyahu, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 24:7). Therefore it needed strengthening, for had it not been for this the building would still be standing. For from the day that the Temple was built until Yoash repaired it, only a hundred and fifty five years had passed, and a strong building like that would have stood much longer than that, had it not been broken by Atalyahu and her sons, those whom she had from a different husband. Since they broke it, Yoash set upon his heart to repair it. And he had to gather hallowed things from Israel, that they should hallow shekels or free-will consecrated items. As for the hallowed things that were in the house of God, it says in *Divrei ha-Yamim* that Atalyahu and her sons used most of them for the Ba'alim, and whatever was left Yehoash did not want to use them for the construction, so that God's treasury not be empty. So he thought to use the hallowed things outside. And he said to the priests that they should gather all the money brought to the house of the Lord. (Radak, II *Melakhim* 12:5)

In the next *shiur* we will deal with the reign of Yehoash.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Yaavetz, *Toledot Yisrael*, vol. 2, pp. 103-104. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Da'at Mikra* to II *Melakhim*, Mossad HaRav Kook. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Once again the verses (II *Melakhim* 11:13-19) prove the exceedingly close physical and essential connection between the house of the king and the house of the Lord. The two houses are exceedingly close to each other, and even connected, the house of the king being located below the house of the Lord. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This is the only instance of the word in Scripture, which emphasizes her wickedness all the more. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. And similarly *Devarim* 7:5; *Devarim* 12:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)