YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #299: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CIX) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXXXV)**

In this *shiur* we will examine the reign of Uziyahu. The account of his reign in the book of *Melakhim* is very short, even though he ruled for fifty-two years. Scripture states: "And he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father Amatzya had done" (II *Melakhim* 15:3). This raises a certain difficulty, for regarding Amatzya himself, it says: "And he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not like David his father; he did according to all that Yoash his father had done" (II *Melakhim* 14:3).

In *Divrei ha-Yamim* a clear distinction is made between the earlier period of his life and the later period, and so it is impossible to know whether the verse in *Melakhim* that assesses his reign refers to the earlier period in his life or to his entire reign. The verse adds: "And the Lord smote the king, so that he was a leper until the day of his death, and dwelt in a house set apart" (II *Melakhim* 15:5). This verse does not relate to the reason that he was afflicted with leprosy, nor does it indicate when during his reign this occurred.

The author of *Seder Olam Rabba* (chapter 10) refers to the years of Uziyahu's leprosy as "a leprous kingdom" and he maintains that he was a leper for twenty-five years. During this period Uziyahu lived in a house set apart, outside the city.

The account of Uziyahu's reign in the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim* is much more detailed. Scripture first notes: "And he set himself to seek God in the days of Zekharya, who had understanding in the vision of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God made Him to prosper" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:5). Uziyahu seeks God, and it is reasonable to assume that he did this both by turning to a prophet and by making inquiries by way of the *Urim* and *Tumim*. The simple understanding of this verse is that Uziyahu sought out God during the lifetime of Zekharyahu, but not afterwards.

### Who is ZekharyaHU?

An interesting question may be raised: Who is this Zekharya? Is he Azaryahu the chief priest who is mentioned later in the chapter (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 15:20) and who was in charge of the administration of the house of God? Or – and so said R. Zev Yaavetz – perhaps we are dealing with Zekharyahu the son of Berakhyahu who is mentioned in *Yeshayahu* 8:2.

According to Rashi the reference is to Zekharyahu the son of Yehoyada who had been killed during the days of King Yehoash. Yehuda Kil (in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to *Divrei ha-Yamim* directs us to the words of the *Meshekha Chokhma* in his commentary to the verse: "And he shall stand before Elazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord; at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation" (*Bemidbar* 27:21). The *Meshekh Chokhma* accepts Rashi's view who explains the verses as referring to the period of Amatzyahu.

### Uziyahu's leprosy

In the continuation, Scripture describes Uziyahu's conquests and testifies that God gave him the power and the strength to overcome the Pelishtim and the Arabians who dwelt in Gur-Ba'al and the Meunim. Uziyahu was involved in building projects in Jerusalem, in the wilderness, in the lowlands, in the tablelands and in the Carmel.

Scripture describes at length and in detail the king's armies and their weaponry. He fortifies the country, builds it up, and encourages widespread settlement. He enlarges his army to over three hundred thousand men and turns the kingdom of Yehuda into one of the strongest powers in the region. He extends the borders of the kingdom southeast and southwest and the neighboring peoples pay him tribute. In addition to the strengthening of his army:

And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and upon the corners, wherewith to shoot arrows and great stones. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up so that he did corruptly… (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:15-16)

Scripture continues with a detailed description of how Uziyahu's "uplifted heart" found expression:

… and he trespassed (*vayim'al*) against the Lord his God; for he went into the Temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azaryahu the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men; and they withstood Uziyahu the king, and said to him, It pertains not to you, Uziyahu, to burn incense to the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aharon that are consecrated it pertains to burn incense; go out of the sanctuary; for you have trespassed; neither shall it be for your honor from the Lord God. Then Uziyahu was wroth; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense; and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy broke forth in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the altar of incense. And Azaryahu the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out quickly from there; he too made haste to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. And Uziyahu the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a house set apart, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord… (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:16-21)

The term *me'ila* is used in the Torah in reference to consecrated objects:

If anyone commit a trespass (*tim'ol ma'al*), and sin through error, in the holy things of the Lord, then he shall bring his forfeit to the Lord, a ram without blemish out of the flock, according to your valuation in silver by shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt-offering. (*Vayikra* 5:15)

And similarly in reference to an adulterous wife:

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, If any man's wife go aside, and act unfaithfully against him (*u-ma'ala vo ma'al*). (*Bemidbar* 5:12)

And similarly in the passage of rebuke at the end of the book of *Vayikra*:

And they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, in their treachery (*be-ma'alam*) which they committed (*ma'alu*)against Me, and also that they have walked contrary to Me. (*Vayikra* 26:40)

It is very interesting to see the connection between the various appearances of this term. In the world of consecrated objects, the simple meaning of the term is desecration of the holy. This also appears to be the meaning of the term in the context of marriage; when a woman is suspected of having a relationship with another man, her relationship with her husband is desecrated. And so too when the people of Israel worship idols or profane God's name with their actions, the holy covenant between God and Israel becomes unraveled, as it were.

In our context, when King Uziyahu tries to burn incense as if he were a priest, there is sort of a breach of a covenant. The Torah's fundamental separation between the priesthood and the monarchy is trampled. Beyond the blurring of the two realms, the king's attempt to burn the incense, a service that distinguishes the priesthood, is an attempt on the part of the monarchy to take control of the priesthood. The deeper meaning of this step is trespass against God, His Torah and His attributes.

*Chazal* connect this sin to the land:

"For he loved the land" (II Divrei ha-Yamim 26:10). For he was the king, but he gave himself over to the land, and did not engage in Torah. One day [Uziyahu] came to the Beit Midrash. He asked them: What are you discussing? They said: The law that "The stranger that approaches [the sanctuary] will suffer death" (*Bemidbar* 1:51). Uziyahu said to them: God is a king, and I am a king. It is appropriate that the king serve the king by offering incense before Him. Immediately: "He went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azaryahu the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:16-17). All of them were young priests. "And they said to him, It pertains not to you, Uziyahu, to burn incense to the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aharon that are consecrated it pertains to burn incense; go out of the sanctuary; for you have trespassed" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:18). It was about this that God's wrath was set against him. Immediately: "Then Uziyahu was wroth; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense; and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy broke forth in his forehead" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:19). At that time the sanctuary broke through this way and that twelve mil by twelve mil: "And they thrust him out quickly from there; he himself made haste also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:20). What caused this? That he neglected Torah study and gave himself over to the land. (*Tanchuma* [Warsaw], *Noach* 13)

The main point emphasized in this Midrash explains well the order of the verses in *Divrei ha-Yamim*. Uziyahu's heart is lifted up only after Scripture describes his strength and dominion, the strengthening of his army, and his contributions in the areas of settlement, construction and fortification.

The deeper meaning of this arrogance is a sort of comparison between the kingdom of Uziyahu – a human kingdom – and the kingdom of God. This arrogance allows Uziyahu to understand that his being the king makes it possible for him to ignore the Torah's command: "The stranger that approaches the sanctuary will suffer death." That is to say, this prohibition does not apply to him or obligate him, owing to his kingship. That connection, as it were, between human kingdom and God's kingdom allows him to serve the King and burn incense before Him on the incense altar.

Uziyahu's leprosy breaks out specifically on his forehead. This gives expression, on the one hand, to greatness and majesty, as we find with the High Priest and his *tzitz*:

And you shall put it on a thread of blue, and it shall be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And it shall be upon Aharon's forehead, and Aharon shall bear the iniquity committed in the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow, even in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord. (*Shemot* 28:37-38)

So too the king wears his crown on his forehead. On the other hand, the prophet Yeshayahu refers to arrogance as a "brass brow" (*Yeshaya* 48:4).

It is the priest who confines the leper, "for according to their word shall every controversy and every stroke be" (*Devarim* 21:5). And so too here. In the wake of his action, Scripture states: "And Uziyahu the king was a leper to the day of his death, and dwelt in a house set apart, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:21).

"For he was cut off from the house of the Lord" is an interesting expression. Uziyahu, being ritually impure owing to his *tzara'at*, is removed from all the camps of Israel – the camp of the *Shekhina*, the camp of the Levites, and the camp of the Israelites – and he finds himself outside the walls of Jerusalem. Uziyahu's impurity severs him from the house of God.

As with the two kings that preceded him, Yehoash and Amatza, a distinction is made between Uziyahu's earlier days and his later days. As for his burial site, Uziyahu is buried in the field of burial that belongs to the kings. Owing to his *tzara'at* and his actions, he is not buried in the royal tombs, but in the field of burial adjacent to the burial tombs of the kings of the house of David.

In the next *shiur* we will consider the spiritual significance of the reign of Uziyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)