YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #300: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CX) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXXXVI)**

In the previous *shiur* we reviewed the main points of Uziyahu's reign in a general and summarizing manner. In this *shiur* we wish to consider the meaning of his reign. In order to understand the processes that ultimately led to the great earthquake and to the arrival of the king of Ashur, let us examine the prophecies in *Yeshayahu* 2-6, which, in our opinion, relate to the days of Uziyahu.

According to *Chazal's* calculations, for all effective purposes Uziyahu ruled as king during the last fifteen years of the reign of his father, Amatzya. In practice, he greatly strengthened the kingdom in all senses. The army grew greatly in size; the agricultural sector developed; the fortifications and security in Jerusalem and the entire kingdom grew; the economy soared; construction both in and outside of Jerusalem reached enormous dimensions, including the construction of a road to Etzion Gever in the south.

The neighboring kingdom of Israel also prospered under the leadership of Yerovam the son of Yehoash, who ruled for over forty years. The coordination between Uziyahu king of Yehuda and Yerovam king of Israel allowed Yehuda to conquer Edom in the south and the land of the Pelishtim in the west, while the kingdom of Israel conquered Aram up to Damascus and part of the lands of Amon and Moav.

This power brought Uziyahu to arrogance and a sense of omnipotence. In many senses, the kingdom of Uziyahu tried to resemble the kingdom of Shelomo. This is the reality in the kingdom of Yehuda when the prophet Yeshayahu begins to prophesy. In accordance with our argument above, we wish to examine Yeshayahu's attitude toward the reign of Uziyahu in chapters 2 through 6.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The beginning of chapter 2 is a vision concerning Yehuda and Jerusalem at the end of days:

The word that Yeshayahu the son of Amotz saw concerning Yehuda and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the end of days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say: Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Yaakov; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (*Yeshayahu* 2:1-4)

In this vision all the nations of the world come to Jerusalem to the house of God. They recognize God's absolute lordship and kingdom, as well as His Torah and His commandments. There is a renewed giving of the Torah to the entire world on Mount Moriya in the house of God which is different from the original giving of the Torah to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. In the wake of this giving of the Torah God judges the nations and a state of universal peace is reached among all the nations of the world who for the first time recognize God's absolute kingship.

It is reasonable to assume that this new world vision, which clearly sets as a most lofty value the exclusive kingdom of God over all the nations of the world, signifies a certain despair from earthly kingdoms, kingdoms of flesh and blood. The encounter with the great might of the kingdom of Uziyahu with all of its grand projects, and along with that all the arrogance and haughtiness that accompanied it, brings the prophet to this vision in which all the nations of the world recognize their absolute subordination to the kingdom of God, while arriving at the house of God in Jerusalem and receiving the Torah and the *mitzvot*, "for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

We should address the meaning of the words: "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills." It is possible to understand, and so understood the Radak, ad loc., that all the nations will relate with great honor to the mountain of the house of the Lord. The Radak says as follows:

At the top of the mountains, that it will be established and elevated above all the other mountains and hills, for all the nations will honor it and elevate it, and they will come to worship in it for the sake of God. The mountains are mentioned because the nations used to worship their gods on the high mountains. (Radak, *Yeshayahu* 2:2)

On the simple level, we are dealing here with a respectful attitude toward the place and with going toward it. It is possible, however, to explain this differently, namely that the mountain of the God will become elevated, in contrast to the topographical reality today in which the mountain of the house of God is located in a place that is not high, where east to it stands the Mount of Olives, which is taller than it, and where west to it is the western hill (which includes today's Jewish quarter) which is taller than it, and where even north of it is stands the hill on which later stood Fort Antonia, which is also taller than the Temple Mount. Therefore, in the end of days a great change will take place and the mountain of the house of God will be topographically at the top of the mountains. It is possible that this vision will involve an earthquake and significant tectonic and topographical changes in Jerusalem and on the Temple Mount.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The current reality is that the nations of the world worship their gods on the high mountains, while Mount Moriya and the house of God are not in the highest place, both on account of God's humility,[[3]](#footnote-3) and because God reveals Himself in all places, in high places and in low places.[[4]](#footnote-4) Therefore, in the present reality, even a supreme spiritual state can be revealed in this world in a low place. In Yeshayahu's vision, the world changes and in the wake of an earthquake there will be a full correlation between the supreme Divine revelation to all the nations of the world who accept the kingdom of God, and the fact that the mountain of the house of God will be at the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills.

Certainly the prophet sees a huge gap between the military, political, and economic power of Uziyahu's kingdom and its internal content of arrogance, haughtiness, and a sense of omnipotence. Therefore, this prophecy comes to express the empowerment of God's absolute kingdom over the entire world, without any practical expression of the kingdom of flesh and blood. It is possible that this is the significance of this prophecy, which expresses in the wake of the reign of Uziyahu the profound disappointment and prophetic despair of human kingdom.

One of the expressions of this insight later in chapter 2 is the reference to the manner in which Uziyahu behaves in his kingdom in flagrant violation of the prohibitions imposed upon the king against increasing his silver, gold and horses, and while engaged in idol worship:

O house of Yaakov, come you, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. For You have forsaken Your people the house of Yaakov; for they are replenished from the east, and with soothsayers like the Pelishtim, and they please themselves in the brood of aliens. Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land also is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land also is full of idols; every one worships the work of his own hands, that which his own fingers have made. And man bows down, and man lowers himself; and You cannot bear with them.  Enter into the rock, and hide you in the dust, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be brought low, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. (*Yeshayahu* 2:5-11) 

In practice, beyond the increase of horses and the increase of silver and gold, which the Torah forbids in the passage relating to the king, the verse summarizing that section with regard to the king is:

That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left; to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children, in the midst of Israel. (*Devarim* 17:20)

The increase of horses, silver, gold and wives leads naturally to arrogance in the military, economic and social spheres of activity, and therefore they stand in clear opposition to the objective of the *mitzvot* imposed upon the king.

For King Uziyahu, the increase of horses, the increase of silver and gold, and the worship of idols were all an expression of "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:16), and the prophet Yeshayahu sees the enormous gap between the external reality (Uziyahu's military conquests, the flourishing economic reality, the fortifications in Yehuda and Jerusalem, the flourishing agricultural settlement), and the arrogance, the exaggerated self-confidence, and the sense of omnipotence. He sees before his eyes the kingdom of God where God alone is exalted and there is no kingdom of flesh and blood whatsoever, and therefore later in the chapter he describes the coming of the day of God in which all the great and lofty works of Uziyahu will be lost:

For the Lord of hosts has a day upon all that is proud and lofty, and upon all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low; And upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan… And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away… In that day a man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats…Cease you from man, in whose nostrils is a breath; for how little is he to be accounted! (*Yeshayahu* 2:12-22)

His conclusion is very sharp: "And the Lord alone shall be exalted on that day." The human response that is described is to hide in caves out of the fear of God.

In chapter 3, the prophet continues to describe the result of the fall in the wake of the great abundance and power:

For, behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, does take away from Jerusalem and from Yehuda stay and staff, every stay of bread, and every stay of water; the mighty man, and the man of war; the judge, and the prophet, and the diviner, and the elder… For a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father: You have a mantle, be you our ruler, and let this ruin be under your hand. In that day shall he swear, saying: I will not be a healer; for in my house is neither bread nor a mantle; you shall not make me ruler of a people. For Jerusalem is ruined, and Yehuda is fallen; because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of His glory…

The Lord stands up to plead, and stands to judge the peoples. The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders of His people, and the princes thereof: It is you that have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses; What mean you that you crush My people, and grind the face of the poor? says the Lord, the God of hosts. Moreover the Lord said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet; Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their anklets, and the fillets, and the crescents… (*Yeshayahu* 3)

Your men shall fall by the sword, and your mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and utterly bereft she shall sit upon the ground. And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying: We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name; take you away our reproach. In that day shall the growth of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remains in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written unto life in Jerusalem; when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof, by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of destruction. (*Yeshayahu* 4:1-4)

Arrogance leads to downfall. There is no one to lead the people but young boys. There is nobody to lean on. The social reality is bleak, the poor are being robbed. Against the backdrop of the social gap, the appearance of the daughters of Zion showing off their jewelry and their bodies is jarring. In the end all of this lavish glory will be replaced by the simple clothing of the poor.

To complete the prophecy, the prophet returns to the vision of the revelation of the kingdom of heaven:

And the Lord will create over the whole habitation of Mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory shall be a canopy. And there shall be a pavilion (*sukka*)for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a refuge and for a covert from storm and from rain. (*Yeshayahu* 4:5-6)

This vision of the future describes the appearance of the cloud of glory on Mount Zion together with a description of the *sukka* that will serve as shade from the heat during the day and as a shelter from rain. There is here sort of a return to the reality of the resting of the *Shekhina* in the wilderness, only that it takes place in Jerusalem on Mount Zion.

In the next *shiur* we will examine chapters 5-6 in *Yeshayahu* which describe the reality in the days of Uziyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. This issue is expanded upon by R. Yoel Bin-Nun and R. Benyamin Lau, in their book, *Yeshayahu* (Yediot Acharonot-Sefer Chemed), pp. 39-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In Zecharya's vision in chapter 14, in the framework of his description of God's war against the nations, an account is given of the God's feet, as it were, on the Mount of Olives: "And the Mount of Olives shall cleft in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, so that there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south… And it shall come to pass in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem: half of them toward the eastern sea, and half of them toward the western sea; in summer and in winter shall it be" (*Zekharya* 14:4-8). That is to say, the prophet describes an earthquake in the course of which the Mount of Olives shall be split, and water will issue forth in the direction of the Dead Sea. It is reasonable to assume that if the Mount of Olives is split, the relative height of Mount Moriya will also rise. This accords with what is stated here in *Yeshayahu.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Like the Midrash that describes Mount Sinai in this manner. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Tehilim* 113:4-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)