YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #301: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CXI) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXXXVII)**

In continuation of our study of chapters 2-4 in the book of *Yeshaya* in the previous *shiur*, in this *shiur* we shall examine the parable of the vineyard (*Yeshaya* 5-6) and its significance with regard to the events that take place in the days of Uziyah. This will serve as background for the king's entering the Sanctuary to burn incense and his being afflicted with leprosy.

Let me sing of my well-beloved, a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. And he digged it, and cleared it of stones, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a vat therein; and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Yehuda, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now come, I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; I will break down the fence thereof, and it shall be trodden down. And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned nor hoed, but there shall come up briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. (*Yeshaya* 5:1-6)

The prophet first describes the vineyard planted by his beloved and all the preparatory work required for its good growth - the removal of the stones, the digging of the land, the construction of a fence and a watch tower, and the planting of the choicest vines. After all the preparations and investment, there is an expectation of a blessed and abundant harvest, but in the end this does not materialize.

The beloved turns to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the people of Yehuda and explains to them that he did all that was needed and he asks them to judge between him and his vineyard. In the wake of the wild grapes that grew in his vineyard, the beloved breaks down the fence of the vineyard, thus allowing the sheep and cattle to trample the vines. He stops tending the vineyard and investing in its development.

At the end of the parable, the prophet explains its meaning:

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Yehuda the plant of His delight; and He looked for justice, but behold violence; for righteousness, but behold a cry. (*Yeshaya* 5:7)

In the end, the military, settlement, and economic buildup that superficially glorifies the monarchy fails to guarantee justice and righteousness, but just the opposite. The price of increased power is moral corruption; justice (*mishpat*) turns into violence (*mispach*), and righteousness (*tzedaka*) becomes a cry (*tze'aka*).

This harsh metaphor serves as an introduction to the grim reality that is expected to overtake Jerusalem, where the sinful behavior will find fullest expression. Yeshayahu begins a series of lamentations all beginning with the word *hoi*, "woe":

Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and you be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land! In mine ears said the Lord of hosts: Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one *bat*, and the seed of a *chomer* shall yield an *efa*. (*Yeshaya* 5:8:-10)

The first lamentation describes the fact that the houses are completely adjacent to each other. This arrangement does not leave any space between the houses nor does it allow for any areas that serve the public.

Rav Yoel Bin-Nun and Rav Benny Lau note in their book (*Yeshayahu* 2011, p. 67, note 32) that in the ancient period the space between the houses was designated for the homeless. This was a social obligation based on the principle that "this one benefits, and the other one suffers no loss," for the poor would enjoy the privately owned area, while at the same time the owner would not suffer any loss, because that area was not for rent.

In such a situation, *Chazal* established (*Bava Kama* 21b) that "we compel a person not to act in the manner of Sodom," that is to say, we compel those with means to allow the poor to live on the edge of their properties, so that society will not resemble Sodom. In this lamentation, the prophet describes a society that does not provide such areas, thus creating significant social gaps.

The second lamentation describes the people's drunkenness:

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that tarry late into the night, till wine inflame them! And the harp and the psaltery, the tabret and the pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither have they considered the operation of His hands. Therefore My people are gone into captivity, for want of knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude are parched with thirst. Therefore the nether-world has enlarged her desire, and opened her mouth without measure; and down goes their glory, and their tumult, and their uproar, and he that rejoices among them. And man is bowed down, and man is humbled, and the eyes of the lofty are humbled.  But the Lord of hosts is exalted through justice, and God the Holy One is sanctified through righteousness. Then shall the lambs feed as in their pasture, and the waste places of the fat ones shall wanderers eat. (*Yeshaya* 5:11-17)

The prophet describes a reality in which people are in a drunken state all day long, from morning to evening, all this as a result of feasts and revelries. This situation prevents them from seeing the hand of God, and thus the exile will come as a great surprise and the nether-world will swallow up all who had participated in such feasts.

In the sad reality that was created, God remains alone. When justice is not executed by man on earth, it returns, as it were, to God. It is possible to see in this call the cry that was mentioned in the parable of the vineyard, and the account of the people's drunkenness fits in with that parable.

The third lamentation describes the calamity that will come in the wake of the people's sins:

Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope, that say: Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that change darkness into light, and light into darkness; that change bitter into sweet, and sweet into bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink; that justify the wicked for a reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

Therefore as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as the chaff is consumed in the flame, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and contemned the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against His people, and He has stretched forth His hand against them, and has smitten them, and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. (*Yeshaya* 5:18-25)

The text describes the continuation of the hostility, the drunkenness, the injustice, and the bribery that will bring calamity in their wake. The rejection of God's Torah will lead to kindling of His anger, "and the mountains will tremble." It is very possible that this trembling of the mountains alludes to the great earthquake in the days of Uziyahu. Here we can see the connection between the calamities and the words of the parable of the vineyard: "I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; I will break down the fence thereof, and it shall be trodden down."

It is reasonable to assume that all of the rebukes are directed at the people at large, but first and foremost to the leaders who are responsible for the execution of justice in the realm. They mock the prophet and distort his words; they glory in their wisdom and valor, while taking bribes and perverting justice.

The calamity has already begun, but it will only grow worse in the future:

And He will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth; and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly. None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken. Whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent; their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind. Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions, yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and carry it away safe, and there shall be none to deliver. And they shall roar against them in that day like the roaring of the sea; and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and distress, and the light is darkened in the skies thereof. (*Yeshaya* 5:26:31)

In the wake of all the sins, the prophet heralds the arrival of an enemy that will soon come. There is no precise identification of the enemy that is to arrive. The prophet describes in a very detailed manner an army that will be equipped with all that is required. Its arrows will be sharp, its bows will be bent, the horses' hoofs will be counted like flint, and the wheels of the chariots will be like a whirlwind. It is possible that concealing the name of the enemy makes it even more threatening. At the same time, this fact may emphasize that Ashur is the revelation of God's long hand.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Even in the exceedingly prosperous days of Uziyahu, when he displays great military, governmental, security and settlement strength, the prophet is able to point to the impending calamity, from which there will be no escape. Indeed, after the death of Yerovam the son of Yoash, within a short time, Menachem, king of Israel, submits to Tiglat Pileser, king of Ashur:

There came against the land Pul[[2]](#footnote-2) the king of Ashur; and Menachem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand. And Menachem exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Ashur. So the king of Ashur turned back, and stayed not there in the land. (II *Melakhim* 15:19-20)

In the kingdom of Yehuda, Ashur's entry will take place in the days of Chizkiyahu, with the arrival of Sancheriv and his army, who will conquer Lachish and the Judean plain. This connects with the beginning of chapter 6 in the book of *Yeshaya*:

In the year that king Uziyahu died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and His train filled the Temple. (*Yeshaya* 6:1)

Ostensibly, according to the order of the chapters, this chapter concludes the prophecies of Yeshayahu that were delivered in the days of Uziyahu, which begin in chapter 2 and end in chapter 6. According to this understanding, the year of Uziyahu's death was the same year that he was afflicted with leprosy following his entry into the Sanctuary to burn incense (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 26:16-21, and so too in Targum Yonatan ad loc.).

[According to an alternative interpretation, chapter 6 is Yeshayahu's consecration prophecy. The matter might depend on how we understand the reference to King Uziyahu's death; if this refers to Uziyahu's actual death, as proposed by the Radak, this cannot be Yeshayahu's initial prophecy.]

According to our approach, the prophecy in chapter 6 is a prophecy of departure, and not a prophecy of consecration. This is also the understanding of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi in his *Kuzari*:

At other times he sees wrath poured out and the people in mourning on account of their threatened abandonment by Him, "Who is sitting upon a throne high and lifted up… above it stood the seraphim." The very act of leaving is perceived by the prophet as the chariot's journey, as Yechezkel saw it…. (*Kuzari* IV, 3)

According to this understanding, there is a direct connection between Uziyahu's leprosy, which was a consequence of his entry into the Sanctuary to burn incense, and the removal of the *Shekhina,* which the prophet heralds at the beginning of chapter 6.

In the next *shiur*, we will summarize our study of the reign of Uziyahu. We will consider the significance of his entering the Sanctuary in order to burn incense and the account of the earthquake that comes in the wake of this entry.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. The enemy is generally identified with the army of Ashur. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Pul is the Babylonian name of Tiglat-Pileser. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)