YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

**Lecture #309: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CXIX) – The Prohibition of Bamot (XCV)**

In this *shiur*, we will complete our study of King Achaz.

### "Seal the instruction"

*Chazal* expanded Achaz's betrayal of God to include not only all that he did in the house of God, but also his actions in the realm of Torah study. The *Yerushalmi* in *Sanhedrin* states as follows:

R. Chonya said in the name of R. Lazar: Why was he named Achaz? Because he sent out his hand [*achaz*] to the synagogues and study halls. To what may Achaz be likened? To a king who had a son whom he placed in the charge of a governor who wished to kill him. He said: If I kill him, I will be liable for the death penalty. Rather I will take away his nursemaid, and he will die by himself. So said Achaz: If there are no kid-goats, there will be no he-goats. If there are no he-goats, there will be no flock. If there is no flock, there will be no shepherd. If there is no shepherd, there will be no world. If there is no world, as it were… Thus Achaz thought to himself saying: If there are no minors, there will be no adults. If there are no adults, there will be no Sages. If there are no Sages, there will be no prophets. If there are no prophets, there will be no holy spirit. If there is no holy spirit, there will be no synagogues or study halls. R. Yaakov bar Abaye in the name of R. Acha brings this from that which is stated: "And I will wait for the Lord, that hides His face from the house of Yaakov, and I will look for Him" (*Yeshayahu* 8:17). (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin* 10:2)

*The* principle that finds expression in the *Yerushalmi's* exposition is that if there is no holy spirit, there will be no synagogues or study halls, and, as it were, God will not rest His *Shekhina* on Israel. This approach of *Chazal* is the same as the approach we discussed in the previous *shiur* which follows from the plain meaning of the verses concerning the king's actions in the house of God, which were clearly aimed at restricting the resting of the *Shekhina* in the Temple by cutting the Temple vessels into pieces.

The prophet Yeshayahu (*Yeshayahu* 8:16-18) describes his understanding that following Achaz's decision to submit to Ashur and accept political and military servitude, as well as total spiritual enslavement and at the same a plethora of idol worship in each and every city in the kingdom of Yehuda, Yeshayahu was left with no other choice but to seclude himself with his children and disciples to record his prophecies and bind his book so that it would be preserved for posterity:

Bind up the testimony, seal the instruction among My disciples. And I will wait for the Lord, that hides His face from the house of Yaakov, and I will look for Him. Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me shall be for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion. (*Yeshayahu* 8:16-18)

The prophet faces a period of God's hiding His face and also a period of great darkness. What is necessary is to see the hope and expectation for a repaired world that will ultimately emerge. The prophet goes on to relate to the fact that in the absence of God's word and in the reality of God's hiding His face, the people seek hope from ghosts and spirits:

And when they shall say to you: Seek to the ghosts and the familiar spirits, that chirp and that mutter; should not a people seek their God? on behalf of the living unto the dead for instruction and for testimony? Surely they will speak according to this word, wherein there is no light. And they shall pass this way that are sore bestead and hungry; and it shall come to pass that, when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse by their king and by their God, and, whether they turn their faces upward, or look to the earth, behold distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish, and outspread thick darkness. (*Yeshayahu* 8:19-22)

The Torah explicitly forbids turning to ghosts and spirits, as is stated in *Devarim*:

There shall not be found among you any one that makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, one that uses divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or one that consults a ghost or a familiar spirit, or a necromancer. For whosoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you. You shall be whole-hearted with the Lord your God. For these nations that you are to dispossess, hearken to soothsayers, and to diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not suffered you so to do. A prophet will the Lord your God raise up to you, from the midst of you, of your brothers, like to me; to him you shall hearken." (*Devarim* 18:10-15)

Turning to ghosts and spirits is not the solution, but rather every nation must seek its god. Israel must seek the Torah and testimony, to hear the word of God and the words of his servants, the prophets. The basic assumption is clear, that there is no truth in ghosts or spirits. The prophet describes the harsh consequences of the journey of Tiglat Pileser, the king of Ashur. The Assyrian conqueror will pass through the lower Galilee by way of the Gil'ad, and he will reach the kingdom of Israel and nobody will be able to stop him. Thus it turns out that from the time of Achaz's submission to the king of Ashur and until the end of his days in Jerusalem, the reigning king is subservient politically, militarily, and spiritually to the king of Ashur, and in practice the king of Ashur does in fact manage to control the entire area: Aram of Damascus, the Galilee, and the Gil'ad, Gaza, and the entire kingdom of Israel are all ultimately conquered by the kingdom of Ashur. The people who followed their king absorbed the culture of Ashur.

The prophet and his group of disciples seclude themselves, record the prophecies and hope for future salvation, knowing that at this time God is indeed hiding His face.

### THe Prophecy about Peleshet in the year of King Achaz's death

In chapter 14, the prophet Yeshayahu prophesies the last prophecy to be delivered during the years of King Achaz's reign:

In the year that king Achaz died was this burden. Rejoice not, O Peleshet, all of you, because the rod that smote you is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a basilisk, and his fruit shall be a flying serpent. And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety; and I will kill your root with famine, and your remnant shall be slain.  Howl, O gate; cry, O city; melt away, O Peleshet, all of you; for there comes a smoke out of the north, and there is no straggler in his ranks. What then shall one answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord has founded Zion, and in her shall the afflicted of His people take refuge. (*Yeshayahu* 14:28-32)

It turns out that there was great joy in Peleshet during the period leading to the death of Achaz. The prophet tells them not to rejoice, because while they believe that Achaz their enemy was like a broken snake, out of that snake shall come a basilisk, a lethal reptile. This is an allusion to Chizkiyahu the son of Achaz who will eventually smite the Pelishtim with a harder strike than the strike with which Achaz and his forefathers struck the Pelishtim, and when the Pelishtim will be beaten, there will be relief for Israel. Israel will find refuge in Zion, and the emissaries of the Gentiles who will come to Jerusalem will recognize that it was God who founded Zion.

In Yeshayahu 9 the prophet is found in the circle of his disciples, surrounded by idolatry throughout the kingdom of Yehuda, worship of the king of Ashur at the altar in the house of God, and the burning of children to Molech in the valley of Bin Hinom. Even in this darkness the prophet is able to see great light.

### THE REPAIR OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HOUSE OF dAVID

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined. You have multiplied the nation, You have increased their joy; they joy before You according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, You have broken as in the day of Midyan. For every boot stamped with fierceness, and every cloak rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire. (*Yeshayahu* 9:1-4)

The prophet is able to see that the kingdom of the house of David will continue. Part of the great light at the end of the tunnel of darkness is the appearance of King Chizkiyahu, the son of Achaz:

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; and the government is upon his shoulder; and his name is called Pele-Yoetz-El-Gibbor-Avi-Ad-Sar-Shalom; that the government may be increased, and of peace there be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it through justice and through righteousness from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts does perform this. (*Yeshayahu* 9:5-6)

The vision of the repaired kingdom of the house of David that will replace Achaz's kingdom stands before Yeshayahu's eyes, a kingdom that will be founded on justice and righteousness.

### The end of Achaz

In the book of Kings (II Kings 16:20) it is stated: "And Achaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David." In the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*, the text emphasizes that Achaz did not merit to be buried in the sepulchers of the kings of the house of David, but rather he was buried in a separate section:

And Achaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem; for they brought him not into the sepulchers of the kings of Israel. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:27)

In this way the text expresses its reservations regarding the kingdom and actions of Achaz.

Chazal say that Hezekiah "dragged his father's bones [corpse] on a rope bier, and they [the Sages] agreed with him" (*Pesachim* 4:9). Rash explains:

He dragged his father's bones – for the sake of atonement. He did not bury him with honor with a couch and a bier. And for the sake of sanctifying God's name, that he should be disgraced for his wickedness, and the wicked shall be reproached. (Rashi, *Pesachim* 56a)

### Achaz as opposed to Chizkiyahu

In addition to the fact that the period prior to the days of Chizkiyahu is essential background for understanding his own time, our analysis of the days of Achaz demonstrates that his leadership is the complete opposite of Chizkiyahu's leadership in all respects, regarding Ashur and political behavior, and regarding God, the prophet and the Temple.

It is true that the prophet severely criticizes some of Chizkiyahu's moves (the pact with Egypt, the hospitality shown to the Babylonian delegation, the spiritual reality in Jerusalem, and others). But Chizkiyahu, in complete contrast to his father, relates to the word of God and heeds it. Indeed, in his vision regarding the days of Chizkiyahu, the prophet Yeshayahu describes the period as days of great light that will come after the darkness of the days of Achaz. In that time Achaz's evil deeds will be rectified, first and foremost the inner spiritual repair of the kingdom and upholding it in judgment and righteousness.

In the next *shiur* we will begin to examine the kingdom of Chizkiyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)