YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #298: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (CVIII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXXXIV)**

In this shiur we will examine the kingdom of Amatzya.

As with Yehoash, so too with Amatzya, there is room to divide his life into two essentially different periods of time. The early reports regarding Amatzya describe how Amatzya walked in the ways of God and how he did that which was right in His eyes, in addition to victory over the Edomites and the reincorporation of their lands into his kingdom.

The later reports regarding Amatzya following his victory over the Edomites describe a king who provokes the kingdom of Israel and King Yoash. According to *Divrei ha-Yamim*, during this period he worships idols and refuses to heed the words of the prophet who was sent to rebuke him. He is defeated in battle and Yoash king of Israel breaches the wall of Jerusalem and takes all of the gold and silver and vessels found in the house of God and in the treasures of the house of the king.

### The Early Reports Regarding Amatzya

The overall assessment of Amatzya in the book of *Melakhim* is as follows:

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. Howbeit the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and offered in the high places. (II *Melakhim* 14:3-4)

As for doing that which was right in the eyes of God – but not like David – the *Malbim* explains:

That is to say, he did that which was right as "a commandment of men learned by rote," by virtue of the fact that this was what his father had done, and not for love of God like David, for Yehoash as well did what he did only because Yehoyada the priest had instructed him to do so, but he turned away from God as soon as Yehoyada died. (*Malbim*, II *Melakhim* 14:3)

It is interesting that the formulation in *Divrei ha-Yamim* is: "And he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not with a whole heart" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 25:2). One possibility is to say that the verses relate to his seeking the gods of Edom in the aftermath of his war with Edom, in the second part of his reign. After establishing his kingdom, he slays the servants who had killed Yehoash his father, but he takes care not to kill the children of those who slew him, and thus fulfill the Torah's command:

The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin. (II *Melakhim* 14:6)[[1]](#footnote-1)

In general, the book of *Melakhim* abridges the account of his reign, whereas *Divrei ha-Yamim* expands upon it in detail. This is what we find with many of the kings. He assembles an army and prepares it for war against Edom. The preparation of the army is spelled out in detail in *Divrei ha-Yamim* but not in *Melakhim.* The preparation includes recruiting soldiers and dividing them into units. He hires a hundred thousand men of valor from Israel. In the wake of this action, a man of God[[2]](#footnote-2) comes to him and warns him against allowing the army of the kingdom of Israel to join the campaign:

But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with you; for the Lord is not with Israel, even with all the children of Efrayim. But if you will go, and do engage never so valiantly in battle, God will cast you down before the enemy; for God has power to help, and to cast down. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 25:7-8)

It is clear that "the children of Efrayim" is a reference to the entire kingdom of Israel, as Rashi writes there:

Since Yerovam was from the tribe of Efrayim and he was the first to cause Israel to sin, and in every generation after him he was a stumbling block for them, as whey worshipped the golden calves of Yerovam. (Rashi, II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 25:7)

In any event, Amatzya numbers the people from twenty years old and upward, thus fulfilling the Torah's commandment, and appoints captains of hundreds and captains of thousands. It is interesting that despite the great size of his army – three hundred thousand soldiers – he hires for an exceedingly large sum another one hundred thousand soldiers from the kingdom of Israel. The prophet demands of Amatzya that he put his trust directly in God, without resorting to the help of the people of the kingdom of Israel who continue in the path of Yerovam. Amatzya passes the test with honors and sends the soldiers of the kingdom of Israel back to their country despite the financial loss, the humiliation and perhaps even the danger that this step involved.

Amatzya sets out on his campaign against Edom, and beyond the simple facts mentioned in *Melakhim*, the verses in *Divrei ha-Yamim* expand upon the matter and say:

And another ten thousand did the children of Yehuda carry away alive, and brought them to the top of the Rock, and cast them down from the top of the Rock, that they all were broken in pieces. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 25:12)

This appears to be an act of great cruelty that was altogether unnecessary. The Midrash (*Petichta* 14 in *Eikha Rabbati*) sees in this conduct of Amatzya a reason for the exile. Even if there was a military and national interest in fighting against Edom, what interest was served and what need was there to cast ten thousand people down from the top of the Rock?

### The Later Reports Regarding Amatzya

It seems that the war against Edom leads to a fundamental change in Amatzya's behavior. Until this victory, he had ostensibly behaved in a proper manner:

Now it came to pass, after that Amatzya was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and prostrated himself before them, and offered to them. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 25:14)

The victory over Edom brings Amatzya to idolatry. The very fact of his fall is puzzling, and all the more so the fact that he fell into idolatry in the wake of his military victory. It is also very difficult to understand why after his victory over Edom he now decides to serve their gods. Granted that we do not find Amatzya thanking the God of Israel and sacrificing thanksgiving offerings in the house of God for his victory over Edom. But to worship the gods of Edom? Does this indicate that Amatzya believed in their power and feared that they would harm him in the future? S it possible that this worship attests to the fact that Amatzya despised his absolute dependence on God and that he was not ready to attribute his victory to Heaven?[[3]](#footnote-3)

This seems to be a classic instance of "My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth" (*Devarim* 8:17). His choosing a foreign cult was a voluntary choice to reject all subordination to the God of Israel, without any commitment to the gods of Edom.

In the wake of his sin, Scripture describes the direct and immediate Divine response to his action:

The anger of the Lord was kindled against Amatzya, and He sent to him a prophet,[[4]](#footnote-4) who said to him, Why have you sought after the gods of the people, which have not delivered their own people out of your hand? And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that [the king] said to him, Have we made you of the king's counsel? forbear; why should you be smitten? Then the prophet forbore, and said, I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this, and have not hearkened to my counsel. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 25:15-16)

Amatzya's attitude toward the prophet is shocking. In addition to the scorn that he demonstrates as if he had been among those who appointed him to be a prophet, he threatens to beat him. And all this takes place less than a generation after King Yehoash killed Zecharya the son of Yehoyada the priest!

We see here as well the notion of an all-powerful kingdom in which the king is the supreme authority, and prophecy is subordinate to him. The continuation of the story reveals that Amatzya's reaction is part of the divine punishment meted out against him.

Amatzya sends a proposal to Yoash the king of Israel that they should meet face to face on the battlefield. Yoash replies as follows:

You say, lo, you have smitten Edom; will your heart therefore lift you up to glory therein? abide now at home; why should you meddle with evil, that you should fall, even you, and Yehuda with you? (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 25:19)

In other words, Yoash advises Amatzya not to go out to war because the forces are not equal, and his victory over Edom brought him to excessive pride and self-confidence that have no real cover.

But Amatzya would not hear; for it was of God, that He might deliver them into the hand [of their enemies], because they had sought after the gods of Edom. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 25:19)

Scripture explains that the Divine punishment for Amatzya's seeking the gods of Edom was his falling into the hands of the king of Israel. And indeed the war takes place in Beit-Shemesh, and Yehuda is defeated. Yoash the son of Yehoachaz, king of Israel, breaches the wall of Jerusalem, and takes the gold and silver and vessels found in the house of God, and in addition he takes King Amatzya.

Scripture then reaches the end of Amatzya's life:

Now from the time that Amatzya did turn away from following the Lord they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 25:27)

*Chazal* say:

Just as Yehoram, Achazyahu, and Yoash died a death of illness caused by others, so Amatzyahu died a death of illness caused by others. (*Seder Olam Rabba*, chap. 19)

His son Uziyahu was crowned as king in place of Amatzya. The parallel between the death of Amatzya and the deaths of Yehoram, Achazyahu and Yehoash requires explanation. In the end there is a great similarity between the reign of Amatzya and the reign of his father Yehoash:

First, the very fact that the lives of both of them can be divided into two periods; the first good and beneficial and the second a time of serious sin. Second, Yehoash did that which was good and right in the eyes of God all the days of Yehoyada the priest; Amaziah did that which was good and right in His eyes up until his victory over Edom. Third, their attitude toward prophecy – Yehoash kills Zecharya the son of Yehoyada the priest in the Temple; Amatzya threatens to strike the prophet. And fourth, they both end their reigns by being murdered.

Based on this we can say that during the first part of Amatzya's reign when he was seemingly doing that which was good and right in the eyes of God, he was acting out of rote because of the external framework, with no deep connection to observing the Torah and its commandments. The moment his reign becomes a goal in itself, his conduct reverses and in the end he is punished.

With this we conclude our study of the kingdom of Amatzya. In the next shiur we will deal with the kingdom of Uziyahu.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. See *Devarim* 24:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Chazal* in *Megila* 10b and *Sota* 10b identify this man of God as Amotz the father of the prophet Yeshayahu and brother of Amatzya. So too understands the Radak (ad loc.). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. So proposes Rav Yigal Ariel in his book *Mikdash Melekh*, *Iyyunim le-Sefer Melakhim*, p. 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This is probably the same man of God who appeared earlier. See note 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)