

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

SEFER MELAKHIM BET: THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS
By Rav Alex Israel

Dedicated in memory of
Joseph Y. Nadler z"l, Yosef ben Yechezkel Tzvi

Shiur #14: Chapters 12-13
YO'ASH'S REVERSAL

At the end of Yo'ash's reign, the kingdom takes a downturn. Chaza'el of Aram threatens Yerushalayim (*II Melakhim* 12:18-22). Yo'ash responds by paying a huge bribe to Chaza'el, thereby averting war. He sends Chaza'el the gold reserves of the Temple and the royal treasury, as well as specific Temple artifacts that had been consecrated to the Temple by Yo'ash and his predecessors.¹ With this huge payoff, Chaza'el abandons his military advance. Whereas Yo'ash's sidestepping of armed conflict may be viewed as a skillful maneuver on the king's part, some members of his inner circle think otherwise. Yo'ash's courtiers conspire and assassinate him. Who are the perpetrators? From the context, it would seem that these are his political opponents, maybe government or military figures,² outraged at his capitulation to the Aramean forces.

THE ACCOUNT IN *DIVREI HA-YAMIM*

But *II Divrei Ha-yamim* (ch. 24) offers a far more sinister record of Yo'ash's reign. In truth, *Melakhim* offers a possible hint: "Yeho'ash did that which was right in God's eyes, all his days that Yehoyada instructed him" (12:3). This sentence may be read in one of two ways. Either we may say that Yo'ash followed God all his life, due to Yehoyada's good teaching. Or we may opt for a second possibility: Yo'ash adhered to service of God only under

¹ These "*kodashim*," or consecrated objects remain undefined. In David's time (see *II Shmuel* 8:11-12, *I Melakhim* 7:51) they appear to be trophies of war. These were installed into the *Beit Ha-mikdash* by Shlomo, but we do not understand the role they may have played in the Temple. David and Shlomo's "*kodashim*" were looted by King Shishak (*I Melakhim* 14:25-26). The verse here specifies that even Yo'ash's idolatrous father and grandfather made these sacred donations to the Temple, which shows that even though they were devoted to Baal, they did not ignore the Temple service absolutely. Apparently the monotheistic tradition was sufficiently strong to demand of kings that they follow the royal norms regarding the central institute of God- worship.

² The men responsible for the assassination appear to be officials of high standing, as they remain in government long after Yo'ash's assassination; his son, Amatzia, succeeds in killing the murderers only once "the kingdom is strong in his hands" (14:5). In other words, he needs to muster considerable political power in order to oust them.

Yehoyada's instruction or influence. The implication now³ is that after Yehoyada's death, Yeho'ash adopts an alternative path. That is precisely what we read in *II Divrei Ha-yamim*:

But after the death of Yehoyada, the officers of Yehuda came, bowing low to the king, and the king listened to them. They forsook the House of the Lord God of their fathers to serve the Asheira and idols; and there was wrath upon Yehuda and Yerushalayim because of this guilt of theirs. The Lord sent prophets among them to bring them back to Him; they admonished them but they would not pay heed. The spirit of God enveloped Zekharia son of Yehoyada the priest; he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus says God: 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord when you cannot succeed? Since you have forsaken the Lord, He has forsaken you.'" They conspired against him and pelted him with stones in the court of the House of the Lord, by order of the king." (24:17-21)

As a child, Yo'ash was raised under the influence of the high priest, Yehoyada. Moreover, it is Yehoyada and the priests who control the affairs of state while Yo'ash is a minor. But as a young adult, Yo'ash seeks to rule independently. And so, he begins by flexing his muscles in the arena of the *Mikdash*. When he accuses the *kohanim* of neglecting the Temple and abusing its funds, he is in fact beginning to wrest control of the *Mikdash* from priestly hands and to limit their enormous power, thereby returning the king to his original place and sidelining the national influence of the priesthood.

Now, after Yehoyada's death, the process of Yo'ash's independence gains momentum, as the king engages new "advisors." In other words, he adopts a fresh political and religious direction.⁴ This story presents two rival factions or lobbies: the "right-wing," inward looking, priestly group, and the "left-wing," more cosmopolitan advisors, with Ach'av-like tendencies. Yo'ash rejects the first faction which he knows so well. Needing a new alliance and power base, he turns to the second group, which has a more international agenda. The introduction of idolatry into the kingdom indicates that the new officials advocate a political reorientation, opening the country to other cultures, with a relaxed approach to foreign worship instead of a strict monotheistic regime. Obviously, this sharp national cultural turnabout leads

³ *Daat Mikra, II Melakhim*, pg. 611 (chapter summary).

⁴ The *Midrash* in *Shemot Rabba*, 8 presents a different dynamic: "Why did they bow to the king? They turned him [the king] into a god. They said, 'If it were not for the fact that you were a god, how could you have emerged unscathed after residing in the Holy of Holies for seven years?' He replied, 'Indeed!' and willingly assumed the role of a deity, and caused his own destruction." From the text, both in *Melakhim* and *Divrei Ha-yamim*, we never find Yo'ash as an object of worship. Moreover, as noted by *Daat Mikra*, bowing to the king is a gesture of respect to royalty and not a gesticulation of worship. We may understand this *midrash* then, as reflective of the norms of other kingdoms in which the king was perceived as a god. In that case, it is an allusion to Yehuda's adoption, under Yo'ash, of foreign religious paradigms. Alternatively, we may read the *midrash* more psychologically, suggesting that precisely because Yo'ash was raised in the Temple, he felt he could disregard its sanctity. He viewed himself as above it all and was more prepared to disregard its authority than another monarch would have been.

Yo'ash into a direct clash with the priests who had controlled the agenda up to this point. But Yo'ash seems set upon his new national priorities. At first Yo'ash merely ignores the priests and prophets despite their opposition, but as they become more vociferous, he soon becomes their bitter enemy. When the new high priest, Zekharia, publically admonishes the king, "they conspired against him," in other words, the king resorts to bloodshed in order to silence his influential critic.

As opposed to the religiously positive account of Yo'ash in *Sefer Melakhim*, *Divrei Ha-yamim* depicts Yo'ash's later life in terrifying terms.⁵ The idolatry and murder are all the more shocking when we consider Yo'ash's unique upbringing.

Yo'ash's sins are met by swift punishment, in the form of Chaza'el's attack against Yerushalayim. Unlike the depiction in *Melakhim*, *Divrei Ha-yamim* describes a military conflict in which God delivers Yo'ash's larger army into the hands of the smaller Aramean force. The forces of Chaza'el loot the country but also punish Yo'ash personally with severe injuries.⁶ Yo'ash's assassination is described in the following manner:

His courtiers plotted against him because of the blood of the sons of Yehoyada the priest; and they killed him in his bed... These were the men who conspired against him: Zavad, son of Shim'at the Ammonite, and Yehozavad son of Shimrit the Moabite. (24:25-6)

TWO ACCOUNTS

Melakhim and *Divrei Ha-yamim* differ in several significant details:

	<i>Melakhim</i>	<i>Divrei Ha-yamim</i>
Religious Waywardness	-	Yo'ash's adoption of Baal after Yehoyada's death. Yo'ash has Zekharia killed.
The War	Yo'ash averts war.	Chaza'el attacks, and his army, though smaller in number, defeats Yo'ash.
Tribute Spoils	Yo'ash pays Chaza'el a large tribute.	Chaza'el takes spoils of war.
Assassination of	--In the House of the	--In his bed

⁵ Some academics assert that *Divrei Ha-yamim* consistently hides the flaws of the kings of Yehuda. Y. Kiel, in *Daat Mikra, II Divrei Ha-yamim* (Mossad Harav Kook: Jerusalem, 1989) pg.767, suggests that this story demonstrates that there are times when *Melakhim* hides the sins of a particular king, while *Divrei Ha-yamim* exposes those crimes. See also Y. Kaufman, *The Religion of Israel, from Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, (Tel Aviv: Bialik Institute-Dvir, 1947) vol. 4, pg. 474.

⁶ *Mekhilta Amalek* talks of Yo'ash as in ingrate ("kafoy tova"). It also details the "wounds" spoken of in *II Divrei Ha-yamim* 24:24-5 as a product of terrible sexual torture inflicted by Chaza'el's men.

the King	Milo --No explicit motive is mentioned.	--Motive: to avenge Zekharia
Burial of Yo'ash	Buried with his fathers in City of David	They did not bury him in the royal burial site.

Many of the traditional commentaries⁷ solve the disparities in the depiction of the war by suggesting that both *Melakhim* and *Divrei Ha-yamim* are historically correct, but each depicts a *different* military campaign. *Melakhim* describes a first war, which is averted by means of a bribe. But then, Yo'ash murders Zekharia, and the following year Aram defeats Yehuda, as depicted in *Divrei Ha-yamim*.⁸ Similarly, commentaries suggest resolving the other contradictions on a local level. For example, regarding the site of the assassination, Yo'ash's "bed" (*Divrei Ha-yamim*) was placed in the "House of Milo" (*Melakhim*); regarding the war, the spoils mentioned in *Divrei Ha-yamim* may be the same bribe that is described in *Melakhim*. And hence, the two books complement one another. Abarbanel builds an interesting theory around this:

I have already written in my introduction to this book [*Melakhim*] that the book does not intend to relate all the biographical and national details of the kings ... for this was recorded in the [royal] annals ... With Yo'ash it states: "Yeho'ash did that which was right in God's eyes, all the period that Yehoyada instructed him"(12:3), and thus it indicates that after Yehoyada's death, he did not perform that which was right in God's eyes and served Baal ... But Ezra [author of *Divrei Ha-yamim*] saw that in the course of time, the royal annals had been lost. To ensure that the events not be entirely forgotten, he wrote details that were essential in order to comprehend that which is written in *Sefer Melakhim*, and in such a case, *Divrei Ha-yamim* ... acts as an expansion of *Sefer Melakhim*.

Abarbanel is suggesting that originally, royal sources external to the Biblical book would have recorded Yo'ash's move to idolatry, and *Melakhim* could be read and understood on the backdrop of that common knowledge. However, with the passage of time, as the history was forgotten, *Divrei Ha-yamim* included much of the forgotten history.

With all this having been said, the variance between the "parallel" books is considerable: a reader of *Melakhim* would be unaware of any of Yo'ash's sins, whereas *Divrei Ha-yamim* depicts Yo'ash as a king who created a violent and idolatrous regime. A full explanation as to why *Melakhim* ignores Yo'ash's idolatry still eludes us.

EPITOME OF INGRATITUDE

⁷ Radak in *II Melakhim* 12:22, Abarbanel, and Malbim.

⁸ A similar pattern of an initial advance by a conquering army followed by a second attack may be found later in *Melakhim*, in the two attacks on Yerushalayim by Sancherev (*II Melakhim* ch.18-19).

King Yo'ash disregarded the loyalty (*chesed*) that his father Yehoyada had shown him and killed his son. As he was dying, he said, "May the Lord see and require it." (*II Divrei Ha-yamim* 24:22)

The first point emphasized here is Yo'ash's absolute disloyalty, his cruel deflection of the natural human instinct of gratitude in response to Yehoyada's *chesed*. The depravity of Zekharia's murder is underscored by its location: the Temple courtyard. The same Temple which provided a safe-haven for the young Yo'ash now becomes a killing-ground, as he murders the son of the man who saved him and raised him.

In the same vein, several aspects of Yo'ash's death are indicative of reciprocal justice (*mida ke-negged mida*), evoking precisely Yo'ash's disloyalty to the family of Yehoyada, as evidenced by the following:

- "He received reciprocal punishment. He killed Zekharia, a person whose position was safe and secure, due to his status as son of Yehoyada ... and so he (Yo'ash) was killed when he was calm and secure – in his bed." (Rashi)
- "Yo'ash violated God's Temple and commanded that Zekharia the Kohen be executed in the House of God; and his [Yo'ash's] servants violated his authority, killing him in his bed.

... Just as Yo'ash repudiated the kindness done to him by Yehoyada, similarly his servants ignored the kindness performed by their sovereign.

Yo'ash had no qualms regarding the execution of a *kohen*, a son of a prophet, and his servants were undeterred in the killing of a king, son of a king." (Abarbanel)

- Yo'ash's death in his bed is reminiscent of his being hidden as a baby in a bedroom (*hadar ha-mittot*).⁹
- "Let the nation of ingrates take vengeance upon he who is ungrateful" (*Mekhilta Amalek*, 1). The *Mekhilta* suggests that Yo'ash is murdered specifically by a Moabite and an Ammonite (*II Divrei Ha-yamim* 24:25). These are two national identities singled out by the Torah for their ingratitude: "No Ammonite or Moabite ... may be admitted to the assembly of God. These nations did not welcome you with food and water when you came out of Egypt. Instead, they hired Bil'am ... to curse you" (*Devarim* 23:3-4). And so, in this damning epitaph, the *Midrash* casts Yo'ash's ingratitude as his enduring legacy, his hallmark.

“MAY THE LORD SEE AND REQUIRE IT”

⁹ *II Divrei Ha-yamim* 22:11

As he was dying, Zekharia said: "May the Lord see and **require it** [ve-*vidrosh*]." This language evokes associations with God's warnings about murder in the aftermath of the flood in *Bereishit*: "But for your life-blood, I will **require** a reckoning; I will **require** it of every beast; of man too will I **require** a reckoning for human life" (*Bereishit* 9:5). Similarly, the term appears in Re'uven's comment, after the sale of Yosef: "And now comes the **reckoning** for his blood" (*Bereishit* 42:22). The implication of these verses is clear: an act of murder is a moral outrage which must be redressed and avenged. All these sources connect this idea with the blood of the dead which cries out with injustice.¹⁰

Possibly, this is the reason that *Chazal* viewed Zekharia's blood as everlasting, bubbling madly in the Temple, eternally unappeased until the day of its destruction. The Talmud depicts the Babylonian aggressor Nevuzradan, as being transfixed by Zekharia's blood, which he tries to avenge, with no success:

[After that] he [Nevuzradan] saw the blood of Zekharia bubbling.

"What is this?" he cried.

"It is the blood of sacrifices, which has been spilled," they answered.

"Then," he said, "bring [some animal blood] and I will compare them to see whether they are alike."

So he slaughtered animals and compared them, but they were dissimilar.

"Disclose [the secret] to me, or if not, I will tear your flesh with iron combs," he threatened.

They replied: "This is [the blood of] a priest and a prophet, who foretold the destruction of Yerushalayim to the Israelites, and they killed him."

"I," he said, "will appease him."

So he brought the scholars and slew them over him, yet it did not cease [to boil]. He brought schoolchildren and slew them over him, still it did not rest. He brought the young priests and slew them over him, and still it did not rest, until he had slain ninety-four thousand, and still it did not rest.

Whereupon he approached him and cried out, "Zekharia Zekharia! I have destroyed the flower of them; do you desire that I massacre them all?"

Straightway it rested.

¹⁰ *Bereshit* 4:11, *Bemidbar* 35:33-4

Thoughts of repentance came into his mind: if they, who killed one person only have been so [severely punished], what will be my fate? So he fled, sent his testament to his house, and became a proselyte. (Sanhedrin 96b)

CONCLUSION

Yo'ash is a king with great promise. Coming after the evil Atalia, and raised in the Temple by the High priest, one would anticipate that this king would follow God devotedly. Yo'ash, however, grows up and rejects the priests' influence in affairs of state. This religious repudiation thrusts him in the direction of advisors with a different agenda, and Yo'ash turns towards idolatry. One sin causes the next, as events lead to the murder of the High priest, Zekharia. In the final account Yo'ash has all the potential, but he fails to live up to these high expectations.