

# The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

The Book of Shmuel  
Yeshivat Har Etzion

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Shiur #05: CHAPTER 2 (PART III)  
THE PROPHECY OF THE MAN OF GOD (VERSES 27-36)

Rav Amnon Bazak

## I. "LIGHT" AND "HEAVY"

Following the detailed description of the sins of the sons of Eli, the man of God now comes to Eli, bearing severe reproach and harsh tidings about the punishments that await his household. The man of God opens with a historic survey of the selection of the tribe of Levi:

And there came a man of God to Eli and said to him, Thus says the Lord, Surely I appeared<sup>1[1]</sup> to the house of your father, when they were in Egypt in the house of Pharaoh.<sup>2[2]</sup> And I chose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon My altar, to burn incense, to wear an *efod* before Me. And I gave to the house of your father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel. (27-28)

God assigned the tribe of Levi special roles that earned them distinguished rewards. The verse employs three personal pronouns to emphasize that the priest was chosen to serve as a worker before God: "To be **My** priest, to offer upon **My** altar, to burn incense, to wear an *efod* before **Me**." It is only by virtue of his role as God's minister that the priest receives a reward from Him, "All the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel." Eli's sons' taking of the meat by force and their father's feeble reproach impair this special privilege:

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1[1] The letter *heh* in the word *ha-niglo* does not introduce a question, but rather the statement, "Surely I appeared." A similar phenomenon is found in *Mishlei* 23:5: "Surely when you set (*ha-ta'if*) your eye upon it, it is already gone."

2[2] This description, according to which God chose Levi already in Egypt, is quite novel, for the selection of the Levites seems to have taken place only in the wilderness. The matter requires further study.

Wherefore do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering, which I have commanded in My habitation, and honored your sons above Me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel My people? (29)

From a literary perspective, Scripture makes interesting use of the roots *kuf-lamed-lamed* (light, belittle) and *kof-bet-dalet* (heavy, honor) and of the word *kavod*. The man of God accuses Eli that with his silence, "he **honored** (*vaticabed*) his sons above Me." In response, God emphasizes that his intention to give the High Priesthood to the house of Eli for ever will not be realized, "for them that **honor Me I will honor** (*mekhabdi akhabed*), and they that despise Me **shall be lightly esteemed** (*yekalu*)" (verse 30). In the next chapter, God says to Eli that the severity of the punishment imposed on the house of Eli stems from the fact that Eli "knew that his sons were **blaspheming** (*mekalelim*), and he restrained them not" (3:13). In the end, Eli died "because he was an old man and **heavy** (*kaved*)" (4:18), and on that same day a grandson was born to him who was given a name that perpetuates what happened: "And she named the child **I-Khavod**, saying, **Honor** (*kavod*) is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband" (ibid. vv. 21-22).

As was noted already in the previous lecture, the man of God makes no reference to the sexual offense of lying with the women who assembled at the Tent of Meeting, the sin that had brought Eli to reproach his sons. Thus, he emphasizes that this is not the worst of the sins committed by the sons of Eli. The focus of the reproach of the man of God relates to Eli's sons' great failure in administering the *Mishkan* service, the injury caused to the people of Israel, and its effect on the meaning of the world of priestly gifts.

## II. CRIME AND PUNISHMENTS

The structure of the verses in this passage is complex and involved, but it is still possible to isolate three punishments:

- 1) Premature death: "I will cut off your arm, and the arm of your father's house, that there shall not be an old man in your house... and there shall not be an old man in your house forever... and all the greater folk of your house shall die in the flower of their age" (vv. 31-33)

2) Removal of the priesthood from the house of Eli - "I said indeed that your house, and the house of your father, should walk before Me forever;<sup>3[3]</sup> but now the Lord says, Far be it from Me..." (v. 30) - and transferring it to another house, which will remain in that office during the period of the monarchy: "And I will raise Me up a faithful priest... and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before My anointed forever" (v. 35).

3) The house of Eli will not be totally wiped out. A remnant of that house will survive, only to see how others have assumed their role: "And you shall see a rival in your habitation<sup>4[4]</sup> enjoying all wealth which God shall give Israel" (v. 32); "And your descendants shall I not cut off from My altar, but they shall be there to consume your eyes, and to grieve your heart"<sup>5[5]</sup> (v. 33). In the end that remnant will be forced to humiliate itself and plead before the priestly house that comes in its stead to provide it with some office so that it can survive: "And it shall come to pass, that everyone that is left in your house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray you, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread"<sup>6[6]</sup> (v. 36).

How are we to understand these heavy punishments? They seem to point in the direction of "measure for measure." The removal of the priesthood stems, of course, from Eli's sons' failure to fill their roles in the appropriate manner. Leaving remnants who will see their rivals taking over their roles – that is, who will be forced to look up to their replacements from below – corresponds to the condescending and threatening manner in which Eli's sons had looked upon those who came to the

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<sup>3[3]</sup>The verse seems to imply that had the sons of Eli not sinned, the High Priesthood would have stayed among their descendants forever. This is difficult, for the High Priesthood was already promised to Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon – "And he shall have it, and his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood" (*Bamidbar* 25:13) – whereas Eli descended from Itamar the priest, as is implied in I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 24:3-6: "And David and Tzadok of the sons of Elazar, and Avimelekh of the sons of Itamar, divided them up according to their offices in their service... and Shemaya the son of Netanel the scribe, one of the Levites, recorded them in the presence of the king, and the princes, and Tzadok the priest, and Achimelekh the son of Evyatar, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the priest and Levites: one father's house being chosen for Elazar and one chosen for Itamar." Rashi and Radak write in the name of the Midrash that the High Priesthood was removed from the descendants of Pinchas and given to the descendants of Itamar during the time of the incident involving the concubine in Giv'a, when Pinchas the son of Elazar was High Priest, and the people of Israel abandoned most of the *mitzvot*. According to this, the transfer of the priesthood from the house of Itamar to the house of Tzadok, who was of the house of Pinchas the son of Elazar, restored the original situation.

<sup>4[4]</sup>That is to say: You will see your rival – namely, the priest who will replace you, like a man's two wives, who are each others' rivals - when you are in the habitation, namely, the *Bet ha-Mikdash* (Rashi, Radak). This use of the word *ma'on* in reference to the *Mikdash*, and the omission of the letter *bet*, "in" – parallels the description of the sin a few verses earlier: "Wherefore do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering, which I have commanded **in My habitation** (*ma'on*)" (v. 29).

<sup>5[5]</sup>This sharp wording alludes to the reproach in the Torah: "I also will do this to you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and fever, **that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart**: and you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it" (*Vayikra* 26:16).

<sup>6[6]</sup>This conclusion seems to intentionally parallel what Chana had said in her prayer: "They that were full have hired themselves out for bread" (2:5).

*Mishkan*. And it is most fitting that he who had forcibly seized meat from those who came to the *Mishkan* should be forced to prostrate himself before others for a piece of bread.

The third and most severe punishment – the premature death of Eli's descendants – is more difficult to understand, for at first glance it bears no connection to the sins. On closer examination of the wording of the punishment, however, we see that what is emphasized is not so much that Eli's descendants will die young, but rather that no old men will be found among them: "I will cut off your arm, and the arm of your father's house, that there shall not be **an old man** in your house... and there shall not be **an old man** in your house forever." This punishment seems to be directed at Eli, about whom it had previously been said: "Now Eli was very old" (v. 22). Generally speaking, the role of the elders is to advise and guide in the way of God.<sup>7[7]</sup> Since Eli failed to fulfill this role in his old age, his old age did not justify itself, and so in the manner of measure for measure it was decreed that "there shall not be an old man in your house."<sup>8[8]</sup>

A sign is attached to these three penalties, which itself constitutes the beginning of the punishment: "And this shall be a sign to you, that shall come upon your two sons, on Chofni and Pinchas; in one day they shall die both of them" (v. 34). This sign will be the last message that Eli will receive, and thus he will die with the certain knowledge that the prophecy of doom will indeed come true. There is no doubt that we are dealing here with severe punishments, the likes of which are difficult to find anywhere else in Scripture. The severity of the punishments correspond to the severity of the sins, which was discussed at length in the previous lecture.

### III. FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHECY

The first stage in the realization of the prophecy is, as stated above, the appearance of the sign – the death of Chofni and Pinchas on the same day, in the war that brought about the destruction of Shilo (4:11-22). The next encounter with the house of Eli is merely to meet the continuation of the family dynasty. On the eve of Shaul's first war against the Pelishtim, we hear of a High Priest who was a descendant of Eli:

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<sup>7[7]</sup> As this finds expression in the advice given to Rechavam by the elders (I *Melakhim* 12:6-13); see also *Yechezkel* 7:26.

<sup>8[8]</sup> Rashi also explains the punishment as measure for measure, but in a different manner: "Measure for measure, you ate sacrificial meat before their time, 'before they burnt the fat,' and therefore you too shall die before your time."

And Achiya, the son of Achituv, I-Khavod's brother, the son of Pinchas, the son of Eli, was the Lord's priest in Shilo, wearing an *efod*. (14:3)

We learn from this that I-Khavod had an older brother, named Achituv, and that Achituv's son, Achiya, served as a priest in the time of Shaul. In the continuation, when David flees from Shaul, he reaches Nov, the city of priests, and there he receives help from the High Priest, Achimelekh the son of Achituv (22:11). For our purposes it makes no difference whether we are dealing with Achiya's brother, or whether Achiya and Achimelekh are one and the same person. In any event, Achimelekh's fate is decided by Shaul, who commands Doeg the Edomite to punish Achimelekh and his family for abetting David. Doeg destroys all the members of the family, except for one, who can then continue the punishment:

And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day eighty five persons that did wear a lined *efod*. And Nov, the city of the priests, he smote with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword. And one of the sons of Achimelekh the son of Achituv, named Evyatar escaped, and fled after David. (ibid. 18-20)

Indeed, Evyatar continues to serve as High Priest, wearing the *efod* (23:6), and serves as King David's priest during his wanderings – until all of a sudden, another priest pushes him aside.<sup>9[9]</sup> In the course of Avshalom's rebellion, while David is fleeing from Jerusalem, it suddenly becomes apparent that Evyatar is no longer the main priest:

And lo **Tzadok** also came, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God; and they set down the ark of God; and **Evyatar** went up, until all the people had finished passing out of the city. And the king said to **Tzadok**, Carry back the ark of God into the city... The king said to Tzadok the priest, Do you see? return into the city in peace, and **your two sons with you**, Achimaatz your son, and Yehonatan the son of Evyatar. (II *Shemuel* 15:24-27)

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<sup>9[9]</sup>This phenomenon finds textual expression for the first time in II *Shemuel* 8:17 in a verse which itself is difficult: "And Tzadok the son of Achituv and Achimelekh the son of Evyatar were the priests." Here we learn for the first time of a priest named Tzadok; the expression "Achimelekh the son of Evyatar," however, is very difficult, for surely it should have read "Evyatar the son of Achimelekh"; see commentaries, ad loc. In any event, the verses at the end of chap. 8 seem to summarise the chapters of David's monarchy at its height (II *Shemuel* 5-8), and so it seems that chronologically these verses precede Avshalom's rebellion.

We see from here that the main priest was Tzadok, Evyatar lagging behind him; David gives his instructions to Tzadok, even though they are directed at Evyatar as well. What brought about the change? Why did Tzadok seize the place of Evyatar? Scripture is quiet and doesn't explain. This is because it did not attach any importance to the direct reason for this pushing aside. The primary importance of the story lies in Evyatar's being pushed aside, as part of the realization of the prophecy delivered by the man of God to Eli.

This story ends with the crowning of Adoniyahu, by which time Tzadok and Evyatar had already parted ways: Tzadok remained with Shelomo's supporters, whereas Evyatar joined Adoniyahu's camp.<sup>10</sup>[10] Following Shelomo's rise to the throne (I *Melakhim* 2), the circle is finally closed, when the natural historical process becomes interlaced in the Divine process:

And to Evyatar the priest the king said, Get you to Anatot, to your own fields; for you are worthy of death: but I will not at this time put you to death, because you did bear the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because you have been afflicted in all my father's afflictions. So Shelomo thrust Evyatar from being priest to the Lord; **that he might fulfill the word of the Lord, which He spoke concerning the house of Eli in Shilo.** (ibid. vv. 26-27)

#### IV. THE FAITHFUL PRIEST

Through the review of the events that led to the fulfillment of the prophecy of doom concerning the house of Eli, we have also learned the identity of "the faithful priest" mentioned in that prophecy, who was promised a "sure house."<sup>11</sup>[11] Indeed, the descendants of Tzadok continue to serve as High Priests in later periods as well. A list of his descendants appears in I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 5:34-41, where mention is made of several important priests:

And Achituv begot Tzadok, and Tzadok begot Achimaatz. And Achimaatz begot Azarya, and Azarya begot Yochanan. And Yochanan begot Azarya (he it is who executed the priest's office in the Temple that Shelomo built in Jerusalem... And Seraya begot Yehotzadak, and Yehotzadak went into exile,

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<sup>10</sup>[10] Together with another person who felt "deprived" – Yoav the son of Tzeruya, who had also been discharged from his office by David (II *Shemuel* 19:14).

<sup>11</sup>[11] In this way the High Priesthood was returned from the house of Itamar (see above note 3) to the descendants of Pinchas the son of Elazar, which also included Tzadok (see I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 5:30-34).

when the Lord carried away Yehuda and Jerusalem in the hand of Nevukhadnetzar.

Yehotzadak, one of the Tzadok's descendants, was the last High Priest to serve in the First Temple. His son, Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak, served as High Priest in the Second Temple (*Zekharya* 6:11). In the prophecy of Yechezkel (chap. 44), we find a positive attitude toward the descendants of Tzadok, who will continue to serve as High Priests in the future as well:

But the priests the Levites, the sons of Tzadok, that kept the charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to Me to minister to Me, and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat<sup>12[12]</sup> and the blood, says the Lord God. They shall enter into My sanctuary, and they shall come near to My table, to minister to Me, and they shall keep My charge. (*Yechezkel* 44:15-16)

The conclusion of the tragic story of the house of Eli is connected then to hope and promise for the future. The promise brought in the prophecy of the man of God about the building of a "sure house" for the faithful priest recalls the promise made to David by Natan the prophet: "And your house and your kingdom shall be established for ever before you" (II *Shemuel* 7:16). Thus the faithful houses of Israel will serve side by side – the royal house of David and the priestly house of Tzadok.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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<sup>12[12]</sup> This statement might be understood as standing in contrast to the sons of Eli, who took of the meat before the burning of the fat, an offense the significance of which was discussed above.