YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #272: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (LXXXII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LIX)**

After having dealt with King Shelomo's marriages to foreign women as the background to his building of *bamot* for idol worship, and in continuation of our discussion of his offering of sacrifices on *bamot* before the building of the Temple, in this *shiur* we will examine the significance of the offering of sacrifices in Shelomo's reign.

### David and the ark in Jerusalem – Shelomo and the Great *bama* in Giv'on

We demonstrated in previous *shiurim* that King David is connected in a most essential way to the ark which represents the resting of the *Shekhina*, whereas Shelomo is much more connected to the great *bama* in Giv'on, where he offers a thousand burnt-offerings on the altar. In this context it is very instructive to compare the first acts of David to the first acts of Shelomo following the establishment of his kingdom in Jerusalem.

As we have seen, after David conquers Jerusalem, the first thing that he does is to bring the ark to the city. With this act David marks two aspects of the spiritual direction in which he is going: Jerusalem (and not Giv'on), the ark (and not the altar).

From David's perspective, this is the first thing that should be done. From the moment that he brings the ark to Jerusalem, the ark is a fundamental fact that establishes Jerusalem as the place in his kingdom that houses the primary vessel for the resting of the *Shekhina*.

In contrast, if we examine the path taken by Shelomo after the kingdom is established in his hands (I *Melakhim* 2:46), we see that Scripture describes how Shelomo went off to Giv'on and offered a thousand burnt-offerings on the altar there.

Shelomo who was born in Jerusalem and knows the location of the ark in the tent in the City of David, chooses to go to the great *bama* and offer sacrifices there. This indicates how important the matter of the sacrifices was to Shelomo.

Later in this *shiur* we will examine how this finds expression in the status of the Temple as it is described in the verses and in the dedication of the Temple.

There is a disagreement about the thousand burnt-offerings that Shelomo offered on the altar at Giv'on. Rashi understands that they were all offered on one day, whereas the Radak maintains that they were not all offered on the same day, but rather they were all offered before Shelomo returned from there to Jerusalem. That is to say, this took place at the great *bama* in Giv'on, and Shelomo may have spent a certain amount of time there before returning to Jerusalem.

In I *Melakhim*, following Shelomo's prayer and after the king blesses the entire congregation of Israel, it says:

And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the Lord. And Shelomo offered for the sacrifice of peace-offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord. The same day did the king hallow the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord; for there he offered the burnt-offering, and the meal-offering, and the fat of the peace-offerings; because the brazen altar that was before the Lord was too little to receive the burnt-offering, and the meal-offering, and the fat of the peace-offerings (I *Melakhim* 8:62-64)

In II *Divrei ha-Yamim* the event is described once again with certain additions:

Now when Shelomo had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. And all the children of Israel looked on, when the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord was upon the house; and they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and prostrated themselves, and gave thanks unto the Lord; "for He is good, for His mercy endures forever"…

And King Shelomo offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God… and all Israel stood. Moreover Shelomo hallowed the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord; for there he offered the burnt-offerings, and the fat of the peace-offerings; because the brazen altar which Shelomo had made was not able to receive the burnt-offering, and the meal-offering, and the fat. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 7:1-7)

Our first impression from this story is that the event under discussion took place together with all of Israel, and that the dedication is attributed to the king and to all of Israel. Second, we are dealing with a huge quantity of sacrifices – 22,000 heads of cattle and 120,000 sheep. Scripture notes that the king hallowed the entire courtyard because the brazen altar was too small to receive all of the burnt-offerings, meal-offerings, and peace-offerings.

In *Divrei ha-Yamim* we find a description of how fire came down from heaven and consumed the offerings and how the glory of God filled the Temple.[[1]](#footnote-1) The people of Israel see the descending fire, bow themselves with their faces to the ground, and offer thanks to God.

When the ark was brought into the Temple (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 5:5-10), they brought into the Temple both the ark from the City of David, as well as all the holy vessels and the *Ohel Mo'ed* from the great *bama* in Giv'on. The commentators (ad loc.) refer us to the *Tosefta* in *Sota*:

When the first Temple was built, the *Ohel Mo'ed* was hidden away, and with it its hooks, its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets. And nevertheless they used only the table that was made by Moshe and the candelabrum that was made by Moshe. (*Tosefta*, *Sota* 13:1)

It is reasonable to assume that the event described in II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 5 took place when King Shelomo hid away the *Ohel Mo'ed* with its boards, hooks, pillars and sockets in the caves under the Temple.[[2]](#footnote-2) It is interesting that Scripture notes the table and the candelabrum, but not the gold altar or the brazen altar.

It turns out that at that assembly which included bringing the ark and other holy vessels into the Temple, Shelomo's prayer and the blessing of the people, sacrifices were offered both at the beginning and at the end. In other words, the great number of sacrifices form sort of a framework for the entire event at the beginning and at the end. We see then that offering sacrifices was very meaningful and important to Shelomo.

### The description of the burnt-offering altar as one of the Temple vessels in the books of *Melakhim* and *DIvrei ha-Yamim*

In order to understand the relationship between the sacrifices and the altar in the house of God and the need to offer sacrifices on the floor of the Temple courtyard we must examine the altar itself.

The description of the structure of the Temple and its vessels in the book of *Melakhim* does not mention the altar at all.

In addition to the verses already mentioned in the dedication of the Temple (and not in the account of the vessels or the structure of the Temple), the verses in I *Melakhim* state:

And three times in a year did Shelomo offer burnt-offerings and peace-offerings upon the altar which he built unto the Lord, offering thereby, upon the altar that was before the Lord. So he finished the house. (I *Melakhim* 9:25)

Here Scripture notes that Shelomo built an altar for God. The parallel verse in II *Divrei ha-Yamim* states:

Then Shelomo offered burnt-offerings unto the Lord on the altar of the Lord, which he had built before the porch, even as the duty of every day required, offering according to the commandment of Moshe, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the appointed seasons, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 8:12-13)

On the other hand, in the description of the structure of the Temple and the vessels, the verse states:

Moreover he made an altar of brass, twenty cubits the length thereof, and twenty cubits the breadth thereof, and ten cubits the height thereof. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 4:1)

It is possible that Scripture calls it an altar of brass because it came to replace the altar of brass, even though it is reasonable to assume that it was built of stone. This is the view of Rashi in I *Melakhim*:

Since it stood in place of the altar of brass and as its replacement it is called an altar of brass. (Rashi, I *Melakhim* 8:64)

The Ralbag (ad loc.) disagrees with Rashi:

It was called an altar of brass because it was plated with brass, but under the plating it was made of whole stones. (Ralbag, I *Melakhim* 8:64)

The verse in II *Melakhim* describe the altar in the days of Achaz:

And the brazen altar, which was before the Lord, he brought from the forefront of the house, from between his altar and the house of the Lord, and put it on the north side of his altar. (II *Melakhim* 16:14)

The book *Shiltei Gibborim* brings a proof from *Yechezkel* 9 that as long as the altar was not made of brass (because the Torah did not want to trouble Israel to make it out of brass) the ideal way was to plate the altar with brass. This is what Shelomo did in the First Temple.

Rav Makover[[3]](#footnote-3) cites these sources and suggests the conflicting views depend on the question whether the altar has the status of a vessel or it is part of the structure of the Temple. If it is a vessel, it must be plated with brass. If it is part of the structure of the Temple, there is no reason to plate it with brass.

In light of all of this, why didn't Scripture mention the altar among the Temple vessels in the book of *Melakhim*?

In general it may be argued that the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim* describes the Temple as the place where man serves God. In contrast, the book of *Melakhim* emphasizes the Temple's being the site of the resting of the *Shekhina*.

As may be recalled, the *Rishonim* disagree as to the ultimate goal of the Temple: Is it the resting of the *Shekhina*, as argued by the Ramban in his commentary to the beginning of *Parashat Teruma*,[[4]](#footnote-4) or is it the site of man's service of God, as understood by the Rambam at the beginning of *Hilkhot Beit ha-Bechira?[[5]](#footnote-5)*

If we compare this to what was stated above, the book of *Melakhim* which summarizes the First Temple period emphasizes the idea of the resting of the *Shekhina*, whereas the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim* which was written during the Second Temple period emphasizes the idea of man's service of God.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The author of *Dorot Rishonim*[[7]](#footnote-7) offers a different explanation for the absence of the *Mishkan* in the description of the structure in *Melakhim*:

In my opinion, the Pelishtim removed from the *Mishkan* in Shilo all the gold vessels, and they left in the *Mishkan* the brass altar, and also the curtains of the *Ohel Mo'ed* that were made in the wilderness.

The altar and what was left of the curtains were transferred after the destruction of the *Mishkan* in Shilo to Nov and to Giv'on.

King Shelomo brought the ancient brass altar into the Temple, and therefore there was no need to dedicate it. Scripture does not mention it in the book of *Melakhim* because it already existed, and Shelomo did not build a new altar.

From this we can understand something else. *Divrei ha-Yamim* describes the building with the term "*vaya'as*," "he made." It is possible that this means that Shelomo enlarged it and made it taller according to the new dimensions.[[8]](#footnote-8)

### The Difference between Shelomo's altar in the Temple and Moshe's altar in the *Mishkan*

The dimensions of the altar are spelled out in *Parashat Teruma*:

And you shall make the altar of acacia-wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be four-square; and the height thereof shall be three cubits. (*Shemot* 27:1)

The Gemara in *Zevachim* 59b brings a Tannaitic dispute between Rabbi Yose and Rabbi Yehuda regarding the dimensions of the altar in the *Mishkan*.

According to Rabbi Yose, the length and breadth of the altar was five cubits, in accordance with the plain sense of the verse, whereas its height was ten cubits, twice its breadth. Thus, "and the height thereof shall be three cubits," means from the border of the altar and up. He learns from the word, "four-square," from the inner altar to the outer altar – the height and breadth of the outer altar is twice that of the inner altar.

According to Rabbi Yehuda the height is three cubits, whereas the length and breadth is ten cubits by ten cubits. According to Rabbi Yehuda the dimensions of the outer altar in the *Mishkan* are learned from the outer altar mentioned in *Yechezkel*, where the measurements of the altar are taken from the middle:

And the hearth shall be twelve cubits long by twelve broad, square in the four sides thereof. (*Yechezkel* 43:16)

A third opinion brought in *Beraita de-Melekhet ha-Mishkan*[[9]](#footnote-9) is that of Rabbi Meir who explains the verses in their plain sense:

It was taught: The burnt-offering altar was five cubits long, and five cubits broad and three cubits high. (*Baraita de-Melekhet HaMishkan*)

The Radak as well in his commentary to *Melakhim* relates to the relationship between the dimensions of the brass altar of Shelomo and the brass altar in the *Mishkan*, and to the meaning of the difference between them:

"The king hallowed the middle of the court" – Why did he hallow it? To do **there the burnt-offerings and the meal-offering and the peace-offering, because the brass altar** that Shelomo made **was too small to receive** the great number of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. He is not speaking of the brass altar that was made by Moshe, for it is explicitly stated in *Divrei ha-Yamim* that the brass altar that Shelomo made could not receive the burnt-offerings. And that of Moshe was hidden away with the *Ohel Mo'ed*, as we explained above. And the brass altar that Shelomo made, which was twenty cubits long and twenty [cubits] broad, could not receive the great quantity of burnt-offerings and fat, for the brass altar made by Moshe was five by five. And it says that Shelomo offered a thousand burnt-offerings on that altar, and the brass altar made by Shelomo was twenty by twenty [cubits]…

Between the burnt-offerings and the meal-offerings and the fats of the peace-offerings, the brass altar made by Shelomo could not receive it all, so that Shelomo had to hallow the floor of the courtyard and offer there of the burnt-offerings and the meal-offerings and the fats of the peace-offerings, that which the altar could not receive. (Radak, I *Melakhim* 8:64)

The Radak calculates the size of the altars, comparing Moshe's altar to Shelomo's altar, and he concludes based on its area that it would have been impossible to sacrifice at one time such a large quantity. Therefore Shelomo was forced to hallow the courtyard, and thus enable the offering of such a large number of offerings at one time.

In this *shiur* we dealt with Shelomo's relationship to the world of sacrifices, as it finds expression in his going to Giv'on, in the structure of the Temple, and in its dedication.

In the next *shiur* we will complete our discussion of the dedication of the Temple, and examine the meaning of the hallowing of the entire courtyard because of the large number of sacrifices that were brought for the Temple's dedication.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. The wording clearly parallels that found in the account of the dedication of the *Mishkan* in *Shemot* 40:34-45, where Scripture states twice: "The glory of the Lord filled the *Mishkan*." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As is noted in *Sota* 19a. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In his book, *Otzar ha-Bayit ha-Rishon*, Danny books, p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. "The mystery of the *Mishkan* is that the glory that rested on Mount Sinai should rest on it in a concealed manner" (*Shemot* 25:2). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. "It is a positive commandment to construct a house for God, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within" (*Hilkhot Beit ha-Bechira* 1:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This also finds expression in the different ways that the structure of the Temple is described in the books of *Melakhim* and *Divrei ha-Yamim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. R. Yitzchak Halevi, *Dorot Rishonim*, *al Tekufat ha-Mikra* (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 5699), pp. 171 ff., and especially chapter 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. To this should be added what we mentioned earlier that the very mention of the altar in the description of the structure of the Temple in *Divrei ha-Yamim* means that it attaches great significance to the aspect of man's service of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See also *Bemidbar Rabba* 6, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)