YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

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Dedicated by Steven Weiner and Lisa Wise with prayers for Refuah Shelemah for all who require healing, comfort and peace –

those battling illnesses visibly and invisibly, publicly and privately.

May Hashem mercifully grant us strength, courage and compassion.

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**Lecture #282: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (XCII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXVIII)**

In the previous *shiurim* we examined the calves fashioned in the wilderness and by Yerovam, to what extent they were idolatry, and why calves were chosen to substitute for the *keruvim.* In this *shiur*, as part of our summary of Yerovam's actions, we wish to consider *Chazal's* attitude toward Yerovam's motives and examine the entirety of his actions in the kingdom of Israel on various planes – time, place and people.

We have seen that there was a comprehensive change in the Divine service, the primary purpose of which was to firmly establish Yerovam's kingdom and rule, and sever the tribes of the kingdom of Israel from Jerusalem. The main changes involved the presentation of an alternative location – Bet-El and Dan; a change in the cult itself – the calves; a change in the people who conducted the service – no longer the priests, but anyone who wished to make himself a priest; and a change in the calendar.

In this *shiur* we wish to examine Yerovam's considerations as they find expression in the words of *Chazal*.

The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* relates to Yerovam's actions and his considerations, and says as follows:

Rav Nachman said: The conceit which possessed Yerovam drove him out of the world, as it is stated: "Now Yerovam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn to their lord, even to Rechavam king of Yehuda, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rechavam king of Yehuda" (I *Melakhim* 12:26-27). He reasoned thus: It is a tradition[[1]](#footnote-1) that none but the kings of the house of Yehuda may sit in the Temple courtyard. Now, when they [the people] see Rechavam sitting and me standing, they will say, The former is the king and the latter his subject; while if I sit too, I am guilty of treason, and they will slay me, and follow him. Straightway: "Therefore the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said to them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bet-El, and the other he put in Dan" (I *Melakhim* 12:28-29). (*Sanhedrin* 102a)

### Yerovam's Motives

In the verse cited by the Gemara (I *Melakhim* 12:27), the concern about continuing the Divine service in the house of God in Jerusalem is that the people would kill Yerovam and return to Rechavam the king of Yehuda. Yerovam's use of the term "their lord" seems to indicate that Yerovam concedes that Rechavam is the legal ruler, whereas he himself, Yerovam, is but a slave who rebelled against his master.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Rechavam's son, Aviya, says in his address to Yerovam on Mount Tzemarayim:

Hear me, O Yerovam and all Israel; ought you not to know that the Lord, the God of Israel, gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt? (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 13:4-5)

He notes that God turned the house of David into a permanent royal dynasty. The expression used by Aviya is "a covenant of salt." What this expression means is that the covenant that God made with David and his household is a covenant that can never be nullified. This expression is rooted in the Torah. The Torah states with respect to the meal-offering:

And every meal-offering of yours shall you season with salt; neither shall you suffer the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your meal-offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt. (*Vayikra* 2:13)

And in God's words to Aharon, with regard to the portions of the sacrifices given to the priests, it is stated:

All the heave-offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the Lord, have I given you, and your sons and your daughters with you, as a due for ever; it is an everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord to you and to your seed with you. (*Bemidbar* 18:19)

Salt symbolizes the eternal covenant that God made with the people of Israel.

In our context, Aviya tells Yerovam explicitly that God's relationship with the kingdom of the Davidic house is a covenant of salt that will never be nullified or changed. According to this understanding, Yerovam is rebelling against the kingdom. Yerovam himself says that the heart of the people will still turn to their lord Rechavam.

Since the Halakha states that none but the kings of the house of David may sit in the Temple courtyard, the Gemara says that if the people of Israel were to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and see Rechavam sitting and Yerovam standing, they would think that Rechavam was the king and Yerovam was his subject. On the other hand, if Yerovam were to sit in the Temple courtyard he would be guilty of treason. In any case, then, everyone would follow Rechavam. Therefore Yerovam makes the two golden calves.

It follows that Yerovam's first and primary concern was about his personal honor, that it would be compromised if he were to stand and Rechavam were to sit. In addition, the Maharsha (ad loc.) notes that in order to preserve his own status, Yeravam would have been willing even to transgress the law and sit in the Temple courtyard, were it not for his fear that he would be executed.

This concern is alluded to by the double use of the term *shiva,* return – *tashuv* and *ve-shav*. This idea appears in another formulation in the *Yerushalmi*, *Avoda Zara* 1:1, as cited in the commentary of the Radak (ad loc.):

Rabbi Yose bar Yaakov said: **At the end of the Sabbatical year, Yeravam ruled as king over Israel.** This is what the verse states: "At the end of every seven years, in the set time of the year of release, in the feast of Sukkot, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing" (*Devarim* 31:10-11). [Yerovam] said: I must read from the Torah. If I stand up to read, [the people] will say that the king of the place [Rechavam] takes precedence. If I read second to him, it is a dishonor to me. And if I do not read at all, it is a disgrace to me. And if I allow [the people] to go [to Jerusalem] alone, they will leave me and go back to Rechavam the son of Shelomo. (Radak, I *Melakhim* 12:27)

According to the *Yerushalmi*, Yerovam assumed the kingship at the end of the Sabbatical year. Here too the main issue on Yerovam's agenda is his personal honor. If Rechavam as king would read from the Torah first, and he second, it would be a dishonor to him, and if Yerovam would not read at all, it would be a disgrace to him.

From a comprehensive perspective on Yerovam's actions, it may be said that they relate to the three main components of man's behavior: place, time and people; or in the language of Chassidut – world, year and soul.[[3]](#footnote-3)

### Place

As we have shown in previous *shiurim*, the choice of a place is significant on several levels. In the historical context, Bet-El is connected to the stories of the patriarchs, especially that of Yaakov. Primarily, however, setting the calves up along the borders of the kingdom reflects an inclination that is just the opposite of that of the Temple: Placing the calves as a shield along the borders of the kingdom (as opposed to Jerusalem which is located in the heart of the kingdom of Yehuda) and as representing sanctity that impacts from the outside (as opposed to the Temple that impacts from within).

### time

Scripture relates that Yerovam devised a month on his own and the festival of Sukkot was celebrated "in the eighth month on the fifteenth of the month like the festival in Yehuda" (I *Melakhim* 12:32). Ostensibly, the simple understanding of the verses is that Sukkot was celebrated that year in the kingdom of Israel on the fifteenth of Cheshvan.

Rav Reuven Margaliot,[[4]](#footnote-4) relating to the month that Yerovam introduced on his own, writes as follows:

Rashi in *Melakhim* (ad loc.) writes: He expounded for them that this is the month of the harvest, and that it is fitting that the festival be celebrated in it. That is to say, just as we know from the laws that determine the year, that we can intercalate the year and move the festival of Pesach a full month if the spring does not come at its appointed time, so too Yerovam expounded for them that the year can be intercalated in order that the harvest festival be at its appointed time. The assumption that only the month of Adar can be intercalated is not stated explicitly in the Torah, but rather is known from tradition. But Yerovam, whose Torah was faultless and all the sages of Israel in comparison to him resembled the herbs of the field (*Sanhedrin* 102a), but together with this he was filled with conceit (*Sanhedrin* 101b), knew about himself that there was nobody like him in Israel and he allowed himself to disagree with this fundamental principle…

It is no wonder then that Yerovam devised a month of his own, that is to say, he intercalated the month of Elul, and because of this the festivals of the seventh month were transferred to what was the eighth according to the determination of the Sages of Israel who disagreed with him, as they called that month "the eighth" month, whereas Yeravam considered it the seventh month, and fixed the festival on the fifteenth of the month, as it is stated, just as they called the month in which Chizkiyahu established the festival of Pesach "seven days" by the name "the second month" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 30). Yeravam did not change that which is stated explicitly in the Torah, but rather he disagreed with one of the accepted assumptions concerning the intercalation of the year. Just as he knew how to expound the book of *Vayikra* in a hundred and twenty ways (*Sanhedrin* 103b), so too he knew how to explain his assumption to intercalate Elul so that the harvest festival be in its time, and with this he succeeded in turning the heart of the people.

However, by intercalating Elul, not only was the festival of Sukkot moved, but also the time of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. This is what is stated in the *Yerushalmi* (*Avoda Zara* 1:1, and in *Midrash Rabba* *Eikha*, chap.2): "The Lord has caused to be forgotten in Zion appointed season and Shabbat" (*Eikha* 2:6). Is it possible that the Holy One, blessed is He, caused the appointed seasons and Shabbats of Israel to be forgotten. Rather, [He caused to be forgotten] the appointed seasons and Shabbats of Yerovam ben Nevat which he had invented on his own. This is what it says: "In the month which he had devised of his own heart (*milibo*)" (I *Melakhim* 12:33). It is written *milvad,* as in: "Apart from the Shabbat of the Lord" (*Vayikra* 12:33). According to the superficial understanding, it is exceedingly astounding how Yerovam could have allowed himself to devise a "Shabbat" of his own heart, to move a holy day from its appointed time…

However the "appointed time and the Shabbat" which Yerovam devised are Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashana is not a holiday, but rather an "appointed time," and Yom Kippur is a "*Shabbat Shabbaton*"… Even when he came to change the appointed times and holidays from what they were in Yehuda, he did not raise his hand again what is explicit in the Torah. He devised a month on his own, he intercalated Elul and explained the intercalation by expounding that the harvest festival should be in its time, just as the festival of Pesach must be in the spring. But at no time was it possible in Israel for a person to rise up and change what is explicit in the Torah and to institute novelties against what was known and rooted in the people from the day that the Torah was given to Israel.

It turns out that according to Rav Margaliot, the festival of Sukkot was celebrated in the kingdom of Israel on the fifteenth of Tishrei and not on the fifteenth of Cheshvan. Yerovam intercalated Elul, and so the fifteenth of Tishrei in the kingdom of Israel paralleled the fifteenth of Cheshvan in the kingdom of Yehuda. In this way Yerovam succeeded from that time on to celebrate the festivals in the kingdom of Israel a month later that when they were celebrated in the kingdom of Yehuda.

Zev Ehrlich[[5]](#footnote-5) notes that the agricultural situation in the kingdom of Israel from Mount Bet-El northward served as a good background for the month long delay. The agricultural produce ripens in Israel a little later than in Yehuda. This situation serves as a convenient background in the kingdom of Israel to accept the change in the appointed times.

It is possible[[6]](#footnote-6) that when Yerovam ascended the altar to offer sacrifices in Bet-El he had Sukkot in mind, on the fifteenth of Tishrei according to his calculation, and in practice on the fifteenth of Cheshvan in the kingdom of Yehuda. This in essence was the dedication of the *bamot* in Bet-El and in Dan, which replaced Shelomo's dedication of the Temple.

We suggested in the past that Shelomo's dedication of the Temple took place in the twenty-fourth year of his reign. According to this calculation, Yerovam's dedication of the *bamot* took place seventeen years after the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem by Shelomo.[[7]](#footnote-7) If we add also what was cited above from the *Yerushalmi* in tractate *Avoda Zara* that Yerovam ascended to the throne in the year following the Sabbatical year, it turns out that the dedication of the *bamot* in Bet-El was in essence a *Hakhel* ceremony in which Yerovam starred as the priest and as the king over the ten tribes, and it took place a month after the parallel *Hakhel* ceremony led by Rechavam in the kingdom of Yehuda.

It is interesting to consider whether it is possible to attach spiritual significance to this aspect of the dedication of the Temple by Rechavam and Yerovam in the kingdom of Yehuda and in the kingdom of Israel after the dedication of the Temple by Shelomo, which also took place in the month of Tishrei.

In the next *shiur* we will complete our discussion of the actions taken by Yerovam, including the changes that he introduced regarding the people who performed the Divine service.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 4:4 (ed. Zuckermandel). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is also the understanding of Yehuda Kil in his *Da'at Mikra* comentary to the book of *Melakhim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Zev Ehrlich, "*Vaya'as Yeravam – Olam Shana Nefesh be-Mif'alei Yeravam ben Nevat*," *Kotleinu* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In his book "*Ha-Mikra ve-ha-Mesora*," *Chodesh Asher Bada mi-Libo*, pp. 54-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In his article, "*Le-Beirur ha-Hevdelim bein Mamlekhet Yisrael le-Mamlekhet Yehuda (Bi-Yemei Yeravam ben Nevat*," in *Sefer Yaakov Leslau.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. So suggests Zev Ehrlich in the article cited above. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In his article Ehrlich suggests that Shelomo's dedication of the Temple took place 28 years before Yerovam's dedication of the house of *bamot*. According to our calculation, Shelomo's dedication of the Temple took place in the twelfth year of his reign, following four years until the construction began and seven years during which the construction continued. Our suggestion is different than that of Ehrlich. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)