YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #287: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (XCVII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXXIII)**

As with many other issues, parallel to what is related about Yerovam in the book of *Melakhim*, there are also accounts about him in the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim.*

After having dealt in the last two *shiurim* with the prophetic assessment of Yerovam and his actions, let us now examine what happened to Yerovam in the end.

**What Happened to Yerovam in the End**

In I *Melakhim* 14, Scripture describes Yerovam's death in a very succinct and schematic manner, as we find with all the other kings:

And the rest of the acts of Yerovam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. And the days which Yerovam reigned were two and twenty years; and he slept with his fathers, and Nadav his son reigned in his stead. (I *Melakhim* 14:19-20).

The twenty-two years of Yerovam's reign apparently begin parallel to the start of the reign of Rechavam after Shelomo's death. Rechavam ruled for seventeen years, Aviya ruled for three years, and after him Asa began his reign. Yerovam died then in the second year of Asa, king of Yehuda.

II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 13 refers to the reign of Aviya, and mention is made there of a war that was fought between Aviya and Yerovam.

The text records Aviya's speech on Mount Tzemarayim in the hills of Efrayim. This speech is directed at Yerovam and all of Israel. In it Aviya says as follows:

And Aviya stood up upon Mount Tzemarayim, which is in the hill-country of Efrayim, and said, 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 forever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?

Yet Yerovam the son of Nevat, the servant of Shelomo the son of David, rose up, and rebelled against his lord. And there were gathered to him vain men, base fellows that strengthened themselves against Rechavam the son of Shelomo, when Rechavam was young and faint-hearted, and could not withstand them. And now you think to withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hand of the sons of David; and you are a great multitude, and there are with you the golden calves which Yerovam made you for gods. Have you not driven out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aharon, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the peoples of other lands? so that whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same becomes a priest of them that are no gods.

But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and we have priests ministering to the Lord, the sons of Aharon, and the Levites in their work; and they burn unto the Lord every morning and every evening burnt-offerings and sweet incense; the showbread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening; for we keep the charge of the Lord our God; but you have forsaken Him. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 13:4-11)

The first point that he makes is that God gave the kingdom over Israel to David forever, to him and to his descendants,[[1]](#footnote-1) by way of a covenant of salt, that is to say, the Davidic house will rule eternally. The division of the kingdom did not change this fundamental fact.

The expression "covenant of salt" is found in the Torah in connection with the meal-offering. Thus we read in *Vayikra*:

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)

Similarly, we find in God's words to Aharon:

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)

The simple meaning of "a covenant of salt" in both contexts is an eternal covenant, a covenant that will continue to exist forever. This is why Aviya uses this expression against Yerovam and all of Israel – the covenant with the house of David is stable, permanent and eternal.

The second point is the reference to the service in the Temple in Jerusalem as opposed to the ritual conducted at Bet-El. He notes the golden calves "which Yerovam made you for gods"; here he accuses the people of idolatry. He goes on, making reference to the harm done to the priesthood and to the Temple, and to the removal of the priests, as opposed to the priests, the sons of Aharon, who serve in the Temple in Jerusalem. He then describes the permanent service in the Temple, which includes the offering of the daily offerings, the burning of the incense and the lighting of the candlestick – "for we keep the charge of the Lord our God; but you have forsaken Him."

We see then two clear accusations leveled at Yerovam and all of Israel – the rebellion against the kingdom of the house of David and the abandonment of God.

In the end Aviya refers to a war that was fought between him and Yerovam:

And, behold, God is with us at our head, and His priests with the trumpets of alarm to sound an alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight you not against the Lord, the God of your fathers; for you shall not prosper. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 13:12)

Here, as it were, he describes the camp of Yehuda, with the ark of the covenant possibly going out before it with God Himself:

And when Yehuda looked back… and they cried to the Lord… that God smote Yerovam… Neither did Yerovam recover strength again in the days of Aviya; and the Lord smote him, and he died. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 13:14-20)

However, it is not clear from here when Yerovam died. Ostensibly, verse 15 states explicitly that God smote Yerovam, and it is possible that he was smitten already in the battle. But verse 20 states that Yerovam never recovered from the campaign and that God smote him, implying that he died before his time, but after the battle, perhaps from a difficult illness.

If so, verse 20 can be reconciled with what was already mentioned, that Yerovam died in the second year of Asa, the king of Yehuda, and not in the course of the war with Aviya.

The war itself is described as a miraculous battle, in which the kingdom of Yehuda represented the way of God, and the kingdom of Israel just the opposite. The faith in God which revealed itself in the camp of Yehuda is what brought about the miraculous victory. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Aviya captured Bet-El, but there is no indication that he abolished the worship of the calf in that city.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**“The City Which the Lord Had Chosen to Put His Name There”**

And Rechavam the son of Shelomo reigned in Yehuda. Rechavam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there; and his mother's name was Naama the Amonitess. (I *Melakhim* 14:21)[[3]](#footnote-3)

After describing Rechavam's age and the years of his reign in Jerusalem, Scripture adds the fact that Jerusalem was the city that God chose from all the tribes of Israel to put His name there. What is meaning of this addition in this context?

The source of the expression is in *Parashat Re'eh*. There it is said that in contrast to the idol worshippers:

You shall not do so to the Lord your God. But to the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put His name there, even to His habitation shall you seek, and there you shall come; and there you shall bring your burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the offering of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill-offerings, and the firstlings of your herd and of your flock. (*Devarim* 12:4-6)

Scripture notes that in contrast to the idolaters who choose their places of worship on the high mountains and the hills and under every tree, the people of Israel are required to serve their God in the place of His choosing, and this choosing is meant "to put his name there."

First of all, the verse in *Melakhim* explicitly states that the place that God chose to put His name there is the city of Jerusalem. What was chosen was not just the Temple itself, the site of the sacrificial service, but rather the entire city, as is implied by the verse in *Devarim* which mentions the eating of tithes in that place. The novelty here is that God chooses a place, a city that includes secular and practical life, so that His name be put on it, on the city of Jerusalem.

In addition, Scripture notes here that the city of Jerusalem, which God chose to put His name there, is from all the tribes of Israel.

The Torah repeats this expression in connection with the eating of second-tithe in Jerusalem:

**And if the way be too long for you, so that you are not able to carry it, because the place is too far from you, which the Lord your God shall choose to set His name there, when the Lord your God shall bless you. (*Devarim* 14:24)**

Returning now to the verse in *Melakhim* which summarizes the reign of Rechavam, why does the prophet choose to mention this expression specifically in relation to Rechavam's reign? All of the kings of Yehuda ruled in Jerusalem, and in connection with almost none of them is mention made of the Divine choosing of the city and of God's putting His name there.

In order to answer this question, let us first examine the various places in the Bible where this expression is indeed found.

The first mention of God's selection of the city to put His name there is at Shelomo's dedication of the Temple:

And the Lord said to him, I have heard your prayer and your supplication, that you have made before Me: I have hallowed this house, which you have built, to put My name there forever; and My eyes and My heart shall be there perpetually. (I *Melakhim* 9:3)

It is important to emphasize that "this house was hallowed to put My name there forever." Here we are dealing with the dedication of the Temple and its purpose.

This issue is mentioned in Shelomo's prayer already at an earlier stage:

Since the day that I brought forth My people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house, that My name might be there; but I chose David to be over My people Israel. (I *Melakhim* 8:16)

And again:

That Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place whereof You have said, My name shall be there; to hearken to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place. (I *Melakhim* 8:29)

… that Your name is called upon this house which I have built… toward the city which You have chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Your name. (I *Melakhim* 8:43-44)[[4]](#footnote-4)

The second mention of this matter is in the words of Achiya the Shilonite to Yerovam when he leaves Jerusalem. The prophet informs Yerovam about the division of the kingdom:

And to his son will I give one tribe, that David My servant may have a lamp always before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen Me to put My name there. (I *Melakhim* 11:36)

With the news of the division of the kingdom, the prophet emphasizes the Divine choice of the city. The division of the kingdom is supposed to take place when the Divine choice of the city of Jerusalem to put His there is a fundamental fact.

The third mention is in the days of Menashe:

And he built altars in the house of the Lord, whereof the Lord said, In Jerusalem will I put My name… And he set the graven image of Ashera, that he had made, in the house of which the Lord said to David and to Shelomo his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put My name for ever. (II *Melakhim* 21:4-7)[[5]](#footnote-5)

Why is this matter mentioned specifically in the days of Menashe?

The prophet testifies in II *Melakhim*:

Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Yehuda, to remove them out of His sight, for the sins of Menashe, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and the Lord would not pardon.(II *Melakhim* 24:3-4)

And in the book of *Yirmeyahu*:

And I will cause them to be a horror among all the kingdoms of the earth, because of Menashe the son of Chizkiyahu king of Yehuda, for that which he did in Jerusalem. (*Yirmeyahu* 15:3)

In other words, the destruction of the city and the Temple are due to the sins of Menashe. Therefore, Scripture makes a point of mentioning in this context the Divine choice of the city to put His name there. Menashe's actions in a certain sense negate God's name as it is revealed in the city because these actions cause the city's destruction.

Let us now return to the mention of this matter in the days of Rechavam. Rechavam is the first king for whom God's choosing of the city of Jerusalem is of special significance. With the division of the kingdom, there are for the first time new ritual centers in Dan and Bet-El in the kingdom of Israel that undermine the selection of Jerusalem. Hence the special need to mention and emphasize the Divine choice of Jerusalem. With the division of the kingdom special emphasis is placed on the choice of Jerusalem so that it will be clear that the city's selection has not been changed.

There are commentators (Rav Yosef Kara and Rav Yosef Caspi) who explain that this special expression appears in relation to Rechavam in connection with the following verse:

And Yehuda did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; and they moved Him to jealousy with their sins which they committed, above all that their fathers had done. (I *Melakhim* 14:22)

According to this explanation, Scripture emphasizes God's choosing of the city in contrast to the deeds of the people of Yehuda who showed no interest in God's choosing their actions, and to highlight their wickedness and their shame.

There is no contradiction between the two explanations, and it may be argued that this expression is used in connection with Rechavam for two reasons.

In the next *shiur*, we will examine the worship of God in the days of Rechavam.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. We will not go into depth here concerning Aviya himself, about which it is stated: "And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; and his heart was not whole with the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father" (I *Melakhim* 15:3). When we reach the days of Aviya, we will deal with the relationship between this verse and what is stated in our passage, "For we keep the charge of the Lord our God." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In continuation of what was said in note 1, *Chazal* voice much criticism against Aviya. The *Yerushalmi*, *Yevamot* 16:3, criticizes Aviya and says that he died before Yerovam for two reasons: because "idol worship came into hands and he did not destroy it" (when he captured Bet-El); and because "he bribed Yerovam in public," that is to say, because he slandered Yerovam before the battle. They, therefore, understand that God smote Aviya and not Yerovam. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This formulation appears also in the parallel text in II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 12:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. And similarly in v. 48. And so too in the parallel text in II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 6:5-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. And similarly in the parallel text in II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 33:4-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)