

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Sefer Melakhim: The Book of Kings
By Rav Alex Israel

This week's shiurim are dedicated
in memory of Mrs. Cela Meisels, Tzerka Nechama bat Shlomo.

Shiur #11: The Rebellion of Yerovam - Part 1. (Chapter 11)

In this week's *shiur*, we will take a look at Yerovam and the rebellion that he instigated. It is easy to view Yerovam as a wholly negative person and a sinner, in the spirit of the *mishna* that brands Yerovam a villain condemned to eternal perdition:

Three kings and four commoners have no portion in the World to Come: Three kings - Yerovam, Achav and Menashe. (*Sanhedrin* 10:2)¹

However, we will present a more nuanced approach, assessing Yerovam as a complex character with both positive and negative elements to his biography. *Chazal* reflect this more ambivalent view when they commend Yerovam for speaking out against Shlomo:

Why did Yerovam deserve to be king? Because he denounced Shlomo (*Sanhedrin* 101b)

Chazal also describe Yerovam as a leading scholar in his generation.² Thus, Yerovam is an ambivalent character with virtues and flaws, successes and failures. We will try to discuss them.

WHO IS YEROVAM?

(26) Yerovam ben Nevat, an Ephraimite of Tzeredah, the son of a widow whose name was Tzerua, was in Solomon's service; he raised

¹ See also *Rosh Hashana* 17a

² *Sanhedrin* 102a: "Just as the new robe had no flaw, so Yerovam's Torah had no flaw... They [Yerovam and Achiya] innovated [Torah] the likes of which had never been heard previously ... All the scholars of the generation were compared before them to the grass of the field."

Needless to say, the *peshat* does not indicate that Yerovam was a Torah scholar. This is the aggadic style of *Chazal*, who also introduce David Ha-Melekh as a *talmid chakham* and *posek halakhot*, at variance with the impression that one may find in *Tanakh*.

his hand against the king. (27) The circumstances under which he raised his hand against the king were as follows: Shlomo built the Milo, repairing the breach of the city of David. (28) Yerovam was an able man,³ and when Shlomo saw that the young man was a capable worker, he appointed him [as tax collector] over all the province of the House of Yosef. (11:26-28)

Many of the commentators⁴ switch the order of these *pesukim* in order to make sense of the information here. We would present the story in the following manner: Yerovam was a man who demonstrated impressive management and leadership skills. His outstanding reputation led him to a high office when Shlomo appointed him as head of the administrative region of Yosef. His role was to collect the tax money that supports the palace expenses. If you recall, we read that "these officers (*nitzavim*) financed King Shlomo and all those who sat at King Shlomo's table, each one for a month; they let nothing be lacking" (4:7).

However, at a certain point, Yerovam decided to confront Shlomo. We may presume that as tax collector, he was sensitive to the financial burden weighing upon the common people. As the palace expenses burgeoned, the people strained to maintain their financial balance, and Yerovam decided to speak out. Yerovam's interest in the issues of taxation is expressed further in the continuation of the story (see chapter 12), in which Yerovam confronts Shlomo's son, the young king Rechavam. One imagines that the fact that the ruling tribe of Yehuda was exempt from taxation,⁵ whereas the tribes of Yosef were harshly taxed, only exacerbated the tension. Yerovam's emphatic demand of Rechavam was a reduction of the tax burden:

Your father put a heavy yoke on us - but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you. (12:4)

It seems obvious that as the nation appealed to the new monarch for a tax reduction, they turned specifically to Yerovam as their representative precisely because he had a history of representing the working class and a track record of protest against the government.

So Yerovam raised his objections to Shlomo. This is described by the *pesukim* in an extreme way: "He raised his hand against the king." We can surmise that this took the form of a public protest and that Shlomo saw it as a

³ JPS translation; in Hebrew, "*gibor chayil*." We don't find Yerovam serving in a military capacity, like David or Na'aman, who were also described with this appellation. The other Biblical figure who functions in a civilian context and is given this title is Boaz (*Rut* 2:1). It is possible that "*gibor chayil*" represents some form of social status, as we see in *Melakhim* II 15:19-20; Menachem ben Gedi requires all "*giborei chayil*" to pay 1,000 talents of silver. In that context, it refers to people of higher class or financial means. Recall that other potential kings - both Shaul (*Shmuel* I 9:1) and David (*Shmuel* I 16:18) - are given this title in their introductory descriptions.

⁴ See Rashi, Radak, and Ralbag.

⁵ Yehuda is absent from the list of tax-paying tribes in chapter 4.

challenge, a provocation, an act of disloyalty, and even an act of treason.⁶ We know the result:

Shlomo tried to kill Yerovam, but Yerovam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Shlomo's death. (11:40)

A king does not seek to eliminate a political opponent unless he views the protagonist as a significant threat. Yerovam certainly appears to be a person who believed passionately in his cause.

THE MILO

What prompted Yerovam to make such a drastic move? We read here that it was the building of the *Milo* that triggered his protest. The most significant piece of information about the *Milo* may be found in a previous chapter:

The daughter of Pharaoh ascended from the City of David to her house which [Shlomo] had built her. That was the building of the *Milo*. (9:24)

In other words, the *Milo* was the space designated for the construction of the palace for the daughter of Pharaoh. If we put the pieces together, we understand that Yerovam was protesting the use of public funds in order to build exotic palaces for Shlomo's foreign wives. One can certainly understand a government official taking a principled stand on an issue like that.

But there is more to understand about the *Milo*. When we read the *pasuk* (11:37), we note two phrases:

- 1) Shlomo built the *Milo*,
- 2) repairing the breach of the city of David.

What exactly is the *Milo*? Where is it? And in what way does it close the breach, or gap, in *Ir David*? What breach?

Various suggestions regarding the *Milo* are proposed equally by archeologists and traditional commentaries.⁷ Three basic options are raised:

1. It is a fortress – this is the translation of the Septuagint.⁸
2. It represents a fortification of the slopes and outer wall surrounding Jerusalem. Walls were constructed and filled with dirt (a landfill – "*Milo*" from

⁶ The *gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 101b) tells us that Yerovam was wrong in making his differences with Shlomo public, but it is difficult to assess how these issues could have been resolved behind closed doors.

⁷ See *Olam Ha-Tanakh* on 9:16 for a good summary of references in *Tanakh* and archeological perspectives on the topic. R. Yitzchak Levi also wrote a very useful piece on the *Milo* - <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/yeru2/16yeru.htm>

⁸This may be the meaning of the phrase in *Shoftim* 9:20 which speaks about "*beit Milo*." Of course, that story takes place in Shekhem, which demonstrates that the phrase *Milo* is not limited specifically to Jerusalem.

the Hebrew word "*maleh*," "full"), creating reinforced terraces and a steeper gradient with which to defend the city. *Sefer Melakhim* talks of "the Milo and the walls of Jerusalem" (9:15), indicating a connection between the two. Archeologists have found evidence of structures such as this on the eastern flank of *Ir David*. Rashi adopts this explanation in *Sefer Shmuel*:

A low wall filled in with earth, the high point of the mound being in the middle and sloping in all directions – this is called *Milo*. Upon it David constructed buildings and that *Milo* surrounded the stronghold. (Rashi *Shmuel* II 5:9)

What these two explanations have in common is the sense that the Milo is a type of specialized construction for purposes of defense or war-fortification. This fits in with many references that mention the *Milo* in a military context.⁹

PEOPLE POWER - RELIGIOUS ACCESS

3. A third option, the possibility that we shall prefer, is that the *Milo* refers to the area that connected the City of David to *Har Ha-Bayit*, the Temple Mount. The Temple was situated on a hillock many hundreds of meters from David's City. The building of the *Milo* was the development of the land that linked the city with the Temple. In that sense, the building of the *Milo* "closed the breach of the city of David." Some have even suggested that there was need for heavy earthworks or landfill (*maleh* = full) in order to connect the two hills – hence the term *Milo*.

When *Tehillim* lauds Jerusalem as "Jerusalem built up, a city knit [joined] together" (*Tehillim* 122:-3), it is referring to a city that joins the Temple with the palace, the sacred and the mundane. This joint or knit is the *Milo*!

This view sees the *Milo* as serving a civilian role rather than a military one. Let us look at a number of understandings of this urban space, and hence the problem with its subsequent construction:

He [Yeravam] said to him [Shlomo]: Your father David created passageways (*peratzot*) in the walls [of Jerusalem] in order that Israel may gain access to the Temple for the pilgrimage to the Temple. How could you close up the passageways in order to make a building, built by tax labor, for Pharaoh's daughter? (*Sanhedrin* 101b)

David his father had left an open space for all of Israel, a place to gather and seek God in the presence of the Ark. He [Shlomo] closed it, cordoning it off for Pharaoh's daughter. (R. Yoseph Kra)

He closed the passage in the wall of the City of David: There was a place so that people could freely and easily approach the king in order to complain or to offer their arguments for adjudication. (Ralbag)

⁹ See *Shmuel* II 5:9; *Divrei Ha-Yamim* II 32:5.

Three explanations of the “breach” are offered here:

1. That it gives access from the city to the Temple
2. A city square or gathering place for the people to convene for spiritual occasions at the Temple
3. It allows for the people's access to the king, so that he may act as an appeals commission and a judge.

What emerges from each of these explanations is the sense that this space, which was either designated for the nation or earmarked for spiritual pursuits (access to God or to the courts of justice) has now been appropriated and sequestered for royal purposes. And this is no ordinary royal commission. This central location, representing national spiritual aspirations, has been dedicated to housing a foreign queen.

Considering the above, we can better understand Yerovam's view of taxes and finances. As we have proposed, Yerovam was a passionate and determined advocate on behalf of the nation. But his democratic tendencies go further than that. Seeing the central area, the city square of Jerusalem, rezoned from public land to a royal precinct, he decided to protest the expansion of the Crown at the expense of the constituent citizens, whose public land had been misappropriated. There is a third element here as well - the religious. Yerovam took up the cause of open access to the Temple and to religious services. In the commentaries we have seen above, we see that the access routes to the *Mikdash* (or courts) had been closed in order to build a new palace. Yerovam could justifiably talk about the manner in which the religious priorities had been eclipsed by imperial indulgences.¹⁰

And so, Yerovam publicly opposed the emperor, King Shlomo. Make no mistake - this was no sedate, gentlemanly disagreement. Yerovam offered fierce critiques of Shlomo's style of government.¹¹ He ended up being banished from the kingdom for fear of his life.

[At this juncture, let me just add that in order to properly understand the geography and layout of Jerusalem, as well as the city contours and the distances involved, there is nothing better than properly touring Ir David (The City of David,) and the Southern Wall excavations next to the *Kotel*. I lead tours for all my Tanakh students there, and I believe that it is invaluable, both for the intellectual information, and for the experience of being in this unique place at the hub of so much Jewish History. Next time you are in Israel, make sure that you visit!]

STAGE TWO: ACHIYA'S PROPHECY

We have yet to discuss one critical element; the prophecy of Achiya Hashiloni that gives divine backing to Yerovam's actions.

¹⁰ We will demonstrate in our upcoming *shiur* how these elements – the democratic and religious perspectives - find their way into the religious reforms that Yerovam makes.

¹¹ Abarbanel: "There is no doubt that this was not a rebuke of public critique but "hidden love;" there was hatred and vulgarity. Were it not for that, Shlomo would not have sought to have him killed."

At that time, Yerovam went out of Jerusalem and the prophet Achiya of Shilo met him on the way. He had put on a new robe; and when the two were alone in the open country, Achiya took hold of the new robe he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. "Take ten pieces," he said to Yerovam, "For so says the Lord, God of Israel: I am about to tear the kingdom out of Shlomo's hands and I will give you ten tribes..." (11:29-32)

The dramatic image of Achiya tearing the new robe into twelve shreds and asking Yerovam to take ten of them is a deliberately traumatic scene. The tearing of clothes always indicates shock or trauma.¹² Moreover, the symbolic imagery of the kingdom being ripped into pieces is highly evocative. The word used for the robe or garment here is the relatively unusual word, "*salma*." With different vowels, this word reads "Shlomo"! This deliberate play on Shlomo's name is designed to illustrate the ripping of Shlomo himself.

We have already mentioned the numerous parallels that may be found between the rejection scene of King Shaul and the tearing of the Kingdom from Shlomo.¹³ But it is significant that in this scene, it is not Shlomo – the accused – who is subject to the tearing of the coat, but Yerovam, who is to take up the new kingdom. Maybe this is because Yerovam has to "take" the ten pieces rather than be handed them by Achiya, to signal to Yerovam that he was going to have to seize the ten tribes; they would not be handed to him.

It is unclear at what point in the storyline Yerovam received this prophecy. There are two possibilities:

1. Achiya communicated this *nevua* AFTER Yerovam had denounced the king and publicly expressed his opposition. On his way out of Jerusalem, fleeing from the wrath of Shlomo, Yerovam was confronted by the *navi*, who presented with this image in approval of his actions, further boosting and reinforcing his rebellion. Yerovam then (*pasuk* 40) defected from the country. This approach follows the order of the *pesukim* and is adopted by *Da'at Mikra*.

¹² For just a few of many numerous examples: Reuven tears his coat when he realizes that Yosef is gone (*Bereshit* 37:29); Kalev and Yehoshua tear their clothing in response to the report of the spies (*Bamidbar* 14:6); Yiftach tears his clothing upon understanding that he has vowed to kill his daughter (*Shoftim* 11:35); The king of Israel in a crisis tears his clothing (*Melakhim* II 5:7); as do Yoshiyahu (*Melakhim* II 22:11) and Mordechai (*Esther* 4:1).

¹³ The similarities include the act of tearing the coat itself, as well as the similar pronouncements:

So says the Lord, God of Israel Behold I will tear the kingdom from Shlomo, and I have given to you the ten tribes (11:31)	The Lord has this day torn the kingship of Israel from you, and given it to another who is worthier than you." (<i>Shmuel</i> I 16:28)
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In both case, the contender for the throne (David or Yerovam) find themselves under death threat. This induces them to defect from the country and to take protection with foreign aggressors of Israel, David with the Philistine king Achish (*Shmuel* I ch.27), and Yerovam with Shishak of Egypt. Finally, the phrase, "And the two of them were alone in the field" (11:29) and the scene of the prophet alone with the new king is reminiscent of Saul's appointment – see *Shmuel* I 9:26/10:1.

2. The Radak and other *mefarshim* suggest that this prophecy was relayed at the start of Yerovam's career, when he was first appointed to high office.

"At that time" - BEFORE he had rebelled against the king, Achiya found him and gave him the news of his kingship. (Radak)

"At that time" - When he was newly appointed and left Jerusalem to begin the process of collecting taxes. (Metzudat David)

The phrase "at that time" as it is used in Tanakh frequently indicates a disruption in the historical flow, pointing to an EARLIER event.¹⁴ These commentators propose that the encounter with Achiya preceded Yerovam's insurrection, and possibly took place on the very day of his appointment to a government position. In this context, we may note the fact that the garment that is ripped is described as a "new robe." *Chazal* debate whether it was Achiya or Yerovam's robe (see Radak). But we might propose that this new robe was a symbol of Yerovam's fresh appointment as governor of the province of Yosef.¹⁵

If we can reconstruct the scene, it would be the day of Yerovam's installation to his now position. He would have travelled, probably with family and friends, to Jerusalem for a ceremony filled with pomp and solemnity. He was wearing his elegant new robes of office. Possibly, he attended his first cabinet meeting, meeting fellow ministers of state and government officials. He might have celebrated with his family and friends, maybe even offering a *korban* in the *Mikdash*. Filled with a sense of dignity and elation, he left Jerusalem. And at that juncture, Achiya met him, tearing his robe and indicating to him that he would be the one to tear the kingdom apart! One can only imagine the sense of confusion and bewilderment for Yerovam.

If we read the story this way, we have to say that Achiya's prophecy had a Machiavellian influence upon later events, functioning as a prime instigator and confidence booster that induced Yerovam to flex his political muscles and publically oppose Shlomo.

CONCLUDING NOTES: SEFER DIVREI SHLOMO

Chapter 11 ends with an official form conclusion of the Shlomo era, recording the years of his reign and his burial place. We will see these sorts of summary lines for most of the kings in this *sefer*. In addition, we are informed that more information about Shlomo may be procured in a book entitled "*Sefer Divrei Shlomo*." This is not the only time that *Tanakh* refers to outside works. Elsewhere, we have seen reference to *Sefer Ha-Yashar*¹⁶ and

¹⁴ See, for example, *Devarim* 1:9, 10:1, and 10:8

¹⁵ In *Tanakh*, as well as what we know in wider society, special regalia are a sign of high office. Obvious examples are Yosef (*Bereishit* 41:42) and Mordechai (*Esther* 8:15).

¹⁶ *Shmuel* II 1:18

Sefer Milchamot Hashem.¹⁷ *Sefer Melakhim* frequently refers to the *Sefer Divrei Ha-Yamim* of the kings of Yehuda or Yisrael.¹⁸ This tells us something quite fundamental - *Sefer Melakhim* is NOT the royal archive. There were other historical records that publicized the achievements and prowess of kings, but that is not *Sefer Melakhim*! This book is a work of prophecy, of the word of God, and hence it has a very different tone and objective. No royal sponsored work would ever record the flaws and sins of a monarch in the manner of *Sefer Melakhim*. In fact, this is a most subversive version of history. What king would ever allow a book of this sort to be published? The same is true of *Sefer Shmuel*, which records the sins and failures of Shaul and David more than their virtues and successes. What *Sefer Melakhim* does is to offer a spiritual commentary on history, interpreting events and evaluating them against the yardstick of Torah. We will discuss this theme more when we engage in an interim introduction to *Sefer Melakhim* in a few weeks. In the meantime, it is worthwhile to dwell upon the difference between *Sefer Divrei Shlomo* and *Sefer Melakhim*.

Next week's *shiur* will complete our discussion of the Yerovam rebellion.

¹⁷ *Bamidbar* 21:14

¹⁸ See *Melakhim* I 14:19,29; 15:7,23,31; 16:5,14,20; 22:40