THE LEAP-MONTH FABRICATED BY JEROBOAM

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In order to squelch possible competition to his sovereignty from Israelites ascending to Jerusalem (in the Kingdom of Judah) for the traditional pilgrimages, King Jeroboam of Israel devised a series of "religious reforms" to keep his constituents loyal to his crown. These include erecting two golden calves for his citizens to worship at, in lieu of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Bible records the new holiday which Jeroboam instituted for his idolatrous calves:

And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah [i.e. Sukkot]. . . And he went up unto the altar which he had made in Beth-el on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month which he had fabricated of his own heart; and he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and went up unto the altar, to offer. (I Kgs. 12:32–33)

In this, Jeroboam deviated from the biblically prescribed time of Sukkot in the seventh month (Lev. 23:34 and Num. 29:12). Rashi explains that Jeroboam explained to his subjects that the eighth month is really the month of *the ingathering* [of produce] (Ex. 34:22) and is more fitting to host the festival of Sukkot. [1]

JEROBOAM INSTITUTES CHANGES TO THE CALENDAR

Looking at this passage from a traditionalist view, R. Reuven Margaliot (1889–1971) finds grave difficulty in accepting it literally. He notes that from the Revelation at Mount Sinai, several centuries prior, to the time of Jeroboam, the Israelites always adhered to the basic tenets of Judaism and followed the laws as ordained by the Torah. Margaliot argues that it is farfetched to believe that the subjects of Jeroboam would accept moving the festival of Sukkot from the seventh month as ordained by the Torah to the eighth month. He concludes that Jeroboam's innovation could not have been something contrary to what was explicitly written in the Torah, but must have been a more nuanced novelty. Margaliot offers a novel interpretation. He notes that if the true meaning of the above passage was that Jeroboam simply moved the date of Sukkot from the seventh month to the eighth month, then the

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prophet's criticism of his actions should read, *in the* festival *which he had fabricated of his own heart*. The fact that the prophet criticized Jeroboam's sacrifices *in the* month *which he had fabricated of his own heart* indicates that Jeroboam's deviation was not necessarily in how he established the date of the festival, but in how he established the *month* itself.

Margaliot explains that Rashi also alludes to this explanation. Rashi explained that Jeroboam publicly expounded that the eighth month is really the month of the ingathering. However, upon further examination, this explication should bear no influence on determining the date of Sukkot because the Bible does not peg the festival necessarily to the "month of the ingathering" as it pegs the festival of Passover to the *month of springtime* (Deut. 16:1). Rather, argues Margaliot, therein lies Jeroboam's invention: Jeroboam resolved to treat the relationship between Sukkot and the month of the ingathering the same as the relationship between the Passover and the month of the springtime.

Special effort is exerted by the rabbinic courts to ensure that Passover would always occur in the springtime, including adding an extra month (the additional Adar) when needed. Jeroboam extended this notion to similarly require that Sukkot always fall out in the month of the ingathering – even though the Bible itself does not demand such a requirement. Just as the courts would intercalate the year by adding a second Adar so that Passover would occur in the springtime, Jeroboam decreed that intercalating the year should be done by way of adding a second Elul when needed, so that Sukkot would occur in the month of the ingathering. In years that a second Elul was added to the calendar, Sukkot would continue to be celebrated in Tishrei, but Tishrei would be the eighth month, not the seventh. Thus, the Prophet's criticism of Jeroboam stems from his addition of an additional Elul which pushed Sukkot into the eighth month.[2]

Margaliot notes that while intercalating the year at Elul instead of Adar is definitely contrary to Jewish tradition, the Bible does not explicitly mandate that years be only intercalated at Adar. In fact, the entire notion of intercalating the year is never explicitly mentioned in the Bible. Since Jeroboam's innovation did not openly diverge from what the Bible prescribes, opposition to his efforts would not have had as much fuel, thus justifying its acceptance amongst his constituents. Furthermore, Margaliot notes that TB *Sanhedrin*

102a claims that Jeroboam was on par with the Torah scholars of his generation, so he likely could have refuted their extra-biblical arguments.[3]

While R. Margaliot offered this explanation as his own, it is also found in a recently published manuscript of R. Saadia Gaon (882–942). R. Saadia lists several idolatrous practices of the Israelites in biblical times and, *inter alia*, notes that they would intercalate the month of Elul, instead of the month of Adar, so that Sukkot would occur in the eighth month, instead of the seventh. He then quotes the above-cited verses in Kings about Jeroboam's idolatrous celebration in the eighth month.[4] This explanation is also cited by *Da'at Mikra* which expressed uncertainty as to whether this was a long-term policy instituted by Jeroboam or was a one-time event.[5]

THE BABYLONIAN CALENDAR ADDS AN EXTRA ELUL

The basic structure of the traditional Jewish calendar closely resembles that of the standard Babylonian calendar. Both contain twelve-month lunisolar years with an additional leap month added at certain intervals to accommodate synchronizing the lunar year with the seasons of the solar year. As is well-known, the months of the Jewish calendar follow the naming conventions adopted from the ancient Babylonian calendar.[6] Thus, the Babylonian month Ululu corresponds to the Jewish month Elul, and Addaru corresponds to Adar. In general, the Babylonian calendar only adds a leap month after the sixth (Ululu) or twelfth (Addaru) months (while the exact system for determining which years required an intercalation varied from period to period).[7] In this, the Babylonian calendar differs slightly from the traditional Jewish calendar which only calls for the twelfth month (Adar) to be intercalated, but never the sixth (Elul).[8]

If R. Margaliot's explanation of Jeroboam's actions is correct, then one can argue that the prophet's criticism of Jeroboam developed from his introduction of foreign calendrical policies to the Israelite kingdom. Jewish tradition demands that the year be intercalated only at Adar;[9] yet Jeroboam followed the policy of parallel Mesopotamian calendars that would intercalate the year at their equivalent to Elul.

KING HEZEKIAH INTERCALATES NISAN

The Bible's account of the Paschal celebration under King Hezekiah in the Kingdom of Judah and the rabbinic understanding of that story somewhat parallels the story of Jeroboam: *For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the Passover in the second month* . . . (II Chron. 30:2). *Prima facie*, this passage means that Hezekiah abrogated the Torah's instruction (Ex. 12:1–20; Lev. 23:4–8; Num. 9:1–5; 28:16–25) to offer the Paschal sacrifices and celebrate Passover in the first month and instead did so in the second month. Alternatively, one might argue that Hezekiah actually took advantage of a biblical "loophole" which allows for individuals, under dire circumstances, to bring their Paschal offerings in the second month (Num. 9:9–14).

However, rabbinic literature takes a different approach in understanding Hezekiah's actions. The rabbis declared that Hezekiah "intercalated Nisan in Nisan and the sages did not agree with him".[10] Scholars have identified two ways of explaining this declaration: Some understand that instead of adding a second Adar, Hezekiah added a second Nisan and celebrated Passover in that month, which the Bible calls the second month. Others explain that Hezekiah indeed did add a second Adar, but that he did so too late so that the month he declared as the second Adar was already Nisan and the next month which he deemed Nisan, was actually Iyar.[11]

Whether one understands that Hezekiah added a second Nisan or simply intercalated Adar too late, the Mishnah's criticism of Hezekiah seems to be limited to his wrongly interfering with the calendar process, but not to his role in celebrating the holiday at the wrong time, similar to the Bible's criticism of Jeroboam.

CONCLUSION

In an epic poem about the different months of the Jewish calendar, a scholar and poet of the Geonic period named R. Pinhas ha-Kohen writes, "The reason of two Adars / from the days of the humble one [i.e. Moses] are prescribed".[12] In this, he follows the traditional view that only the month of Adar may be intercalated in the Jewish calendar. R. Reuven Margaliot proposes that this tradition was violated by Jeroboam who intercalated the month of Elul, causing the festival of Sukkot to be celebrated in the eighth month, in-

stead of the seventh. That policy may have been influenced by foreign calendars.

Others take the Bible's account of Jeroboam as criticizing him for simply moving the date of Sukkot from the seventh month to the eighth. However, when is all said and done, the advantage of Margaliot's understanding is that Jeroboam's innovation does not contradict explicit biblical passages, for there is no clear explicit biblical source which outlaws intercalating the year at Elul, while there are explicit passages which date Sukkot to the seventh month.

NOTES

1. *Midrash Tanhuma Pinhas* §17 and *Numbers Rabbah* §21:25 record a debate concerning Jewish holidays between a gentile and the Tannaic sage, Rabbi Akiva. In one of his arguments, Rabbi Akiva contrasts the Divinely-ordained holidays with those invented by Jeroboam in that the former will never be nullified, while the latter ceased to exist. That passage clearly implies that Jeroboam created new holidays, not that he changed the date of preexisting ones. This understanding is at odds with Rashi's explanation and the others presented in this paper who understood that Jeroboam did not fabricate new holidays, but rather changed the rules governing the dates of ones already extant. A possible way of reconciling these understandings is by reinterpreting Rabbi Akiva's words to refer not to the holidays invented by Jeroboam but to the system of determining their dates, as instituted by Jeroboam.

2. TJ *Avodah Zarah* 1:1 and *Lamentations Rabbah* §2:10 refer to the "convocations and Sabbaths" invented by Jeroboam. This implies that the innovations implemented by Jeroboam were not restricted to redefining the seventh month, but were more widespread. However, Rabbi Margaliot addresses these sources and proves that the term "convocation" in this context means Rosh Ha-Shanah and "Sabbath" means Yom Kippur. Those two holidays are always in the same month as Sukkot, so by adding an extra Elul to make Sukkot in the eighth month, those days were also moved to the eighth month.

3. R. Margaliot, *Ha-Mikra ve-ha-Mesorah* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1989) pp. 54–56.

4. Y. Ratzabi (ed.), *Pirushei Rav Saadia Gaon le-Sefer Shemot* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1998) pg. 193.

5. Y. Kiel (ed.), *Da'at Mikra* vol. 13 (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1989) pg. 282.

6. See TJ *Rosh HaShanah* 1:2 and *Genesis Rabbah* §48:9.

7. S. Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity: Empires, States, and Societies* (Oxford University Press, 2012) pp. 94-124.

8. J. D. Eisenstein (ed.), *Otzar Yisrael* (New York, 1907) pg. 17 cites an interesting discussion based on Josephus' account of several Jewish holidays. Josephus writes about a certain year that the Jews celebrated Sukkot on October 22, while Passover earlier that year was celebrated on April 8. The wide interval between the two holidays – approximately six and a half months – suggested to some historians that there was a leap-month that year sometime between Nisan and

Elul. The suggested candidate for this leap-month was a second Elul. However, Eisenstein notes that Josephus is not a reliable source on this topic. Eisenstein points out that Josephus contradicts himself anyway because he wrote elsewhere about that same year that the Festival of Wood (i.e., the 15th of Av) which is exactly two months before Sukkot, was celebrated on August 14, which would suggest that Sukkot occurred on October 12. This contradicts his previous account that Sukkot fell on October 22 that year, regardless of whether or not an extra Elul was added. From this, Eisenstein concludes that a mistake obviously crept into Josephus' writings and it is impossible to deduce anything on this matter from his accounts.

9. Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 2:3 asserts that the year may only be intercalated at Adar and not any other month. This Tosefta is also cited by the Talmud (TB *Sanhedrin* 12a and *Rosh HaShanah* 7a). While the Tosefta does not offer its reason or source for limiting the leap month to a second Adar, other passages in rabbinic literature find biblical bases for such a rule. *Sifrei* (to Deut. 16:1) and *Mekhillta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (to Ex. 12:2) cite the verse *Guard the month of springtime, and make the Passover unto the LORD thy God . . .* (Deut. 16:1) as the source for this rule. Using classic rabbinic hermeneutics, those sources interpret this verse to say that the court should *Guard the month* adjacent to the springtime (i.e. Adar) to ensure that the springtime will occur in its proper time, i.e. in the first month. *Mekhillta de-Rashbi* cites another verse as the source: *You shall guard this ordinance in its season [lit. festival] from year to year* (Ex. 13:10). This verse is exegetically interpreted to mean that the year may only be intercalated at the month before the festival, which in the context of that passage refers to Passover. Most early commentators refer to one of these two verses as the source for adding only an extra Adar to the year.

10. Mishnah *Pesahim* 4:9 and the middle opinion cited in Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 2:10.

11. See S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshuta* vol. 4 (New York: JTS, 1962) pp. 622-623. R. Jacob Bachrach (1824–1896) in *Ma'amare Jacob ha-Bakri* (Warsaw, 1893) pg. 20 shows how the Jerusalem Talmud favored the first approach, while the Babylonian Talmud followed the second. See also R. Margaliot, *Margoliot ha-Yam* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1958) pp. 50–52 for a comprehensive survey of the explanations to the story of Hezekiah.

12. A. Marmarstein, "*Kiddush Yerahim de-Rabbi Pinhas*", *Hazofeh: Quartalis Hebraica* vol. 5 (Budapest, 1921) pg. 254.