

THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

Rav Amnon Bazak

LECTURE 68: CHAPTER 5

THE CONQUEST OF JERUSALEM

I. WHY JERUSALEM

The first of David's steps that Scripture describes following his anointment as king over all the tribes of Israel and the unification of the kingdom under his rule is his conquest of the stronghold of Zion and turning it into his capital. The account of the conquest is well known for its difficulties, but we will open with a point that is clear – David's move from Hebron to Jerusalem:

(6) And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Yevusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke unto David, saying, "Except if you take away the blind and the lame, you shall not come in hither," thinking, David cannot come in hither. (7) Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion; the same is the city of David. (8) And David said on that day, "Whosoever smites the Yevusites, and gets up to the gutter [*tzinor*], and takes away the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul--. Wherefore they say, "There are the blind and the lame;1[1] he cannot come into the house." (9) And David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Milo and inward. (10) And David waxed greater and greater; for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.

1 [1] The issue regarding the blind and the lame will be dealt with at length below. For now, let it be noted that this is an example of repetition of elements in inverted order (A-B, B-A, A-B): "Except if you take away **the blind and the lame**... and gets up to the gutter, and takes away **the lame and the blind**... Wherefore they say, There are **the blind and the lame**...." Additional examples of this structure can be found in *Bereishit* 2:4 and *Shemot* 9:33-34.

Why does David move specifically to Jerusalem? There is no question that David cannot remain in Hebron: Hebron is the capital of Yehuda, and it is located in the southern part of the country. Now that he has become king over all of Israel, David cannot leave his capital in a region that is so identified with Yehuda and that is not in the center of the country. But why did he choose specifically Jerusalem?

First of all, one of the clear advantages of Jerusalem is that the city is not clearly located in the tribal territory of either of the two main tribes in the people of Israel – Yehuda and Binyamin – it being situated on the border between them (see *Yehoshua* 15:8; 18:16). Moreover, a comparative analysis teaches that Jerusalem is regarded as belonging to the tribal territories of both tribes. At the end of the description of the tribal territory of Yehuda in the book of *Yehoshua* it says:

And as for the Yevusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of **Yehuda** could not drive them out; but the Yevusites dwelt with the children of **Yehuda** at Jerusalem, unto this day. (*Yehoshua* 15:63)

At the beginning of the book of *Shoftim*, however, we find a parallel verse – almost word for word – but with one important difference:

And the children of **Binyamin** did not drive out the Yevusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Yevusites dwelt with the children of **Binyamin** in Jerusalem, unto this day. (*Shoftim* 1:21)

There is a direct contradiction between these two verses regarding the question of the tribal affiliation of the city of Jerusalem. Matters become even more complicated in light of another verse in the same chapter at the beginning of *Shoftim*:

And the children of Yehuda fought against Jerusalem, and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire. (*Shoftim* 1:8)

We are faced with a double question: What is the meaning of the contradiction regarding the tribal affiliation of Jerusalem? And if the city was already conquered at the beginning of the period of the Judges, why did David have to conquer it now for a second time?

Many have addressed these questions; we shall present here two of the main approaches to the matter:

1) Some have suggested²[2] that we must distinguish between the two parts of Jerusalem. We know from the writings of Josephus and from the archaeological evidence that during the Second Temple period, the city was divided into two: the lower city, which sat on the ridge known to us as "the city of David," and the upper city on the Yevusite ridge, in the area of today's Jewish quarter. The proponents of this approach suggest that this division existed already in Biblical times: the upper city was in the tribal territory of Yehuda and was captured by them, while the lower city was in the tribal territory of Binyamin, which did not succeed in conquering it, and it is this part that was captured by David in our chapter.

2) According to another approach,³[3] a distinction must be made between the "land of Jerusalem," which was conquered by the tribe of Yehuda (at the beginning of the period of the Judges, after having failed in the days of Yehoshua), and the city of Jerusalem, which was in the tribal territory of Binyamin, and which was not captured by the children of Yehuda, but rather burned. According to this proposal, this is the meaning of the verse at the beginning of the book of *Shoftim*: "And the children of Yehuda fought against [the region of] Jerusalem, and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and set the city [itself] on fire."

However, even if we can reconcile the verses historically following one of these approaches, it seems that from a literary perspective, Scripture intentionally created this difficulty, and it is not by chance that it contains two apparently contradictory verses. In this way, it wishes to emphasize that indeed there was a lack of clarity regarding the tribal affiliation of Jerusalem – and this is precisely the advantage it presents: it is not clearly identified with any one tribe.

2 [2] See the commentary of Y. Kil in *Da'at Mikra* (ad loc.).

3 [3] See the commentary of Y. Elitzur in *Da'at Mikra* to *Shofetim* 1:8.

It is precisely for this reason that Jerusalem merited to become the capital of the unified kingdom, in that it is a unifying city that is not perceived as the city of one tribe. *Chazal* will later give expression to the halakhic dimension of this phenomenon: "Jerusalem was not divided among the tribes."⁴[4] Thus, the move from Hebron to Jerusalem gives special expression to David's approach, i.e., his desire to unify Yehuda and Israel in a single kingdom, whose capital does not clearly belong to either of the two components that comprised the divided kingdom.⁵[5]

II. THE GUTTER [TZINOR]

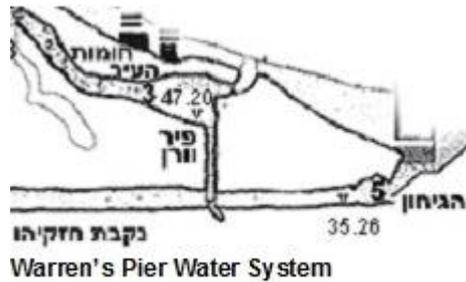
We can now move on to the verses themselves, which, as was already noted, are known for the difficulties that they present. It is interesting that the author of *Divrei Ha-yamim* seems to have had difficulty understanding these verses as well; he therefore omitted the difficult sections and described the events in simple manner:

And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem – the same is Yevus – and the Yevusites, the inhabitants of the land, were there. And the inhabitants of Yevus said to David, "You shall not come in hither." Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion; the same is the city of David. And David said, "Whosoever smites the Yevusites first shall be chief and captain." And Yoav the son of Tzeruya went up first, and was made chief. And David dwelt in the stronghold; therefore they called it the city of David. (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 11:4-7)

There is no mention of the blind and the lame in this account, and the matter of the "tzinor" is omitted as well. On the other hand, these verses include an element that does not appear in the book of *Shmuel*, which will be discussed below.

4 [4] See *Yoma* 12a and elsewhere. For the halakhic ramifications of this principle, see *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, vol. 25, s.v. *Yerushalayim*, columns 321 and on.

5 [5] Similarly, in the United States, the capital, Washington, is in the District of Columbia (D.C.), which does not belong to any of the fifty states.



Let us begin with the matter of the "*tzinor*." Most of the commentators understand that the reference is to a tower, but by its very nature, a "*tzinor*" is connected in one way or another to water.⁶[6] Indeed, Ralbag understands it as a gutter. New light was shed on this word with the uncovering of the amazing underground water system in the city of David, known as Warren's pier (see illustration). There have been new revelations regarding this system since it was first exposed in the nineteenth century, but one thing remains clear and accepted – it is an underground channel through which water could be brought into the city of Jerusalem from its primary source, the Gichon spring, without having to leave its walls.⁷[7] In light of these findings, many are inclined to say that it is this system that is called "*tzinor*," and that David offered a reward to anyone who managed to penetrate through it into the stronghold, and thus apparently to surprise the guards, to open the gates of the fortified city, and to allow David's army to enter the city.

III. THE BLIND AND THE LAME

6 [6] See *Tehillim* 42:8: "Deep calls unto deep at the voice of Your **cataracts** (*tzinorekha*); all Your waves and Your billows are gone over me."

7 [7] In the past, it was commonly accepted to identify the *tzinor* with the 13 meter vertical shaft that connects the underground channel with the water channel leading away from the Gichon, and thus to explain that Yoav climbed through this shaft and entered the city. In recent years it has become clear that this shaft was not part of the water system, but rather a natural shaft that was only discovered many years after they started to use the dug out channel. Originally, this channel passed over the shaft, and continued to descend until it emerged over the large pool that collected the Gichon waters. The recent discoveries have not changed the fundamental understanding that David intended to enter the city through its water system. But it is no longer necessary to say that Yoav had to climb a 13 meter shaft, something that appears to be an impossible task.

It seems that the main difficulty in this story is the matter of “the blind and the lame.” Many explanations have been offered, and we shall present here two of the most well-known among them:

1) Rashi writes in midrashic manner: "The stronghold of Zion is called Yevus, and they were of the seed of Avimelekh, and they had two idols, one blind and one lame, who were modeled after Yitzchak and Yaakov,^{8[8]} and in their mouths the oath that Avraham took to Avimelekh. And for this reason they did not drive them out; when they captured Jerusalem they did not capture the stronghold, as it is stated: 'And as for the Yevusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Yehuda could not drive them out' (*Yehoshua* 15:63). And it was taught in a Baraita: 'R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: They were capable, but they were not permitted.'" Similar *midrashim* are brought also by the Radak, but it is difficult to accept them as the plain sense of Scripture.

2) Another explanation, according to the plain sense of the text, was proposed by the Radak in the name of the Ibn Ezra: "Even if it is [only] the blind and the lame that turn to fight against you, they will prevent you from entering, for the stronghold is exceedingly strong, and we do not fear fighting you." Thus, these were the taunting words of the Yevusites, who mocked David by saying that even the blind and the lame could prevent him from entering the city. This explanation is very similar to a much earlier explanation offered by Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (VII, 61): "However, the inhabitants of the city... stationed on the wall people with defective eyes and legs and other deformities, in order to mock the king, saying that people with deformities would prevent him from entering the city. They did this because of their trust in the strength of their walls." According to Josephus, the Yevusites mocked David not only with their words, but also with a symbolic act added for emphasis: they stationed blind and lame people to defend the city. The problem with this approach is that it is not clear from where the Yevusites, the isolated residents of Jerusalem, drew their exaggerated confidence against David – a rising power, who was just recently anointed king over all of Israel.

Yigal Yadin made an interesting suggestion in his book, "*Torat Ha-Lechima Be-Artzot Ha-Mikra*." Yadin relies on a Hittite document that describes a ceremony in which the Hittite army swears allegiance to its king. There it is stated that anyone who thinks badly of the king will himself become blind or lame. The Yevusites, who understood that they would not be able to stand up against David, brought the blind and the lame up on the wall, and threatened David with a staged ceremony featuring an oath at the end of which the punishment of blindness and lameness was promised to anyone

8 [8] For Yitzchak was blind, and Yaakov was lame.

who touches the blind or the lame or any of the Yevusites. Our chapter does not cite the entire oath, but only its beginning. In any event, in the wake of the oath, David had to promise a special reward to one who proved to the entire army that nothing would happen to those who entered the city and smote the blind and the lame.^{9[9]}

This explanation seems perfectly reasonable, and it fits in well with what is stated in our chapter. What is more, this explanation enjoys an essential advantage over the other explanations. When we encounter a difficulty in a verse, it is not enough to resolve the difficulty: we must try to explain why the difficulty exists, especially in a story such as the one before us, where the difficulties are exceedingly striking. According to Yadin's explanation, the answer is clear: Scripture is not wont to describe magical rites at length,^{10[10]} and for this reason the words of the Yevusites were not spelled out in detail; the story merely alludes to them. This may also be the reason that the entire matter is omitted from the account in *Divrei Ha-Yamim*.

In the end, Jerusalem was captured, and David turned it into his place of residence. But there is still another point that we must understand, one about which the book of *Divrei Ha-Yamim* adds information that is not mentioned in our chapter: "And David said, 'Whosoever smites the Yevusites first shall be chief and captain.' And Yoav the son of Tzeruya went up first, and was made chief." David's declaration in our chapter is also cut off, but Yoav ben Tzeruya's part in the conquest of the city is not mentioned at all. Why?

9 [9] An explanation must still be provided for the words, "Wherefore they say, There are the blind and the lame; he cannot come into the house." It is clear that the intention is to explain the source of the expression, "There are the blind and the lame; he cannot come into the house," which apparently was a familiar saying in the biblical period, but the context was unclear. The commentators explain the words in two directions. Rashi understands the verse as it was translated above: When the blind and the lame are at the entrance to the house, one cannot enter into it. According to the Radak, the meaning is that the blind and the lame were not allowed to enter the "house," i.e., the stronghold of Zion, because the Yevusites had used them to humiliate Israel. Both explanations fit in with Yadin's proposal.

10 [10] What is more, Scripture also does not speak at length about the mystical tools of Israel. Thus, for example, Scripture does not explain how inquiries were made of God or how the *Urim* and *Tumim* worked. In one place, it formulates the matter in an especially obscure fashion: "Therefore Shaul said unto the Lord, the God of Israel, Declare the right. And Yehonatan and Shaul were taken by lot; but the people escaped" (I *Shmuel* 34:41).

It seems that the book of *Shmuel* intentionally omitted mention of Yoav's part in the conquest. As we noted, the conquest of Jerusalem was carried out for the purpose of unifying Israel and Yehuda. We saw in chapter 3 that Yoav ben Tzeruya tried to undermine this policy by killing Avner ben Ner for personal reasons, after Avner had initiated the union with David. It seems that for this reason Scripture preferred at this stage not to emphasize Yoav's part in the city's conquest, and it is only in the book of *Divrei Ha-Yamim* that the story is brought in its entirety.

(Translated by David Strauss)
