
Lesson 19: From Hebron to Jerusalem

Text: Samuel II, chapters 5-6

The Philistines were pleased with David's kingdom. They eagerly followed the clashes between David's warriors and Ish-bosheth's bands, and they were glad that David gained the upper hand. Ish-bosheth was the rightful descendent of the hated house of Saul, whilst David had enjoyed Philistine hospitality when fleeing from Saul. "Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David waxed stronger and stronger, but the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker" (Samuel II, 3, 1). But as time went on the Philistines had little cause to rejoice in David's success. Ish-bosheth became so weak that David was left entirely in control of the situation, and he no longer required Philistine assistance. Ish-bosheth was killed (4, 5-12) and David became king of all Israel (5, 1-3). The king of Hebron was now a dangerous neighbour of the Philistines, for he was now the popularly acclaimed successor to the royal throne of Israel. The dependent ally had become a strong competitor.

And David had no intention to rest on his laurels. When the tribes of Israel invited David to become king of all Israel, they said: "Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh" (5, 1). The dual implication of this phrase was very clear to David. The Israelites both complimented him and offered a warning. You are one of us, and this means that from now on you are no longer a chieftain of the tribe of Judah. Your undivided loyalties belong to the whole of Israel.

David realized that so long as he will continue to reside in Hebron he would not be able to free himself from his tribal limitations. Hebron was geographically too far from the northern tribes. In Hebron he was surrounded by the people who had aided him throughout the lean years, and they regarded David as their man. In Hebron, David knew, he would not become "the bone and the flesh" of the whole of Israel. He had to establish a new royal residence in a place which was not associated with any tribe. The new capital of Israel had to be a truly royal residence, uncluttered with tribal attachments. The ideal choice was a city that had not been incorporated into any of the tribal territories.

Jerusalem was just such a place. "And as for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out" (Joshua, 15, 63). Jerusalem remained unconquered since the days of Joshua. It was still Jebusite territory, but it held a special place in the Israelite tradition. It was the famed land of Moriah where, according to the book of Genesis, God had tested Abraham (Genesis chapter 22). The king Melchizedek, who was "a priest of God the Most High" and a good friend of Abraham, ruled in Jerusalem. The city was also situated on the crossroads connecting north with south as well as east with west. It could be easily defended against enemy attacks for it was a natural fortress, a small hilly area surrounded by deep ravines. The Jebusite city of Jerusalem was rather small, comprising the area between the

hill of the Temple and the hill which is nowadays called "Hill of Zion". Most of the area of the Old City of Jerusalem was in those days outside the Jebusite fortress. No wonder the tribe of Judah did not succeed in conquering this small but firmly-entrenched fortress. But to David Jerusalem presented both challenge and opportunity.

"And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites... David took the stronghold of Zion... and David waxed greater and greater... Now the Philistines came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim" (5, 6-10 and 17-18). Only after David's conquest of Jerusalem did the Philistines realise that David had gone a long way from being a captain of a band of warriors. After taking away Jerusalem from the Jebusites and setting it up as the capital of all Israel, David was welding the tribes into a mighty and unified kingdom. The Philistines decided to strike at Jerusalem, the military base of David and the symbol of his united kingdom. This time the Philistines allied themselves with the Jebusites who were still smarting under the defeat inflicted upon them by David's intrepid warriors.

The battlefield was the valley of Rephaim, south of Jerusalem. Today this valley is marked by the modern Emek Rephaim Street, the old Jerusalem railway-station and the Baqa and Mekor Haim neighborhoods. The way from this plain which lies in a mountainous area to the western flat land of the Shefela, passes through the winding course of the valley of Rephaim, then joining with Nahal Shorek, which is the main wadi in north Judah. Shorek reaches the Mediterranean Sea near Yavneh. In their battle against David, the Philistines marched from their territory through the Nahal Shorek into the valley of Rephaim. Many events in the history of Eretz-Israel are connected with this winding path in the wadi. At a later period in our history, at about the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, Yavneh came to replace Jerusalem as the spiritual center of the Jewish people. The center of Jewish life moved from Jerusalem, symbolically as it were, through Nahal Shorek to Yavneh.