

## THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

### LECTURE 84: CHAPTER 12 (PART IV)

#### THE END OF THE WAR WITH AMON AND A SUMMARY OF THE UNIT

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#### I. THE END OF THE WAR WITH AMON

The tragic nature of the David-Bat-Sheva episode has almost caused us to forget its context - the war with Amon. With David's repentance and the closing of the circle, we can now return to the battle-field and see how that campaign ended:

(26) Now Yoav fought against Rabba of the children of Amon and took the royal city. (27) And Yoav sent messengers to David, and said, "I have fought against Rabba, yea, I have taken the city of waters. (28) Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it; lest I take the city, and it be called after my name.<sup>1</sup>[1] (29) And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabba, and fought against it, and took it. (30) And he took the crown of Malkam<sup>2</sup>[2] from off his head; and the weight thereof was a talent of

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1 [1] There is a certain asymmetry in the verse: Yoav says to David that he should conquer the city, lest Yoav take it and it be called after him, but he does not tell David that the city should be called after him. It stands to reason that after David already called the city of Yevus after himself, it would no longer be dignified to give the same name to a foreign city. But Yoav as general could have called the city after himself had it been conquered by him.

2 [2] The word "Malkam" has been understood in two different ways. Rashi writes that the reference is to a certain god, for the Amonites worshipped a god of that name: "For Shelomo went after Ashtoret the goddess of the Tzidonians, and after Milkom the detestation of the Amonites" ([I Melakhim 11:5](#)); "Because that they have forsaken Me, and have worshipped Ashtoret the goddess of the Tzidonians, Chemosh the god of Moav, and Milkom the god of the children of Amon" (ibid. v. 33). In contrast, Targum Yonatan and the Radak understand that the reference is to the king of Amon ("their king"), even though according to this interpretation, the verse should have referred to "*malkah*" ("its king"), as the antecedent is the city of Rabba, and not the people of Amon.

gold, and in it were precious stones; and it was set on David's head.<sup>3</sup>[3] And he brought forth the spoil of the city, exceeding much. (31) And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln;<sup>4</sup>[4] and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Amon. And David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem.

Here too the positive side of Yoav's personality is manifest. Yoav expresses exceptional loyalty towards David: He sets David's honor before his own, inviting David to reap the fruits of victory and strike the final blow so that the conquest of the city will be regarded as his triumph, rather than that of Yoav.

Several terms for Rabba are used in this passage, and it is difficult to understand the relationship between them. Yoav fights against Rabba of the children of Amon and takes "the royal city;" he then informs David that he has taken "the city of waters," and therefore invites him to take "the city." What did Yoav already take, and what was left to conquer? According to Rashi, Yoav conquered the outer portion of the city, called "the royal city," but proposed to David that he take the inner city, its more fortified section. The wording of the passage, however, suggests that Yoav merely invited David "to cut the ribbon." The Radak's explanation is therefore more persuasive. In his view, "the royal city" that Yoav conquered was the section that was harder to take; this city was also called "the city of waters," apparently because it controlled the regional sources of water. (Rabba is close to the sources of the Yabok).

In the end, David subdues the Amonites and deals with them in a most aggressive manner, as he did with Moav back in chapter 8, and we already

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3 [3] A talent of gold is estimated at 30 kilograms. The Radak therefore writes that this does not mean that David actually wore this crown on his head, but that it was suspended over his head, or else that he would rest it on his head only on special occasions.

4 [4] The context suggests that the verse is listing instruments of torture. Regarding "*malben*," which is written as "*malkhen*" (translated here as "brick-kiln"), the Radak proposes an interesting explanation: "He burned them in the place where they burn [bake] the bricks. And it is written '*malkhen*' with a *khaf*, i.e., in the place of Molekh in the fire, for the people of Amon would pass their children through fire to Molekh, for Malkom was the abomination of the people of Amon, and it is Molekh, and Malkam and Malkhan are the same, for the letters *mem* and *nun* interchange."

discussed the reason for his conduct (see *shiur* no. 75). It is important to note that the relationship between the house of David and Amon later improved; Shuvi the son of Nachash assisted David at the time of Avshalom's rebellion (17:27), and Na'ama the Amonitess married Shlomo and was the mother of Rechav'am (see I *Melakhim* 14:21). Nevertheless, from this point on, Amon was a diminished power, and it is no longer mentioned as an enemy of Israel (unlike Moav, which grew in strength in a later period, as we explained in *shiur* no. 75).

## II. THE BOOK OF *DIVREI HA-YAMIM*

To conclude our study of the Bat-Sheva episode, let us say a few words about how its treatment in the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*. In the book of *shmuel*, the story is inserted between, "And it came to pass, at the return of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Yoav, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Amon, and besieged Rabba. But David tarried at Jerusalem" (11:1) and the verses describing the conquest of the city mentioned above. In the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, we only find the verses that serve here as a framework:

And it came to pass, at the time of the return of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that Yoav led forth the power of the army, and wasted the country of the children of Amon, and came and besieged Rabba. But David tarried at Jerusalem. And Yoav smote Rabba, and overthrew it. And David took the crown of Malkam from off his head, and found it to weigh a talent of gold, and there were precious stones in it; and it was set upon David's head... (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 20:1-2)

The commentary on *Divrei ha-Yamim* attributed to Rashi famously states that "it does not want to say in this book anything disrespectful to the house of David" (see his commentary to I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 17:13). Indeed, the omission of the Bat-Sheva episode from the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, as well as the omission of the series of punishments that came upon David in its wake that are described in the coming chapters in *Shmuel* (the story of Amnon and Tamar, Amnon's killing, Avshalom's rebellion, and the like), is one of the strongest expressions of this idea.

The two books, *Shmuel* and *Divrei Ha-yamim*, complement each other. The book of *Shmuel* presents David in his full complexity, sparing no criticism

of his actions. The book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, in contrast, presents David's positive qualities, describing him in his full glory. Without a doubt, the everyday David is the David described in the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, and therefore this perspective on his personality is of great importance. But David was certainly also a person of ups and downs, of great falls and impressive rehabilitation, as is evident from the book of *shmu'el*.

### III. SUMMARY

The end of chapter 12 is an appropriate place to end this year's series of *shiurim*, as it brings to a conclusion the unit of chapters that form the core of the chapters describing the kingdom of David. Here, a new unit begins – chapters 13-20 – which deal with the punishments that came upon David, a series of difficult blows, most of which occurred in David's own house, and each of them clearly connected to his sin. These are chapters relating to the low point of David's kingdom, but they too demonstrate David's greatness and his capacity to confront trying situations.

In any event, at this stage I wish to look back and summarize the two units that we studied this year. The first unit presented David in his greatness, and it itself is comprised of two separate sub-units.

The first sub-unit, chapters 2-4, described David's kingdom during the period of the split kingdom, when David ruled only over the tribe of Yehuda and the other tribes of Israel were ruled by Ish-Boshet under the protection of Avner ben Ner. During this period, David revealed himself as a wise leader who aspired to establish his kingdom over all of Israel in peaceful ways. In contrast to a string of people who sought confrontations during this period – most prominently, the two competing generals, Avner ben Ner and Yoav ben Tzeruya – David adopted a different, more reconciling approach that pursued peace between the various factions of the nation. Even though he was unable to totally prevent bloodshed, and even though he bore a certain measure of responsibility for Yoav's actions, David represented in the eyes of the nation a different approach, which ultimately was accepted by all the people. This unit ends at the beginning of chapter 5, where David begins to rule over the entire people of Israel.

The second sub-unit, chapters 5-8, deals with David's rule over all of Israel. These chapters constitute the high point of David's kingdom, and in them he established his kingdom externally and internally.

This sub-unit opens (chapter 5) and closes (chapter 8) with David's glorious military victories, which brought peace and quiet, to the point that God gave him rest from all his enemies round about. David's first step as king over all of Israel was the conquest of the city of Yevus and turning it into his capital city. In this conquest, David continued the policy of seeking unity that he had followed up to this point: the selection of a city located on the border between Yehuda and Binyamin and which had no clearly defined tribal identity helped to unify the tribes of Israel.

Internally (chapters 6-7), David brought to an end the period during which the ark was abandoned in a place far away from the *Mishkan* and brought it up to Jerusalem. This was not an easy process, and it even exacted a price in life of Uza, but in the end, David found the proper balance between the attributes of fear and love in the service of God, and the ark reached its resting place in Jerusalem. David then alluded to Natan the prophet that he wished to build a house for God – the Temple. God did not fulfill this request until the time of David's son, but at that time, he promised David that his house would be the eternal royal house of the people of Israel. This was the climax of David's life.

It is precisely here, however, that David begins to get in trouble. It begins with a seemingly marginal affair: the delegation of comforters that David sent to the king of the Amonites. This unnecessary act led to the Bat-Sheva story, in which David sank into the depths of sin. He fell from one sin to the next, thus undermining the foundations of the Torah of Israel: family purity and the value of human life.

A person's character, however, becomes manifest not only in his climactic hours, but also in the low points of his fall. Even during the greatest crisis of his life, David did not lose his humanity. He revealed a sense of responsibility towards Bat-Sheva, even though he could have disavowed her with no one raising a word of objection. In the end, when Natan the prophet appeared before him and rebuked him for the severity of his sins, David made no attempt to evade responsibility, but without hesitation offered confession loud and clear: "I have sinned against the Lord."

David's repentance helped him on the personal level, and God set aside his sin and exempted him from the death penalty to which he was liable. It is, however, impossible to come out of such a situation without paying a heavy price, despite his full repentance. A series of harsh punishments was

decreed upon David and upon his house, regarding which his repentance did not help.

At this point, the unit of chapters that was the subject of our study this year comes to an end. The rest of the book is dedicated primarily to an account of the realization of these punishments and to the sharp blows that fell upon the house of David, one after the other. We shall deal with these chapters next year. We will follow David's confronting the difficult hours of his kingdom until the surprising positive conclusion of the entire book.

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We are now concluding our third year of studying the book of *shmue'l*. I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank the participants in this series, especially those who have raised questions and offered comments over the course of the year. I will, of course, be happy to respond to all questions and comments addressed to me in the future. I also wish to thank R. Boaz Kalush for his precise and beneficial editing of these *shiurim*.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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