
Lesson 22: History and Prophecy

Text: Samuel II, Chapters 10-11-12

In lesson 20 we noted the dry and laconic enumeration of David's conquests. The Bible does not stop to explain the background causes. It does not evaluate the consequences, nor does it describe any of the dramatic battles. In a wide and breathtaking sweep we are told of David's successes in conquering Gath in the west, Moab in the east, Edom and the gulf of Aqaba in the south, and Syria (Aram) in the north.

And yet, when we reach the story of the military campaign against Ammon the narrative changes drastically. Instead of the terse "and he smote Ammon" (as in chapter 8, with regard to Moab and the other countries) we are now given an exhaustive account of the diplomatic and military history of the war against Ammon.

It all began when David sent a delegation to the king of Ammon to console him after the death of his father. The Bible relates in chapter 10 every move and each conversation that led up to the humiliating treatment which the king meted out to David's delegation, and then goes on to describe in detail the military preparations on both sides. Chapters 11 and 12 tell of the prolonged siege on the capital of Ammon, the ups and downs of the drawn-out struggle, until at last the royal city was captured by the Israelite army and David took the Ammonite crown and set it on his head (12, 30).

Why should the Bible single out the campaign against Ammon and describe it in great detail as opposed to the brief enumeration of the other wars? Surely, the other conquests were equally important. Furthermore, it may be reasonably argued, strategically and politically the conquests of Syria and the other countries exceeded the importance of Ammon, a country which was half desert.

Chapter 10 by itself gives the impression that this is mainly a story of a war. But when studied in conjunction with chapters 11 and 12 the conviction grows upon the reader that chapter 10 is merely an introduction to the main narrative- which is the story of Bath-sheba and Uriah the Hittite.

The numerous facts about the war against Ammon are meant to serve as a background of the drama of Uriah, Bath-sheba and David. Mighty battles and military prowess are the narrative framework of the essential theme of sin, punishment, and repentance. This Biblical story is drawn on a broad canvas, but the Biblical purpose is to present the military narrative as a background to the story of David's sin and repentance and the sharp rebuke by Nathan the prophet. Once again, it is clear that the Biblical stories are not intended to relate history but to

present prophecy in a narrative form. The fate of men and nations as seen by the Bible is seen in the light of prophecy and their actions are weighed in the scales of prophetic ethics. The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are usually called "the historical books", but they are in fact no less books of prophecy than Isaiah and Jeremiah.