

110: Chapter 24 (Part IV) Aravna's Threshing Floor and the Selection of Jerusalem

- Rav Amnon Bazak

THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

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LECTURE 110 CHAPTER 24 (PART IV)

ARAVNA'S THRESHING FLOOR AND THE SELECTION OF JERUSALEM

I. "This is the house of the Lord God"

In the previous *shiur*, we examined the excessive wordiness in the account of the acquisition of Aravna's threshing floor. The parallel account in *Divrei Ha-yamim*, however, adds a most important element, whose absence from the book of *Shmuel* is surprising. As may be recalled, in the book of *Shmuel*, the story ends with the cessation of the plague which had been afflicting Israel. In *Divrei Ha-yamim*, there is an epilogue which explains the importance of the site of Aravna's threshing floor:

At that time, when David saw that the Lord had answered him in the threshing floor of Ornan the Yevusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the Lord, which Moshe made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt-offering, were at that time in the high place at Giv'on. But David could not go before it to inquire of God; for he was terrified because of the sword of the angel of the Lord. Then David said, "**This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of burnt-offering for Israel.**" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 21:28-22:1)

The site of the threshing floor is thus the place where the house of God will some day stand. This is even more explicit in another verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim*:

Then Shelomo began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriya, where the Lord appeared to David his father; for which provision had been made in the place of David, in the threshing floor of Ornan the Yevusite. (II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 3:1).1[1]

Thus, Arvana's threshing floor is on Mount Moriya, and that is where the Temple would stand.

Why is this information omitted from the book of *Shmuel*? This question is especially acute if we assume that it was not by chance that this story is recorded at the end of the book, immediately preceding the book of *Melakhim*, in which the Temple is built. If, indeed, this is the reason for the story's placement, why isn't this connection between the threshing floor of Aravna and the site of the Temple spelled out in the books of *Shmuel* and *Melakhim*?

The answer to this question seems to be connected to a principle regarding the selection of Jerusalem in the book of *Shmuel*, which we already noted in the past. According to the book of *Shmuel*, David chose Jerusalem as his capital city and place of domicile in order to unite the people of Israel around a city that was not identified with either of the two major forces in the nation, Yehuda and Binyamin (we expanded upon this point in our *shiur* on chapter 5). It was there that David brought the ark of God (chapter 6), but it was only at the time of Avshalom's rebellion, when Tzadok and Evyatar took the ark from Jerusalem hoping to attach it to the fleeing camp of David, that David resolutely established that Jerusalem is the site of the resting of the *Shekhina*:

1 [1] That Mount Moriya is the site of the *Mikdash* is already mentioned in the account of the *Akeida*, which took place in the "land of Moriya" ([Bereishit 22:2](#)). There it says: "And Avraham called the name of that place Adonai-yir'eh; as it is said to this day, ' In the mount where the Lord is seen' " (ibid. v. 14).

And the king said to Tzadok, “ Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back, and show me both it, and **His habitation.**” ([II Shmuel 15:25](#))²[2]

The city which unites all of Israel, turning them into friends, is the city that is fit to be the site of the *Shekhina* and the *Mikdash*.

The book of *Divrei Ha-yamim* has a different perspective on the selection of Jerusalem, according to which it was God who chose the city in order to rest his *Shekhina* in it. For this reason, the book emphasizes that the site of the *Mikdash* was chosen based on the understanding of God's command to erect an altar precisely there (even though the *Mishkan* and the altar were at that time in Giv'on) and the appearance of the angel at that place.

This also explains another difference between the two books. In *Divrei Ha-yamim*, it says:

And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, **and called upon the Lord; and He answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering.** (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 21:26)

In our chapter, in contrast, there is no mention of a fire coming down from heaven. This description seems to be an inseparable part of the story's purpose in *Divrei Ha-yamim*. The fire from heaven indicates that the site of the threshing floor has been designated for the Temple, just as it says in that book regarding the dedication of the Temple itself:

² [2] We expanded on this point in our *shiur* on chapter 15.

Now when Shlomo had made an end of praying, **the fire came down from heaven,3[3] and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices**; and the glory of the Lord filled the house. (II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 7:1)4[4]

To summarize, the two books express two different perspectives on the selection of Jerusalem as the site of the resting of the *Shekhina*. According to the book of *Shmuel*, God chose Jerusalem because David had selected it, whereas according to the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, David chose Jerusalem because God had selected it. As in many other places, here too the principle of "double causality" is evident: a process which begins with human action and a process which from the very outset is overseen by God. In the end, these two processes lead to the same place.5[5]

3 [3] There is also room to say that the falling of fire from heaven is itself the difference between the two books, for also at the resting of the *Shekhina* in the *Mikdash* this element is brought only in *Divrei Ha-yamim*, whereas in *Melakhim* it only says: "And it was so, that when Shelomo had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication to the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread forth toward heaven" ([I Melakhim 8:54](#)).

4 [4] There may be another expression in the story of the tendency of the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim* to present the story of the threshing floor as the story of the selection of Jerusalem. In the account of the angel there, we find an element that is not found in our chapter: "And David **lifted up his eyes, and saw** the angel of the Lord standing between the earth and the heaven, **having a drawn sword in his hand** stretched out over Jerusalem" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 21:16). This account brings to mind the angel whom Yehoshua met when he entered *Eretz Yisrael*: "And it came to pass, when Yehoshua was by Jericho, that **he lifted up his eyes and looked**, and, behold, there stood a man over against him **with his sword drawn in his hand...**" ([Yehoshua 5:13](#)). That man commands Yehoshua: "Put off your shoe from off your foot; for the place on which you stand is holy" (ibid. v. 15). There, the encounter with the angel of God emphasizes the entry into the land; according to the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, the encounter with the angel at Aravna's threshing floor similarly emphasizes the holiness of the place.

5 [5] The difference in approach between the two books regarding the selection of Jerusalem may also be reflected in another difference between the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim* and the book of *Melakhim*, which is a continuation of the book of *Shemuel*. In Shelomo's prayer at the dedication of the *Mikdash*, we find a verse with a striking difficulty: "Since the day that I brought forth My people Israel out of Egypt, **I chose no city** out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house, that My name might be there; **but I chose David** to be over My people Israel" ([I Melakhim 8:16](#)). The verse opens with the issue of the selection of the city, and one might have expected that it would say in the continuation that now God has

II. The difference between the threshing floor of Aravna and *Akeidat Yitzchak*

All this notwithstanding, even the book of *Shmuel* alludes to a connection between Aravna's threshing floor and Mount Moriya. There are many connections between our chapter (and the parallel chapter in *Divrei Ha-yamim*) and the story of *Akeidat Yitzchak*:

1. In both stories, someone builds an altar and sacrifices a burnt-offering:

And Avraham built the altar there...And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. ([Bereishit 22:9](#), 13)

chosen Jerusalem. But instead, the verse concludes with the selection of David. In the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, the problem is resolved in a simple fashion – there there are two selections: "Since the day that I brought forth My people out of the land of Egypt, **I chose no city** out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house in, that My name might be there; **neither chose I any man** to be prince over My people Israel; **but I have chosen Jerusalem**, that My name might be there; **and have chosen David** to be over My people Israel" (II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 6:5-6).

Indeed, in the Septuagint, the reading in *Melakhim* is like that in *Divrei Ha-yamim*. Some have argued that words were omitted in *Melakhim* because of the confusion caused by the repetition of the words "that My name might be there."

It seems, however, that the difference is intentional, and not by chance. The reading in the book of *Melakhim* implies that the selection of the king is connected to the selection of a place for the resting of the *Shekhina*. According to this reading, the selection of Jerusalem followed from God's selection of David, and since David chose Jerusalem, God chose it as well, following the approach of the book of *Shemuel*. In contrast, the reading in *Divrei Ha-yamim* implies that God's choosing of Jerusalem was not connected to David, in accordance with the general approach of that book.

And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. ([II Shmuel 24:25](#))

2. In both stories, it is God who chooses the site of the altar: God sends Avraham to the land of Moriya, and David to the threshing floor of Aravna.

3. In both stories, emphasis is placed on early rising in the morning: "And Avraham rose early in the morning" ([Bereishit 22:3](#)) – "And when David rose up in the morning" ([II Shmuel 24:11](#)).

4. In both stories, an angel of God is involved in preventing the expected continuation. At *Akeidat Yitzchak*, it is the angel himself who stops Avraham:

And the **angel** of the Lord called to him out of heaven, and said, " Avraham, Avraham." And he said, " Here am I." And he said, " **Lay not your hand** upon the lad, neither do you any thing unto him..." ([Bereishit 22:11-12](#))

In our chapter, it is God who stops the angel, using similar wording:

And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented Him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, " It is enough; **now stay your hand.**" ([II Shmuel 22:16](#))

5. More similar wording: "And Avraham lifted up his eyes, and looked" ([Bereishit 22:13](#)) – "And David lifted up his eyes, and saw" (*I Divrei Ha-yamim* 21:16); "On the third day" ([Bereishit 22:4](#)) – "Three days" ([II Shmuel 24:13](#)); "Behold the fire and **the wood**; but where is the lamb **for a burnt-offering?**" ([Bereishit 22:7](#)) – "Behold the oxen **for the burnt-offering**, and the threshing-instruments and the furniture of the oxen **for the wood**" ([II Shmuel 24:22](#)).

What is the meaning of this correspondence? First, it is connected to what was discussed above. The book of *Shmuel* places greater emphasis on the selection of Jerusalem based on David's human considerations, but it does not utterly ignore the Divine selection of the city. It alludes to it by way of the parallel to the story of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, which is the only story in the Torah which deals with the selection of Jerusalem.

III. *Akeidat David*

This correspondence may also have additional meaning. In chapter 18, we noted another parallel to the story of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, which emphasizes the contrast between Avraham, who was ready to offer his son on the altar in order to obey the word of God, and David, who was unable to make the right decision regarding his rebellious son Avshalom and commanded his men not to harm him.

In our chapter, which tells of David's full repentance (as we saw in the previous *shiurim*), the parallel comes to his credit. The chapter seems to reach its climax in David's words when he understands that his unfortunate choice had led to the punishment of the plague:

(17) And he said, " Lo, I have sinned, and I have done iniquitously; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray You, be against me, and against my father's house."

In this declaration, David fully accepts punishment upon himself and his house, based on the understanding that it is he who must be punished. He now understands that he should not have bound the "sheep" instead of himself, but rather he should have sacrificed his family in order to save Israel, the holy flock. The parallel to the *Akeida* sharpens this point and gives expression to the place to which David arrived at the end of the story: sacrificing himself for the sake of the people of Israel, an idea that is drawn from the flames of the *Akeida* of Avraham.

IV. Conclusion

The story of the census and God's revelation at Aravna's threshing floor brings the book of *Shmuel* to an end. Based on our analysis of the story, we can say that there is no better place to end the book of *Shmuel*, as the point of transition from David to Shelomo and from the book of *Shmuel* to the book of *Melakhim*.

This story describes David's most striking feature: his readiness to repent. This trait, which has characterized David throughout the book, is especially emphasized in this chapter, and serves as a reminder about the importance of recognizing one's sin, confessing, and then repairing. This episode also offers hope for the future: it alludes to the next stage – the building of the *Mikdash* in that same place, and it attests to the sovereignty that the kingdom of Israel had attained in the land. These conditions prepare the groundwork for the high point of the people of Israel: the building of the *Mikdash* and the resting of the *Shekhina* in its permanent place. This phenomenon is described in a separate book, the book of *Melakhim*.

With this, we complete four years of studying the book of *Shmuel*.

Shmuel is the most dramatic book in Scripture. No other book delves in such detail into the personalities of its heroes and the tempestuous events that passed over them. This is especially true about the two central heroes, the first two kings of Israel – Shaul and David. With extraordinary force, prophecy tells us about the unique personalities of these two kings, their struggle with inner and outer challenges, and especially their human qualities, with all their similarities and differences. The book presents the complexity of the institution of the monarchy with its advantages and disadvantages, with its opportunity for good and its potential for corruption.

In the book of *Shmuel*, we also learn about complex relationships within the family: relationships between man and wife, e.g., between David and his wives – Avigayil, Mikhal, and Bat-Sheva; relationships between parents and children, e.g., between Shaul and Yonatan and between David and his children; relationships between brothers, e.g., between Amnon and Avshalom; and others. Supporting characters

embellish the book and they are presented in the fullness of their humanity, for better or worse. To the supporting characters mentioned above, we must add, among others, the three sons of Tzeruya and Avner ben Ner.

The book also describes the changes that affected the people of Israel during the period under discussion: the political change – the transition from suffering the rule of foreign nations, most notably the Pelishtim, to enjoying sovereign rule and kingship, which was becoming more and more established; and the spiritual change – from a people immersed in idolatry to one which sees its kings walking in the paths of God. As opposed to the book of *Shoftim* which precedes it and the book of *Melakhim* which follows it, there is almost no idolatry (to the exclusion of the beginning of the book) in the book of *Shmuel*. Essentially, the book of *Shmuel* is the most optimistic book in the books of the Prophets. It does not end with a cry for change, as does the book of *Shofetim*, nor with destruction and the shattering of opportunities, as does the book of *Melakhim*. The book describes a process of ascent in all areas, and ends with a hint of even better times in the next generation.

Here is the place to thank all those who have participated in this virtual *shiur*, and especially those who raised questions and offered comments. A special thanks goes to Boaz Kalush, who edited all the *shiurim* in a most thorough and professional manner. I would be happy to continue receiving comments and responses.

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