

THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

Rav Amnon Bazak

LECUTRE 74: CHAPTER 8

DAVID'S WARS (PART I)

I. “ AND AFTER THIS IT CAME TO PASS”

Chapter 8 deals for the most part with David's military victories over the surrounding nations. The beginning of the chapter reads:

(1) And after this it came to pass that David smote the Philistines and subdued them; and David took Meteg Ha-Ama¹[1] out of the hand of the Philistines.

What is meant by "and after this it came to pass"? Chapter 8's proximity to chapter 7 only sharpens the question, for chapter 7 began with the words: "And it came to pass, when the king dwelt in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies round about" (7:1). How is it possible that David's wars followed God's giving him rest from all his enemies?

1 [1] The phrase "Meteg Ha-Ama" is obscure. The parallel in *Divrei Ha-yamim* reads: "And after this it came to pass that David smote the Philistines and subdued them, and took Gat and its towns (*Gat u-benoteha*) out of the hand of the Philistines" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 18:1), and therefore the commentators suggest various ways to relate the phrase to Gat. Rashi writes: "Because it [Gat] is a ruling scepter over all the Philistines, the residence of kings, for we do not find among any of the lords of the Philistines in Aza, or in Ashdod, or in Ekron, or in Ashkelon a term of kingship; only in Gat do we find 'Akhish the king of Gat' ([I Shmuel 21:14](#))." Similarly, the *Metzudot Zion* mentions that the word "*meteg*" in Scripture means "bridle" (pointing to [Mishlei 26:3](#); see also [II Melakhim 19:28](#) and [Tehilim 32:9](#)). The Radak, on the other hand, writes: "Perhaps the water channel (*ama*) passed through the city; they altered it to come from outside the city to the city; therefore the city was called *Meteg ha-Ama*."

It seems then that chapter 8 is not really a continuation of chapter 7, but rather a resumption of the account found at the end of chapter 5, which dealt with David's wars against the Philistines. Proof for this may be adduced from a linguistic connection that is created when we juxtapose the end of chapter 5 to the beginning of chapter 8:

And when the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to seek David...And David came to Ba'al-Peratzim, and David **smote** them there...

And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Refa'im...And David did so, as the Lord commanded him, and **smote** the Philistines from Geva until you come to Gezer. (5:17, 20, 22, 25)

And after this it came to pass, that David **smote** the Philistines, and **subdued** them; and David took Meteg Ha-Ama out of the hand of the Philistines.

David smote the Philistines three times – first a local blow, then a regional blow, and finally utterly: "He smote...he smote...he smote...he subdued them."

If what we say is correct, why doesn't our chapter immediately follow chapter 5? This ordering of the chapters seems to have been intentional, so that the climactic chapters of David's kingdom (chapters 5-8) should create a special structure:

Chapter 5 – The solidification of David's kingdom²[2]

Chapter 6 – Bringing the ark to Jerusalem

2 [2] The conquest of Jerusalem, the siring of sons, and victories over the Philistines. See *shiur* no. 69.

Chapter 7 – Natan's vision

Chapter 8 – David subdues his enemies

This structure highlights the inner content against the background of the outer framework. The chapters constituting the outer framework describe David's solidification of his kingdom and his victories over his enemies – things which, as important as they may be, did not stand at the heart of David's kingdom. David's uniqueness is expressed in the inner chapters, which tell of his great love for God that brought him to remove the ark of God from the forsaken place where it was resting and bring it up to Jerusalem and to ask for permission to build a Temple in which to house the ark – an aspiration that was only realized in the days of Shlomo, but in reward for which David merited the promise of everlasting kingship. The chapters are not arranged chronologically, but they are well ordered from a literary perspective.

Let us now return to the verse with which we opened this *shiur*. David's great victory put an end to the Philistine's period of glory. For many years – from the days of the Judges and until the days of Shaul and the beginning of the period of David – the Philistines were the people of Israel's number one enemy. From now on, they cease to constitute an important factor in *Eretz Yisrael*. Regarding Shlomo, we read: "And Shlomo reigned over all kingdoms from the river to **the land of the Philistines** and to the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Shlomo all the days of his life" ([1 Melakhim 5:1](#)).

II. MOAV

The next verse is somewhat surprising:

(2) And he smote Moav, and measured them with the line, making them to lie down on the ground; and he measured two lines to put to death, and one full line to keep alive. And the Moavites became servants to David, and brought presents.

David did not relate to any other nation with such severity, to the point of killing two thirds of the population and turning the remaining third into servants. Why did David treat Moav in this manner? The question is particularly difficult in light of the connections that existed between David and

Moav, beginning with the Moavite extraction of Ruth, David's great-grandmother, and continuing with – perhaps because of the former connection – bringing his parents to the king of Moav when he ran away from Shaul:

And David went thence to Mitzpeh of Moav; and he said unto the king of Moav, “ Let my father and my mother, I pray you, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me.” And he brought them before the king of Moav, and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the stronghold ([1 Shmuel 22:3-4](#)).

How can this phenomenon be understood?

The commentators followed in the footsteps of *Chazal*, who assumed that something happened between the time that David entrusted his parents to the king of Moav and our chapter. In their attempt to fill in the gap between the two stories, *Chazal* suggest ([Bamidbar Rabba 14:1](#)) that the king of Moav killed David's parents, as Scripture only notes that they arrived before the king of Moav, "but we do not find that they ever left" (Rashi, here). According to this approach, David's treatment of the Moavites in our chapter was an act of personal revenge.

The problem is that if this understanding is correct, a critical element of the story is missing, and Scripture should have explicitly stated what the king of Moav did to David's parents. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand why the king of Moav would suddenly change his attitude toward David's parents and bring them harm after they had dwelt with him "all the while that David was in the stronghold."

It is possible then that David's radical treatment of Moav should be understood in a different way. It seems that David's attitude stems from national considerations. The very fact that David entrusted his parents to Moav testifies that Moav was Israel's enemy, just like David himself found refuge with an enemy king – Achish the king of Gat. Moreover, Moav took part in a cruel war fought against Israel, as is described in the book of *Tehillim*:

For, lo, Your enemies are in an uproar; and they that hate You have lifted up the head. They hold crafty converse against Your people, and take counsel against Your treasured ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. For they have consulted together with one consent; against You do they make a covenant; the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; **Moav**, and the Hagrites. ([Tehillim 83:3-7](#))

When did this war take place? Without a doubt it took place after the period of the judges Devora and Gid'on, for the psalm makes explicit reference to their enemies: "Do You unto them as unto Midyan; **as to Sisera, as to Yavin**, at the brook Kishon...Make their nobles **like Orev and Ze'ev, and like Zevach and Tzalmuna**^{3[3]} all their princes." It is reasonable to assume that the war with Moav took place not too long afterwards, and therefore the earlier wars were still remembered when the psalm was composed. It seems, then, that this war was fought in the days of Shaul, and perhaps it is the war alluded to in the verse, "So Shaul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against **Moav**, and against the children of Amon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Tzova, and against the Philistines" ([I Shmuel 14:47](#)).^{4[4]} The echoes of this war could still be heard in the days of David, and therefore David struck Moav in a particularly severe manner.

The psalm mentions other nations that took part in the war: "The tents of Edom and the Yishmaelites; Moav, and the Hagrites; Geval, and Amon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tzor; Assyria also is joined with them..." ([Tehillim 83:7-9](#)). But at the end of the list it is stated explicitly that all these nations "have been an arm to the children of Lot. Selah." In other words, the primary participants in the war were the descendants of Lot – Moav and Amon. And indeed, the only other nation that David treated with similar severity was Amon, about whom it says below: "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; and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Amon" (12:31). Against this

3 [3] Orev and Ze'ev were Midyanite officers who were killed in a war fought by Gid'on ([Shoftim 7:25](#)), and Zevach and Tzalmuna were two Midyanite kings who were killed in that same war following their pursuit (see [Shoftim 8](#)).

4 [4] The Radak writes in his commentary to [Tehillim 83](#) that the prayer relates to the war that was fought in the days of Yehoshafat, mentioned in II *Divrei Ha-yamim*. This approach, however, is difficult, for it is not at all reasonable that in the days of Yehoshafat mention was still being made of Orev, Ze'ev, Zevach and Tzalmuna, who were killed centuries earlier, rather than many other enemies whom Israel defeated during the interim.

background, we can well understand David's exceptional attitude towards Moav and Amon – the two main enemies in the war that was meant to wipe out the name of Israel and was fought not very long before.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to free oneself from the impression that David engaged here in extreme behavior, which apparently was part of the reason that David himself gave for his being denied permission to build the Temple: "You have shed blood abundantly, and have made great wars; you shall not build a house unto My name, because you have shed much blood upon the earth in My sight" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 22:18). It seems that it is for this reason that the author of *Divrei Ha-yamim* omitted this story from the account that parallels our chapter, and contented himself with a much more general description: "And he smote Moav; and the Moavites became servants to David, and brought presents" (ibid. 18:2).

In any event, the blow to Moav was very effective, and they remained servants to Israel until the death of Achav (see [II Melakhim 1:1](#)).

III. THE WAR AGAINST ARAM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Following the victories over the Philistines and Moav, an account is given of victories over the two parts of Aram – Aram-Tzova and Aram-Damesek:

(3) David smote also Hadadezer, the son of Recho, king of Tzova, as he went to establish his dominion^{5[5]} at the river Euphrates.^{6[6]} (4)

5 [5] The *Metzudot* explains that Hadadezer went "to push his place back, to extend the border of his land." However, the parallel verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim* reads: "And David smote Hadadezer king of Tzova by Chamat, as he went to establish (*le-hatziv*, rather than *le-hashiv*) his dominion at the river Euphrates" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 18:3), which may be understood as "to establish for himself a victory monument" (as is stated regarding Shaul following his war with Amalek: "Shaul came to Carmel, and, behold, he was setting him up a monument (*matziv lo yad*)" [[I Shmuel 15:12](#)]).

6 [6] The word "Euphrates" (*Perat*) is not written, and it is included among the words that are "read, but not written" (see [Nedarim 37b](#)). It seems that this word was omitted because the word "*ha-nahar*" (river), when unqualified, refers to the "the great river, the Euphrates" (see [Bereishit 15:18](#)), for in *Eretz*

And David took from him a thousand and seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen;⁷[7] and David incapacitated all the chariot horses, but reserved of them for a hundred chariots. (5) And when the Arameans of Damascus came to succor Hadadezer king of Tzova, David smote of the Arameans two and twenty thousand men. (6) Then David put garrisons in Aram-Damesek; and the Arameans became servants to David, and brought presents. And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went.

Two important points arise in these verses: First, the incapacitation of the horses. This action brings to mind God's command to Yehoshua during the war against the kings of the North: "And the Lord said unto Yehoshua, ' Be not afraid because of them; for tomorrow at this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel; you shall incapacitate their horses, and burn their chariots with fire" ([Yehoshua 11:6](#)). Without a doubt, the incapacitation of the horses was meant as a fulfillment of the Torah's command, "Only he shall not multiply horses to himself;" incapacitating the horses – disabling them by cutting the tendons of the hock – impairs their fighting capability, and thus prevents the king from trusting in his strength and becoming drunk with power. We have already noted in the past (see *shiur* no. 14 on I *Shmuel*) that Scripture often speaks out against placing one's trust in horses rather than in God. For example, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many, and in horsemen, because they are exceedingly mighty; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord" (*Yeshayahu* 31:1).⁸[8] David's greatness is

Yisrael itself there are no rivers. (This point is especially prominent in the words of Na'aman: "Are not Amana and Parpar, **the rivers of Damascus**, better than **all the waters of Israel**?" [[II Melakhim 5:12](#)]). It should be noted that the word "Euphrates" (*Perat*) does appear in the parallel passage in *Divrei Ha-yamim* 18:3.

⁷ [7] The parallel verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim* reads: "And David took from him a **thousand chariots, and seven thousand horsemen**" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 18:4). The Radak, who always notes the differences between the two books, explains the difference: "Here he counts the great officers in Hadadezer's camp, whereas there [in *Divrei Ha-yamim*], he counts all the chariots and the horsemen; and similarly he doesn't mention here the number of chariots, whereas there he mentions them, and the footmen he mentions here, but not there." As for the issue itself, there are many differences in the numbers between the books of *Shmuel* and *Melakhim* and the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, and it is not always possible to find a persuasive explanation for them. This, however, is not the forum in which to expand upon the matter.

⁸ [8] See also [Hoshea 14:4](#): "We will not ride upon horses; neither will we call any more the work of our hands our gods;" [Mikha 5:9](#): "And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord, that I will cut off your horses out of the midst of you, and will destroy your chariots;" [Tehillim 20:8](#): "Some trust in chariots,

evident in the fact that he did not wait for a special command from God like the one given to Yehoshua, but rather he disabled the horses on his own. In this, he continued in his characteristic path – great faith in God that He will bring him success: "That the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's" ([I Shmuel 17:47](#)).

The second point, which in great measure stems from the first, is the description: "And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went." These words have great significance. We saw in I *Shmuel* that the goal to be achieved through the appointment of Shaul as king was the deliverance of Israel: "Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man out of the land of Binyamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel, and **he shall save** My people out of the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto Me" ([I Shmuel 9:16](#)). In practice, however, the term "save" is never used regarding Shaul, and it was other people who saved Israel during the period of his rule: his son Yehonatan⁹[9] and David in wars fought against the Philistines.¹⁰[10] Shaul did indeed achieve success in the wars that he fought, but Scripture is careful not to use the term "save." In one place it is especially clear that this is intentional: "So Shaul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moav, and against the children of Amon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Tzova, and against the Philistines; and wherever he turned himself, **he put them to the worse** (*yarshi'a*)" ([I Shmuel 14:47](#)). This wording stands in clear contrast to "and wherever he turned himself, **he saved** (*yoshi'a*),"¹¹[11] thus showing that Shaul did not fulfill his mission, and did not truly save Israel.

Against this background we can well understand the repetition in our chapter of the words: "And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went" (vv. 6, 14), which constitute a sort of refrain for the battle songs in our chapter. David, who disabled horses as an expression of his faith in God, merited God's deliverance and absolute victory over his enemies.

and some in horses; but we will make mention of the name of the Lord our God;" and elsewhere.

9 [9] See I *Shmuel* 14:45: "Shall Yonatan die, who has wrought this great salvation in Israel?"

10 [10] See I *Shmuel* 19:5; 23:2,5.

11 [11] This is the reading in the Septuagint.

Indeed, Aram was also subservient to Israel for an extended period, until the end of the days of Shlomo, when Razon ben Elyada, who had fled from his master, Hadadezer king of Tzova, appointed himself king (see [1 Melakhim 11:23-24](#)). From that time on, Aram was once again a threatening kingdom and bitter enemy of Israel.

(Translated by David Strauss)
