

THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

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LECTURE 78: CHAPTER 10 (PART II)

THE TWO WARS AGAINST AMON AND ARAM

I. THE FIRST BATTLE

At the end of the last *shiur*, we saw that the Amonites erroneous interpretation of the delegation sent to Chanun the son of Nachash raised David's wrath, and he began to prepare for war against Amon. In order to avert a total rout, the Amonites enlist several of their neighbors in the region to their aid:

(6) And when the children of Amon saw that they were become odious to David, the children of Amon sent and hired the Arameans of Bet-Rechov, and the Arameans of Tzova, twenty thousand footmen, and the king of Ma'akha¹[1] with a thousand men, and the men of Tov²[2] twelve thousand men.

1 [1] Ma'akha is a region on the east bank of the Jordan in the north of Gil'ad; see [Devarim 3:14](#) and [Yehoshua 12:5](#). The connection between Ma'akha and Aram has an ancient family foundation. Aram was the son of Kemuel, the son of Nachor (see [Bereishit 22:21](#)), and Ma'akha was the son (or perhaps the daughter) of Nachor from his concubine Re'uma (ibid. v. 24). In the parallel verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim*, the description is slightly different: "Chanun and the children of Amon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire for themselves chariots and horsemen out of Aram-Naharayyim, and out of Aram-Ma'akha, and out of Tzova" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 19:10). The mention of Aram-Naharayyim (instead of Aram-Rechov) at this stage is surprising, and requires further examination.

2 [2] The simple understanding of "the men of Tov" is the men of the land of Tov, located in Gil'ad, as is mentioned in the story of Yiftach the Gil'adite: "Then Yiftach fled from his brethren and dwelt in the land of Tov" (*Shofetim* 11:3). According to this, 20,000 men came from Aram and another 12,000 men came from the land of Tov. However, in I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 19:7 there is no mention of the men of the land of Tov, and instead it says: "So they hired them **thirty and two thousand** chariots, and the king of Ma'akha and his people." From here it might perhaps be inferred that the author of *Divrei Ha-yamim* understands "the men of Tov" as select fighters (see [I Shmuel 9:2](#):

David hears about this, but he doesn't reconsider going out to war. Nevertheless, it seems that in light of this information, he decides to send out his most elite units to battle:

(7) And when David heard of it, he sent Yoav and all the host of the mighty men.

Indeed, this campaign was particularly difficult. The soldiers who laid siege against the people of Amon found themselves fighting on two fronts:

(8) And the children of Amon came out and put the battle in array at the entrance of the gate; and the Arameans of Tzova, and of Rechov, and the men of Tov and Ma'akha,³[3] were by themselves in the field. (9) Now when Yoav saw that the battle was set against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Arameans. (10) And the rest of the people he committed into the hand of Avshai,⁴[4] his brother, and he put them in array against the children of Amon. (11) And he said, " If the Arameans be too strong for me, then you shall help me, but if the children of Amon be too strong for you, then I will come and help you. (12) Be of good

"And he had a son, whose name was Shaul, **young and goodly**"; and *ibid.* 14:53: "And when Shaul saw **any mighty man**, or any valiant man, he took him unto him"); and therefore he groups them all together into a single group of 32,000 men.

3 [3] The names of the nations are mentioned in chiasmic order: In v. 6: Aram-Rehov/Aram-Tzova, Ma'akha/Tov, whereas in v. 8: Aram-Tzova/Aram-Rehov, Tov/Ma'akha.

4 [4] This is the only time that Avishai the son of Tzeruya is called Avshai in the book of Shmuel, whereas this is his usual appellation in *Divrei Ha-yamim*. An original explanation for this difference between the books is brought in the commentary attributed to Rashi to *Divrei Ha-yamim*. One of the central themes in this commentary is that the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim* speaks only in praise of the house of David, and this principle explains, in his opinion, the name Avshai as well: "And therefore throughout this book it is Avshai, for the entire book was written in honor of David, and it would not be to his honor if the son of his sister was called Avishai, which means: I too am as important as David, for my father is Yishai. Therefore, in the entire book it is Avshai, whereas throughout the book of *Shmuel* it is Avishai except for one Avshai."

courage, and let us prove strong for our people and for the cities of our God; and the Lord do that which seems Him good.”

Without a doubt, Yoav is described as the hero of the story, with Scripture noting four of his positive qualities:

1) Yoav reveals himself as a superior commander, who does not bow to the pressure of the difficult situation, but rather composedly adopts a wise strategy. He divides his army into two, stationing the more elite units ("all the choice men of Israel") in the more difficult battle, but also prepares for the possibility of a cooperative effort and transfer of forces from one front to the other as needed.

2) Yoav also demonstrates bravery. He accepts upon himself the hardest mission, the battle against Aram, and assigns to his brother the less difficult role – continuing the campaign against Amon.

3) Yoav addresses Avishai with humility. He first mentions the scenario in which he will need his brother's assistance – "If the Arameans be too strong for me, then you shall help me" - and only afterwards does he mention the reverse situation – "but if the children of Amon be too strong for you, then I will come and help you."⁵[5]

4) And the most important thing – Yoav reveals his deep belief in God, and his terse but faith-filled words have ever since served as Israel's motto when going out to war: "Be of good courage, and let us prove strong for our people, and for the cities of our God;⁶[6] and the Lord do that which seems Him good." In this way, Yoav expresses the proper relationship between the efforts

5 [5] It is possible that this was a realistic assessment of the situation, for the campaign against Aram would likely be the more difficult one.

6 [6] The idea that the cities of Israel are the cities of God is also mentioned in the words of the wise woman from Avel of Bet-Ma'akha: "Do you seek to destroy **a city** and a mother in Israel? Why will you swallow up **the inheritance of the Lord**" (II *Shmuel* 20:19). Usually, this term is unique to Jerusalem (see [Tehillim 48:2,9](#); 87:3; and elsewhere).

that a person must make and the recognition that his strength is limited, and that in the end his fate lies in the hands of God.⁷[7]

This character is very different from the character that we met in chapters 2-3. There, Yoav was painted as a warmonger, who cold-bloodedly murdered Avner the son of Ner, ignoring national considerations, and as a total opposite of the character of David. Effectively, this gap reflects one of the interesting literary roles of Yoav in the book of Shmuel. Throughout the book, Yoav serves as David's "negative:" When David follows in the way of God and does good, Yoav adopts a negative path, and the stories in which Yoav is presented as a positive character usually turn out to be stories in which David is portrayed negatively. The war in our chapter takes place between David's error in sending a delegation of comforters to Chanun the son of Nachash the Amonite, which was discussed in the previous *shiur*, and the main sin in his life – the story of Bat-Sheva – which appears in the next chapter. It is precisely here that Yoav reveals himself in full strength, both militarily and spiritually.

Indeed, Yoav enjoys victory on both fronts:

(13) So Yoav and the people that were with him drew nigh unto the battle against the Arameans; and they fled before him. (14) And when the children of Amon saw that the Arameans were fled, they likewise fled before Avishai, and entered into the city. Then Yoav returned from the children of Amon and came to Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, he did not enjoy total victory. Aram and Amon may have fled, but they were not vanquished. Yoav did not succeed in turning his victory into a lasting achievement, and at most attained temporary respite.

7 [7] Unlike the attitude of Eli the priest, who responded with similar words when he heard from Shmuel the evil decree that was to fall upon his house - "It is the Lord; **let Him do what seems Him good**" ([1 Shmuel 3:18](#)) – but made no effort to change the decree. (We dealt at length with this approach, characteristic of Eli's attitude, in *shiur* no. 6 on *1 Shmuel*). The Ralbag writes here: "We learn from here that it is not fitting to rely on a miracle, but rather it is fitting that a person should try to rescue himself to the extent possible, and then God, blessed be He, will help, for God, blessed be He, only performs miracles in necessary situations."

II. THE SECOND BATTLE

The Aramaeans had difficulty coming to terms with their rout in the first battle, and therefore redeployed for a second battle:

(15) And when the Arameans saw that they were put to the worse before Israel, they gathered themselves together. (16) And Hadadezer sent and brought out the Arameans that were beyond the River; and they came to Chelam,^{8[8]} with Shovach the captain of the host of Hadadezer at their head. (17) And it was told to David; and he gathered all Israel together, and passed over the Jordan, and came to Chelam. And the Arameans set themselves in array against David and fought with him. (18) And the Arameans fled before Israel; and David slew of the Arameans seven hundred drivers of chariots,^{9[9]} and forty thousand horsemen,^{10[10]} and smote Shovakh^{11[11]} the captain of their host, so that he died there. (19) And when all the kings that were servants to Hadadezer saw that they were put to the worse before Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Arameans feared to help the children of Ammon any more.^{12[12]}

8 [8] The city Chelam is apparently located in the northern part of Trans-Jordan; most scholars identify it with Alma, which is near Betzer in the Bashan (see *Encyclopedia Mikra'it*, s.v. *Chelam*, vol. 3, p. 114). The city is not mentioned in *Divrei Ha-yamim*, and the next verse there reads, "And he passed over the Jordan, and came upon them" (*aleihem*) (instead of: "And he passed over the Jordan, and came to Chelam [*Chelama*]" here).

9 [9] The parallel verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim* reads: "And David slew of the Arameans the men of **seven thousand** chariots" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 19:18). The Radak, in his usual manner, notes the difference, and suggests that there were seven hundred "choice chariots," and seven thousand chariots in all.

10 [10] *Divrei Ha-yamim* reads: "And forty thousand **footmen**." See the Radak.

11 [11] *Divrei Ha-yamim* reads: "*Shofakh*." Regarding the interchange between the letter "*bet*" and the letter "*peh*," see *shiur* no. 72, note 1. The *gemara* (*Sota* 42b) explains the difference between the two names in midrashic manner.

12 [12] From here it would seem that our chapter chronologically precedes chapter 8, for there we find David's absolute victory over Hadadezer, king of Aram: "Then David put garrisons in Aram of Damascus; and the Arameans became servants to David, and brought presents" (8:6). We already saw (in *shiurim* nos. 74-75) that chapter 8 concludes the unit of chapters 5-8 – the

This campaign was only against Aram – who had become significantly stronger by joining the men of Aram-Naharayyim into their ranks and without the weaker kingdom of Amon. There are two striking differences between the two battles:

1) In the first battle, Yoav went out at the head of the army, whereas here it was David.

2) In the second battle, a decisive victory was achieved: "They made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Arameans feared to help the children of Amon any more."

It seems that Scripture wishes to express the connection between these two points.¹³[13] Despite all of Yoav's strength, in the end it was precisely David who succeeded in deciding the campaign against Aram. It is possible that with respect to his military skills, Yoav was a greater fighter than David, but David was more resolute, and did not rest until he achieved his objective, as he says in his song:

I have pursued my enemies, and destroyed them; neither did I turn back till they were consumed. And I have consumed them, and smitten them through, that they cannot arise; they are fallen under my feet.
(22:38-39)

climactic chapters of David's kingdom – whereas the episode involving Bat-Sheva and its tragic consequences constitute a separate unit.

13 [13] The victory was so great that the *mishna* compares it to the victory over Golyat: "They come [relying] upon the might of flesh and blood, but you come [relying] upon the might of the All-Present. The Philistines came [relying] upon the might of Golyat; but what was his fate? In the end, he fell by the sword and they fell with him. The Amonites came [relying] upon the might of Shovakh; but what was his fate? In the end he fell by the sword and they fell with him. But with you it is otherwise; ' For the Lord your God is He that goes with you to fight with you, etc.' ([Devarim 20:4](#))" (*Sota* 42a).

It stands to reason, however, that this emphasis is meant to sharpen what will happen later. We saw that the first battle did not achieve a decisive victory over Amon or Aram, but in the second battle, in which David led the army of Israel, Aram was totally vanquished. One might have expected that David would lead a second battle against Amon as well. However, the description of the second battle is very reminiscent of the account of the first battle.

And it came to pass,¹⁴[14] at the return of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle,¹⁵[15] **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)¹⁶[16]

Scripture emphasizes that not only did David content himself with sending Yoav to fight against Amon, but he "tarried at Jerusalem." This is very significant for understanding the events that followed. Had David acted as he had in the battle against Aram and gone out himself to war against Amon, the whole Bat-Sheva affair would not have taken place. But David chose to **send** Yoav once again. In the next chapter, we will see the central role that the missions that David cast upon several people played in the Bat-Sheva affair. In any event, already now we can say that this verse serves as a preparation for the Bat-Sheva incident and as an initial explanation of its difficult outcome. This is how the Malbim explains the matter: "Because the king sat in his house and did not himself go out to fight the wars of God, the incident occurred."

In conclusion, I wish to proceed one verse further into the next chapter:

14 [14] I.e., a year later, as the *Metzudat David* writes: "When the sun returned to that very point where it was when the kings went out the year before to fight Israel and help the people of Amon." See [I Melakhim 20:22](#), 26; II *Divrei Hayamim* 36:10.

15 [15] *Malakhim* = *Melakhim*, kings. The verse means: After a year had passed since the kings went out to fight (see the Radak; and see the other explanation that he brings for these words).

16 [16] According to the non-Jewish division of the book into chapters, this verse belongs to the Bat-Sheva story, and there is something right about that. But a more precise picture arises from the Masoretic division, which sets this verse as a separate unit, thus teaching that, on the one hand, it concludes the previous chapter, while on the other hand, it opens the next chapter and the story of Bat-Sheva.

And it came to pass at eventide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house; and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. (11:2)

It seems that Scripture is drawing a connection between the two verses. The root of what happened is that "David **tarried** in Jerusalem;" having tarried there, he came to take an afternoon nap in his bed which continued until eventide, and from there "he walked upon the roof of the king's house." Standing out against the intensive efforts of Yoav and his men are the pastoral peace and quiet in Jerusalem. It is this sharp contrast that stands behind the most difficult episode in David's life.

(Translated by David Strauss)
