

THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

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LECTURE 72: CHAPTER 7 (I)

NATAN'S VISION: WHY DIDN'T DAVID BUILD THE TEMPLE

I. "GO, DO ALL THAT IS IN YOUR HEART"

Following the ark's transfer to Jerusalem is the next stage, which seems to be a natural continuation of the process that began in the previous chapter:

(1) 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, (2) that the king said unto Natan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtains." (3) And Natan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you."

David does not clarify his intentions, but merely describes the problematic situation: He resides in a house of cedar, while God's ark is located in a tent. But Natan fully understands what David has in mind, and even approves of his plan.

Here we come to the first difficulty in our chapter. As we know, God answered David in the negative. From here it follows that Natan answered David on his own, rather than based on an answer that he had received from God. This phenomenon is interesting in itself, and it testifies to the fact that a prophet does not always speak in the capacity of a prophet, but as a spiritual guide. But how is it that Natan the prophet gave David a positive response,

against that of God? And if he erred in his personal judgment, why was it important for Scripture to tell us about this mistake?

II. YOU HAVE SHED BLOOD ABUNDANTLY”

In order to answer this question, we must first understand why in fact God refused David's request. God appeared to Natan and in a rather long vision (vv. 4-17) explained the reason for His refusal:

(4) And it came to pass the same night, that the word of the Lord came unto Natan, saying, (5) “Go and tell My servant David, Thus says the Lord, Shall you build Me a house for Me to dwell in? (6) for I have not dwelt in a house since the day that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. (7) In all places wherein I have walked among all the children of Israel, spoke I a word with any of the tribes of Israel,¹[1] whom I commanded to feed My people Israel, saying, Why have you not built Me a house of cedar? (8) Now therefore thus shall you say unto My servant David, Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over My people, over Israel. (9) And I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like unto the name of the great ones that are in the earth. (10) And I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disquieted no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as at the first, (11) even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel;²[2] and I will cause you to rest from

1 [1] "Any of the tribes (*shivtei*) of Israel" means "any of the judges (*shofetei*) of Israel," as in the parallel verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim*: "Did I speak a word to any of the **judges** (*shofetei*) of Israel whom I commanded to be shepherds to My people, saying" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 17:6). It seems that the word "*shofet*" is derived from "*shevet*" in the sense of staff (see *Tehillim* 23:4: "Your staff (*shivtekha*) and your rod comfort me"; *Mikha* 7:14; and elsewhere), as indeed is stated there: "Whom I commanded to be shepherds to My people." The interchange of *shevet-shofet* is common in Scripture, and it explains many verses. For example: "The staff (*shevet*) shall not depart from Yehuda, nor the scepter from between his feet" (*Bereishit* 49:10); "You stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains, your tribes (*shivteichem*), your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel" (*Devarim* 29:9).

2 [2] It seems that the first half of this verse continues the parenthetical remark that began in the previous verse, so that the verse means: God will appoint a

all your enemies. Moreover the Lord tells you that the Lord will make you a house. (12) When your days are fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, that shall proceed out of your body, and I will establish his kingdom. (13) He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (14) I will be to him for a father, and he shall be to Me for a son; if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men; (15) but My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Shaul, whom I put away before you. (16) And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before you; your throne shall be established forever.” (17) According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Natan speak unto David.

At first glance it is difficult to understand from all this the true chief reason for God's refusal. We shall deal later with this vision, but let us first deal with a reason that does not appear here. It is precisely that reason that has become the prevalent explanation for why David didn't build the Temple. This reason appears twice in the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, but not in a direct account of the words of God, but in David's explanations to others for why he didn't build the Temple.^{3[3]} It is interesting that in both places, David clearly alludes to Natan's vision and makes use of expressions appearing in it.

David first explains the matter to his son Shelomo:

Then He called for Shelomo his son and charged him to build a house for the Lord, the God of Israel. And David said to Shelomo, My son, as for me, it was in my heart to build a house unto the name of the Lord my God. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “**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.** Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Shelomo, and I will give peace and

place for Israel, where the children of wickedness will no more afflict them, "as at the first," and as it was "from the day that I commanded judges to be over the children of Israel."

^{3 [3]} It is important to note that Natan's vision also appears in its entirety in the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim* (chapter 17). We should thus not view the difference between the reason mentioned by David and the reason appearing in Natan's vision as a fundamental difference between the book of *Shemuel* and the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*.

quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name; and he shall be to Me for a son, and I will be to him for a father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.”⁴[4] (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 22:6-10)

Later, David says this to the entire nation:

And David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies... Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, “Hear me, my brethren, and my people; as for me, it was in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God; and I had made ready for the building. But God said unto me, You shall not build a house for My name, **because you are a man of war, and have shed blood**... And of all my sons – for the Lord has given me many sons – He has chosen Shelomo my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel. And He said unto me, Shelomo your son, he shall build My house and My courts; for I have chosen him to be to Me for a son, and I will be to him for a father. And I will establish his kingdom forever, if he be constant to do My commandments and My ordinances, as at this day.” (ibid. 2:1-7)

How are we to understand this phenomenon? Why does David speak of a reason that was not mentioned in Natan's prophecy? The Radak, in his commentary to I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 22, proposes two fundamental explanations of this phenomenon:

"You have shed blood abundantly" – We do not find that God said this to him, but David said this in his heart, that for this reason God prevented him from building the Temple. Or else Natan the prophet said this to him, and even though it is not written in the book of *Shmuel*, there are many examples of this, e.g., "And you said, 'We will send men'" (*Devarim* 1:22).⁵[5]

4 [4] This verse parallels, of course, verses 13-14 in our chapter.

5 [5] That is to say, the book of *Devarim* says that spies were sent on the initiative of the people, whereas there is no mention of this in the book of *Bemidbar*, from which it would appear that the initiative was entirely that of God.

In other words, either David was not given this reason, but he nevertheless thought that this in fact was the true reason; or else David was told this in a different prophecy that is not recorded in the book of *Shmuel*, and thus there are several reasons why God prevented David from building the Temple.

As for the reason itself, we must understand the connection between David's being a man of war who shed abundant blood and his being barred from building the Temple. Here, too, the Radak (*ibid.*) suggests two understandings:

And when he said, "You have shed blood abundantly" – for there was innocent blood among the blood that he shed, like the blood of Uriya, and this happened before.^{6[6]} Also regarding the blood of the priests, he was the reason, as he said, "I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house" (I *Shmuel* 22:22). Also among the blood of the nations that he shed, it is possible that there were good and pious people among them. Nevertheless, he was not punished for them because his intention was to destroy the wicked that they not attack Israel and to save himself when he was in the land of the Philistines, and therefore he spared no man or woman. **But since he was involved in abundant bloodshed**, God barred him from building a Temple, which is for peace and atonement of sin and the crown of prayer, as He forbade the waving of iron over the altar and in the Temple. Since iron is used for the production of tools of death, it should not be used for the production of tools of peace.

Two points arise in the Radak's remarks. On the one hand, we have here criticism regarding the blood that David wrongfully shed: the blood of Uriya the Chitite, for which he bears the greatest responsibility; the blood of the priests of Nov, for which David himself accepted responsibility, as he said to Evyatar, the sole survivor, "I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house" (I *Shmuel* 22:22); and also the blood of non-Jews, which David occasionally seems to have shed more abundantly than necessary (see especially I *Shmuel* 27). On the other hand, the continuation of the Radak's remarks implies that even if David committed no wrong when he shed this blood, and he is not liable for unnecessary killing, his very

6 [6] The words "this happened before" mean that the story of Uriya the Chitite and the whole Bat-Sheva episode took place prior to what is related in our chapter, even though textually they appear later in the book (chapters 11-12).

occupation in bloodshed, even if justified, prevents him from building the Temple. The Temple represents the idea of peace, and it is impossible for it to be built by a man of war.

In any event, this reason is not at all mentioned in our chapter. Now we can return to our chapter and examine the matter: What is the reason given in Natan's vision for why David was prevented from building the Temple?

III. “AND I WILL APPOINT A PLACE FOR MY PEOPLE ISRAEL”

It seems that the most explicit answer is found in verses 10-11:

(10) And I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disquieted no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as at the first, (11) even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will cause you to rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord tells you that the Lord will make you a house.

It would appear from here that the time had not yet come for the building of a Temple for God, for the political situation of the people of Israel was still imperfect. As Rashi explains: "I still wish to bring peace, that it be peaceful and serene for My people in the days of your son." These verses are difficult, for they seem to contradict what is stated at the beginning of the chapter: "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.**" How can it be said, on the one hand, that God had already given him rest from all his enemies round about, while on the other hand, that this still did not happen?

The answer seems to lie in the source of the expression used at the beginning of the chapter. Without a doubt, this expression creates a connection to the verses in the book of *Devarim*, which mention for the first time the resting of God's name in a particular geographical location:

But when you traverse the Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God gives you to inherit, **and when He gives you rest from all**

your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety; then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there; there shall you bring all that I command you; your burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which you vow to the Lord.... (*Devarim* 12:10-11)

Now the picture becomes clearer. On the one hand, we can understand why David thought that the time had already arrived for building the Temple, for "when He gives you rest from all your enemies round about" was fulfilled in him. On the other hand, it is understandable why God refused David's offer, for the condition was not fulfilled in its entirety. While it is true that God gave David rest from all his enemies, the time had not yet arrived when "you dwell in safety." Even if the wars with the enemies round about had come to an end, they had still not come to dwelling in safety, free of all danger. This promise would only be fulfilled in the days of Shelomo; then Israel would come to the rest and the inheritance: "And I will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disquieted no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more."

In the book of *Melakhim*, it is explicitly stated that this condition was fulfilled in the days of Shelomo: "And Yehuda and Israel **dwelt in safety**, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan to Be'er-Sheva, all the days of Shelomo" (I *Melakhim* 5:5). And in the continuation of that chapter, Shelomo himself notes, in his words to Chiram the king of Tzor, that this is the reason that David did not build the Temple:

And Shelomo sent to Chiram, saying, "You know how David my father could not build a house to the name of the Lord his God on account of the war with the nations which were about him on every side, until the Lord put them under the soles of my feet.^{7[7]} But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil hindrance. And, behold, I purpose to build a house to the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord spoke to David my father, saying, Your son, whom I will set upon your throne in your place, he shall build the house to My name. (I *Melakhim* 5:16-19)

7 [7] There is a significant difference here between the *keri (ragla)* and the *ketiv (raglo)*: According to the way the word is read, it was Shelomo who subdued the enemies, whereas according to the way the word is written, God already put them under the soles of David's feet, but the rest only came in the days of Shelomo.

Only in the days of Shelomo will the people of Israel reach the state that "there is neither adversary nor evil hindrance," which parallels "dwelling in safety," and in the words of the vision of Natan: "That they may dwell in their own place, and be disquieted no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more."

We see then that the Temple is the high point of Israel's settlement in their land – after they have reached the rest and the inheritance – and that political stability is an essential condition for its construction.

IV. "I TOOK YOU FROM THE SHEEPCOTE, FROM FOLLOWING THE SHEEP"

Even though this answer is explicitly stated in Scripture, it is not the only explanation found in Natan's vision. Verses 10-11 are preceded by verses 8-9:

(8) Now therefore thus shall you say unto My servant David, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the sheepecote, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over My people, over Israel. **(9)** And I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like unto the name of the great ones that are in the earth."

The Ralbag has an interesting explanation of these verses:

And now it should be enough for David that God took him from following the sheep to be prince over the house of Israel, and that He was with him wherever he went, and that He cut off his enemies, and that He made him a great name, like the name of the great ones that were in the earth, through his great success and the great standing of his kingdom, and that through him He gave Israel a place of rest and Israel's enemies no longer oppressed them... And since this was the case, the success that he achieved should have been enough for him, and he should not have asked for [further] greatness that the Temple

should be built through him, but rather his son who will rule after him will build it...

That is to say, God already did a great deal for David, and therefore David should be satisfied with what he already received, and not aspire also to build the Temple.

It is possible to accept the Ralbag's basic understanding that these verses allude to another reason why David did not build the Temple – but not because he already received enough, but rather because of something connected to the previous matter. Just as the building of the Temple is conditioned on political stability, so too stability is required in the life of the leader who will build it. This trait was absent in the life of David, which was so filled with upheavals, and therefore he could not build the Temple.

V. “THE LORD WILL MAKE YOU A HOUSE”

Now we can move on to the third and last answer. The guide word "house" appears fifteen times in our chapter in various declensions, and it is used in two very different senses: the house that David wished to build for God, and the house of royalty – the dynasty – that God will build for David. Natan contrasts the timing of the building of these two houses:

Thus says the Lord, “Shall you build Me a house for Me to dwell in? ... that the Lord will make you a house....”

That is to say, the proper order is not that man should first build a house for God, but just the opposite: first God will build a house for man, for the king, and only afterwards will he build a house for God. And since the concept of a royal house is only relevant when there are at least two kings from the same dynasty, it turns out that only in the time of Shelomo will a royal house arise for David.

The root of this reason, of course, is similar to the root of the two previous reasons: the need for stability. Thus far we have spoken about political stability and stability in the life of the leader, and now we come to the

need for governmental stability: a stable royal house is also a necessary condition for the building of the Temple.^{8[8]}

VI. “GO, DO ALL THAT IS IN YOUR HEART”

Now we can answer the question with which we opened this lecture: Why did Natan err? It stands to reason that in this way Scripture is trying to say that David in himself, according to Natan's vision, was fit to build the Temple, and God prevented him from building it because of the timing and the instability, not because of his personality.

This understanding stands in contradiction to the explicit understanding in *Divrei Ha-yamim*, where it is stated that David was barred from building the Temple also because of a personal flaw. If indeed there were two prophecies on the matter, it may be argued that the prophecy in the book of *Shmuel* emphasizes the problematic nature of the timing, which would have been the same even had there been no problem with David, whereas in *Divrei Ha-yamim*, David expresses the opposite message – that even without the problem of the timing, David would have been barred from building the Temple because of the problem of bloodshed.^{9[9]}

(Translated by David Strauss)

8 [8] Now we can understand the opening verses of the vision (vv. 5-7): "Go and tell My servant David: Thus says the Lord, Shall you build Me a house for Me to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the day that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all places wherein I have walked among all the children of Israel, spoke I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed My people Israel, saying, Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?" God says to David that just as up till then He had not asked Israel to build a Temple, so too there is no reason to work in haste to build it now; the building of the Temple is the last stage in a long process, and the time for this stage has not yet arrived.

9 [9] If the words of David in the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim* are his own interpretation of Natan's vision (as the Radak first suggested), it may be argued that he thought that the problems mentioned in this vision would not have barred him from building the Temple were there not also a problem in his personality.

