



The Messiah in II Samuel 20-24

By Jacques Isaac Gabizon

The second book of Samuel is ultimately about the coming of the Messiah. It tells the story of the many difficulties surrounding the life of His ancestors and of what they endured for carrying the seed of Genesis 3:15. From the moment God promised that the seed of the woman would come to crush the serpent's head until the second coming,

the resistance to God's Messianic plan and the attempts to stop the preparations for His coming have never subsided. The book of Samuel teaches us that the closer the world gets to the arrival of Messiah, the more the attacks increase. In this way, Samuel is like a prophecy for today, for Yeshua is coming soon.



Samuel's first book begins with Hannah's lament over the condition of the tabernacle. At the time, God's dwelling place was in the hands of the sons of Eli, whom the Bible called "sons of Belial," or "sons of the devil." Then God raised up Samuel to take over and cleanse the tabernacle and to anoint the true king of Israel, David. From the moment he was anointed, David's life was difficult because he became the ancestor of the Messiah. Yet, his name opens up the New Testament, and he carried the torch well. David conquered Jerusalem and moved the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant to the city.

Toward the end of the book of Samuel, one encounters a multitude of stories of uprisings and loyalties, of friendship and unfaithfulness—stories that seem unrelated to each other. Four new giants rise up against David, and one wonders why they all come out at this time and not before. Then there is a long list of choice men of war, with their names and their ranks. Yet, most of them have not been mentioned before, and again the question arises why the information is given now and not before. The book ends with a census, but no reason is given for it, nor does the reader learn why David was punished although he bitterly repented after God sent a plague that killed 70,000 people. Hence, the book seems to leave the reader with a few big question marks.

However, this is only a bird's eye view of the last chapters of 2 Samuel, an unfair surface browsing, for if one pays attention to the many scattered details, there is indeed a movement forward, an underlying story toward a specific goal; and at the end, one can lay back, fully satisfied because there

one realizes that God had the last word after all. The book ends in great victory with the building of the altar of sacrifice, the center and first element of the temple of God and the place which speaks of the Messiah Himself, the Lamb of God who opens the way to the presence of God. It is around the altar that Solomon built the temple. Hence, the book ends with the assurance that the temple will be built, and that the Messiah will come.



The Uprising of Sheba

This study of 2 Samuel begins with chapter 20 of the book and the revolt of Sheba. Verse 1 states: *And there happened to be there a rebel, whose name was Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjamite. And he blew a trumpet, and said: "We have no share in David, Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; Every man to his tents, O Israel!"*

Sheba's name means "seven," the number of completeness and perfection. Yet, this man's "perfection" went in the wrong direction. In Hebrew, the verse states that Sheba was *beliyyal*, "worthless." The term was used in the context of the two sons of Eli. However, they were called "sons of beliyyal," while Sheba *is* beliyyal. In Jewish writings, beliyyal is another name for Satan. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, this is

the name of the leader of the forces of darkness. Its root is from a word meaning "to swallow," like the swallowing Sheol. David used the term in Psalm 22:5-6, comparing beliyyal with the cords of Sheol: *When the waves of death surrounded me, The torrents of destruction [beliyyal] overwhelmed me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me.* Paul asked in 2 Corinthians 6:14-15a: *For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Messiah with Belial?* Here, Paul spoke of Belial as the leader of lawlessness and darkness. Eventually, beliyyal became one of the titles of Antichrist. Who, then, was this man Sheba to merit such a name?

David realized Sheba's power when he said in 2 Samuel 20:6, *Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom.* Absalom was David's son who tried to kill him. Yet, Sheba was worse than Absalom because he attempted to divide Israel into Judah in the south and Samaria in the north. He appeared right before the temple was to be built, and ultimately, his successor, Rehoboam, one of Solomon's sons, succeeded in dividing Israel. Rehoboam used Sheba's words when he said, *We have no inheritance with the son of Jesse. Every man to his tents, O Israel* (2 Chron. 10:16, 1 Kgs. 12:16). The worthless man's words became a slogan for other rebels.





Giants

After Sheba, a new threat arose when the giants made their appearances again. In 2 Samuel 21:15, we read: *When the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David and his servants with him went down and fought against the Philistines; and David grew faint.* The Philistine uprising occurred toward the end of David's life, and he was weaker then. When he grew faint, his enemies took out their best weapons in an attempt to wipe out him and all of Israel. David had plans to build a temple for God, and soon he was to place its foundation with the altar. It seems that the forces of evil knew about it. In the next seven verses, four giants entered the battlefield in an attempt to kill David, the ancestor of the Messiah.

The first giant was Ishbi-Benob (v. 16), the second was Saph (v. 18), and the last one was not named, but described as a man of great stature (v. 20). The one giant that causes problems for some is the third one, mentioned in verse 19: *There was war with the Philistines again at Gob, and*

Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. Some have said that there are two mistakes in this verse. First, the giant's name is Goliath, but Goliath had been dead for a long time at this point. Second, David, not Elhanan, killed Goliath. First Chronicles 20:5 resolves the first part and explains that this was the brother of Goliath, not Goliath himself. The problem of Elhanan was resolved by a great grammarian and Bible commentator who knew his Hebrew well: Rabbi David Kimchi, known as "the Radak," from the Middle Ages. The scholar explained that the Hebrew *et Goliath* may be rendered as "with Goliath." Hence, the verse should read: "He struck down the one who was with Goliath."

The question arises why these giants were returning here, at this very time. The word for "giant" is *rapha*, or *rephaim* in the plural. If we follow their history, these were the ones who attempted to stop Israel from entering into the Promised Land. The ten spies saw and feared them, and because of them, Israel's entrance was delayed another 38 years. Even when the Israelites finally did enter the land, the giants attempted again to stop them, but this time they could not. The first three chapters of Deuteronomy concentrate on the battle against these giants until the Israelites succeeded in wiping out most of them. They resurfaced with Goliath, who came to the scene only after David was anointed king and thus entered into the history of Israel. In 2 Samuel, we are witnessing the last appearance of the giants at the moment the temple was to be built.

So the evil forces brought them forth at some crucial moments:

- ✧ When Israel entered the land
- ✧ When David, the ancestor of the Messiah, was anointed king
- ✧ When the altar and the temple were to be built

Their demonic origin is seen in their attempt to destroy the Messianic seed. However, *These four were born to the giant in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.* (2 Sam. 21:22), never to be seen or heard of again.



The Census

Sheba's rebellion and the rising of the four giants demonstrate the underlying spiritual battle that was going on at the time of David. This battle is amplified in the last chapter of 2 Samuel, the story of the famous census. Verse 1 of chapter 24 sets the stage: *Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah."* The specific reason for God's anger is not given. However, at this point, it is not hard to figure out. The storyline led from sin to sin, followed by grace over grace. The result of God's anger was that He moved David to number the people. While no reason is given why taking a census was a mistake, it immediately



becomes clear that it was wrong. Even David's commander Joab, who was not a spiritual man, tried to dissuade the king from performing the census (2 Sam. 24:3).

Commentators offer several theories as to why God punished David for numbering the people. The most popular is that at this point, the king relied on his own strength instead of relying on God. He should have known that God does not see the number, but the quality of the people, the character of each. It was not long before David that God had told Gideon that his army was too big and reduced it to 300 men. These 300 were enough to win over a powerful army of about 185,000 Midianites and Amalekites. Yet, the most amazing thing here is that they did not even fight. All they had to do is blow 300 trumpets and at the same time break 300 pitchers, enough noise to scare the Midianites and Amalekites, who ended up killing each other. This principle of a minority winning over a great and powerful majority is seen throughout the Bible. Even in more recent history, this principle has played itself out after Israel was reborn in 1948. Over and over again, the country has been attacked by numerous armies, but it won every time. No country could have withstood the military power and the sheer number of attackers, unless God had been with them. This is a miracle of recent history that is often forgotten.

First Chronicles 21:1 details the driving force behind David's action: *Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.* It was Satan himself, not a simple demon, who instigated the census.

Some have seen a contradiction between the account in 2 Samuel 24

and in 1 Chronicles 21. Was it God or Satan who moved David to number the people? Both verses are correct, as they present the story from two different sides. Satan has no power unless it is given to him by God; God allowed the temptation to take place. And so, after nine months and 20 days, the census was taken (2 Sam. 24:8).



David's Choice

It is after this time that God sent Gad the prophet to David, and what follows may be among the richest parts of Scripture. Here, we are going to see how faith and prayer can stop the harshest punishments and how the judgments are brought right to the foot of the *tav*, the cross.

The passage begins in 2 Samuel 24:11-13:

¹¹ Now when David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, ¹² "Go and tell David, 'Thus says the LORD: "I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you."'

¹³ So Gad came to David and told him; and he said to him, "Shall seven years of famine

come to you in your land? Or shall you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' plague in your land? Now consider and see what answer I should take back to Him who sent me."

What a difficult choice David had to make! He had just experienced three years of famine (2 Sam. 21), so he knew what to expect. He had also been pursued by his enemies, one of whom was his own son. The third punishment seems to be the most severe, for a plague can wipe out a nation in three days. The Hebrew word for "plague" is *deber*. It comes from *dabar*, which means "destruction." This word is believed to refer to what we know as the bubonic plague or the Black Death, which decimated the population of about 100 to 200 million people in Europe in the mid-1300s. The Talmud orders a city that is ravaged by pestilence to fast and pray.

David chose the last of the three options. Verse 14 shows his reason: *I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man.* While pestilence was the harshest punishment, it meant that God was going to be in full control. David proved to be wise when he chose this option. Famine would have made the Israelites dependent upon neighboring countries who were no friends of Israel. Falling into the hands of enemies would have meant abuse. But falling into the hands of God is falling into the hands of mercy and grace, even in times of judgment.

God did send the plague, but it was not for three days. He cut the punish-



ment short: *So the LORD heeded the prayers for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel* (2 Sam. 24:25). Prayer is what stopped the judgment, and David knew it. He knew God. He knew how to move Him. Prayer is the last weapon mentioned in the context of the armor of God; all other parts of the armor must be immersed in it (Eph. 6:18). Prayer is the one powerful means by which times and seasons are changed. But effective prayer has a long trail of hard work behind it. For prayer to work, we must believe; otherwise it becomes an incantation only.

In David's case, prayer was indeed accompanied by faith. The king had full confidence in God. He knew God could change His mind. After all, Israel was His people. David must have remembered the story of Moses when he argued with God and God relented from wiping out the nation (Num. 14). Faith changes the spirit of man and conforms it to the Spirit of God. A man of great faith is one whose will has been conformed to God's will.

The third element that is needed for prayer and faith to become effective is repentance. In fact, repentance is the beginning of the process, as is seen in verse 17: *Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house."* David did not argue with God. He simply said, "I have sinned. It is no one else's fault but mine." That is the key to repentance. David could have found a million reasons for having done what he did, but he took full responsibility.

Faith, prayer, repentance is the formula here.



The Threshing Floor of Araunah

As the plague went through all of Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south (2 Sam. 24:15), it came to Jerusalem and stopped by the threshing floor of the Araunah the Jebusite (2 Sam. 14:16). Verse 18 then quotes the prophet Gad as saying: *Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.* Hence, the plague stopped right at the future place of the altar of sacrifice of the temple, for this is where the judgment ends and where its power ceases. It is where God said to the destroying angel, *It is enough; now restrain your hand* (v. 16). According to 1 Chronicles 21:26, God marked this altar of sacrifice with a miracle, for when David offered the first sacrifice, he *called on the LORD; and He answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering.* God sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice as a token of His acceptance. All of this is prophecy. It prepares the reader for the coming of the Messiah.

As if this was not enough grace already, one has to pay close attention to who else was by the threshing floor of Araunah. Verse 16 says it was *the Angel of the LORD*. The word "angel" does not only describe the nature of the individual, but also his mission: An angel is a messenger of God. So, verse 16 should read: "The ambassador of the LORD was by the threshing floor." Every time "the Angel of the LORD" is mentioned, the expression refers to the Messiah Himself, for men worshipped Him (Judg. 13:20; Num. 22:31). Here, the Messiah was confirming His soon coming, for it was in this place that, a few hundred years later, He died for the sins of the world. All sins and all judgment stop at the foot of Yeshua.

From Sheba who planned to divide and destroy Israel to the giants who wanted to extinguish the lamp of Israel (2 Sam. 21:17) to the pestilence which was about to wipe the people and the land, God rose from His throne to affirm that salvation will come, and it did.



The Symbolism of the Threshing Floor

It is significant that the temple was built on a threshing floor. There is a great symbolism here. After a harvest, the grains were brought to the threshing

floor, and they were repeatedly beaten there until the inner, softer part of the seed was separated from the hard layer and also from the chaff that was covering it. At the end of the day, when the winds rose, they took the seed and threw it in the air so that the wind would separate the last chaff from the grain. What remained was the good seed. This sorting happened on the threshing floor, a large area outside the city. The same process of threshing and winnowing is the picture that is used to show how Yeshua will come and sort out His church: *His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire* (Lk. 3:17). When the Lord

comes back, He will separate the good seed from the chaff, the wheat from the tare. Referring to the Angel of the Lord, Samuel speaks highly of Yeshua.

After His resurrection, Yeshua gave the two men He had met on the road to Emmaus a Bible study: *And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself* (Lk. 24:27). Perhaps, when they came to this passage of Samuel, He showed them where He was standing, right next to the altar. In many ways, He is still standing there to make the final separation of the tare and the wheat. Recognizing Him in the Holy Scriptures opens up the understanding of God's Word to those who will listen.

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