

# Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Ki Seitzei 5769

**“If a man has a wayward and rebellious son, who does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother, and they chastise him, but he does not listen to them.” (21:18)**

The Parsha begins with the law that a Jewish soldier may take a captive woman as his wife. Next comes the law that if a man has two wives, one beloved and one hated, he may not take the birthright away from the hated wife’s son and give it to the beloved wife’s son. Then comes the law of the rebellious son. Rashi says (on 21:11) that the Torah places the laws in this order to teach us that although the taking of the captive woman is permitted, it is not the best thing to do, and no good will come of it. The husband will eventually come to hate the captive wife, and the son she bears him will be rebellious.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 107a) says that Dovid Hamelech’s life was a living example of this. He married the captive woman Maacha, and she bore him Avshalom, who rebelled against him. The Gemara says that when Dovid was fleeing from Avshalom and realized that Avshalom was planning to kill him, he decided to commit idolatry, so that his punishment would be just. “Otherwise,” he argued, “why should a righteous king like me be killed by his own son?” Chushai the Archite, however, came and explained to Dovid that this was happening because of his marriage to a captive woman. We must ask: why was Dovid so surprised that Avshalom wanted to kill him? Hadn’t Nossan the Prophet foretold (Shmuel II 12:11) that Avshalom’s rebellion would take place as a punishment for the sin of Bas Sheva?

Furthermore, Chazal (Berachos 7b) question the opening line of Tehillim 3: “A song of Dovid, when he fled from his son Avshalom.” Why is this called a “song” – it should be called a “lamentation”! Chazal answer that when Dovid heard from the prophet that a rebellion would arise from within his own house, he feared that it would be a slave or bastard who would not have mercy on him. When he found out that the rebel was his own son Avshalom, he rejoiced in song. The obvious question is: Avshalom did not have mercy on Dovid either – he wanted to kill him. So why did Dovid rejoice?

The answer is that Dovid knew that his punishment would be a rebellion, but did not think that the rebellion would automatically lead to his death. That would depend on who the rebel would be. When he saw that the rebel was Avshalom, he at first rejoiced, thinking that a son would certainly not kill his own father. But then he heard that Avshalom indeed planned to kill him, and he was shocked. Dovid did not understand why he deserved such a severe punishment. Superficially, it happened because Avshalom was born from a captive woman, but why did Dovid deserve this? Moreover, we know that Hashem punishes measure for measure. How was the rebellion of Avshalom measure for measure for Dovid’s sin in taking Bas Sheva?

It seems that not only Dovid but Chazal as well were perplexed at the severity of this punishment. The Gemara (Berachos 10a) explains that the third chapter of Tehillim, which is about Avshalom, was juxtaposed to the second, which is about Gog and Magog, so that in case someone asks, “Is there such a thing as a servant rebelling against his master?” - one can reply to him, “Is there such a thing as a son rebelling against his father? Indeed there was, so this too can be.” Chazal are saying that there is something unbelievable about the rebellion of Avshalom, and that same unbelievable aspect is present

in the rebellion of Gog and Magog. But what is that unbelievable aspect? And what exactly is the rebellion of Gog and Magog?

Avshalom's rebellion ended with a war between Dovid's men and the rest of the Jewish people, who followed Avshalom. This war took place in a forest. The main body of the Jewish people, although vastly superior in manpower, lost the war because "the forest ate more of them than did the sword on that day" (Shmuel II 18:8). The Targum Yonasan, quoted by Rashi, explains this to mean that the animals of the forest ate them. Why did the animals eat Avshalom's men and not Dovid's men? And why did this happen in the war between Avshalom and Dovid, and not in any other war in history?

To answer all these questions, let us go back and study the sin of Bas Sheva. How could Dovid Hamelech, the great tzaddik, steal another man's wife? Of course, Dovid made sure that she was technically not married (Shabbos 56a), but that does not explain why he would do such a thing. As Nosson the Prophet said, Dovid was comparable to a rich man who steals a poor man's only sheep. Dovid already had many wives; why did he have to take away a man's only wife and have that man killed, merely because he was attracted to her? Is this what we would expect of a tzaddik?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 107a) provides the answer: "Bas Sheva was destined for David from the six days of Creation... but he ate her unripe." When Dovid looked at Bas Sheva, he immediately realized that she was destined to be his wife, and that Shlomo Hamelech, the entire dynasty and, eventually, moshiach would come out of her. He therefore took steps to marry her as soon as possible. His sin was that he made too much effort and married her too soon. He violated the oath against "forcing the end" by taking physical steps to bring the moshiach and the redemption too soon. Had he waited, Hashem would have brought Bas Sheva to him in the right time.

Now we understand why Avshalom's rebellion was the appropriate punishment for this. Avshalom attempted an even more serious violation of the oaths. He was the oldest remaining son of the king, yet the king had promised the kingdom to his baby son Shlomo, son of Bas Sheva. Avshalom wanted to usurp the throne from his father in his lifetime so that Shlomo would not inherit it. Since the dynasty of Dovid leading to moshiach could only come through Shlomo, Avshalom was really rebelling against moshiach and attempting to take over his role. This is analogous to the oath that prohibits the Jewish people from "going up as a wall" – taking over Eretz Yisroel before moshiach comes, an act that usurps and displaces the role of moshiach. This explains why the people who followed Avshalom were consumed by wild animals – the exact punishment prescribed by the Gemara (Kesubos 111a), based on Shir Hashirim 2:7, for violating the oaths.

Although Dovid was also guilty of violating one of the oaths, the men who defended him had no part in this violation, so they were not eaten by the animals. Had Dovid himself participated in the battle, he might have been in danger; therefore Hashem arranged that he should stay behind (Shmuel II 18:3). But Avshalom's followers all shared in the violation of the oath, since they wanted to establish him as king in replacement of the dynasty of Dovid, Shlomo and moshiach.

In passing, this explains another enigma: why was Shlomo Hamelech, of all the prophets of Tanach, the one who expressed the Three Oaths? According to what we are saying now, Shlomo realized that he had sparked the entire rebellion of Avshalom. When he, as a baby, was declared Dovid's successor, Avshalom and the people rebelled, and they were punished with wild animals. Shlomo looked at the history of his own life and said, "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, not to usurp the role of my descendent, moshiach, or else you will meet the same fate that befell those who attempted to prevent me from inheriting the kingdom – you will be eaten like the deer and hinds of the field!"

Now let us return to the Gemara's comparison in Berachos 10a between Avshalom's rebellion and that of Gog and Magog. Tehillim Chapter 2 begins as follows: "Why do the nations make noise, and the peoples speak vainly? The kings of the earth stand up, and leaders meet together, against Hashem and against his moshiach. Let us cut off their reins and throw off from us their ropes. He Who sits in heaven laughs, Hashem mocks them." These verses are usually understood as describing a war waged by the gentile nations, led by a king named Gog, against the Jewish people, led by moshiach. But it is known that in November 1947, when the United Nations voted to establish a Jewish state, the Brisker Rov paced back and forth in his room and said these verses over and over (Uvdos Vehanhagos Leveis Brisk v. 4 p. 207, based on the testimony of Rabbi Dovid Soloveitchik).

Some religious Jews also rejoiced over the U.N. resolution. The faithful Jews of Jerusalem were very troubled by this, and they decided to post signs describing the Torah view on the current situation. They came to ask the Brisker Rov how they should word the signs. Right away, he opened up a Tehillim to Chapter 2 and said, “Here Dovid Hamelech describes our situation: ‘The kings of the earth stand up, and leaders meet together, against Hashem and against His moshiach.’ We must strengthen ourselves in our belief that the exile was decreed upon us by Hashem Yisborach, and we must wait patiently for Him to redeem us and save us through moshiach. We must pass the tests. Then we will merit to see Hashem’s laughter at the wicked and their false redemption, as Dovid Hamelech continues, “He Who sits in heaven will laugh, Hashem will mock them.” (ibid. p. 195)

Clearly, the Brisker Rov understood that the war of the nations of the world against moshiach, as described in this chapter of Tehillim, does not mean an actual war, but rather an attempt to usurp moshiach’s role by establishing a Jewish state. Gog and Magog – the United Nations - rebelled against Hashem by interfering in the history of the Jewish people, replacing their long-awaited messianic redemption with something else.

Therefore, centuries before the era of Zionism, Chazal said: Perhaps someone will wonder at this chapter of Tehillim and say, “Is there such a thing as a servant rebelling against his master?” Of course servants sometimes rebel against their masters, but the question is: Could it really be that the nations of the world, who are called the servants of Hashem, would rebel against their Master in this particular way – by giving moshiach’s role away to someone else? The next chapter of Tehillim answers this question: Just as Avshalom rebelled against his father and attempted to take away moshiach’s role, so too the nations of the world will one day try to do this.

Now we can answer the first question, asked by Dovid himself. Why did he deserve such a severe punishment – that his own son should try to kill him? The answer is that if the rebellion had been a minor one, leaving Dovid alive to bequeath his throne to Shlomo, it would not have interfered with the coming of moshiach or violated the oaths, and this would not have been a measure-for-measure punishment.

There is another parallel here to Zionism. Just as Dovid Hamelech’s minor sin of making effort to bring moshiach too soon by taking Bas Sheva led to Avshalom’s major sin of completely displacing moshiach, the history of Zionism took a similar course. It began with Rabbi Hirsch Kalischer and the Chovevei Tzion, who wanted to settle Eretz Yisroel with the goal of bringing moshiach closer. They said clearly that they did not desire a state, an army or wars, merely to farm the land and hasten the redemption. But this led to the Zionist movement, whose goal was not to hasten moshiach’s coming but to replace it entirely with a political and military movement.

Just as Dovid Hamelech triumphed in the end, we believe with complete faith in the coming of moshiach, and we are confident that the Zionist replacement will not endure.

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