

# The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

## The Book of Shmuel Yeshivat Har Etzion

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### LECTURE 19: CHAPTER 11 (PART I)

#### THE WAR AGAINST AMMON

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#### A. THE HUMILIATION

Nachash the Ammonite encamps against Yavesh-Gilad, and the people of Gilad, fearing for their lives, turn to him in submission, saying: "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you" (I *Shmuel* 11:1). The term "*brit*" (covenant) does not necessarily denote a pact between equals, but also an agreement of surrender. The difference between the two types of "*brit*" finds expression in the distinction between a *brit* with (*im*) another party, which indicates a pact between equals (as in, for example, *Bereishit* 26:28; I *Shmuel* 20:17) and a *brit* to (*le-*) another party, similar to the proposal of the Givonites – "therefore now make a covenant *lanu*" (*Yehoshua* 9:11).

Nachash the Ammonite is willing to accept the proposed agreement, but he adds a humiliating condition:

...On this condition will I make it with you, that all your right eyes be put out; and I will lay it for a reproach (*cherpa*) upon all Israel. (2)

We are familiar with the practice of putting out eyes as an expression of the humiliation of the vanquished party from other places in Scripture.<sup>1[1]</sup> Nachash, however, seeks not only the humiliation of the people of Yavesh-Gilad, but also the humiliation of the entire people of Israel. The "*cherpa*" of which he speaks follows from the fact that nobody will dare come to the defense of the people of Yavesh-Gilad – and it is precisely this message that he wishes to send out. Golyat the Pelishti will one day express himself in similar fashion: "I do taunt (*cherafti*) the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together" (17:10). The "*cherpa*" lies in the fact that nobody is willing to stand up against him.

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<sup>1[1]</sup> As in the case of Shimshon (*Shofetim* 16:21) and Tzidkiyahu (II *Melakhim* 25:7).

The people of Yavesh-Gilad present Nachash with the following proposal:

...Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers unto all the borders of Israel; and then, if there be none to deliver us, we will come out to you. (3)

This proposal is a bit surprising. In effect, the people of Yavesh-Gilad concede to Nachash that they are incapable of standing up to his superior might, but it is possible that somebody will come to their rescue and deliver them from his hand, and this will be clarified within the next week. Is this not a show of *chutzpa* to Nachash? Why should Nachash agree to this delay, which by its very definition is meant to give the people of Yavesh-Gilad a chance to summon help and emerge victorious over Nachash?!

The commentators suggest several answers to this question. According to Ralbag, Nachash's objective from the very beginning was an all-out war against Israel, and therefore he agreed to this proposal: "Because it was his intention to fight against Israel and to take their land if he can." Metzudat David, in contrast, understands that the proposal put forward by the people of Yavesh-Gilad appealed to Nachash because of his desire to humiliate Israel: "If the intention is to humiliate all of Israel, it is appropriate to inform them, so that if they fail to deliver us, it will be regarded as humiliation."

Nachash's agreement may, however, have followed from a different consideration. The continuation of the story indicates that the people of Israel were not very enthusiastic about coming to the aid of the people of Yavesh-Gilad, and that Shaul was forced to take drastic measures in order to persuade the people to follow him:

And he took a yoke of oxen, and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the borders of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, Whosoever comes not forth after Shaul and after Shmuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. (7)

And even then the people of Israel went out after him only because of God's intervention:

...And the dread of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out as one man.

There is room to think then that had the spirit of God not rested on Shaul, the people of Yavesh-Gilad would have been left to fend for themselves and they would have been forced to accept Nachash's humiliating terms of surrender. It is reasonable to assume

that Nachash was fully aware of this situation, and therefore responded favorably to their request, expecting only to add to their humiliation.

A question remains: what led to this state of affairs? Why didn't the rest of Israel go out immediately and as a matter of course to rescue the people of Yavesh-Gilad?

The answer might lie in the general state of the tribes of Israel at that time. The book of *Shoftim* records various cases of inter-tribal hostility. Devora criticized several tribes for not having come "to the help of the Lord against the mighty men"; Gidon fought against the tribe of Ephraim and against the people of Sukkot and Penuel; additional tribal conflicts stood before Yiftach, Shimshon and others. We are left with a gloomy picture of detachment between the different tribes and regions; there is no sense of belonging to the people of Israel or feeling of unity between the tribes. Thus we can explain the situation faced by the people of Yavesh-Gilad as consistent with the general insensitivity on the part of the people of Israel during the period of the *Shoftim* to the suffering of particular sectors of the people.

This explanation, however, presents a certain difficulty. Already at the end of the book of *Shoftim* we find a tendency toward unity among the tribes of Israel - "as one united company" (*Shoftim* 20:11) – and reciprocal responsibility for what is happening to the people of Israel.<sup>2[2]</sup> Under the leadership of Shmuel, the people worked in full cooperation, and there is no hint to isolationist feelings based on tribal affiliation. It seems, therefore, that we must seek a more specific explanation for the phenomenon described in our chapter.

## **B. YAVESH-GILAD AND BINYAMIN**

The troubles of the people of Yavesh-Gilad seem to follow from the problematic relationship between them and the rest of Israel. At the end of the book of *Shoftim*, following the war fought by the tribes of the Israel against the tribe of Binyamin in the wake of the incident involving the concubine in Giva, we read about the people's regrets about having sworn during the course of war not to marry the daughters of Binyamin (*Shoftim* 21). The people of Israel were very sorry about their negative attitude towards Binyamin and about their detachment from this tribe, and they were worried what would happen with them. The problem became particularly acute when it turned out that "the women are destroyed out of Binyamin" (*ibid.* v. 16). At this stage, the people of Israel wanted to solve

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<sup>2[2]</sup> Even if the chapters at the end of the book of *Shofetim* describe events that took place earlier (see the *Da'at Mikra* commentary), the impression that we get from the general tendency of the book, is that as we approach the period of Shmuel, the feeling of unity in Israel is growing stronger.

the marriage problem by finding a group of people who did not participate in the war, so that the oath did not apply to them. When it became clear that the people of Yavesh-Gilad had not joined the war effort, the people of Israel went into action:

And the congregation sent there twelve thousand of the most valiant men, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Yavesh-Gilad with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children. And this is the thing that you shall do, you shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that has lain with a man. And they found among the inhabitants of Yavesh-Gilad four hundred young virgins, that had known no man carnally: and they brought them to the camp to Shilo, which is in the land of Canaan... And Binyamin returned at that time; and they gave them the wives whom they had saved alive of the women of Yavesh-Gilad.... (ibid. vv. 10-14)

Scripture does not explain why the people of Yavesh-Gilad didn't join the war against Binyamin, but it stands to reason that this followed from an ancient connection between the people of Binyamin and the people of Yavesh-Gilad.<sup>3[3]</sup> Such a connection would also explain why the people of Israel adopted such a severe measure with respect to the people of Yavesh-Gilad. In any event, it stands to reason that the hostility between Yavesh-Gilad and the tribes of Israel continued for a long time, and therefore there was little chance that one of the tribes of Israel would rescue the people of Yavesh-Gilad.

The people of Yavesh-Gilad might have found empathy among the tribe of Binyamin, which from the time of that episode had four hundred marital connections with them. Indeed, this connection is described in our chapter:

Then came the messengers to Givat-Shaul, and spoke these words in the ears of the people; and all the people lifted up their voice, and wept. (4)

Nevertheless, what could the tribe of Binyamin do? Needless to say, the people of Binyamin were the last who could call up the other tribes to help the people of Yavesh-Gilad.

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<sup>3[3]</sup> A faint allusion is found in Scripture to early connections between Binyamin and Gilad. The list of those who went down to Egypt mention Binyamin's grandsons Mupim and Chupim (*Bereishit* 46:21), and the census in *Parashat Pinchas* records those names with a slight variation: "Of Shefufam, the family of Shufami; of Chufam, the family of Chufami" (*Bamidbar* 26:39). Now, the genealogical list in *Divrei Ha-yamim* records "*Shupim and Chupim*" (*I Divrei Ha-yamim* 7:12), and later in the same chapter mention is made of a marital connection between them and Menashe: "The sons of Menashe; Asriel, whom she bore: (but his concubine, the Aramian woman bore Makhir the father of Gilad; and Makhir took to wife of the family of Chupim and Shupim, a sister; whose name was Ma'akha;) and the name of the second was Tzelofchad; and Tzelofchad had daughters. And Ma'akha the wife of Makhir bore a son, and she called his name Peresh..." (ibid. vv. 14-15). The verses are difficult to explain (see Radak), but it seems that Makhir the son of Menashe married Ma'akha, the sister of Chupim and Shupim of Binyamin, in addition to the wife who bore him Gilad.

In light of Yavesh-Gilad's evasion of the war effort against Binyamin, all that the tribe of Binyamin could do was to weep – until Shaul came and changed the situation.

In light of this, we can understand the need for such a drastic measure on the part of Shaul, and so too God's intervention, in order to muster the people of Israel to join the battle in defense of the residents of Yavesh-Gilad. In the end, however, the unification of the tribes of Israel brought about not only the victory in war, but also closure to the tragic incident involving the concubine of Giva.<sup>4[4]</sup>

### C. THE INCIDENT INVOLVING THE CONCUBINE OF GIVA AND THE WAR AGAINST THE AMMONITES

This is not the only connection between our chapter and the story of the concubine of Giva and its ramifications. There are, indeed, many parallels between the two stories:

- 1) The most striking similarity is the manner in which Shaul mustered the nation, which was very similar to the way in which the concubine's husband mustered the people of Israel:

And when he was come to his house, he took a knife, and laid hold of his concubine, **and divided her**, together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into **the whole territory of Israel**. And it was so, that all that saw it said, No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt to this day; consider of it, take counsel and speak your minds. (*Shoftim* 19:29-30)

And he took a yoke of oxen, **and cut them in pieces**, and sent them **throughout all the borders of Israel** by the hand of messengers, saying, Whosoever comes not forth after Shaul and after Shmuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the dread of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out as one man. (*I Shmuel* 11:7)

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<sup>4[4]</sup> The connection between Yavesh-Gilad and Binyamin in general and Shaul in particular does not end here. In chapter 31, after the Pelishtim desecrate Shaul's corpse, it is the people of Yavesh-Gilad who come to put an end to the humiliation: "And when the inhabitants of Yavesh-Gilad heard of that which the Pelishtim had done to Shaul, all the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Shaul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bet-Shan, and came to Yavesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Yavesh, and fasted seven days" (31:11-13). David blessed them for this act of kindness: "Blessed are you of the Lord, that you have shown this loyal love to your lord, to Shaul, and have buried him. And now may the Lord do lovingkindness and truth to you..." (*II Shmuel* 2:5-6).

2) Both stories center on the same places: The centers of action in our chapter are Yavesh-Gilad and Giva, just as the story of the concubine in Giva is connected to Yavesh-Gilad.

3) Both stories describe the shame that hovers over Israel. The incident involving the concubine is defined as:

Wantonness and vileness in Israel. (*Shoftim* 20:6)

And parallel to this, Nachash's objective in his proposal to put out the right eyes of the residents of Yavesh-Gilad is:

A reproach upon all Israel. (*I Shmuel* 11:2)

4) In both stories mention is made of the weeping of the people:

And all the people went up, and came to the house of God, **and wept**. (*Shoftim* 20:26)

And all the people lifted up their voice, **and wept**. (*I Shmuel* 11:4)

5) In both places the assembly of the people is described with the same expression. The common term in the war against Binyamin is "as one man":

Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation assembled **as one man**... And all the people arose **as one man**... So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, **as one united company**. (*Shoftim* 20:1-10)

This expression is also found in our chapter:

And the dread of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out **as one man**. (*I Shmuel* 11:7)

6) After they were promised help, the people of Yavesh-Gilad turn to the Ammonites and present themselves as if they were ready to submit to Nachash and accept his terms:

And the men of Yavesh said, To-morrow **we will come out** unto you, **and you shall do with us all that seems good unto you**.

This wording is very reminiscent of the proposal of the elderly host from Mount Ephraim to the people of Giva in the incident of the concubine:

Behold, here is my daughter a virgin, and his concubine: them **I will bring out** now; ravish them, **and do with them what seems good to you:**<sup>5[5]</sup> but to this man do not so vile a thing. (*Shoftim* 19:24)

7) When the people of Israel heard about the incident involving the concubine in Giva, they demanded of the Ammonites:

**Now, deliver us the worthless men** (*benei beliya'al*), **who are in Giva that we may put them to death**, and put away evil from Israel. (*Shoftim* 20:13)

This demand is rejected by the people of Binyamin:

But the children of Binyamin would not hearken to the voice of their brothers the children of Israel. (*ibid.*)

In parallel fashion, a similarly worded demand is heard at the end of the story of the war against Ammon:

And the people said unto Shmuel, Who is he that said: Shall Shaul reign over us? **bring the men, that we may put them to death.**<sup>6[6]</sup> (*I Shmuel* 11:12)

It should be added that this demand refers to the people mentioned in the previous chapter, where they were described by the same term as that used by the people of Israel to describe the people of Giva:

But **certain worthless men** (*benei beliya'al*) said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no present. (*ibid.* 10:27)

And here too it was a representative of Binyamin who refused the demand:

And Shaul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day; for today the Lord has wrought deliverance in Israel. (*ibid.* 11:13)

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<sup>5[5]</sup> These are the only two instances of the expression "what seems good to you" (*ha-tov be-eineikhem*) in Scripture.

<sup>6[6]</sup> These are the only two instances in Scripture that such a demand is made.

We can now examine the question: What is the significance of this similarity?

The book of *Shoftim* concludes with a description of the debased state which the people of Israel had reached, which included sins of idol worship (*Shoftim* 17 – the idol of Mikha), sexual offenses (ibid. 19 – the concubine in Giva), and bloodshed (ibid. 20-21 – the war against Binyamin). This difficult situation is explained by the verse which repeats itself: "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25; and see 18:1; 19:1). As part of this terrible situation, we can include the dreadful incident involving the concubine in Giva, the shocking device that her husband was forced to use in order to gather Israel so that they would judge the sinners, and the civil war that followed.

Our chapter closes the circle. The great hope for a king over Israel, which finds expression in the stories related at the end of *Shoftim*, is realized in these chapters in the figure of Shaul. Chapter 11 is the most positive one from the perspective of Shaul's kingdom, and it describes the beginning of the fulfillment of the hopes regarding the monarchy. Among other ways, Scripture expresses this through the total contrast between the two stories.

The mustering of Israel is no longer done by cutting up a corpse and sending it throughout Israel, but rather through the cutting up of a yoke of oxen. When the people break out in tears, there will be somebody who will deliver them from their troubles. There will no longer be wantonness and vileness in Israel; on the contrary, when someone attempts to humiliate Israel, the king will thwart his plans. The people of Israel gather "as one man" not to embark on civil war, but in order to wage battle against and defeat an external enemy. Outsiders will no longer be told to do as they please with the people of Israel as submission toward the wicked in Israel, but as a cunning maneuver on the way to victory over the wicked of the nations of the world. If the wicked in Israel are not punished, it will not be because their partners in crime will refuse to punish them, but because of a royal decision not to strike at the wicked on the day that God delivered Israel.

There is a king in Israel. No longer does every man do what is right **in his own eyes**, and no longer can a foreign king put out **the eyes** of the people of Israel.

(Translated by David Strauss)

