

**THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL***  
**LECTURE 34: CHAPTER 17**  
**DAVID AND GOLYAT (PART III)**

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### **VIII. The Connection Between David and Yonatan**

We are left with one more point to discuss regarding the speech that David delivers before he kills Golyat.

We have already noted the growing passivity demonstrated by Shaul in the wars waged against the Pelishtim. Corresponding to this passivity, there is a clear similarity between the two people who seize Shaul's place in the last two wars: Yonatan in chapter 14 and David in our chapter. They both stand up to the scorn and mockery demonstrated by the Pelishtim: The men of the Pelishti garrison call out to Yonatan: "**Come up to us**, and we will show you a thing" (14:12), and we have already seen the derisive words of Golyat to David: "**Come to me**, and I will give your flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field" (v. 44). And they both express their profound faith in God, that He will deliver the Pelishtim into their hands despite the disparity in forces. Yonatan faces an enormous quantitative imbalance, while the David faces a striking qualitative gap:

For there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few. (14:6)

That the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hand. (17:47)

It stands to reason that the similarity between these two figures is what created the deep emotional connection between them, which begins in the next chapter immediately following the present battle: "And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Shaul, that the soul of Yehonatan was knit with the soul of David, and Yehonatan loved him as his own soul. And Shaul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house. Then Yehonatan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul" (18:1-3).

### **IX. The Results of the War**

Following the slaying of Golyat, Scripture describes the results of the war on two plains: the national and the personal.

On the national plain, we are presented with a somewhat surprising report:

(51) ... And when the Pelishtim saw that their mighty man was dead, they fled. (52) And the men of Israel and of Yehuda arose, and

shouted, and pursued the Pelishtim, until you come to Gai, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Pelishtim fell down by the way to Sha'arayim, even unto Gat, and unto Ekron. (53) And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Pelishtim, and they spoiled their camp.

According to the conditions set down by Golyat himself at the beginning of the campaign, we would have expected a different conclusion, for Golyat had proclaimed: "If he be able to fight with me, and kill me, then will we be your servants." Why, then, did Israel pursue the Pelishtim, inflict casualties, and plunder their camp?

It would appear that the Pelishtim's flight stemmed precisely from this condition and expressed their unwillingness to comply with the conditions that had been fixed at the outset. It is reasonable to assume that the Pelishtim had never seriously accepted these conditions, for they had no doubt whatsoever that no one would be found capable of defeating Golyat in battle. Golyat's sudden and unexpected death found the Pelishtim in a situation that they had never dreamed of; therefore, instead of admitting defeat and surrendering to Israel, they took flight. This step, however, supplied Israel with the justification to pursue them. Encouraged by David's moral victory over Golyat, the men of Israel chased after the Pelishtim and routed them.

Scripture deals with the personal plain in a single verse:

(54) And David took the head of the Pelishti, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his equipment in his tent.

Both halves of the verse are difficult. The first half is difficult because during this period, Jerusalem had no significance – it was in the hands of Yevusites.<sup>1[1]</sup> It seems, then, that this verse is not describing what happened at that time, but at a much later period,<sup>2[2]</sup> when David had already chosen Jerusalem as his capital city, and perhaps even as the site of the Temple. In this light, we understand bringing Golyat's head to Jerusalem, for, as we have noted in the past, it was common practice at the time to bring the spoils of victory to a temple in order to give expression to the recognition that the victory came from one's god.<sup>3[3]</sup>

The second half of the verse is also difficult. Golyat's most prominent piece of equipment was his sword, and that we will meet once again in Nov, the city of the priests:

And David said unto Achimelekh, "And is there perhaps here under your hand spear or sword? For I have neither brought my sword nor my

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weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." And the priest said, "The sword of Golyat the Pelishti, whom you slew in the vale of Ela, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the efod; if you will take that, take it, for there is no other save that here." And David said, "There is none like that; give it to me." (21:9-10)

If we assume that our verse relates to a later period, this problem can also be solved. The sword was, indeed, first brought to the *Mishkan* in Nov, as part of the aforementioned practice of attributing victory to God. Later, David received the sword from Achimelekh, and from that time on it remained with him, until in the end he was able to set it down in his tent.

## **X. "I Am Unable to Reconcile Scripture According to its Plain Sense"**

The epilogue to the story of David and Golyat recounts the meeting between David and Shaul:

(55) And when Shaul saw David go forth against the Pelishti, he said unto Avner, the captain of the host, "Avner, whose son is this youth?" And Avner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I cannot tell." (56) And the king said, "Inquire you whose son the stripling is." (57) And as David returned from the slaughter of the Pelishti, Avner took him, and brought him before Shaul with the head of the Pelishti in his hand. (58) And Shaul said to him, "Whose son are you, you young man?" And David answered, I am the son of your servant Yishai the Beth-lehemite."

Much ink has been spilled over the question of how it could be that Shaul did not recognize David, when only in the previous chapter it was David who played before him and served as his arms-bearer. Rashi, following *Chazal*, explains that Shaul was not asking about the boy's identity, but rather about his genealogy and his fitness to serve as king. The Ralbag understands the question in its simple sense and explains: "It seems that owing to his many affairs and the many people who come before him, a king is incapable of recognizing each one of them individually."<sup>4</sup>[4] Rashi's disciple, Rabbi Yosef Kara - one of the great commentators belonging to the school that interprets Scripture according to its plain sense - records *Chazal's* approach to the issue, but admits defeat when he tries to solve the problem in accordance with the plain sense of the verse: "I am unable to reconcile Scripture according to its plain sense."

In addition to this difficulty, there are other difficulties with respect to the relationship between our chapter and the previous chapter:

- 1) In the previous chapter, David was anointed king "in the midst of his brothers" (v. 13), whereas in our chapter there is no hint to his having been anointed. On the contrary, as we have seen, David's oldest brother Eliav patronizes and mocks him.
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- 2) In chapter 16, David's family is described in detail. It is mentioned there that Yishai the Beth-lehemite had eight sons, the first three being Eliav, Avinadav and Shama, and the last one being David. Why, then, does Scripture repeat this detail in our chapter: "Now David was the son of that Efratite of Beth-lehem in Yehuda, whose name was Yishai; and he had eight sons; and the man was an old man in the days of Shaul, stricken in years among men. And the three eldest sons of Yishai had gone after Shaul to the battle; and the names of his three sons that went to the battle were Eliav the first-born, and next unto him Avinadav, and the third Shama" (vv. 12-13)?
- 3) There is also a wide gap between the anonymous and modest figure of David in our chapter (until his victory over Golyat) and the description of him in the previous chapter: "Who is skilful in playing, and a mighty man of valor, and a man of war, and prudent in affairs, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him" (16:18).
- 4) David's status is also not clear. At the end of chapter 16, he had been appointed Shaul's arms-bearer; why then does David not go out with Shaul to war? Scripture seems to answer this question: "Now David went to and fro from Shaul to feed his father's sheep at Beth-lehem" (v. 16). The difficulty, however, remains, for it is still not clear why David takes a long walk around the camp before he reaches Shaul, rather than going directly to him.

It would appear that in order to resolve these difficulties, we have no alternative but to invoke the method that was adopted in earlier chapters, starting with chapter 8, that are filled with contradictions and redundancies like these.<sup>5[5]</sup> Among other things, we dealt with the contradictions regarding the following questions: whether the kingdom was an improper request on the part of the people (chap. 8) or a positive initiative on the part of God (9:16); why Shmuel must choose Shaul by way of a lottery after he already anointed him king (chap. 10); why Shaul tends his flocks after he was already anointed king, so that only by chance he hears of the attack of Nachash the Ammonite (chap. 11); why Shmuel cries out over God's rejection of Shaul in chapter 15, when he himself informed Shaul about what would happen in chapter 13; and others.

As may be remembered, we saw that, beginning in chapter 8, Scripture describes the events from two different "perspectives." There are two separate accounts: one track, which begins in chapter 8, sees the kingdom in a negative light, as having been accepted only *be-di'eved*; a second track, which begins in chapter 9, presents a positive picture of the kingdom. We showed that this approach resolves all the difficulties, for we are dealing with two parallel accounts that do not constitute a single continuum; in this way,

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Scripture gives expression to the complexity of the idea of kingship in Israel. We offered an overview of chapters 8-12 in light of these two perspectives:

| The Negative Perspective                                                                                   | The Positive Perspective                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8 – the people request a king, a request that is understood as a rejection of God.                         | 9 - God informs Shmuel about Shaul's appointment as king, in order to deliver Israel from the Pelishtim. |
|                                                                                                            | 10:1-16 – the signs and the resting of the spirit of God upon Shaul.                                     |
| 10:17-26 – choosing Shaul as king by way of a lottery, and Shaul's appearance before the people.           |                                                                                                          |
| [the missing account – the victory over Amon as part of the appointment of a king on Israel's initiative.] | 11:1-11 – the victory over Amon and Shaul's appearance before the people.                                |
| 11:12-15 – the result of the war against Amon: acceptance of Shaul as king by all of Israel.               |                                                                                                          |
| 12 – renewal of Shaul's monarchy.                                                                          |                                                                                                          |
| 15 – the loss of the kingdom in the wake of the sin committed during the war against Amalek.               | 13-14 – the loss of the kingdom in the wake of the failure in the war against the Pelishtim.             |

Now, it can easily be demonstrated that chapter 16 continues the positive perspective on the kingdom, whereas chapter 17 continues the negative course and constitutes a direct continuation of chapter 14. This division is proven from both sides:

- 1) Following the negative perspective, textually, chapter 16 directly continues chapter 15 (15:1: "And the Lord said unto Shmuel, 'How long will you mourn for Shaul?"). Linguistically, this perspective is evident in the root *mem-alef-samekh*, which appears 9 times in the book of *Shmuel*, all instances in the negative perspective: 7 times in chapters 8, 10, and 15, and two more times in chapter 16 (vv. 1, 7).
- 2) According to the positive perspective, the Pelishtim are the main enemy of Israel (as opposed to Amon or Amalek according to the negative perspective). As was already noted, there is a clear connection between the three battles in which Shaul's decline is evident – from chapter 11, through chapter 13, and until our chapter. This connection also distinguishes between Shaul who received signs; Yonatan – who made signs for himself; and David – who didn't need any signs.

Conceptually, chapters 16 and 17 present two different accounts of the way in which David achieves status in Shaul's house. In chapter 16, David arrives when Shaul needs someone to play for him, whereas in chapter 17, he arrives during the campaign against the Pelishtim. According to the positive perspective, Shaul's failure stems from his lack of faith in God, which was also

evident in the previous war against the Pelishtim. As opposed to Shaul's problematic conduct, David's faith is striking; therefore, chapter 17 constitutes a continuation and repair of Shaul's problems in chapters 13-14. In chapter 15, on the other hand, Shaul's sin is his failure to obey God's command. From this perspective, David arrives at Shaul's house as a musician, who turns into an arms-bearer, but whose time to reveal himself as having been designated for the throne has not yet come.

According to this approach, all the difficulties disappear: Chapter 17 is not a direct continuation of chapter 16; the two chapters continue parallel tracks that run throughout the book. It seems, however, that owing to the great difficulty of reading chapter 17 after chapter 16, the redactor of the book<sup>6</sup> added two notes which slightly moderate the difficulties and allow the two chapters to be read as a single continuum, at least in the practical sense, even if a textual separation exists between them. The first note is in v. 15: "Now David went to and fro from Shaul to feed his father's sheep at Beth-lehem." The second note is a single word in v. 12: "Now David was the son of **that** Efratite of Beth-lehem in Yehuda, whose name was Yishai; and he had eight sons...."<sup>7</sup>

(Translated by David Strauss)

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8[1] The Radak brings a surprising solution to this problem in the name of his father: "And my father, my master, of blessed memory, wrote that **Nov, the city of the priests, is called Jerusalem**, because the Pelishti's sword was there, as is stated explicitly."

9[2] The phenomenon of the integration of verses describing a later situation in an account of an event at the time that it occurred is familiar to us from other contexts. For example: "And the children of Israel did eat the manna for forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they did eat the manna until they came to the borders of the land of Cana'an" (*Shemot* 16:35); and similarly II *Shmuel* 6:23.

10[3] See lecture 9, regarding the capture of the ark by the Pelishtim (chapter 5).

11[4] This answer does not solve the difficulty of how it could be that Avner, Shaul's captain of the army and most intimate associate, did not recognize Shaul's arms-bearer.

12[5] For those readers who have joined this year, it is highly recommended that at this point you peruse last year's lectures on chapters 8-15 (especially lectures no. 16, 18, 20 and 29), where this method of resolving contradictions was thoroughly explained. It will be almost

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impossible to understand the rest of this lecture without being familiar with what was presented in those lectures.

13[6] As was noted in the past (lecture no. 14), according to *Chazal* (*Bava Batra* 15a), the book of Shmuel was redacted by Gad the prophet and Natan the Seer, as is implied by I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 29:29). According to the Abravanel, Yirmiyahu redacted the books of *Shmuel* and *Melakhim*. In any event, the book undoubtedly contains later additions that were written long after the events described in the book transpired (see the aforementioned lecture).

14[7] There is another textual difficulty in our chapter, connected not to the previous chapters, but to the relationship between our chapter and what is stated in II *Shmuel* 21:19: "And there was a further battle in Gov with the Pelishtim, where Elchanan the son of Ya'are-Oregim, the Beth-lehemite slew Golyat the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam." This description is similar to that of Golyat in our chapter (v. 7 – "And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam"). It is therefore strange that the killing of Golyat should be attributed to another resident of Beth-lehem, Elchanan the son of Ya'are-Oregim. Rashi there explains, in the wake of *Chazal*, that Elchanan was David, although this is difficult according to the plain sense of the text. The author of *Divrei Ha-yamim* appears to have had difficulty with this matter, and therefore brings the story in a slightly different version: "And there was war again with the Pelishtim; and Elchanan the son of Yair slew Lachmi the brother of Golyat the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 20:5). That is to say, David killed Golyat, whereas Elchanan killed Lachmi, Golyat's brother. It should be noted that throughout our chapter, the giant is designated as "the Pelishti," and only once is it noted: "And there went out a champion from the camp of the Pelishtim, **named Golyat**, of Gat, whose height was six cubits and a span" (v. 4). I shall address this difficulty at greater length, when we reach II *Shmuel* 21).

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