

## THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

### LECTURE 40: CHAPTER 20 (PART II) THE STORY OF THE ARROWS

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#### I. "Go Your Way; for the Lord Has Sent You Away"

In the previous lecture, we discussed the complexity of the relationship between Yonatan and David as it expressed itself in the question regarding how far Yonatan was capable of going in his love for David and in his standing up to his father Shaul. This complexity also underlies the verses in the continuation of the chapter, which will be discussed in this lecture. It should be remembered that in his answer to David's question, "Who shall tell me if perchance your father answer you roughly?" (v. 10), Yonatan swears that even if Shaul is planning to do evil, Yonatan will inform David of the developments:

(13) "The Lord do so to Yonatan, and more also, should it please my father to do you evil, if I disclose it not unto you, **and send you away**, that you may go in peace..."

In the wake of this, Yonatan swears again to David and makes a covenant with him, as we saw in the previous lecture. After these ornate words, however, Yonatan proposes an altogether different plan:

(18) And Yonatan said unto him, "Tomorrow is the new moon; and you will be missed, your seat will be empty. (19) And in the third day<sup>1</sup>[1] you shall hide yourself well, and come to the place where you hid yourself in the day of work,<sup>2</sup>[2] and shall remain by the stone Ezel.<sup>3</sup>[3] (20) And I will shoot three arrows<sup>4</sup>[4] to the sideward, as though I shot at a mark. (21) And, behold, I will send the lad: 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say unto the lad: 'Behold, the arrows are on this side of you; take them, and come;' for there is peace to you and no hurt, as the Lord lives. (22) But if I say thus unto the boy: 'Behold, the arrows are beyond you,' go your way; for the Lord **has sent you away**. (23) And regarding the matter which I and you have spoken of, behold, the Lord is between me and you for ever."

It is evident from these verses that Yonatan has retreated from his

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previous oath. His earlier words clearly implied that he had obligated himself to inform David of the results of the test performed on Shaul in a **direct** manner, and that he would send David away. Now Yonatan tells David that he will not meet with him directly, but rather he will inform him of the results in a secret manner. It seems that Yonatan was concerned about the implications of a direct meeting with David should Shaul's negative attitude toward David prove to be absolute, and he therefore preferred that it not be he who sends David away. Rather, "Go your way; for the Lord has sent you away."

These two declarations – "I will send you away" versus "the Lord has sent you away" – appear to contradict each other – but in fact they express the inner tension between the two poles in Yonatan's personality. There is no question that either way Yonatan is faithful and dedicated to David, but the scope and force of this fidelity gives rise to an inner conflict that never finds resolution.

## II. The Test

Yonatan's plan is executed:

(24) So David hid himself in the field; and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to the meal to eat. (25) And the king sat upon his seat, as at other times, even upon the seat by the wall;<sup>5</sup><sup>[5]</sup> and Yonatan stood up, and Avner sat by Shaul's side; but David's place was empty.<sup>6</sup><sup>[6]</sup> (26) Nevertheless, Shaul spoke not any thing that day; for he thought, "Something has befallen him, he is unclean; surely he is not clean."<sup>7</sup><sup>[7]</sup>

At this stage, Shaul gives David the benefit of the doubt, and does not attach significance to his absence. The next day, however, the confrontation between Shaul and Yonatan reaches its climax:

(27) And it came to pass on the morrow after the new moon, which was the second day,<sup>8</sup><sup>[8]</sup> that David's place was empty; and Shaul said unto Yonatan his son, "Wherefore comes not the son of Yishai<sup>9</sup><sup>[9]</sup> to the meal, neither yesterday, nor today?" (28) And Yonatan answered Shaul, "David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem. (29) And he said: 'Let me go, I pray you; for our family has a sacrifice in the city; and my brother,<sup>10</sup><sup>[10]</sup> he has commanded me; and now, if I have

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found favor in your eyes, let me get away, I pray you, and see my brethren.' Therefore, he is not come unto the king's table." (30) Then Shaul's anger was kindled against Yonatan, and he said unto him, "You son of perverse rebellion, 11[11] do not I know that you have chosen the son of Yishai to your own shame, and unto the shame of your mother's nakedness? (31) For as long as the son of Yishai lives upon the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he deserves to die." (32) And Yonatan answered Shaul his father, and said unto him, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" (33) And Shaul cast his spear at him to smite him; whereby Yonatan knew that it was determined of his father to put David to death.

Shaul's crude language, his clear declaration that David deserves to die, and finally his casting his spear at Yonatan in order to smite him, leave Yonatan with no room for doubt regarding his father's intentions. In the wake of this conclusion:

(34) So Yonatan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no food the second day of the month; for **he was grieved** for David, and because his father had put him to shame.12[12]

These words close the circle that had begun at the beginning of the chapter. There, Yonatan had disputed David's claim that Shaul was trying to kill him but was concealing his intentions from Yonatan "**lest he be grieved.**" Now, it becomes clear that David had been right, and indeed, Yonatan is grieved.

Now Yonatan is supposed to report the results to David by way of the arrows. Once again, however, the drama undergoes an unexpected turn.

### III. Why Were the Arrows Necessary?

The account of the shooting of the arrows raises a question. Indeed, Yonatan takes a "little lad" with him (v. 35),13[13] shoots the arrows, makes a pronouncement that expresses the negative message, and even adds the words, "Make speed, hasten, stay not," (v. 38), in order to urge David on and warn him about the concrete danger that awaits him. Yonatan then sends the lad back to the city; at that point, the story should have ended. But the chapter concludes in a surprising manner:

(41) And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down

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three times;14[14] and they kissed one another, and wept one with the other, until David exceeded. (42) And Yonatan said to David, "Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my seed and your seed, for ever.'"

If, in the end, David met with Yonatan, what was the purpose of the whole exercise with the arrows?

It seems that here, too, the answer is connected to the complexity of the relationship between Yonatan and David. When Yonatan initiated the arrow maneuver, he reversed, as noted before, his original idea that he himself would report back to David directly. At the moment of truth, however, when Yonatan is about to part from David and send him off in peace, his love for David is once again aroused. His feelings overcome the rational considerations that had previously guided him, and he wishes to take leave of David in a personal way. In hindsight, the exercise with the arrows was superfluous, but it is precisely this account that expresses more than anything else Yonatan's internal turmoil.

The final word, however, bring us back to the problematic dimension of the story:

And he arose and departed; and Yonatan went into the city.  
(21:1)15[15]

This verse sharpens the fact that, in the end, Yonatan did not go with David, but rather returned to the city. It is possible that he had no alternative, and it would be unreasonable to say that Yonatan should have gone off with David and cut himself off from his father. The bottom line, however, is that in this verse Yonatan seals his own fate. Since he tied his fate to that of his father rather than to that of David, it was decreed that he would die with his father on Mount Gilboa and not take part in the future kingdom of David. This was the most tragic moment in Yonatan's life, and it is possible that this is what David refers to in his lament: "Shaul and Yehonatan were loved and dear in their lives, and in their death they were not divided" (II *Shmuel* 1:23). Yonatan's decision during his lifetime to remain with his father brought about the fact that even in their death, they were not divided.

*Chazal* appear to have been aware of the tension found in this verse, and this is the source of their statement:

For Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Had Yonatan lent David two loaves of bread, Nov the city of the priests would not have been put to death, Doeg the Edomite would not have been banished [from the

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world-to-come], and Shaul and his three sons would not have been killed. (*Sanhedrin* 104a)

*Chazal* tie our verse to the story of Nov, the city of priests, and also to the death of Shaul and his three sons. They find fault in Yonatan's taking leave from David, and express this by saying that he did not give David bread. It seems that they also wish to imply that Yonatan did not act here as might have been expected in light of his great love for David, and this is what later brought to his death.16[16]

(Translated by David Strauss)

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17[1] *Chazal* explain that the word "*ve-shilashta*" means that David should hide for three days, until the second day of Rosh Chodesh, when the results of the test should become evident.

18[2] Rashi explains that "*yom ha-ma'aseh*" refers to a weekday, when work is performed, as opposed to Rosh Chodesh, on which work was forbidden during the biblical period, as is implied by the words of Amos (8:5) regarding the impatient merchants who say: "When will the **new moon** be gone, that we may sell corn, and the **Sabbath**, that we may set forth wheat." This understanding is supported by the words of Yechezkel (46:1): "The gate of the inner court that looks towards the west shall be shut for the six **working days**; but on the Sabbath it shall be opened, and on the day of the **new moon** it shall be opened;" there, we also find the contrast between "working days" and Rosh Chodesh. The Radak, on the other hand, understands "*yom ha-ma'aseh*" as "that day of the act of the oath that Shaul made to Yonatan that David would not be killed, on which David was hiding in the field."

19[3] This may be a place name or a reference to a certain road-sign. Rashi explains: "A stone that served as a sign for travelers." The implication is that it was a stone similar to the milestones found on Roman roads.

20[4] Why specifically three arrows? The Radak finds a linguistic connection between the three arrows and the word "*ve-shilashta*" used above, and this explains the definite article (the *heh* in *ha-chitzim*, "the three arrows"). According to the *Metzudat David*, the first arrow was meant to designate the place; the second for the sign ("on this side of you" or "beyond you"); and the third in case he does not succeed with the second arrow. This explanation is very forced, especially in light of the fact that Yonatan was known for his archery skills – "The bow of Yonatan turned not back" [II *Shmuel* 1:22]). It is possible that the sum of three arrows was a fixed unit of shooting, which would not have aroused suspicion (similar to the arrows shot by Yoash, the king of Israel; see II *Melakhim* 13:18). We discussed the conceptual significance of the shooting of arrows above, in the first lecture on chapter 19 (lecture no. 37).

21[5] It is possible that Shaul sat by the wall out of fear of "being stabbed in the back."

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22[6] This verse is not entirely clear. Rashi explains that, as a rule, David would sit next to Shaul, and owing to his absence, there was no one between Shaul and Yonatan – something that was unbefitting the dignity of the king, inasmuch as the diners would recline on couches. For that reason, Yonatan arose from his place, until Avner arrived and reclined next to Shaul; then Yonatan reclined next to him, at a distance from Shaul. The Radak explains the sequence of events in a similar fashion, but he suggests that Yonatan wanted to distance himself from Shaul not as a show of respect, but out of fear that he would smite him. In any event, it is clear from Scripture that there was a fixed seating order, and that David therefore stood out in his absence.

23[7] Rashi explains that the reference is to impurity stemming from seminal emission. The wording brings to mind what is stated in the Torah: "If there be among you any man that is not clean by reason of uncleanness that chances (*mikreh*) by night" (*Devarim* 23:11); and see the Radak.

24[8] Rashi and the Radak understand that the reference is to the second day of the month, whereas R. Yeshaya explains that it is a reference to the second day of Rosh Chodesh. R. Yeshaya's explanation is more convincing, for according to Rashi and the Radak there is a difficulty: What is special about the meal eaten on the second of the month, and what is special about the second of the month that Scripture specified the date?

This discussion is connected to a wide debate regarding the sanctification of the month. In his struggle against the Karaites, Rabbenu Sa'adya Gaon (see *Otzar Ha-Geonim, Rosh Ha-Shana*, p. 84) and the Geonim argued that the month was always sanctified based on mathematical calculations, for in the wilderness there was no sun or moon (based on *Nechemya* 9:19). This was the wisdom of the tribe of Yissachar, who "had understanding of the times" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 12:33) and knew how to calculate the appearance of the new moon. This argument is also brought in Rabbenu Chananel's commentary to *Shemot* 12:2, where proof is also brought from our chapter, in which David and Yonatan know that "tomorrow is the new moon." Furthermore, they know from the outset that there will be two days of Rosh Chodesh (as is implied in R. Yeshaya's explanation). According to this approach, it was only during the period of the Sadducees, who challenged the established calendar, that the rabbis began to sanctify the month based on the testimony of witnesses who saw the new moon in order to confirm the calculation.

The Rambam, in his commentary to the *Mishna (Rosh Ha-Shana 2:7)*, vigorously rejected this approach, arguing that Rabbenu Sa'adya was engaged in apologetics, and that many rabbinic sources imply that the sanctification of the month was originally based on the testimony of witnesses. It is possible that this debate is what brought Rashi and the Radak to explain that the day under discussion was not Rosh Chodesh, despite the difficulties with this explanation; they found it difficult that David and Yonatan knew from the outset that there would be two days of Rosh Chodesh.

25[9] The expression "son of Yishai" (here, and in vv. 30 and 31) attests to scorn, as in other places in Scripture (see, for example, below 22:7, 9, 12) where a person is called by his father's name and his own name is omitted (similar to the meaning in our own times, in certain situations, of calling a person by his family name). Indeed, when he responds to his father, Yonatan says: "**David** earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem."

26[10] According to the commentators, this means that David's brother commanded him, that is to say, informed him of the family sacrifice and of the expectation that he would participate in it. It is possible, however, that the words, "he has commanded me," refer to David, and that the words, "my brother," is a citation of David's words to Yonatan, where he calls him "my

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brother." According to this, the verse should be understood as follows: "And he [David] said, 'Let me go, I pray you; for our family has a sacrifice in the city;' and he commanded me, 'My brother, and now, if I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away, I pray you, and see my brethren.'" The term "my brother" in reference to a friend appears in several places, e.g., II *Shmuel* 20:9; I *Melakhim* 13:30).

27[11] The meaning of the expression "*ben na'avat mardut*" is unclear. The word *mardut* seems to attest to a son who rebels against his father. The word *na'avat* seems to derive from the root *ayin-vav-heh*, which denotes sin, as in "If he commit iniquity (*be-ha'avato*), I will chasten him with the rod of men" (II *Shmuel* 7:14). According to this, the expression means, "a son who sins and rebels against his father," similar to a *ben sorer u-moreh* ("a rebellious son").

28[12] Who did Shaul put to shame? It is possible to understand that the reference is to David, and that Yonatan was grieved about the fact that Shaul had shamed him publicly. Alternatively, the reference is to Yonatan. According to this (see the Radak), Yonatan had two reasons to be grieved – the decree against David, and the shame that he himself suffered owing to Shaul's sharp words and his casting a spear at him.

29[13] Apparently, Yonatan used a "little lad" in order to maintain secrecy, for an older lad would have been likely to question this strange behavior and understand its significance.

30[14] Once again, the motif of "three" repeats itself, as with the three days and the three arrows.

31[15] While the Masoretic division of the sections sees this verse as the beginning of the next section, and the Christian division of the book into chapters similarly places this verse at the beginning of the next chapter, it seems to me that this verse concludes this chapter no less than it opens the next chapter.

32[16] It is possible that the understanding proposed here can be connected to the fact that Scripture notes: "And they wept one with another, **until David exceeded.**" In the end, the parting was more painful to David, perhaps because he was distressed by the complexity of Yonatan's attitude toward him.

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