

## THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

### LECTURE 42: CHAPTER 22 (PART I) DAVID AND HIS MEN AGAINST SHAUL AND HIS MEN Rav Amnon Bazak

#### I. DAVID'S MEN

In chapter 21, the story of Achimelekh in Nov was cut off by the account of David's flight to Akhish the king of Gat; in the previous lecture, we discussed the connection between these two events. The beginning of chapter 22 continues to describe David's movements, and only in verse 6 do we return to the main story regarding Nov, the city of priests. We will begin with verses 1-5, which describe David's wanderings after he runs away from the Pelishtim.

Scripture opens with a description of those who joined David's ranks:

(1) David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. (2) And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him, and he became captain over them; and there were with him about four hundred men.

Two groups join with David: members of his family, and people of a low social class. The joining of these two groups to David does not speak well of Shaul. David's family presumably joined with David out of fear that Shaul would do them harm (see *Metzudat David*). And the joining to David of members of the lower ranks of society alludes to a difficult social reality, which, according to the continuation of the chapter as we shall see below, Shaul had a part in creating.

On the other hand, this description of the group in which David finds himself during the period of his wanderings serves as an exposition that will help us understand various stories that take place along the way. Special note should be taken of the conduct of these people when David is afforded the opportunity to harm Shaul. In chapter 24, a conversation takes place between David and his men, who try to push him to action:

And the men of David said unto him, "Behold the day in which the Lord has said unto you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good unto you.'" Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his men, "The Lord forbid it to me, that I should do this thing unto my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put forth my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed." So David checked his

men with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Shaul....  
(24:4-7)

There is no doubt that people in such desperate financial straits would tend to blame Shaul for their situation, and therefore they rejoiced over the opportunity that they were given to strike at Shaul. It is not by chance that in our chapter these people are called "discontented" (*marei nefesh*, lit., bitter of soul). This emotional state is described in other places as well as a possible cause of violent reactions. For example:

And the children of Dan said to him, "Do not raise your voice among us, lest **angry fellows** (*marei nefesh*) run upon you, and you lose your life with the lives of your household." (*Shoftim* 18:25)

And David was greatly distressed; for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved (*mara nefesh*), every man for his sons and for his daughters. (I *Shmuel* 30:6)

To David's credit, it may be said that he succeeded in gaining control over his men, and they obeyed him and did not harm Shaul. It was not easy leading such people, but in none of the stories of David and his men do we find that his men acted improperly or against David's orders.<sup>1[1]</sup>

In light of this, we can easily understand the argument put forward by Naval the Carmelite: "And Naval answered David's servants, and said: 'Who is David? And who is the son of Yishai? There are many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master'" (25:10). David's band was likely to stir up scornful reactions, inasmuch as it was comprised of poor and destitute people. Naval's reaction also testifies to the difficult social reality in the time of Shaul.<sup>2[2]</sup>

It is possible that David first acquired his leadership skills while leading these people. Anyone who can impose his authority on four hundred<sup>3[3]</sup> poor and discontented men, can, when the time comes, serve as the leader of Israel.

## II. DAVID AND MOAV

David does not remain for very long in the cave of Adullam (v. 1), and he is forced to wander from place to place, as is detailed in the coming verses:

(3) And David went thence to Mitzpeh of Moav; and he said unto the king of Moav, "Let my father and my mother, I pray you, come forth,

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and be with you, till I know what God will do for me." (4) And he brought them before the king of Moav; and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the stronghold.<sup>4[4]</sup> (5) And the prophet Gad<sup>5[5]</sup> said unto David, "Abide not in the stronghold; depart, and get you into the land of Yehuda." Then David departed, and came into the forest of Cheret.

Why does David transfer his parents specifically to Moav? It is possible that David is following the approach that we saw in the previous chapter: using the house of a king who is hostile to the reigning king as a haven for those persecuted by the latter. Moav is mentioned among the nations against whom Shaul fought,<sup>6[6]</sup> and therefore it is only natural that the people of Moav would cooperate with those persecuted by him.

Nevertheless, going specifically to Moav seems to have special significance in light of David's genealogy – "And Boaz begat Oved, and Oved begat Yishai, and Yishai begat David" (*Ruth* 4:21-22). David's great-grandmother Ruth's Moavite origins would likely help the temporary absorption of Yishai and his wife in Moav.

In any event, the lengthy description of the move to Moav is somewhat surprising. It is reasonable to assume that the move from the cave of Adullam to Mitzpeh Moav was not executed quickly, and it is therefore unclear why Scripture cuts off the account regarding Nov in order to describe this event, which presumably took place at some later date.

*Chazal* seem to have been aware of this difficulty, and they express their solution to the problem in their explanation of David's attitude toward the Moavites after ascending to the throne and imposing his authority on the neighboring nations. His attitude toward the Moavites is very strange, especially in light of his positive attitude toward Moav in our chapter:

And he smote Moav, and measured them with a line, making them lie down on the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. (II *Shemuel* 8:2)

Why does David adopt such a severe measure specifically against Moav? The plain sense of Scripture does not provide any clear answers, but *Chazal* proposed an explanation of dramatic significance:

For the king of Moav killed them, and nobody escaped except for one brother of David, who ran away to Nachash king of Amon, and the king of Moav sent after him and he did not agree to turn him over. This is

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the kindness that Nachash did for David.<sup>7[7]</sup> And therefore he fought against the Moavites. This is what is written: "And he smote Moav, and measured them with a line...." (*Bamidbar Rabba* 14, 1)

The *midrash* is apparently based on the fact that David's parents are not mentioned again after moving to Moav. It is doubtful, however, whether this *midrash* – and especially the story of the brother who ran away to Nachash the king of Amon – is supported by the plain sense of Scripture. It stands to reason that what *Chazal* wanted to accomplish here is to give expression to the severity of David's responsibility for the killing of the priests of Nov, as was discussed at length in the previous lecture. It is difficult to ignore the similarity between what is stated in the *midrash*, "and nobody escaped except for one brother of David," and what is stated later in our chapter:

And one of the sons of Achimelekh the son of Achituv, named Evyatar, escaped, and fled after David.

The *midrash* is alluding here that it was owing to David's responsibility for the death of all the priests of Nov, except for one, that all of the members of David's family except for one were put to death by the king of Moav.<sup>8[8]</sup>

### III. "WILL HE GIVE EVERY ONE OF YOU"

In verse 6, Scripture returns to the story of Nov, the city of the priests. Scripture describes Shaul's reaction when he hears that David is moving around in the area with a group of his men:

(6) And Shaul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him; now Shaul was sitting in Giv'a, under the tamarisk-tree in Rama, with his spear in his hand,<sup>9[9]</sup> and all his servants were standing about him. (7) And Shaul said unto his servants that stood about him, "Hear now, you Binyaminites; will the son of Yishai<sup>10[10]</sup> give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds; (8) that all of you have conspired against me,<sup>11[11]</sup> and there was none that disclosed it to me when my son made a league with the son of Yishai, and there is none of you that is sorry for me,<sup>12[12]</sup> or discloses unto me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?"

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Shaul's words conceal a difficult situation. Shaul turns to his servants with the argument: Do you really think that if David becomes king, he will give your fields and vineyards and appoint you to senior positions? Why did none of you tell me of the pact between my son and David? The implication between the lines is that Shaul himself had indeed given his tribesmen fields and vineyards and appointed them to such positions. These verses bring us back to the prophet Shemuel's warning (above, chapter 8), when he tried to convince Israel to withdraw their request for a king:

(11) And he said, "This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons, and appoint them unto him for his chariots and to be his horsemen; and they shall run before his chariots.  
(12) And he will appoint them unto him for **captains of thousands, and captains of fifties**... And he will take **your fields, and your vineyards**, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them **to his servants.**"

In order to strengthen the connection between our chapter and chapter 8, we might add what is stated later in v. 17: "And the king said unto the runners (*ha-ratzim*) that stood about him" – which is reminiscent of "and they shall run (*ve-ratzu*) before his chariots." Additionally, the location of the entire story is "under the tamarisk-tree in Rama," which alludes to the connection with Shemuel the Ramatite.<sup>13[13]</sup> The chapter is hinting, then, that what Shemuel had warned about actually took place, and a king arose who took people's fields and vineyards and gave them to his servants.

This point is, of course, relevant to what was stated at the beginning of the chapter: "And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented." It might be suggested that the discontented people symbolize those whose fields had been taken by the king and handed over to his servants and friends. The chapter, as it were, stands two groups up one against the other: those in power and those who are being exploited.

Above all else, Shaul stands up and demands to know: Why did no one inform him of the conspiracy between David and Yonatan? Shaul sees this alliance, one that was based on love that is not dependant on anything else,<sup>14[14]</sup> as an act of conspiracy and treachery and as initiative on the part of Yonatan to set David up as an enemy to Shaul.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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15[1] A distinction must be made between these discontented people, who were poor and unfortunate, and a similar situation – Yiftach and his men, about whom a negative moral judgment is explicitly expressed: "And **idle fellows** joined themselves to Yiftach, and went out with him" (*Shoftim* 11:3).

16[2] Especially grave was the situation of "every one that was in debt," owing to the common practice of taking debtor's children as slaves (see I *Melakhim* 4:1; *Nechemya* 5:1-11).

17[3] In the continuation, David's regiment grows to six hundred men (23:13), but it is still possible to distinguish between two groups – four hundred fighters and two hundred who remain behind guarding the equipment. It is possible that these correspond to the original core and those who joined later. So we find when David goes up to the house of Naval – "And there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the baggage" (25:13); and similarly in the pursuit after the Amalekites – "But David pursued, he and four hundred men; for two hundred stayed behind, who were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor" (30:10). In that pursuit, the tension between the two groups is clearly evident: "And David came to the two hundred men, who were so faint that they could not follow David, whom also they had made to abide at the brook Besor; and they went forth to meet David, and to meet the people that were with him; and when David came near to the people, he saluted them. Then answered all the wicked men and base fellows, of those that went with David, and said, 'Because they went not with us, we will not give them aught of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away, and depart'" (ibid. vv. 21-22). But there, too, David's leadership skills stand out: "Then said David, 'You shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord has given unto us, who has preserved us, and delivered the troop that came against us into our hand. And who will hearken unto you in this matter? For as is the share of him that goes down to the battle, so shall be the share of him that carries by the baggage; they shall share alike.' And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day" (ibid. vv. 23-25).

18[4] It is not clear from the verses whether the stronghold is located near Moav or at a distance. According to R. Yeshaya, the stronghold is the Mitzpeh of Moav mentioned in the previous verse, and he understands that Gad's admonition of David, "Abide not in the stronghold; depart, and get you into the land of Yehuda," was meant to distance David from Moav, owing to a concern that were he to remain in Moav, the king of Moav was liable to hand him over to Shaul, who had defeated him in battle (see below). According to the Radak, however, the reference is to a stronghold in Yehuda.

19[5] In *Divrei Ha-yamim*, Gad is referred to several times as a "seer" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 21:9; 29:25, 29). In the book of *Shmuel*, he is mentioned only one other time - in the story of the census and the purchase of the threshing floor of Aravna the Yevusite, which closes the book (II *Shmuel* 24). In any event, it is not surprising to find here a "new" prophet, for Shmuel was already old when Israel had asked for a king (above 8:1), and would certainly not have been able to travel to the places where David was hiding.

20[6] See above 14:47: "So Shaul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against **Moav**, and against the children of Amon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Tzova, and against the Pelishtim; and wherever he turned himself, he put them to the worse."

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21[7] The reference is to the kindness mentioned in II *Shmuel* 10:2: "I will show kindness to Chanun the son of Nachash, as his father showed kindness to me."

22[8] According to the plain sense of Scripture, we can propose a more moderate explanation: Owing to the fact that through his lack of caution, David brought harm to Achimelekh and his family, he put his own family into danger, to the point that he had to seek the haven of the king of Moav.

23[9] In chapter 17 (lecture no. 33), we noted the repeated motif of Shaul and his spear. Here, too, the spear ironically represents Shaul's difficult mental state: lack of confidence, fear, and despair.

24[10] Here and in the next verse, Shaul mockingly refers to David as "the son of Yishai" – as we saw in chapter 20 (see lecture no. 40, note 9) – and by the designation, "my servant."

25[11] Three times in this short passage Shaul repeats the term, *kulkhem*, "all of you," thereby expressing his feelings of isolation, that he has not a single loyal supporter.

26[12] The meaning seems to be: Nobody is pained and sorrowed by my troubles. But the verse also contains a play on words: "And there was none that disclosed (*goleh*) it to me when my son made a league with the son of Yishai, and there is none of you that is sorry (*choleh*) for me, or discloses (*ve-goleh*) unto me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?" It would appear that the awkwardness of the verse follows from Shaul's excited state (this phenomenon was already noted in chapter 12, lecture no. 21).

27[13] We are, however, dealing with different places, for Shaul resides in Giv'a – his city, Giv'at Shaul, in Binyamin.

28[14] This love also demonstrated cracks, as we saw in the previous chapters (see lectures no. 39-40).

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