

## THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

### LECTURE 53: CHAPTER 28 SHAUL IN EIN-DOR (PART I) Rav Amnon Bazak

#### I. THE EXPOSITION

Chapter 28 describes the last stage of Shaul's decline on the eve of his going out to his final battle. A somber atmosphere hovers over the chapter, one that has ignited the imagination of poets and writers. In the upcoming lectures, I will examine the chapter and analyse the lessons that Scripture wishes to teach through it.

At the beginning of the story, in verse 3,1[1] an exposition makes note of two facts<sup>2</sup>[2] that are important for our understanding of the events of the chapter:

(1) Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Rama, even in his own city.<sup>3</sup>[3] (2) And Shaul had put away the mediums and the wizards out of the land.

On the simple level, these two facts are important in order to understand why Shaul wishes to raise Shmuel by way of a medium, and why the medium at Ein-Dor is afraid of Shaul. This exposition, however, seems to serve another function: to emphasize the contrast between the prophet and the mediums and wizards. Shaul's removal of the wizards seems to be a positive step, but the fact that it is related here (as opposed to the death of Shmuel, which was already mentioned in 25:1), in the chapter where Shaul himself visits a medium, does not speak well of Shaul. Furthermore, the Torah connects the prohibition of mediums and wizards to the obligation to obey a prophet:

When you are come to the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There must not be found among you anyone that makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire... Or a charmer, or **a medium**, or **a wizard**, or a necromancer... For these nations, which you shall dispossess, hearken to soothsayers, and to diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you so to do. The Lord your God will raise up to you **a prophet** from the midst of you, of your brethren, like me; to him you shall hearken. (*Devarim* 18:9-15)

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It is possible that the verse which juxtaposes the removal of the mediums and wizards to the death of Shmuel comes to emphasize that while Shaul took the positive step of removing the practitioners of forbidden magic, he refused to obey the prophet. Shaul fulfilled only the "remove yourself from evil" aspect of the Torah's command, but he did not continue with the "do good" part. This is reflected in the fact that he failed to fulfill Shmuel's commands in their entirety (in chapters 13 and 15), and in the fact that he pursued David and refused to accept God's decree as sounded by Shmuel that David would rule as king in his place.

## II. THE BACKGROUND

Let us proceed now to the verses that give the background for Shaul's turning to the medium in Ein-Dor:

(4) And the Pelishtim gathered themselves together and came and pitched in Shunem; and Shaul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa. (5) And when Shaul saw the host of the Pelishtim he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.

Once again, Shaul reacts in extreme fashion to the campaign against the Pelishtim. In chapter 13, Shaul did not comply with Shmuel's instructions; rather, he offered the sacrifice prior to Shmuel's arrival owing to the pressure applied by the Pelishtim, and afterwards he remained passive until Yonatan took action. In the second campaign against the Pelishtim, we are told regarding the people of Israel, Shaul included, that when they heard the words of Golyat, they responded with fear: "And when Shaul and all Israel heard those words of the Pelishti, **they were dismayed, and greatly afraid**" (17:11). Now we come to further deterioration: "He was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly" – a personal description, formulated in exceptionally severe language.

At first glance, Shaul responds in a positive manner: "And Shaul inquired of the Lord" (v. 6). The response on God's part, however, is negative: "But the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets."<sup>4</sup>[4] Scripture does not explain why God fails to answer him.<sup>5</sup>[5] Rashi writes that God's refusal to answer by way of the Urim was a measure-for-measure punishment for the destruction of Nov: "Nor by Urim – Because he destroyed Nov the city of priests, he was not answered."<sup>6</sup>[6] This is supported by the fact that when he speaks to Shmuel, Shaul omits mention of the Urim, stating merely: "And He answers me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams" (v. 15). As Rashi explains (ad loc.): "But he doesn't mention to him the Urim and Tumim, even though he inquired through them as it is stated

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above, because he was ashamed owing to his destroying Nov the city of priests." But expanding the punishment for the destruction of Nov to include failure to receive the divine message through dreams and prophets seems a bit forced; we must therefore find a different explanation for God's refusal to answer Shaul.

It stands to reason that God ignored Shaul because of the series of Shaul's religious and moral failures over the course of his reign, in the wake of which God's spirit departed from him and was replaced by an evil spirit (see chapter 16). Perhaps this was a special punishment for Shaul's attitude toward inquiring of God in chapter 14 during the three stages of the first war against the Pelishtim (his passivity and not inquiring by way of the *efod* in vv. 2-3; "Withdraw your hand" in v. 19; not inquiring of God in v. 36; see lecture no. 24). Since Shaul failed to inquire of God when he should have done so, he does not merit receiving God's answer when he wants to receive it. The general impression is that precisely when Shaul wishes to hear the word of God, it becomes clear to him that **it is too late**. The entire chapter revolves around this idea.

In any event, God's ignoring his inquiry leads Shaul to make the final mistake of his life – going to the medium in Ein-Dor:

(7) Then said Shaul unto his servants, "Seek me a woman who is a medium,<sup>7[7]</sup> that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at Ein-Dor."

### III. THE MEETING

After receiving the information from his men, Shaul goes to the medium and seeks out her services:

(8) And Shaul disguised himself and put on other raiment and went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night;<sup>8[8]</sup> and he said, "Divine unto me, I pray you, by means of the familiar spirit, and bring me up whomsoever I shall name unto you." (9) And the woman said unto him, "Behold, you know what Shaul has done, how he has cut off the diviners and the wizards<sup>9[9]</sup> out of the land; wherefore then lay you a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" (10) And Shaul swore to her by the Lord, saying, "As the Lord lives, there shall no punishment happen to you for this thing."

In addition to the violation itself of the prohibition to turn to a medium, the severity of Shaul's action is striking in several ways. Shaul disguises himself first and foremost to deceive the medium. Scripture does not clarify

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how it was that the medium in Ein-Dor survived Shaul's purge of the mediums and wizards, but the woman's words imply that she was cautious in her actions and did not respond in the affirmative to everyone who turned to her. In any event, Shaul's conversation with the medium highlights the problem of the hypocrisy of Shaul's action. At the very moment that the medium is overcome by fear of the great enemy of the magicians, Shaul turns to her in his distress and seeks out her help.

Following the woman's initial refusal to accede to the stranger's request for help by way of her magic, Shaul tries to convince her that no evil will befall her, and he confirms this with an oath taken in God's name. About this, *Chazal* say as follows:

Rabbi Shimon ben Levi says: To what was Shaul likened at that time? To a woman who is with her lover and takes an oath by the life of her husband. So, too, Shaul inquires of a medium and swears to her: "As the Lord lives, there shall no punishment happen to you for this thing." (*Vayikra Rabba* 26:7)

Indeed, Shaul's oath in the name of God is quite astonishing inasmuch as it consciously violates the Torah's command not to turn to mediums. It should be emphasized, however, that there is no real contradiction, for while it is true that Shaul wished to gain knowledge of the future by way of forbidden magical practices, this did not involve a violation of a prohibition of idol worship.<sup>10</sup>[10]

There is also an internal contradiction in Shaul's behavior: If he believed in the woman's ability to know hidden things, how did he think that he could deceive her and hide his true identity? Shaul is presented here as acting not on the basis of sound judgment, but rather under pressure and in haste.

And, indeed, it does not take very long for the medium to reveal the true identity of the stranger who had come to her under the darkness of night:

(11) Then said the woman, "Whom shall I bring up unto you?" And he said, "Bring me up Shmuel." (12) And when the woman saw Shmuel, she cried with a loud voice; and the woman spoke to Shaul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Shaul."

These verses raise a question: How did the medium know from seeing Shmuel that the man who had come to her was Shaul? *Chazal* answer that when a king inquired of a medium, the spirit would rise in a different manner than when the inquirer was an ordinary person:

How did she know then that he was Shaul? Rather they said: [A spirit] rises for a king not in the manner that it rises for an ordinary person.

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For an ordinary person, it rises with its head down and its feet up; for a king, [it appears] with its feet down and its head up. (*Vayikra Rabba*, *ibid.*)

This distinction is based on the next verse:

(13) And the king said unto her, "Be not afraid; for what see you?"<sup>11</sup>[11] And the woman said unto Shaul, "I see a godlike being coming up out of the earth."

According to the plain sense of Scripture, it is difficult to answer our question on this verse. Scripture seems to be purposely avoiding describing the details of the medium's practices. The difficulty in the verse is therefore intentional; this is Scripture's way of emphasizing its negative attitude regarding magic.

A similar difficulty is found in the next verse as well:

(14) And he said unto her, "What form is he of?" And she said, "An old man comes up; and he is covered with a robe." And Shaul perceived that it was Shmuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground, and prostrated himself.

Here, too, Scripture does not explain how Shaul knew from the description of "an old man comes up; and he is covered with a robe" that it was Shmuel. It seems that the robe was special, "a special garment for an important and distinguished person" (*Metzudat David*), worn only by kings and other important people.<sup>12</sup>[12] A robe (*me'il*), however, was especially characteristic of Shmuel. We encountered Shmuel's robe already in his childhood ("Moreover his mother made him a little robe, and brought it to him from year to year" [2:19]), and again in the incident involving the tearing of a robe following the war against Amalek (15:27-28). There is a clear connection between our chapter and what is stated there, for there Shmuel says to Shaul, "The Lord has rent the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, that is better than you" – precisely as he says to him in our chapter, "And the Lord has rent the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbor, even to David" (v. 17).<sup>13</sup>[13]

We now come to the final, unexpected encounter between Shmuel and Shaul, which Shaul had yearned for. Will this meeting achieve its objective?

(Translated by David Strauss)

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14[1] Verses 1-2, which bring the story narrated in the previous chapter to a conclusion, were dealt with in the previous lecture.

15[2] Both facts are formulated in the past perfect, "*U-Shmuel met*" and "*ve-Shaul hesir*" (rather than "*va-yamat Shmuel*" and "*va-yasar Shmuel*"). In this way, Scripture emphasizes that they are not part of the story itself, but rather an introductory exposition.

16[3] The formulation, "*va-yikberuhu ba-Rama u-be-iro*" (literally, "they buried him in Rama, and in his city"), is difficult. Rashi writes: "The word '*u-be-iro*' refers back to 'And all Israel lamented him:' They lamented him in Rama when they buried him, and they lamented him each person in his city." The Radak raises two possible understandings: Either Scripture comes to emphasize that they buried him in Rama, which was his city (and not in another city of that name), or that they buried him inside the city. According to Rabbenu Yeshaya, the *vav* is superfluous, as in *Bereishit* 36:24 (for other examples see Rashi, ad loc.).

17[4] Who are these "prophets?" According to the Radak, the reference is to the band of prophets who were with Shmuel (see 19:20). The reference may also be to prophets such as Gad (see 22:5) and others.

18[5] Verse 18 reads: "Because you did not hearken to the voice of the Lord and did not execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore has the Lord done this thing unto you this day," and one might understand that this refers to God's refusal to answer Shaul as a measure-for-measure punishment for Shaul's failure to obey Him (so explains the *Metzudat David*, ad loc.). It seems, however, that this verse is referring to the removal of the kingdom from Shaul, mentioned in the previous verse.

19[6] The Radak relates to the difficulty that the Urim do not seem to have been readily accessible to Shaul: "That which he says 'Urim,' when they were not with him, but rather with Evyatar who was with David - it is possible that he sent people over there to inquire [of the Urim] about this war."

20[7] The combination, "*eshet ba'alat ov*," is similar in structure to "*eshet yefat to'ar*" (*Devarim* 21:11). In both cases, the intention seems to be obvious, "*isha ba'alat ov*" and "*isha yefat to'ar*," for in ancient Hebrew, the letter *tof* often served as a suffix in place of the more common *heh* (this phenomenon was especially preserved in the poetic sections of Scripture, where many words that usually end with a *heh* end with a *tof*, e.g., *ezrat* (*Tehillim* 60:13), *shenat* (ibid. 132:4), and many others).

21[8] Why at night? It is possible that coming at night was part of Shaul's attempt to hide his identity (Radak); or perhaps mediums worked at night because of their fear of Shaul. In any event, the fact that Shaul went at night adds to the gloominess of the story. Already *Chazal* said: "Was it night? Rather, to teach you that that hour was for them as dark as night" (*Vayikra Rabba* 26:7).

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22[9] Here it says that Shaul removed "**ha-yidoni**," as opposed to verse 3, where it says that Shaul removed "**ha-yidanim**." The word *ha-yidoni* may serve here as a collective noun. Alternatively, it is possible that this is an example of the phenomenon of haplology, the dropping of one of two similar or identical successive syllables or sounds in a word; the *mem* at the beginning of the next word ("*min ha-aretz*") serves also as the final letter of the previous word. (For more on this phenomenon regarding full words, see lecture 23, note 5, and lecture 52, note 9).

23[10] At this point, Shaul the Binyaminite repeats to a certain degree the sin of Rachel, his grandmother, when she stole the *terafim*. In chapter 4 (lecture 8), we discussed at length how Rachel stole the *terafim* based on the belief that they had the power to reveal the future (see there the various sources which indicate that the *terafim* served as tools for seeing into the future), and that this was her primary sin, in the wake of which she was punished with premature death at the crossroads and with not being buried with the rest of the patriarchs and matriarchs. The direct connection between Shaul and Rachel was discussed at the beginning of chapter 10 (lecture 17), when Shmuel sent Shaul to Rachel's tomb. Another connection between the two stories will be discussed below.

24[11] The Radak explains that there are two parts to Shaul's words: "Therefore Shaul said to her, 'Be not afraid,' that is to say, be not afraid of that which you fear, for I will not kill you, for I have already given you my promise; 'but what did you see that you recognize that I am Shaul?' The answer to this was: 'I see a godlike being coming up out of the earth,' which according to *Chazal* means: I saw a great man coming up out of the earth, his feet facing the earth, which is not the usual way of the world. Therefore, I knew that you are Shaul the king, and that it was in honor of you that it rose in that manner."

25[12] Apart from Shmuel, the only people in the book of *Shmuel* about whom it is said that they wore a *me'il* are Shaul (24:40) and Yonatan 18:4).

26[13] See the last lecture on chapter 15 (lecture no. 29), where we dealt with the famous question of who tore whose robe. We noted there that according to the plain sense of Scripture, the torn robe belonged to Shmuel. It might be argued then that Shaul identified Shmuel here on the basis of his ripped robe.

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