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**The Book of Shmuel
Yeshivat Har Etzion**

Shiur #16: CHAPTER 9 (PART III) THE CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

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I. THE CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN CHAPTER 9 AND THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

Having completed the analysis of chapters 8 and 9, we can now tackle a problem that will accompany us in the coming chapters time and time again, namely, the many contradictions and redundancies in the course of the narrative. Let us begin by presenting the contradictions between chapters 8 and 9:

1) Chap. 8 sharply criticizes Israel's request for a king, and sees it as a rejection of God. In chap. 9, on the other hand, God turns to Shmuel using an entirely different tone:

Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man out of the land of Binyamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel, **and he shall save My people out of the hand of the Pelishtim; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto Me.** (16)

This formulation is reminiscent of the situation during the time of Israel's servitude in Egypt:

And the Lord said, **I have surely seen** the affliction of **My people** who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows... Now therefore, behold, **the cry** of the children of Israel **is come to Me**; and I have also seen the oppression with which Egypt oppresses them. Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, **that you may bring My people the children of Israel out of Egypt.** (*Shemot* 3:7-10)

In this chapter, Shaul's appointment as king – in order to save Israel from the hand of the Pelishtim – parallels Moshe's appointment as the leader who will take Israel out of Egypt! God's words in chap. 9 imply that the decision to appoint a king was God's initiative, stemming from His identification with the affliction of Israel, who need a king to deliver them from the hand of Pelishtim. This, of course, stands in opposition to what is stated in chap. 8.

2) There are also differences between the chapters with respect to the choosing of the king. Chap. 8 ends with the words: "And the Lord said to Shmuel, Harken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Shmuel said unto the men of Israel, Go you every

man unto his city." We are left with the impression that Shmuel is supposed to take an active role in appointing the king. In chap. 9, on the other hand, God chooses Shaul, and only afterwards does He inform Shmuel that the man who is designated to become king will arrive the next day.

3) There is also a significant difference between the chapters with respect to the enemy. The people's request for a king in chap. 8 does not mention the specific reason that they asked for a king, but merely mentions their assertive demand: "No; but there shall be a king over us" (8:19). But as was already noted earlier, Shmuel's parting words to the people reveal the true reason that led to their request: "And when you saw that Nachash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, you said unto me: No, but a king shall reign over us" (12:12) – implying that the people's request for a king stemmed from their fear of Nachash the Ammonite.

In our chapter, on the other hand, the enemy because of whom God chooses a king is, as stated, the Pelishtim. This is surprising not only because of the discrepancy between what is stated here and what is stated in chap. 12, but also because of the discrepancy between the distress on account of the Pelishtim described here and what has been told to us earlier in the book. Chap. 7 describes Israel's victory over the Pelishtim, and we get the impression that the Pelishtim no longer vexed Israel:

So the Pelishtim were subdued, and they came no more within the border of Israel; and the hand of the Lord was against the Pelishtim all the days of Shmuel. And the cities which the Pelishtim had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gat; and the border thereof did Israel deliver out of the hand of the Pelishtim. And there was peace between Israel and the Emori. (7:13-14)

How, then, did the Pelishtim suddenly turn into an enemy under whose oppression the people of Israel cried out as they had done during their bondage in Egypt?

4) The figure of Shmuel also changes in this chapter. In the previous chapters Shmuel was presented as Israel's great leader, in the image of Moshe Rabbeinu, who succeeded in bringing the people to repent and in leading them to great victory over the Pelishtim. In our chapter, in contrast, Shmuel is presented as a humble and unknown figure, known as "the seer" – sort of a fortune-teller who can divine the future in return for appropriate compensation. When Shaul meets Shmuel, he does not recognize him. There is a significant discrepancy between what is stated at the outset: "And all Israel from Dan to Be'er-Sheva knew that Shmuel was trusted as a prophet of the Lord" (3:20), and the question posed by Shaul and his lad to the maidens who went out to draw water: "Is the seer here?" (9:11).

How can we resolve these contradictions?

II. "SHITAT HA-BECHINOT" – "THE METHOD OF ASPECTS"

I will try to reconcile the many contradictions in the book of Shmuel with "*shitat ha-bechinot* - the method of aspects," developed by Rav Mordechai Breuer, ז"ל. The reader who is familiar with this method may skip to the next section. In this

section I will briefly outline the principles of this method for those readers who have not yet been exposed to it.^{1[1]}

Shitat Ha-bechinot deals with the many contradictions found in Scripture. As we all know, there are many contradictions in Scripture between different accounts of the same story. Perhaps the most famous contradiction is that between the two accounts of Creation in the first two chapters of *Bereishit*: Chap. 1 implies that the plants were created first; then the animals; and finally man, who was created male and female. In chap. 2, however, man was created first, and then the plants; the animals were created only to serve as "a help to match him"; and the woman was created at a later stage.

How can we explain this contradiction? Many commentators tried to resolve each problem separately. One question, however, remains, namely, if so many explanations are necessary, why was the Torah written in this manner? Couldn't the Torah have been formulated without contradictions?

The main argument of the "*bechinot*" method is that the Torah was intentionally written with contradictory accounts. The purpose of these accounts, called "*bechinot*" ("aspects"), is to give separate expression to different perspectives – perspectives which only when taken together provide the full picture. In the example under discussion, chap. 1 of *Bereishit* describes the natural world (using the name, "*Elokim*"), in which man only fills the role of the natural creature who dominates nature, all of which existed before him. In chap. 2 (which uses the name "*Hashem Elokim*"), man plays a central role in the creation, and the entire world is created only for his sake: man and woman are created not only to reproduce like other animals, but rather with a mutually complementary spiritual connection between them; man's role is not restricted to the natural plain, but rather he operates on a higher plain as well – "to till it and to keep it" (*Bereishit* 2:15). Only when these two, very different perspectives are presented alongside each other, can we appreciate the full picture that conceptually includes both aspects.

This method can be used to explain many contradictions in the Torah, both in the narrative sections and in the legal sections. I will briefly mention a few striking examples of such contradictions, some in the same passage, and others in two different passages. For example, in the account of the flood, Noah is first told: "And of every living thing of all flesh, **two** of every sort shall you bring into the ark... they shall be **male and female**... **two** of every sort shall you bring into the ark" (ibid. 6:19-20), whereas four verses later, he is told: "Of every clean beast you shall take to you by **sevens**, male and female." In the account of the sale of Yosef, it first says: "And the Midyanim sold him to Egypt" (ibid. 37:36), but later it says: "And Potifar... bought him of the hand of the Yishmaelim, who had brought him down there" (ibid. 39:1). In the story of the plague of blood, Moshe says: "Behold, **I** will smite **with the rod that is in my hand** upon the water in the river, and it shall be turned to blood" (*Shemot* 7:17), but two verses later God says to Moshe: "Say to **Aharon**, Take **your rod**, and stretch out **your hand** upon the waters of Egypt... that they may become blood." In the account of the Exodus from Egypt, Moshe commands: "And **none of**

^{1[1]} For this method, see at length Rav Breuer's works, *Pirkei Mo'adot* and *Pirkei Bereishit*, and the recent study published by the Herzog College, *Shitat Ha-bechinot shel ha-Rav Mordechai Breuer*.

you shall go out at the door of his house **until the morning**" (ibid. 12:22), implying that the people of Israel left Egypt during the day; but a few verses later we are told: "And he called to Moshe and Aharon **by night**... And Egypt was urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land **in haste**... because they were **driven out** of Egypt, **and could not delay**," which implies that they left at night, as is stated also in *Devarim* (16:1): "For in the month of Aviv the Lord your God brought you forth out of Egypt by night." There are many more contradictions between what is stated in the book of *Devarim* and what is stated in the other books, e.g., regarding who initiated the sending of the spies, who appointed the judges in Israel, and when did God forgive Israel for the sin of the golden calf.^{2[2]} So, too, in the legal sections of the Torah. On the one hand, for example, the Torah says about a Hebrew slave whose ear was pierced, "And he shall serve him forever" (*Shemot* 21:6); but elsewhere it says: "He shall serve you until the year of jubilee. And then shall he depart from you, both he and his children with him, and shall return to his own family... For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen" (*Vayikra* 25:40-42). Regarding a Hebrew handmaid, it is stated in *Shemot* 21:7: "She shall not go out as the menservants do"; whereas in *Devarim* 15, it says: "And if your brother, a Hebrew man, **or a Hebrew woman**, be sold to you, he shall serve you six years." Regarding the paschal offering, it says in *Parashat Bo*, "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year; you shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats." (*Shemot* 12:5), whereas in *Devarim* 16:2, it says: "You shall therefore sacrifice the passover to the Lord your God, of the flock **and the herd.**"

As stated above, these are only a few isolated examples of the many contradictions in the Torah and the rest of Scripture.^{3[3]} As stated, it is possible to deal with each contradiction separately and resolve it in various different ways. But as the number of contradictions and difficulties grows, the question rises: Why are there so many difficult passages in Scripture? Why do we need so many resolutions the correctness of which can not be proven? Would it not have been possible to write the Torah without all these difficulties and contradictions?

According to the "*bechinot*" method, this question does not arise; on the contrary, the many contradictions testify to a consistent and systematic approach of a two-fold description of reality, which expresses in the best possible way the complexity of the world and of life in general. According to this approach, one must see in every story the particular perspective in each account, and focus on the

^{2[2]} At this point, I wish to veer from Rav Breuer's approach. It seems to me that it would not be an exaggeration to say that there is no story repeated in the book of *Devarim* without differences from the original account, or even direct contradictions to it. But it is precisely with respect to the book of *Devarim* that there is no fundamental need for the "*bechinot*" method, for it is mostly comprised of Moshe's parting speeches from the people, in which he presents the events from his own perspective. Since we are dealing with Moshe's subjective perspective, no difficulty is posed by the contradictions between his accounts and the objective accounts of the Torah. They are no different than the differences between the objective accounts of the Torah and the accounts given by subjective reporters with respect to other events in the Torah (e.g., the account given by Avraham's servant in *Parashat Chayyei Sara*, or Yehuda's emotional speech before Yosef at the beginning of *Parashat Vayigash*). A subjective account will never perfectly parallel an objective account, even if we do not accept the "*bechinot*" method.

^{3[3]} Anyone who wishes to read more about the "*bechinot*" method of reconciling these contradictions, as well as many others, is advised to see Rav Breuer's books cited above in note 1.

differences between the contradictory accounts. Only after we answer the question what does each account represent, and what approach stands behind it, can we combine the two accounts, and understand the full complexity of what really happened.^{4[4]}

III. TWO "*BECHINOT*" REGARDING THE MONARCHY

We can now return to the contradictions between the accounts in chaps. 8 and 9. In chap. 8, I examined the complex attitude of Scripture with respect to the monarchy: some sources view the monarchy in a positive light, as a desirable regime, whereas other sources see the monarchy as a negative substitute for belief in the kingdom of heaven. Thus far I resolved the contradiction by arguing that the matter depends on the timing and on the character of the king. When the king follows in the way of God, there is positive potential; but when he veers from this path, the monarchy presents great dangers in comparison to other forms of government.

In order to give expression to the complexity of the issue, the book of *Shmuel* presents two accounts of the development of the monarchy. One account, centered in chapter 8, describes the chain of events from a negative perspective regarding the monarchy, according to which God only agrees to the monarchy as a less than ideal solution, in the sense of "the Torah spoke only in view of man's evil inclination." The account in chapter 9, in contrast, sees the Israelite kingdom in a positive light, and presents the events from that perspective. From here on, through many of the chapters of the book, there are two different, and at times contradictory, "aspects" regarding specific events, and regarding the kingdom in Israel in general.^{5[5]}

I wish to explain the matter in greater detail. Chapters 1-8 present the negative attitude toward the institution of the monarchy, the main argument being the successful leadership of Shmuel. Shmuel succeeded on all accounts – including his defeat of the Pelishtim – and therefore there was no need to change the form of government in his old age, but rather to find a different judge. In this account, the request for a king is perceived as a rejection of God. Even from this perspective, however, God agreed to Israel's request, and instructed Shmuel to appoint a king.

Chap. 9 is not a direct continuation of chap. 8, but rather it opens a new account, which conceptually continues off from the closing chapters of the book of *Shoftim*, which cry out over and over again: "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (*Shoftim* 17:6, and elsewhere). From this perspective, there was nothing before chap. 9, and it was God who initiated the establishment of the kingdom in Israel, after the cries of Israel under

^{4[4]} From the perspective of the literary analysis, the "*bechinot*" method parallels the analytical methods of biblical criticism, which uncovered many contradictions in Scripture, and proposed that the differences in approach between the different accounts express differences in outlook and perspective. However, the gap between the "*bechinot*" method and the documentary hypothesis of biblical criticism is as wide as the distance between heaven and earth and the distance between faith and heresy. Biblical criticism came to the conclusion that the contradictory accounts give expression to the different sources of the chapters of the Torah, whereas the "*bechinot*" method assumes that it was God, the Giver of the Torah, who composed the Torah in that manner.

^{5[5]} I was first introduced to this approach to the study of the book of *Shmuel* by my teacher, Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Sabato. My understanding is also based also on the analysis of M.Tz. Segal in his book, *Sifrei Shmuel*.

the oppressive hands of the Pelishtim (who from this perspective continued to be Israel's main enemy) reached the heavenly throne. This perspective also restricts Shmuel's role: he is not presented as the absolute leader of the people (or even as their military leader), but as a "seer," whose public role is far narrower; and thus the need for a leader is much more prominent.

It is important to emphasize the significant difference between the roles assigned to Shaul in the different accounts. In chap. 8, the people of Israel ask for a "king," with all the problems that that position raises. In chap. 9, which opens an account according to which the process appears to be positive and coming at God's initiative – the word "king" does not appear, but instead we find the term "*naggid*." What does this term signify?

The answer to this question is found in the account of the anointing of a different king – David – where the people of Israel cite God's promise to David:

And the Lord said to you, You shall be a **shepherd** for My people Israel, and you shall be a **prince** (*naggid*) over Israel. (II *Shmuel* 5:2)

We see from here that a "*naggid*" is a shepherd.^{6[6]} We are not dealing with a person who leads that which belongs to him, but with a shepherd, who generally tends sheep belonging to someone else, and in this case – God. This title lessens the danger inherent in the term "king," and emphasizes the critical point in the perspective that views the Israelite kingdom in positive light: the king's subordination to the King of kings, God.

The accounts in chapters 8 and 9 open a series of two stories, which will continue to be told one alongside the other in the coming chapters. From now on we shall be alert to the existence of many contradictions that stem from the simple fact that we are not dealing with a single account, but with two. Exposing these contradictions will allow us to assign each account to the perspective to which it belongs, and create two consecutive accounts, based on the two perspectives described in these chapters.

One might ask: what in the end is the truth? Is the monarchy a positive phenomenon or a negative one? Did the people initiate the monarchy or was it God's idea? The answers to these questions will always be the same: "These and those are the words of the living God." The ability to accept the idea that two contradictory accounts are two perspectives that complement each other and create a single, all-inclusive truth, is the basis for understanding the "*bechinot*" method, and for that matter, the entire Torah.

(Translated by David Strauss)

^{6[6]} This is also implied by a comparison to Aramaic, where the root *n-g-d* means *m-sh-kh*, and *nagda* is *mashkhukhit*, the animal that walks at the head of the flock (see *Bava Kama* 52b).

