

# The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

The Book of Shmuel  
Yeshivat Har Etzion

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## LECTURE 18: CHAPTER 10 (PART II)

### MAKING SHAUL THE KING

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#### I. THE REBUKE

Shmuel gathers all of Israel to Mitzpeh, and opens the assembly with sharp words of rebuke, in which he repeats the main ideas that he had expressed in chapter 8:

...Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all the kingdoms that oppressed you. (19) But you have this day rejected your God, who Himself saves you out of all your calamities and your distresses; and you have said unto Him: I[1] Only set a king over us... (18)

Scripture does not record another revelation of God to Shmuel, besides what is recorded in chapters 8 and 9. Of course, it is possible that there was another such revelation that was not recorded in Scripture. But it is also possible that Shmuel is combining together two prophecies that had been received on two entirely different occasions. The first part of his rebuke is very reminiscent of the words of the man of God after the people of Israel cried out to God because of Midyan, before God sent Gidon to save them:

**Thus says the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of slaves; and I delivered you out of the hand**

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[1] I *Shmuel* 8:19 states: "Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Shmuel, and they said, No: but we will have a king over us." In light of this the Radak says here about the verse, "'And you have said unto Him (*lo* with a *vav*): Only set a king over us': "Some understand the word [*lo*] as if it were written with an *alef* (*no*), because the letters *alef-heh-vav-yod* are interchangeable." Later, however, he cites the Aramaic translation of Yonatan, which he understands as having added the word "no" based on I *Shmuel* 8:19. It is possible, however, that Yonatan had the reading: "And you have said unto Him (*lo* with a *vav*): No (*lo* with an *alef*), set a king over us."

**of Egypt, and out of the hand of all those that oppressed you,** and drove them out before you, and gave you their land, and I said to you, I am the Lord your God, fear not the gods of the Emori, in whose land you dwell; but you did not obey My voice. (*Shoftim* 6:8-10)

The almost identical wording, together with the fact that here the message is brought in abridged form, supports the notion that Shmuel opens with words that had already been stated in the past, and joins to them the words of God that he himself received in chap. 8 (vv. 7-8):

For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not be king over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, in that they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto you.

Inasmuch as God compares Israel's request for a king to Israel's idolatry at different points in time since the Exodus from Egypt, there is full justification to use the same wording that had been used on those occasions in our context as well. In this way Shmuel strengthens the comparison between the request for a king and the idolatry that Israel had practiced over the generations.

It is possible that this is also the reason for holding the gathering specifically in Mitzpeh. Radak writes: "There was an altar and a house of prayer." The choice of Mitzpeh might, however, have additional significance. The last time that the people of Israel had gathered in Mitzpeh was for the grand repentance assembly described in chap. 7,2[2] in the course of which they went out to war against the Pelishtim and defeated them under Shmuel's leadership. These events, which were part of the Shmuel's ideal leadership, should have been engraved in the memories of the people of Israel. Shmuel might have wanted to stir up these memories, in order that the people should internalize the idea that their fate would not be determined by a monarchical regime, but by their walking in the path of God.

## II. THE LOTS

After opening with words of rebuke, Shmuel moves on to the choosing of a king. Shmuel does not inform the people whom has been chosen king, and the selection is done by way of a lot:

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[2] There (Lesson 11, note 3) I discussed why Mitzpeh is regarded as an assembling stage "before God."

So Shmuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Binyamin was taken.

And he brought the tribe of Binyamin near by their families, and the family of the Matrites was taken; and Shaul the son of Kish was taken...<sup>3[3]</sup> (20-21)

Why did Shmuel use this method? Radak explains: "For had Shmuel said to them: 'Shaul will be king over you,' the other tribes would have been envious, if he were not picked by way of the *Urim ve-Tumim*." According to Radak, choosing the king in this manner demonstrated that it was not Shmuel but rather God Himself who chose the king.

This method may have been adopted for another reason as well. Two main types of lotteries are found in Scripture. In one type of lottery, there is no specific significance to the choice itself, but a particular group must be matched to particular laws that will apply to its components, without there being any clear reason for that correspondence. This type of lottery includes the lottery involving the two goats, one for God and one for Azazel (*Vayikra* 16:8-10), the lottery for assigning the tribal territories in the book of *Bamidbar* (26:55-56 and elsewhere), and the lottery for dividing up the priestly *batei av* (*I Divrei Ha-yamim* 24:5). A second type of lottery is used to reveal a specific identity, and this type includes the lottery found in our story.

All the other instances of casting lots of this second type have negative connotations. It is by way of lots that Akhan was identified as the one who took from the devoted property in Jericho (*Yehoshua* 7:14-18). This is also the way that Yonatan the son of Shaul was identified as the one who violated Shaul's oath when he tasted of the honeycomb (*I Shmuel* 14:41-42). And this is also the way that Yona was identified as bearing responsibility for the tempest that threatened the ship (*Yona* 1:7). Using a method that is generally associated with uncovering a guilty party might very well have been meant as a criticism of the very process of choosing a king.

### III. THE CHOSEN PARTY

Quite surprisingly, once Shaul is "picked," nobody is able to find him:

...But when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they asked of the Lord further, Is there yet a man come hither? And the Lord answered,

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<sup>3[3]</sup> Here three lots are drawn - tribe, family, and person - whereas in the story of Akhan, there are four stages - tribe, family, *bet av*, and person (*Yehoshua* 7:16-17; though the Septuagint here too has a lot within the family of the Matrites). Radak writes: "There is an abridgement here, because first he brought forward the males of the Matrite family, and then Shaul was selected." It is possible that in the story of Achan, there was a desire to emphasize the *bet av*, as bearing part of the responsibility, whereas here the *bet av* is irrelevant, as was already stated earlier, "And who is their father?"

Behold, he has hid himself among the baggage.<sup>4[4]</sup> And they ran and fetched him thence; and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. (21-23)

Shaul's behavior can be interpreted in two ways, as we already saw in earlier lectures. On the one hand, we can appreciate Shaul's modesty, the fact that he does not push himself ahead, and that he tries to the best of his ability to avoid being chosen. I already discussed the significance of this quality, precisely in the first king of Israel, as giving expression to the importance attached to a king conducting himself with appropriate humility.

On the other hand, Shaul's conduct displays inordinate modesty that is unbecoming a king. It is reasonable to assume that the entire situation – the king hiding himself among the baggage – took the people by surprise, and presumably Shaul's body language radiated bashfulness and lack of confidence. The people must have stood astounded before their chosen leader, and their silence brought Shmuel to encourage them by calling out: "See you him whom the Lord has chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?" (v.24). It is only in the wake of this declaration that the people shouted: "Long live the king." But it immediately became apparent that the people were split into two groups:

And Shaul also went to his house to Giva; and there went with him the men of valor, whose hearts God had touched. But certain base fellows said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no present. But he was as one that held his peace. (26-27)

There is a clear division here between the "good guys" ("the men of valor, whose hearts God had touched") and the "bad guys" ("the base fellows") who did not bring him a present.<sup>5[5]</sup> But we must not ignore the fact that Shaul's conduct was an important factor that caused this division. The chapter's concluding words, "But he was as one that held his peace," can also be understood not only to Shaul's credit as reflecting his modesty, but also to his discredit as pointing to excessive modesty unbecoming a king. The *midrashim* already disagree about this. On the one hand, the Gemara states (*Yoma* 22b):

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Why was Shaul punished? Because he forewent the honor due him. As it is stated: "But certain base fellows said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no

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<sup>4[4]</sup> The phrase, "*nechba el ha-kelim* - hidden among the baggage," became a common Hebrew expression, denoting a bashful person. In its original context it seems to relate to a storage area for the profane equipment that was not to be brought into the sanctuary. See, for example, I *Shmuel* 17:22: "And David left his baggage in the hand of the keeper of the baggage"; 25:13; 30:24.

<sup>5[5]</sup> As opposed to the three people on their way to Bet-El, who even before they knew about Shaul's appointment to the monarchy, gave him two loaves of bread (vvs. 3-4). Radak writes: "It was the custom to bring a present to the king on the day that he rose to the throne."

present. But he was as one that held his peace."

On the other hand, it is stated in *Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer (parasha 10)*:

Rabbi Yannai said: Scripture mentions twelve good traits of Shaul. First, he was modest. As it is stated: "Am I not a Binyamini" (I *Shmuel* 9:21). Second, he heard his disgrace and remained silent. As it is stated: "But certain base fellows said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no present. But he was as one that held his peace." What is "as one that held his peace"? As one who was unaware.

It seems that these two *midrashim* complement each other. Modesty is indeed a positive quality, but not in the case of a king. A king is expected to act assertively, and not forego the honor due him, when restraint is liable to impair his rule.

#### IV. THE SUCCESSION OF EVENTS

We can now discuss several difficulties in the juxtaposition of our story to the previous story at the beginning of the chapter. There are two main difficulties. First, despite all that was said above regarding Shaul's modesty, certain points still require clarification: Why did Shaul hide himself among the baggage? Did he not know that he would be chosen as king? How can this conduct be reconciled with what was stated above: "God gave him another heart... and the spirit of God came mightily upon him" (I *Shmuel* 10:9-10)? What did Shaul gain through his hiding?

Moreover, at the beginning of the chapter, Shmuel sends Shaul on his way, informing him of the signs that he would encounter, and even mentioning a future meeting between them in Gilgal (v. 8). Why did Shmuel not mention the gathering in Mitzpeh? Why didn't Shmuel and Shaul plan out the event?

And furthermore, the verses imply that Shmuel himself did not know whether or not Shaul had arrived in Mitzpeh – "Therefore they asked of the Lord further, Is there yet a man come hither?" It is very difficult to assume that Shmuel would have "wasted" using the lottery had he known that Shaul was present. What does all this mean?

In light of what was proposed earlier (see Lesson 16), everything makes sense. I noted that there is not one story about the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, but two: one describes the event from a negative perspective on the idea of monarchy, and that

begins in chap. 8; the second describes the event from a positive approach to the institution, and that begins in chap. 9, and continues into chap. 10 until verse 16.

It seems then that the section that we studied in this lecture is not a direct continuation of the positive perspective reflected in the beginning of the chapter. The negative attitude toward the idea of monarchy that is expressed in these verses is absolutely clear, and it was already noted that Shmuel repeats what he had stated in chap. 8, that the request for a king constitutes a rejection of God. It seems then that this section continues from the end of chap. 8, and describes what happened from a negative perspective on the monarchy.

This is the way to understand the order of the passages. At the end of chap. 8, God commands Shmuel: "Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king" (v. 22). Shmuel then turns to the people and says to them: "Go you every man to his city." As was already noted, these words imply that the obligation to find a king was cast upon Shmuel. This account continues with the verses before us: After a certain time, Shmuel gathers the people to Mitzpeh in order to crown a king as he had been commanded. Since this account continues the negative perspective on the monarchy, from its perspective all that is stated in chap. 9 and in the first half of chap. 10 never took place. According to this account, Shmuel did not yet know who would be chosen as king, and Shmuel and Shaul had not yet met. Accordingly, neither Shmuel nor Shaul knew the lottery results in advance. Shaul hid himself among the baggage, because he never imagined that his name would be chosen by the lottery. And Shmuel, who had never met Shaul, was forced to ask: "Is there yet a man come hither?"<sup>6[6]</sup> According to this account, this is also the reader's first encounter with Shaul, and this seems to be the reason that it is only here that Scripture describes Shaul as "Shaul son of Kish."<sup>7[7]</sup>

Thus both accounts reach the point that Shmuel and Shaul have already met, and both of them mention Shaul's unique physical trait, his exceptional height. In both accounts we find the same complexity regarding Shaul's modesty. In the positive account of the monarchy this complexity finds expression in chap. 9, when Shaul appears to be modest and humble in relation to his lad, but at the same time to be dragged along after him. In the negative account of the monarchy it is manifest in the combination of Shaul's modesty with

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<sup>6[6]</sup> In this way, it is also possible to reconcile the difference between chapters 9 and 10 regarding Shaul's genealogy. In chap. 9 (vv. 1-2), Shaul's lineage is spelled out in detail: "Now there was a man of Binyamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Aviel, the son of Tzeror, the son of Bekhorat, the son of Afia, a Binyamini, a mighty man of valor. And he had a son, whose name was Shaul...." In chapter 10, on the other hand, it says: "And he brought the tribe of Binyamin near by their families, and **the family of the Matrites** was taken; and Shaul the son of Kish was taken." "The family of the Matrites" is not mentioned at all in chapter 9. This difference is understandable if we assume that we are dealing with two different accounts.

<sup>7[7]</sup> Were this a continuation of what was stated in chap. 9, it would have sufficed to say, "And Shaul was taken," for we already know who he is.

the ease with which he foregoes the honor due him. Both accounts present Shaul as meeting the Torah's requirements for kingship, but at the same time allude to the point of weakness that underlies all of his failures (which later in the book will also be described from both perspectives, as we shall see below).

(Translated by David Strauss)

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