

THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

LECTURE 30: CHAPTER 16 (PART I)

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID AS KING

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This year, we will continue to study the book of *Shmuel I*, from chapter 16 and on. For those who participated in last year's series, this course will directly continue from where we ended off last year. For the new students, chapter 16 is a good place to join, for it opens a new unit in the book that deals in great measure with the figure of David. At certain points, we will rely on our discussions from last year (the lectures are available in the VBM Archives),^{1[1]} but most of what will be said this year will be understandable even to those who are joining only now.

I turn to you, the readers, newcomers and old-timers alike: Please, send in your questions, comments, and thoughts, and help us realize thereby one of the main objectives of this site – to serve as a center for vibrant and lively *Bet-Midrash*-like study. I, for my part, will be happy to relate to every communication.

With my best wishes for a good and fruitful year,

Amnon Bazak

I. "HOW LONG WILL YOU MOURN FOR SHAUL"

Following Shaul's sin in the war against Amalek and the decree issued against him that "The Lord has rent the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you" (15:28), the time arrives to anoint the next king:

(1) And the Lord said unto Shmuel, "How long will you mourn for Shaul, seeing I have rejected him from being king

over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Yishai the Beth-lehemite, for I have provided Me a king among his sons." (2) And Shmuel said, "How can I go? If Shaul hears it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I am come to sacrifice to the Lord.' (3) And call Yishai to the sacrifice, and I will tell you what you shall do; and you shall anoint unto Me him whom I name unto you."

These verses give rise to several difficulties. First, what does God mean when he admonishes Shmuel, "How long will you mourn for Shaul?" What was Shmuel supposed to have done? Second, why does God say, "For I have provided Me a king among his sons," without telling Shmuel whom specifically He has in mind?

From a different perspective, it may be asked: What was Shmuel's concern when he said, "If Shaul hears it, he will kill me?" Surely Shmuel was commanded by God to go! And not only does God not admonish Shmuel for what he said, but He even continues in the same vein and suggests a solution: "Take a heifer with you!"

This last question troubled the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*. Thus, for example, writes the Radak in the wake of *Chazal*:

We find that even when a prophet or a righteous man is assured [safety] by God, he is nevertheless careful not to walk about in a dangerous place, as we see regarding Ya'akov... The reason is that even though the Holy One, blessed be He, performs miracles and wonders for those who fear Him, they are usually governed by the natural course of the world... This was the question: "How can I go;" and God said to him: "Take a heifer with you"... And our Rabbis of blessed memory learned (*Yevamot* 65b) from this verse that there is a *mitzva* to modify a statement in the interest of peace.

That is to say, Shmuel was acting properly when he asked how he could protect himself in a natural manner, for in a situation of danger, one must not rely on a miracle.²[2] From God's answer we learn the allowance to modify a statement in the interest of peace. The difficulty with this explanation lies in the assumption that Shmuel was asking an innocent question, while the tone of the verse implies that it is not a question, but rather an argument that the task that he has been asked to perform cannot be executed.³[3]

It seems, therefore, that the passage should be understood in the manner proposed by Abravanel:

That which Shmuel said: "How can I go? If Shaul hears it, he will kill me," seems to me to be **a false excuse, for Shmuel did not want to anoint anyone during Shaul's lifetime**, and it seemed bitterly wrong to him that he himself should destroy his own handiwork... And, therefore, in order to avoid going, he tried to excuse himself by saying: "How can I go? If Shaul hears it, he will kill me," even though he knew that God would not abandon his pious ones, but always watch over them, and also that Shaul would never cast his hand against God's prophet, and that he loved Shmuel very much, and revered and honored him more than his own father. How then could he kill him?! **Without a doubt, then, it was to avoid going...** And for this reason, God answered him here: "Take a heifer with you," the answer corresponding to the question, appeasing him with words.

The advantage of Abravanel's explanation is that it fits in well with the overall tenor of the chapter and helps us resolve the difficulties mentioned above.

It seems that God's argument with Shmuel, "How long will you mourn for Shaul," was not about the mourning itself, but about the passivity that it caused Shmuel. Surely, Shmuel already knew that Shaul's kingdom had come to an end and that a new king had already been selected.^{4[4]} It might have been expected, then, that the prophet would initiate steps to fix the problematic situation in which, for all practical purposes, there was no king in Israel. For example, Shmuel could once again have assembled all of Israel and chosen a king by lottery, as he had done when Shaul had publicly been appointed to the throne (10:17-24). Shmuel, however, continues his mourning, as if refusing to accept the decree, and does nothing about finding a replacement for Shaul. It is for this reason that God admonishes Shmuel: How can you continue to mourn over Shaul, and show no desire to replace him, when you know that "I have rejected him?" Is it possible that a person's feelings should take precedence over God's thoughts? Therefore, "Go, I will send you to Yishai the Beth-lehemite; for I have provided **Me** a king among his sons" - "Me" and not "him," for the king is chosen exclusively in accordance with Divine vision.

Shmuel does not overcome his grief easily. Like Moshe in his day (as noted by Abravanel later in the passage), he also tries to avoid the task: "How can I go? If Shaul hears it, he will kill me." Shmuel knows that Shaul poses no danger to him, and "without a doubt it was to avoid going." God responds to him in kind, and pushes aside his evasion: "Take a heifer with you."

II. "BUT THE LORD LOOKS ON THE HEART"

From now on, two items are on the agenda: First, anointing David, and second, demonstrating to Shmuel that human thoughts must not set aside a Divine decree. It is apparently for this reason that God conceals from Shmuel the specific identity of the designated king, and merely informs him in a general way: "And I will tell you what you shall do; and you shall anoint unto Me him whom I name unto you" (v. 3).⁵

At the first stage, it seems that Shmuel has not yet internalized the lesson:

(6) And it came to pass, when they were come, **that he beheld** Eliav, and said, "Surely, the Lord's anointed is before Him."

Shmuel does not wait for the word of God, but decides on his own, based on human considerations, that the person standing before him is God's anointed one. We now come to the main idea of the section:

(7) But the Lord said unto Shmuel, "Look not on **his countenance** (*mar'ehu*), or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for it is not as man **sees** (*yir'eh*): for man **looks** (*yir'eh*) on the outward appearance (*yir'eh*), but the Lord **looks** (*yir'eh*) on the heart."

A human being only sees what is evident to his eyes, which does not necessarily attest to the inner nature of the person he is looking at. God alludes to Shmuel that his mistake here is a repetition of the mistake that he had made with respect to Shaul, about whom it was stated: "From his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people" (9:2); "he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward" (10:23) – but in the end it turned out that "I rejected him." Once again, Shmuel is impressed by Eliav's height and appearance from a human perspective, when God has "rejected him."

Chazal expanded upon this criticism with respect to an earlier remark of Shmuel:

Similarly it says: "Then Shaul drew near to Shmuel in the gate... And Shmuel answered Shaul, and said, 'I am the seer'" (9:18-19). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: You are the seer? I will tell you that you do not see. When did He tell him this? When He said to him: "Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Yishai the Beth-lehemite,

for I have provided Me a king among his sons." What does it say? "And it came to pass, when they were come, that he beheld Eliav, and said, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him.'" The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Did you not say, I am the seer? "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him." (*Sifrei, Devarim 17*, ed. Finkelstein, p. 30)

The criticism is formulated as a response to what Shmuel said at the time that Shaul was anointed, "I am the seer," but it is clearly not directed solely at that, but also at Shmuel's general attitude, which was very sympathetic to Shaul, but stemmed from external appearances.

The distinction between Shmuel's attitude toward Shaul at the time of his anointing and his attitude toward David is also evident:

Then Shmuel took the vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, **and kissed him**, and said, "Is it not that the Lord has anointed you to be prince over His inheritance?" (9:1)

Then Shmuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren. (16:13)

This parallel emphasizes the warm personal relationship that Shmuel had with Shaul, a relationship that proved in the end to have been a mistake. The anointing of David closes the circle.

III. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE ANOINTING OF DAVID AND THE BINDING OF YITZCHAK

As we have seen previously in the book of *Shmuel*, Scripture chooses another way to reinforce its criticism of Shmuel's conduct: a parallel that it draws to another biblical story – this time, the binding of Yitzchak. I wish to note the points of similarity between the two stories:

1) In both stories, God sends a person to perform a certain task in a particular place. Avraham is told: "Take now your son, you only son Yitzchak, whom you love, and **go** you **to** the land of Moriya" (*Bereishit 22:2*), and Shmuel is told: "Fill your horn with oil, and **go**, I will send you **to** Yishai the Beth-lehemite" (*Shmuel I 16:1*).

2) In both cases, something is taken for the purpose of offering a sacrifice:

Take now your son... Yitzchak... and offer him there for a burnt offering. (*Bereishit* 22:2)

Take a heifer with you, and say, "I am come to sacrifice to the Lord."
(*Shmuel I* 16:2)

- 3) In both cases, a certain detail is not spelled out during the first stage:

And offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains **which I will tell you of.** (*Bereishit* 22:2)

And call Yishai to the sacrifice, and I will tell you what you shall do; and you shall anoint unto Me him **whom I name unto you.** (*Shmuel I* 16:3)

- 4) In both stories, emphasis is placed on the fact that the final choice is in the hands of God:

My son, God will **provide Himself** a lamb for a burnt offering.
(*Bereishit* 22:8)

For I have **provided Me** a king among his sons. (*Shmuel I* 16:1)

In general, the root *resh-alef-heh* appears many times both in the story in *Bereishit* (22:4, 8, 13, 14) and in our story (16:1, 6, 7, 12).

The points of similarity sharpen the differences between the two accounts. Avraham is asked to give God that which is dearer to him than anything else, and he does so without hesitation. When he passes this great trial, it becomes evident "that you fear God" (*Bereishit* 22:12), and the place where he passes the test he calls "**The Lord will see**" (*Hashem yir'eh*) (ibid. v. 14). Shmuel, on the other hand, tries to get out of the mission that had been cast upon him, and he does not accept God's will as an absolute command. He tries to decide for himself what God has chosen, and is made to understand: "For it is not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but **the Lord looks** (*Hashem yir'eh*) on the heart.^{6[6]}

IV. "OF BEAUTIFUL EYES, AND GOODLY TO LOOK UPON"

The end of the section testifies to the fact that the clear message has been internalized. After God admonishes Shmuel, Yishai continues to make his

sons pass before him. But now Shmuel emphasizes that the choice lies not in his own hands, but in the hands of God:

(8) Then Yishai called Avinadav, and made him pass before Shmuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this." (9) Then Yishai made Shamma to pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this." (10) And Yishai made seven of his sons to pass before Shmuel. And Shmuel said unto Yishai, "The Lord has not chosen these."

At this point, Shmuel's trial becomes more difficult, for after it had become clear that none of the seven sons was chosen by God, Shmuel appeared as if he had troubled Yishai for no reason. Shmuel, however, believes that a solution still exists, and therefore he turns to Yishai:

(11) And Shmuel said unto Yishai, "Are here all your children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and, behold, he keeps the sheep." And Shmuel said unto Yishai, "Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he comes here."

Indeed, David is brought before Shmuel:

(12) And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and of beautiful eyes, and goodly to look upon...

The problem seems to have been solved. No doubt remains that the young lad is God's chosen one, for he is the last of Yishai's sons. Moreover, this lad is also "of beautiful eyes, and goodly to look upon." There is no apparent reason for waiting - Shmuel must quickly anoint him.

Shmuel, however, seems to freeze. It is easy to guess what thoughts must have been racing through his mind. On the one hand, if this is the last of Yishai's sons, he clearly must be the one whom God had in mind. On the other hand, even though David was "of beautiful **eyes** (*einayim*), and goodly **to look upon** (*ro'i*)," it had already been made clear to him that only "man looks on the **outward appearance** (*yir'eh le-einayim*)!" Shmuel therefore waits for God's guidance, as he had been commanded. This waiting is so striking that God is forced to bring it to an end: "And the Lord said, 'Arise, anoint him; for this is he.'"^{7[7]} The lesson seems to have been well absorbed.

Indeed, as the story ends, the correspondence between Shmuel and Avraham reappears:

So Avraham returned to his young men, **and they rose up and went** together to Be'er-Sheva. (*Bereishit* 22:19)

So Shmuel **rose up and went** to Rama. (*Shmuel I* 16:13)

Appendix: How many Brothers did David Have?

A question may be raised regarding the makeup of David's family. Our chapter explicitly states that Yishai had eight sons, David being one of them:

(10) And Yishai made seven of his sons to pass before Shmuel...

Similarly, it is stated explicitly in the next chapter:

(12) Now David was the son of that Efratite of Beth-lehem in Yehuda, whose name was Yishai; and he had eight sons... (14) And David was the youngest; and the three eldest followed Saul.

The book of *Divrei Ha-yamim* records different information:

And Bo'az begot Oved, and Oved begot Yishai, and Ishai begot his firstborn Eli'av, and Avinadav the second, and Shim'a the third, Netan'el the fourth, Raddai the fifth, Ozem the sixth, **David the seventh**. (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 2:12-15)

To resolve this difficulty, the commentators raised various suggestions:

1) Rashi (*Shmuel I* 17:2) writes that one of the sons mentioned in our chapter died without children, and therefore he is not mentioned in the genealogical list in the book of *Divrei Ha-Yamim*.

2) The commentary on *Divrei Ha-yamim* attributed to Rashi suggests that the eighth son is Elihu, who is mentioned later in *Divrei Ha-yamim* – "Of Yehuda, Elihu, one of the brothers of David" (ibid. 27:18). He is not mentioned in the genealogical list because "he now found the pearl, and therefore did not count the eighth [son],

Elihu" (commentary to *Divrei Ha-yamim I 2:15*).^{8[8]} This explanation is, of course, very forced, for the book of *Shmuel* emphasizes that David was the youngest son.^{9[9]} If we reject this understanding, it is possible that Elihu should be identified with Eli'av, Yishai's firstborn.

3) The Radak writes there that Yishai's eighth son was from a different woman, and therefore he is not included in the genealogical list in *Divrei Ha-Yamim*. In our chapter, all of Yishai's sons are listed in age order.

We cannot prove which of these explanations is factually accurate, and therefore we can adopt Rashi's understanding or that of the Radak. It seems, however, that the main point in this regard is not the practical issue, but rather the idea behind the description in *Divrei Ha-yamim*. This idea seems to be connected to the general tendency found in the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, as it was defined many times in the commentary attributed to Rashi throughout the book: "For the entire book was written in honor of David and his descendants" (commentary to *Divrei Ha-yamim I 3:6* and in many other places). This being the case, it is not surprising that *Divrei Ha-yamim* describes David as the seventh son, for this number adds stature and honor, as we find in the *midrash*:

All sevenths are dear forever... Among the lands, the seventh is dear... Among the generations, the seventh is dear: "Adam, Shet, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalal'el, Yered, Chanokh" (*Divrei ha-Yamim I 1:1-3*), and it is written: "And Chanokh walked with God" (*Bereishit 5:24*). Among the patriarchs, the seventh is dear: Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Levi, Kehat, Amram, Moshe, and it is written: "And Moshe went up to God" (*Shemot 19:3*). Among the sons, the seventh is dear, as it is stated: "David the seventh" (*Divrei ha-Yamim I 2:15*).

(Translated by David Strauss)

10[1] <http://www.etzion.org.il/vbm/tanach.php>, under the heading "*Shiurim Be-Sefer Shmuel*."

11[2] See the words of the *gemara*: "But surely Rabbi Elazar said: Those sent on pious missions will meet no evil! Where injury is prevalent, it is different. As it is stated: 'And Shmuel said, How can I go? If Shaul hears it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take a heifer with you, etc.'" (*Pesachim* 8b).

12[3] The word "*eikh*" ("how") usually denotes a negation of the proposed idea and introduces a rhetorical question. For example: "There is none greater in this house than I; neither has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. **How** (*eikh*), then, can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (*Bereishit* 39:9); "For **how** (*eikh*) shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? Lest I see the evil that shall come on my father" (*ibid.* 44:34); "**How** (*eikh*) then should I hold up my face to Yo'av your brother?" (*Shmuel I* 2:22).

13[4] As he was told to tell 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" (15:28).

14[5] This wording brings to mind Shmuel's command to Shaul, "Seven days shall you tarry, till I come unto you, and tell you what you shall do" (10:8), which was also a test for Shaul, as was explained in lecture no. 23. Regarding this comparison, see M. Garciel, *Encyclopedia Olam Ha-Tanakh, Shmuel I* (Jerusalem-Ramat Gan, 1985), p. 150.

15[6] These are the only two instances in Scripture of the combination "*Hashem yir'eh*."

16[7] This may be alluded to by the break in the middle of the verse: "And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and of beautiful eyes, and goodly to look upon; And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him; for this is he."

17[8] That is to say, when Scripture reached the "pearl" – i.e., the seventh son, David – it was no longer concerned about completing the list of Yishai's sons and counting Elihu.

18[9] The Radak brings this explanation in the name of the *midrash* and solves the problem in a midrashic manner: "And that which it says, 'And David was the youngest' – since he would diminish himself, he is called the smallest."
