

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

**The Book of Shmuel
Yeshivat Har Etzion**

LECTURE 23: CHAPTERS 13-14

THE FIRST WAR AGAINST THE PELISHTIM (PART II)

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IV. "SEVEN DAYS SHALL YOU TARRY

In the previous lesson we saw the many difficulties facing Shaul in his first war as king of Israel against the Pelishtim. We noted the enormous gap in size between Shaul's tiny army and the huge forces of the Pelishtim, and the fact that Shmuel ordered Shaul to assemble in Gilgal, which put him at a distinct strategic disadvantage. We explained that the first war of the first king of Israel was purposely conducted under these conditions, in order to emphasize that in all of Israel's wars it is God who determines the outcome, and that victory in battle will only be achieved if the king and the people are found worthy.

To the difficulties already noted we should add the great test that Shmuel set before Shaul, when he alluded to him in the past about the expected war:

And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto you, to offer burnt-offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace-offerings; seven days shall you tarry, till I come unto you, and tell you what you shall do. (I *Shmuel* 10:8)

It is reasonable to assume that at the time of the command Shaul did not understand the enormous difficulty that he would have in fulfilling it, and the great test that Shmuel was setting before him. This test fits in with the purpose of the entire war: emphasizing the need for total submission to the Divine command, out of recognition that the outcome of the war is entirely in God's hands, even when the command is difficult to fulfill and contradicts strategic logic.

And indeed in actual practice fulfillment of the command becomes more difficult from one minute to the next. The nation – presumably worried enough already about a war that seems to be hopeless – does not wholly stand up to the test, and the first signs of desertion begin to appear:

When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait - for the people were distressed - then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in holds, and in pits. Now some of the Hebrews had gone over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilad; but as for Shaul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. (6-7)¹[1]

In order to make the test even harder, Shmuel waits until the very last moment before arriving. He waits until the seventh day, and Shaul, who had promised the people that Shmuel would arrive on that day, finds himself in a very difficult situation:

And he tarried seven days, according to the time that Shmuel [had appointed]²[2]; but Shmuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. (8)

Here Shaul's test reaches its climax: Will he put his trust in God and his prophet Shmuel,³[3] and manage to hold on to the people for a little longer, or will he surrender to the objective pressure from the outside and the subjective pressure from the inside, and go out to war on his own without waiting for God's command?

V. "AND HE OFFERED THE BURNT-OFFERING"

And Shaul said, Bring me the burnt-offering and the peace-offerings. And he offered the burnt-offering. And it came to pass that, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt-offering, behold, Shmuel came; and Shaul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. (9-10)

Scripture emphasizes the tragic irony in Shaul's failure: Shaul wants to offer a burnt-offering and peace-offerings before going out to battle; he manages only to offer the burnt-offering, and Shmuel arrives. Thus, Scripture emphasizes that had Shaul waited a few

¹[1] Unless specified otherwise, all references to verses in this lecture are to I *Shmuel* 13.

²[2] According to all the commentators, the verse is abridged. Rashi explains: "according to the time that Shmuel set [*sam*]," in the sense of "that Shmuel said to him." It is possible that Rashi uses the word '*sam*' (rather than *amar lo* [Radak], *higbil lo* [Ralbag], or *natan* [Rid]), because this word could have been swallowed up by the next word '*Shmuel*.' As we see below, v. 20: "*Va-yerdu kol Yisrael ha-Pelishtim* – which might mean: "*Va-yerdu kol Yisrael el ha-Pelishtim*."

³[3] Shmuel already proved the connection between the offering of sacrifices and victory in war: "And as Shmuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Pelishtim drew near to battle against Israel; but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Pelishtim, and discomfited them; and they were smitten down before Israel" (I *Shmuel* 7:10).

minutes longer, he would have succeeded in fulfilling his mission. On the threshold of success, Shaul loses faith, and as a consequence, he loses the monarchy.

The story, however, does not end here. At this point Shmuel offers Shaul the opportunity to explain his actions: "And Shmuel said, What have you done?" (v. 11). Shaul response is comprised of three different answers:

And Shaul said,

- (1) Because I saw that the people were scattered from me,
- (2) and that you came not within the days appointed,
- (3) and that the Pelishtim assembled themselves together against Michmas. Therefore said I, Now will the Pelishtim come down upon me to Gilgal, and I have not entreated the favour of the Lord; I forced myself (*va-etapek*⁴[4]), and offered the burnt-offering. (vv. 11-12)

The common denominator of the first two answers is the fact that Shaul points his finger at others: at the people and at Shmuel. The third answer, however, conceals an ideological argument: Shaul did not wait for Shmuel because he feared that the Pelishtim would begin the battle and he would no longer be able to offer a sacrifice.

Shmuel does not relate in substantive manner to any of Shaul's arguments. All that he does is inform Shaul that he has lost his kingdom:

And Shmuel said to Shaul, You have done foolishly; you have not⁵[5] kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you; for now would the Lord have established your kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now your kingdom shall not continue; the Lord has sought⁶[6] him a man after His

4[4] The meaning of the word *le-hitapek* in Scripture is sometimes the very opposite of its contemporary usage (refraining from doing a certain action, despite the desire to do it). As the Radak says: "The term *hitapek* always denotes forcing oneself to go against one's desire." Shaul means to say that he was forced to offer sacrifices against his will. Today we would say that Shaul did **not** *mitapek*, but rather brought a sacrifice.

5[5] Radak understands the word "*lo*" in its plain sense, as "not," that is to say, as a rebuke that Shaul failed to keep God's commandment. It is reasonable to assume however that the word should be understood in the sense of "*lu*" – "had you kept the commandment of the Lord your God" - because the end of the verse, "for now would the Lord have established your kingdom..." is difficult to understand if *lo* means "not" [a clause that continues with "*ki ata...*" is usually a condition opening with the word "*lu*"; see *Bamidbar* 22:29; below 14:30), or with the negative conditional term "*lulei*" (see *Bereishit* 43:10; *ibid.* 31:42)].

According to Radak, it might be that the clause must be read twice, first as a negation, and then again as a condition, so that the verse means: "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you; for had you kept the commandment of the Lord your God, now would the Lord have established your kingdom upon Israel for ever." Regarding the possibility of reading a clause in Scripture twice, in two different senses, see Rashbam, *Bereishit* 36:2.

6[6] The use of the past tense - "*bikesh*" (sought) - is strange, and can be understood in two different ways: Radak understands that it refers to the future: God will seek a man after His own heart, and appoint him to be prince over His people. But it is possible to understand that it refers to the past – to the selection of Shaul himself, and the verse notes God's disappointment that He had sought a man of

own heart, and the Lord has appointed him to be prince over His people, because you have not kept that which the Lord commanded you. (13-14)

Scripture itself, however, expresses its position regarding Shaul's ideological argument, through its allusion to another incident, which is similar to the incident before us, namely, the sin involving the Golden Calf.

VI. THE PARALLEL TO THE SIN OF THE GOLDEN CALF AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS CORRESPONDENCE

There are many similarities between the two stories:

- 1) In both stories, we are dealing with the expected arrival of a leader – Moshe or Shmuel^{7[7]} - whose delay arouses concern among the people:

And when the people saw that Moshe delays to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aharon, and said to him, Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; for as for this man Moshe, who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. (*Shemot* 32:1)

And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Shmuel [had appointed]; but Shmuel came not to Gilgal... Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you came not within the days appointed. (I *Shmuel* 13:8-11)

- 2) In both stories, there is a leader of secondary importance – Aharon or Shaul – who is pressured by the people and who succumbs to that pressure.
- 3) The parallel wording found in the account of the offering of the sacrifices in the two stories is especially interesting:

And they rose up early on the morrow, **and offered (*va-yagishu*) burnt offerings.** (*Shemot* 32:6)

His own heart and appointed him as prince, but the appointment was unsuccessful, inasmuch as the chosen prince did not keep God's commandment.

^{7[7]} I dealt at length with the many parallels between Shmuel and Moshe in previous lectures, especially in chap. 3 (lecture no. 6) and chapters 7-8 (lectures 11-12).

Bring (*hagishu*) me the burnt-offering and the peace-offerings. (I *Shmuel* 13:9)

These are the only two instances in Scripture in which the root *n-g-sh* is used in connection with peace offerings.

4) In both stories the leader arrives in the end and reprimands the secondary leader with a similar rhetorical question:

And Moshe said to Aharon, **What has this people done** to you? (*Shemot* 32:21)

And Shmuel said, **What have you done?** (I *Shmuel* 13:11)

5) The secondary leader justifies his action before the principal leader, by casting blame on the people:

And Aharon said, Let not the anger of my lord burn; you know **the people**, that they are bent on mischief. (*Shemot* 32:22)

And Shaul said, Because I saw that **the people** were scattered from me. (I *Shmuel* 13:11)

The secondary leader also alludes to the principal leader's responsibility for the debacle because of his tardiness:

For they said to me, Make us gods... for as for this Moshe... we know not what became of him. (*Shemot* 32:23)

And that you came not within the days appointed. (I *Shmuel* 13:11)

It seems that this entire comparison comes only to compare Shaul's sacrifice to the sacrifice brought before the Golden Calf. A sacrifice's value is based on one and only one thing: the fact that God commanded that the sacrifice be offered. When a person offers a sacrifice in clear violation of the Divine command, his sacrifice is no different than a sacrifice to the Golden Calf. Shaul's justification for his action demonstrates a lack of basic understanding of the world of *mitzvot* in general, and sacrifices in particular.^{8[8]}

^{8[8]} Shaul will later repeat this mistake. In his war against Amalek (chap. 15) Shaul justifies his failure in leaving the best of the sheep and the oxen in the hands of the people with these very same excuses: First, he shifts the blame on to the people: "For the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen... But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the devoted things... because I feared the people, and hearkened to their voice" (15:15-24). And then he provides an ideological

To conclude this issue, I wish to emphasize one point. Many prophets warned about a situation in which Israel brought sacrifices as commanded, but at the same time committed all kinds of sins, between man and God and between man and his fellow man.^{9[9]} Shaul's twofold sin was a little different, and even more severe than the phenomenon railed against by the prophets. The prophets warned about offering sacrifices as commanded – which in itself is something positive, but loses its meaning when it is not accompanied by appropriate religious behavior. In the case of Shaul, in contrast, we are dealing with the offering of **forbidden** sacrifices, because the very bringing of sacrifices – without waiting for Shmuel as he had been instructed to do – was problematic. Here Shaul's transgression was even more grievous than the evil practices of Israel, because his approach severed not only his specific action from his general conduct, but also his specific action from God's command. In order to emphasize the severity of this outlook, Scripture chose, through a literary device, to allude to the incident involving the Golden Calf – the root of Israel's sins throughout the generations.^{10[10]}

VII. THREE COMPANIES

Shmuel harshly rebukes Shaul and then departs, leaving Shaul all by himself:

And Shmuel arose, and got him up from Gilgal unto Giv'at-Binyamin. And Shaul numbered the people that were present with him, about six hundred men. And Shaul, and Yonatan his son, and the people that were present with them, abode in Giv'at-Binyamin; but the Pelishtim encamped in Michmas. (15-16)

Shaul's presence in Gilgal radiates a feeling of helplessness. His army, which at the beginning of the chapter had numbered three thousand men – to which were added more men of Israel – was now reduced to six hundred.^{11[11]} In contrast to his active role in the war against Ammon, and in contrast to the atmosphere of revolt appearing at the beginning of the chapter, now Shaul does not take any positive initiatives. It is the Pelishtim who take the initiative:

answer: "They have brought them from the Amalekites... to sacrifice unto the Lord your God... But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the devoted things, to sacrifice unto the Lord your God in Gilgal" (ibid. 15-21). As opposed to what we find in our chapter, there Shmuel rejects both arguments, as we shall see below.

^{9[9]} See, for example, *Yishayahu* 1:10-17; *Yirmiyahu* 7:21-23; *Hoshea* 6:6; *Amos* 5:21-25; *Mikha* 4:6-8; *Tehillim* 51:18-19.

^{10[10]} According to Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (*Kuzari*, I, 97), one of the key elements in the Sin of the Golden Calf was serving God in a way that He had not commanded.

^{11[11]} The number "six hundred" may be a typological number used in connection with a Scriptural battalion, as we find in many places; see: *Shoftim* 3:31; 18:11; I *Shmuel* 26:2; II *Shmuel* 15:18.

And the spoilers came out of the camp of the Pelishtim **in three companies**: one company turned unto the way that leads to Ofra, unto the land of Shu'al; and another company turned the way to Bet-Choron; and another company turned the way of the border that looks down upon the valley of Tzevo'im toward the wilderness. (17-18)

This stands in stark contrast to the war against Ammon in chapter 11. There is was Shaul who employed the very same tactic:

And it was so on the morrow, that Shaul put the people **in three companies**; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and smote the Ammonites until the heat of the day.... (I *Shmuel* 11:11)

It is evident then that the spirit of God that had accompanied Shaul in his war against Ammon was gone. Shaul is left now with no help from God, and since he is hesitant by nature (as we saw earlier in this series), he lacks the driving force that is needed in order to go out to war against the Pelishtim.^{12[12]}

Fortunately for Israel, God did not abandon His people during this battle. The deliverance that Shaul was unable to provide was brought by Yehonatan, as we shall see in the next lecture.

(Translated by David Strauss)

12[12] The chapter concludes with a dismal account of the weaponry in the hands of Israel, and the absolute Pelishti control over the metal industry in *Eretz Yisrael*, as we saw in the previous lesson: "Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel; for the Pelishtim said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears" (v. 19). For this reason, the people of Israel were forced to go down to the Pelishtim when they had to sharpen their agricultural tools: "But all the Israelites went down to the Pelishtim, to sharpen every man his plowshare, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock" (v. 20).

Scripture continues: "And the price of the filing was a *pim* for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks with three teeth, and for the axes; and to set the goads" (v. 21). The word "*pim*" is, of course, difficult, and creates a difficulty in understanding the entire verse. (See Rashi, ad loc., who understands the word as the plural of *peh*.) In the archeological excavations a weight marked as a "*pim*" was uncovered (see *Encyclopedia Mikra'it*, s.v. *middot u-mishkalot*, vol. 6, pp. 870-871). This discovery allows us to understand the word "*pim*" in this verse as referring to a coin of that weight. The Pelishtim exploited the situation and charged an especially high price for sharpening the Israelites' tools.