

THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

LECTURE 35: CHAPTER 18 (PART I)

DAVID IN SHAUL'S HOUSE

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I. The Relationship Between Shaul and Yonatan

In the previous chapter, I noted the similarity between David's stance of firm trust in God in the face of Golyat, who enjoyed superior strength and battle experience, and Yonatan's stance in the previous campaign against the superior arms and larger forces of the Pelishtim (chapter 14), which was also based on great faith in God. As was noted, this similarity is apparently the background for what is stated at the beginning of our chapter:

(1) And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Shaul, that the soul of Yonatan was knit with the soul of David, and Yonatan loved him as his own soul.^{1[1]}

The continuation of the passage displays a unique structure. The passage is comprised of two accounts that present different attitudes toward David: Yonatan's actions, on the one hand, and Shaul's actions, on the other. At this stage, Shaul has not yet begun to manifest hostility toward David, but Scripture presents Yonatan's reaction to David's deeds, which expresses whole-hearted love, and the reaction of Shaul, who exploits David for his own needs, in an integrated manner, comparing one to the other. It is easy to see the contrast between the two accounts when we separate the two elements:

Yonatan's reaction	Shaul's reaction
(1) ... that the soul of Yonatan was knit with the soul of David, and Yonatan loved him as his own soul.	
	(2) And Shaul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.
(3) Then Yonatan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. (4) And Yonatan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his apparel, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle. ^{2[2]}	

	(5) And David went out; wherever Shaul sent him, he had good success; and Shaul set him over the men of war...
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What stands out in Shaul's attitude toward David is his aggressiveness: "And he would let him go no more home to his father's house" – implying that David remained in Shaul's house against his will. Moreover, this passage ends with the words: "And it was good in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Shaul's servants" (v. 5) – a description that emphasizes the fact that in the eyes of one person, David was not good: He was good in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Shaul's servants – but not in the sight of Shaul himself.

From here we learn that, from the very outset, Shaul had difficulty relating to David in an appropriate manner. On the one hand, there is no doubt that during the campaign itself and immediately thereafter Shaul values David, who had saved Israel, and in great measure saved Shaul himself from disgrace. At the same time, however, Shaul reveals his jealousy of David, who had the faith and confidence to do what Shaul himself dared not do. For this reason, Shaul relates to David from the very beginning in an aggressive and domineering manner, and he has difficulty seeing him in a favorable light. It will not be long before Shaul's feelings rise to the surface.

II. "Shaul Has Slain His Thousands, and David His Ten Thousands"

Scripture moves now from the campaign's effects on Shaul and Yonatan to the campaign's effect on the people, as it finds expression in the women's singing:

(6) And it came to pass as they came, when David returned from the slaughter of the Pelishti, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing,^{3[3]} to meet king Shaul, with timbrels, with joy, and with three-stringed instruments. (7) And the women sang one to another in their play, and said, "Shaul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

Women going out to welcome victorious soldiers is a well-know phenomenon.^{4[4]} The novelty here is the song that the women sing, the meaning of which is not entirely clear. What do they mean when they attribute the slaying of thousands to Shaul, and ten thousands to David? The Radak proposes two possible ways to understand this song:

- 1) Shaul slew thousands of Pelishtim, whereas David slew ten thousands

of them.

- 2) With his thousands and with his ten thousands – that is to say, when Shaul strikes the Pelishtim, he strikes by himself as if there were thousands with him, and David by himself strikes the Pelishtim as if there were tens of thousands with him.

Both explanations share the understanding that the women intended to magnify David's deeds in relation to those of Shaul. There is, however, a certain difficulty with this approach: The women went out "to greet king Shaul," and not David. Thus, it is difficult to assume that they consciously intended to insult Shaul.

It seems, therefore, that from the women's perspective, there was no intention whatsoever to present David as if he had done more than Shaul. The song is constructed in accordance with a literary device that has no quantitative implications. On the contrary, the women opened with Shaul, whom they saw as the central figure. We find other verses constructed in this manner:

And five of you shall chase a **hundred**, and a hundred of you shall put **ten thousand** to flight.^{5[5]} (*Vayikra* 26:8)

How should one man chase a **thousand**, and two put **ten thousand** to flight. (*Devarim* 32:30)

A **thousand** shall fall at your side and **ten thousand** at your right hand. (*Tehillim* 91:7)

These verses indicate that we are dealing with a common literary device: a statement emphasizing great numbers, made up of two clauses, the first mentioning a thousand (or a hundred, as in the first example), and the second – ten thousand, without showing any preference to the second clause over the first.

In any event, Shaul interprets the song as if it shows preference to David over himself:

(8) And Shaul was very wroth, and this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands; and all he lacks is the kingdom!"

It seems that two things brought Shaul to this faulty interpretation. First, Shaul reveals his main problem in a most direct manner when he says: "And all he lacks is the kingdom!" David gave no hint whatsoever of a desire to be king, nor did the women in their song consider the possibility of a regime change. Shaul, however, is haunted by Shmuel's prophecy: "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). And it stands to reason that Shaul's heart already tells him that this courageous lad standing before him is in fact the subject of that prophecy. Second, as we saw above, Shaul's complex attitude toward David did not begin now; Shaul's erroneous interpretation of the song can be understood against the background of the hidden jealousy that nested in his heart for quite some time. In any event, this song brings Shaul to a conscious conclusion regarding his attitude toward David:

(9) And Shaul eyed David with hostility from that day and forward.

III. From Hostility To Fear

The relationship between Shaul and David did not remain at the level of hostility on the part of Shaul. It did not take long before another feeling stirred in his heart in the wake of the chain of events that were unfolding. The first event transpires in Shaul's house:

(10) And it came to pass on the morrow, that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Shaul, and he raved in the midst of the house; and David played with his hand, as he did day by day. And Shaul had his spear in his hand. (11) And Shaul cast the spear; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall. And David stepped aside out of his presence twice. (12) And Shaul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Shaul.

The background for this event is Shaul's difficult emotional state. On the one hand, an evil spirit once again rests upon him, but at the same time we find the word *va-yitnabe* (translated here as "and he raved"). It was already explained in chapter 16 (lecture no. 31) that the term *hitnab'ut* denotes spiritual preparation for receiving prophecy. Someone who had been accustomed to receiving prophecy and all of a sudden this experience is removed from him is likely to experience severe emotional distress. Shaul tries to release his frustration and distress by injuring David with his spear. This difficult situation also displays irony: in the previous chapter, it was repeatedly emphasized that Golyat had a spear in his hand (17:7[2], 45, 47), whereas Shaul was unable to muster the courage to go out and challenge him with his own spear; now, in the bitterness of his soul, Shaul deems it right to turn his spear on David.

To understand what is happening here, it should be added that Shaul appears to have concealed his intentions. Let us compare what is stated here and what is found in the next chapter:

And an evil spirit from the Lord was upon Shaul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand; and David was playing with his hand. And Shaul sought to smite David even to the wall with the spear; but he slipped away out of Shaul's presence, and he smote the spear into the wall; and David fled, and escaped that night. (19:9-10)

In chapter 19, Shaul is acts in an overt manner – "And Shaul sought to

smite David even to the wall with the spear;" in our chapter, Shaul has not yet reached this level. He tries to injure David in such a way that will look like an accident: "And Shaul cast the spear; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall." Moreover, in chapter 19 David slips away from the spear and it hits the wall with force – "he smote the spear into the wall" – whereas in our chapter it is merely stated that "David stepped aside out of his presence twice." It seems that in our chapter Shaul casts his spear haphazardly, and David – perhaps even without noticing – moves his body in such a way that the spear does not hit him. This explains why in our chapter David continues to live in Shaul's house, whereas in the next chapter he runs away that very night. Only when there is no longer any doubt that Shaul intends to kill him does David understand that he has no alternative but to run for his life.

It is, however, precisely because David survives the indirect attempts on his life that a new feeling takes hold of Shaul:

(12) And Shaul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Shaul. (13) Therefore, Shaul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people.6[6]

It is reasonable to assume that David barely survived the attempts at his life, and that the only logical explanation for David's having emerged unscathed was that "the Lord was with him." In light of the fact that, on the one hand, God was with David, and, on the other hand, He had departed from Shaul (as was proven once again by his unsuccessful attempt to achieve prophecy), we can understand Shaul's fear. The feeling is strengthening in his heart that it is David who will one day replace him.7[7]

Shaul distances David from him, but David's appointment to an important military role merely exacerbates Shaul's fear of him:

(15) And when Shaul saw that he had great success, **he dreaded** him.8[8]

If earlier Shaul's feelings moved from hostility to fear, now they pass from "fear" to "dread." Shaul sees that David's early successes were not by chance, but that they rather testify to his unique personality and to the fact that God is with him.

In conclusion, we will note that, like the verses at the beginning of the chapter that emphasize the contrast between Yonatan's loving attitude toward David ("And Yonatan **loved** him as his own soul... Then Yonatan made a covenant with David, because he **loved** him as his own soul") and Shaul's

estranged attitude toward him, the middle of the chapter presents a contrast between the people's love for David and Shaul's attitude toward him.

- (15) And when Shaul saw that he had great success, he dreaded him.
(16) But all Israel and Yehuda **loved** David; for he went out and came in before them.

In the continuation of the chapter, we will meet another character who loves David, in contrast to Shaul, who continues to conspire against him.

(Translated by David Strauss)

9[1] This contrasts with the view of the *Metzudat David*, who understands that Yonatan's feelings for David stemmed not necessarily from his personality, but from his lineage, about which Yonatan had reported to Shaul at the end of the previous chapter.

10[2] In the previous chapter (lecture no. 33), I noted the symbolic meaning of this step, which parallels the step taken by Shaul when he gave David his apparel. Symbolism is also to be found in the fact that while in the previous chapter David refuses to wear Shaul's clothing, in our chapter he expresses no opposition to wearing Yonatan's clothing.

11[3] The Radak explains that the word *mecholot* refers to musical instruments, as is implied elsewhere, e.g., by the parallelism in the following verses in *Tehillim*: "Let them praise His name in the *machol*: let them sing praises to him with the timbrel and the lyre" (149:3); "Praise Him with the timbrel and *machol*: praise Him with stringed instruments and the pipe" (150:4). In some places, however, the word has the same meaning as it has today, i.e., dance. This is the plain sense of *Shemot* 32:19: "He saw the calf and the dancing [*mecholot*]," and so it is explicit in *Shoftim* 21:21: "And behold, if the daughters of Shilo come out to dance in the dances [*mecholot*]." It is possible that a particular instrument was used primarily for dances, and the word therefore has two meanings. In any event, by extension, the word is also used to denote "joy:" "You have turned my mourning into joy [*machol*]" (*Tehillim* 30:12); "Our joy [*mecholenu*] is turned into mourning" (*Eikha* 5:15).

12[4] Following the splitting of Yam Suf, it says: "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon, took a timbrel in her hand: and all the women went out after her **with timbrels and with dances**" (*Shemot* 15:20). Similarly, after Yiftach's victory over the Ammonites, it says: "And, behold, his daughter came out to meet him **with timbrels and with dances**" (*Shoftim* 11:34). See also II *Shmuel* 1:20: "Lest the daughters of the Pelishtim rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph."

13[5] *Chazal* were troubled about the different ratios, and expounded as follows, as is brought by Rashi (ad loc.): "But is this the right proportion? Surely it should have stated only "and a hundred of you shall pursue two thousand" [and not ten thousand]! But the explanation is: a few who fulfill the commandments of the Torah cannot compare with the many who fulfill the commandments of the Torah."

14[6] The expression "going out and coming in" (here and in v. 16) is used in Scripture to denote military leadership. See *Bamidbar* 27:17, 21; *Devarim* 31:2-3; *Yehoshua* 14:11-12.

15[7] Over the course of the chapters, I have noted the two-fold account of the initiative to establish a kingdom in Israel and of the kingship of Shaul. In the previous lecture, we saw the blatant contradiction between chapters 16 and 17 as to the manner in which Shaul came to know David, and I demonstrated how these chapters continue the two different perspectives. In our chapter, it is possible to see the continuation of the two accounts. Verses 1-9 constitute a direct continuation of chapter 17 and the victory over Golyat, and they imply that the conflict between Shaul and David stemmed from Shaul's jealousy over the glory enjoyed by David following his defeat of Golyat. These verses relate how David turned from a simple soldier into a captain: "And David went out; wherever Shaul sent him, he had good success; and Shaul set him over the men of war" (v. 5.). Verses 10-15, on the other hand, continue chapter 16, in that they return to David playing music for Shaul. According to this account, the conflict between Shaul and David is not at all connected to the Golyat story, but rather to the evil spirit and to Shaul's frustration over God's being with David and His having departed from him. According to this perspective, David's appointment as captain is not presented as advancement, but rather as a distancing from Shaul: "Therefore, Shaul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand."

In the coming chapters as well, it is possible to discern redundancy that can be explained as part of the two perspectives running through the course of the book. Nevertheless, distinguishing between the two perspectives becomes increasingly more difficult and less clear-cut. For this reason, I shall not be dealing with this aspect any further (apart from short notes for those who are interested).

16[8] For the severity of this expression, see, for example, *Bamidbar* 22:3: "And Moav was **sore afraid** (*va-yagar*) of the people, because they were many: and Moav was seized with dread because of the children of Israel."
