

THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

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LECTURE 104: CHAPTER 21 (PART II)

THE WARS FOUGHT AGAINST THE SONS OF THE GIANT

The next section – the second appendix to the book of *Shmuel*, which has no apparent connection to what came before it (see previous *shiur*) – is comprised of verses 15-22 in chapter 21, which describe four battles between the warriors of David and the four "sons of the giant." This *shiur* will be devoted to this short section, and therefore it will be shorter than usual. The four battles are described with similar language, and note is taken of their chronological order:

1. **(15) And the Pelishtim had war again¹[1] with Israel;** and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Pelishtim; and David waxed faint. **(16) And Yishbi-be-Nov, who was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear²[2] was three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with new armor, thought to have slain David. (17) But Avishai the son of Tzeruya succored him, and smote the Pelishti, and killed him. Then the men of David swore unto him, saying, "You shall go no more out with us to battle, that you quench not the lamp of Israel."³[3]**

1 [1] The word "*od*" (again) is a little strange, as this is the first battle described here. It is possible that this section was originally located after chapter 5 – in other words, is to say, after the first wars of David against the Pelishtim - and from there it was moved to the appendices.

2 [2] The word "*keno*" is obscure; this is the only instance of the word in Scripture. The Radak explains, based on Arabic, that the term refers to the wooden handle of a spear, but the intention is the combined weight of the blade and the handle.

3 [3] This expression, "the lamp of Israel," refers to David, who was the leader of Israel, and Israel walked in his light. Alternatively, the expression refers to the kingdom of Israel in general (*Targum Yonatan*).

2. **(18)** And it came to pass after this, **that there was again war with the Pelishtim** at Gov; then Sibekai the Chushatite slew Saf, who was of the sons of the giant.

3. **(19)** **And there was again war with the Pelishtim** at Gov; and Elchanan the son of Ya'arei-Oregim the Bet-Lechemite slew Golyat the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

4. **(20)** **And there was again war at Gat**, where was a champion, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant. **(21)** And when he taunted Israel, Yonatan the son of Shim'a, David's brother, slew him.

(22) These four were born to the giant in Gat; and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

We must first examine who were these "sons of the giant" – *yelidei ha-rafa*. In the parallel passage in *Divrei ha-Yamim*, the word *rafa* is spelled with an *alef*, rather than with a *heh*. From here we may conclude that the reference is to the children of the Refa'im, who lived on the east bank of the Jordan and were counted among the giants, as is stated in the Torah: "These also are accounted Refa'im, as the giants; but the Moavites call them Emim" (*Devarim* 2:11). In our chapter as well, the giants are portrayed as figures who cast fear on others because of their great size and unusual bodies. Presumably, these giants served as mercenaries in the Pelishti army.

From here, we can understand the importance of this account. In the book of *Yehoshua*, it says:

And Yehoshua came at that time, and cut off the giants from the hill-country, from Hebron,^{4[4]} from Devir, from Anav, and from all the hill-

4 [4] As may be recalled, that giants of Hebron cast their dread on the spies sent by Moshe: "And they went up into the South, and came unto Hebron; and Achiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the children of Anak, were there... And they returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days... And they told him, and said, 'We came unto the land where you sent us... But the people that

country of Judah, and from all the hill-country of Israel; Yehoshua utterly destroyed them with their cities. There was none of the giants left in the land of the children of Israel; **only in Gaza, in Gat, and in Ashdod, did some remain.** (*Yehoshua* 11:21-22)

Yehoshua did not completely remove the giants from the land, and now David and his warriors do so, and in effect complete the conquest of the land.

The account of the first battle is longer than the others because of the drama that it involved. It would seem that in the battle against the giant Yishbi, David himself became caught in a life-threatening situation, and he needed the help of Avishai ben Tzeruya to save him from death. This was a traumatic event for the people of Israel, who established that David would no longer go out to war with them.⁵[5] Why did David get himself into this difficult situation?⁶[6] It seems that Scripture wishes to draw a connection between this story and the previous story, and thereby tie David's ignoring of the corpses of Shaul and his descendants to his entering into a life-threatening situation. According to this, we can understand why in the end David was saved from death, as he had already corrected the wrong and fulfilled his obligation.

Who killed Golyat?

The main problem in this passage is, of course, the famous question as to who killed Golyat. As we know, according to I *Shmuel* 17, it was David who killed Golyat the Pelishti. Here the account is slightly different:

dwelling in the land are fierce, and the cities are fortified, and very great; and moreover we saw the children of Anak there" (*Bamidbar* 13:22-28).

5 [5] Regarding the relationship between what is stated here and what is stated in the war against Avshalom (above 18:2-4), see our *shiur* there.

6 [6] The Radak brings a *midrash* that connects the name Yishbi-be-Nov to the place Nov: "And in the *midrash*: 'Yishbi-be-Nov' – a man who came because of the affairs of Nov, that is to say, that he came because of what had happened in Nov, city of the priests, David being the cause of their death. David was [therefore now] in danger."

(19) And there was again war with the Pelishtim at Gov; and Elchanan the son of Ya'arei-Oregim the Bet-Lechemite slew Golyat the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.^{7[7]}

Who, then, killed Golyat the Gittite? Was it David, or perhaps Elchanan the son of Ya'ari-Oregim? This is an exceedingly difficult problem, and since we do not have a persuasive resolution, we shall content ourselves with several suggestions proposed by others.

Rashi, based on the *midrash*, writes that Elchanan was David himself,^{8[8]} for it says here that Elchanan was from Bet-Lechem, just like David. According to the plain sense of the text, this explanation is difficult, for it is unreasonable to assume that Scripture would have referred to David by an entirely different name without mentioning that the reference is to the central character in the book of *Shmuel*.

Another resolution is brought by R. Yeshaya of Trani, who suggests that there were two people named Golyat, one of whom was killed by David and a second of whom was killed by Elchanan.^{9[9]}

An interesting resolution of this problem is found in the parallel verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim*:

And there was again war with the Pelishtim; and Elchanan the son of Yair slew Lachmi the brother of Golyat the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 20:5)

7 [7] This expression also appears in the story of David's battle against Golyat: "And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam" (I *Shmuel* 17:6).

8 [8] He was called "the son of Ya'arei-Oregim" because "his family wove (*oregim*) the *parokhet* in the Temple, which was called 'a forest' (*ya'ar*)" (Rashi).

9 [9] It may be added that perhaps "Golyat" is not a personal name, but rather a designation for a giant.

According to this formulation, Elchanan did not kill Golyat, but rather his brother, who was named Lachmi (similar to Elchanan himself, who was a Bet-Lechemite). In light of this, the Radak suggests that we understand the verse in *Shmuel* in similar fashion: "And Elchanan the son of Ya'arei-Oregim the Bet-Lechemite slew [him who was with] Golyat the Gittite," that is to say, Lachmi, Golyat's brother.

(Translated by David Strauss)
