

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION  
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)  
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**Fundamental Issues in the Study of *Tanakh***  
**By Rav Amnon Bazak**

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This shiur is sponsored by Aaron and Tzipora Ross and family  
in memory of our grandparents  
Shmuel Nachamu ben Shlomo Moshe HaKohen, Chaya bat Yitzchak Dovid,  
Shimon ben Moshe, and Rivka bat Aharon, z"l  
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**Shiur #7g: *Nusach Ha-mikra* - Accuracy of the Biblical Text**

**G. Proposals for textual amendments (continued)**

1. One of the most common scribal errors is known as the homeoteleuton. It sometimes happens that a section of the text is omitted because a word, or series of words, appears twice in close proximity, and while copying the text the scribe's eye jumps from the first instance of the word(s) to the second, such that the text in between is inadvertently left out.<sup>1</sup>

There are instances in which scholars have proposed amending various verses in the Bible, citing this phenomenon as their justification. For example, during the inauguration of the Temple, Shlomo cites God's words:

"From the day when I brought My nation, Israel, out of Egypt I have not chosen any city out of all the tribes of Israel for the building of a House, that My Name should be there, but I have chosen David to be over My nation, Israel." (*Melakhim I* 8:16)

This verse is seemingly problematic: at first God states that in the past He had not chosen any *city* in which His House was to be built; hence, the logical continuation would seem to be that He has now chosen Jerusalem. Instead, the continuation of the verse speaks of the choosing of *David*. In the parallel chapter in *Divrei Ha-yamim*, the verse appears in more elaborate form and the problem is solved:

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<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon exists not only in the scribal copying of texts, but also in the reading of them. For instance, a well-known halakha pertains to a person who is reciting the "*Shema*" by heart and skips from the words, "And you shall inscribe them upon the doorposts of your home and at your gates," in the first section of the *Shema* (*Devarim* 6:9), to the same words in the second section (*ibid.* 11:20). See *Berakhot* 16a and *Shulchan Arukh*, *Orach Chaim* 64:4.

"Since the day that I brought My people out of the land of Egypt I have not chosen a city out of all the tribes of Israel for the building of a House, that My Name should be there, **nor have I chosen any man to be ruler (*nagid*) over My people, Israel. But I have chosen Jerusalem, that My Name should be there**, and I have chosen David, to be over My people, Israel." (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 6:5-6)

Here God states that in the past He had chosen neither a city nor a king, and that now He has chosen both a city and a king. In light of this parallel, many scholars have proposed that the form of the verse in *Melakhim* is a homeoteleuton, owing to the scribe having mistakenly skipped from the first appearance of the words "that My Name should be there" to the second. Indeed, in the Septuagint the wording of the verse in *Melakhim* is identical to the wording in *Divrei Ha-yamim*.

However, closer inspection reveals the extent to which this proposed amendment is mistaken. In the Books of *Shmuel* and *Melakhim*, the emphasis is on David's choice of Jerusalem, without any Divine intervention, and the fact that the resting of the Divine Presence in Jerusalem was a function of his choice. It is David who chooses Jerusalem as his royal capital (*Shmuel* II 5:6-9), and he decides, on his own initiative, to bring the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem (*ibid.* ch. 6). It is he who raises the idea of building a House for God in Jerusalem (*ibid.* 7:1-2), and God accepts this suggestion – with a slight change: it is not David himself who will build it, but rather his son Shlomo (*ibid.* verses 12-13). In contrast, *Divrei Ha-yamim* states explicitly that the choice of Jerusalem as the site of the Temple is Divinely guided. This guidance is manifest in the halting of the plague that breaks out in the wake of the census ordered by David. In *Divrei Ha-yamim*, the narrative ends with David's understanding that God is hinting to him that the threshing-floor of Ornan is the site destined for the Temple:

"Then the angel of God told Gad to tell David that David should go up and set up an altar to God on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. So David went up at Gad's word which he had spoken in God's Name... And David built there an altar to God, and he offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and he called upon God, and He answered him with fire from the heaven upon the altar of burnt offering... At that time, when David saw that God had answered him at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he sacrificed there... And David said, This is the House of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel." (*Divrei Ha-yamim* I 21:18 – 22:1)

We find that the two versions of Shlomo's prayer – in *Melakhim* and in *Divrei Ha-yamim* – reflect two fundamentally different aspects of the choice of Jerusalem as the resting place for the Divine Presence: human choice and Divine choice. Hence, the attempt at amending the wording in *Melakhim* in accordance

with the wording in *Divrei Ha-yamim* misses the significant message that is embodied specifically in the difference between them.

The idea of amending the text in *Melakhim* to accord with the text in *Divrei Ha-yamim* appears mistaken for another reason, too. According to the version in *Divrei Ha-yamim*, God declares that up until the time of David, He had not chosen "any man to be ruler over My people, Israel." This formulation sits well with the focus of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, which ignores almost completely the reign of Shaul, recording only the story of Shaul's death (*Divrei Ha-yamim* I 10). However, it is difficult to imagine how such an expression could appear in *Sefer Melakhim*, which continues on from *Sefer Shmuel*, where God explicitly defines Shaul as a "*nagid*" (ruler) in his promise to Shmuel:

"Tomorrow about this time I shall send to you a man from the land of Binyamin, and **you shall anoint him as ruler (*nagid*)** over My people, Israel." (*Shmuel* I 9:16)

Likewise, as Shmuel is anointing Shaul he tells him,

"Has God not **anointed you as *nagid* (ruler)** over His inheritance?"

This, then, is an example of a seemingly simple and logical textual amendment which, upon closer examination, may turn out to be mistaken.

2. One of the literary devices adopted by the biblical text in order to convey a certain message is the deliberate omission of a word or series of words in a verse. One example is the openly disdainful attitude of the text towards the son of Shaul, Ish Boshet. Despite his royal status, Ish Boshet is depicted as a weak and almost insignificant character. The "strong man" in the kingdom is Avner, captain of the army and the initiator behind Ish Boshet's coronation. With a view to expressing Ish Boshet's weakness, the text omits his name over and over again, even where this results in verses with peculiar syntax:

"And Shaul had a concubine whose name was Ritzpa, daughter of Aya, and he said<sup>2</sup> to Avner, Why have you come to my father's concubine?" (*Shmuel* II 3:7)

"But he could not answer Avner a word again, for his fear of him." (*ibid.* 11)

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<sup>2</sup> Who is the subject of the verb "said"? At first glance it would seem to be Shaul, but as we know Shaul is already dead, and from the context it is clear that the reference is to Ish Boshet. Ish Boshet was last mentioned by name in the text dozens of verses previously, and thus our expectation is that his name should appear again in this verse. The text deliberately avoids this, so as to emphasize his weakness.

"And when **Shaul's son** heard that Avner had died in Chevron, his hands became feeble and all of Israel were afraid. And **Shaul's son**<sup>3</sup> had two men who were captains of bands..." (ibid. 4:1-2)

The same idea may explain other instances where the biblical text seems to be "deficient." For instance, one of the most difficult verses to explain is, "Shaul was a year when he reigned" (*ben shana Shaul be-molkho*) (*Shmuel I* 13:1). Since no one would suggest that Shaul was one year old when he began to reign, commentators have attempted to offer more "reasonable" interpretations of the verse. Rashi cites *Chazal's* well-known teaching (*Yoma* 22b) that the descriptive phrase "a year (old)" is to be understood metaphorically – "like a one-year old, who had never sinned." He also offers an alternative explanation (suggested also by Radak), representing the "*peshat*" (i.e., on the literal level of the text), according to which the events recounted in the chapter took place during the first year of Shaul's reign. However, the structure of the verse follows the classic pattern of verses introducing the reign of various kings, including both Ish Boshet and David in *Sefer Shmuel* (see *Shmuel II* 2:10; 5:4) and of most of the kings listed in *Sefer Melakhim*: "Y was X years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for Z years over Israel/Yehuda." It is therefore difficult to propose that the expression "Shaul was a year when he reigned..." refers to either the amount of time that he has reigned up to this point, or to his moral character.

How, then, are we to understand the verse? It seems that we must adopt the interpretation of R. Tanchum the Jerusalemite,<sup>4</sup> who proposes that the verse is intentionally written in deficient form, where it should have stated, "*ben X shana Shaul be-molkho*" (Shaul was X years old when he reigned...)<sup>5</sup> Why should this be the case? The conventional view among modern biblical scholars is that Shaul's age was not written clearly in the manuscript from which the scribe was copying, and he had meant to fill in the number from a different source, but never ended up doing so. Thus, the verse, minus Shaul's age, was passed down from generation to generation, without Shaul's age ever being filled in.<sup>6</sup> However, this approach misses the essence of the literary message underlying the unusual formulation. It would seem that through the deficient introductory verse to Shaul's reign, the text seeks from the very outset to hint that Shaul failed in his role, and

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<sup>3</sup> When the biblical text refers to someone by his father's name alone, it usually signifies disdain (see, for example, *Shmuel I* 10:11; 20:31). The expression "Shaul's son" implies a certain scorn towards Ish Boshet.

<sup>4</sup> A 13<sup>th</sup> century commentator and grammarian. Little is known about his life. His original interpretation of the verse is cited by Y. Kiel in the *Da'at Mikra* commentary on *Sefer Shmuel*, Jerusalem 5741, p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, some manuscripts of the Septuagint add the word "*sheloshim*" (thirty), but it is clear that this is a later addition, since this would present a highly unlikely chronology: would it really be possible that by the age of thirty, Shaul could already have a son who defeated the Pelishtim in battle?

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, M. Garsiel, *Olam ha-Tanakh: Shmuel I*, Tel Aviv 1993, p. 117.

that he should not be regarded as a true king. Hence, he is not "deserving" of the standard introductory verse that appears in relation to the other kings of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

3. In Shmuel's parting speech to the nation (*Shmuel* I 12) there are several verses that are written in obscure form, representing prominent and puzzling departures from the clear language characterizing the rest of the book. Examples include the following:

a. the expression, "[It is] God **Who made Moshe and Aharon (*asher asah et Moshe ve-et Aharon*)**, and who brought our forefathers up from the land of Egypt" (ibid. 6);<sup>8</sup>

b. the unfamiliar name that appears in the list of judges that Shmuel mentions: "Yeruba'al and **Bedan**<sup>9</sup> and Yiftach and Shmuel";

c. the condition that is left incomplete: "If you will fear the Lord and serve Him, and obey Him, and not rebel against God's command, and (if) both you and also the king who rules over you will follow the Lord your God.." (ibid. 14);<sup>10</sup>

d. the puzzling word at the end of the verse, "But if you do not obey God, but rebel against God's command, then the hand of God shall be against you **and against your forefathers (*u-va-avotekhem*)**" (ibid. 15);<sup>11</sup>

e. the word '*ki*' which appears redundant in its (first) appearance in the verse, "Turn not astray except (*ki*) after vain things which cannot profit nor save, for they are vain" (ibid. 21).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For another example of the deliberate literary omission of a word in order to convey a certain lesson, see my article, "*Zeman Matan Torah*," *Megadim* 13, 5751, pp. 107-112.

<sup>8</sup> The commentators address this difficulty and propose different interpretations: see Rashi, Radak, and Metzudat David. The language here seems to anticipate the following verse: "... let me plead with you before God concerning all the righteousness which God has done with you (*asher asah itekhem*) and with your forefathers."

<sup>9</sup> Chazal (*Rosh ha-Shana* 25a) maintain that this refers to Shimshon, who was a "son of Dan" (ben Dan), and most of the classical commentators follow this view. However, Radak points out the chronological difficulty that this entails, since Bedan is mentioned in between Yeruba'al and Yiftach, while in *Sefer Shoftim* Shimshon appears after Yiftach. He concludes that although Yiftach preceded Shimshon chronologically, Shimshon was more important and is therefore mentioned before him by Shmuel.

<sup>10</sup> This difficulty leads some of the commentators to explain that the second part of the verse is meant as the outcome: "*then* both you and also the king who rules over you will follow the Lord your God"; i.e., "both you and the king will survive for a long time" (Rashi). However, this interpretation is also problematic, since the word "*vi-hyitem*" does not suggest long-term survival, and the verse seems to suggest that this is a continuation of the condition: "and (if) both you and also the king will follow God..."

<sup>11</sup> Seemingly, the word we would expect to find here would be "*u-ve-malkekhem*" – "and against your king," which would make sense in light of the previous verse. Likewise, later on we read, "But if you continue to act wickedly, **both you and your king** will be swept away" (ibid. 25). It seems that the expression "and against your forefathers" appears here as a result of its appearance in verses 7 and 8, but its significance in our verse is unclear. Radak attempts to solve the problem by explaining the word "*u-va-avotekhem*" as follows: "[The meaning of this word is] like 'and against your king', for the sovereign over a nation is like a father towards a son."

<sup>12</sup> Radak offers two possibilities: a. "Turn not astray from God, for (*ki*) if you turn away from Him you will be turning to vanity – i.e., the gods that cannot profit or save you, for they are vanity"; or b. "Turn not astray to vanity, for (*ki*) they cannot profit or save." Targum Yonatan ignores the word '*ki*' and omits it from his translation of the verse.

Most of these difficulties can be resolved fairly easily by proposing textual amendments, in the wake of the Septuagint, which introduces the following changes:

- a. The word '**ed**' (witness) is introduced before the phrase "God Who made Moshe and Aharon";
- b. "**Barak**" appears instead of "Bedan";
- d. "against you and **against your king**" replaces "...and against your forefathers";
- e. The seemingly superfluous word '*ki*' is omitted.

The conventional view maintains that the text is corrupted and that it should be amended, either in accordance with the Septuagint or in a different manner.<sup>13</sup>

However, in-depth familiarity with the literary style of the Bible would point us in a different direction entirely. Most of the difficulties above arise from the fact that several times in this chapter Shmuel says a word whose proper place is in a different context in the flow of ideas. This is something that often happens when a person is in a state of great excitement or emotion, and speaks without thinking his words through. The text seems to choose this most unique way of depicting Shmuel's inner state as he addresses the nation. It is specifically the preserving of the exact formulation of his speech, with the unusual language that keeps appearing in it, that facilitates its dramatic impression. What the text indicates to us here is that Shmuel's speech is not a pre-planned and well-structured address uttered in a clinical and precise manner. Rather, he speaks from the depths of his heart, with the heat and passion of a concerned leader who fears that his entire life's work is about to be lost. Thus the text records here – as in other instances<sup>14</sup> – not only the words that are spoken, but also the feelings of the speaker, in a direct and unmediated manner.

We might bring support for this idea from an instance in which we are actually aware of two versions of the same speech, an original, clearly articulated formula and the same idea spoken in the heat of the moment. When the prophet Natan sends Bat-Sheva to David in order to prevent the coronation of Adoniyahu, she addresses David with the following words:

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, S. Bar Efrat, *Mikra le-Yisrael – Shmuel I*, Jerusalem 5756, p. 163; M.Z. Segal, *Sifrei Shmuel*, Jerusalem 1964, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Other examples of this phenomenon include David's emotional words of thanksgiving after Natan's prophecy concerning the future building of the Temple and the establishment of the royal dynasty (*Shmuel II* 7:18-29) and the emotional words that the woman of Teko'a addresses to David (*ibid.* 14:13-17).

"She said to him: Please, my lord, you swore by the Lord your God to your handmaid, that 'Shlomo, your son, will reign after me, and he will sit upon my throne.'" (*Melakhim I* 1:17)

And she immediately adds,

"**And now**, behold, Adoniya reigns, **and now**, my lord, the king, (you) do not know it." (ibid. 18)

Seemingly, the second appearance of the word "*ve-'ata*" (and now) should have been spelled with an '*alef*' instead of an '*ayin*,' such that the verse would have read, "**and you**, my lord, the king, do not know it." On the other hand, later on Bat-Sheva says,

"**and you**, my lord, the king – the eyes of all of Israel are upon you, to tell them who shall sit upon the throne of my lord the king after him." (ibid. 10)

This is exactly the opposite situation, where it would seemingly have been more appropriate for the word "*ve-'ata*" (with an '*ayin*' - 'and now') to appear instead of "*ve-ata*" (with an '*alef*' – 'and you').

Radak was aware that the exchange of "*ve-ata*" and "*ve-'ata*" would have been more logical, and was also aware that there existed versions of the text that had indeed introduced these amendments. Nevertheless, he remained committed to the textual version of the manuscripts that he had studied, refusing to accept the amendments. Concerning verse 18 he writes:

"Many scribes have been mistaken concerning this word, and have written it with an '*alef*' since that seemed to make more sense, but it is clear to us that the proper spelling is with an '*ayin*,' both according to the accurate manuscripts and according to tradition."

Commenting on verse 20 he writes:

"This should be '*ve-ata*,' with an '*alef*,' and some have mistakenly written it with an '*ayin*,' since that seems to make more sense."

In this instance we even have evidence of an alternative version: the Targum Yonatan, which appears in the standard printed editions, translates verse 18: "**And now**, behold, Adoniyahu reigns, **and you**, my lord, the king, do not know it." The Septuagint adopts the same editing. Indeed, the Minchat Shai notes: "In a certain old book I found it written "*ve-ata*" (and you), and likewise the Targum Yonatan..." and he refers to the Masoretic note cautioning against this version, written with an '*alef*.'

"In three places [this being one of them] the word '*ata*' is mistakenly read as though written with an '*alef*' instead of an '*ayin*,' [since this version appears to make more sense]."

Here, too, although the seemingly simpler version does have a grounding in ancient manuscripts, the Masoretic version still appears to possess a deeper literary significance. A review of these verses demonstrates that Bat-Sheva deviates from the message that Natan had given her to convey to David:

"Did not you, my lord, the king, swear to your maidservant, saying that 'Shlomo, your son, will reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne' – why, then does Adoniyahu reign?" (ibid. 13)

This message is much sharper than the one that is actually conveyed by Bat-Sheva to David. She dares not accuse David of not keeping his word; instead, she presents the coronation of Adoniyahu as an event that has taken place without David's knowledge. The exchange of "*ve-ata*" with "*ve-'ata*" is a literary expression of the fact that instead of addressing David in what might be construed as an accusatory tone – "and you, my lord, the king, do not know it," she changes her statement – perhaps at the last minute – to "*ve-'ata*," "and now," thereby softening even further any hint of accusation. It is therefore entirely possible that this is not a scribal error in the biblical text, but rather a change that Bat-Sheva herself introduces in her words, reflecting the fear that she feels as she stands before King David, presenting a request that may seal her own fate and that of her son.

Thus, we see that proposals to amend the biblical text may miss various literary messages in the text, and this entails that the greatest degree of caution must be exercised in this area. We shall conclude our discussion with the words of Rabbi Mordechai Breuer:

"There are many places in the Bible that are similar to the two examples cited above. In each instance it appears to the scientific scholar that our text has become 'corrupted'. In each instance one might question whether the scientific proof is absolutely certain, beyond any doubt. However, one is always entitled to postulate that perhaps the scientific hypothesis is in fact correct. But a man of science one will not suffice with this: he will seek the reason for this 'corruption.' And as a believing Jew whose desire is only to study Torah, he will seek the religious significance behind this 'corruption' – transforming it into Torah."<sup>15</sup>

Translated by Kaeren Fish

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<sup>15</sup> Rabbi M. Breuer, "*Emuna u-Mada be-Nussach ha-Mikra*," p. 91.