



# "AL HAPEREK"

## A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

### Shmuel Perakim 7-8

Under Shmuel's leadership, the nation triumphs over the Philistines, and a sense of normalcy is restored. However, Shmuel's sons do not follow in his ways, leading to even stronger demands for a monarchy.

### General Overview < "וַיִּקְרְאוּ בְּסֵפֶר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים"

#### Perek 7

- ❶ In chapter 7, the Philistines wage war against Israel, and once again the "help stone" (אבן העזר) is mentioned (4:1, 7:12). See 4:3, 5, 10-11 and 7:2 and 10. Pay attention to the literary and conceptual connections between the two chapters. Is it possible to look at the second battle as a 'correction' (תיקון) of the first?
- ❷ Shmuel, the son of Channah, teaches the nation that powerful prayer can change one's reality (5-6). How does Shmuel teach the nation the expansive power of prayer?

#### Perek 8

- ❸ At the end of chapter 7, Shmuel is portrayed as a leader deeply connected to his people, while in chapter 8, Shmuel's sons are portrayed as leaders completely alienated from their people (7:15-17; 8:1-3). In your opinion, what message emerges from the text regarding inherited leadership? See also 2:11-13, 22-25.
- ❹ Twice in this chapter, the people ask for a king (5, 19-20), and in one additional time Shmuel refers to their request (6). What are the different aspects of kingship expressed in each of these verses? Which aspect does Shmuel's response emphasize?
- ❺ The book of Devarim (17:14-20) lists the restrictions imposed by Torah law on a king. The book of Shmuel (8:11-17) mentions both restrictions placed on the king and demands the king can impose on his people. Compare these two sections and examine the differences in their respective descriptions of kingship.

## In-depth Study < "מִפְּרֹשׁ וְשׁוֹם שְׁכָל"

- 6 "And Shmuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Beth-el, and Gilgal, and Mizpah; and he judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah, for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar unto the Lord." (7:15-17). What do these verses teach us about Shmuel's involvement in the lives of the people? Examine the following midrash which elaborates on this idea:

"Moshe and Shmuel are both equal, but how do Moshe and Shmuel compare [to each other]? Moses would enter and come before God to listen to speech, but with Shmuel, God came [to him]. Moshe would sit, and people who wanted judgment would come to him, but Shmuel went to towns throughout Israel and judged the people in their own cities" (Shemot Rabbah 16:4).

- 7 There is a debate among commentators whether kingship is in its essence a positive institution, or only allowed as a concession to the nation's desire, and whether appointing a king is even a positive commandment at all according to Torah law. See the following sources which discuss the appointment of a king. How is Shmuel's reaction to the nation's request better understood in light of these comments?

Devarim 17:14-20: "When you come unto the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you will possess it, and will dwell in it, and you will say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are round about me'; you will in any case set him king over you, whom the Lord your God will choose; one from among your brothers will you set king over you; you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses; forasmuch as the Lord has said to you: 'You shall henceforth return no more that way.' Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be, when he sits upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them; that his heart be not lifted up above his brothers, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left; to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children, in the midst of Israel."

**Tosefta Sanhedrin 4:** Rabbi Yehuda says, "Three commandments were commanded to Israel upon their entering the Land: They were commanded to appoint a king, to build for themselves a capital city, and to destroy the seed of Amalek. If so, why were they punished in the days of Shmuel? Because they performed them too soon." Rabbi Nehorai says, "This episode was related only because of resentment, as it says (Devarim 17:14), "And you will say, 'I will set a king over me.'" Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Yossi says, "The elders asked correctly, as it says (I Shmuel 8:6), "Give us a king to rule over us," but the nations of the land returned and ruined it, as it is said (8:20), "that we may also be like all the nations."

**Commentary of the Ran on Torah:** "To rule us like all the nations." Because they wanted their laws drawn from the side of the king and not from the side of the judges of the Torah. If they had simply asked for a king and said, "Make us a king..." there would not have been found in this a sin that they committed, but rather a positive commandment (*mitzvah*).

**Abarbanel, Shmuel 8:6:** The text says, in my opinion, that at the end of days, after Israel dwelt in the land, which was permitted them through the graciousness of God upon them, they will be ungrateful when they ask for a king to rule over them, not out of necessity but rather to be like the nations that have kings to rule over them. That is to say, it will be from foolishness, that when Israel was fighting the wars of the conquest, they did not ask for a king, which would have been a more appropriate time [for this request]. But after they inherited the land and divided it and dwelt in it in safety, and all this was under the supervision of the Almighty, without a king and without the necessity for one, to say "I will set a king over me." This is "like all the nations all around me," that is to say, not of necessity nor from any other purpose, and when this happens, they should not crown the king based on their own will, but rather [they must crown] ". . . the one whom God chooses." And this is the true, actual commandment, to "Set a king over you, whom the Lord your God will choose," not that this was what Israel was commanded, [but] that Israel asked for a king. According to this, the commandment depends on a voluntary situation; that is to say, when you want to do this (even though it is not ideal), do it only in this manner . . . This is similar also to the section: "When you will beget children, and children's children . . . and shall deal corruptly, and make a graven image . . ." (Devarim 4:25), neither is this a commandment, but rather it is the work of the evil inclination, and the end of the matter is (4:30) "you will return to the Lord your God," but this is a positive commandment to repent of this voluntary situation, that when you sin, "you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice."

## Appendix < "וַיְבִינּוּ בַּמִּקְרָא"

At Mitzpah, he [Samuel] assembled the people as the spiritual congregation of Israel before surrounding the clarion call of battle. Notice that Samuel acted in what appears to be a foolhardy and irresponsible manner, frittering away time that he may have employed to assume a defensive posture against the ascending Philistine forces. In verse 7, the people express awareness that the Philistines are gaining on them. At that point, it would have seemed reasonable to suspend their revival meeting and prepare for fight or flight. But no; Samuel—by the force of his personality, by the dint of his leadership—controlled the crowd and brought them to the point where they intuitively understood what the Children of Israel did not realize when standing in crisis on the shores of the Red Sea. At that auspicious moment, it was Moses who explicitly stated: "God will fight on your behalf and you shall remain silent?" (Exod. 14:14) [author's translation]. In our story, Samuel brought the Children of Israel to a remarkable degree of intuitive spiritual self-awareness. It is they who initiated the request that he entreat God on their behalf.

Let me stress this point. It is Samuel's greatest achievement that he does not submit to the fears of the people or to the pressures of the situation; rather he used the urgency of the hour to transform the nation's desperation into a sublime moment of spiritual rebirth. He held them in a position of prayer before God until the very last instant, forcing them to great heights of belief and trust in the Lord. That faith was rewarded. Thunder resounded from heaven as God dramatically smote the Philistines, manifesting the clearest recorded case of supernatural intervention on the part of the Almighty in any of the battles of the Judges. Samuel saved the nation's soul and, by doing so, also saved them from the tyranny of their enemies.

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