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Nach Yommi

COMPANION

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Volume I:

Neviim Rishonim - Early Prophets

Section C:

Shmuel Alef - I Samuel

II Sammuell

Chapter 1

Elkanah's Wives, Chana and Peninah

There was a man named Elkanah, who was Levite from Mt. Ephraim. Elkanah had two wives; Chana (Hannah) had no children, but Penina did. When Elkanah would bring a sacrifice, he would always give Chana an extra portion, but it was small consolation. Peninah would make snide comments that only made Chana feel worse.

Chana was at the Mishkan (Tabernacle) in Shiloh and she prayed to Hashem from the pain in her soul. She said that if Hashem gave her a son, he would be dedicated to Hashem all his life as a Nazirite (like Samson). Eli, the Kohein Gadol (High Priest) saw Chana praying. She was crying and moving her lips, but not making any sounds, so he thought she was drunk. Chana disabused him of this notion, so he blessed her that G-d should grant her prayer.

Soon after, Chana conceived and had a son, whom they named Shmuel (Samuel), meaning "requested from G-d." When the child was weaned, she brought him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh and reminded Eli of what had transpired, as well as that the child was dedicated to the service of G-d.

This chapter, which is read as the Haftarah on the first day of Rosh Hashana, is well known and full of meaningful lessons. We'll share just one here: Peninah was a righteous woman, who intentionally provoked the childless Chana in order to motivate her to prayer. Even though it worked, Peninah was still punished severely for her insensitive behavior. Pure motivations do not excuse cruel means.

Chapter 2

I Am Sam. (Sam I Am.)

When Chana brought Shmuel to the Tabernacle, she sang a song of praise to Hashem that is full of prophetic meaning. As with Deborah's song in Judges, there's no way a synopsis can do it justice, so make sure you read it for yourself.

Shmuel remained with Eli in the Tabernacle, to be trained in the service of Hashem. Eli was assisted by his two sons, Chofni and Pinchas. Chofni and Pinchas are described by the Navi as "lawless" because they abused their authority. They used force and intimidation to take portions of sacrifices beyond those to which they were entitled. Eli got wind of the people's complaints against his sons and chastised them, but it was too little, too late. They kept on with their evil behavior, but as they were declining, Shmuel's star was rising.

G-d sent a prophet (possibly Elkanah) to Eli with a dire message. Because of his sons' behavior, the hereditary position of High Priest would be removed from Eli (a descendant of Aaron's son Itamar) and given to another branch of Aaron's descendants. Furthermore, none of Eli's descendants would live to see old age. The sign G-d gave was that Chofni and Pinchas would die on the same day. (The merit of Torah study and mitzvos could mitigate the curse; descendants of Eli were among the sages of the Talmud - see Rosh Hashana 18a.)

Chapter 3

Go Back to Sleep!

One night, G-d called to Shmuel. Shmuel wasn't training to be a prophet, so he didn't know what he was hearing. He assumed it was Eli calling him. Eli said, "I didn't call you" and sent Shmuel back to bed. G-d called a second time; once again, Shmuel ran to Eli, who again dismissed him. The third time this happened, Eli realized what was going on and he instructed Shmuel how to answer.

G-d told Shmuel that He was going to fulfill the curse against Eli's family. Shmuel was hesitant to tell this to Eli, but Eli said, "So may G-d do to you if you withhold any detail from me," so Shmuel felt compelled to tell him all. To his credit, Eli accepted G-d's judgment as just. Meanwhile, Shmuel acquired his reputation as a prophet.

Chapter 4

Raiders of the Lost... ah, you know!

Israel went to war against the Philistines. The Jews lost the battle, so they brought the Ark out to the battlefield. The Philistine forces became scared that G-d Himself had joined the fray, but their leaders encouraged them to be brave.

The Philistines won this battle, too. Eli's sons, Chofni and Pinchas, were both killed (on the same day, as per the prophecy), and the Ark was captured.

A Benjaminite (possibly Saul) carried word to Eli of the battle's outcome. He tried to break it to him slowly, but the news of his sons' death and the Ark's capture was too much for him; he fell off his chair, broke his neck and died.

Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Pinchas, was pregnant. When she heard all these things, she went into labor. She had a son and called him "Ichabod," meaning "there is no more honor" because of all the calamities that had occurred. She died as a result of her difficult labor.

Chapter 5

God: 5, Dagon: 0

Having captured the Ark from the Jews, the Philistines took it to the city of Ashdod and put it in the house of their idol, Dagon, who was possibly in the form a merman. The logic behind this move was that the “gods” would probably enjoy hanging out together. The next day, however, the Philistines found the idol of Dagon face down on the floor. They righted it, but the next day it was again fallen, only this time its head and hands were severed. The Philistines sanctified the place where the idol had fallen.

Seeing that the Philistines were a stubborn lot and just not getting the message, G-d sent the people of Ashdod a message that was harder to miss. He struck the entire city and its suburbs with hemorrhoids, a painful and embarrassing condition. The people of Ashdod responded by forwarding the Ark to the city of Gath. G-d struck Gath with even worse hemorrhoids, so they sent it to Ekron. The people in Ekron started to die as a result of the affliction, so the Philistine rulers gathered together to plan a course of action. They decided that it might be a better idea to get rid of the Ark altogether.

Chapter 6

You Can't Make This Stuff Up

The Philistines asked their priests what to do about the fiasco with the Ark. They didn't say to send it back, but they did say, IF they were going to send the Ark back, a gift should be included to appease G-d. The gift was five golden hemorrhoids and five golden mice, to represent the plague and mice which were destroying the Philistine land. (The mice were not mentioned previously. Some commentators say that the mice would chew on the people's hemorrhoids or enter the people's bowels - see Rashi on 5:5 and Radak on 6:4.) The Ark and the golden statuettes were placed on a new wagon that was hitched to two nursing cows. (The cows would not be inclined to leave their young unless led by G-d.) The Philistines sent representatives to follow the wagon to Beis Shemesh in Israelite territory. The cows went straight there.

When the Jews saw the wagon with the Ark approaching, there was great rejoicing. They chopped up the wagon for firewood and offered the cows as a sacrifice to G-d. But some of the people disrespectfully looked into the Ark and were killed by G-d. (The text is unclear as to whether it was 50,000 people who were each worthy of being one of the 70 Elders of Israel, or 70 Elders each of whom was equal to 50,000 commoners, or perhaps 70 Elders AND 50,000 regular people. In any event, it was not a good thing.) The people of Beis Shemesh became too scared to host the Ark, so they asked the people of Kiryas Ye'arim if they would come and take it. (Contrast this with the Philistines, who just shipped it off to the next city. The Philistines attributed the plague to an inherent destructive force within the Ark itself and treated it like a “hot potato.” The Jews attributed it to their own unworthiness and sought more appropriate hosts for the Ark.)

Chapter 7

Discombobulating the Philistines

The people of Kiryas Ye'arim took the Ark and put it in the house of a man named Avinadav, where it would reside for twenty years. Shmuel then presided over a national teshuvah movement. ("Teshuvah" means repentance, or a return to G-d.) The Jews discarded their idols and turned to G-d.

At a national gathering in Mitzpah, the Philistines attacked the nation. The people cried out to Shmuel to pray for them. He did and G-d sent thunderous noises that so discombobulated the Philistines that they were easily defeated. Shmuel established a monument to the event and called it "even-ezer," meaning "the rock where G-d helped us."

After this, the Philistine threat subsided and they remained in the background for the duration of Shmuel's tenure as a Judge. Shmuel was an exceptional Judge, traveling the country to go to the people, rather than expecting them to come to him. Unfortunately, the rigors of his self-imposed routine made him old before his time.

Chapter 8

King Me!

Having grown old because of the rigors of his job, Shmuel appointed his sons to assist him. They turned out to be unfit for the job; they took bribes and judged dishonestly. The Elders approached Shmuel and said that since he was getting too feeble to handle the task, and since his sons were unfit successors, he should appoint a king. G-d told Shmuel not to take it personally; the people were not rejecting Shmuel's leadership, but G-d's own! (When they requested this, they said "give us a king, like all the other nations," which was an improper motivation. Because of this, their first king would be a temporary ruler, rather than the permanent Davidic dynasty.)

Shmuel didn't like the Jews' request and tried to discourage them by relating all the powers a king would exercise, including taxation and confiscation of property. But the people would not be swayed and G-d told Shmuel to do as they asked.

(That the nation would eventually demand a king is foretold by the Torah in Deuteronomy chapter 17.)

Chapter 9

Dude! Where's My Donkey?

A man from the Tribe of Benjamin named Kish had a tall, handsome son named Shaul (Saul). One day, Kish's donkeys went missing, so he sent Shaul and a servant to go look for them. Shaul traveled far and wide, but he didn't find the donkeys. After a while, Shaul suggested that they return home, as by this point his father would probably be more worried about the search party than about the animals. (In his modesty, Shaul said to his attendant, "my father must be worried about us," including the servant, rather than "about me.") The attendant pointed out that they were not far from Shmuel's residence in Tzuf and suggested they go to him for guidance.

They got directions from some local girls, who engaged Shaul in conversation because he was so good-looking. They informed Shaul that Shmuel was presiding over a sacrifice and directed him to the location of the altar. (At this point, subsequent to the destruction of the Tabernacle and prior to the construction of the Temple, private altars were permitted.)

The day before, G-d had spoken to Shmuel, telling him that Shaul would arrive and that he would be the man Shmuel should anoint king of Israel.

Shaul arrived and asked for Shmuel. Shmuel identified himself and told him not to worry about the donkeys, as they had been found. As an aside he added, "Why are you so worried about some donkeys when the entire wealth of the nation lies before you?" This comment was confusing to Shaul, who considered himself a member of a minor family from the smallest Tribe. Shmuel then gave Shaul a seat at the head of his table and had Shaul served a portion of great honor. (The portion had been set aside for Shaul, as G-d had told Shmuel to expect him.) Shaul stayed overnight and the next morning, Shmuel gave him instructions from G-d.

(Thanks to Aliza Libman Baronofsky, from whom I stole for the title of the synopsis.)

Chapter 10

The Adventures of Saul in the Coat Room

Shmuel anointed Shaul with oil - the commentators differ as to whether this was the shemen hamishcha, the special oil prepared by Moses, which was used to anoint the kings of the Davidic dynasty. Then, Shmuel gave Shaul three signs. First, he would meet two men who would tell him that his lost donkeys were found, and that his father was now looking for him. Next, Shaul would meet three men, bringing kids, loaves of bread and a jug of wine for sacrifices. He was to take the bread that would be offered him. Finally, he would meet a band of prophets and would, himself, be overcome by a spirit of prophecy and become "a different person." After all these signs came to pass, Shaul was to go to Gilgal, where he would be joined by Shmuel, who would offer sacrifices.

All of these things came to pass. When Shaul was prophesying with the prophets, he was seen. The sight amazed the people who coined an expression, "Saul is one of the prophets now?"

Shaul returned home and was met by his uncle. He told his uncle that Shmuel told him the donkeys had been found, but he didn't say anything about being made king.

Shmuel called a gathering at Mitzpah, where he announced that he was going to publicly anoint the king they had demanded. He drew lots Tribe by Tribe, family by family, until he came to Shaul, son of Kish. But when they called his name, the modest Shaul was hiding among the luggage. The people were impressed by the tall, handsome Shaul and proclaimed him their king. Shmuel repeated all the laws of the King, then sent them home. Some lowly people denigrated Shaul, saying he was unfit. He heard, but he let his natural humility win out. He is actually criticized for this, as a king may not forego the honor due him (see Talmud Yoma 22b, end).

Chapter III

What Am I, Chopped Oxen?

Nachash, ruler of Ammon, attacked the city of Yaveish. They asked for a pact, in which case they would agree to serve him. He said, "One condition - each of you must put out his right eye." (The commentators explain this to symbolically refer to a number of things, for example dissolving the Sanhedrin.) The people of Yaveish asked for a week's time. They then sent messengers to get help.

When the people heard of the attack, they wept. Shaul came in from plowing his field (according to Radak, still not acting like a king!) and asked what the commotion was. When he heard what occurred, he took charge. He cut two oxen into pieces and had them sent throughout the land, saying that's what would be done to the oxen of anyone who doesn't join the fight. (This may superficially resemble what the Levite did with his concubine's body at the end of the Book of Judges, but you can see from the text that the intention of the two acts was very different. The Levite meant to shock people with "Look what they did!" Shaul meant to rally the people and to send a message of "united we stand, divided we fall.")

330,000 troops gathered and they sent word to Yaveish that they would be saved by the next afternoon. The people of Yaveish told Nachash, "We're coming to you tomorrow." Nachash took that to mean they would surrender the next day, so he was unprepared for attack.

Shaul divided his forces into three companies, which entered the Ammonite camp at dawn. They routed the Ammonites and the few survivors scattered. The Jews were so inspired by Shaul's leadership that they wanted to execute those who had bad-mouthed Shaul for their treasonous slander. Shaul refused to have anybody executed on a day on which Hashem had wrought such a victory. Instead, they retired to Gilgal, where they crowned Shaul again, this time unanimously. They offered sacrifices to Hashem and rejoiced there.

Chapter 12

The Rain in Israel Falls Mainly on the Wheat

Now that Shaul had been crowned king, Shmuel was ready to withdraw from his role as Judge. (He would still serve as prophet, but he was no longer the head of the government or the military.) Shmuel asked if anyone had any complaints against him; nobody did. Shmuel then reminded the people that it was G-d Who sent Moses and Aaron, and Who saved them from Egypt. But when the nation forgets G-d, He allows foreign powers like Sisera and the Philistines to oppress them. However, when the people return to G-d, he sends redemption through great leaders (and less-than-great leaders). Here Shmuel named the lesser Judges: Gideon, Samson and Yiftach. The Talmud in Rosh Hashana, daf 25b, top, says that these leaders were as appropriate for their generations as Moses and Aaron were for theirs. Speaking prophetically, Shmuel was impelled to include himself in the list of leaders of the Jewish people, doing so in the third person.

However, Shmuel still maintained that the people erred in demanding a king to lead them, rather than Hashem Himself. The fact that G-d had granted their request was no proof that it was necessarily a good thing, as Shmuel would proceed to demonstrate. It was summer, when it doesn't rain in Israel, and the wheat was standing in the fields. Shmuel called out to Hashem and a heavy thunderstorm rained down (which wasn't a good thing for the crop). The people were afraid that they had sinned by asking for a king and they asked Shmuel to pray for them. He told them not to worry, just to continue by listening to the Word of Hashem. If they follow Hashem, they will be His people. If they stray, both they and the king they requested are done for.

Chapter 13

Saul's First Mistake

Shaul selected 3,000 troops for his standing army and sent the rest of the people home. Shaul's son Jonathan, looking to provoke a battle with the Philistines, assassinated a Philistine commander. Saul gathered his army in Gilgal, while the Philistines mounted their forces. The people of Israel were massively intimidated by the size of the Philistine army, with 30,000 chariots and endless foot soldiers. Many of the Jews hid in caves, pits and towers. Some even ran to Trans-Jordan. Shaul was instructed by Shmuel to wait seven days for him. When Shmuel didn't arrive, people started to desert. Shaul took matters into his own hands and offered the sacrifice to G-d. As he was finishing, Shmuel arrived.

Shmuel became angry because Shaul had "jumped the gun." Shaul had what he felt was the best of reasons, but he didn't follow the instructions of G-d's prophet. This was the first step in Shaul losing the kingship. Shmuel informed Shaul that G-d had chosen another to succeed him as king, then he departed. (Shaul followed Shmuel, a fact that is not directly stated, but is evident from subsequent verses.)

Shaul counted what remained of his army and it was only 600 men. Furthermore, the Philistines had kept the Jews from employing blacksmiths, so the army of Israel had no swords or spears. (They had to go to Philistine blacksmiths to sharpen their farm tools.) So things looked pretty bleak, but appearances can be deceiving.

Chapter 14

A LOT of Stuff Happens

On his own initiative, Shaul's son Jonathan took his armor-bearer and went to spy out the Philistine camp. Nobody knew that they had gone. Jonathan knew that, when they saw Philistines, if the enemy said "Halt - we'll come to you" that they were strong and confident, but if they said, "Hey, come here," then they were afraid of an ambush and that G-d would allow the Jews to defeat them.

They approached the Philistine camp and the guards saw them. They said, "Hey, come here! We want to tell you something!" Jonathan knew from the sign that G-d would deliver the Philistine army into the Jews' hands, no matter how unevenly matched they appeared to be. Jonathan and his armor-bearer then ran through the camp, routing the Philistine army, whom G-d had struck with fear.

Shaul's army saw the Philistine camp panicking and running amok. Clearly, something was up. They looked to see who was missing and realized that it was Jonathan and his attendant. Meanwhile, the crazed Philistines were wiping each other out in their panic and the Jews who had gone into hiding returned to fight.

In order to keep the people focused on the task at hand, Shaul decreed a fast. On pain of death, no man was to eat until nightfall. The battle raged into the forest where honey was dripping, but nobody tasted it because of Shaul's oath. Jonathan, however, hadn't been with the rest of the army at the time, so he didn't know about the oath. He ate some honey, which reinvigorated him. One of the other soldiers told him about his father's oath, with which Jonathan disagreed. (Shaul's reason was so that the people would not be distracted; Jonathan felt the army could use the extra energy.)

The Jews defeated the Philistines - clearly with G-d's help! They settled down to eat, but they ate "on the blood." The exact meaning of "on the blood" is unclear. It does NOT appear that they ate the blood itself (which is a very serious sin). More likely, they ate the meat of the sacrifices before the blood was sprinkled on the altar. (There are other explanations offered by the commentators.) Shaul saw this and put a stop to it. He set up an altar for the sprinkling of blood to obviate the problem.

Shaul then had the Kohein Gadol (High Priest) consult G-d via the Urim and Tumim as to whether or not they should pursue the remaining Philistines. G-d did not reply, which had never happened before. Shaul knew from this that there was still a sin hanging over the heads of the nation and he was determined to find out what it was. He said, "No matter who it is, even my own son Jonathan, shall die."

Shaul was able to determine that it was, in fact, Jonathan! He asked his son what he had done and Jonathan told him that he violated his father's oath of a fast. Shaul was prepared to carry out his word - it wouldn't do for the king to be guilty of favoritism! But the people rallied to Jonathan's defense, as the victory had been brought about through his actions. Because the people stood up for him, Jonathan was spared.

Shaul broke off pursuit of the Philistines, who retreated to their territory. Shaul strengthened his army and consolidated his rule. He fought against the nation's enemies on all sides.

Chapter 15

“Okay, so what are all these sheep and cattle doing here, then?”

Now that the nation had settled the land and appointed a king, G-d sent word through Shmuel that it was time to fulfill the obligation of eradicating the nation of Amalek, who attacked Israel after they left Egypt. G-d commanded to destroy the entire nation of Amalek, including the livestock.

Shaul sent word to the Kenites, descendants of Yisro (Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses) who lived in Amalekite territory, that they should evacuate, after which time Shaul attacked. They destroyed the Amalekite city, but they captured Agag, king of Amalek, and kept the best livestock to use for sacrifices to G-d. G-d was displeased and he sent Shmuel to Shaul.

Shaul beamed that he had fulfilled G-d's command. Shmuel then asked, “So then what are all these cattle and sheep doing here?” Shaul replied that they were intended as sacrifices. (Agag would be publicly executed.)

“G-d told you to kill all the livestock,” Shaul countered. “Do you think He wants sacrifices or do you think He wants you to listen to what He tells you?” (An analogous case would be when a teen's parent says they can't go to a concert. If the teen sneaks out to the concert, bringing the parent back a T-shirt only adds insult to injury.) Since Shaul rejected G-d's word, Shmuel said, G-d has rejected Shaul as king. (Yes, he already cost himself the kingdom in chapter 13, but there he cost himself a lasting dynasty. Here he cost himself the throne altogether.)

Shaul admitted that he had sinned, but he tried to explain his actions. Shmuel was having none of it. He turned to leave and Shaul grabbed the hem of Shmuel's garment, which tore. Shmuel told him that this symbolized how Hashem has torn the kingdom from Shaul.

Shmuel personally executed Agag. Unfortunately, in the time between his capture and execution, Agag had a conjugal visit. From that union eventually came Haman (referred to in Megillas Esther as “the Agagite”), proving once again that G-d knows what He's talking about and we're much better off listening!

Chapter 16

Here Comes David!

G-d told Shmuel to “get over” Shaul because He was sending him to anoint his successor, one of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem. Shmuel was concerned that Shaul would find out and try to kill him. (Yes, Shmuel had faith that G-d would protect him, but one cannot rely on miracles; due diligence must be taken.) G-d told Shmuel to take a cow as an offering. With this pretext, he would invite Jesse's family to the feast.

Arriving in Bethlehem, Shmuel invited all the city elders, including Jesse, to partake in his feast. When he saw Jesse's oldest son, Eliav, he was convinced that this must be Hashem's chosen one. “Not so fast!” G-d said. “Don't look at the outside; only I can see what's on the inside!” After that, Shmuel wasn't so hasty. He looked

at Avinadav, Shammah and the other sons of Jesse and knew that none of them were the one. "Have you no other sons?" Jesse sent for the youngest of his eight sons, David, who was tending the sheep. G-d informed Shmuel that David was, in fact, the one and Shmuel anointed him.

Meanwhile, Shaul started suffering from an "evil spirit," a melancholy that we might call clinical depression. Music having charms, his servants looked for someone to play the harp and settle Shaul's troubled spirit during these episodes. Who did they recommend but the same David who, unknown to them, was just anointed Shaul's successor! Shaul sent for David and came to like him very much. His harp-playing calmed Shaul's nerves and Shaul made him his armor bearer. At this point, Shaul gave David a regular job, although David still went home periodically, to help with the family business, as we shall see.

Chapter 17

David and Goliath

The Philistines set up a camp on the opposite side of a valley from the Tribe of Judah. They had a champion named Goliath who was a giant of 12 or 13 feet tall. (That may not be as supernaturally large as some people like to depict him, but you have to admit that it's pretty intimidating!) He was so big that his spear was the size of a weaver's beam and the blade alone weighed 25-30 pounds. Every day, morning and evening, Goliath would come and taunt the Jews, challenging them to send a champion to face him in single combat. (No takers.)

David's three oldest brothers were in Shaul's army, in the camp facing Goliath. While he was home from his harp-playing duties, Jesse sent David to bring supplies to his brothers. While he was visiting the camp, David saw the incident with Goliath and asked what was going on. A soldier told him that Shaul had promised riches and his daughter to the man who kills Goliath. David was merely unimpressed that this crass Philistine should disgrace the Jewish army.

At this point, David's brother Eliav came by and yelled at him for neglecting his sheep-tending. Unaware that their father had sent him, he accused David of coming to watch the fighting. It could be that Eliav knew what David was planning and was trying to discourage him from taking unnecessary risks. In any case, Eliav knew that David had been anointed and it was inappropriate to talk to David this way.

Soldiers had overheard David's words and repeated them to Shaul. Shaul summoned David, who said that no one should lose heart because of Goliath; he, David, would kill him himself! Shaul pointed out the obvious: David was no soldier. What he didn't know was that, as a shepherd, G-d had sent a lion and a bear to attack David's flocks, so that David would know what he was capable of. Shaul agreed to let David try. He tried to clothe David in his own armor, but David declined, being unused to maneuvering in armor. (The Targum Yonasan says that David wanted the miracle of Goliath's defeat to be even greater, which is why he declined armor.) David took only his staff, his sling and five smooth stones.

Goliath saw the shepherd boy approach with his staff and laughed. "Are you going to beat me like a dog?"

David replied that swords and spears don't win battles: G-d does. David lobbed a stone at Goliath, which penetrated his forehead. The giant keeled over, dead.

David took Goliath's sword and used it to cut off the giant's head. Terrified, the Philistine army scattered, the army of Israel in hot pursuit.

Amazed by this stunning victory, Shaul asked his general Avner whose son David was. Of course, he knew that Jesse was David's father; by this he meant that he wanted to know more about David's background - a history of military valor, worthiness to marry his daughter, and the possibility that David was the usurper that Shaul feared.

Chapter 18

An Unusual Dowry

David became great friends with Shaul's son Jonathan (Yonason). After the victory over Goliath, David was drafted to Shaul's service full-time, so he no longer commuted between his family and the king. David became renowned as a great warrior and the people composed a song in his honor, the refrain of which went, "Shaul has slain thousands, but David has slain tens of thousands." This did not sit well with Shaul, who considered the possibility that David was his foretold successor.

The next day, Shaul was suffering from his depression and David was playing the harp to calm him. Shaul took the opportunity to throw his spear at David, figuring that his mental illness would be blamed. Even though he was a crack shot with a spear, G-d made him miss David at point-blank range. David continued to be successful and Shaul continued to grow jealous of David.

Shaul decided to offer David his daughter Merav as a wife. (David had not pursued the offer from killing Goliath because he did not consider himself worthy of such an honor.) It turned out that Merav was betrothed to someone else, but Shaul's daughter Michal wanted to marry David. When David replied that he could not offer an appropriate dowry for the king's daughter, Shaul said that all he wanted was 100 Philistine foreskins. Shaul fully expected David to be killed while trying to raise this unusual dowry.

G-d favored David, who killed 200 of the enemy and returned quickly with twice the dowry he had promised. Shaul understood that David had G-d on his side and that his daughter loved David. Of course, this only made him more paranoid.

It's interesting to note that when the Navi speaks of Jonathan in the context of his friendship with David, he is called "Yehonason" rather than "Yonason" - there is a letter Hey added to his name. The letter Hey represents G-d. (It's the letter that was added to Abram and Sarai's names when they became Abraham and Sarah.) The added Hey when speaking of the love between David and Jonathan is a symbol of how G-d rests upon such selfless relationships.

Chapter 19

Is Saul Among the Prophets AGAIN?

Shaul spoke to his advisors about killing David, but Jonathan warned David. He told him to hide out while he spoke to his father about him; he would report back to David as to Shaul's disposition.

Jonathan then spoke to his father the king about David, assuring him that David was as loyal as they come. David risked his life to defeat Goliath and never sinned against the king - to kill him would be to murder an innocent man! Shaul had to agree that what Jonathan said was correct and he promised not to hurt David. Jonathan reported this to David, who was reconciled with Shaul.

But it was not to last. Shaul's illness returned and he attacked David with his spear again. David wisely beat a hasty retreat. Shaul sent soldiers to stand guard in front of David's house so that they could arrest him in the morning when he left. Michal saw the soldiers and warned her husband. She lowered him out the rear window and put a dummy in his bed. When David didn't come out in the morning, Shaul sent his men into the house, where they eventually discovered the subterfuge. Shaul asked his daughter how she could side with David against him. In order to protect herself, she lied that David had threatened her. (Without this excuse, Michal would have been guilty of treason against the king. While blaming David doesn't seem very nice, what could Shaul possibly do to him? Kill David twice?)

David ran away to Shmuel in Ramah. Shaul found out and sent soldiers to arrest him, but as soon as they came among the prophets that Shmuel was training, they removed their military garments and started prophesying. After three groups of soldiers failed to return, Shaul decided to go himself. Being a great person despite his flaws, and having already experienced prophesy once before, Shaul was more sensitive to it and he started propheying as soon as he entered Ramah. He removed his royal robes and prophesied day and night, reinforcing the previous saying about Shaul being among the prophets.

Chapter 20

Tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh...

David ran to Jonathan. "Uh, Jonathan? Your father is still trying to kill me."

"No, he's not - he promised me he'd stop!"

"I promise you, he's still after me! He just didn't tell you because he knows we're friends!"

"Okay, David, what do you want me to do?"

"Tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh. I'll hide in the field on the day after tomorrow. If your father asks where I am, please tell him that you gave me permission to visit my family rather than attend his feast. If he's okay with it, we'll know that everything's all right, but if he gets mad, you'll see he's out to get me. But how will you get word to me?"

“That’s easy, David. I’ll go shoot some arrows into the field. If I tell the boy that the arrows are to the side, that means everything’s all right. If I say that they are beyond him, then run away. All I ask is that when you become king, you extend your protection to my descendants.”

And so, on the first day of Rosh Chodesh, Shaul noticed David’s absence from his banquet. He didn’t say anything because he considered the possibility that David may have become ritually unclean and had not yet been purified. When David was absent on the second day, Shaul became quite suspicious. He asked Jonathan, who told him the “cover story” about David attending a family feast. Shaul became enraged that Jonathan would help David overthrow the throne. This time he threw his spear at Jonathan. (Missed again.) Jonathan ran to give David the signal to run away. They were able to say a quick good-bye, swearing a covenant of peace between their families forevermore.

If the story sounds familiar, it’s because it’s the Shabbos Haftarah whenever Rosh Chodesh falls on Sunday. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos uses David and Jonathan’s selfless friendship as an example of a pure, unconditional love.

Chapter 21

No Shortage of Madmen

Jonathan went home and David took his forces to Nov a city of Kohanim (Jewish ‘priests’ - descendants of Aaron). He told Achimelech that he was on a secret mission for Shaul and asked for food for his troops. Achimelech told David that all he had was “sacred bread” (probably the lechem hapanim - the “show bread” placed on the Table every week), but that David could have it if his men had not been with women.

Shaul had a faithful officer named Doeg, who happened to be worshipping in Nov and witnessed this transaction between David and Achimelech. File that piece of information away; it’s going to be important later.

David also asked if there were any weapons in Nov they might take. All they had was Goliath’s sword, which had been placed behind the ephod. They were reluctant to part with it, but who was more entitled to it than David? David took it and ran to Gath.

Seeking refuge in Gath was perhaps not David’s smartest move, since Goliath (whom David killed) was from Gath. The people recognized him and reported to Achish, the king of Gath, that David was in town. They brought him to Achish, but David pretended to be a madman. Achish either refused to believe that this was David or he figured that punishing him was pointless; in either case, he sent David away. This incident is the basis of Psalm 34, “A Psalm of David when he feigned madness before Avimelech, who drove him away and he departed.” (“Avimelech” in this case is a title, like all Egyptian kings were called Pharaoh.)

When David was brought before him, Achish said, “Do I have any shortage of crazy people in my house?” The Midrash tells us that this was more than a rhetorical question; Achish had a wife and a daughter who were mentally ill. He really couldn’t tolerate the thought of keeping David around if he, too, were insane.

Chapter 22

Saul Goes Too Far

David left Gath and fled to Adulam. His family heard and joined him there. He was also joined by a variety of equally troubled and oppressed people who identified with him, 400 in all. David went to the King of Moav and asked if his parents could stay there. (His logic was that they were descendants of Ruth, who was from Moav.) Gad the prophet told David to return to Judah.

Meanwhile, Shaul was appealing to his fellow Benjaminites to join him against David. He called for loyalty and his lackey Doeg seized the opportunity. He reported that he had seen David in Nov and that the Kohanim (Priests) of the city had given supplies and Goliath's sword to David. This infuriated Shaul, who accused Achimelech of siding with his enemies against him. Achimelech replied that, as far as he knew, David was Shaul's loyal son-in-law and that he would never act against Shaul. Shaul paid no heed. He ordered the city destroyed and the Kohanim killed. His men were hesitant to carry out this order, so Doeg took it upon himself. 85 men, plus women, children and livestock were killed. (You will notice that Shaul acted here as he was supposed to act towards Amalek earlier. The Talmud tells us in Yoma 32b that one who is merciful when he should be harsh will ultimately be harsh when he should be merciful.)

The only survivor of the massacre in Nov was Achimelech's son, Evyasar. He ran to David, who took full responsibility for the atrocity, since he had seen Doeg and should have realized that something like this would happen. David commemorates this incident in Psalm 52.

Chapter 23

"Thanks a Lot, Guys!"

David got word that the Philistines were pillaging the granaries in a town called K'ila. Using the Urim and Tumim, David asked of G-d whether they should go to help; G-d said yes. Aware that, in the past, asking the wrong question had led to disastrous results (as in Judges chapter 20), David's men were afraid to go. David restated the question and G-d reiterated that they should go, so they went.

David and his men saved K'ilah, but Shaul got wind of their whereabouts. Hearing that Shaul was on his way, David inquired of G-d whether the people of K'ilah would hand him over; G-d replied that they would. (This may seem ungracious of them after David just saved their food supply from the Philistines, but remember what Shaul did in Nov when he suspected them of aiding David!) So David left K'ilah for the wilderness of Ziff.

Jonathan went to see David in Ziff (the watchmen let him pass), and he told David that he knew his friend would one day be king. Furthermore, he added, Shaul knew it, too. They sealed a pact and Jonathan went on his way.

Some people from Ziff reported to Shaul where David was hiding and that they were willing to hand him over. Shaul blessed them and asked them to report to him on David's activities. People told David that Shaul's men were on to him again, so he fled to Maon. At one point, Shaul and David were in close proximity, on opposite sides of the mountain. Shaul's forces were on the verge of capturing David when a messenger brought word that the Philistines were attacking. To his credit, Shaul broke off his personal vendetta in order to fulfill his duties as king, and he took his men to fight the Philistines. Because of the conflict of interests Shaul had between capturing David and fighting the Philistines, the place where he was notified became known as the Rock of Conflicts.

Chapter 24

David Surprises Saul in the Facilities

David went to Ein Gedi. Shaul finished his business with the Philistines and resumed his pursuit of David. At one point, Shaul entered a particular cave in order to use it as a rest room, while David and his men were at the other end. David's men were ecstatic that G-d had delivered Shaul into their hands, but David felt otherwise. Despite everything, David said, Shaul was still G-d's anointed king. (As a future king himself, it would be imprudent for David to advocate assassination.)

While Shaul was relieving himself, David crept in and cut off a piece of Shaul's robe. He then called out to Shaul from a safe distance. "Why do you listen to people who tell you I'm an enemy?" David asked. "I could have done you harm, but I didn't. See? Here's a piece of your robe, I cut off!" Shaul realized that David was right. He wept and called David his son. He acknowledged that David would eventually reign and asked that David not eradicate his descendants. David swore to this, then the two men parted and went their separate ways.

Chapter 25

Naval Lives Up to His Name

The prophet Shmuel (Samuel) died and the entire nation mourned for him. David, experience telling him not to trust Shaul, resumed his flight.

There was a wealthy man named Naval who owned a lot of sheep. Naval was a descendant of the noble Caleb (Caleb), but he was an evil, petty man. David's men had provided protection to Naval's shepherds so, when Naval made a feast, David sent men to ask him for food. Naval refused the request in the harshest terms, disparaging David in the process. (As a descendant of a prominent prince of the Tribe of Judah, Naval may have considered himself more qualified than David to be king.)

Naval's reply did not sit well with David. Having been anointed by Shmuel, David was a rightful king and

Naval's response constituted rebellion, a capital crime. David decided that this prerogative should be exercised since, given his wealth and lineage, Naval was in a position to lead an insurgence against David; such a person could not be left unchecked. David's men strapped on their swords and headed for Naval's home.

Naval's wife Avigayil (Abigail) heard what David was doing. Avigayil hurried to prepare food for David's camp. She loaded the provisions on donkeys and took an attendant with her to bring them to David. She encountered David coming the other way and begged him to reconsider, not because Naval was innocent, but because he wasn't worthy of David taking the action. (The word "naval" means lowly or base. She said he lived up to his name.) She assured David that G-d would do great things for him and she asked that he remember her. (She was hinting that David marry her after her husband's death, which was inappropriate to discuss while she was still married.) David accepted her advice (and the food) and blessed her.

Avigayil returned home where Naval was having his party and was drinking heavily. The next morning she told him what had nearly happened, which stunned Naval. Ten days later, Naval died. David heard and praised Hashem for defending his honor without David having to take Naval's life himself. David sent messengers to take Avigayil to him for a wife, as they had discussed. David also married a woman named Achinoam, but Shaul had annulled David's marriage to his daughter Michal. Shaul gave Michal to a man named Palti, but Palti considered Michal still married to David and never lived with her.

Chapter 26

David Sneaks In - Again

The people of Ziff, who betrayed David once before, again told Shaul where David could be found. Shaul, easily influenced by people bad-mouthing David, set off after him again. David found out and learned where Shaul's army was camped.

David and his nephew Avishai sneaked into Shaul's camp while the army was sleeping. (G-d arranged it so that the entire army of 3,000 slept so soundly that none of them awoke - not even the ones who were supposed to be on guard duty!) They found Shaul and his general Avner (Abner) asleep in a circle of troops, Shaul's spear plunged in the dirt near his head. Avishai offered to take the spear and end Shaul's threat with it. Again, David refused to harm G-d's anointed king. Instead, he took Shaul's spear and his jug of water.

Crossing to a mountain on the other side of a stream, David called out to Avner. He criticized Avner for doing a poor job protecting his king, Shaul. He displayed the spear and the container of water to show that he had been there. Shaul joined the conversation and David complained that people keep turning Shaul against him when he had done nothing wrong. Shaul admitted that he was wrong and asked David to join him, but having been down this road before, David was taking no chances. He sent back the spear, which was Shaul's personal property, but he kept the water. Shaul blessed David and they parted ways.

Chapter 27

Tricky, Tricky David

David knew that his business with Shaul wasn't finished. It was only a matter of time before he turned on him again. David decided to "get out of town." He took his men back to Gath. While his last escape there did not go well, by this time his struggles with Shaul were well known and King Achish was easily convinced that David had turned against his own people. David, his 600 men, and their families settled in Gath. Using the pretext that he didn't want to be a burden, David convinced Achish to give them their own town, Ziklag. (This town became the personal property of David and his descendants, rather than Tribal property of Judah.)

David and his men spent their time fighting enemies of Israel and looting their property, but he told Achish that they were raiding the neighboring Tribe of Judah. Achish believed that David had become disillusioned with his own people and that he was actually loyal to the Philistines.

Chapter 28

King Saul and the Deathly Hallows

King Achish prepared for war against Israel and he appointed David to his personal retinue, thinking he was loyal to the Philistine cause. David answered with an ambiguous, "Just wait until you see what I do!" (At this point, he wasn't 100% sure how he was going to get out of it.)

Meanwhile, Shaul was looking for a sorcerer. Shmuel (Samuel) had died and G-d wasn't sending Shaul any direction through prophets or the Urim and Tumim. Unfortunately for Shaul, he had previously rid the land of sorcerers. (Don't think he spent his whole reign just chasing David; he DID run the country!) He sent his men to find a sorcerer and they located a woman in Endor. (The character "Endora" on the old TV show "Bewitched" gets her name from the famous "witch of Endor.")

Shaul traveled to Endor in disguise, but the witch was hesitant to help; she was afraid this was a case of entrapment. Shaul assured her that no harm would come to her if she helped him. She raised up the ghost of Shmuel for Shaul, which made her realize that her client was the king in disguise. Shaul reassured her that she would not be harmed and asked her to describe the spirit. (The witch could see Shmuel, but not hear him; Shaul could hear him, but not see him.)

Shmuel asked Shaul, "Why have you disturbed my rest?" Shaul explained how G-d wasn't sending him any messages and he needed direction. Shmuel replied that G-d has given the kingdom to David, G-d was going to permit the Philistines to win the upcoming battle, and that Shaul and his sons would be killed. (They would, however, merit their place in the Next World.)

Shaul was so overcome by Shmuel's words that he fell to the ground and refused all food. The witch and his men impressed upon him to eat, which he ultimately did. Shaul and his men departed to meet their fate.

There is a difference of opinion as to whether or not ancient sorcerers actually had any magical abilities. The Radak and others say they did. The Rambam says they didn't and that their deeds were tricks. (Even today there's no shortage of people doing such things.) A third opinion is offered by Rav Saadia Gaon: for the most part these people are frauds, but in this case, G-d permitted Shaul to be raised in order to give Shmuel the prophecy. (We'll see a similar question by a seemingly false prophet who receives a real prophecy in the Book of Kings.)

Chapter 29

David, Go Home!

The Philistine army advanced, David and his men among them. The Philistine generals objected to Achish about the Jews in their ranks; they didn't trust them. (Rightfully so!) Achish stuck up for David, but the officers wouldn't hear of it. They remembered the songs praising David for all the Philistines he killed! Achish called David and reluctantly told him that while he trusted David, his commanders insisted that the Israelite forces be dismissed. David pretended to be offended, though this was secretly what he wanted. So, the next morning, David and his men headed back to their city in the Philistine territory.

Chapter 30

You Know That Rashi in Parshas VaYishlach...?

Arriving home to Ziklag, David and his men discovered that the Amalekites had attacked in their absence. They burned the city and took all the women and children captive. (Miraculously, they didn't kill anybody, quite counter to their usual modus operandi.) David's wives Achinoam and Avigayil were also among the captives. The people were so upset, they were ready to stone David for leading them away with Achish, leaving their own city undefended. David asked Aviasar the Kohein (Priest) to consult G-d as to whether they should pursue and if they would be victorious; G-d said yes on both counts.

While pursuing the Amalekites, David's men found an Egyptian man starving in the field. He was the slave of an Amalekite who had become ill three days earlier, so they left him behind, with neither food nor water. He agreed to lead David to his former masters.

David and his men found the Amalekites partying and enjoying their booty. The Jewish army handily defeated them, except for 400 soldiers who fled on camels. (These 400 youths were descendants of the 400 men who deserted Esau rather than attack Jacob in Genesis chapter 33. They were spared as a reward for that - see Rashi on Gen. 33:16.) All the captives were recovered, safe and sound.

400 of David's men had gone to battle; 200 remained behind, guarding the gear. Some of the 400 didn't want

to share the spoils with the non-combatants, but David wouldn't have it. Not only did he give equal shares to the 200 who stayed back on guard, he also sent gifts as a sign of gratitude to the towns that had supported them in the tough times.

Chapter 31

The Death of King Saul

Meanwhile, Shaul and his army were fighting the Philistines. The Jews were overpowered; they retreated and were killed in large numbers. Shaul's sons Jonathan, Avinadav, and Malki-Shua were all killed in battle. (His son Ishboshes wasn't there, as we shall see in II Samuel.) Archers approached Shaul and he became scared of being captured, tortured, and an object of ridicule. Shaul asked his armor bearer to kill him before the enemy could take him, but the request was denied. Shaul then fell on his sword and died.

The people in the nearby cities who saw how handily the Israelite army had been defeated fled their homes, which were then occupied by the Philistines. The next day, the Philistine army went to plunder the corpses and they found Shaul. They severed his head from his body and displayed his remains and his armor as trophies.

The people of Yavesh-Gilad heard about this desecration. They went by night and captured the remains of Shaul and his sons from the Philistines. Their bodies had started to putrefy, so they burned the flesh and gave the bones a proper burial.

The question of how Shaul could commit suicide is a complicated one, a full discussion of which is clearly beyond the scope of this synopsis. Suffice it to say that mitigating factors include the fact that Shaul knew that he was fated to die in this battle, and that his motivation was to avoid torture and a desecration of G-d's Name before an inevitable death.

Continued in II Samuel...