

THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

LECTURE 55: CHAPTER 29 DAVID IN THE PELISHTI CAMP

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I. THE ORDER OF THE CHAPTERS

Following the dramatic story of Shaul and the medium in Ein-Dor, Scripture picks up from where it left off in the account of what is happening to David. As may be recalled, it was related in chapter 27 how David had deceived Akhish king of Gat, telling him that he was conducting raids against Yehuda, while in fact he was conducting raids against the Geshurites, the Gizrites, and the Amelekites. In this way, David gave Akhish the impression that he had severed his ties with Israel and that he would be prepared to go out to war with him against them. We noted there (lecture no. 52) that David's maneuver was problematic, for even if his intentions were to help his people, his readiness to present himself as a traitor against them was an exceedingly severe step, involving a measure of desecration of God's name.

Our chapter opens with a description of the competing forces:

(1) Now the Pelishtim gathered together all their hosts to Afek; and the Israelites pitched by the spring which is in Yizra'el.

This account is somewhat surprising, for in the previous chapter it was related: "And the Pelishtim gathered themselves together, and came and pitched in Shunem; and Shaul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa" (28:4). Why then is it stated in our chapter that the Pelishtim gathered themselves in Afek? It is true that several different places are called "Afek,"^{1[1]} but even the northernmost city going by that name – in the region of today's Rosh ha-Ayin – is south of Shunem^{2[2]} and the spring in Yizra'el! Based on this, it might be concluded that what is related in our chapter took place prior to what is related in chapter 28. Our chapter describes the initial staging of the two armies, which took place in the center of the country, before they went north for the real battle. Accordingly, it is only at the end of our chapter that we read: "And the Pelishtim went up to Yizra'el" (v. 11).

Of course, this assertion raises the question of why Scripture records our chapter only after chapter 28. Surely it would have been much simpler had Scripture brought our chapter after chapter 27, which deals with the relationship between David and Akhish, and only then the contents of chapter

28, the story of Shaul and the medium – not only because this is a different story, but also because chronologically it took place later, during a more advanced stage of the campaign.

It seems then that it was important from a narrative perspective to record the incident involving the medium before our chapter, even though it transpired only later. The importance of this arrangement of the events will be discussed below.

II. THE ARGUMENT

Scripture describes how David goes to Akhish and how Akhish argues with the rest of the Pelishtim princes whether or not to allow David to join the campaign:

(2) And the lords of the Pelishtim passed on by hundreds and by thousands; and David and his men passed on in the rearward with Akhish. (3) Then said the princes of the Pelishtim, "What do these Hebrews³ here?" And Akhish said unto the princes of the Pelishtim, "Is not this David, the servant of Shaul the king of Israel, who has been with me these days or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell away⁴ unto me unto this day?" (4) But the princes⁵ of the Pelishtim were wroth with him; and the princes of the Pelishtim said unto him, "Make the man return, that he may go back to his place where you have appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us; for wherewith should this fellow reconcile himself unto his lord? Should it not be with the heads of these men?⁶" (5) Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Shaul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?"

The Pelishtim princes argue with Akhish about David's loyalty. According to Akhish, David was absolutely loyal to him. He was essentially a mercenary in his camp, no different than the gentiles, like Achimelech the Chittite and Doeg the Edomite who served in the Israelite army. The Pelishtim princes, on the other hand, argue that David's loyalty was to his people, and that when put to the test, he would act as a fifth column.

Who was right? Did David really intend to fight against Shaul's army, or perhaps to strike at the Pelishtim? It goes without question that David did not really intend to hurt his own people, but where is this alluded to in Scripture itself? It is reasonable to assume that the answer to this question is found in

chapter 27. As stated earlier, David acquired Akhish's trust by way of deception, and so it stands to reason that here, too, Akhish fell into David's trap. Just as in chapter 27 David struck at the foreign tribes of the south and fooled Akhish into believing that he had fought against Israel, in our chapter, David wanted to continue in his deception, and thus to deliver Israel. It was only the Pelishti princes who thwarted David's attempt to deceive Akhish and thus to influence the outcome of the war.

We can now return to the question raised earlier regarding the order of the chapters. Had our chapter immediately followed chapter 27, we would lack the answer to the question of why David's plot fails. It is for this reason that chapter 28 is presented first, for it is there that it becomes clear that Shaul is headed for utter defeat as part of the punishment imposed upon him and as was told to him in the story involving the medium. It is for this reason that God manipulated events so that David's plan would not succeed.

In any event, David does not immediately agree with Akhish, but rather continues to argue with him:

(6) Then Akhish called David, and said unto him, "As the Lord lives,⁷[7] you have been upright, and your going out and your coming in with me in the host is good in my sight, for I have not found evil in you since the day of your coming unto me unto this day; nevertheless, the lords favor you not. (7) Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that you displease⁸[8] not the lords of the Pelishtim." (8) And David said unto Akhish, "But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant so long as I have been before you unto this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" (9) And Akhish answered and said to David, "I know that you are good in my sight, as an angel of God;⁹[9] notwithstanding, the princes of the Pelishtim have said, 'He shall not go up with us to the battle.' (10) Wherefore now rise up early in the morning with the servants of your lord that are come with you; and as soon as you are up early in the morning and have light, depart."

Why does Scripture expand at length upon this argument between David and Akhish? It seems that expression is given here to a second point in the story: the problematic nature of David's action, alluded to above. This finds expression on two levels. First, Akhish is described as a moral character, albeit somewhat naive. Akhish, as may be recalled, was the king who had saved David's life, refusing to kill him as his men had demanded (see chapter 21). He puts his full trust in David and sings his praises in his presence, including, "you have been upright," a somewhat grating praise in

light of David's cunning behavior, even if it was meant to serve a positive purpose.

Second, as already noted, David's presentation of himself as having betrayed his people is also problematic. Is it right that David, as a servant of God, should relate to his people as "the enemies of my lord the king?"¹⁰[10] Even Achish seems to have sensed the problematic nature of these words, and so when he turns to David, he says to him: "Wherefore now rise up early in the morning with the **servants of your lord** that are come with you." It is as if Achish were alluding to David: I believe you that in certain respects we share a common interest, but still I see no reason for you to totally deny your origins.

Of course, the main proof of the problem with David's behavior lies in the events taking place at precisely the same time in his camp in Tziklag, events that would never have taken place had David remained there. I shall expand on this topic in the next chapter.

III. "IN THE MORNING"

I wish to conclude my analysis of this chapter with the final two verses:

(10) "Wherefore now rise up early **in the morning** with the servants of your lord that are come with you; and as soon as you are up early **in the morning and have light**, depart." (11) So David rose up early, he and his men, to depart **in the morning** to return into the land of the Pelishtim. And the Pelishtim went up to Yizra'el.

Despite David's failure to execute his plan, the chapter ends on a positive and optimistic note that expresses itself in the threefold repetition of the word "morning" and the addition of the word "light." These words stand in stark contrast to the gloomy atmosphere hanging over the previous story that began with "and they came to the woman by **night**" (28:5) and ended with "then they rose up, and went away that **night**" (ibid. v. 25).

This may be another reason for the inverted order of the chapters. This is the way that Scripture signals the two parallel processes: Shaul's sun is setting, while David's day is breaking through the dawn.¹¹[11]

(Translated by David Strauss)

12[1] In the book of *Yehoshua*, there seem to be four different cities called Afek. In *Yehoshua* 13:4, in the description of "the land that remains," mention is made of "as far as Afek, to the border of the Emori," and there the reference is to a city near the Emorite border. In 15:53, mention is made of Afek among the cities of Yehuda. And in 19:30, mention is made of a city with that name in the territory of Asher (and similarly in *Shoftim* 1:31). The fourth mention is in 12:18: "The king of Afek, one; the king of Lasharon, one," from which we learn about a city with that name in the Sharon region. It stands to reason that this is the city mentioned above in I *Shmuel* 4:1, a day's walk from Shilo. The fact that many cities are called by this name can be explained in various ways. Perhaps the name derives from the word *afik* – river, wadi (see *Iyov* 6:15; *Tehillim* 42:1) – and cities near a river or wadi were called by that name. Alternatively, the name is connected to the Akkadian word "*afek*," which means fortress, this name being given to fortified cities.

13[2] Shunem is a city in the territory of Yissachar (see *Yehoshua* 19:18). Some identify it with the village of Sulam, southwest of Giv'at ha-Moreh.

14[3] We have already noted (chapter 4, lecture no. 7, note 3) that the term "Hebrews" was used by the other nations to describe Israel, and that occasionally the people of Israel referred to themselves by that name in their dealings with those nations. In some places, as in our verse, the term seems to be used in a derogatory sense, as in 14:11. Here there might also be a play of words, *Ivrim* - *overim*, for the previous verse reads: "And the lords of the Pelishtim passed on (*overim*) by hundreds, and by thousands; and David and his men passed on (*overim*) in the rearward with Akhish," similar to what was stated earlier: "Now some of the Hebrews (*Ivrim*) had gone over (*avru*) the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead" (13:6).

15[4] According to Rashi, the words, "*mi-yom naflo*," mean: "from the day he camped by me." The Radak adds that the word *nafal* can be used in the sense of "dwell," as in "And he dwelt (*nafal*) in the presence of all his brethren" (*Bereishit* 25:18). Here, however, the word seems to be used in the sense of "desertion," as we find in other places: "He that abides in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; but he that goes out, and **deserts** (*ve-nafal*) to the Kasdim that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be to him for booty" (*Yirmiyahu* 21:9); "And he seized Yirmiyahu the prophet, saying, 'You are **deserting** (*nofel*) to the Kasdim'" (ibid. 37:13). This sense is especially striking in the verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim* that relates to our chapter: "And some of Menashe **deserted** (*naflu*) to David, when he came with the Pelishtim against Shaul to battle; but they did not help them, for the lords of the Pelishtim took counsel and sent him away, saying, 'He will **desert** (*yipol*) to his master Shaul to the jeopardy of our heads'" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 12:20). See also II *Melakhim* 7:4.

16[5] Throughout the chapter, Scripture alternates between "*sarnei Pelishtim*" and "*sarei Pelishtim*," but the two terms seem to mean the same thing. Targum Yonatan, however, translates *sarnei* as *turnei* and *sarei* as *ravrevei*, implying that we are dealing with two different sets of officers.

17[6] "With the heads of these men" means "with our heads," but it was common practice to avoid referring to oneself by way of a curse, and therefore the curse was formulated in terms of others. The verse cited in note 4 above reads: "For the lords of the Pelishtim took counsel and sent him away, saying, 'He will desert to his master Shaul to the jeopardy of **our heads**'" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 12:20). This phenomenon is familiar to us from other places in Scripture, e.g. *Bamidbar* 16:14: "Will you put out the eyes of **these people**;" and see above 20:16: "The Lord even require it at the hand of **David's enemies**."

18[7] Akhish's oath in God's name is quite surprising. The Radak comments: "For all agree that He is the Prime Cause, and since he swore to David, he swore in the name of God in whom David believed." It is also possible that Akhish swore in the name of his own god, but Scripture reported it as if he swore in the name of the God of Israel.

19[8] In several places in Scripture, the word *shalom* (peace) stands in contrast to the word *ra* (evil). E.g., "I form the light, and create darkness: I make **peace**, and create **evil**" (*Yeshayahu* 45:7). See also *Tehilim* 7:5; *Mishlei* 12:20.

20[9] It is interesting that two other people, the woman from Tekoa (II *Shmuel* 14:17, 20) and Mefiboshet (ibid. 19:28), compare David to an angel (*mal'akh*) of God, and without a doubt this testifies to David's virtuous and charismatic character. This comparison stands in contrast to the attitude of the Pelishtim, who compare David to a "*satan*" (verse 4), translated here as "adversary," a term that is used in contrast to a "*mal'akh*" in other places in Scripture; see *Zekharya* 3:1-2; *Iyov* 1:6.

21[10] It can be argued that David purposely formulated his words in this manner so that they could be understood as referring to the Pelishtim, the enemies of king Shaul. The simple understanding of the words, however, remains problematic.

22[11] This phenomenon repeats itself later during the period when the kingdom was divided between David, who ruled over Yehuda, and Ish Boshet, who ruled over Israel. During this short period (II *Shmuel* 2-4), the decline of the house of Shaul and ascent of the house of David continued, as Scripture attests: "Now, there was a long warfare between the house of Shaul and the house of David; but David became stronger and stronger, and the house of Shaul became weaker and weaker" (II *Shmuel* 3:1). The contrast between the image of day and light and the image of night and darkness accompanies that process, as is stated at the end of the battle at Giv'on between Yo'av the son of Tzeruya, David's general, and Avner the son of Ner, the commander of Shaul's army: "And Avner and his men walked all that **night** through the plain... And Yoav and his men marched all night, and they came to Hebron **at break of day**" (ibid 2:29, 32).
