

## THE BOOK OF *SHEMUEL*

### LECTURE 52: CHAPTER 27 THE TZIKLAG PERIOD

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#### I. The end of the chase

Despite the emotional exchange between David and Shaul at the end of their second meeting in the previous chapter, David has no illusions about the future:

(1) And David said in his heart, "I shall now be swept away one day by the hand of Shaul; there is nothing better for me than that I should escape into the land of the Pelishtim; and Shaul will despair of me, to seek me any more in all the borders of Israel, so shall I escape out of his hand."

Even though David had said to Shaul in the previous chapter that leaving the Land of Israel is like worshipping idols – "for they have driven me out this day that I should not cleave unto the inheritance of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods'" (26:19) – he understands that he won't find peace in the Land of Israel and that the only way to achieve temporary calm is to leave its borders. Once again, therefore, David flees to the Pelishtim, and Scripture attests that his assessment of the situation had indeed been correct:

(4) And it was told Shaul that David was fled to Gat; and he sought no more again for him.

Without a doubt, this verse speaks to Shaul's discredit, for in the previous chapter he had assured David, "I will no more do you harm" (*ibid.*, v. 21); now it becomes clear that had David not run away to the Pelishtim, Shaul would have continued to pursue him. At the same time, this verse acknowledges the correctness of David's step, he having no alternative but to run away.

David flees once again to Akhish, king of Gat:

(2) And David arose, and passed over, he and the six hundred men that were with him, unto Akhish the son of Maokh, king of Gat. (3) And David dwelt with Akhish at Gat, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Achinoam the Yizraelitess, and Avigayil the Carmelitess, Naval's wife.

As may be recalled, this is not the first time that David runs away to the Pelishtim and to Akhish. The previous time, in chapter 21, this step ended with David's last minute rescue when he pretended to be a madman. The

Pelishtim, who remembered David as the killer of their mightiest warrior, Golyat, were not very happy to receive him in their land, despite the fact that it was common practice for opponents of a ruling regime to seek refuge in a country hostile to it.<sup>1[1]</sup> Why then does David repeat his earlier step?

The Radak explains that in chapter 21 David first concealed his true identity and it was only later revealed by the Pelishtim, whereas here, when he comes with six hundred men, it may be presumed that his arrival had been coordinated in advance with Akhish and carried out in the open. Alternatively, there are those who argue (such as R. Yosef Kaspi) that "Ákhish the son of Maokh" who is mentioned here is not the same Akhish as in chapter 21.

It seems, however, that we are dealing with the same king as in chapter 21. Already there we noted that Akhish himself displayed a forgiving attitude toward David and did not hurry to strike at David as his men had desired. David's repeated flight to Akhish seems to reinforce his claim that he was being pursued by Shaul; presumably, Shaul's pursuit of David had already become a matter of public knowledge.<sup>2[2]</sup> Akhish therefore receives David with open arms, believing that David, the famous warrior, can help him in his current military campaigns and that he might even betray the people of Israel.

## II. David in Tziklag

It is reasonable to assume that not everyone agreed with Akhish's latest step, which indeed proved in the end to have stemmed from excessive naiveté. Accordingly, David petitions Akhish for a place of his own:

(5) And David said unto Akhish, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, let them give me a place in one of the cities in the country, that I may dwell there; for why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?" (6) Then Akhish gave him Tziklag that day; wherefore Tziklag belongs unto the kings of Yehuda unto this day.<sup>3[3]</sup> (7) And the number of the days that David dwelt in the country of the Pelishtim was a full year and four months.

David prefers to distance himself from the royal city, from suspicious foreign eyes, and settle in one of the outlying cities. It stands to reason that he had other motives as well, as will be discussed below. In any event, Akhish gives him Tziklag, which presents us with a certain difficulty. In the book of *Yehoshua*, Tziklag is counted among the cities of Yehudah (*Yehoshua* 15:31),

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<sup>1[1]</sup> We discussed this matter at length in chapter 21 (lecture no. 41).

<sup>2[2]</sup> It is possible that the Pelishtim's invasion in chapter 23, at the height of Shaul's pursuit after David, stemmed from the rumors that had reached their ears that Shaul was busy with other matters.

<sup>3[3]</sup> The comment in the second half of the verse was obviously added at a much later date, at a time when there were "kings of Yehuda." We already noted on various occasions that there are verses in the book of *Shemuel* that appear to have been inserted at a later period by the book's editor. Similarly, we brought the view of R. Yitzchak Abravanel that Yirmiyahu edited the book of *Shemuel*.

but in the continuation (ibid. 19:5) it appears in the list of cities given to Shimon "in the inheritance of the sons of Yehudah" (ibid. v. 1). In our chapter, it is stated that Akhish gave the city to David, and therefore it belongs "to the kings of Yehudah!" The Radak (on our verse and in *Yehoshua* 16:31) relates to these questions, and one of his suggestions is "that the people of Israel took it at the time of the conquest of the land and it fell in the lot of Shimon, and later the king of Gat captured it from them, until David settled there; and therefore it belonged to the kings of Yehuda from that day on" (Radak on *Yehoshua*, ibid.).

Akhish, on his part, seems to have had a good reason to give David the city of Tziklag. As we shall see later, David exploited his stay in Tziklag to strike at nomadic tribes in the south, the Geshurites, the Gizrites and the Amalekites, who presumably vexed the Pelishtim alongside the Israelites.

Scripture notes that David dwelt in the country of the Pelishtim for "*yamim* and four months." The *Metzudat David* explains: "*Yamim* – a year," as the word means in various places in Scripture, such as, "And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold, within a full year (*yamim*) may he redeem it" (*Vayikra* 25:29).<sup>4[4]</sup> This explanation, however, gives rise to a difficulty, as pointed out by the Radak:

This instance of "*yamim*" cannot be understood as a year, for Shaul reigned as king for only two years, and all the interactions that David had with Shaul – is it possible that they were in eight months? And furthermore, David did not go down to the land of the Pelishtim until after Shemuel's death, and Shemuel's death preceded that of Shaul by only seven months. We therefore understand "*yamim*" in its literal sense, "days," that is to say, four months and a few days of the fifth month.

The primary reason that the Radak gives for his explanation is the contradiction between what is stated here and the puzzling verse at the beginning of chapter 13: "Shaul was a year old when he began to reign; and two years he reigned over Israel" (13:1). There (lecture no. 22) we noted the various explanations proposed for that verse, and we mentioned that the Ralbag proves from our chapter that it cannot be understood in its plain sense. It seems, therefore, that the aforementioned verse must be explained in one of the ways suggested there, and that our verse should be understood in its plain sense; namely, that David dwelt among the Pelishtim for a relatively long period of time.<sup>5[5]</sup>

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<sup>4[4]</sup> See also *Bereishit* 24:55: "And her brother and her mother said, 'Let the girl stay with us days (*yamim*), or ten; after that she shall go.'" Rashi there explains (based on *Ketuvot* 57b) that the reference is to a year.

<sup>5[5]</sup> Over the course of this lengthy period, David's army grew in size and strength, as is described in I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 12:1-2: "Now these are they who came to David **to Tziklag, while he yet kept himself shut up because of Shaul** the son of Kish; and they were among the mighty men, his helpers in war. They were armed with

Those commentators who preferred to understand that David resided in Tziklag for a shorter period of time might have chosen that approach for another reason as well. It may be argued that, according to its plain sense, the verse speaks of an excessively lengthy period, and thus it is critical of David, who distanced himself from his country and his people for such a long time. The words, "*yamim* and four months" might also allude to what is stated at the beginning of the story of the concubine in the Giv'a: "And his concubine was faithless to him, and went away from him to her father's house to Bet-Lechem-Yehuda, and was there *yamim arba'a chodoshim* [= the days of four months]" (*Shofetim* 19:2). There, too, we are dealing with a relatively long period of time, which eventually led to a great calamity.<sup>6[6]</sup>

We see, then, that Scripture opens with criticism of David's Tziklag period. David's stay in Tziklag becomes even more problematic in the continuation.

### III. "And David left neither man nor woman alive"

David exploits his stay in Tziklag to pursue two separate goals:

(8) And David and his men went up, and made a raid upon the Geshurites,<sup>7[7]</sup> and the Gizrites, and the Amalekites; for those were the inhabitants of the land, who were of old, as you go to Shur, even unto the land of Egypt. (9) And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel. And he returned, and came to Akhish. (10) And Akhish said, "Where<sup>8[8]</sup>

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bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in slinging stones and shooting arrows from the bow; they were of Shaul's brethren of Binyamin."

<sup>6[6]</sup> The connection between the two verses was pointed out to me by Rav Moshe Rosenberg of New York.

<sup>7[7]</sup> The reference here is to the Geshurites in the Negev region, who are mentioned in *Yehoshua* 13:2-3: "This is the land that yet remains: all the regions of the Pelishtim, and all the Geshuri, from Shichor, which is before Egypt..." This stands in contrast to the kingdom of Geshur, located northeast of the land of Israel (see *Yehoshua* 12:5; 13:11-13; II *Shemuel* 13:38, and 15:8).

<sup>8[8]</sup> The commentators offer various explanations of this word, "*al*." Rashi explains that it is equivalent to '*an*' (where) with a *lamed* replacing the *nun*: "Where have you made a raid?" The interchange of *lamed* and *nun* is familiar to us from other places in Scripture. Rashi himself points to the verses in *Nechemya* 13:7-8: "And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Elyashiv did for Toviya, in preparing him a chamber (*nishka*) in the courts of the house of God. And it vexed me very much; so I cast all the household articles of Toviya out of the chamber (*lishka*)." And also to the verse: "A garden (*gan*) enclosed... a spring (*gal*) shut up" (*Shir ha-Shirim* 4:12). See what we wrote (10:18) regarding "*evel ha-gedola*" (lecture 10, note 7).

The Radak brings two other explanations: 1) that of R. Yona Ibn Ganach, who explains "*a*" with an *alef* as if it were written "*a*" with an *ayin*, "on," and that the word "*mi*," "who," is missing. Thus the verse should be understood: "*al mi peshatetem*," "upon whom did you raid;" 2) that of the Ibn Ezra, who explains "*a*" as "*lo*." The verse should be understood as a question: "Did you not raid today?"

have you made a raid today?" And David said, "Against the south of Yehuda, and against the south of the Yerachmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites." (11) And David left neither man nor woman alive, to bring them to Gat, saying, "Lest they should tell on us, saying, 'So did David, and so has been his manner all the while he has dwelt in the country of the Pelishtim.'"9[9] (12) And Akhish believed David, saying, "He has made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore, he shall be my servant for ever."

First of all, David did a good job striking at these nations, who in general lived off of spoil and plunder.10[10] Second, David presented Akhish with a false picture, as if the spoil that he brought from these nations came from Israel, and thus he earned Akhish's trust; Akhish was led to believe that David had caused the people of Israel to despise him and that he would remain loyal to him for ever.

Was David permitted to act in this manner? It is difficult to adduce unequivocal proof on the matter, but there seems to be room for criticism of David's conduct in this case as well. First of all, it is not at all clear that it is permissible to present a false picture of this sort that will lead in the end to a desecration of God's name. Second, in order to cover up his true actions, David was forced to take the drastic step of killing all the captives, so that Akhish would not find out that the spoil that he was given did not really come from Israel.

It is reasonable to assume that in the eyes of Scripture this measure was severe and extreme. This follows from, among other things, the incidents in the coming chapters, the connection of which to what is reported in our chapter will be discussed at a later point. At this stage, let us merely note that it is related in chapter 30 how the Amalekites raided Tziklag when David was in the Pelishti camp, but even that notorious tribe of brigands acted differently than David: Whereas regarding David's conduct it is related: "**And David left neither man nor woman alive,**" regarding the Amalekites it is said that they took David's family as captives: "And they had taken captive the women and all that were therein, both small and great; **they slew not any**" (30:2).

The Radak deals with the problematic aspects of David's treatment of these tribes – not in our chapter, but in his commentary to David's words to Shelomo, in which he explains why he did not merit to build the Temple: "But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'You have shed blood abundantly, and have made great wars; you shall not build a house to my name, because

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9[9] It seems that the verse should be read as follows: "And David left neither man nor woman alive, to bring them to Gat, saying, "Lest they should tell on us, saying, 'So did David. **So did David,** and so has been his manner all the while he has dwelt in the country of the Pelishtim.'" That is to say, the words, "So did David," should be read twice: the first time in the framework of the report that David feared, and the second time as a description of David's conduct. For more about verses constructed in this manner, see what we wrote above regarding 13:13 (lecture no. 23, note 5).

10[10] We noted the despicable conduct of these nations at the beginning of chapter 15 (lecture 27).

you have shed much blood upon the earth in My sight" (I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 22:8). The Radak writes as follows:

And when He said, "You have shed much blood upon the earth," because there was innocent blood among the blood that he shed, e.g., the blood of Uriya, and this is the meaning of "in My sight"... Also among the blood of the nations which he shed... it is possible that among them were good and pious people. Nevertheless, he was not punished for them, because his intention was to destroy the wicked that they not strike at Israel and to save himself when he was in the land of the Pelishtim, and so he left neither man nor woman alive.

The Radak points out that while David's actions in our chapter did not make him liable for punishment, they were nevertheless inappropriate, and therefore one of the factors because of which David was prevented from building the Temple. It is true, as the Radak notes, that David was in an exceedingly difficult situation, which did not leave him many alternatives. Reading this chapter, however, does not leave the reader with a positive feeling about David or his conduct.

#### **IV. Going out to war**

The Christian division of the book into chapters transferred two verses to the beginning of the next chapter, even though in terms of content they definitely belong in our chapter:

And it came to pass in those days, that the Pelishtim gathered their hosts together for warfare to fight with Israel. And Akhish said unto David, "Know you assuredly, that you shall go out with me in the host, you and your men." And David said to Akhish, "Therefore you shall know what your servant will do." And Achish said to David, "Therefore will I make you keeper of my head for ever." (28:1-2)

These verses seem to indicate that David's plan had succeeded. In the end, David convinced Akhish of his loyalty to him, to the point that Akhish instructed David to join him, together with his men, in battle against Israel. David responded in a manner that could be understood in two ways: "Therefore you shall know what your servant will do." But once again, Akhish falls into the trap and gives him a promotion: "Therefore will I make you keeper of my head for ever."

Here, too, however, a question arises: Should David have acted in a manner that presented him as being so loyal to Akhish that he was prepared to fight against his own people? At this point, Scripture interrupts the story about David and returns to Shaul. As stated, however, in the coming chapters

we shall see how the story ends and how his Tziklag period will be engraved upon David's consciousness.<sup>11</sup>[11]

(Translated by David Strauss)

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<sup>11</sup>[11] The title that I chose for this lecture, "The Tziklag Period," is of course taken from S. Yizhar's famous book of that name, for which he was awarded the Israel Prize fifty years ago. While the book deals at length with questions regarding wartime morality, it was not my intention to imply that I agree with the contents of that work or with the positions of its author, which are very far from my own outlook.