



# "AL HAPEREK"

## A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

### Shmuel Perakim 5-6

These chapters follow the journey of the Ark after being captured by the Philistines. Through the attitude of the Philistines toward the Ark and their collective punishment, and through the bitter fate suffered by the people of Beit Shemesh, we learn just how dangerous inappropriate contact with the Ark can be.

### General Overview < "וַיִּקְרָאוּ בַּסֶּפֶר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים"

#### Perek 5

- ❶ The root "k-v-d" (כבד) plays a critical role in the description of both the fall of Eli's household and the fall of the Ark into the hands of the Philistines. This key word suggests a fundamental connection between the two stories. Study the verses below and consider the various meanings of the word and its connection to either honoring (לכבוד) God or, heaven forbid, disgracing God: 2:8, 30; 4:18, 21, 22; 5:11; 6:5, 6.
- ❷ "*Behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord*" (5:3). What is the broader significance of Dagon's fall to the ground before the Ark? How do the physical details of this scene emphasize this significance? Regarding the custom not to tread on the threshold, see Tzafania 1:8-9.
- ❸ The Ark wanders amongst Philistine cities wreaking havoc. Follow the journey of the Ark, and note each city's response to its arrival. Why did the Philistines think that transferring the Ark from place to place would stop the plague? How is the approach of the Philistines towards the Ark similar to that of the servants of the king of Aram during their war against Achav in I Malachim 20:23?

## Perek 6

- 4 Despite the Philistine's recognition of the connection between the capturing of the Ark and the resulting plagues, they feel the need to make sure the events are not coincidental. What test do the Philistines conduct? (6:7-9). What do they choose to return along with the Ark (6:4-5, 7-9), what do these objects symbolize, and why are they called a "guilt-offering" (4, 8)?
- 5 What do the Philistines understand upon returning the Ark that the people of Beit Shemesh do not (13, 16, 19)? After being struck by the plague, what perceptual error is made by the people of Beit Shemesh regarding the Ark (20-21)?

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

- 6 Significant parallels exist between the story of the Ark's capture and the enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt. Both stories contain captivity, plagues, and sending away of the plagues' source. Consider these parallels and their meanings. Compare the following sources: Shemot 10:1-2 to I Shmuel 4:8; Shemot 11:6, 12 to I Shmuel 5:10; and Shemot 7:11 to I Shmuel 6:2.
- 7 The Philistines conduct a test to see whether "it was a chance that happened to us" (6:8). They take two cows, separate them from their calves, and send the cows to Beit Shemesh. Along the way, the two cows continuously sob, calling out for their young as they travel directly to Beit Shemesh. How does the midrash cited below interpret the word "directly" (וישרנה in 6:12)? According to the different opinions in the midrash, does this incident honor God's name (*kiddush Hashem*) or desecrate it (*chillul Hashem*)?

*"And the kine took the straight way . . ." [means] walking straight. They turned their faces toward the Ark and said a song, as it is written, "took the straight way", they said a song with their mouth. What song did they sing?*

*Rabbi Meir said: They sang the Song of the Sea. It says here "they went along, lowing (וגעו) as they went" and it says there (Shemot 15:1) "He is highly exalted" (כי-גאה גָּאָה)*

*Rabbi Yochanan said: "Sing to the Lord a new song."*

*Rabbi Eliezer said: "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name." The sages said: "The Lord is king, He rules the earth."*

*Rabbi Yirmiya in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Yitzḥak said: Three [songs]--"Sing to the Lord a new song," "Sing to the Lord all the earth," and "God is king, let the nations tremble." Elyahu Romi gave this interpretation: Wave in all your glory, you who have circles of gold, in the sanctuary of the palace, who falls between two cherubim.*

*Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said: How exhausting was it for the son of Amram to teach this song to the Leviim, and you say your song strengthens your powers.*

(Bereshit Rabbah Parshat Vayera, parsha 54).

## Appendix < "וַיְבִינּוּ בַּפִּקְרָא"

In chapters 5-6, God sends a plague that afflicts the Philistines with "swellings"/ "hemorrhoids". The purpose of the plague is to teach the Philistines that it is impossible to defeat God by capturing the Ark. The Philistines who internalize this lesson end up returning the Ark with golden "swellings" and additional gifts. Throughout these two chapters, the written word "swellings" (עפליכס) is replaced by the word "piles" (פּוֹרִיכָם), an example of *ketiv/ kri*, when there is a difference between what is written in the Tanach and what is actually read. Some suggest that this alteration was made as a euphemism, meant to preserve propriety during public readings of the text.

How did the differences between the written and recited language of the text arise? Radak, in his introduction to his commentary on the Prophets, suggests that this phenomenon has its roots in the first diaspora: *"It seems that these words appear thus because in the first exile, books were lost and knowledge floundered, and the sages who knew the Tanach had died. The men of the Great Assembly returned to the original Torah, and when they found arguments in books, they followed the opinion of the majority. In places where they could not side with one or another opinion, one person would write the word without vowels or write in the margin rather than in the main body of the text. And thus one opinion was written on the inside [in the main text] and another on the outside [in the margin]."*

Abarbanel disagrees with this explanation, offering an alternative understanding of this phenomenon: *"I distance myself from this version of events [the Radak's]. Because how can I truly believe, and how can it arise to my lips, that Ezra the Scribe found the Torah of God and the books of the Prophets, and the other holy Writings in doubt and uncertainty and confusion; for a Torah scroll missing one letter is invalid, even more so with *ketiv/ kri* in the Torah . . . this would mean that multiple letters are missing from the Torah...This matter for me is that Ezra and the men of the Great Assembly found the books of the Torah whole and intact, as they were written. . . . Ezra examined the Tanach, and the words seemed to him foreign according to the natural language and the intention of the story, and he thought that this was due to one of two possible causes: If the author intended through these foreign words to convey secrets from the hidden mysteries of the Torah as arise from deep and wise prophecy, he [Ezra] did not dare to delete any part of the books of God. . . . For he understood, according to his opinion, that they were written thus with great wisdom. . . . And therefore he left them in the text as it was written, and in the outer margin he put the *kri* [the way the text should be read] which is the explanation of the foreign word, according to the nature of the language and clarity of the idea."*