

THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

LECTURE 56: CHAPTER 30 DAVID AND THE AMALEKI TROOP

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I. THE PUNISHMENT

With the return of David and his men from the Pelishti camp to Tziklag, after the Pelishti officers rejected Akhish's request to allow them to go out with him to war against Israel, a difficult scene unfolds before them:

(1) And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Tziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid upon the south and upon Tziklag, and had smitten Tziklag and burned it with fire; (2) and had taken captive the women and all that were therein, both small and great; they slew not any, but carried them off, and went on their way.^{1[1]} (3) And when David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives and their sons and their daughters were taken captives. (4) Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep. (5) And David's two wives were taken captives, Achinoam the Yizraelitess, and Avigayil the wife of Naval the Karmelite.

David's difficult situation gives rise to the question: Why? Why was the city in which David and his men resided burned to the ground, and why were women and children taken captive? There is a simple answer in light of the approach that we adopted in the previous chapters, where we dealt with the problematic aspects of David's joining forces with Akhish when he went out to war against Israel. As we noted, it is clear that David's intention was not to harm Israel, but rather to serve when necessary as a fifth column that would desert the Pelishtim and help Israel, precisely as was argued by the Pelishti officers. We noted, however, that it was improper for David to go out to war with Akhish and to give the temporary impression that he was betraying his people. Moreover, David exploited the naiveté of Akhish, who is not portrayed in Scripture as a negative character – another act of David that is less than spotless.

Scripture describes the price that David paid for his going off with Akhish and the fact that it was precisely the officers' rejection of him that helped David and his men in the end, enabling them to pursue the Amelike troop. It is reasonable to assume that the Amalekites knew very well that David had gone off to war and that they exploited the situation to take the women and children as captives.

It is easy to imagine the state of David's men when they saw the burnt city. Fully familiar with the Amalekites and their nature, they were justified in their grave concern about the welfare of their family members. The great weeping reflected their despair, and an accusatory finger was pointed at David:

(6) And David was greatly distressed; for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters...

David's men, who, as may be recalled, were "embittered souls" (see 22:2 and what we wrote there [lecture no. 42]), wanted to strike out at David. Not only did David have to handle the difficult situation itself, but he was forced to deal with his own men, who charged him with being responsible for what had happened owing to his failed attempt to go out to war with Akhish.^{2[2]}

There is a certain similarity between David's situation in this chapter and Shaul's troubles at the time of the incident involving the medium in Ein-Dor. Corresponding to Shaul's words, "I am sore distressed" (28:15), it is now stated: "And David was greatly distressed." About Shaul it was stated: "and there was no strength in him" (28:20), and about David and his men it is stated: "until they had no more power to weep." But it is precisely at this point that the difference between these two characters finds expression. David is not helpless, but rather immediately:

(6) ... David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. (7) And David said to Evyatar the priest, the son of Achimelekh, "I pray you, bring me the efod." And Evyatar brought the efod to David. (8) And David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I pursue after^{3[3]} this troop? Shall I overtake them?" And He answered him, "Pursue; for you shall surely overtake them, and shall without fail recover all."

As opposed to Shaul, who did not receive an answer from God, David merits a positive response, which promises him deliverance from the troubles into which he had fallen. We noted in the past the problematic aspects of Shaul's conduct, the fact that he did not always inquire of God,^{4[4]} and worse than that, that he had killed the priests of Nov. It is possible that this is also the reason that Achimelekh is mentioned in verse 7; this emphasizes not only why God answered David, but also why He did not answer Shaul. As opposed to Shaul, David immediately inquired of God, as was his usual practice (which we noted in the past; see lecture no. 44 on chapter 23), and he was therefore answered in a positive manner.

II. "FOR TWO HUNDRED STAYED BEHIND WHO WERE SO FAINT THAT THEY COULD NOT GO OVER THE BROOK BESOR"

After receiving an answer from God, David sets out in pursuit of the Amaleki troop. From this point on, the story is constructed in an interesting manner. In the outer framework (verses 9-10; 21-25), we are told about the internal struggle unfolding in his camp; within this framework, an account is given of the war against the Amaleki troop and the finding of the Egyptian lad (verses 11-20). The connection between these two stories, which brought to the creation of this framework, will be discussed below. I wish, however, to first discuss verses 9-10, which constitute an exposition in anticipation of the main event described in the continuation of the chapter:

(9) So David went, he and the six hundred men that were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed.

(10) But David pursued, he and four hundred men; for two hundred stayed behind, who were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor.

It seems that the division of David's men into two groups – one group of four hundred men who joined David in the pursuit and a second group of two hundred men who remained behind – is not by chance. Already when David's men gathered behind him, it was possible to distinguish between two groups: the original core of four hundred men – "And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him, and he became captain over them; and there were with him **about four hundred men**" (22:2) - and the two hundred who were added later – "Then David and his men, who were **about six hundred**, arose and departed out of Ke'ila, and went whithersoever they could go" (23:13). This division is also found in the story involving Naval the Karmelite: "And David said unto his men, 'Gird you on every man his sword.' And they girded on every man his sword, and David also girded on his sword; and there went up after David **about four hundred men, and two hundred** abode by the baggage" (25:13). We already suggested (lecture no. 42, note 3) that the four hundred men who went up with David were the four hundred men who comprised the original group, whereas the two hundred who remained behind with the baggage were those who joined up later and failed to blend in with the core group. Thus, it may be argued that the four hundred men who went with David in our chapter were the four hundred members of the original group, whereas the additional two hundred were those who remained with the baggage in the campaign against Naval as well.^{5[5]}

In light of this, we can understand the tension that develops between the two groups in the continuation of the story: This was not a one-time incident, but rather part of the ongoing tension between the two groups in David's camp, a tension the meaning of which will be discussed below.

III. "AND MY MASTER LEFT ME, BECAUSE THREE DAYS AGO I FELL SICK"

David's deliverance arrives with the help of a particular incident:

(11) And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they gave him water to drink; (12) and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins; and when he had eaten, his spirit came back to him; for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three days and three nights. (13) And David said unto him, "To whom do you belong? And from where are you?" And he said: "I am a young Egyptian, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick. (14) We made a raid upon the south of the Keretites, and upon that which belongs to Yehuda, and upon the south of Kalev; and we burned Tziklag with fire."

These verses describe, first and foremost, the deep moral abyss that separates the Amalekites from David's camp. David's men meet the Egyptian lad on the verge of death and rescue him without even knowing who he is, despite their own difficult psychological state and despite the fact that they are engaged in a pursuit. The lad's Egyptian origins sharpen two points. First, had he been an Amalekite, there might have been room to assume that David's men saved him only for their own benefit, on the assumption that he would be able to provide them with information about the troop that had attacked Tziklag. The fact that he belonged to a different people proves that the assistance that they extended to him stemmed solely from a moral obligation. Second, the fact that the lad was Egyptian was liable to negatively effect their attitude toward him, after hundreds of years of enslavement during which "an Egyptian man hitting a Hebrew man" (*Shemot* 2:11)^{6[6]} must have been a common sight. Nevertheless, David and his men fulfilled the Torah's command, "You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land" (*Devarim* 23:8), and saved the lad from death.

All this stands out, of course, against the cruelty of the Amalekites. The Egyptian lad's sickness bothered his Amaleki master, who cast him off without food or water to die a certain death. This is slightly reminiscent of Amalek's attitude toward Israel at the time of the exodus from Egypt: "How he met you by the way, and smote the hindmost of you, all that were feeble in your rear, when you were faint and weary" (*Devarim* 25:18). Amalek is a nation of plunderers, void of moral restraints regarding those weak and behind, so different from the way of David.

Indeed, by virtue of this act of kindness, David and his men merit to receive important information about the whereabouts of the Amaleki troop:

(13) And David said unto him, "To whom do you belong? And from where are you?" And he said: "I am a young Egyptian, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick. (14) We made a raid upon the south of the Keretites, and upon that which belongs to Yehuda, and upon the south of Kalev; and we burned Tziklag with fire. (15) And David said to him, "Will you bring me down to this troop?" And he said, "Swear unto me by God, that you will neither kill me, nor deliver me up into the hands of my master,^{7[7]} and I will bring you down to this troop."^{8[8]} (16) And when he had brought him down,^{9[9]} behold, they were spread abroad over all the ground, eating and drinking and feasting, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Pelishtim and out of the land of Yehuda. (17) And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day;^{10[10]} and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, who rode upon camels and fled. (18) And David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken; and David rescued his two wives. (19) And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them; David brought back all.

We see, then, that the immoral act performed by the Amalekites against the slave sealed their fate, and the act of kindness performed by David and his men ensured the restoration of the situation to its previous state.

IV. THE STATUTE

The story of the war is not yet finished, and its continuation highlights even further the gap between David and Amalek:

(20) And David took all the flocks and the herds, which they drove before those other cattle, and said, "This is David's spoil." (21) And David came to the two hundred men, who were so faint that they could not follow David, whom also they had made to abide at the brook Besor; and they went forth to meet David and to meet the people that were with him; and when David came near to the people, he saluted them. (22) Then answered all the wicked men and base fellows of those that went with David, and said, "Because they went not with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away and depart." (23) Then said David, "You shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord has given unto us, who has preserved us and

delivered the troop that came against us into our hand. (24) And who will hearken unto you in this matter? For as is the share of he who goes down to the battle, so shall be the share of he who tarries by the baggage; they shall share alike. (25) And it was so from that day forward that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day.¹¹[11]

The mood of David's men undergoes a dramatic change, and now they laud and praise David: "This is David's spoil." This perception, however, is problematic, and it leads to the confrontation alluded to above. David relates to the people who stayed behind in a respectful manner. He inquires about their welfare and insists on their right to receive their share of the spoil. He does not view them as people who "could not go over the brook," but rather as those "who tarry by the baggage," that is to say, as guards who are needed in every military campaign. His primary argument is that the spoil is not "the spoil of David," as his men had declared, but rather "that which the Lord has given us," and it therefore must be dealt with in a proper and upright manner. David's greatness lies also in his ability to impose peace upon his camp; he rebukes the "base fellows" who wish to deny the others their share, but at the same time he addresses them as "my brethren." Thus, he gives them a sense of belonging, which neutralizes their feeling of haughtiness.

At this point, the connection is made between the story told in the outer frame and the inner story of the battle against the Amalekites. Amalek is noted as relating in an immoral manner towards the weak and behind. David displays an entirely different ethical norm: concern for the welfare and dignity of the weak, based on the clear knowledge that fitting ethical norms are what underlie his success: "That which the Lord has given unto us, who has preserved us, and delivered the troop that came against us into our hand."¹²[12]

V. EPILOGUE

At the end of the chapter, we find a list of cities to which David sent the spoil taken from Israel's enemies,¹³[13] thus fulfilling the Torah's command to divide the spoil between those who go out to war and the rest of the people (see *Bamidbar* 31:27). According to the masoretic tradition, this list is written in poetic form, in the manner of other victory poems:¹⁴[14]

(26) And when David came to Tziklag, he sent of the spoil unto the elders of Yehuda, even to his friends, saying, "Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the Lord." (27) To those that were in Bet-

El,15[15] and to those that were in Ramot of the south, and to those that were in Yatir; (28) and to those that were in Aro'er, and to those that were in Sifmot, and to those that were in Eshtemo'a; (29) and to those that were in Rakhal, and to those that were in the cities of the Yerachme'elites, and to those that were in the cities of the Kenites; (30) and to those that were in Chorma, and to those that were in Bor-Ashan, and to those that were in Atakh; (31) and to those that were in Hebron, and to all the places where David himself and his men were wont to haunt.

Attention should be paid to the end of the list: Hebron. Here, too, as in other biblical lists,16[16] the last to be mentioned is the most cherished; David takes one more step toward establishing his kingship in Hebron.

(Translated by David Strauss)

17[1] According to the Radak, the Amalekites raided Tziklag because they had learned that it was from there that the invading forces set out (chapter 27). Even though David did not leave anyone alive in his attacks (ibid. 9:11), nevertheless, "they searched out the matter among the neighboring peoples until they found it out." From the continuation of the chapter, however, it seems that the raid against Tziklag was part of a larger series of raids that was not directed specifically at Tziklag. We read below in v. 14: "We made a raid upon **the south of the Keretites, and upon that which belongs to Yehuda, and upon the south of Kaleb;** and we burned Tziklag with fire;" and in v. 16 it says: "Eating and drinking, and feasting, because of all the great spoil that they had taken **out of the land of the Pelishtim and out of the land of Yehuda.**" It appears from these verses that the Amalekites exploited the war between the Pelishtim and Israel in order to raid the lands of both peoples, especially in the south, which was far away from the region of the battle.

According to the Radak, there is also the difficulty why the Amalekites did not kill anyone, for this was a punitive raid, the natural reaction would be to kill all the inhabitants, just as David had done. The Radak suggests in a forced manner: "And for reasons known to the Creator and because He protected those who love Him, he did not kill man or woman, even though David had killed many of them." But if this was a regular raid undertaken for the spoil, this is entirely understandable: The captives were kept alive in order to sell them as slaves.

18[2] As was noted by *Metzudat David*: "Besides the trouble that his wives had been taken captive, the people also talked about stoning him because he had tried to go out to war with Akhish, and this was the reason that Amalek came and did what it did."

19[3] Here, "erdof" is used in the sense of "ha-erdof," the interrogative *heh* being swallowed up in the letter *alef*, as was noted by the Radak and the *Metzudat Zion*, who bring other Scriptural examples of this phenomenon.

20[4] We saw this especially in chapter 14 (lecture no. 24), and we discussed this in chapter 28 (lecture no. 53).

21[5] It is, of course, possible that there is no connection between the groups, and each time we are dealing with different people. But if we are not dealing with two distinct groups, it is difficult to understand why Scripture mentions this division.

22[6] The combination "Egyptian man" is found in a negative context in other places in Scripture as well: "And the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was **an Egyptian man**, went out among the children of Israel; and this son of the Israelite man and a man of Israel strove together in the camp; and the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of the Lord, and cursed." (*Vayikra* 24:10-11); "And Benayahu the son of Yehoyada... slew **an Egyptian man**, a fine looking man; and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the hand of the Egyptian, and slew him with his own spear" (II *Shmuel* 23:20-21).

23[7] The slave's fear of being handed over to his master stemmed from the social obligation in the ancient world to hand over runaway slaves to their masters, an obligation that ancient near-eastern law anchored with a financial penalty (and, in the Code of Hammurabi, even with the death penalty) that was cast upon one who failed to fill this duty (see *Encyclopedia Mikra'it*, s.v. *eved*). An example of informing on runaway slaves is found also in Scripture; see I *Melakhim* 2:39-40. This, of course, runs counter to an explicit Torah prohibition: "You shall not deliver to his master the servant who is escaped from his master to you; he shall dwell with you, among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of your gates, where it likes him best; you shall not oppress him" (*Devarim* 23:16-17).

24[8] It stands to reason that the lad knew where the troop usually camped.

25[9] Scripture does not say that David actually swore to the Egyptian lad – apparently because David never had any intention of handing him over to his master, and Scripture preferred not to mention an unnecessary oath taken by David.

26[10] Rashi sees in this word an allusion to the Torah section dealing with Amalek: "The Amalekites were accustomed to be beaten on the next day, as it says: 'Tomorrow I will stand' (*Shemot* 17:9)." The Radak explains that the word "*neshef*" means "evening," and "*le-macharatam*" means "the day after two evenings." He also cites the understanding of *Chazal* that "*neshef*" can also mean the end of the night, in which case the reference is to the time between sunrise and sunset. Indeed, the word "*neshef*" has two meanings: the beginning of the night (see, for example, *Yeshayahu* 5:11; *Mishlei* 7:9) and the end of the night (see *Tehillim* 119:147; *Iyov* 7:4). The Radak raises an objection against *Chazal*; according to their understanding, the word "*le-macharatam*" is difficult. The *mem*, however, might be like the *mem* in *yomam*, *shilshom*, *tzaharayim*, *reikam*, and the like, in which case it does not denote the plural.

27[11] We noted in the past (chapter 27, lecture no. 52) that the expression "unto this day" expresses, according to the plain sense of Scripture, the fact that the verse was written well after the events under discussion. *Metzudat David* offers a very surprising comment: "That is

to say: Until the time that Israel went into exile and no longer engaged in war." According to him, the verse was written during a very late period, after "Israel went into exile!"

28[12] The Ralbag offers an interesting explanation: it was precisely the two hundred men who stayed behind who found the Egyptian lad and brought him to David. Even though his explanation is difficult from a practical perspective, he emphasizes from a conceptual perspective the contribution of those who stayed behind to the war effort.

29[13] As opposed to Shaul in chapter 15, David is not punished for taking spoil from Amalek. The taking of spoil was only forbidden in a war fought to wipe out the memory of Amalek, as was explained at length in lecture 28. This stands in contrast to the war in our chapter, which is not an official war between Israel and Amalek, but rather a battle to rescue David's camp.

30[14] See *Yehoshua* 12:9-24; I *Shmuel* 6:17; *Ester* 9:7-9.

31[15] Bet-El, which is included in this list of cities located in the southern part of Yehuda, is clearly not the well-known Bet-El in the territory of Binyamin. There are those who identify this Bet-El with the city Betul mentioned in *Yehoshua* 19:4 (Betu'el in *Divrei Ha-yamim* 4:30).

32[16] See, for example, the list of the children of Nachor, which ends with Rivka (*Bereishit* 22:20-23; and Rashi, v. 23).
