

Stones and Stories #5

Saul, David and the Philistines

Outline of Samuel I

1-3 Samuel's birth and youth, Eli's downfall

4-6 Israel's defeat by Philistines at Afek, capture and return of the Ark of the Covenant

7-10 Samuel's leadership, choosing Saul as king

11-15 Saul's leadership and downfall

16 David anointed as next king

17 David and Goliath battle

18-27 David's misadventures in Saul's household and his wanderings

28-31 Saul's final battle, with an interlude of David fighting in the south

Samuel II chapter 1 David's lament about Saul and Jonathan

Philistines: Israel's Greatest Enemy for Centuries

To Me, O Israelites, you are Just like the Ethiopians —declares the LORD. True, I brought Israel up From the land of Egypt, But also the Philistines from **Caphtor** And the Arameans from Kir. (Amos 9:7)

assuredly, thus said the Lord GOD: I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines and cut off the **Cherethites** and wipe out the last survivors of the seacoast. (Ezekiel 25:16)

Ah, nation of **Cherethites** Who inhabit the seacoast! There is a word of the LORD against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines: I will lay you waste Without inhabitants. (Zefaniah 2:5)

The Route of the Ark

The cows went straight ahead along the road to Beth-shemesh. They went along a single highroad, lowing as they went, and turning off neither to the right nor to the left; and the lords of the Philistines walked behind them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

The people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. They looked up and saw the Ark, and they rejoiced when they saw [it]. (Samuel I 6:12-13)

Gat: Goliath's Hometown?

So he concealed his good sense from them; he feigned madness for their benefit. He scratched marks on the **doors of the gate** and let his saliva run down his beard. (Samuel I 21:14)

Philistine Might

The Philistines assembled their forces for battle; they massed at Socoh of Judah, and encamped at Ephes-dammim, between Socoh and Azekah. Saul and the men of Israel massed and encamped in the valley of Elah. They drew up their line of battle against the Philistines, with the Philistines stationed on one hill and Israel stationed on the opposite hill; the ravine was between them. A champion of the Philistine forces stepped forward; his name was Goliath of Gath, and he was six cubits and a span tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and wore a breastplate of scale armor, a bronze breastplate weighing five thousand shekels. He had bronze greaves on his legs, and a bronze javelin [slung] from his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's bar, and the iron head of his spear weighed six hundred shekels; and the shield-bearer marched in front of him. He stopped and called out to the ranks of Israel and he said to them, "Why should you come out to engage in battle? I am the Philistine [champion], and you are Saul's servants. Choose. one of your men and let him come down against me. If he bests me in combat and kills me, we will become your slaves; but if I best him and kill him, you shall be our slaves and serve us." And the Philistine ended, "I herewith defy the ranks of Israel. Get me a man and let's fight it out!" When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and terror-stricken. (Samuel I 17:1-11)

Israelite Right

He took his stick, picked a few smooth stones from the wadi, put them in the pocket of his shepherd's bag and, sling in hand, he went toward the Philistine. The Philistine, meanwhile, was coming closer to David, preceded by his shield-bearer. When the Philistine caught sight of David, he scorned him, for he was but a boy, ruddy and handsome. And the Philistine called out to David, "Am I a dog that you come against me with sticks?" The Philistine cursed David by his gods; and the Philistine said to David, "Come here, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field." David replied to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Hosts, the God of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hands. I will kill you and cut off your

head; and I will give the carcasses^j of the Philistine camp to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth. All the earth shall know that there is a God in Israel. And this whole assembly shall know that the LORD can give victory without sword or spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and He will deliver you into our hands." (Samuel I 17:40-47)

What Really Happened at Ein Dor?

Now Samuel had died and all Israel made lament for him; and he was buried in his own town of Ramah. And Saul had forbidden [recourse to] ghosts and familiar spirits in the land. The Philistines mustered and they marched to Shunem and encamped; and Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. When Saul saw the Philistine force, his heart trembled with fear. And Saul inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets. Then Saul said to his courtiers, "Find me a woman who consults ghosts, so that I can go to her and inquire through her." And his courtiers told him that there was a woman in En-dor who consulted ghosts. Saul disguised himself; he put on different clothes and set out with two men. They came to the woman by night, and he said, "Please divine for me by a ghost. Bring up for me the one I shall name to you." But the woman answered him, "You know what Saul has done, how he has banned [the use of] ghosts and familiar spirits in the land. So why are you laying a trap for me, to get me killed?" Saul swore to her by the LORD: "As the LORD lives, you won't get into trouble over this." At that, the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He answered, "Bring up Samuel for me." Then the woman recognized Samuel, and she shrieked loudly, and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" The king answered her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I see a divine being coming up from the earth." "What does he look like?" he asked her. "It is an old man coming up," she said, "and he is wrapped in a robe." Then Saul knew that it was Samuel; and he bowed low in homage with his face to the ground. Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me and brought me up?" And Saul answered, "I am in great trouble. The Philistines are attacking me and God has turned away from me; He no longer answers me, either by prophets or in dreams. So I have called you to tell me what I am to do." Samuel said, "Why do you ask me, seeing that the LORD has turned away from you and has become your adversary?. The LORD has done for Himself^e as He foretold through me: The LORD has torn the kingship out of your hands and has given it to your fellow, to David, because you did not obey the LORD and did not execute His wrath upon the Amalekites. That is why the LORD has done this to you today. Further, the LORD will deliver the Israelites who are with you into the hands of the Philistines. Tomorrow your sons and you will be with me; and the LORD will also deliver the Israelite forces into the hands of the Philistines." (Samuel I 28: 3-19)

In the dark of night with neither bow nor Javelin On the back of a light horse Endora came King Saul. In one of the houses a dark light appeared: - " Here she

lives " - the boy had quietly expressed. - "The sorceress? - "Yes sir, here I am." - "Conjured up your magic, Show me the Shadow of the seer!" Darkness ...fire of horrors ...in the corner a cauldron, The names of all the demons and a boiling concoction. Like a squirming snake in the Bashan grass Pillars of smoke crawling in a vicious circle , sulfur anointed , There stand the king, restless is his heart Creatures of mist images of idols Beads of sweat trickle down his cheek. His spirit slackened, his soul aches. How his heart melts and prophesizes death His whole life passes in front of his eyes "leave me alone, let me be" his lips whisper (Ein Dor by Shaul Tchernichovsky)

Taken to Bet Shean

The Philistines attacked Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and [many] fell on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines pursued Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, sons of Saul. The battle raged around Saul, and some of the archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers. Saul said to his arms-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, so that the uncircumcised may not run me through and make sport of me." But his arms-bearer, in his great awe, refused; whereupon Saul grasped the sword and fell upon it. When his arms-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. Thus Saul and his three sons and his arms-bearer, as well as all his men, died together on that day. And when the men of Israel on the other side of the valley and on the other side of the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned the towns and fled; the Philistines then came and occupied them. The next day the Philistines came to strip the slain, and they found Saul and his three sons lying on Mount Gilboa. They cut off his head and stripped him of his armor, and they sent them throughout the land of the Philistines, to spread the news in the temples of their idols and among the people. They placed his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth, and they impaled his body on the wall of Beth-shan. (Samuel I 31)

Yavesh Gilad: Closing the Circle

When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard about it—what the Philistines had done to Saul— all their stalwart men set out and marched all night; they removed the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth-shan and came to Jabesh and burned them there. Then they took the bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days. (Samuel I 31)

David was told what Saul's concubine Rizpah daughter of Aiah had done. And David went and took the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh-gilead, who had made off with them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hung them up on the day the Philistines killed Saul at Gilboa. He brought up the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan from

there; and he gathered the bones of those who had been impaled. And they buried the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan in Zela, in the territory of Benjamin, in the tomb of his father Kish. And when all that the king had commanded was done, God responded to the plea of the land thereafter. (Samuel II 21)

What Was Jewish Life Like?

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Zeruz, son of the father-in-law of Rabbi Meir, testified before Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi about Rabbi Meir that he ate the leaf of a vegetable in Beit She'an (that was not tithed) And Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi permitted all the produce of Beit She'an on the basis of his testimony. (Hullin 6b)

One may not allow the people of Beit She'an, nor the people of Beit Haifa, nor the people of Tivonin to pass before the ark in order to lead the service because they pronounce alef as ayin and ayin as alef (Megillah 24b)

A city in which an idolatrous festival is taking place, some of its shops being decorated and some not decorated this was the case with Beth-Shean, and the Sages said: in the decorated stores it is forbidden [to buy] but in the undecorated ones it is permitted. (Mishnah Avoda Zara 1:4)

And It All Came Crashing Down

"ובכ"ג בשבט צום לארץ ישראל יקראוהו
צום הרעש משום שארץ ישראל רעשה ונפלו ממנה
הרבה ערים ומתו תחת החרבות חכמים
ויש לו במקראות רמז "בזעם תצעד ארץ". מזמן שחרבה
ירושלים עד הזמן שקרה (הרעש) בארץ ישראל מניין בזע"ם"

(Piyyut from the Cairo Geniza)

וִיקְנֶנּוּ דָּוִד אֶת־הַקִּינָה הַזֹּאת עַל־שְׂאוֹל וְעַל־הַוַּנְתָּנוּ בְּנוֹ:

וְלֵאמֹר לְלַמֵּד בְּנֵי־הַיְהוּדָה קִשְׁת הַנָּה כְּתוּבָה עַל־סֵפֶר הַיְשָׁר:

הַצְבִּיל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־בְּמוֹתֶיךָ חָלַל אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גְבוּרִים:

אֶל־תִּגְדֹּדוּ בְּגַת אֶל־תִּבְשְׂרוּ בְּחוּצַת אֲשֻׁקְלוֹן פֹּרֶת־שְׂמֹלְחָהּ בְּנוֹת פְּלִשְׁתִּים פֹּרֶת־עֲלִזָּה בְּנוֹת
הָעַרְלִים:

הָרִי בְּגִלְבָּע אֶל־טַל וְאֶל־מָטָר עֲלֵיכֶם וּשְׂדֵי תְרוּמֹתַי כִּי שָׁם נִגְעַל מִגֶּן גְּבוּרִים מִגֶּן שְׂאוֹל בְּלִי
מְשִׁיחַ בְּשָׁמוֹ:

מִדָּם חֲלָלִים מִחֲלָב גְבוּרִים קָשֶׁת יְהוֹנָתָן לֹא נִשְׁוֹג אַחֲרָיו וְחֶרֶב שָׂאוֹל לֹא תָשׁוּב רִיקָם :

שָׂאוֹל וַיהוֹנָתָן הִנָּאֲהָבִים וְהִנְעִימָם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם וּבְמוֹתָם לֹא נִפְרְדּוּ מִנְּשָׁרִים לָלוּ מֵאֲרָיוֹת
גְּבוּרָו :

בְּנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל אַל־שָׂאוֹל בְּכִינָה הַמְּלַבְּשָׁכֶם שָׁנִי עִם־עַדְנָיִם הַמְּעַלָּה עֲדֵי זָהָב עַל לְבוּשְׁכֶם :

אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גְבוּרִים בְּתוֹךְ הַמְּלַחְמָה יְהוֹנָתָן עַל־בְּמוֹתֶיךָ חֲלָל :

צַר־לִי עֲלֶיךָ אַחִי יְהוֹנָתָן נַעֲמֶתָ לִי מֵאֲדָנְךָ נִפְלְאַתָּה אֶהְבֶּתְךָ לִי מֵאֶהְבֶּת נָשִׁים :

אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גְבוּרִים וַיֵּאבְדּוּ כְּלֵי מְלַחְמָה :

And David intoned this dirge over Saul and his son Jonathan—

He ordered the sons of Judah to be taught [The Song of the] Bow.^a It is recorded in the Book of Jashar. Your glory, O Israel,
Lies slain on your heights;
How have the mighty fallen!

Tell it not in Gath,
Do not proclaim it in the streets of Ashkelon,
Lest the daughters of the Philistine rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

O hills of Gilboa—
Let there be no dew or rain on you,
Or bountiful fields,^b
For there the shield of warriors lay rejected,
The shield of Saul,
Polished with oil no more.

From the blood of slain,
From the fat of warriors—
The bow of Jonathan
Never turned back;
The sword of Saul
Never withdrew empty.

Saul and Jonathan,
Beloved and cherished,
Never parted
In life or in death!
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions!

Daughters of Israel,
Weep over Saul,
Who clothed you in crimson and finery,
Who decked your robes with jewels of gold.

How have the mighty fallen
In the thick of battle—
Jonathan, slain on your heights!

I grieve for you,
My brother Jonathan,
You were most dear to me.
Your love was wonderful to me
More than the love of women.

How have the mighty fallen,
The weapons of war^e perished!