

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XLVIII: Shoftim (Deut. 16:18–21:9)

Essay 7. The wicked are not immediately punished

Mephibosheth was a grandson of King Saul. After David became king of the united monarchy, he sought “someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of G-d,”¹ and Mephibosheth was brought to him. David restored Saul’s inheritance to Mephibosheth and permitted him to live within his palace in Jerusalem. He appointed Ziba, a former servant of Saul, to serve Mephibosheth.

However, when David fled Jerusalem after Absalom’s conspiracy, Ziba came to David with supplies, claiming that Mephibosheth was not faithful to David. David responded by giving all of Mephibosheth’s property to Ziba. Upon David’s return to Jerusalem, Scripture relates:

Mephibosheth said: “[Ziba] has slandered your servant to my lord the king. But my lord the king is like an angel of the L-rd; do as you see fit. For all the members of my father’s family deserved only death from my lord the king; yet you set your servant among those who ate at your table. What right have I to appeal further to Your Majesty?’ The king said to him, ‘You need not speak further. I decree that you and Ziba shall divide the property.’ And Mephibosheth said to the king, ‘Let him take it all, as long as my lord the king has come home safe.’”²

שַׁבָּת פָּרָק ה' אָנִי אֲמַרְתִּי מְתֵי תְבֵא בְּשָׁלוֹם וְאַתָּה עוֹשֶׂה לִּי כֵךְ, לֹא עָלִידָה יֵשׁ לִי תַרְעוּמָת, אֲלֵא עַל מִי שֶׁהִבִּיאָה לְשָׁלוֹם וְכוּ'. יִצְאָתָה בֵּת קוֹל וְאֲמַרְהָ לוֹ: נִצָּא בֵּר נִצָּא. "נִצָּא", הֵא דְאַמְרֵן. "בֵּר נִצָּא", דְּכַתִּיב: "וַיָּבֵא שָׂאוּל עַד-עִיר עֲמֶלֶק וַיָּרֶב בְּנַחֲלֵי", וְאָמַר ר' מְנַי: עַל עֶסְקֵי נַחֲל ע"כ. מִקְשִׁים הָעוֹלָם מָה הִשְׁיִבְתּוּ בֵּת קוֹל לְמַפְיבוֹשֶׁת מִמָּה שֶׁשָּׂאוּל לֹא רָצָה לְהַכְרִית כָּל זֶרַע עֲמֶלֶק, וְעוֹד שֶׁאָמַר "גַּם אֶת-הַכֹּל יִקַּח אַחֲרָי אֲשֶׁר-בָּא אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ", מָה טַעַם הוּא זֶה לְהַפְסִיד וְנִכְסָיו בְּשִׁבִיל שֶׁהִמְלִיךְ הַזֶּה בְּשָׁלוֹם, אֲדַרְבָּא זֶה נוֹתֵן מְקוֹם לְלִשׁוֹן הָרַע שֶׁל צִיבָא עֲבָדוּ.

Tractate Shabbat, chapter 5:

[Mephibosheth] **said to [David]: I [had hoped for your return], saying: When will he come in peace, but you do this to me [giving Ziba half of my estate]? It is not against you that I have a grievance, but against He who brought you back in peace.**

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¹ II Sam. 19:28–31.

² II Sam. 19:31.

This is what is written: “And the son of Jonathan was Meriv-Baal” (I Chron. 8:34). And was Meriv-Baal his name? Wasn't his name Mephibosheth? However, since he entered into a quarrel [*meriva*] with his Master [*ba'al*] [i.e., G-d, and complained about G-d having saved David], **a Heavenly Voice emerged and said to him: Quarrelsome [one], the son of a quarrelsome [one; you are just like your grandfather, Saul].** [The Gemara explains:] **Quarrelsome [one]; that which we said** [that Mephibosheth complained to G-d about His salvation of David]. **The son of a quarrelsome [one]; as it is written: “Then Saul advanced as far as the city of Amalek and quarreled [וַיָּרִיב] [*va'yariv*] in the valley.”** (I Sam. 15:5). **Rabbi Mani said:** [Saul quarreled with G-d] **with regard to matters of the valley.** [He argued that an unsolved murder must be atoned by breaking the neck of a heifer in a valley, because the victim could have produced great deeds or offspring, and thus he questioned the need to kill all of Amalek, reasoning that great things or offspring may have come from some of them.]

- Shabbat 56b

Everyone asks why the Heavenly Voice answered Mephibosheth regarding Saul not wanting to destroy all of Amalek. [They ask] also why [Mephibosheth] said to King David, “Let him take it all, as long as my lord the king has come home safe.”³ What was the point of losing his possessions because the king returned in peace? Rather, this supports the slander of Ziba, his servant, i.e., almost as if Mephibosheth is now admitting that Ziba's report was not slander, but was factual.

וְגַם לומר דאיתא בירושלמי דפיאה דורו של אחאב על ידי שלא היו בהם דלטורין היו יוצאים למלקמה ונוצחין, ודורו של דוד על ידי שהיו בהם דלטורין היו יוצאין למלקמה ונופלין וכו'. וידוע שהלשון הרע עובר עליו בין האומרו ובין המקבלו, והואיל שדוד קבל הלשון הרע, מוכרח לומר שלא הנה חמור לפניו איסור זה. וציבא שאמרו, שמע מינה שהנה בעל לשון הרע, והואיל שציבא הנה דלטור, ודוד לא הנה חושש לאיסור הנה לו ליפול במלקמה. ועוד שבבעלי לשון הרע הם שונאים השלום, כדמוכח ממזמור "אלהי בצרתה לי" שמדבר נגד מספרי לשון הרע, כדכתיב "ה' הצילה נפשי משפת־שקר" וכו' "רבת שכנה־לה נפשי עם שונא שלום: אֲנִי־שְׁלוֹם" וכו' "המה למלקמה". ובכאן דוד הנה חוזר מן המלקמה עם אבשלום והנה מבקש שכל ישראל ישלימו עמו ולהיות בשלום עמם, וציבא בא לקראתו עם שמעי ראש לכל בית יוסף כנראה מפשט הכתובים.

It can be said that it's brought in the Jerusalem [Talmud] of tractate Peah [1:1]: “The generation of Ahab were idolaters, but since there was no informants among them, they went to war and were victorious. The generation of David were all righteous, but because there were informers among them, they went to war and were falling [in battle].” It's known that slander is a sin both for the one who speaks it and for the one who accepts it.⁴ Since David accepted

³ II Sam. 19:31.

⁴ Arachin 15b.

the slander, it must be said that he was not strict regarding this prohibition.⁵ Since Ziba said [this slander], hear from this that he was one who speaks slander, and since Ziba was an informant, and David wasn't afraid of this prohibition, [David] was liable to fall in war. Also, speakers of slander hate peace, as is proven from the poem:

A song of ascents: In my distress I called to the L-rd and He answered me.
O L-rd, save me from treacherous lips, from a deceitful tongue! What can you profit, what can you gain, O deceitful tongue? A warrior's sharp arrows, with hot coals of broom-wood. Woe is me, that I live with Meshech, that I dwell among the clans of Kedar. **Too long have I dwelt with those who hate peace. I am all peace;** but when I speak, **they are for war.**

- Ps. 120:1-7

Here David was returning from the war with Absalom and asked that all of Israel reconcile with him and that he could be at peace with them. But Ziba came to meet him with Shimei, head of all the house of Joseph, as appears from the plain meaning of the verses. Mephiboshet was confused, as it seems that David accepted slander, and should have been punished in battle. But David survived and said he wanted peace, but then he met again with the slanderer.

ואם כן אמר מפיבושת, הואיל שיש בדור הזה מספרי לשון הרע, וגם אתה שקבלתו, שמע מינה שלא היית חושש לאיסור זה, אני תמה איד גיצולת מן המלקמה. ועוד תורת בשלום עם כל בית ישראל אל ביתה, בלכן לא עליך יש לי תרעומת שאנדרבא זהו סימן לה שמה שקבלת אינו לשון הרע אלא דברי אמת. והראיה שתורת בשלום אל ביתה, והואיל שיש לה ראיה זו שפן השמים נתנו לה מקום לטעות, גם את הפל יקח, שהרי אם האמת כדבריו הדין עמה, שאני נקרא מורד במלכות ואין לי כלום, ומשום הכי "את הפל יקח אחרי אשרבא . . . בשלום אל ביתו". אבל יש לי תרעומת על מי שהביאך בשלום, שהקב"ה יודע שזה לשון הרע ועונש לשון הרע הוא שלא יבא בשלום. למה הביאך בשלום?

If so, Mephibosheth said, since in this generation there are speakers of slander, and also you accept it, hear from this that you did not fear from this prohibition. Thus, I am astounded how you were saved from the war. Also, you returned in peace with the entire house of Israel to your house, and therefore, "It is not against you that I have a grievance," for the contrary, this is a sign to you that you believe that what you received is not slander, rather words of truth. The proof is that you returned in peace to your house. I know that Ziba's words were slander, but since you have this proof, that from Heaven you were allowed to err, then you should take everything, for if the truth is like his words, the law is with you, that I would be called a rebel against the throne and I would have nothing. Because of that, "Let him take it all, as long as my lord the king has come home safe."

But I have a grievance against He that brought you back in peace, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, knows that this is slander, and the penalty for slander is that he should not come in peace. Why did You bring him back in peace?

⁵ Shabbat 56a.

מיד יצאתה בת קול ואמרה לו נצא בר נצא וכו', כלומר יש להשיב על תרעומת זו של מפיבושת, דדילמא מה שחס הקב"ה על דוד ולא המיתו במלקמה או בדרדך כמו שהיה העונש של בעלי לשון הרע, לא היה אלא משום שעתידי לצאת ממנו איזה דבר טוב, או יעשה איזה דבר טוב בישראל, שהקב"ה אינו ממית את הרשעים תכף ומיד שחטאו אלא מוותר להם, או מפני תיקון העולם או מפני שעתידי לצאת מהם איזה דבר טוב, כדאשכחן בשני אומות שחס הקב"ה עליהן בשביל שתי פרידות טובות ולא התריבו כדאמרינן [בבבא קמא], ואם כן מפיבושת היה לו להתנישב בדעתו בסברא זו ולא להיות קורא תגר.

Immediately a Heavenly Voice emerged and said to him: Quarrelsome one, the son of a quarrelsome one; you are just like your father, Saul. This is as if to say, one can answer this grievance of Mephibosheth, that perhaps the reason that the Holy One, Blessed be He, saved David and didn't kill him in the war or on the way, as was the punishment for speakers of slander, was only because something good was going to come from him in the future, or because he would do something good in Israel. That is, the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not kill the wicked immediately when they sin, rather He overlooks [the sin for the moment], either because of repairing the world or because something good will come from [the sinners] in the future.

This is as we found with the two nations that the Holy One, Blessed be He, saved because of two virtuous fledglings, viz, Ruth, the Moabite, the ancestor of David, and Na'amah the Ammonite, Solomon's wife. Because of [these two women], He didn't destroy [those two nations], as it is written in [Bava Kamma],⁶ page 38b. If so, Mephibosheth should have settled his thinking with this opinion and not been quarrelsome.

ויותר קשה שישאול אבי אביו כשנצטנה להרוג את עמלק עשה קושניא הפך זה והפך ציווי הקב"ה. ומה אם על נפש אחד אמרה תורה הבא עגלה ערופה בנחל, והטעם הוא כדאמרינן בסוטה תבא מי שלא עשתה פירות ותיערף במקום שאינו עושה פירות לכפר על מי שלא הניח והוה לעשות פירות, כל הנפשות הללו על אחת כמה וכמה שאי אפשר שלא יצא מהם איזה דבר טוב.

It is even more difficult to understand that Saul, his grandfather, when he was commanded to kill Amalek, did the opposite of this and the opposite of the commandment of the Holy One, Blessed be He.

Saul was thinking that the Torah spoke about the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley because of one person [who was found murdered].⁷ The reason for the form of the response is as it is written in Sotah 46a, "Let a heifer which is only one year old and which therefore has brought forth no fruits [i.e., no offspring] have its neck broken at a spot which has not brought forth fruits, to expiate for the murder of him whom they did not permit further to beget children." In other words, great deeds, or great children, could have come forth

⁶ The first edition cited Ketubot.

⁷ Deut. 21:1–9.

from the victim, and we should take action to note that lost possibility. Thus, Saul reasoned, isn't the same true **for all these souls** of Amalek, **all the more so, that it's impossible that something good would not come forth from some of them.**

אם כן שאול ומפיבושת התרעמו על הקב"ה בסברות הפוכות, שאם תרעומת של אהד הוא תרעומת, תרעומת השני אינו תרעומת. אלא נדאי שפוננתם להתרעם, וזהו נצא בר נצא, והאמת הוא ששם בעמלק גלוי היה לפני הקב"ה שאינו עתיד לצאת מהם דבר טוב וכאן בודד היה אדרבא להפך.

If so, Saul and Mephibosheth were angry with the Holy One, Blessed be He, with opposite reasonings, for if the grievance of one is a true grievance, then the grievance of the second is not a true grievance. That is, Mephibosheth thought that if someone sinned, he should be punished immediately, whereas Saul recognized that G-d [typically] delayed punishment for a sin, in recognition that good could later come from the sinner.

Rather, certainly their intent was to be angry, and this is the meaning of “quarrelsome [one], the son of a quarrelsome [one].”

The truth is that there with Amalek it was revealed before the Holy One, Blessed be He, that even in the future, no good thing would come from [Amalek], and there was no need to delay their punishment, whereas here with David to the contrary, it was the opposite.

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