

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

**BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE:
THE PROPHECIES OF HOSHEA AND AMOS**

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**Shiur #07:
The Prophecies of Amos: Oracles against the Nations (continued)**

In this *shiur*, we will continue our study of Amos's oracles against the nations. Last week, we surveyed the history of Aram in order to put the crime of which they are accused and the punishment designated for them into context. We will do much the same with the oracles against Philistia ("Peleshet") and Phoenicia ("Tzor"). The rationale for studying these two together goes beyond convenience and their juxtaposition in the text. It may well be that these two coastal nations – the only two to be accused of the crime of handing over war refugees – have more in common than alphabetical proximity.

PHILISTIA IN THE TORAH AND PROPHETS

We are familiar with the Pelishtim from narratives in *Bereishit*, *Shoftim* and *Shemuel*. They are also referenced in *Shemot* (geographically¹) and *Yehoshua*,² and they appear in the oracular sequences of the major Prophets.³

Like Aram, Philistia's earliest mention is in the postdiluvian genealogy, among the descendants of Cham, particularly the children of his second son, Mitzrayim (Egypt):

Mitzrayim gave birth to Ludim and Anamim and Lehavim and Naftuchim and Patrusim and Kasluchim from whence emerged Pelishtim and Kaftorim. (*Bereishit* 10:13-14)

Traditional scholarship maintains that "Kaftor" is Crete. The juxtaposition of Peleshet with Kaftor appears several more times in the canon. Yirmeyahu pronounces an oracle against Philistia, in anticipation of the latter's being overrun and conquered by Egypt:

¹ *Shemot* 13:17, 23:31.

² 13:2-3.

³ *Yeshayahu* 14:29-32; *Yirmeyahu* 47; *Yechezkel* 28:15-17.

1 The word of God that came to Yirmeyahu the prophet concerning the Pelishtim, before that Pharaoh smote Aza. **2** So says God: Behold, waters rise up out of the north, and shall become an overflowing stream, and they shall overflow the land and all that is therein, the city and them that dwell therein; and the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall wail. **3** At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his strong ones, at the rushing of his chariots, at the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers look not back to their children for feebleness of hands; **4** Because of the day that comes to spoil all the Pelishtim, to cut off from Tzor and Tzidon every helper that remains; *for God will spoil the Pelishtim, **the remnant of the isle of Kaftor.*** **5** Baldness is come upon Aza, Ashkelon is brought to naught, the remnant of their valley; how long will you cut yourself? **6** O you sword of God, how long will it be before you are quiet? Put up yourself into your scabbard, rest, and be still. **7** How can you be quiet? for God has given it a charge; against Ashkelon, and against the seashore, there He has appointed it. (*Yirmeyahu 47*)

In the same period, Tzefanya (2:3-7) includes the Pelishtim in his dire prophecy about the impending day of God's anger:

3 Seek God, all you humble of the earth, who have executed His ordinance; seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hid in the day of the God's anger. **4** For Aza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation; they shall drive out Ashdod at the noonday, and Ekron shall be rooted up. **5** Woe to the inhabitants of the sea-coast, nation of Kereitim (*goi Kereitim*)! The word of God is against you, O Canaan, the land of the Pelishtim; I will even destroy you, that there will be no inhabitant. **6** And the seacoast shall be pastures, even meadows for shepherds (*kerot ro'im*) and folds for flocks. **7** And it shall be a portion for the remnant of the house of Yehuda, whereon they shall feed; in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening; for the Lord God will remember them, and turn their captivity.

"Kereitim" here is likely a reference to Cretans, which, as noted above, is synonymous with Kaftor. "*Goi Kereitim*" could be (loosely) translated as "nation about to be cut off," a play on words; this root is used again in "meadows for shepherds," "*kerot ro'im*."

Yechezkel, in his screed against the neighboring nations, declaims:

15 So says the Lord God: Because the Pelishtim have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with disdain of soul to destroy, for the old hatred; **16** therefore so says the Lord God: Behold, I will stretch out My hand upon the Pelishtim, and I will cut off Kereitim, and destroy the remnant of the seacoast. **17** And I will execute great vengeance on them with furious

rebukes; and they shall know that I am God, when I shall lay My vengeance on them. (*Yechezkel* 25)

Here, the wordplay which is hinted at in Tzefanya is explicit: “*ve-hikhrati et Kereitim.*”

PHILISTIA OF THE PATRIARCHS

Let us take a moment to step back and consider the early appearances of the Pelishtim, in the days of the Patriarchs. This phenomenon poses two problems which may be related. First of all, the historical records which substantiate the existence of the “sea-peoples” who migrate to Canaan from the Mediterranean islands and are involved in numerous skirmishes with Egypt is our earliest external testimony to the existence of the Pelishtim. These records, however, date from the middle of the 12th century BCE (c. 1180), which is significantly later than the era of the Patriarchs. We aren’t troubled by a lack of external evidence of the Pelishtim during this period; we may apply the maxim that absence of evidence is hardly evidence of absence. However, the external evidence points to Philistine migration to the south Israeli coast during the period of Egyptian servitude, long after the Patriarchs.

Second of all, the “sea-peoples” Ramses III mentions are organized into military units and have no political governing system; in other words, the various Pelishti cities are governed by military leaders, not by kings. However, the interactions with the Pelishtim in *Bereishit* all revolve around their king. Avimelekh is not only a king, but bears a royal titular name (evidently there were several kings in this dynasty with that name; one with whom Avraham makes a covenant [*Bereishit* 21:23-30] and a later one with whom Yitzhak agrees to an oath of non-aggression [*ibid.* 26:26-31]). Finally, the Pelishtim of the late Bronze/ Early Iron Age (identified as the “sea-peoples”) settle in five coastal cities. They live in Aza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron and Gat. The Pelishtim of Avraham’s time live in one city – Gerar – which is inland and south of Be’er Sheva.

There is a general approach taken by devotees of the Documentary Hypothesis who posit that *Bereishit* is a combination of traditions from the beginning to the middle of the first millennium BCE. They rather uniformly maintain that any mention of Pelishtim in *Bereishit* is anachronistic. The difficulties with this approach are clear. Why would a later author introduce a “current” nation but give it such wildly divergent characteristics?

The common approach taken by those who accept the historicity of *Bereishit* (e.g. Y. M. Grintz, Kitchen) is to argue that the term “Pelishti” and “land of the Pelishtim” may be a generic term used to describe any non-Canaanite residents of the Land, specifically if they had migrated from western Mediterranean islands. There are those who suggest that Avimelekh’s Pelishtim are migrants from Phoenician Tyre and its environs. Both nations hail originally from the islands of

Greece; perhaps, they argue, these early Pelishtim move south along the coast and then migrate inland.

PHILISTIA AT ITS PEAK

Curiously, although they are mentioned in the Song at the Sea as being terrified of God's power along with the other nations in the area ("The peoples have heard, they tremble; pangs have taken hold on the inhabitants of Peleshet. Then were the chiefs of Edom frightened; the mighty men of Moav, trembling taking hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Kena'an are melted away"), we never hear of Yehoshua going to war against them in his war of conquest; nor are the Jewish people commanded to wage war against Pelishtim as they are regarding the seven Canaanite nations. The Pelishtim of the "second wave" seem to occupy some sort of protected space.

In the Book of *Shoftim*, Pelishtim are the primary antagonists for the final leader, Shimshon, but otherwise they appear only briefly. They are listed among the unconquered ethnicities at the beginning of *Shoftim*, and they reappear as allies of the Ammonites against Menashe in *Shoftim* 10. There is one earlier mention of the Pelishtim at the end of *Shoftim* 3, where a particular Shamgar ben Anat is credited with killing 600 Pelishtim with a cattle prod. There are those who suggest that Shamgar was a Canaanite; both his non-Israelite name as well as his father's idolatrous name are strong clues to his Canaanite identity. This would indicate that the Pelishtim were not beloved by their Canaanite hosts and that, curiously, there may have been an alliance of common enemies between the Canaanites and Israelites against the Pelishtim.

The story of Shimshon (*Shoftim* 13-16) is a dramatic story of spiraling vengeance – all motivated by personal insult, not by national salvation. We learn much about the Pelishti customs and a bit about their pagan worship, but very little about their military tactics and ethics.

It might be argued that the Pelishtim reach the peak of their power and impact during the period just prior to the establishment of the United Monarchy; indeed, there is good reason to argue that one of the chief motivations for the establishment of that monarchy is the constant Pelishti threat. During the era of Shemuel, the Israelites are constantly at war with the Pelishtim. The greatest Pelishti victory is at the Battle of Afek, in which thousands of Israelite soldiers are killed and the *Aron Ha-brit* is seized (I *Shemuel* 4-5). The subsequent war, in which those Israelite cities taken by the Pelishtim are restored and Israelite honor is restored as well (*ibid.* ch. 7), is immediately followed, in the narrative, by the people's demand for a king.

As Shaul's era begins, there are Pelishti garrisons in some of the Israelite cities (*ibid.* 10:5) and the Pelishtim have sufficient control over Israel to prevent them

from developing Iron Age technology, forcing them to come to the Pelishtim to sharpen their farm implements (ibid. 13:19-21).

At Efes Damim, young David defeats the Pelishti warrior Golyat and the Israelites chase the fleeing Pelishti army back to Ekron (ibid. 17:52ff.) During the subsequent era (c. 1000 BCE) as David flees from and eventually succeeds Shaul, the Pelishtim play a central role. They continue to harry the Judeans, as evidenced by their pillaging the granaries of Ke'ila (ibid. ch. 23).

Although David leads the charge to save Ke'ila from the Pelishtim, he eventually flees to Peleshet itself for refuge.⁴ What is curious is that by this time, the Pelishtim have (again?) a unified capital, Gat, ruled by a king, Akhish. Although the *seranim* (lords?) continue to lead them into battle (ibid. 29:2), nonetheless, David's "loyalty" is to Akhish and the former is granted a Gazan city (Tziklag), which he and his band of malcontents use as their base for raiding other desert tribes.

Even upon Shaul's death and David's return to Judea to become king in Chevron (*II Shemuel* 2:1ff), it isn't at all clear that the Pelishtim see David as an enemy. It is only with his conquest of Yerushalayim (ibid. ch. 5) that the Pelishtim go to war against him, twice being rebuffed, at Ba'al Peratzim and at Emek Refa'im (ibid. vv. 17-27). At this point we sense that the sun has begun to set on the Pelishti empire. At the beginning of the brief recap of David's conquests (*II Shemuel* 8:1) the text records that David "smote the Pelishtim and subdued them, and he took the *meteg ha-ama* from the hands of the Pelishtim." Most commentators, based on the parallel verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim*, regard this as a reference to Gat. In *II Shemuel* 21:15-22, we hear of several battles between David (or his men) and the Pelishtim, and in 23:13-17 we learn of the famous battle against the Pelishti stronghold at Beit Lechem. It is unclear at what point in David's rule these battles take place, as the last chapters of *II Shemuel* recount earlier battles and events in David's life.

We do not hear from the Pelishtim again throughout the First Commonwealth. The one brief exception to this is a mention of Chizkiyahu's conquest of the Pelishtim at the end of the 8th century BCE (*II Melakhim* 18:8). Nevertheless, their regular appearances among the oracles against the nations authored by Yeshayahu, Yirmeyahu and Yechezkel, along with mentions by Amos and Tzefanya, lead us to believe that Peleshet continues to thrive and to "make trouble" throughout the pre-Babylonian period.

The information in *Divrei Ha-yamim* gives us a broader picture with two later mentions. In the middle of the 9th century BCE – over a hundred years after David – we are told about Yehoshafat's strong rule over Yehuda:

⁴ Fleeing to Gat is something that happens again when two of Shimi's slaves seek refuge there (*I Melakhim* 2:39).

And a terror from God fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Yehuda, so that they made no war against Yehoshafat. And some of the Pelishtim brought Yehoshafat presents, and silver for tribute; the Arvi'im also brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he-goats. (*II Divrei Hayamim* 17:10-11)

Nearly a hundred years later, the long and successful realm of Uzziya includes this description:

And he went forth and warred against the Pelishtim, and broke down the wall of Gat, and the wall of Yavneh, and the wall of Ashdod; and he built cities in [the country of] Ashdod, and among the Pelishtim. And God helped him against the Pelishtim, and against the Aravim of Gur Ba'al, and the Me'unim. (*ibid.* 26:6-7)

We see that the Pelishtim continue to be a force to be reckoned with throughout the First Commonwealth and must be subdued – and have enough wealth to bring tribute to the king.

THE PELISHTIM OF AMOS

This too-brief sketch of the history of the Pelishtim leaves them as bit players in the drama of Israelite history by the time Amos comes along. All of which leaves us with the question asked by most commentators – what are the circumstances of a “total exile” which the Pelishtim “handed over” to Edom?⁵

There is an assumption made by many commentators, modern as well as medieval, that the refugees handed over to Edom are Jews. Grintz suggests that the Pelishtim would take people who fled from Assyria and sell them as slaves to the Mediterranean islands. He then suggests a novel understanding of who Edom might be, in order to have it all fall into place.

I do not believe that there is any need to start with this assumption. After all, if the common denominator of the war crimes in the first six oracles is violation of an assumed code of ethics in war, it hardly matters who the victims of this treachery may have been. Indeed, the point may be even considered stronger if the victims were not our brothers, but another nation that fled from the Edomites to the west (as we see David's fleeing from Moav to Gat and Shimi's slaves' fleeing from Yerushalayim to Gat) who had some sort of a treaty with the Gazans upon which they relied. The Pelishtim violated this understanding and handed them over to their pursuers – and this treachery and violation of trust is the crime that seals Peleshet's fate.

⁵ We might similarly ask why they are so prominently castigated in the other prophecies of the time and even later – but that may be more historic reflection, as even Sedom is mentioned in the same chapter in *Yechezkel*.

THE TEXT

AGAINST PHILISTIA (AZA, ASHDOD, ASHKELON, EKRON)

6 *Ko amar Hashem*: For three transgressions of Aza, indeed, for four, I will not reverse it: because they carried away captive a whole captivity, to deliver them up to Edom. **7** So will I send a fire on the wall of Aza, and it will devour her palaces; **8** And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and the one who holds the scepter from Ashkelon; and I will turn My hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Pelishtim will perish, *amar Hashem Elokim*

Note that just as we saw with Aram, the primary punishment is destruction of the walls of its cities and the leaders from the principal cities, ultimately leading to the complete annihilation of Peleshet. This is a prophecy that seems, at least in its ultimate sense, to have been realized not long afterward, as we no longer hear of the Pelishtim after the First Commonwealth.

PHOENICIA – BEGINNINGS

Unlike Philistia, which (in one form or another) makes numerous active appearances in Israelite history, Phoenicia is very much in the background for most of that history. Unlike the Pelishtim, the Phoenicians never go to war against Israel. Not only do they marry into Israelite monarchy (Izevel – although we all know how well *that* turns out), but even before that, both David and Shelomo create treaties of alliance and friendship with Chiram, the king of Tyre, the Phoenician capitol. Not only do the Tyrians provide the wood – and lumberjacks and woodworkers – for the building of Shelomo’s Temple, but Chiram regards Shlomo as his “brother” and praises God for having chosen such a wise son to take David’s place on the throne.⁶ In addition, the Phoenicians provide the Israelites with one of their greatest gifts – the alphabet. The ancient Hebrew script (Paleo-Hebrew) is an adaptation of the Phoenician script.

Thus, with all of this history of harmony and cooperation between the two nations, it is hard to fathom Israelite exiles fleeing to Phoenicia and being turned away. In addition, for Phoenicia to deliver slaves/refugees to Edom is a geographic oddity – why would they do so, and how would they traverse either Yehuda or Shomeron – the homeland of their putative captives – to do so?

Therefore, we must come to the same conclusion as we did regarding the crime of the Pelishtim: there must have been another people fleeing from Edom, and these people had an assumption of safety with the Tyrians.

⁶ | *Melakhim* 5:15-25; for “brother”, cf. *ibid.* 9:13

Instead of honoring that understanding and assumed alliance, the Tyrians handed them over to their pursuers.

THE TEXT
AGAINST PHOENICIA (TYRE)

9 *Ko amar Hashem*: For three transgressions of Tyre, indeed, for four, I will not reverse it: because they delivered up a whole captivity to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brothers. **10** So will I send a fire on the wall of Tyre, and it shall devour her palaces.

Note that the form of this oracle shifts to the “short form” with only a single stage of punishment. This is partially due to the literary desire to present “long-long-short-short” forms as we outlined earlier; it is convenient that the Phoenicians have only one major city (Tyre/ Tzor) to rhetorically attack.

Again, the geographical and rhetorical “convenience” of aligning Pelishtim with Phoenicians may have historic roots, as it is possible that the first wave of “sea-peoples” invading (Hebrew “*poleshim*”!) Canaan may have been Phoenicians who migrated south.

For further study:

Pelishtim

1) Grintz, Y.M.: *Yichudo Ve-kadmuto shel Sefer Bereishit*, Jerusalem 1983, pp. 66-67 [Heb.].

2) Michlelet Orot published a helpful collection by Prof. Yisrael Rozenon in 1992: *Ha-Pelishtim Ba-mikra, Ba-midrash, U-ve-mekorot Chitzoniyim* (The Pelishtim in the Bible, in the Midrash and in Apocryphal Sources) [Heb.].