

Plishtim - Philistines

By Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David (Greg Killian)



In this paper I would like to look at the Plishtim from a remez or drashic perspective. In other words, I am going to look at the ancient Plishtim to understand the modern day Palestinians. This will NOT be a pshat or literal perspective. For example, the Nazis during World War II acted and displayed the actions of the ancient Amalekites. In the same way I am going to view the Palestinians as Plishtim because their actions mirror each other.

There are a few things that the Plishtim and the Palestinians[[1]](#footnote-1) have in common that beg for us to equate these two peoples:[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. They both inhabited the area around modern day Gaza[[3]](#footnote-3) – on the south Mediterranean coast of eretz Israel.
2. They both called themselves Palestinians.[[4]](#footnote-4)
3. They share many of the same behavior patterns.
4. They constantly challenge(d) Israel’s claim to the land, and who were ever in a state of conflict with them, precisely as is the case, today.
5. Both were / are invaders from other lands! To convince Saul to let him fight Goliath, David the shepherd related that he had killed a lion and a bear that threatened his flock.[[5]](#footnote-5) The relevance of this tale in connection with Goliath was that like the lion and the bear, neither Goliath nor the Palestinians belong here.
6. Plishtim were / are the only nation with whom Abraham and Isaac negotiated a peace treaty, but they are also the only nation with whom there was constant enmity. This is eerily similar to modern Palestinians.
7. The Plishtim / Palestinians are not seeking victory! Throughout history, their aim was simply to thwart the rule and sovereignty of Israel. They want to wear them down.
8. Both are bands of marauders who could / can not tolerate the fact of Jewish settlements.
9. David asks: "What shall be done to the man that kills this Philistine, and takes away the taunt from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should have taunted the armies of the living G-d?" In David's eyes Goliath is the representative of the uncircumcised because he has taunted and shamed the armies of the living G-d. He is a Philistine, whose forefathers *came forth from there* - once again the theme repeats itself!
10. The Plishtim / Palestinians consistently deny the existence of the G-d of Israel - yet He exists!

Clearly HaShem is calling our attention to the coincidence with the current conflict and begging us to pay attention. So, this study is an attempt to “pay attention”.

Although the Sages taught that Psalms chapter two describes Messianic times, Rashi and Radak suggest that the simple reading of the text lends itself more readily to the events of David’s own career, specifically the time immediately following his coronation. ‘And when the Plishtim heard that they had anointed David King over Israel, all of the Plishtim came up to seek David’ [to attack him].[[6]](#footnote-6)

In reality, the two proposed settings past and future, present no contradiction. David had the ability and the genius to be stimulated and inspired so profoundly by present events that he could soar above the boundaries of time, and sing of past, present, and future in the same breath, with the same words.

In the brazen Plishtim of his day, David detected the seeds of גוג ומגוג, Gog and Magog, the arch-enemies of Messiah. The war of Gog and Magog begins when all seventy nations of the world unite against Israel (the numerical value of גוג ומגלג, is 70). All of those nations will suffer internal instability, and will be plagued by revolution, audacity, atheism, scandal, and unbridled inflation. Truth will be virtually non-existent and falsehood will prevail.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Thus we see that a study of the Plishtim will help us understand the events of David’s time, our time, and Messianic times.

Let’s start with a question: Who were the Plishtim,[[8]](#footnote-8) the Philistines,[[9]](#footnote-9) where did they come from? Says the Torah:

***Bereshit 10:13-14*** *Mitzrayim fathered Ludim, Anomim, Lehavim, Naftuchim, Pasrusim, Kasluchim, from which came the Pelishtim and the Kaftorim.[[10]](#footnote-10)*

Rashi[[11]](#footnote-11) to Bereshit 1:13-14:PASRUCHIM, KASLUCHIM, FROM WHICH CAME THE PLISHTIM: From the two of them, since the Pasrusim and the Kasluchim used to trade wives with each other and from this came the Plishtim.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In other words, the Plishtim were not from pure stock, but, were the result of an adulterous relationship.[[13]](#footnote-13) This affects the spiritual reality of a people, especially when seen in Bereshit at the beginning, and, might explain why they were such an antagonist in Jewish history.

The special nature of the Philistines is made evident for Rabbi Zvi Tau by the genealogy listed in Bereshit 10. In verses 13 and 14, the Hebrew text sets the Philistines apart: "And Mitzrayim begat Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim, and Pathrusim, and Casluhim, out of whom came Pelishtim, and Caphtorim." "Out of whom came" is a unique parenthetical wording within the long litany of nations, and clearly indicates, according to Rabbi Zvi Tau, that the Pelishtim, the Philistines, were not intended to be "a legal member" in the family of nations. Indeed, he declares, they "were not meant to be, there is no place for them from the outset". He buttresses his view with an ancient Midrash, cited by Rashi, claiming that the Philistine nation was born out of illegitimate wife-swapping between the Pathrusim and Casluhim.

Rabbi Zvi Tau emphasizes that "Philistine nationhood has no self-contained moral, historical or ideal content in and by itself". Apart from their supporting role in the founding of a new Kingdom of Israel, "they do not have ideals, a purpose, or a foundation". That this is true of the Palestinians in our own time is crystal-clear to Rabbi Tau, who finds convenient analogies between their behavior and that of their Philistine forbearers. In the Tanach, the Philistines gloated over the plight of the blinded Samson, betrayed by Delilah: "As their spirits rose, they said, 'Call Samson here and let him dance for us.' Samson was fetched from the prison, and he danced for them".[[14]](#footnote-14) So too, says Rabbi Tau, when an enemy rocket lands on Israel, the Palestinians "mount the rooftops and rejoice, since this is the inner essence of their whole national organization". Later in the Tanach, when "David's kingdom reaches Jerusalem, Philistines are at the height of their military success and the height of their strength," and indeed today, when "the People of Israel return to their land, [and] the State of Israel has been founded at the end of Days, there are Philistines, too".

Plishtim (etymologically, geographically, and symbolically similar to the Palestinians) in Gerar (Gaza area)

It is also interesting that, after so many years, millennia, in fact, and, at this very late time in Jewish history, that the Jewish people should once again be hounded by the Plishtim. Well, they call themselves "Palestinians," which, in itself is bizarre considering that it was a name originally applied to non-Arab Israel decades ago. However, the name is very much like "Plishtim", and, they base themselves in what was once called "Gerar", but is now called "Gaza." They certainly are intent on being a thorn in the side of the Jewish nation.[[15]](#footnote-15)

The Plishtim personified over-indulgence in the sensuality of this world. This is alluded to by their name, which is derived from the root *pei-lamed-shin*, meaning "breaking through" or "overdoing it".

# In Yitzchak’s Time.

Virtually the Torah’s entire discussion of Yitzchak is contained in Parshat Toldot. This is the account of his experiences in the Land of the Plishtim.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Rav Ovadia Sforno’s comments provide an insight that may answer this question. He asks: What was the source of the Plishtim’s jealousy? He explains that the Pelishtim observed that Yitzchak’s agricultural efforts were remarkably successful and their own were correspondingly fruitless.[[17]](#footnote-17)

It is not difficult to identify the message that this phenomenon communicated to the Plishtim: The land responded with abundance to the efforts of Yitzchak and rejected their efforts. This phenomenon communicated an affinity between Yitzchak and the Land of Canaan. It also communicated that the land responded to them as aliens and usurpers. In other words, not only was it clear to the Pelishtim that Yitzchak enjoyed HaShem’s providence, but it was also clear that Yitzchak had a special relationship with the land they regarded as their own!

We can now understand their response of destroying Avraham’s wells and chasing Yitzchak away. These wells represented an inter-generational connection to the land.[[18]](#footnote-18) Before Yitzchak, Avraham had also achieved great success in this land. The wells were a reminder of this inter-generational relationship to the land and the special connection that Avraham and Yitzchak had with the land. The Pelishtim wanted to deny this relationship and destroy any memorial of it. The wells had to be destroyed and it was imperative to drive Yitzchak away. In other words, the Pelishtim were willing to sacrifice their own welfare for a cause that they believed was more important than their immediate well-being. They felt that their claim to the land was at stake. They were determined to undermine and erase any claim that Yitzchak had to the land. In order to accomplish this end, they were willing to sacrifice their own well-being.

Rashi, on the other hand looks at this from a different, but very interesting perspective. The Torah says:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 26:14-15*** *and he (Yitzchak) had flocks and cattle and much possessions and the Philistines were jealous of him. 15 And all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father the Philistines stopped up and filled them with dirt.*

Rashi says: 26:15 the Plishtim stopped up Rashi: Because they (Plishtim) said "they are a problem for us because of the armies who come against us".

The previous verse tells us the Plishtim were jealous of Yitzchak's wealth. Why isn't that a good enough reason for them destroying Yitzchak's wells? Why does Rashi have to offer a different reason?

If jealousy was the motivation of the Plishtim the verse would have stated this somewhat differently. Verse 15, which follows the statement that "the Plishtim's were jealous of him" should have begun "And they stopped up and filled them with dirt" etc. This would have conveyed the idea that we are talking about cause and effect. Cause = "the Philistine's were jealous of him". Rashi, therefore, sought a different reason for the stopping up the wells.

Rashi begins with "Because they said". "They said" was their public explanation (that foreign armies would use the wells) but the true reason was their jealousy of Yitzchak. But as we think of it, it is truly strange. The Plishtim needed these well themselves. Why destroy them? If they feared foreign armies they should have protected the wells not totally destroyed them.

Yitzchak grows rich in the area of the Plishtim and they become jealous of him.[[19]](#footnote-19) They (after signing a Covenant between the children and grandchildren already in the second generation (Yitzchak, Abraham's son) is asked to leave the area, breaking the Covenant again. And then what do the Palestinians do? They destroy the wells, which Abraham dug, even though they needed them themselves.

Do you recall when the Gush Katif families were evicted they were asked to leave intact their productive hothouses, so that the Palestinians could make a living and become self-supporting? What did the Palestinians (Plishtim) do immediately upon taking over that area? They destroyed the Hothouses left for their own benefit! Ma'sei Avot Siman L'banim![[20]](#footnote-20) History repeats itself, to the letter.

It seems that these events are a paradigm and template for current events. The Palestinian rejection of the State of Israel reflects exactly the same attitudes and includes the same measures attributed to the Plishtim. Like the Plishtim, the Palestinians have no reservations against engaging in the most outlandish, self-destructive behaviors. They have ripped up much of the infrastructure left by Israel in its abandonment of Gaza. They needed this infrastructure but they could not tolerate any signs or memorials of Israel’s success in developing this arid, barren land. The Palestinians constantly acknowledge that they can only survive through access to Israel’s economy: Israel’s economy is their only source of jobs and Israel provides a market for any goods that the Palestinians can produce. But despite these compelling reasons to make peace with Israel, the Palestinians sacrifice their children in futile suicide bombings. They use their children and civilian population as human shields. These actions are clearly self-destructive. But they serve the greater end of attempting to wipe out any sign of a Jewish presence in the land.

Sefer Bereshit, 26:14 also offers important advice regarding how to respond to such attitudes. Yitzchak did succeed in forcing Avimelech to accept him. How did he secure this outcome?

Nachmanides explains that there are two factors that brought about this outcome. First, HaShem provided Yitzchak with His continual support. As a result, Avimelech realized that his best hope was to enter into a treaty with Yitzchak. This treaty would acknowledge Yitzchak’s right to dwell in the land. However, it would also secure the future of Abimelech’s people, Yitzchak would promise not to wage war against them. Second, implicit in Nachmanides’ comments is the observation that Avimelech only entered into this treaty because he knew that there was no alternative. He could never succeed in driving out Yitzchak and his descendants.[[21]](#footnote-21)

This provides us with an important lesson: In order to triumph in our conflict with the Palestinians we must not allow them to have any hope of success. As long as they feel that there is a reasonable chance that we can be driven from the Land of Israel, they will never give up their battle. We must be victorious in ever)' confrontation. This will require Hashem's help

 Israel's wars are not mere historical events, but cosmic necessities. Peace will come about, not through any diplomatic pacts with the Palestinians, but only when all nations, except for the Palestinians, "shall see how [the Jews] live under the light of the divine idea and the light of the content of Torah, prophecy, and Shechinah, and how these serve to shape the kingdom".

I will conclude with the Vilna Gaon's interpretation of a verse of Balaam's prophecy. The verse reads "And out of Jacob shall one have dominion, and shall destroy the remnant from the city".[[22]](#footnote-22) According to the Vilna Gaon, this refers to the Philistines, who sought to invalidate the kingdom and sovereignty of Israel, to render them null and void. Their strategy never varies - they never fight a pitched battle, army against army. It's always a few thousand here, a "remnant" there... They plunder, they maraud, they attack Israel when they plough their fields, when they tend their sheep...

Once Israel lost dominion over their land, through the First and Second Temple eras, the Exile and beyond, there is no more mention of the Philistines. For hundreds of years they had every opportunity to rule and control the country, yet not a word is heard about them. They returned when we returned!

And this is David's message, which we must always remember: the armies of Israel are the armies of the Lord of hosts. As long as we never lose sight of this, we can contend with "this Philistine" who has always been with us.

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1. The name "Falastin" that Arabs today use for "Palestine" is not an Arabic name. It is the Arab pronunciation of the Roman "Palaestina". Quoting Golda Meir:

The British chose to call the land they mandated Palestine, and the Arabs picked it up as their nation's supposed ancient name, though they couldn't even pronounce it correctly and turned it into Falastin a fictional entity. [In an article by Sarah Honig, Jerusalem Post, November 25, 1995] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Palestinians are not the *offspring*, but the *heirs* of the Philistines.  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron and Gath. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In Hebrew, the name Palestine (פלשת) and the name Philistine (פלשתי) are pretty much the same, and *Philistine* literally means One of Palestine. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 17:34. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. II Shmuel (Samuel) 5:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Sotah 49b, Berachot 58a – The above section was excerpted an edited from: *The ArtScroll Tanach Series, Tehillim*, A new translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and rabbinic sources. Commentary by Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Translation by Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer in collaboration with Rabbi Nosson Scherman. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Pelishtim* literally means “foreign invaders” or “trespassers”. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Palestinians of today claim to be descendants of the Philistines. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In several places in Tanach, the Philistines are mentioned as having come from Caphtor (for example, Yirmiyahu 47:4 and Amos 9:7) - the Philistines and the Caphtorim are therefore closely related. It's uncertain where Caphtor is. R. Aryeh Kaplan zt"l cites sources that it might be either an area in modern Turkey or in Egypt. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Rashi is basing his comments on Midrash Rabbah to Bereshit (Genesis) 37:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. One verse says the Plishtim came from the Pasursim while the other verse says the Plishtim came from the Casluchim which is it? Were the Plishtim from the Pasrusim or the Casluchim? Rashi simply resolves this using the 2 aspects method: The Pasrusim and Casluchim engaged in wife-swapping. Hence the Plishtim descended from both. Adulterous relations are frequently indicated discretely using the contradiction method. It is interesting that from the word *Plishtim* comes the word *phallic*, describing the emphasis and nature of these people. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Pasrusim and Casluchim played wife exchanges. Hence (out of doubt) Philistines are said to descend from both! [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Shoftim (Judges) 16:25 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The above section is an edited and excerpted portion from a shiur given By Rabbi Pinchas Winston**.** [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Palestine [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Rabbenu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Bereshit, 26:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. RADAK: Commenting on how the Plishtim plugged up Yitzchak’s wells the Radak writes, “All these episodes about digging the wells and giving them names are to tell us that, in the part of Eretz Israel that he had a hold on, he dug wells as he pleased without objections. All this was a forewarning concerning what Hashem had set aside for his descendants. “But the land of the Plishtim, even though it is part of EretzIsrael, was not held in the hands [of the Patriarchs] and therefore [the Plishtim] quarreled with them about the border, and all this was to inform [the Patriarchs’ descendants] that not all [of Eretz Israel] would be held in their hands. Even though it was apportioned, it would not be held until the end, in the days of Mashiach, like the land of the three nations – the Keini, the Kniziand the Kadmoni” (Bereshit26:23). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Bereshit (Genesis) 26:13ff [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. A simple translation of that phrase is: “the actions of the fathers are a sign for the children”. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Rabbenu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Bereshit 26:29. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Bamidbar (Numbers) 24:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)