

Parsha Ponders

Va'eira | December 31, 2021 | 27 Teves 5782

The three Shauls¹

ובני שמעון ימואל וימין ואהד ויכין וצחר ושאוּל בן-הכנענית אלה משפחת שמעון

[These are] the children of Shimon: Yemuel, Yamin, Ohad, Yachin, Tzochar, and Shaul the son of the Canaanite. These are the families of Shimon²

As Moshe began his mission to rescue the Jewish people from bondage and release the devastating ten plagues on Egypt, the Torah lists the descendants of the first three children of Yaakov. The purpose is to show us just exactly who Moshe and his brother were, and their prominent lineage³. It starts with Yaakov's firstborn Reuven, then Shimon, and ends with Levi, who formed Moshe's tribe of Moshe. When listing the sons of Shimon, we are told that one of his sons was called "Shaul, the son of the Cananite". Why is he referred to this way? Was his mother really a Canaanite?

Some say⁴ that this was really Zimri, the one who would later lead a rebellion against Moshe and the Torah through illicit relations⁵. He is called the son of the Canaanite because his actions reflected those of the Canaanite nation⁶. If so, we can ask a question. There's a more famous Shaul in Tanach, namely King Shaul, the first king of Israel. We are taught that there's an idea of שם רשעים יקרב, the names of the wicked shall rot⁷. Meaning, we should let the names of the wicked die out and not keep them for posterity. As such, it's not appropriate to name after wicked people⁸. Why then was King Shaul given this name, if he was preceded by the wicked Zimri, who was also called Shaul⁹?

One suggestion is that if we find someone righteous who also had this name, there should be no problem using it, even if there was also someone wicked with that name. Where else do we see the name Shaul in Tanach? One verse tells us¹⁰ that of the eight kings who ruled in the land of Edom before

¹ Based on Yehuda Ya'aleh § 199, by Mahar"i Assad, i.e. Rav Yehuda Assad, a responsum to his son Rav Aharon Shmuel Assad. This could also be used for *parshas Vayigash*

² Exodus 6:15

³ Rashi to v. 13

⁴ Targum "Yonasan" to Genesis 46:10, based on Sechel Tov *ad. loc.* and Sanhedrin 82b, the latter of which says זמרי was called both שאוּל and בן הכנענית, the latter being because כנען מעשה כנען. Rav Aharon Shmuel Assad, when he sent his father his question, said this was the explanation of Rashi, and his father said he couldn't find it. He then realized his son must have been mistaken and meant Targum "Yonasan". Cf. Rashi to Genesis *loc. cit.*, who says that this person was the son of Shimon and his sister Dina, who was violated by a Canaanite. This is based on Bereishis Rabbah 80:11. Surprisingly, L'Machseh Atik by Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita, which is usually pretty thorough, only gives the second explanation

⁵ End of *parshas Balak*

⁶ Sechel Tov *loc. cit.* says he was called Shaul because he was נשאל לעבודה זרה. See also Sanhedrin *loc. cit.*

⁷ Proverbs 10:7. The Mahari Assad says this is the source for the following idea. Perhaps he was coming from Tosafos to Megillah 10b s.v. רבה בר עופרן, who says this

⁸ Tosafos to Kesubos 104b s.v. שני דיני. Tosafos doesn't give a source for this, but see the previous note

⁹ Rav Aharon Shmuel Assad suggests to answer that King Shaul was called this because מלכותו היתה שאולה. I couldn't find a source for this, other than Bereishis Rabbah 98:15, which says Yehoshua is called Shaul (see I Chronicles 5:10) because המלכות היתה שאולה בידו. His father responded that this still doesn't justify naming him this if a wicked person had this name. Furthermore, his parents didn't know when they named him this that he would become king

¹⁰ Genesis 36:37

the Torah was given, one was named Shaul, from the city of Rechovos. We can prove that he was righteous, and that he kept the seven *mitzvos* for Gentiles. How?

The next verse tells us that the king who followed him was named Ba'al Chanan. Although that is what the verse calls him, his name was really Chanan¹¹. We know¹² that one of the Sages was named Chanan. There are also many righteous Jews with the name Chanan. The fact that the name Chanan is used is proof that the king Chanan was righteous, otherwise no one would have been given that name. Therefore, since one of the eight kings in Edom was righteous, presumably they all were¹³. If so, there was no problem giving King Shaul his name, as he was named after the righteous individual, not the wicked one.

Another possibility is based on the source for this idea. As we said, it's best not to name after the wicked, as the verse says that their names should rot. Who first said this idea? King Shlomo, in his book of Proverbs. He must have said this with prophetic insight. However, before he said this, perhaps such an idea didn't exist. Since King Shaul was born before King Shlomo, there was no problem naming him after a wicked person¹⁴. We can even say that the King Shaul of Edom was wicked as well. This idea didn't exist yet, so his parents didn't need to be concerned that there were wicked people who were named Shaul. There was no issue at all.

Good Shabbos

¹¹ Mahari Assad says the Ramban says this. All I found is in v. 35 he writes ובעל חנן בן עכבור היה ממקום שאול על כן לא הזכיר לו עיר אחרת ויתכן שהיה חנן מקום והוא בעל עליו. If I'm reading this right, he's simply saying that he was from a place called Chanan, and he ruled over it. He doesn't tell us what his name was. The Mahari Assad's son wrote a footnote that cites the Ba'al HaTurim. If he means to v. 39, he simply writes like the Ramban, that all of these kings have their places listed except for Ba'al Chanan. The Mahari Assad's son also proves from the Seforno to v. 40 that Chanan was the name of this place, not his name. I'm not sure how he sees that in the Seforno, or how this is more evident from him than the Ramban and Ba'al HaTurim themselves

¹² For example, see Kesubos 13:1, 2. See also Middos 2:6, אבא יוסי בן חנן

¹³ I don't understand his justification to say this

¹⁴ The son of the Mahari Assad in a footnote asks on his father from Tosafos to Megillah *loc. cit.* Tosafos say that the father of an *Amorra* cannot be named Efron, as Efron was a wicked person (see Genesis Chapter 23). Tosafos say this even though Efron was from before King Shlomo. I wonder if he misunderstood his father's intent, because the way I understood the Mahari Assad, the emphasis isn't that the *wicked person* was before King Shlomo, but rather if the *person in question* who was named after them was before King Shlomo, i.e. King Shaul. If so, there's no question from Tosafos, who is discussing an *Amorra*