

THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

LECTURE #49: CHAPTER 25 NAVAL THE CARMELITE (PART III)

Rav Amnon Bazak

I. THE PARALLEL BETWEEN AVIGAYIL AND RUTH THE MOAVITESS

In the previous lecture, we saw how Avigayil, in her remarkable wisdom, successfully prevented David from engaging in unnecessary bloodshed; despite the severity of Naval's action, it did not warrant the death penalty for him and his entire house, as David had initially planned to impose. To David's credit it may be said that he succeeded in internalizing Avigayil's message, and even blessed her for having prevented him from carrying out his original strategy.

There is an interesting correspondence between the figure of Avigayil in our chapter and a figure that preceded her chronologically - Ruth the Moavite, David's great-grandmother. Let us note the parallels between the two stories and the two personalities, and especially between the encounter between David and Avigayil and the encounter between Ruth and Boaz:

- 1) In both stories a woman expresses her respect for a man in an identical manner:

Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground.
(*Rut* 2:10)

And she fell before David on her face, and bowed herself down to the ground. (I *Shemuel* 25:23)

It should be noted that Ruth and Avigayil are the only women in Scripture about whom the expression is used: "She fell on her face."¹[1]

- 2) These are the only two women in Scripture who hint to a man about their desire to marry him. Ruth says to Boaz:

And she answered, "I am Ruth your handmaid; spread therefore your skirt over your handmaid, for you are a near kinsman." (*Ruth* 3:9)²[2]

And similarly, Avigayil says to David:

And it shall come to pass, when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you and shall have appointed you prince over Israel... then remember your handmaid. (I *Shmuel* 25:30-31)³[3]

3) In both cases, the man blesses the woman for the good that she did for him, using identical language. Boaz says to Ruth:

Blessed be you of the Lord, my daughter. (*Rut* 3:10)

And similarly David blesses Avigayil:

And blessed be your discretion, and **blessed be you**. (I *Shemuel* 25:33)

This formulation is also unique to these two instances, appearing nowhere else in Scripture.

4) The two stories end with the marriage of the man to the woman:

So Boaz **took** Ruth, **and she was his wife**. (*Rut* 4:13)

And David sent and spoke concerning Avigayil, **to take her to him to wife... and she became his wife**. (I *Shmuel* 25:39-42)

5) It is difficult to ignore another expression that appears only in these two stories. Boaz turns to his young men and tells them:

And do not reproach (*takhlimuha*) her. (*Rut* 2:15)

The very same wording is found in David's words to Naval, and afterwards in the words of Naval's young men to Avigayil:

And we did them no hurt (*hekhlamnum*)... and we were not hurt (*hokhlamnu*). (I *Shmuel* 25:7-15)

6) Both incidents take place during a festive period from an economic perspective; the incident involving Ruth and Boaz takes place during the harvest season, and the incident involving David and Avigayil during the sheep-shearing season.⁴[4]

What is the meaning of this correspondence? It seems that this is the way in which Scripture tries to answer an important conceptual question: Why did David merit Avigayil's stepping in and preventing him from sinning? Why didn't

other sinners merit having someone stop them along the way? In light of this correspondence, it can be argued that "the merit of fathers" – and more precisely, "the merit of mothers" – is what came to David's rescue. In reward for Ruth's acts of kindness and humility, her great-grandson, already standing at the edge of the abyss, merited to be saved from doing evil by way of a woman who was similar in character to his great-grandmother Ruth.^{5[5]}

II. "WITH NAVAL YOU SHALL SHOW YOURSELF SUBTLE"

We can now move on to the end of the story – the death of Naval the Carmelite:

(36) And Avigayil came to Naval; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Naval's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken; wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light. (37) And it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Naval,^{6[6]} that his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. (38) And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Naval, so that he died.

For the first time since the beginning of the story, God intervenes in what is happening and brings death upon Naval. In this way, as was noted in previous lectures, expression is given to Scripture's assessment of Naval, who paid with his life for his treatment of David.

The way that Naval met his death is especially interesting. Scripture first describes Naval's feast as being "like the feast of a king," and there Naval becomes "very drunken." These expressions demonstrate Naval's arrogance, which operates without boundaries and without constraints. Avigayil's wisdom stands out in contrast to her husband's behavior. She understands that it would not be right to talk to him while he is drunk, for in any event her words would have no effect; she therefore waits until morning, until he sobers up, and only then does she speak to him.

Something happens now quite unexpectedly: "And his heart died within him, and he became as a stone." Why? What was so terrible about what Avigayil said to Naval? Rashi offers a strange explanation: "And his heart died within him – he was distressed about the present that had been brought to David" (see also the Radak). In my humble opinion, it is difficult to say that Scripture is referring to Naval's miserliness, because of which he was unable to accept Avigayil's gift to David to the point that his heart stopped to function. The *Metzudat David* suggests that Naval's alarm stemmed from his fear that eventually David would come and fight against him.

It seems, however, that we should look at the picture from a wider perspective. It stands to reason that Avigayil's story brought Naval to understand, for the first time in his life, where his despicable conduct had brought him. Avigayil had indeed succeeded in stopping David's onslaught, but were it not for Avigayil, who had adopted an approach totally opposite to that of Naval, David's attack would have wiped out Naval and his entire house. It is difficult to know whether Naval's reaction involved recognition of the sinful path in which he had previously walked and the beginning of a process of repentance, or if it merely reflected a feeling of fear and frustration about his situation. *Chazal* appear to have been aware of the complexity of Naval's state:

"And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Naval" – what [ten days]? ... Rav Nachman said in the name of Rabba bar Avuha: These are the ten days between Rosh ha-Shana and Yom Kippur.^{7[7]} (*Rosh Ha-shana* 18a)

God appears to have given Naval ten days to complete the process and repent, and therefore *Chazal* saw these days as paralleling the ten days of repentance. But Naval, so it seems, failed to internalize the lesson, and did not change his ways in any significant way. When the initial shock wore off, Naval returned to his long-standing and habitual conduct. For this reason, after ten days, God smote him and he died.

III. EPILOGUE

This dramatic story ends on a festive note:

(39) And when David heard that Naval was dead, he said, "Blessed be the Lord, that has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Naval and has kept back His servant from evil; and the evildoing of Naval has the Lord returned upon his own head." And David sent and spoke concerning Avigayil, to take her to him to be his wife. (40) And when the servants of David were come to Avigayil to Carmel, they spoke unto her, saying, "David has sent us unto you, to take you to him to be his wife. (41) And she arose, and bowed down with her face to the earth, and said, "Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." (42) And Avigayil hastened, and arose, and rode upon an ass, with five damsels of hers that followed her; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife.

Scripture seems to be emphasizing the connection between David's recognition of the rightness of Avigayil's way and his desire to take her as his wife. David thanks God for pleading his cause and preventing him from sinning; in other words, he repeats what Avigayil had said. In this short account as well, Avigayil's modest personality comes to the fore, as she does

not see herself worthy of marrying David. David's marriage to Avigayil gives expression to his desire to continue the line of kindness and humility going back to his great-grandmother. We shall later discuss the impact that this story had on David and his attitude toward human life.

We have still not reached the end of the chapter, and two additional facts are yet to be noted:

(43) David also took Achinoam of Yizra'el; and they became both of them his wives. (44) Now Shaul had given Mikhal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Layish, who was of Gallim.^{8[8]}

Whereas David's marriage to Avigayil can be seen from a positive perspective, his marriage to Achinoam arouses questions. David was already married to Mikhal the daughter of Shaul, and taking a third wife, that is, two wives in addition to Mikhal – does not look good. It should be remembered that Mikhal had risked her life and gone against her father Shaul in order to save David, her beloved husband. It stands to reason that Shaul had already given Mikhal to Palti the son of Layish at some earlier point, as is indicated by the past perfect, *ve-Shaul natan* (as opposed to *va-yiten Shaul*). But Scripture's juxtaposition of the two events alludes that there exists a connection, if only moral-conceptual, between David's taking of additional wives and his losing Mikhal as his wife.

On the other hand, we must examine the situation from Mikhal's side as well. Scripture presents Mikhal's two identities, one alongside the other: "his [= Shaul's] daughter" on the one hand, and "David's wife" on the other. Scripture does not specify Mikhal's attitude toward her father's action, but the silence suggests that she did not express serious objection. Later events also imply that a positive relationship developed between Mikhal and Palti the son of Layish (see II *Shmuel* 3:15-16). What caused this great gap between Mikhal's love for and dedication to David in chapters 18-19 and her marriage to Palti the son of Layish in chapter 25?

It seems that the answer to this question lies in what was stated at length in chapter 18 (lecture no. 36). As stated, Mikhal's love for David was one-sided. In such circumstances, Mikhal's dedication to David and ability to stand up to her father could not have continued indefinitely. With David's flight and the severance of the active bond between him and Mikhal, Shaul's influence upon her became stronger, and she began to feel that she is first and foremost "Shaul's daughter" and only secondarily "David's wife." Despite all the assistance that she had given David, she chose to stay home and did not join David in his wanderings. This choice, which in the end brought her to be married to someone else, was a fateful choice, which impacted upon her life from then on and until her dying day.

(Translated by David Strauss)

9[1] Similar expressions are used with respect to other women: regarding the Tekoan woman: "She fell on her face (*apeha*, rather than *pane'ha*) to the ground, and bowed herself" (II *Shmuel* 14:4); regarding Bat-Sheva: "Then Bat-Sheva bowed (*va-tikod*) with her face to the ground, and bowed herself" (I *Melakhim* 1:31); regarding the Shunamite woman: "Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground" (II *Melakhim* 4:37); and regarding Esther: "And she fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears" (*Ester* 8:3).

10[2] See Rashi, ad loc.: "The skirt of your garment to cover me with your cloak, this being a term denoting marriage." The Ibn Ezra writes: "An allusion that he should take her as a wife."

11[3] *Chazal* saw this as an inappropriate request: "Rav Nachman said: This is what people say: While a woman speaks, she weaves {Rashi: While she speaks with him about her husband, she mentions herself, that should [her husband] die, he should marry her). There are those who say: The goose walks about bowed down, but his eyes see to a distance" (*Megila* 14b). In the *Yerushalmi* (*Sanhedrin* 2:3, 20b) the criticism is even stronger: "This shows that she made herself free, and since she made herself free, Scripture impaired her. In all the verses the name Avigayil is spelled full, except for this verse, 'And David said to Avigayil,' which is spelled in defective manner." In other words, the defective spelling of Avigayil's name expresses Scripture's dissatisfaction with her words.

12[4] Additional points of similarity: 1) In both stories, the meeting takes place in secret: in the meeting between Ruth and Boaz, it says: "And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the threshing-floor" (*Rut* 3:14), and about Avigayil it is said: "But she told not her husband Naval" (I *Shmuel* 25:19); 2). In both cases, a similar word is used to describe the woman's reaching the meeting-place – "And she went down (*va-tered*) to the threshing-floor" (*Rut* 3:6), "and came down (*ve-yoredet*) by the covert of the mountain... and alighted (*va-tered*) from her ass" (I *Shmuel* 25:20-23); 3) Both women turn to the man with the humble term, "your maidservant" (*Rut* 3:9 [2]; I *Shmuel* 25:24 [2], 25, 28, 31, 41).

13[5] I expanded on the relationship between the book of Ruth and David in my book, "*Makbilot Nifgashot: Makbilot Sifrutiyot Be-Sefer Shmuel*," pp. 121-133.

14[6] There seems to be here a play on words, based on the combination "*nevel yayin*" ("bottle of wine"), which appears several times in the book of *Shmuel* (1:24; 10:3; II *Shmuel* 15:1; and see *Yirmiyahu* 13:12): Naval turned himself into a *nevel* of wine, and Avigayil waited until the wine was gone out of him.

15[7] The *gemara* brings another explanation of why the execution of Naval's decree was delayed for ten days: "Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Corresponding to the ten sips that Naval gave to David's servants." It is possible that the reference is to the difficult word appearing in the account of the visit of David's young men by Naval (see lecture no. 27, note 9) – "They spoke to Naval according to all those words in the name of David, and **rested**" (v. 9); owing to the momentary rest that David's men found by Naval, Naval merited ten days of grace.

16[8] Scripture does not explain how Shaul could have taken such a step, and the *gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 19b) raised several possibilities. According to one opinion, Shaul and David disagreed regarding one who betroths a woman with a loan (according to Rashi, the reference is to the "great riches" [I *Shmuel* 17:25] that Shaul obligated himself to give David for his killing of Golyat, whereas according to the *Yad Rama*, the reference is to his wages for the act of killing Golyat) and a *peruta* (= the Pelishti foreskins), whether his mind is on the loan (*Shaul*) or on the *peruta* (David); therefore, Shaul maintained that Mikhal's betrothal was invalid (see *Avnei Milu'im*, 28, 37). Another opinion: "Rabbi Yose says: Just as Mikhal's betrothal to Palti was sinful, so too Merav's betrothal to Adriel was sinful," which implies that there was no halakhic justification for Shaul's conduct (but see Rashi, ad loc., s.v. *kiddushei Mikhal*). This approach is also implied by *Seder Eliyahu Rabba*, chap. 29 (ed. Ish Shalom, p. 159), where very harsh criticism is leveled at Shaul: "Shaul the king of Israel was filled with arrogance, and therefore he was killed and the kingdom was uprooted from him... what he was commanded to do, he did not do... what he was not commanded to do, he did... He killed [the inhabitants of] Nov the city of the priests, **and made light of forbidden sexual relations, and he gave his daughter Mikhal, David's wife, to Palti**, etc., and he inquired of mediums, and performed great abominations in Israel. Therefore he was killed and his kingdom was uprooted." This explanation was also suggested by R. Yosef Kaspi, here: "It is not my habit to expand upon such questions and answers, how did Shaul do this and also Palti... because they knew what they did; and if this involved a sin for Shaul, and it was together with the sin of Amalek and others..."

Another possibility emerges from *Bereishit Rabba* 32, 1 (ed. Vilna, p. 66), according to which Doeg the Edomite persuaded Shaul to annul the marriage of Mikhal to David because David had rebelled against the king and was liable for the death penalty: "He said to Shaul: Can David marry? Surely he rebelled against the king and is regarded as dead... and his blood is permitted and his wife is permitted. Shaul stood up and gave Mikhal, David's wife, to Palti the son of Layish."

The Radak brings here the words of the *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* and comments: "All this is far from the plain sense of Scripture." And he adds: "What is correct in my opinion is that David gave Mikhal a *get*, for we saw that Shaul hated David after he married his daughter, to the point that David ran away from Shaul. And when Shaul saw that David had run away, even though he occasionally returned, he forced him to give his daughter a *get*, so that she not be an *aguna*. And he did this, and Shaul gave her as a wife to Palti the son of Layish."
