

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

The Eliyahu Narratives Yeshivat Har Etzion

Eliyahu – Shiur #67 – Navot: Part 5: “Have You Found Me, My Enemy?!” (20)

By Rav Elchanan Samet

Achav reacts twice to Eliyahu’s words – the first time following the first part of Eliyahu’s speech, and then again after the end of the speech. Both reactions demand some clarification, as does the obvious development between the two reactions. In this *shiur* we shall focus on Achav’s first reaction, which follows God’s double message to him as conveyed by Eliyahu:

(19) So says God: Have you then murdered and also taken possession?!...

So says God: In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Navot, the dogs shall lick your blood, too.

(20) And Achav said to Eliyahu: “Have you found me, my enemy?!”

And he said: “I have found [you].”

What is the meaning of Achav’s question, and what does it tell us about his spiritual stance in the face of Eliyahu’s rebuke?

The literal meaning of Achav’s question may lead us to view it as an affront to the prophet – suggesting that he is a *persona non grata* – that the king has no desire to encounter him. It gives the impression that the king regularly evades such encounters, but is now suddenly forced to confront Eliyahu face to face. But this simplistic interpretation disregards the context of this tense dialogue. It fails to clarify how the dialogue arises from what preceded it, and how it contributes to a significant deepening of our understanding of the situation as a whole.

Abarbanel (and Metzudot and Malbim, who adopt his approach) interprets Achav’s words as an attempt to evade responsibility for Navot’s murder:

“Have you found me, my enemy?” – Have you found me guilty as a murderer in this regard, my enemy? Claiming, as it were, that he was not been present at Navot’s murder, and that he knows nothing about it; rather, it was Izevel who was responsible. He [Eliyahu], as [Achav’s] enemy, is suspecting him of something that he did not do. Therefore Eliyahu says, ‘I have found [you]’ – I know that truth – that she committed the act at your instigation and with your knowledge.”

The Ba’al ha-Metzudot briefly cites Abarbanel’s view, and then adds an extra sentence describing Achav’s stance:

“And he thought of denying what the prophet said – as though it had not been committed at his initiative.”

But this interpretation cannot be regarded as the plain meaning of the text. Firstly, linguistically: these commentators project onto Achav’s two words, and Eliyahu’s single word of response, a notion that appears nowhere in the verse. Achav does not say, “Have you found me guilty”; nor does Eliyahu respond, “I have found you guilty.” The debate that these commentators seek to create between Achav

and Eliyahu – as to whether the murder of Navot was Izevel’s act or one that could be attributed to Achav – is not even hinted at.

Secondly, the nature of the situation described in this dialogue is full of dramatic tension; it is not suited to legal debate, whether explicit or implicit. Hence it is clear that Achav’s question, “Have you found me, my enemy,” must be understood as a rhetorical question; Eliyahu’s response is likewise to be understood in that context, and the dialogue can therefore not be a legal debate, as the above commentators suggest.

Many *shiurim* ago, in the appendix to part 8 on the drought, we compared the encounter between the king and the prophet in our chapter and that recorded at the beginning of chapter 18, when Achav and Ovadya go off together in search of some feed for the animals. We noted that there, Achav felt that Eliyahu was guilty for the difficult situation of *Am Yisrael*, and therefore when he meets Eliyahu he assumes – with some degree of justification – the role of accuser, addressing Eliyahu with the rhetorical question: “Is that you, o troubler of Israel?!” The title that Achav uses shows that he regards himself as a king who cares about his nation, and his view of Eliyahu as the enemy of all of *Am Yisrael* because of the drought that he has decreed.

In our chapter, the roles are reversed. Here it is Eliyahu who accuses Achav, who understands that he has been caught in his disgrace. Achav’s response here is not an expression of accusation, as in chapter 18. His rhetorical question, “Have you found me, my enemy,” means: “Have you finally managed to catch me in my disgrace – you, the prophet who has lied in wait for me, awaiting my downfall?!” Eliyahu’s unequivocal answer, “I have found you,” is to be understood accordingly: “Indeed, you have been discovered in your disgrace, at the peak of your crime – and at the very site of the crime!” There is no attempt at evasion, here. On the contrary: Achav recognizes that he has been caught in the most compromising of situations, and expresses an implied admission to the accusation: “Have you then murdered and taken possession.”

On the other hand, we should obviously not get carried away in interpreting Achav’s words here as a manifestation of *teshuva* and regret. His words are uttered in anger, as someone who is pained at having his crime exposed. We may say that there is an “acknowledgment of sin” here, but the next stage of *teshuva* – regret – is absent, and without it there can be no process of repentance. This situation is preferable, in some ways, to the usual scenario in which the accused tends to deny his sin outright (sometimes even claiming that what he did was a worthy deed), or to claim that he is in no way responsible for the sin. In dealing with a sinner of this more common type, the prophet must first and foremost disprove his claims and bring him to recognition of the truth and an admission, before specifying his punishment. (Compare the lengthy, stage-by-stage dialogue between Shemuel and Shaul following the war against Amalek, I *Shemuel* 16:13-31). In our chapter, in contrast, Achav’s position – which is at least honest – facilitates a jump over the wearing legal argument that may have been required, and moving right on to his punishment.

It appears, then, that Achav’s response here may be a first stage leading to his submission, which we shall discuss in the following *shiurim*.

Translated by Kaeren Fish