

THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

LECTURE 62: CHAPTER 2 (3)

THE BATTLE BY THE POOL AT GIV'ON (PART II)

CHAPTER 2 (1)

THE SONS OF DAVID IN HEBRON

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I. THE INCIDENT INVOLVING ASA'EL

In the previous lecture, we analyzed the circumstances in the context of which the battle at Giv'on erupted, a battle that began as a "game" played by Yoav and Avner's men. We saw that the chapter's central theme is the utter defeat of Avner's men as part of the weakening of the kingdom of Ish-Boshet, which had been established by Avner. But Yoav is not entirely free of responsibility for what happened either, as his going to Giv'on – Shaul's ancestral city, and apparently also the site of the *Mishkan* – was the provocation that created the tense atmosphere in the place.

In order to demonstrate Yoav's share in the responsibility for the bloodshed, Scripture describes the personal battle fought between Avner and Yoav's brother, Asa'el:

(18) And the three sons of Tzeruya were there, Yoav, and Avishai, and Asa'el; and Asa'el was as light of foot as one of the roes that are in the field.**(19)** And Asa'el pursued after Avner; and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Avner. **(20)** Then Avner

looked behind him, and said, "Is it you, Asa'el?" And he answered, "It is I."

Asa'el believes in his exceptional speed and is convinced that he can bring the battle to a decisive end by killing Avner. He stubbornly pursues Avner and is not prepared to give up.

Later in the story, however, it becomes clear that Asa'el greatly overestimated his advantage over Avner. Avner, who seems to be the pursued, tries to persuade Asa'el to call off the chase, and even suggests to him an honorable exit so that he would be able to return home with spoils of war – but Asa'el continues in his obstinacy:

(21) And Avner said to him, "Turn you aside to your right hand or to your left, and lay you hold on one of the young men, and take you his armor."¹[1] But Asa'el would not turn aside from following him.

Avner, no longer able to make do with hints, addresses Asa'el a second time and speaks to him in a forthright manner:

(22) And Avner said again to Asa'el, "Turn you aside from following me; wherefore should I smite you to the ground? How then should I hold up my face to Yoav your brother?"

In this manner, Avner makes it clear to Asa'el that if he continues with his pursuit, Avner will be forced to use his superior strength and kill him. Avner emphasizes that this is not the alternative that he prefers, for it will bring him into conflict with Yoav,²[2] and he almost pleads with Asa'el that he

1 [1] The term "*chalitza*" refers to some type of garment (*Metzudat Zion*; see *Shofetim* 14:19; *Zekharya* 14:19). It may have been called by that name because it covers the loins (*chaltzayim*). See *Da'at Mikra*, ad loc.

2 [2] From here we see that despite the fact that they were the commanders of two hostile and opposing armies, there was a certain personal connection between Yoav and Avner.

should not force him against the wall and cause him to take a step that he is not interested in taking.

But despite it all, Asa'el continues to pursue Avner. He turns himself into a classic "*rodef*" (pursuer)^{3[3]} and doesn't leave Avner with many options:

(23) However, he refused to turn aside; wherefore Avner with the hind end of the spear smote him in the groin, that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place....

Attention should be paid to the manner in which Avner killed Asa'el. Avner does not turn around, and does not assault Asa'el with the point of his spear. Rather, he strikes him with the hind end of his spear, while his back is still directed at Asa'el, who is chasing after him. It is difficult to imagine the degree of strength that allows him not only to kill him in this manner, but also to cause the spear to penetrate his entire body and come out behind him. Without a doubt, Scripture uses this cruel description to show how far Asa'el was from understanding the enormous difference in strength between Avner and himself.

Asa'el is presented here in the image of his hot-tempered brothers, who are quick to draw their swords. In I *Shmuel*, we saw his brother Avishai's proposal to kill Shaul (I *Shmuel* 26), and we shall once again see his desire to kill Shim'i ben Gera (below chapters 16 and 19). Yoav will also still kill a number of people and defend his actions with questionable justifications: Avner (chap. 3), Avshalom (chap. 18), and Amasa ben Yeter (chap. 20). The sons of Tzeruya, the sister of David, are blessed with unique military prowess, but sometimes their hot tempers make them act in crazy ways. Asa'el's conduct, for which he paid with his life, demonstrates this temperament, and thus also testifies about Yoav's character and behavior in the entire story, as we saw earlier.

3 [3] See *Sanhedrin* 49a: "Asa'el was a *rodef*." Later in the passage, the *gemara* suggests that Avner did not have to kill Asa'el and that he could have saved himself by inflicting a non-lethal wound in one of Asa'el's organs. The *gemara* may be saying that in this story, which also revolves around the problematic natures of the sons of Tzeruya, Avner did not act in a proper manner.

In any event, Asa'el's death cuts short the momentum of victory in Yoav's camp:

(23) ...and it came to pass that all those who came to the place where Asa'el fell down and died **stood still**.

It is reasonable to assume that the appalling sight of Asa'el's body contributed to the shock that took hold of Yoav's men. At this point, the battle between the two camps came to a halt, and all that was left was the personal pursuit among their leaders:

(24) But Yoav and Avishai pursued after Avner; and the sun went down when they were come to the hill of Amma, which lies before Gi'ach by the way of the wilderness of Giv'on. (25) And the children of Binyamin gathered themselves together after Avner, and became one band, and stood on the top of a hill.

What we have here is a second pursuit of Avner on the part of the sons of Tzeruya, which also fails. It is precisely the people of Binyamin who are portrayed here in a positive manner, as they gather around Avner as one band and protect him like a living wall from Yoav and Avishai.

It is against this backdrop that Avner can now propose a ceasefire, which Yoav accepts. In the previous lecture, we noted the mutual accusations hurled between Yoav and Avner as to who was responsible for the bitter results: Yoav, who created a provocation by going to Giv'on, or Avner, who responded by initiating the battle between the representatives of the respective sides. This way or that, the two camps return home in sorrow, counting their casualties:

(30) And Yoav returned from following Avner; and when he had gathered all the people together, there lacked of David's servants nineteen men and Asa'el. (31) But the servants of David had smitten of Binyamin, even of Avner's men – three hundred and sixty men died.

II. "AND THE DAY BROKE UPON THEM IN HEBRON"

There is, however, a difference between the descriptions of the two camps:

(29) And Avner and his men **went all that night** through the Arava; and they passed over the Jordan, and went through all Bitron, and came to Machanayim...4[4]

(32) And they took up Asa'el, and buried him in the sepulcher of his father, which was in Bethlehem. And Yoav and his men **went all night, and the day broke upon them at Hebron.**

The two camps proceed in the darkness all through the night. But nevertheless, from a literary perspective there is a striking difference between them. At the end of that dark night, Yoav's men arrive in the light in Hebron – before David, whose sun now begins to burst forth.

This literary expression is not by chance, and we already encountered it in the twilight of Shaul's kingdom. The story of the medium (*Ba'alat Ov*) is accompanied throughout by an atmosphere of dark night. It begins: "And they came to the woman by **night**" (I *Shmuel* 28:8), and it ends: "Then they rose up, and went away that **night**" (ibid. v. 25). In the next chapter, in contrast, when we read of David's return from the camp of the Philistines that is going out to battle, Akhish says to David: "Wherefore now rise up early in the **morning** with the servants of your lord that are come with you; and as soon as you are up early in the **morning** and have **light**, depart.' So David rose up early, he and his men, to depart in the **morning**, to return into the land of the Philistines" (ibid. 29:10-11). There too, Shaul walks in darkness, whereas David goes out in the light of the morning.

It is in this spirit that Scripture concludes our chapter and the other processes that have been taking place in that period:

4 [4] Rashi and Radak understand "Bitron" as the name of a region. It seems, however, that the reference is to the cleft mountains on the two sides of the Jordan River valley. Compare to "*harei bater*" (*Shir Ha-shirim* 2:17).

(3:1) Now there was long war between the house of Shaul and the house of David; and David waxed stronger and stronger, but the house of Shaul waxed weaker and weaker.

III. THE SONS OF DAVID IN HEBRON (THE BEGINNING OF CHAPTER 3)

The following section briefly lists the sons born to David in Hebron:

(2) And unto David were sons born in Hebron; and his first-born was Amnon, of Achinoam the Yizre'elites; (3) and his second, Kil'av, of Avigayil the wife of Naval the Carmelite; and the third, Avshalom the son of Ma'akha the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; (4) and the fourth, Adoniya the son of Chagit; and the fifth, Shefatya the son of Avital; (5) and the sixth, Yitre'am, of Egla, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron.

Why is this list found here? It seems that this section contributes to the sense of the stability of David's kingdom. Six sons are born to David in Hebron, including his first-born Amnon – the crown prince – and there is a feeling of solidification and continuity.

This list, however, is interesting from another perspective as well. Three of the first four sons will later participate in struggles over the succession: Amnon, who as stated was the crown prince, was murdered by Avshalom (see chapter 13); Avshalom rebelled against his father and began to rule as king in his lifetime, until his rebellion failed and he died (chapter 18); afterwards, Adoniya viewed himself as the next king: "Now Adoniyah the son of Chagit exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king'... and he was also a very goodly man; and he was born after Avshalom" (1 *Melakhim* 1:5-6). In light of the list in our chapter, the question needs to be asked: What happened to Kil'av, David's second son? Why don't we find him vying to succeed David to the throne?

To this question we may add another surprising phenomenon – the name of this son is different in the parallel genealogical list in the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*:

(1) Now these were the sons of David that were born unto him in Hebron: the first-born, Amnon, of Achinoam the Yizre'elites; **the second, Daniel, of Avigayil the Carmelites;** (2) the third, Avshalom the son of Ma'akha the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; the fourth, Adoniyah the son of Chagit; (3) the fifth, Shefatiya of Avital; the sixth, Yitre'am by Egla his wife.

What is the meaning of the total change in name of this son from Kil'av to Daniel? Is it in any way connected to the question of his not joining the race to serve as David's successor?

The *midrash* seems to have taken the issue of Kil'av in two different directions. According to one approach, Kil'av was a righteous Torah scholar, and it seems that this is meant to explain why he did not take part in the struggle over the inheritance. According to this approach, his original name was in fact Daniel, and Kil'av was a name given to express his great wisdom:

Therefore was David worthy of the privilege that Kil'av should issue from him. R. Yochanan said: His name was not Kil'av but Daniel. Why then was he called Kil'av? Because he humiliated [*maklim*] Mefiboshet in Halakha. (*Berakhot* 4a).5[5]

The second approach agrees that his original name was Daniel, but explains that he was given a second name for an entirely different reason:

And the scoffers of the generation scoffed and said: She conceived from Naval. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He commanded the angel in charge of the creation and form of embryos, saying: Go and form him in the image of his father David, so that all will testify that David was his father. From where do we know this? It is written: "And his first-born was Amnon, of Achinoam the Yizre'elites; and his second, Kil'av, of Avigayil the wife of Naval the Carmelite." What does "Kil'av" come to teach? That he was entirely [his] father

5 [5] Following this approach, *Chazal* counted Kil'av among the four people who did not sin at all (*Shabbat* 55b) and died only because of the mortality imposed upon mankind in the wake of the sin in the Garden of Eden ("they died in the wake of the serpent").

(*kulo av*), for anyone who saw him would say: David is this one's father.
(*Tanchuma, Toledot*, no. 6)

According to this viewpoint, the scoffers of the generation said about Kil'av that he was the son of Naval, and therefore God formed him in the image of David – something that is emphasized in his name, Kil'av, which alludes to the great similarity between him and his father.

R. Yaakov Medan⁶[6] has proposed a third possibility, according to which "the scoffers of the generation" were right, and Kil'av was in fact Avigayil's child from Naval! This argument is based on the great similarity between the name Kil'av and that which is stated about Naval: "Now the name of the man was Naval; and the name of his wife Avigayil... but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was '**Kolbi**' [of the house of Kalev?]" (I *Shmuel* 25:3). The commentators disagree about the meaning of this designation,⁷[7] but if indeed it means that he was of the house of Kalev, it would have been very reasonable to call his son Kil'av, after his paternal family!

According to this approach, it is very understandable why Kil'av did not participate in the struggle over the inheritance, for he was not at all a legitimate son of David. It is also reasonable to assume that at some point in his life, the name Kil'av, which clearly expressed his origins, was changed to Daniel. An expression of this is found in another difference between the two lists: In the book of *Shmuel*, it is explicitly mentioned that Avigayil was Naval's wife: "Kil'av, of Avigayil **the wife of Naval the Carmelite**" – whereas in the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim* it is only stated: "The second, Daniel, of Avigayil the **Carmelites**." In short, in the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, we find a tendency to

6 [6] In his article, "*Amar Naval Be-Libo ein Elokim*," *Megadim* 4.

7 [7] Rashi, ad loc., explains that he was a descendant of Kalev, and there are two possibilities as to the identity of this Kalev: The reference might be to Kalev ben Yefuneh (as argued by *Metzudat David*), or else to Kalev ben Chetzron, who is also called "Keluvai" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 2:9), and whose descendants include Ma'on (ibid. v. 45). Other commentators understood this term as a name of shame for Naval, as, for example, the Ralbag writes: "Owing to his cruelty, his character was the **character of dogs** (*kelavim*)"; and see Radak, ad loc.

blur Avigayil's previous marriage to Naval, and thus also the parentage of her son Kil'av.^{8[8]}

Support for this explanation may perhaps be found in Avigayil's very designation as "the wife of Naval the Carmelite." This appellation, which is Avigayil's fixed designation until our chapter (I *Shmuel* 27:3; 30:5; II *Shmuel* 3:2), seems a bit strange after her marriage to David. But if indeed she was pregnant with Naval's child, it is easier to understand.

In any case, at this point, the struggle over the inheritance is still far off,^{9[9]} and as stated, the main purpose of this list is to describe the solidification of David's kingdom in Hebron.

(Translated by David Strauss)

8 [8] This accords with the tendency of the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, "which does not want to mention anything disgraceful about the house of David" (the commentary attributed to Rashi, I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 17:13) – as is evident from the omission of the unfavorable events in the lives of David and his household, such as the story of Bat-Sheva, the story of Amnon and Tamar, and the story of Avshalom. The aforementioned commentary uses this principle in many places to explain even slight differences between the book of *Divrei Ha-Yamim* and the books of *Shmuel* and *Melakhim*.

9 [9] The *gemara* in *Ketuvot* 62b mentions a surprising lineage: R. Yehuda Ha-Nasi is a descendant of Shefatya ben Avital, the fifth son of David. By noting this, the *gemara* appears to be saying that the grand dynasty of Nesi'im founded by Hillel, which led the Torah world for centuries and of which R. Yehuda Ha-Nasi was one of the most striking representatives, descended from the line of David's seed that was not at all involved in the struggles of succession.