

THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

LECTURE 36: CHAPTER 18 (PART II) DAVID'S MARRIAGE TO MIKHAL Rav Amnon Bazak

I. Shaul and David

The second half of chapter 18 continues to relate the consequences of Shaul's hostility toward David and his attempts on David's life. After failing in his attempt to kill David with his spear in a devious and indirect manner (as was explained in the previous lecture), Shaul tries to rid himself of David in another way:

(17) And Shaul said to David, "Behold my elder daughter Meirav; I will give her to you as a wife. Only be you valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles." For Shaul said, Let not my hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Pelishtim be upon him.

Scripture makes no mention whatsoever of the fact that David is by right entitled to Shaul's daughter, as was promised to him in the battle waged against Golyat and the Pelishtim: "And it shall be, that the man who kills him, the king will enrich him with great riches, **and will give him his daughter**, and make his father's house free in Israel" (17:25). There seems to be no justification for the stipulation introduced by Shaul – "only be you valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles" – for Shaul had already promised to give his daughter in marriage to him who kills the Pelishti, and the time has come to make good on that promise. It seems, however, that Shaul was not truly interested in giving his daughter to David, and that he did so only in the hope that "the hand of the Pelishtim be upon him."

At first, David refuses the offer:

(18) And David said unto Shaul, "Who am I, and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, ¹[1] that I should be son-in-law to the king?"

Shaul, who from the very outset had not been eager to marry off his daughter to David, quickly exploits David's refusal to free himself from his commitment:

(19) But it came to pass at the time when Meirav, Shaul's daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Mecholathite ²[2] as a wife.

From Shaul's perspective, he had been freed from his obligation, and the story could have ended here. Another factor, however, is operative here, and it changes the picture:

(20) And Mikhal, Shaul's daughter, loved David; and they told Shaul...

It stands to reason that Mikhal sent emissaries to Shaul asking for David, and that once again Shaul discerned the opportunity that he had envisioned from the beginning:

... and the thing pleased him. (21) And Shaul said, "I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Pelishtim may be against him." Wherefore Shaul said to David, "You shall this day be my son-in-law through the one of the two."³[3]

Once again, David refuses the offer, but this time his refusal is worded differently:

(23) And Shaul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you to be a light thing to be the king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?"⁴[4]

As opposed to his earlier refusal, when David had argued that owing to his family's status he is not at all fit to marry into the royal family, David now implies that the problem is primarily financial – he does not have the means to provide the king's daughter with a fitting dowry. It should be mentioned once again that there was no justification for Shaul to demand a dowry, for David had already earned the king's daughter fair and square.⁵[5] Shaul, however, exploits David's offer in order to try already at this stage to bring harm to David by way of the Pelishtim:

(25) And Shaul said, "Thus shall you say to David, 'The king desires not any dowry, but a hundred foreskins of the Pelishtim, to be avenged of the king's enemies.'" For Shaul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Pelishtim.⁶[6]

But King Shaul's scheming fails. Not only does David stand up to the test, he returns with double the dowry that had been demanded, and leaves Shaul with no alternative:

(27) And David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Pelishtim two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full number to the king, that he might be the king's son-in-law. And Shaul gave him Mikhal his daughter as a wife.

Once again, David's ability to defeat the Pelishtim in such a manner arouses Shaul's fear, and for the third time in the chapter, Shaul's attitude toward David is presented in contrast to the love of others toward him:

(2) And Shaul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house. (3) Then Yonatan made a covenant with David, because **he loved him** as his own soul...

(15) And when Shaul saw that he had great success, he dreaded him.

(16) But all Israel and Yehuda **loved** (*ohav*) David; for he went out and came in before them...

(28) And Shaul saw and knew that the Lord was with David; and Mikhal Shaul's daughter **loved him**.

The term that Scripture uses to describe the love that so many people felt for David is strikingly similar to the term it uses to describe Shaul's attitude toward him – *ohav-oyev*:

(29) And Shaul was yet the more afraid of David; and Shaul was David's enemy (*oyev*) continually.

And if this is not enough, the chapter ends with an account, which also magnifies Shaul's fear of and hostility towards David:

(30) Then the princes of the Pelishtim went forth; and it came to pass, as often as they went forth, that David prospered more than all the servants of Shaul, so that his name was much set by.

The simple message of this chapter is that not only do Shaul's attempts to bring harm to David fail – they actually lead to the opposite result. First, they intensify the people's adoration of David; second, Mikhal's love for David will, as we shall see in the next chapter, help him slip away from Shaul in the future.

II. Mikhal and David

As stated, however, the story is not limited to Shaul. This chapter begins the account of the relationship between David and Mikhal, one of the most twisted and complicated in Scripture. It begins with unprecedented love and devotion on the part of Mikhal, and ends with frustration and the pronouncement that Shaul's daughter did not have a child until the day that she died (II *Shemuel* 7:23).

When we come to analyze the nature of this relationship, with its ups and downs, we find that Scripture already provides us with a most important key to understand the matter – the parallel, striking in its scope, to another

relationship in Scripture: the love between Yaakov and Rachel.^{7[7]} In the coming chapters, I will deal with this parallel in detail; now I will merely note the beginning of the correspondence and its importance already at the outset.

The main points of correspondence in our chapter are as follows:

- 1) In both stories, the heroes are the groom (Yaakov/David), the father-in-law (Lavan/Shaul), and his two daughters (Lea and Rachel/Meirav and Mikhal).
- 2) In both stories, the father-in-law breaches an obligation that he had already given regarding the marriage of his daughter: Lavan replaces Rachel with Lea (*Bereishit* 29:23); and Shaul, who had obligated himself to give his daughter in marriage to the man who kills Golyat (*I Shmuel* 17:25), gives his daughter to another man.
- 3) In both cases, the groom is asked to pay for the marriage, and in both cases he pays twice the amount that had been demanded at the outset. Yaakov said to Lavan: "I will serve you **seven years** for Rachel your younger daughter" (*Bereishit* 29:18), but in actual practice, after Lavan replaced Rachel with Lea, Yaakov worked "**fourteen** years for your two daughters" (*ibid.* 31:41). Shaul informs David that "the king desires not any dowry, but a hundred foreskins of the Pelishtim" (*I Shmuel* 18:25), but in actuality: "David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Pelishtim two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins" (*ibid.* v. 27).
- 4) Scripture seems to allude to the correspondence between the two stories through the linguistic similarity between them. The book of *Shmuel* relates that after David heard the condition set for his marriage to Mikhal:

And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. And the days were not expired (***mal'u ha-yamim***). (*I Shemuel* 18:26)^{8[8]}

This wording is very reminiscent of Yaakov's words:

"Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled (***mal'u yamai***), that I may go in to her" (*Bereishit* 29:21).^{9[9]}

- 5) The two stories also continue in parallel manner. The rift between son-in-law and father-in-law continues to expand, until in the end the son-in-law runs away from the father-in-law with the help of his wife, who cooperates with him against her own father: Yaakov's wives join him in his flight (*Bereishit*
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31:14-17), and Mikhal saves David from Shaul's men (I *Shmuel* 19:11-17). Interestingly, in both cases mention is made of *terafim* in connection with the woman (*Bereishit* 31:34; I *Shmuel* 19:13).¹⁰[10]

6) In both stories, a meeting occurs in the end between the father-in-law/pursuer and the son-in-law/pursued, and the two parties reconcile, swear to each other by the name of God, and set God as judge between them:

The God of Avraham, and the god of Nachor, the god of their father,
judge between us. (*Bereishit* 31:53)

The Lord therefore be judge, **and judge between me and you.** (I *Shmuel* 24:15)¹¹[11]

It is, however, precisely these parallels that highlight the main difference between the two stories. Whereas with Yaakov, Scripture repeats over and over again how Yaakov loves Rachel – "And Yaakov **loved** Rachel... And Yaakov served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days, for the **love** he had to her... And moreover he **loved** Rachel more than Lea" (*Bereishit* 29:18-30) – regarding David, this feeling is entirely lacking. This lacking is emphasized by the rare mention of the love of a woman:¹²[12] "And Mikhal Shaul's daughter **loved** David... and Mikhal Shaul's daughter **loved him**" (I *Shmuel* 18:20-28).

Moreover, over the course of the chapter, it becomes clear what truly stands behind David's conflict about marrying Mikhal.

And David said, "Does it seem to you to be a light thing **to be the king's son-in-law?**" (ibid. v. 23)

It pleased David well **to be the king's son-in-law.**¹³[13] (ibid. v. 26)

And David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full number to the king, **that he might be the king's son-in-law.** (ibid. v. 27)

This is the way the relationship between David and Mikhal began: one-sided love on the part of Mikhal and consent to marry on the part of David based on the opportunity afforded to him to become the king's son-in-law. Without a doubt, this imbalance is not a good situation, and as we shall see, it is the root of all the problematic proceedings that will transpire in the future.

It should be noted that this correspondence has additional significance in the parallel between Shaul and Lavan. This parallel between two father-in-laws who do not honor their commitments is, of course, not very flattering to Shaul, and exacerbates Scripture's negative evaluation of his conduct.

(Translated by David Strauss)

14[1] According to their plain sense, the words, "and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel," give expression to David's modesty, but the succession of words is difficult to understand. The commentators suggest several interpretations. According to Targum Yonatan, David means to say that his life has no special value, other than his being of the family of his father's house. The Radak explains that he means that both he and his family are unimportant. The Ralbag also suggests an explanation why (based on the Radak) David downplays the importance of his father's family – because he comes from the family of Ruth the Moavite. The word *chayai* might be used here in the sense of tribe or camp, as in "*chayat Pelishtim*" (II *Shmuel* 23:11, 13, and compare with v. 16 there – *machaneh*; see also *Tehillim* 68:11).

15[2] In II *Shmuel* 21:8, this person appears with his full name: "Adriel the son of Barzilai the Mecholatite." There is room to suggest that Barzilai the Mecholatite is Barzilai the Gil'adite, David's friend and supporter during Avshalom's rebellion, because Mechola appears to be located on the east side of the Jordan.

16[3] This expression, *bi-shetayim*, is also difficult. Rashi explains "with one of the two" (see also II *Shmuel* 24:12: "three" = "one of the three"). It is also possible to explain: "with the second." See below.

17[4] David's words include a play on words: "Does it seem to you to be **a light thing** (*hanekeh*) to be the king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, **and lightly esteemed** (*venikleh*)?"

18[5] It should be noted that in the Septuagint (version b) the whole story about Meirav is omitted, apparently owing to its similarity to the story about Mikhal. Similarly, the words, "You shall this day be my son-in-law through the one of the two," are omitted, apparently for the same reason. If, indeed, this is the reason for the omission, then the Septuagint is unaware of the significant differences between the two stories. In the story of Meirav, the initiative for the marriage comes from Shaul; at least from this perspective, Shaul intended to fulfill his obligation from the war against Golyat, without demanding anything in return. In the story of Mikhal, the initiative comes from Mikhal, and Shaul expects a dowry in return for the marriage, thus totally ignoring his obligation to David.

It is also possible that the stories of Mikhal and Meirav continue the two perspectives running through the book: the story of Meirav is a continuation of chapter 17, whereas the story of Mikhal, which disregards Shaul's commitment, is a continuation of the perspective of chapter 16, in which the war between David and Golyat does not appear.

19[6] This is already the third mention in nine verses (17-25) of Shaul's desire to harm David indirectly, through the Pelishtim: "For Shaul said, 'Let not my hand be upon him, but let the

hand of the Pelishtim be upon him'... And Shaul said, 'I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Pelishtim may be against him'... For Shaul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Pelishtim."

20[7] See at length in my book: *Makbilot Nifgashot – Makbilot Sifrutiyot Be-Sefer Shmuel*, Alon Shevut, 5766, pp. 109-121.

21[8] This word also appears later: "And David brought their foreskins, and **they gave them in full number** (*va-yemal'um*) to the king" (ibid. v. 27).

22[9] In the framework of the story about David, this term is difficult. Rashi explains: "He did not wait until the expiry of the days that had been set for him to bring the hundred foreskins." The rest of the commentators follow Rashi (Ri Kera, Radak, Rid, *Metzudat David*). In the previous verses, however, there is no mention of a defined time period that Shaul set for David. This strengthens our conjecture that the term is used to intensify the connection between the two stories.

23[10] There is also a linguistic similarity between Shaul's words to Mikhal "**Why have you deceived me** thus" (19:17), and Yaakov's words to Lavan, "Did not I serve with you for Rachel? **Why then have you deceived me?**" (*Bereishit* 29:25).

24[11] In light of these parallels, we can understand some of the enigmatic verses in our chapter, which might come to strengthen the connection between the two stories. It is possible that this is the way to understand the words, "You shall this day be my son-in-law through [the one of] the two," which perhaps allude to the double wedding of Yaakov to Rachel and Lea. It is also possible that the words, "But it came to pass at the time when Meirav, Shaul's daughter, should have been given..." (v. 19) allude to Lavan's deception.

25[12] Mikhal is the only woman in Scripture about whom it is related that she loved a man.

26[13] Compare: "And Mikhal, Shaul's daughter, loved David; and they told Shaul, and the thing pleased him. And Shaul said, 'I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Pelishtim may be against him'" (ibid. vv. 20-21). It seems that Scripture wishes to allude that both sides took the step out of some hidden personal interest, and not because of a desire for the marriage itself.
