

THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

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LECTURE 67: CHAPTER 4

THE KILLING OF ISH BOSHET (PART II)

CHAPTER 5 – THE ANOINTING OF DAVID AS KING OF ISRAEL

I. REKHAV AND BA'ANA COME TO DAVID

Following the two-fold account of Ish-Boshet's assassination, which stemmed, as we saw in the previous lecture, from Rekhav and Ba'ana's two-fold motive – national revenge (since they were Giv'onites) and a desire to receive a reward from David – Scripture continues with the second element: Rekhav and Ba'ana appear before David with Ish-Boshet's head, and report as follows:

(8) And they brought the head of Ish-Boshet unto David to Hebron, and said to the king, "Behold the head of Ish-Boshet the son of Shaul your enemy, who sought your life; and the Lord has avenged my lord the king this day of Shaul, and of his seed."

Echoes of the first motive can also be heard in the words of Rekhav and Ba'ana. Even though they present Ish-Boshet's killing as the revenge that God took from Shaul and his descendants for his pursuit of David, it is reasonable to assume that in this way they also gave expression to their inner feelings – their personal desire to take revenge from Shaul and his descendants. Later, when David will ask the Giv'onites what can be done to atone for the sin of Shaul's killing of the Giv'onites, they will request: "Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Giv'a of Shaul, the chosen of the Lord" (21:6). In other words, the killing of Shaul's descendants is perceived by the Giv'onites as fitting revenge for what he had done to them.

At least on the surface, however, Rekhav and Ba'ana turn here to David with the clear expectation that he would take pleasure in their actions,

and apparently with the hope of receiving reward. But David reacts in a way entirely different from what they had expected:

(9) And David answered Rekhav and Ba'ana his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Be'erotite,^{1[1]} and said unto them, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of all adversity, (10) when one told me, saying, 'Behold, Shaul is dead,' and he was in his own eyes as though he brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Tziklag, instead of giving a reward for his tidings.^{2[2]} (11) How much more,^{3[3]} when wicked men have slain a righteous person^{4[4]} in his own house upon his bed, shall I not now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?" (12) And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up beside the pool in Hebron...

David's primary argument is that Rekhav and Ba'ana should have learned from the person who had informed him of Shaul's death; David had him killed for the very fact that he had reported the news as good tidings and expected to receive a reward for his action. If David had him killed, how much more so will he kill the wicked men who, with their own hands and in a most despicable manner, killed an innocent man. And indeed, to serve as a lesson, David kills Rekhav and Ba'ana and treats their corpses in an especially humiliating manner.

What, indeed, did Rekhav and Ba'ana think? Did they not know of David's respectful attitude toward Shaul, both while he was alive and following his death? Had they not heard of David's mourning over Avner's death?

1 [1] It is possible that the repeated mention of their origins was meant to sharpen the fact that the assassination was an act of national revenge on behalf of the Giv'onites.

2 [2] I.e.: "who thought to gladden me, so that I might reward him for his tiding."

3 [3] We already noted in the past (see, for example, Lecture 26, note 6) that the expression "*af ki*" usually indicates a "*kal va-chomer*" argument. See, for example, *Devarim* 31:25; I *Shmuel* 14:30; 21:6; 23:3; II *Shmuel* 16:11; I *Melakhim* 8:27; II *Melakhim* 5:13.

4 [4] We already saw in chapter 3 (lecture 65, note 8) that the word "*tzadik*" does not describe a person's character traits, but rather the fact that he is innocent and has been vindicated in judgment.

It would seem that Rekhav and Ba'ana believed that David did not truly grieve over Shaul's death. As for the death of Avner, there are two possibilities: Either they thought that David's mourning was not genuine, as others had also thought at the beginning (we already dealt with this issue at length above in chapter 3, Lectures 64-65); or else they understood that even if David truly mourned the death of Avner, that was because Avner had already moved over to his camp and wanted to bring with him the entire people of Israel, whereas Ish-Boshet remained king of an opposing and hostile kingdom. Rekhav and Ba'ana's emotional involvement might also have distorted their judgment on this issue.

In any event, David may bear a certain responsibility in this case as well, perhaps because he left Yoav ben Tzeruya in his position even after killing Avner, as was noted in chapter 3 (Lecture 65). That Rekhav and Ba'ana could even think that David would be interested in killing Ish-Boshet testifies to the fact that David did not satisfactorily plant a different feeling in the hearts of the people of Israel.

This may also answer a question raised in the previous lecture (in note 2) regarding the first verse: "And when Shaul's son heard that Avner was dead in Hebron, his hands became feeble." Why did Ish-Boshet's hands become feeble only now? Surely Avner had already earlier gotten into a quarrel with him and moved over to David's camp! It may be that Ish-Boshet also thought that David was behind Avner's murder, and that he was afraid that if David took such steps, his end was also near. Against this background, we can understand why Rekhav and Ba'ana shared this perception.

As was already mentioned in chapter 3 (Lecture no. 8), David may also have been punished for a certain responsibility that he bore for Ish-Boshet's assassination. When he was running away from Avshalom, Shimi ben Gera cast stones upon him, and argued as follows: "The Lord has returned upon you all the blood of the house of Shaul, in whose stead you have reigned" (16:8). Shimi was wrong in casting upon David all the responsibility for the killing of the house of Shaul, but it is possible that David did bear a certain degree of responsibility – among other things, for the death of Ish-Boshet.

Nevertheless, the chapter closes with the end of the kingdom of the house of Shaul, concluding in an ironic manner with the words, "But they took the head of Ish-Boshet, and buried it in the grave of Avner in Hebron." The two people who prevented the unification of the kingdom of Israel after David

was anointed as king over Yehuda were brought to rest in Hebron, David's capital.

II. MEFIBOSHET

Now we can return to the verse that we skipped, a verse that constitutes a parenthetical statement that is not connected to the narrative of our chapter:

Now Yehonatan, Shaul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Shaul and Yehonatan out of Yizre'el, and his nurse took him up, and fled;^{5[5]} and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mefiboshet.

What is the meaning of this verse? Why does Scripture mention this information precisely at this point? The commentators proposed several explanations. Rashi writes: "It relates how the kingdom of the house of Shaul came to an end: He and his sons were killed, and the remaining son was killed in his bed, and Yehonatan's son fell and became lame." In other words, even before it describes Ish-Boshet's assassination, Scripture wishes to emphasize that with this act the kingdom of the house of Shaul came to an end, for the sole survivor of the house of Shaul was the lame Mefiboshet, who became crippled in circumstances that were tragic in themselves, and he was no longer fit for the throne.

5 [5] Why did the nurse flee? The author of the *Metzudot* explains: "Out of fear of the Philistines, lest they come to the royal palace to plunder." It is possible, however, that the fear was of David, based on the common practice that when a new king (who is not of the previous dynasty) ascends the throne, he kills all of the previous king's descendants, as happened several times in the book of *Melakhim* (Ba'sha killed all the members of the house of Yerov'am [I *Melakhim* 15:29]; Zimri killed the entire house of Ba'sha [ibid. 16:11]; Yehu killed the sons of Ach'av [II *Melakhim* 10:1-14], and elsewhere.) If, indeed, it was fear that drove her to flee, it proved to be baseless fear, and this just magnifies the kindness that David showed to Mefiboshet, as we shall see below in chapter 9.

The *Metzudat David*, in contrast, understands that the verse does not mean to give an objective description of the situation of the kingdom of the house of Shaul, but rather of the motives of Rekhav and Ba'ana: "And it was written here to say that the intention of the Be'erotites in the killing of Ish-Boshet was to appoint David as king, because there was no one left of the seed of Shaul to appoint as king after him, because they thought that Mefiboshet was unfit for throne inasmuch as he was lame in his feet."

It may be possible to propose a third approach - the verse does not intend to describe the destruction of the house of Shaul, but just the opposite. Lest the reader think that with the killing of Ish-Boshet, the house of Shaul came to a final end, Scripture emphasizes that there remained a survivor of the house of Shaul: Mefiboshet, the son of Yehonatan. And indeed, in the end there arose from this lame person a great and important dynasty:

And the son of Yehonatan was Meriv-Ba'al;^{6[6]} and Meriv-Ba'al begot Mikha. And the sons of Mikha: Piton, and Melekh, and Ta'area, and Achaz... And the sons of Ulam **were mighty men of valor, archers;** and had many sons, and sons' sons, a hundred and fifty. (I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 8:34-40)

Mefiboshet's descendants restored, in a certain measure, the glory of the house of Shaul. Shaul was described as a "mighty man of valor" (I *Shemuel* 9:1); Yehonatan was known as an archer ("the bow of Yonatan turned not back"; 1:22); and both of them together were called "the mighty" (ibid. vv. 19, 21, 25, 27). They merited that from their lame son/grandson there would emerge mighty men who were archers, and from the family that was almost wiped out, people would be born who would have many sons and grandsons.

III. THE ANOINTING OF DAVID (BEGINNING OF CHAPTER 5)

The death of Ish-Boshet paved the way to the unification of the kingdom of Israel:

6 [6] In the lecture on chapter 2 (Lecture 60, note 7) we noted the phenomenon of replacing the name "Ba'al" with "Boshet." The change from Meriv-Ba'al to Mefiboshet is an example of this phenomenon.

(1) Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spoke, saying, "Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. (2) In times past, when Shaul was king over us, it was you that did lead out and bring in Israel;7[7] and the Lord said to you, 'You shall feed My people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.'" (3) So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the Lord;8[8] and they anointed David king over Israel.

The tribes of Israel offer three reasons for turning to David at this time:

1) First, they feel a familial connection to David: "Behold, we are your bone and your flesh."9[9] It stands to reason that they do not merely mean that all of Israel are brothers (as suggested by the Radak), but rather they are referring to David's repeated marriage to Mikhal the daughter of Shaul, which

7 [7] In this verse, there is a two-fold difference between the *keri* and the *ketiv*, in both cases a general phenomenon seen in other places. The first difference relates to the division of the letters into words. According to the *ketiv*, the letter *heh* is the last letter of the word *hayita*, whereas according to the *keri*, it is the first letter of the word *hamotzi*. See also below 21:12; *Yechezkel* 42:9; and *Iyov* 38:12. In the continuation of the verse, the *ketiv* of the word "*ve-ha-mevi*" is missing the *alef* at the end of the word, apparently because of its juxtaposition to the next word, which begins with an *alef* (a phenomenon called "haplography"). See also I *Melakhim* 21:21; *Yirmiyahu* 19:15; 39:15 (and perhaps also *Bamidbar* 32:42).

8 [8] The idea that a covenant includes also a third party – God - is found in other contexts as well, the most striking of them being the covenant made by Yehoyada the priest when Yo'ash was anointed as king: "And Yehoyada made a covenant **between the Lord and the king and the people**, that they should be the Lord's people; between the king also and the people" (II *Melakhim* 11:17).

9 [9] Noting the family connection in this way is found in several places in connection with political pacts and the appointment of leaders. For example, Avimelekh turns to the people of Shekhem: "Which is better for you, that all the sons of Yeruba'al, who are threescore and ten persons, rule over you, or that one rule over you? Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh" (*Shofetim* 9:2); or when David turns to Amasa ben Yeter: "And say you to Amasa, Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if you be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Yoav" (II *Shmuel* 19:14).

turned him into a natural candidate to rule as king over all of Israel, in that he was the son-in-law of the previous king.

2) The people of Israel had always recognized David as a military leader – "that did lead out and bring in Israel." This wording alludes, of course, to the description of David as an officer in Shaul's army: "But all Israel and Judah loved David; for he went out and came in before them"¹⁰[10] (I *Shemuel* 18:16).

3) The people of Israel recognize that this is also the will of God: "And the Lord said to you, 'You shall feed My people Israel, and you shall be prince'¹¹[11] over Israel.'" Like Avner (see chapter 3, Lecture 63), the people were aware of Shmuel's anointing David as king, and at this stage were also prepared to take part in establishing him as king over all of Israel.

These words are said to David in Hebron, in the first two verses of our chapter, by "all the **tribes** of Israel," but the actual covenant is made in verse 3 with "all the **elders** of Israel." According to the Radak, verse 3 describes the past perfect: During the first stage, the elders of Israel came to ascertain that David was prepared to make a covenant with them, and that he was not angry with them for having appointed Ish-Boshet as king over them. Only afterwards did all the tribes of Israel come. However, there is nothing in verse 3 to suggest the past perfect; on the contrary, the verses seem to correspond to the chronological order of the events.¹²[12] It seems then that the order was just the reverse: the arrival of "all the tribes of Israel" was an exploratory mission, after which came the elders, as the official representatives of Israel, who actually entered into a covenant with David.

¹⁰ [10] These two descriptions allude to the words of Moshe: "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, **who may go out before them, and who may come in before them**, and who may lead them out, and who may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no **shepherd**" (*Bamidbar* 27:16-17)

¹¹ [11] In our lecture on I *Shmuel* 9 (Lecture 16), we noted that the parallelism in this verse teaches that "*naggid*" means "shepherd," and we explained the significance of this.

¹² [12] Were this the past perfect, the verse should have read: "*ve-ziknei Yisra'el ba'u*."

Here, in any event, we come to the hoped for moment: David becomes the king of all of Israel. Only now does his reign as king truly begin, and this receives literary expression in the coming verses. Only now is David introduced by Scripture in the official manner used with respect to the kings of Israel:

(4) David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. (5) In Hebron he reigned over Yehuda seven years and six months; and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Yehuda.

The period of the split kingdom comes to an end, as David becomes king of all of Israel. This step has many ramifications – some of them immediate, as we shall see in the next lecture.

(Translated by David Strauss)
