

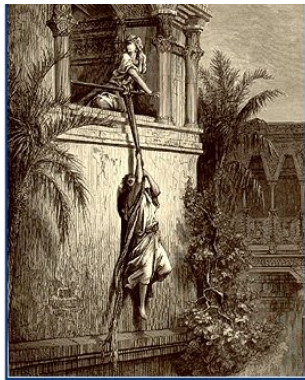
From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [14]

Palti son of Laish and Saul's Daughter Michal (Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 19b)

Background to Our Story

Biblical Background to Palti son of Laish and Michal



I Samuel, Chapter 17

23. And while he was speaking with them, behold, the champion, named Goliath the Philistine, from Gath, was coming up from the ranks of the Philistines, and he spoke the same words (as before), and David heard.

24. And all the men of Israel, upon seeing the man, fled from before him, and were exceedingly frightened.

25. And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who is coming up, for he is coming up to taunt Israel? And it will be, that the man who will kill him, the King will enrich him with great riches, and he will give him his daughter, and he will make his father's house free in Israel."

26. And David said to the men who were standing before him, saying, "What shall be done to the man who slays that Philistine, and takes away reproach from Israel, for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the ranks of the living God?"

27. And the people said to him, "So shall be done to the man who slays him."

I Samuel, Chapter 18

6. And it was when they came, when David returned from slaying the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, to sing, and with musical instruments (in their hands), toward King Saul, with drums, with joy, and with cymbals.

7. And the cheering women sang out and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

8. And Saul was very chagrined, and the matter displeased him, and he said, "They ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they ascribed the thousands. And what more can he have, but the kingdom?"

9. And Saul eyed David from that day on.

10. And it was on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God rested upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, and David was playing with his hand like everyday, and the spear was in Saul's hand.

11. And Saul cast the spear, and said, "I shall pin David to the wall," and David turned from before him twice.

12. And Saul feared David, for the Lord was with him, while He had turned away from Saul.

13. And Saul removed him from (being) with him, and made him for himself a captain over a thousand, and he went out and came in before the people.

14. And David was successful in all his ways; and the Lord was with him.

15. And Saul saw that he was very successful, and he feared him.

16. And all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them.

17. And Saul said to David, "Behold, my elder daughter, Merab. I shall give her to you as a wife. But, be a warrior for me, and wage the wars of the Lord." For Saul said, "Let not my hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him."

18. And David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my life, or my fathers family in Israel, that I should be a son-in-law to the King."

19. And it was at the time that Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel, the Meholathite, as a wife.

20. And Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David; and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.

21. And Saul said, "I shall give her to him, and she will be a snare to him, and the hand of the Philistines will be upon him." And Saul said to David, "With (one of) two, shall you be my son-in-law today."

22. And Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David secretly, saying, 'Behold, the king desires you, and all his servants love you; and now, become the king's son-in-law.'"

23. And Saul's servants spoke these words in David's ears. And David said, "Does becoming the king's son-in-law, seem to you to be a light thing, for I am poor and lightly esteemed?"

24. And Saul's servants told him, saying, "According to these words, has David spoken."

25. And Saul said, "So shall you say to David, 'The king has no desire in a dowry, but in one hundred foreskins of Philistines, to avenge himself upon the king's enemies.'" But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.

26. And his servants told David these words, and the thing pleased David to become the king's son-in-law, and the days had not expired.

27. And David arose, and he and his men went, and he slew two hundred men of the Philistines, and brought their foreskins, and they delivered them in full to the king, in order to become the king's son-in-law. And the king gave him Michal, his daughter, as a wife.

28. And Saul saw, and knew that the Lord was with David, and Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him.

29. And Saul grew still more afraid of David, and Saul was hostile to David all the days.

I Samuel, Chapter 19

8. And there was war again, and David went out and battled the Philistines, and dealt a great blow upon them, and they fled from before him.

9. And an evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul, and he was sitting in his house, with his spear in his hand, and David was playing with his hand.

10. And Saul attempted to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away from before Saul, and Saul drove the spear into the wall, but David fled and escaped on that night.

11. And Saul sent messengers to David's house to guard him and to put him to death in the morning, and Michal his wife told David, saying, "If you do not flee for your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to death!"

12. And Michal let David down through the window, and he fled and escaped.

13. And Michal took the teraphim, and put them into the bed, and she put a goatskin at its head, and covered it with a garment.

14. And Saul sent messengers to take David, and she said, "He is ill."

15. And Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may put him to death."

16. And the messengers came, and behold, the teraphim was in the bed, and the goatskin was at its head.

17. And Saul said to Michal, "Why have you thus deceived me, and you sent away my enemy, so that he escaped?" And Michal said to Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go. Why should I put you to death?' "

I Samuel, Chapter 25

44. And Saul had given his daughter, Michal, to Palti the son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

II Samuel, Chapter 3

12. And Abner sent messengers to David from his place, saying. "To whom the land belongs," saying, "Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand is with you to bring around all Israel to you."

13. And he said, "Good; I shall make a covenant with you, but one thing I ask of you, namely that you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter when you come to see my face."

14. And David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, saying, "Give my wife Michal whom I espoused to myself with one hundred foreskins of Philistines."

15. And Ish- bosheth sent and took her from a man, from Paltiel the son of Laish.

16. And her husband went with her, walking and weeping after her up to Bahurim; and Abner said to him, "Go, return," and he returned.

Biblical Background to Yosef and Potiphar's wife

Genesis, Chapter 39

6. So he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he knew nothing about what was with him except the bread that he ate; and Joseph had handsome features and a beautiful complexion.

7. Now it came to pass after these events that his master's wife lifted up her eyes to Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

8. But he refused, and he said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me my master knows nothing about anything in the house, and all he has he has given into my hand.

9. In this house, there is no one greater than I, and he has not withheld anything from me except you, insofar as you are his wife. Now how can I commit this great evil, and sin against God?"

10. Now it came about when she spoke to Joseph day in and day out, that he did not obey her, to lie beside her [and] to be with her.

11. And it came about on a certain day, that he came to the house to do his work, and none of the people of the house were there in the house.

12. So she grabbed him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand and fled and went outside.

Biblical Background to Boaz and Ruth

Ruth, Chapter 3

6. And she went down to the threshing-floor, and she did all that her mother-in-law had charged her.

7. And Boaz ate and drank, and his heart was merry, and he went to lie at the edge of the stack, and she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.

8. And it came to pass at midnight, and the man quaked and was taken around, and behold a woman was lying at his feet.

9. And he said, "Who are you?" And she said, "I am Ruth, your handmaid, and you shall spread your skirt over your handmaid, for you are a near kinsman."

10. And he said, "May you be blessed of the Lord, my daughter; your latest act of kindness is greater than the first, not to follow the young men, whether poor or rich.

11. And now, my daughter, do not fear, all that you say I will do for you, for the entire gate of my people know that you are a valiant woman.

12. And now, indeed, I am a near kinsman, but there is a kinsman closer than I.

13. Stay over tonight, and it will come to pass in the morning, that if he redeem you, well, let him redeem you, but if he does not wish to redeem you, I will redeem you, as the Lord lives; lie down until morning."

14. And she lay at his feet until morning, and she rose before one could recognize his fellow, for he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor."

Legal Technicalities of Jewish Marriages and their Complexity (Brief Summary)

[Shulchan Arukh, Even HaEzer 17](#)

אשת איש בכלל עריות היא ואין קדושין תופסין בה בד"א בודאי אשת איש אבל אם היא ספק מקודשת או ספק מגורשת קדושין תופסין בה מספק וצריכה גט משניהם וה"ה לפסולי גיטין מדרבנן שאם בא אחר וקידשה שצריכה גט משניהם מהראשון דרבנן ומהשני מדאורייתא:

A married woman is included in the category of sexual proscriptions, and kiddushin (the acquisition aspect of marriage) to her is void. In what case are we dealing? With a woman who is definitely married. However, if she is doubtfully married, or doubtfully divorced, then kiddushin is valid by doubt, and she needs a writ of divorce from both men.

[Shulchan Arukh, Even HaEzer 26](#)

משנתקדשה נחשבת כאשת איש לחייב הבא עליה וצריכה גט להתירה לשוק:

A betrothed woman is considered as a man's wife in that if another lies with her, they will be guilty of adultery and she would need a divorce in order to marry another man.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 19b

The Gemara cites a tradition with regard to Palti, son of Laish: It is written in one place "Palti" (1 Samuel 25:44), and it is written in another place "Paltiel" (II Samuel 3:15).

Rabbi Yohanan says: Palti was his real name, and why was his name called Paltiel? To teach that God [El] saved [pelato] him from the sin, by giving him the insight that he may not touch Michal, understanding that she was still David's wife and therefore forbidden to him.

What did he [Palti] do? He embedded a sword in the bed between him and her, and said: Anyone who engages in this matter, i.e., sexual intercourse, should be stabbed by this sword.

The Gemara challenges this: But isn't it written: "And her husband went with her, weeping as he went, and followed her to Bahurim" (II Samuel 3:16), referring to Palti as Michal's husband?

The Gemara responds: This means that he became like a husband for her through his affection and concern for her.

The Gemara counters: But isn't it written in that very verse: "weeping as he went"? If from the outset he thought that she was David's wife, why was he crying?

The Gemara responds: He was weeping about the mitzva that left him, as from now on, he would receive no reward for restraining his desire. The end of the verse says that they went "to Bahurim;" meaning that they both became like young men [bahurim] in that they did not taste sexual intercourse at all.

Rabbi Yohanan says: Joseph's power is the humility of Boaz, as Joseph is praised for showing strength with regard to an accomplishment that was insignificant for Boaz (see Genesis, chapter 39). Likewise, Boaz's power is the humility of Palti, son of Laish, as Palti's capacity for restraint was greater still.

Joseph's power is the humility of Boaz, as it is written about Boaz: "*And it came to pass at midnight that the man was startled and turned himself, and behold, a woman lay at his feet*" (Ruth 3:8). What is the meaning of "and turned himself [vayyilafet]"? Rav says: The meaning is that his

flesh became like the heads of turnips [*lefatot*], his sexual organ hardening out of arousal, but even though Ruth was not married he refrained from engaging in intercourse with her; while Joseph had to exert more effort, despite the fact that Potiphar's wife was married.

Boaz's power is the humility of Palti, son of Laish, as we said, for he conquered his desire not only for one night, as Boaz did, but for many nights

Rabbi Yohanan says: What is the meaning of that which is written: "*Many daughters have done valiantly, but you excel above them all*" (*Proverbs 31:29*)? "*Many daughters have done valiantly*"; this is a reference to Joseph and Boaz. "*But you excel above them all*"; this is a reference to Palti, son of Laish, who exceeded Joseph and Boaz in restraint, as discussed above.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahman says that Rabbi Yonatan says: What is the meaning of that which is written: "*Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised*" (*Proverbs 31:30*). "*Grace is deceitful*"; this is a reference to Joseph. "*And beauty is vain*"; this is a reference to Boaz. "*Who fears the Lord, she shall be praised*"; this is a reference to Palti, son of Laish, who did not sin with Michal. Although the behavior of Joseph and Boaz is commendable, it is "deceitful" and "vain" relative to that of Palti ben Laish.



Explaining the Story

What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

- ?** Did Palti find Michal attractive? Substantiate your answer!
- ?** Did Joseph find Potiphar's wife attractive? Substantiate your answer!
- ?** Did Boaz find Ruth attractive? Substantiate your answer!
- ?** Why did Palti refrain from having intimate relations with Michal?

? Why did Joseph refrain from having intimate relations with Potiphar's wife?

? Why did Boaz refrain from having intimate relations with Ruth when she came to the threshing floor at night?

? How is Palti's act of self-restraint greater than that of Boaz?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? How is Boaz's act of self-restraint greater than that of Joseph?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

More Analysis Questions

? Based on what you know from our story and from the Biblical story, What could have been Palti's self-justification to be intimate with Michal?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Answer 5 _____

Bonus ? Why did Palti embed a sword between himself and Michal?

Bonus ? Why do you think the Talmud chose the almost unknown Palti son of Laish as the epitome of moral behavior, as opposed to a better known biblical figure?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

Three of the most important things in life I learned from Palti the son of Laish.

1. When it comes to the most important things in life, err on the safe side!
2. Knowing the difference between right and wrong is very important, but useless if you don't act accordingly!

3. "Who is a real hero?" Or "When doing what is right is not easy."



Palti loves Michal. Michal not only is beautiful, but she is also the King's daughter. King Saul, using his full authority both as father and king, gives Michal to Palti in marriage and sends her to live with him, together, as husband and wife.

Everything seems fine with the exception that Palti knows that Michal was once married to David, and even though David is now a proscribed fugitive, Palti believes they might still be married, and in doubt, when it comes to the important things in life, you err on the safe side.

Deep inside Palti knows that he cannot be intimate with Michal. The problem is that he has both the reasons and the opportunity to do what he wishes the most.

It will take a moral compass, courage, self-determination, discipline, and an embedded sword between his bed and Michal's for Palti to do the right thing.