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INSULTS IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE OF THE EARLY ISRAELITE MONARCHY IN LIGHT OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN SOURCES

A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of insults in the political sphere of the Hebrew Bible's depiction of the early monarchy and how the insults operated within their particular socio-political spheres. Insults, by nature, are discrete social acts which are highly context dependent, so the insults found in the Hebrew Bible are interpreted against a backdrop of comparative material from analogous political realms of the ANE/EMED. The specific political matrix in which each insult occurs is then analyzed with a view to determining how the insult operates within it. Power sources in the biblical accounts are identified according to the social power bases proposed by social psychologists John R. P. French and Bertram Raven. This dissertation then draws conclusions about how each insult functioned politically and why the biblical author may have chosen to include the portrayals of insults.

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Abbreviations

ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, 1969
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research/American Society of Overseas Research
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford, 1907
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*
CAD	*Chicago Assyrian Dictionary.* 21 vols. Chicago, 1956-2011
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
COS	*The Context of Scripture.* Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997–
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
EA	El-Amarna tablets, according to the numbering of J. A. Knudtzon. *Die el-Amarna-Tafeln.* 2 vols. Leipzig, 1908–1915
EMED	Eastern Mediterranean
GKC	Gesenius, W., E. Kautzsch, A. E. Cowley. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. 2nd ed. (English) Oxford, 1910
HALOT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994–1999
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JPS	*Jewish Publication Society*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* Supplement
KTU	*Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit.* Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976
LBA	Late Bronze Age
LXX	Septuagint
MARI	*Mari, Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires* (Paris 1982 ff.)
NB	Neo Babylonian
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OB	Old Babylonian
RINAP	*The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period*
SAT	Speech Act Theory
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Edited by R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr. 2 vols. Chicago, 1980
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplement to *Vetus Testamentum*
ZAH	*Zeitschrift für Althebraistik*

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew Bible depicts the period of the early monarchy in 1 & 2 Samuel as a time of significant political transition. The previous period, depicted in the book of Judges, is predominantly characterized by tribalism and the periodic rise of local leaders called *šōpheṭīm* "judges" (שֹׁפְטִים) who primarily fulfilled a limited regional military role.[1] However, by the time of the last judge, Samuel, the people of Israel have become disenchanted with this fragmented system of rule and demand a king in order that they might follow the ways of the other nations who had kings (1 Sam 8:1-5).[2] Thus, by organizing themselves under a new national political rubric with a king at their head, the twelve tribes become a more unified monarchic polity.[3]

Israel's political unification brought with it kingship, but also ever-increasing bureaucracy, competing internal political factions, and sophisticated international

[1] For example, Deborah and Barak led a campaign in the north against the military commander Sisera of Hazor (Judg 4 & 5); Gideon gathered forces from several tribes and led the charge against the Amalekites, Midianites, and other eastern groups who were infiltrating Israelite tribal territories (Judg 6-8); and Samson brought down many Philistines through trickery and revenge (Judg 13-16).

[2] Although Samuel appointed his sons Joel and Abijah as judges after him (1 Sam 8:1-2), this arrangement was quickly dismissed by the elders of Israel who were dissatisfied with their corrupt practices. The biblical author accuses sons, Joel and Abijah, of taking bribes and carrying out injustices. Thus, Samuel was the last judge *de facto*. In Norman Gottwald's book, *The Hebrew Bible--A Socio-Literary Introduction*, he explains that the Deuteronomistic Historian (DH) describes Samuel's role as a judge in various ways including "as a circuit judge administering justice in part of Benjamin (1 Sam 7:15-17), but at the same time Samuel is said to have "judged" Israel by intercessory prayer, offering sacrifice, and possibly even by leading in battle (1 Sam 7:5-14)." See *The Hebrew Bible -- a Socio-Literary Introduction*, (1st pbk.ed. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 239.

[3] This statement is, admittedly, an oversimplification, especially regarding the reign of Saul, because at that time Israel and Judah are still understood to be two distinct entities. For example, in 1 Samuel 11:7-8 the troops of Israel and the troops of Judah are enumerated separately when Saul musters them under duress "as one man" (כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד) to face the Ammonites at Jabesh-Gilead. The geo-political space these two distinct groups inhabit, however, is called "all the territory of Israel" (כָּל־גְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל). It is also highly probably that these references could be from different strands of text.

relationships with other polities.[4] Not surprisingly, this socio-political milieu is characterized in the Hebrew Bible by explicit and implicit power struggles which provide the backdrop for many of the well-known narrative episodes situated in the early monarchic period. One such example is the account where David downs Goliath with a slingshot and one small stone after King Saul and his armed troops are unwilling to face the Philistine giant who has taunted them for forty days (1 Sam 17). David's heroic victory over Goliath spurs a vicious and lengthy domestic political rivalry between David and Saul because, although Saul is king, it is David who earns the adoration of all Israel with his act of heroism.[5] Thus, while Saul faces off with the foreign enemies of Israel such as the Philistines, he also engages in domestic rivalries in an attempt to maintain his status and position as the anointed sovereign of Israel.[6]

A particularly interesting phenomenon that occurs within the volatile socio-political realm of the early monarchy is the use of insults. For example, when David is in the wilderness hiding from King Saul's homicidal pursuit, David and his men encounter the shepherds of a rich man named Nabal who is apparently a Saul supporter (1 Sam 25).

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[4] These aspects have been explored from socio-literary (e.g., Gottwald), ideological (e.g., Halpern), and textual (e.g., McCarter) perspectives. See Norman K. Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) and *The Hebrew Bible -- a Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001); and P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel: A New Translation,* 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980) and *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984).

[5] In 1 Samuel 18:7, the Israelite women greet King Saul by dancing and singing "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" after David's defeat of Goliath. Later on, when David seeks refuge with the Philistines and agrees to fight against Israel in 1 Samuel 29:5, the Philistine commanders advising King Achish reference this song. The commanders cite David's reputation in their argument that David cannot be trusted to remain loyal to the Philistines.

[6] The biblical account of Saul's rise to power, reign, and demise is found in 1 Samuel 9-31. During Saul's time as Israel's leader, he fights the Ammonites, Philistines, and Amalekites.

Though David's men had protected Nabal's shepherds and flocks while they were vulnerable in the open fields prior to David's encounter with Nabal, Nabal treats David dismissively and refuses to provide David and his men with provisions. Other insults from the Bible's depiction of the early monarchy include publicly sleeping with a political rival's concubines and humiliating diplomatic messengers. For example, according to the biblical narrative Absalom has intercourse with King David's concubines on top of David's palace in Jerusalem as part of his attempted *coup d'etat*, and the Ammonite king, Hanun, strips and shaves David's diplomatic messengers when they come to Ammon to bring a message of sympathy following the death of Hanun's father.

These types of insults and their political functions in the early monarchic accounts bear striking similarities to politically related insults described in other ancient Near East/Eastern Mediterranean (ANE/EMED) texts arising from eras of similar political character. For example, insults are common in the Late Bronze Age (LBA) El-Amarna letters (EA) between international and regional rulers, and multi-disciplinary analyses from scholars in various fields have demonstrated that these rulers used insults to perpetuate diplomatic relations, challenge the perception of status inequalities, mitigate or instigate military aggression, and assert rank dominance on multiple political planes.[7]

[7] See Kevin Avruch, "Reciprocity, Equality, and Status-Anxiety in the Amarna Letters" in *Amarna Diplomacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 154-164; Christer Jönsson, "Diplomatic Signaling in the Amarna Letters" in *Amarna Diplomacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000),191-204; and Pinhas Artzi, "The Diplomatic Service in Action: the Mitanni File" in *Amarna Diplomacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 205-211. Mario Liverani notes that this "contentiousness" "is so pervasive that it must be considered not simply a deviation from the norm but a feature (and a characteristic one at that) of the system itself." Liverani distinguishes between "micro-contentiousness" and "macro-contentiousness," the former concerning the details of discrete events of negotiation and the latter concerning larger ideological and conceptual differences. See "The Great

Despite the similarities between biblical and ANE/EMED insults in similar political environments, this type of in-depth evaluation of biblical examples has not been undertaken thus far. This study attempts to fill that gap. Specifically, this analysis of insults between political figures in the early monarchic accounts, when viewed against the backdrop of similar examples from other ANE/EMED texts, will demonstrate that the practice of insulting political rivals constituted a cultural phenomenon in the ANE/EMED whereby insults were used to negotiate power.[8]

In order to analyze this relationship between insults and power, this dissertation explores the three previously mentioned discrete episodes from the Hebrew Bible's depiction of the early monarchic period in which insults occur in politically significant contexts.[9] Specifically, these episodes include the account of the Israelite aristocrat, Nabal, refusing to acknowledge David's identity and reciprocate favors while David is hiding from Saul in the wilderness in 1 Samuel 25; the newly enthroned Ammonite king, Hanun, humiliating David's messengers by stripping and shaving them in 2 Samuel 10; and David's son, Absalom, sleeping with his father's concubines as part of his attempt to usurp the throne in 2 Samuel 16.

Powers' Club," in *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 23-24.

[8] The negotiation of power in these episodes will be analyzed using the methodology described below. In particular, various individuals' social power bases will be identified using theories from social psychology, and a comparison of the power dynamics before and after the insult will be provided. Thus, each insult's impact can be determined.

[9] Editors John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, in the introduction to *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook*, explain that power is a "means value" because it operates in order to further "the realization of honor, which is a Mediterranean goal or end cultural value." See *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), xvii-xix.

These episodes were chosen because of the particular political milieu they depict and because they are embedded in historical accounts which are uniquely rich in narrative description and characterization.[10] Concerning the political milieu which the Hebrew Bible depicts, the combination of both the internal struggles associated with the formation of the early monarchy and the external struggles that arise between regional polities in the absence of a hegemonic power provides the depiction of an era rife with power struggles which can be readily analyzed. Likewise, the historical genre of these biblical accounts provides robust descriptions of interactions between political figures which reveal the negotiation of power. Thus, these three accounts contain insults that occur in politically-charged scenarios, and they have a thorough enough plot to analyze the power dynamics surrounding them.

Certain comparative ANE/EMED texts, mostly from the Late Bronze Age, will be used in the analysis of these three biblical examples because there is an abundance of politically significant texts from this period, and these texts contain examples of insults arising in political environments similar to those portrayed in the accounts of the early monarchy. Both the depiction of the early monarchic period in the Hebrew Bible and the overarching political situation revealed in LBA texts are characterized by the lack of one hegemonic political presence, a circumstance fertile for power struggles between entities vying to gain and/or maintain power.[11] Select ANE/EMED texts from other eras will also

[10] The use of the term "historical" here is not meant to address the topic of the historicity of the early monarchy accounts described in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, the term is used to denote a particular literary genre.

[11] In the field of International Relations, this type of society is termed "anarchical" in that absolute order is not imposed from one overarching, hegemonic power. Rather, several political entities with relatively equal power (military, cultural, etc.) co-exist. This political environment creates a dynamic

provide information about applicable political practices, cultural norms, and common royal customs.

Concerning the validity of studying insults in the Hebrew Bible in light of ANE/EMED sources, numerous scholars affirm the value of the comparative method. Kenton L. Sparks, in the introduction to his book, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible,* validates sociological comparisons in order to note the similarities and differences between cultures.[12] Similarly, in the introduction to *Context of Scripture*, William W. Hallo supports a "contextual approach," analyzing sources critically to "reconstruct and evaluate" the "geographical, historical, religious, political and literary setting" of texts.[13] Like Sparks, Hallo notes the importance of highlighting contrasts as well as comparisons between texts, and he points out that "it is useful to raise questions of category and genre."[14]

In this vein, it must be acknowledged that there are challenges inherent in comparing insults from biblical accounts of the early monarchy to insults in other ANE/EMED texts. First, the biblical accounts are secondary texts while the ANE/EMED

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whereby the entities must constantly maintain contact and negotiate power to maintain their own stability, and thus their participation in this dynamic creates an international society. Although these terms and ideas derive from modern studies in international politics, this political dynamic can generally be applied to the period of the early monarchy just as it has been to the Late Bronze Age. For an overview of this topic, see Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. 4th ed. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[12] Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 4.

[13] William Wolfgang Hallo, K. Lawson Younger, Harry Angier Hoffner, and Robert Kriech Ritner, *The Context of Scripture 1, Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), xxv.

[14] Ibid., xxvi.

texts are primary texts. Second, different genres are represented (e.g., diplomatic letters versus biblical narrative). Third, the biblical material cannot be dated with accuracy, so there is no way to directly link biblical accounts to earlier accounts or situate them in a definitive historical milieu. Finally, the primary sources behind biblical accounts are generally not extant, so there is no way to determine if the biblical writers were recording details of actual events or re-creating them in line with socio-cultural/socio-linguistic behavior of the period. Still, in light of the striking similarities between the biblical and ANE/EMED material (e.g., refusing to honor expectations of reciprocal hospitality, publicly sleeping with a political rival's concubines, and humiliating diplomatic messengers), the phenomenon of politically-related insults in the biblical accounts in light of ANE/EMED sources constitutes a viable topic of exploration.

Before moving on to the analysis of the three biblical episodes describing insults in the political sphere of the early monarchy, however, it is important to succinctly delineate the parameters of the study in the remaining sections of this introduction. First, the concepts of *insult* and *power* which will be used throughout the study are defined below in order to frame the analyses which follow. Next, previous studies related to these two concepts will be reviewed in order to determine how these studies inform, intersect with, and diverge from the current study. Finally, an analytical framework will be set forth in order to methodologically explore the function of insults.

In order to systematically analyze the manner in which insults were used to negotiate socio-political power in these accounts, this dissertation will use a heuristic tool by which to determine how individuals in the accounts rank in different spheres relative to each other (i.e., What is their social status?) and what means of influence each has (i.e.,

How do they use their social power to get what they want from others?). This heuristic tool, which will be discussed in detail below, is a typology of social power bases arising from the field of social psychology. This typology arose out of earlier philosophical works on the conceptual nature of power itself. It will be helpful to review these philosophical origins of the study of power in order to make connections between the socially injurious impact of insults and the realm of power. Thus, this study will analyze specific insults found in the Hebrew Bible's depiction of the early monarchy—based on the nature of their social injury. Then the goal will be to determine how the insults were used to alter, subvert, or undergird the social power dynamics already in place.

Defining Terms

Insult. Concerning the definition of "insult" used in this study, the phenomenon is defined by sociologist Yannis Gabriel as "behavior or discourse, oral or written, which is perceived, experienced, constructed and, at times, intended as slighting, humiliating or offensive."[15] Under this rubric, slights, slurs, humiliation, mocking, accusations, rejection, exclusion, ingratitude, name-calling, impoliteness, and various other offenses are considered insults.[16] What is implicit may be added to this description—insults are potentially socially-injurious, status-lowering acts that occur in the social space which the parties involved inhabit. Thus, the interactants operate within a socio-cultural matrix of

[15] Yannis Gabriel, "An Introduction to the Social Psychology of Insults in Organizations," in *Human Relations* 51, no. 11 (1998): 1331.

[16] This list includes examples from various sources including this writer and Yannis Gabriel, "An Introduction to the Social Psychology of Insults in Organizations," in *Human Relations* 51, no. 11 (1998): 1329.

shared norms so that there is an agreement, however implicit, about what falls inside and outside the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior.

Insult versus Curse and Slander. The socially injurious quality of insults, especially verbal insults, suggests two other related phenomena—curses and slander. Indeed, the primary aim of all three phenomena (curses, slander, and insults) is harm. According to Walter Kim's study of the language of verbal insults in the Hebrew Bible, there is overlap between insults and curses in that the language of both seeks "to impose a certain status upon the receiver, either in the present moment or upon a future contravention of some standard of behavior… the difference mainly resides in the invocation of authority… in a sense the curse places an insult in the mouth of a deity."[17] Furthermore, curses, in contrast to insults, seem to be uttered with an expectation of immediate and tangible results or consequences such as military overthrow, barrenness, dynastic end, etc. For example, on one Babylonian *kudurru* boundary stone, a curse against a boundary violator calls for blindness, deafness, and paralysis.[18] Insults, on the other hand, seek to inflict more generalized social damage rather than tangible, physical harm.

[17] Walter Kim, "The Language of Verbal Insults in the Hebrew Bible" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007), 86. See also Paul Arden Keim, "When Sanctions Fail: The Social Function of Curse in Ancient Israel," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1992).

[18] The Babylonian *kudurru* stones were property boundary markers. See J. A. Brinkman, "Babylonian Royal Land Grants, Memorials of Financial Interest, and Invocation of the Divine," in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49, no. 1 (2006): 1-47. Brinkman's abstract on page 1 describes *kudurru* stones in the following way: "From the fourteenth to the seventh centuries B.C., Babylonian royal land grants and related documents were often engraved on stone stelae, which were decorated with divine symbols, inscribed with elaborate curses against offenders, and placed in a temple." See also CAD $Š_2$: *šarāku* A 3, pg 48.

An especially illustrative example of the nuanced relationship between curses and insults in the Hebrew Bible is found in 2 Kings 2:23-24 where youths *jeered at* (i.e., *insulted*) (קָלַס Hithpael: "to mock, deride") Elisha, then Elisha *cursed* (קָלַל Piel + בְּ "to curse") the youths in the name of the LORD:[19]

וַיַּעַל מִשָּׁם בֵּית־אֵל וְהוּא עֹלֶה בַּדֶּרֶךְ

וּנְעָרִים קְטַנִּים יָצְאוּ מִן־הָעִיר וַיִּתְקַלְּסוּ־בוֹ

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ עֲלֵה קָרֵחַ עֲלֵה קָרֵחַ׃

וַיִּפֶן אַחֲרָיו וַיִּרְאֵם וַיְקַלְלֵם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה

> So he went up from there to Bethel, and as he was going up in the way some small lads came out of the city, and they jeered at him, saying: "Go up, baldy! Go up baldy!" Then he turned around and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD.

As a result of Elisha's curse, two bears come out of the woods immediately and maul the lads who jeered at the prophet, with the implication that the revenge came at the direct behest of the LORD as a result of Elisha's curse uttered in the LORD's name.

Slander in the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, is often addressed in legal and wisdom texts such as Leviticus 19:16: "You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD" (לֹא־תֵלֵךְ רָכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל־דַּם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה);[20] and Proverbs 10:18: "The one who

[19] BDB: קָלַס Hithp. "mock, deride"; קָלַל + ב of oath (1 Sam 17:43 and 2 Kgs 2:24).

[20] רָכִיל (BDB: "slander; gossip") is attested in Lev 19:16; Jer 6:28, 9:3; Ezek 22:9; and Prov 11:13, 20:19.

conceals hatred has lying lips, and the one who brings out slander is a fool” (מְכַסֶּה שִׂנְאָה שִׂפְתֵי־שָׁקֶר וּמוֹצֵא דִבָּה הוּא כְסִיל).[21] The main conceptual difference between slander and insult is that instances of slander attempt to harm one’s reputation in the wider community by spreading falsehoods while insults attempt to harm one’s social status or psychological state by behavior or words that fall outside socially acceptable boundaries. Consequently, slander most often occurs outside the hearing of the one slandered, while insults happen in the “face” (i.e., social presence) of the one insulted.[22] Thus, slander is primarily a breach of ethics while insult is primarily a breach of decorum.

In an effort to not too strictly delineate the conceptual boundaries between insult, curse, and slander, it must be stated that there is much overlap in that all three phenomena are initiated by a human agent in a communicative act, and the main aim of each is harm. Moreover, curses, slander, and insults periodically show up together due to the nature of the social interactions in which they occur. However, curses and slander in the Hebrew Bible fall outside the purview of this dissertation.

Politics and Power. Politics and power are integrally related, for politics is the realm in which entities vie to maintain or gain public or administrative power in the presence of other entities with similar goals.[23] Thus, any discussion of political events rests

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[21] דִּבָּה (BDB: “slander; report”) shows up in a variety of contexts including gossip, bad reports, and plotting (Gen 37:2; Num 13:32, 14:36-37; Jer 20:10; Ezek 36:3; Ps 31:14; and Prov 10:18, 25:10).

[22] For an in-depth analysis of “face” in politeness and impoliteness linguistic theory, see Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Jonathan Culpeper, *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*, vol. 28 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[23] This definition is this author’s. By comparison, Norman Gottwald, incorporating Raymond Boudon and Francois Bourricaud’s sociological perspective, defines political power as “the ability to marshal and apply resources toward strategic ends exercised not only against the inertia of things, but

upon notions of social power. Particularly applicable to this study is work by social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven who have identified six types of power in social settings.[24] These power bases will be explained in more depth in the history of scholarship section on social power below.

History of Scholarship

A study of this type which views the social phenomenon of insults in light of the negotiation of social power necessitates a review of scholarship associated with both *insults* and *social power*. The combination of these two specific elements as a discrete topic of study appears to be a novel idea because this author has not found previous research combining them. Therefore, a review of applicable scholarship on insults and a review of scholarship on social power will be covered separately, and the integration of the two will be left for the interpretation section of each chapter covering an insult in the biblical text. Regarding scholarship on insults, three areas of research are applicable: A) insults in the Bible, B) insults and power in political contexts, and C) the role of insults in

against the *resistance of opposing wills*." See *The Politics of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 7. See also Raymond Boudon and Francois Bourricaud, *A Critical Dictionary of Sociology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 267. Additionally, it is important to note that these entities which vie for public or administrative power can be polities or persons, and there is often overlap such as countries which are ruled by power-hungry leaders.

[24] John R. P. French, Jr and Bertram H. Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," in *Studies in Social Power, ed.* D. Cartwright (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research), 150-167. See also Bertram H. Raven, "The Bases of Power and the Power/Interaction Model of Interpersonal Influence," *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 8, no. 1 (2008): 1-22. For a detailed summary of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptions of symbolic ("soft") power such as patriarchal and ethnic power, see David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

the context of the honor/shame culture in the Mediterranean. It is to these topics this study will turn before reviewing scholarship on social power.

Insults

Insults in the Hebrew Bible

Regarding insults in the Hebrew Bible, three works are particularly relevant: Walter Kim's dissertation, "The Language of Verbal Insults in the Hebrew Bible;" Lyn Bechtel's article, "Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming" in the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (*JSOT*); and Gary Stansell's chapter, "Honor and Shame in the David Narratives," in *Was ist der Mensch…?* Kim's dissertation analyzes verbal insults from the perspective of Speech Act Theory (SAT) which is a subfield of pragmatics (a branch of linguistics).[25] SAT arose from the work of philosopher J. L. Austin who proposed that words not only convey ideas, but they also are performative—that is, they are meant to accomplish something.[26]

The three types of acts Austin defined were locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Locutionary acts are actual utterances or "the act of 'saying something.'"[27] The illocutionary act is the implied meaning behind the utterance which is determined by the way which the utterance is being used, such as to answer a question or

[25] Walter Kim, "The Language of Verbal Insults in the Hebrew Bible," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007).

[26] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: the William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955,* 2nd ed., ed. J. O. Urmson. (Cambridge, NY: Harvard University Press, 1962).

[27] Ibid., 94.

announce a verdict.[28] Perlocutionary acts are "consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons."[29] So, to simplify Austin's model, one could say locutionary acts are utterances, illocutionary acts are the intents behind the utterances, and perlocutionary acts are the effects of the utterances.

Walter Kim's use of SAT to analyze the ways in which insults cause social injury in the Hebrew Bible is helpful for the present study, but Kim does not fully analyze the political context of insults as his focus is primarily on the lexemes and the immediate face threats of verbal insults. For example, in the episode of Nabal insulting David in 1 Samuel 25:10, Kim focuses on the insulting rhetoric of Nabal who refuses to acknowledge David's status (i.e., "Who is David and who is the son of Jesse?"). However, Kim does not fully explore the public nature of the insult, the political overtones of the exchange, and the matrix of power dynamics that influence the figures to act in certain ways.[30]

This study incorporates Kim's analyses of verbal insults, as they relate specifically to the Nabal account, the Hanun account, and the Absalom account, but this work also includes analyses of non-verbal insults. An additional distinction between Kim's analysis and the present study involves the means of analysis. Although Kim explores the social implications of verbal insults, he does so primarily through the lens of

[28] Ibid., 98-99.

[29] Ibid., 101.

[30] Walter Kim, "The Language of Verbal Insults in the Hebrew Bible," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007), 125-151.

SAT (Speech Act Theory). This study differs in that it also analyzes the function of insults socio-politically—through the lens of social power as defined by French and Raven. Finally, this study explores in detail the political matrix within which each insult occurs, in order to determine how the insult functions. Kim's dissertation does not incorporate this type of analysis.

Lyn Bechtel's article addresses Hanun's stripping of David's soldiers as a form of social shaming, but Bechtel only incorporates Neo-Assyrian psychological warfare for comparison.[31] This study differs in that it analyzes the specific political context of diplomatic messaging and the treatment of messengers in diplomatic contexts that are well-documented in LBA letters between regional and international polities. These analyses demonstrate that messengers were understood as state representatives who could be held, insulted, or even punished to send a diplomatic message.[32] Thus, this study expands upon Bechtel's analysis in order to incorporate examples from other ANE/EMED sources which illuminate the significance of a ruler's treatment of foreign diplomatic messengers.

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[31] Lyn Bechtel, "Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 49 (1991): 47-76.

[32] For the diplomatic significance of messengers between ancient polities in the Late Bronze Age, see Christer Jönsson, "Diplomatic Signaling in the Amarna Letters" in *Amarna Diplomacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 191-204. With regard to diplomatic signaling, Jönsson explains that the great kings of the LBA fluctuated between *specific* and *diffuse* reciprocity expectations with regard to messengers and gifts. Specific reciprocity aims for equality and indicates more social distance between the parties, while in diffuse reciprocity, which is the practice expected between closer parties such as family members or close friends, an exact exchange is not expected. This understanding of reciprocity with regard to the treatment of messengers is pertinent to the biblical story of David and Hanun in 2 Samuel 10 in that David's intention is stated as expressing sympathy to Hanun. Thus, when Hanun mistrusts David's intentions and sends the messengers back stripped and shaved, a grave breech in reciprocity occurs. Thus, Hanun's act is not simply a personal affront to David but a power move.

Gary Stansell's work discusses the episode of Nabal's insult toward David and Hanun's shaming of David's men in anthropological terms. [33] For example, Stansell claims that Nabal's "'put down' of David by refusing his claim to be Nabal's "son" should be seen in the context of ancient Bedouin customs of challenge and response over claims for honor and precedence."[34] Though this study does not object to this line of reasoning, it expands upon Stansell's work by including similar examples from other ANE/EMED sources that demonstrate how socio-political power was negotiated through insults which challenged social identity. One such example is a LBA Hittite letter where Urhi-Teshub/Mursili III writes to Adad-nirari I and refuses to call him "brother," effectively denying him social equality in the political milieu of the LBA international society.[35]

Insults and Power in Political Contexts

Two works on insults and power in political contexts that are relevant for this dissertation include Karina V. Korostelina's study of intergroup political insults in the modern world, *Political Insults: How Offenses Escalate Conflict,* and Moshe Halbertal

[33] Gary Stansell, "Honor and Shame in the David Narratives," in *Was ist der Mensch? Beitrdge zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments,* ed. Frank Crüsemann (Munich, Germany: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1992), 94-114.

[34] Ibid., 103.

[35] Gary M. Beckman and Harry A. Hoffner, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), 146-147. For a summary of familial language used in the context of political environments in the wider ancient Near East milieu, see Amanda H. Podany, *Brotherhood of Kings: How International Relations Shaped the Ancient Near East* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-14.

and Stephen Holmes' *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel*.[36] Korostelina's study provides a rubric for categorizing insults in terms of social identity and power, but she refers only to modern intergroup insults such as Pussy Riot's desecration of Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Korostelina's analysis stresses the importance of the social identity and power of the involved parties, their previous history, the level of awareness of the insult by both, and the sociocultural meaning of the insult.[37] These aspects are directly relevant to understanding the multitude of socio-political dynamics underlying insults in the biblical text.

Halbertal and Holmes address political power in the story of Absalom's rebellion, but they do not deconstruct the specific role of the insult of the concubine theft itself or the multi-faceted power dynamics at play as this study does. Furthermore, the analysis of Halbertal and Holmes does not view the insult in light of comparable ANE/EMED examples as this dissertation does. For example, in a LBA letter from the El-Amarna (EA) archive, Biryawaza, a Canaanite ruler, claims that in the midst of a political move in the area of upper Canaan, which was frequently the site of Egyptian-Hittite skirmishes and shifting Canaanite loyalties, the Hittite king came and put Biryawaza's wives and his daughter-in-law "in [his] lap," an apparent reference to a politically-motivated sexual conquest that mirrors Absalom's taking of David's concubines for political purposes.

[36] Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[37] Karina V. Korostelina, *Political Insults: How Offenses Escalate Conflict*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12-23.

Insults in the Context of the Honor/Shame Culture in the Mediterranean

Informative studies on honor/shame cultures in the Mediterranean that are directly applicable to this study include those in J. G. Peristiany's volume entitled *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society, The Nature of Human Society.*[38] Within Peristiany's volume, several studies of cultures around the Mediterranean (Andalusian, Spanish, Greek, etc.) elucidate the concepts of honor and shame that provide a cultural framework for understanding the social injury that insults cause in biblical accounts. These studies generally include ethnographic examples. For example, in Julian Pitt-Rivers' chapter, "Honor and Social Status," he notes that male honor in the Spanish *pueblo* rests on sexual potency (i.e., having *cojones*), and female honor rests on sexual purity—diametrically opposed standards. These divergent standards coalesce in the nuclear family where one manifestation of a man's honor is having the ability (*cojones*) to protect the sexual purity of females in his family (wife, mother, daughters, etc.).[39] Likewise, when Absalom insults David by sleeping with the king's concubines publicly, he simultaneously seeks to destroy David's honor (masculinity) and exalt his own (2 Sam

[38] J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society, The Nature of Human Society,* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966). For more studies on honor and shame applicable to this dissertation, see John Kennedy Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1964); Timothy Laniak, *Shame and Honor in the Book of Esther*, SBL Dissertation Series 165 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998); Saul Olyan, "Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and its Environment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996): 201-19; Gary Stansell, "Honor and Shame in the David Narratives," in *Was ist der Mensch.? Beitrage zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments*, ed. Frank Crüsemann (Munich, Germany: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1992), 94-114; and Johanna Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT Supplement Series 346 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 32-85.

[39] Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society, The Nature of Human Society,* ed. J. G. Peristiany (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 44-45.

16). The sexual act being done intentionally in the public sphere elevates it to a political subversion of power in the highest degree. These anthropological studies do not incorporate ancient examples from the ANE/EMED, however, leaving an important source of information out.

From a methodological standpoint, Johanna Stiebert's *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Contribution* provides an overview and critique of the honor/shame model that has been utilized as a heuristic tool in biblical studies for the comparison of biblical texts to Mediterranean social structures since the 1990's.[40] Furthermore, Stiebert incorporates psychological and anthropological studies into her research, providing a more well-rounded approach to honor/shame topics. The current study will make use of the honor/shame model while incorporating insights from the psychological and anthropological studies that Stiebert references, adding to the dialogue about these issues in the biblical text.

Social Power

A comprehensive review of power as an object of study is beyond the purview of this dissertation due to the vastness of its scope. However, there are several seminal works on the general concept of power which influenced later sociological research applicable to this study. These foundational works include Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), *Capital* by Karl Marx (volume 1 was published in 1867, but volumes 2 and 3 were published posthumously in 1885 and 1894, respectively), and Fredrich Nietzsche's

[40] Johanna Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT Supplement Series 346 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 32-85.

Will to Power (1901).[41] These works began to explore how and why people and societies come under the influence of others, giving rise to later theories focused on social power. A review of the basic premises of these philosophical works will contextualize later scholarship on the social power between individuals that is the focus of this study.

Also, as one of the forefathers of modern social science, German sociologist Max Weber's theory of social power stratification helped define power in individualistic terms.[42] Weber's approach was intentionally antipositivist over and against empiricists who proposed to study the social realm according to the manner of the natural sciences, as his goal in studying social issues was to understand the ways that people make meaning of their own actions.[43] Hobbes, Marx, Nietzsche, and Weber expounded concepts of power that are foundational to French and Raven's later social power typology which is the one used in this study.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes explores the relationship between a sovereign (one person or an assembly of people who rule) and the people under their rule. Hobbes lived through the English civil wars, the catastrophic destruction of which resulted in philosophical

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[41] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: Or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, trans. Ian Shapiro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1990); *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 2. trans. David Fernbach (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1992); and *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* vol. 3. trans. David Fernbach (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1992). Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Vintage Books ed. Walter Arnold Kaufmann, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1968).

[42] *Sociology* (LibreTexts.org), 1.2H.1, accessed August 15, 2020, https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Book%3A_Sociology_(Boundless).

[43] From a methodological standpoint, positivists emphasize that the study of social phenomena should be analogous to the study of the natural sciences. As such, positivists value statistical analysis and empirical approaches. Conversely, those espousing an antipositivist stance utilize approaches such as ethnographical analysis, interviews, and discourse analysis. As an antipositivist, Weber focused on understanding the values of a society and interpretive approaches.

questions about human nature and how to prevent war. Hobbes's treatise posits what many categorize as the first instance of social contract theory—the idea that people give up some liberties in exchange for protection from a sovereign. In Hobbesian philosophy, humans are governed by selfish desires which compel them to threaten or harm each other, so the social contract arises from citizens' need for protection from each other. Within this philosophy of human nature, Hobbes defines power as one's ability to exert one's will and have an impact on the unfolding of events which matter.

Karl Marx's *Capital* provides empirical evidence from the conditions of factory workers in England during the industrial revolution to support Marx's theory of capitalism as exploitative of the working class upon whose back its profit is gained. In Marx's view the ruling class in a capitalistic system (i.e., factory owners) maintains power over the working class (i.e., factory workers) because the ruling class owns the means of production. Though the working class provides the labor which creates profitable goods, they do not benefit from what they create as the ruling class owns the products and the profit, always increasing the value of their private holdings. Meanwhile, the working class gets poorer and more discontent, a scenario that Marx theorized would inevitably lead to a violent upheaval which would reverse the order of the system. Thus, Marx's notion of power largely pertains to class distinctions in an economic sphere.

The meaning of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of *der Wille zur Macht* "the will to power," which is developed in his book of the same name, has been widely studied and debated by philosophers, but the main idea seems to be that there is a driving force within the world that propels people to struggle in order to overcome obstacles which stand in the way of their desires. This phenomenon, perhaps best understood as a life force rather

than a personal one, may be understood on a metaphysical, psychological, and/or biological level. Nietzsche's conception of power is wide-reaching and quite elusive, but it shares the ethos of power that both Hobbes and Marx postulated—a driving will to have one's way in the world by impacting it. In sum, Hobbes understood power through a political lens, Marx through an economic lens, and Nietzsche through a philosophical one.

Sociologist Max Weber further concretized the notion of power by including it in his three-part stratification which determines individuals' social stations.[44] The components of Weber's stratification include *class*, *status*, and *power*. *Class* describes one's station in society based on ownership of property (e.g., working class, middle class, and upper class). Access to property and resources may depend on one's birth situation or personal achievement. *Status* refers to one's prestige or honor in a society and may be related to class but is not dependent on class. For example, Mother Theresa had very high social status based on her admirable religious work and personal piety, but she was not part of the upper class. *Power* is one's ability to accomplish one's will despite resistance or obstacles. For example, politicians who can motivate millions of people to vote a certain way have much power. One's social station relative to their standing in these three areas explains social hierarchy and individuals' level of social power.

Sociology as an academic discipline grew in the early 1900's, and more nuanced understandings of social power developed. By 1959, Dorwin Cartwright, group dynamics researcher and the director of the Institute for Social Research at the University of

[44] *Sociology* (LibreTexts.org), 5.3E.1.

Michigan, published a collection of articles on social power dynamics in his book entitled *Studies in Social Power*.[45] Social psychologists John R. P. French, Jr. and Bertram Raven had researched the sources of power in institutional settings and published an article on their typology of social power in Cartwright's volume. [46]

French and Raven's work, which proved to be foundational in the field of social power research, described five bases of power, three of which are based on *positional power* (legitimate power, reward power, and coercive power), and two of which are based on *personal power* (referent power and expert power). Later, Raven added another power base in the *positional power* category—informational power.[47] In French and Raven's research, they explain how an agent (O) exerts power over a person (P) through these six power bases, with power being defined in terms of "influence, and influence in terms of psychological change."[48]

In their article on the social power bases, French and Raven explain several aspects of the relationship between O and P which need to be explored further before moving on to define each power base. First, the influence of O does not necessarily have

[45] Dorwin Cartwright, ed., *Studies in Social Power* (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1978).

[46] John R. P. French, Jr. and Bertram H. Raven, "The Bases of Social Power" in *Studies in Social Power*, ed. Dorwin Cartwright (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 259-269.

[47] Bertram H. Raven, "Social Influence and Power," in *Current Studies in Social Psychology*, eds. I.D. Steiner & M. Fishbein (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1965), 371–382.

[48] French and Raven explain: "Psychological change is defined as any alteration of the state of some system over time. The amount of change is measured by the size of the difference between the states of the system at time 1 and at time 2: ch (a) = S2 (a) ~ si (a)." See "The Bases of Social Power" in *Studies in Social Power*, ed. Dorwin Cartwright (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 260.

to be an intentional act.[49] For example, French and Raven give the example of a policeman in a uniform standing on a corner having passive influence over a speeding motorist who drives by. Second, the influence of O toward P (what French and Raven call “resultant force”) can be understood as having two components: influence in the same direction as O’s intention or resistance in the opposite direction of O’s intention.[50] The influence of O in the same direction as O’s intention is understood as “positive influence,” and the influence of O in the opposite direction of O’s intention is understood as “negative influence.” Likewise, when O achieves the desired change in P, they are understood to have exerted “positive control,” but when O achieves change in the opposite direction, the result is understood as “negative control.”[51] Consequently, the strength of O’s power is the result of the combination of these two forces because O’s influence has directly caused both. A description of French and Raven’s power bases by which O exerts this influence is as follows:

Legitimate power is the potential influence O has over P in a formal or informal social hierarchy due to having a superior social position. For example, parents are understood to be in a socially superior position over their children, so parents inherently have psychological influence over their children for this reason. Outside of familial

[49] French and Raven state that “ Commonly social influence takes place through an intentional act on the part of O. However, we do not want to limit our definition of "act" to such conscious behavior. Indeed, influence might result from the passive presence of O, with no evidence of speech or overt movement. A policeman's standing on a corner may be considered an act of an agent for the speeding motorist. Such acts of the inducing agent will vary in strength, for O may not always utilize all of his power. The policeman, for example, may merely stand and watch or act more strongly by blowing his whistle at the motorist.” *Studies in Social Power*, ed. Dorwin Cartwright (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 260.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

relationships, persons in positions of recognized authority have power over others because of the recognized legitimacy of their role. For example, governmental leaders, supervisors, and military commanders are viewed as having the legitimate right to lead others, so their influence over those hierarchically lower than them arises from their positional station. In the Hebrew Bible, those who are divinely appointed to a leadership role—be it priest, prophet, or king—automatically gain influence over others who are not divinely appointed to such a role.[52]

Reward power is the ability to dole out benefits (tangible or intangible) to others. When O has resources that are highly desirable, and O is willing and able to allocate these resources, they have influence over those who want what they have to give. The more scarce or desirable the resource which O has, the more power they wield over P. Examples include patrons at a restaurant who can elicit prompt service from servers upon the promise of a good tip and bosses who have the ability to give raises to employees.

As for examples from the Hebrew Bible, King Solomon, with his extraordinary wisdom, embodied reward power in his dealings with the queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10). The narrative indicates that the queen travels a great distance due to her great desire to meet Solomon who is famous for his wisdom, and she brings gold, spices, and precious stones to give him in a diplomatic gesture. This gesture indicates that the queen wanted to

[52] A good example of divine appointment providing legitimate power is described in Exodus 28 where God specifically names Moses' brother, Aaron, and Aaron's sons (Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar) to be priests. Special garments are to be made for the men to distinguish them as priests within the Israelite community, and the garments are to include receptacles for the items called Urim and Thummim. These items are to be worn upon the breast of the priest when he enters the Holy Place. For a thorough discussion on priestly dress and the significance of dress, see Christine Elizabeth Palmer's dissertation, "High Priestly Dress in Ancient Israel: Symbolism and Instrumentality," PhD diss., Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, 2015).

maintain a political relationship with Israel due to her great respect for Solomon and her recognition that Israel's political status was significant.

Coercive power is the potential for influence that is present when O can punish P tangibly or intangibly if P does not acquiesce to O's wishes. Thus, coercive power is the exact opposite of reward power. French and Raven cite the ability of a supervisor to fire an employee if they do not perform up to the supervisor's expectations as one example of coercive power. A child threatening to run away from their parents when not getting their way is also an example of coercive power in that the child attempts to wield some influence over the parents in order to change the family dynamics to their advantage.

Of course, examples of brute force also fall within the tangible category of coercive power. History books are full of examples of brutal world leaders who used threats of physical harm to gain power over others. In general, the more powerful a ruler's military capabilities are perceived to be by those under their control, the higher the ruler's coercive power is. One example from the Hebrew Bible involves Sennacherib, king of Assyria, when he conquers the fortified Israelite cities surrounding Jerusalem during King Hezekiah's reign, resulting in Hezekiah sending silver and gold to him (2 Kgs 18:13-16).

A notable aspect of coercive power dynamics is that punishments can result in P leaving O's sphere of influence altogether. At that point, O has no power over P whatsoever and does not accomplish what was intended. An example from 1 Kings 12 illustrates this dynamic in the Hebrew Bible: when Solomon's son, Rehoboam, comes to power, he takes the stance of the young hard-liners who counsel him, and he threatens to increase the labor requirements on the northern tribes instead of lightening them as they

request. Rehoboam adds that he will be even more harsh than Solomon, by using barbed whips on the workers instead of the regular whips which Solomon used (1 Kgs 12:11). Instead of acquiescing to Rehoboam's harsh demands, however, many of the northern tribes go back to their own territories and tell Judah to take care of itself (v. 16). At this point, Jeroboam assumes the leadership role over the northern tribes, and the great rift between Israel and Judah is set.[53]

Referent power refers to the ability of a figure to garner a following based on character, charisma, or likeability—soft traits. An agent with these traits has influence over others who admire them, want to be like them, or want to be associated with them. For example, many celebrity athletes who gain the respect of fans for their athletic prowess and gritty personalities become prized commodities in marketing initiatives for athletic gear. Passionate leaders also inspire others to follow in their footsteps toward a common mission, even to the point of death. A macabre example includes religious figures whose charisma influences followers to take their own lives.

In the realm of the Hebrew Bible, individuals who are portrayed as having desirable character traits or special powers elicited others to follow them. This seems to be the case for Saul's son, Jonathan, who is described as being especially loyal to David to the point of surrendering his own right to the throne to David (1 Sam 18:1-4). Another

[53] For a detailed exposition of this episode with textual commentary, see Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 10 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 345-352. Cogan points out that the biblical text depicts Rehoboam as "coarse and rough-hewn," traits exemplified by his coercive rhetoric toward the northern tribes (see page 352). Ironically, though, Rehoboam's attempted coercive influence backfires and compels the northern tribes to withdraw instead of succumbing to Rehoboam's wishes. Rehoboam sends his head of corvée labor to enforce his wishes over the northern tribes, but they stone Rehoboam's representative, then Rehoboam flees to Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:18).

example of referent power involves particularly influential prophets such as Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha who are described in the Bible as having gathered a company of prophets who follow them (1 Sam 19:20 & 2 Kgs 2:3-18).

Expert power is demonstrated when O has specialized social status as a holder of expertise so influences P in that realm. For example, financial advisors influence their clients to invest in certain sectors over others because their clients believe them to be more knowledgeable in the financial sphere than non-experts. Likewise, professors are understood as experts in their academic fields and thereby influence their students to adopt new ways of thinking in line with the professor's own area of specialization.

Prophets and priests in biblical accounts of early Israel exercised social clout based on their status as holders of specialized knowledge about God's will and acceptable cult practices. This is poignantly demonstrated in the prophet Samuel's power over the institution of kingship when it first came to fruition. In the biblical account, the people demand a king in order to be like the other nations, but Samuel warns them that a king will bring much hardship on them. Samuel superintends the negotiation of the institution of kingship between the LORD and the people by taking information bank and forth between the LORD and the people (1 Sam 8:10-21). After Saul is selected as Israel's first king, Samuel holds the king accountable for not following the LORD's commands because Samuel, as a prophet who receives divine directives at a time when they are otherwise lacking, is understood to have specialized knowledge about the LORD's will that Saul does not have.[54] As a spokesman for the LORD, Samuel condemns King Saul

[54] The prophet Samuel's specialized divine knowledge is demonstrated even earlier when, as a boy, he receives a divine message which foretells the demise of the house of Eli, the prophet of Shiloh with whom Samuel serves (1 Sam 3:11-18).

and his house because Saul makes a forbidden offering (1 Sam 13:13-14), and Samuel prophesies God's rejection of Saul as king because Saul does not follow Samuel's instructions to completely destroy Israel's enemy, the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:12-23).

Information power is related to expert power, but information power is more focused on the content of the specialized or limited knowledge itself. For example, with expert power the person who embodies the expertise (O) has influence over P who believes O to be more knowledgeable than P, but with information power the information itself brings about the influence. Thus, information power is impersonal while expert power is personal. Examples of these types of limited information which are desirable to P include sealed legal documents, top secret military records, and private surveillance footage. Once the information is given to P, however, its power over P ceases to exist.

A poignant example of information power from the Hebrew Bible is Samuel's grim message to King Saul from the grave which the witch of Endor alone is able to mediate (1 Sam 28). King Saul is in desperate need of battle advice, and since Saul is not able to get the LORD to answer him by the normal means (i.e., dreams, Urim, or prophets) due to falling out of divine favor, Saul resorts to accessing a source of information that he himself had earlier forbidden—a medium. The medium summons Samuel's ghost, and the ghost tells Saul what he fears the most: the Philistines will conquer Israel and Saul will die.

Table 1.1 Description of Power Markers

Legitimate Power	*The potential influence O has over P in a formal or informal social hierarchy due to having a superior social position*

	(Examples include parents, governmental leaders, priests, prophets, and kings)
Reward Power	*The potential influence O has over P due to O's ability to dole out benefits (tangible or intangible) to others* (Examples include restaurant patrons who give tips, bosses with the authority to give employees raises, and wealthy rulers)
Coercive Power	*The potential for influence that is present when O can punish P tangibly or intangibly if P does not acquiesce to O's wishes* (Examples include a boss who has the authority to fire an employee, a child who threatens to run away to gain power over a parent, and enemy kings with superior military might)
Referent Power	*The potential influence O has over P due to O's ability to garner a following based on character, charisma, or likeability—soft traits* (Examples include passionate leaders, charismatic fascists, and prophets)
Expert Power	*The potential influence O has over P when O has specialized social status as a holder of expertise which is valued by P* (Examples include financial advisors, professors, and prophets with secret divine knowledge)
Information Power	*The influence of the content of the specialized or limited knowledge itself* (Examples include sealed documents, top secret military information, and private surveillance records)

Methodology

By highlighting three episodes from the biblical accounts of the early Israelite monarchy in which insults occur, this study will explore how insults served as a means of power negotiation as they did in other ANE/EMED contexts. According to the biblical narrative, Nabal's insult toward David (1 Sam 25) sets off a chain of responses that leads to the politically-significant marriage between David and Nabal's widow and, ultimately, David's exaltation over Saul as the LORD's anointed ruler of Israel. Then, King Hanun's insult toward David's messengers (2 Sam 10) leads to the neutralization of the Aramean-Ammonite alliance which constituted a military threat to the Davidic kingdom. Finally, Absalom's insult of sleeping with David's concubines (2 Sam 16) leads to Absalom's death and the reestablishment of David's rule over Israel.

This exploration of insults and responses in the political sphere of the early Israelite monarchy will highlight how insults caused social injury and how responses to insults sought to ameliorate social injury; the role of audience in social injury (i.e., ramifications of private vs. public insult); how socio-political power dynamics were asserted and subverted through insults; how rank, status, and position affected social interactions; and the possible goals of the biblical writers in including insults in the accounts of the early monarchy. By focusing on these interactions and exploring the questions they raise, a more nuanced understanding of the socio-political world of the Bible will be gained.

In terms of methodology, the analysis of each of the three biblical episodes includes 1) determining the macro and micro political contexts of each insult, 2) identifying "power markers" within the text that demonstrate the types of social power

various figures have at their disposal, 3) isolating the insult and determining its social significance through ANE/EMED comparative material, and 4) interpreting the insult's function within the socio-political matrix in which it occurs.

CHAPTER TWO:
REFUSING RECIPROCITY
(1 SAMUEL 25)

The Nabal account in 1 Samuel 25 is the first biblical example under analysis. This selection was chosen for inclusion in this study due to its political nature, affinities with other ANE/EMED texts containing similar insults, and descriptive qualities that make thorough analysis possible. Competing political loyalties between Nabal and David are apparent in the account, and this dynamic provides context for the insult and the reason for power negotiation. The ANE/EMED texts which will be analyzed for comparison are all from the Late Bronze Age. A letter from the Hittite king to Assyrian king, Adad-nirari I, demonstrates the political significance of particular diplomatic nomenclature. And, four El-Amarna letters from the kings of Babylon and Mittani to Pharaoh (EA 3, 4, 28, and 29) demonstrate the expectation of reciprocity to maintain political goodwill.

Introduction

In its canonical form, 1 Samuel 24-26 forms an inclusio, and the Nabal account is positioned at its center. Concerning the larger context of this inclusio, in the surrounding textual unit of 1 Samuel 18-28, King Saul has lost divine favor and is on his way out as the sovereign of Israel. Meanwhile, David is rising in political status and legitimacy. The discrete theme of the inclusio in chapters 24-26, however, is the portrayal of David's character as he encounters and overcomes the temptation to take vengeance on his enemies (i.e., King Saul in chapters 24 & 26 and Nabal, a wealthy Israelite landowner, in

chapter 25) while awaiting the manifestation of his promised kingship. As Robert P. Gordon explains concerning David's characterization in this portion of text, "the question is not whether he will become king, but how he will become king."[55]

All three chapters of the inclusio found in chapters 24-26 follow a template comprised of seven components that describe a conflict between David and an adversary while David is in hiding in the wilderness. In 1 Samuel 24 and 26, David's adversary is Saul, but in chapter 25 it is Nabal. Another difference between the accounts of Saul and Nabal is the nature of the harm each intends toward David. The harm Saul poses in chapters 24 and 26 is overtly homicidal in nature, but Nabal's harm in chapter 25 is more passive aggressive—an insult. Specifically, Nabal insults David by refusing him and his men honor and succor after they have protected Nabal's shepherds in the wilderness. In lieu of the reciprocity that David expects, Nabal delivers a symbolic slap in the face.[56]

The corresponding elements in the three chapters are depicted in the table below:

Table 2.1 Corresponding Elements in Inclusio of 1 Samuel 24-26

	1 Sam 24	1 Sam 25	1 Sam 26
1) ***David and his band of ruffians***	David went from there and stayed in the wildernesses of En-gedi. When Saul	David went down to the wilderness of Paran.	The Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah and said, "David is hiding in the hill of Hachilah

[55] Robert P. Gordon, "David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24-26," *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 [1980]: 39.

[56] For a full summary of the correspondences between the three accounts, see Gordon's full article cited in the footnote above. Gordon summarizes previous scholarship on the literary affinities of the accounts, and he delineates lexical and thematic connections between the accounts. In so doing, Gordon finds Nabal to be characterized as an "alter-ego" of Saul. The close correspondences between the characterizations of Saul and Nabal suggest that this is the case, but Saul is anointed while Nabal is not. Judging from the differences demonstrated in station 4 of the table ("David's vengeance is thwarted"), this variable seems to be the reason for David's hot response toward Nabal that is in contrast to how he responds to Saul. In chapters 24 and 26, David explicitly names Saul's status as the anointed ruler as a reason to withhold vengeance.

reside in peripheral areas	returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told that David was in the wilderness of En-gedi. vv 1-2	v 1b	facing Jeshimon." Saul went down at once to the wilderness of Ziph, together with three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search for David in the wilderness of Ziph. vv 1-2
2) ***Harm is intended for David***	So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went in search of David and his men in the direction of the rocks of the wild goats. vv 3-4	Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many slaves nowadays who are breaking away from their master. Should I then take my bread and my water, and the meat that I slaughtered for my own shearers, and give them to men who come from I don't know where?" vv 10-11	Saul went down at once to the wilderness of Ziph, together with three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search for David in the wilderness of Ziph v 2
3) ***David has the opportunity for vengeance***	David's men said to him, "This is the day of which the LORD said to you, "I will deliver your enemy into your hands; you can do with him as you please." v 5	And David said to his men, "Gird on your swords." Each girded on his sword; David too girded on his sword. v 13	And Abishai said to David, "God has delivered your enemy into your hands today. Let me pin him down to the ground with a single thrust of the spear. I will not have to strike him twice." v 8
4) ***David's vengeance is thwarted***	"The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my lord—the LORD's anointed—that I should raise my hand against him; for he is the LORD's anointed." David rebuked his men and did not permit them to attack Saul. vv 7-8	"Do not let this be a cause of stumbling and of faltering courage to my lord that you have shed blood needlessly and that my lord sought redress with his own hands." "For as sure as the God of Israel lives—who has kept me from harming you—had you	"But David said to Abishai, "Don't do him violence! No one can lay hands on the LORD's anointed with impunity." And David went on, "As the LORD lives, the LORD Himself will strike him down, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go down to battle and

		not come quickly to meet me, not a single male of Nabal's line would have been left by daybreak." vv 31 & 34	perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed!" vv 9-11a
5) ***The thwarted catastrophe is revealed to David's enemy***	"You can see for yourself now that the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave today. And though I was urged to kill you I showed you pity; for I said, "I will not raise a hand against my lord, since he is the LORD's anointed." v 11	The next morning when Nabal had slept off the wine, his wife told him everything that had happened. v 37	And David shouted to the troops and to Abner son of Ner… "So why didn't you keep watch over your lord the king? For one of the troops came to do violence to your lord the king." vv 14-15
6) ***The enemy is impacted upon finding out he was in harm's way***	Saul broke down and wept. He said to David, "You are right, not I; for you have treated me generously, but I have treated you badly." vv 17b-18	… and his courage died within him, and he became like a stone. v 37	And Saul answered, "I am in the wrong. Come back, my son David, for I will never harm you again, seeing how you have held my life precious this day. Yes, I have been a fool, and I have erred so very much." v 21
7) ***David's future status is assured***	"Surely the LORD will reward you generously for what you have done for me this day. I know now that you will become king, and that the kingship over Israel will remain in your hands." vv 20b-21	"And when the LORD has accomplished for my lord all the good He has promised you, and has appointed you ruler of Israel, do not let this be a cause of stumbling and or faltering courage to my lord…" vv 30-31a	"May you be blessed, my son David. You shall achieve, and you shall prevail." v 25

David's initial impulse toward Nabal, in contrast to the restraint he demonstrates toward Saul, is to take vengeance into his own hands with the help of 400 armed men. Nabal's wise wife, Abigail, springs into action after Nabal's servants warn her about their master's insulting words toward David and the calamity that will surely follow as a result. Abigail gathers provisions and delivers them to David before he and his men arrive to take vengeance on her husband. Serving as a foil to her foolish husband, Abigail acknowledges David's anointing and reminds him that vengeance belongs to the LORD. This wise but hasty intervention works by appeasing David and appealing to his conscience. Just a short time after this impending disaster is averted, Nabal receives the due desserts of his foolishness and dies by divine intervention. Shortly thereafter, David takes Abigail as his own wife.

The specific verses which are under analysis in this chapter (1 Sam 25:4-11) center on the exchanges between David and Nabal which are relayed through David's messengers. These verses are translated below. In verses 6-8, David sends a greeting to Nabal and requests provisions for himself and his men in light of their recent protection of Nabal's shepherds who were shepherding in the wilderness within close proximity of David's men. In verses 10-11, Nabal answers David's request with insulting rhetoric and actions which will be the focus of this study.

Translation

T וַיִּשְׁמַע דָּוִד בַּמִּדְבָּר כִּי־גֹזֵז נָבָל אֶת־צֹאנוֹ׃

Now, David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep,

U וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד עֲשָׂרָה נְעָרִים וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד לַנְּעָרִים עֲלוּ כַרְמֶלָה וּבָאתֶם אֶל־נָבָל וּשְׁאַלְתֶּם־לוֹ בִּשְׁמִי לְשָׁלוֹם׃

so David sent ten of his attendants, and David said to the attendants, “Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal and greet him in my name.”

V וְאָמַרְתֶּם כֹּה לְחָי וְאַתָּה שָׁלוֹם וּבֵיתְךָ שָׁלוֹם וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ שָׁלוֹם׃

“And, you shall say thus …, “Long life and peace to you, your household, and all that belongs to you!””[57]

W וְעַתָּה שָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי גֹזְזִים לָךְ עַתָּה הָרֹעִים אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ הָיוּ עִמָּנוּ לֹא הֲכְלַמְּנוּם וְלֹא־נִפְקַד לָהֶם מְאוּמָה כָּל־יְמֵי הֱיוֹתָם בַּכַּרְמֶל׃

“Now, I hear that you have shearers. Your shepherds who were with us we did not put to shame, and all the days they were in Carmel nothing [of theirs] was missing,”

X שְׁאַל אֶת־נְעָרֶיךָ וְיַגִּידוּ לָךְ וְיִמְצְאוּ הַנְּעָרִים חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ כִּי־עַל־יוֹם טוֹב בָּנוּ תְּנָה־נָּא אֵת אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּלְבִנְךָ לְדָוִד׃

“Ask your attendants, and they will tell you. So may the attendants find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a festive day. Please give whatever you find on hand to your servants and to your son, David.”

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[57] Considering context and form-critical constraints for ANE/EMED greeting formulas, לָחָי (*leḥāy*) in the MT may actually suppress a reading of *lĕ’āḥî*, “to my brother,” an alternative which would only require the addition of an *aleph* in the consonantal text. Of other manuscript witnesses, however, only the Vulgate supports this reading (*fratribus meis*). As for personal addresses in ANE greeting formulas, “to my brother” is a frequent phrase found in epistolary greetings (See, for example, EA 1, 4, 6, 8, etc.). The phrase “to my brother” would have political/diplomatic significance in that “brother” is a term signifying equal status. In verse 8, David calls himself the *ben* בֵּן “son” of Nabal which could indicate lower status. Another possibility is that the term “son” may simply indicate a difference in age. In EA 44, apparently “father” is used instead of the standard “brother” in greetings from a younger individual (Zita, a Hittite prince) to an older individual (Amenhotep III), with both having relatively equal socio-political status. This equality in status is indicated by the exchange of gifts and messengers mentioned in the letter. However, the significance of the greeting terminology is far from certain as mighty Pharaoh likely understood himself to be of greater rank than any prince.

Y וַיָּבֹאוּ נַעֲרֵי דָוִד וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֶל־נָבָל כְּכָל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּשֵׁם דָּוִד וַיָּנוּחוּ׃

Then David's attendants went, and they spoke all these words to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited.

QP וַיַּעַן נָבָל אֶת־עַבְדֵי דָוִד וַיֹּאמֶר מִי דָוִד וּמִי בֶן־יִשָׁי הַיּוֹם רַבּוּ עֲבָדִים הַמִּתְפָּרְצִים אִישׁ מִפְּנֵי אֲדֹנָיו׃

Nabal answered David's servants, saying, "Who is David? And, who is the son of Jesse? Today many servants are breaking away from their masters."

QQ וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶת־לַחְמִי וְאֶת־מֵימַי וְאֶת טִבְחָתִי אֲשֶׁר טָבַחְתִּי לְגֹזְזָי וְנָתַתִּי לַאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֵי מִזֶּה הֵמָּה׃

"Why should I take my bread and my water and my meat which I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give them to men who come from I do not know where?"

Political Milieu

To fully understand the significance of these messages in which Nabal's insults occur and to contextualize the insults, the political milieu must be understood on the macro and micro level. The macro level context, in its broadest sense, is the early monarchic period when Israel's first king, Saul, takes charge as Israel's military and political leader. In this role, Saul leads campaigns against the Ammonites to the east (1 Sam 11) and the Amalekites to the south (1 Sam 15). According to the biblical text, when Saul's kingship is fully established, he also goes to war with the Moabites in the east, Edomites in the south, and kings of Zobah (in the region of Aram) in the north (1 Sam 14:47).

At the time of Saul's pursuit of David in 1 Samuel 24-26, Saul is also engaged in regional battles against the Philistines who inhabit the southern coastal areas and are encroaching inland on the territory of Israel. This Philistine expansionist threat is the major impetus for the Israelites' controversial demand for kingship earlier in the narrative (1 Sam 8:20).[58] Thus, the Israelites' very existence was tied to the efficacy of its leadership, an important concept given that issues about David's legitimacy as the LORD's anointed underlie the Nabal account.

[58] The biblical text states that the elders of Israel were displeased with Samuel's sons, Joel and Abijah, who sat as judges in Beersheba, because they did not "go in the ways of Samuel" (1 Sam 8:1-5). More specifically, Samuel's sons are accused of corruption and injustice: going after ill-gotten gain, taking bribes, and bending justice (וַיִּטּוּ אַחֲרֵי הַבָּצַע וַיִּקְחוּ־שֹׁחַד וַיַּטּוּ מִשְׁפָּט), so the implication is that the people were looking for a king who would not do these things. Also, the people mention that they want a king to judge (שפט) them in the way kings over other nations governed. After a stern warning from Samuel that having a king would also mean conscription, taxation, and bureaucratic oppression (1 Sam 8:11-18), the people reiterate their demand for a king and add that he will go out and lead them in battle. Thus, the motivating factors for the people's call for a king are multi-faceted.

On the micro level, the period of David's wilderness escape stands between the episodes of David's earlier connection with Saul as a member of his courtly retinue and David's later rise as the king of Judah in Hebron. During this span of time, King Saul fails tests of obedience and increasingly loses his grasp on the kingship of Israel by virtue of having lost divine favor. The prophet Samuel also grieves Saul's ascent to kingship, disobedience, and inept leadership due to Saul's disobedience. After Saul begins to lose favor with God and people, David seemingly begins to gain it in an inversely proportional manner.

Although the book of Samuel is notorious for text critical complexities which render the chronologies of some events quite dubious, the text makes clear that during the time of Saul's decline, David is anointed by Samuel who has lost faith in Saul's ability to lead faithfully (1 Sam 16). Additionally, David experiences significant military victories including the famous slaying of Goliath (1 Sam 17). King Saul grows increasingly jealous and intolerant of David who is lauded by the Israelites for being a more efficacious warrior than even the king himself: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Sam 18:7). Thus, a bitter rivalry ensues during the ebb of Saul's power and the flow of David's. During this rocky period of transition, two factions materialize—those who support David and those who support Saul.

David's supporters include members of Saul's own family, social outcasts, and able warriors from different tribes of Israel. Michal, Saul's daughter, loves David (1 Sam 18:20), a situation Saul tries to manipulate to his own advantage to rid himself of his rival. However, instead of Michal siding with her father when he sends henchmen to kill David while he sleeps, Michal saves David by creating a ruse to help him escape (1 Sam

19:11-18). Likewise, Jonathan, Saul's son, is said to love David as himself, and when he realizes that Saul is bent on destroying David, he pledges loyalty to David instead of to his own father (1 Sam 20:17-34).

Others who are loyal to David include men who, finding themselves on the fringes of society for various reasons, are drawn to David as a leader when he hides from Saul (and perhaps from King Achish of Gath) at the cave of Adullam. The biblical narrative describes this group of men as being comprised of those who are מָצוֹק "(in) distress", אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ נֹשֶׁא "have a creditor (i.e., have debt)", and are מַר־נֶפֶשׁ "bitter of spirit" (1 Sam 22:2).[59] These men number about 400 in this account, but by the time David encounters Nabal, there are about 600 men with him (1 Sam 25:13). 400 men join David to face off with Nabal, and 200 stay with the baggage. Similarly, 600 men and their households are with David when he flees to Philistine territory and King Achish gives the city of Ziklag to David as a domicile (1 Sam 27:2-6).

The Chronicler describes the warriors who side with David while he is on the run from Saul in terms of their fighting skill and their tribe of origin (1 Chr 12). Numerous members of Saul's tribe, Benjamin, are also among David's warriors, and they are described as being particularly adept at using the bow and arrow, and slingshot (v. 2). A group of elite warriors who are loyal to David, known as הַשְּׁלֹשִׁים "The Thirty," include Benjaminites in their number (v. 4). Gadites who join David's ranks are known for exceptional bravery and handling the sword and shield expertly; they are also captains in

[59] According to BDB, the term מָצוֹק is related to the verb צוּק which means "to pour out, melt."

David's army (vv. 8-15). Some of David's captains also come from the tribe of Manasseh (vv. 19-21).

As for Saul, the biblical text does not specify as many individuals being particularly loyal to him as it does with David. The exception is Doeg, an Edomite who is Saul's chief shepherd. Doeg demonstrates his loyalty by reporting to Saul that the priest of Nob, Ahimelech, inquired of the LORD for David while David was on the run from Saul—an act of treachery (1 Sam 22:9-10). Doeg's information leads to Saul's command to kill the priests of Nob.[60]

Much later, when Saul is out of the picture, having been killed by the Philistines, one of Saul's kinsmen demonstrates his loyalty to the house of Saul by continually cursing (יֹצֵא וְמְקַלֵּל) David when he is in a politically vulnerable spot (2 Sam 16:5). When David faces the betrayal of his traitorous son, Absalom, a man named Shimei whom the biblical author explicitly links to the clan of Saul, pelts David and his officials with stones as they flee Jerusalem (2 Sam 16:5). Moreover, Shimei publicly calls David a "man of blood" אִישׁ הַדָּמִים, blaming him for killing many in Saul's household (2 Sam 16:7-8).

After Absalom's coup is subdued and David is returning to Jerusalem to reclaim his throne, another man who is linked to Saul's tribe attempts to sabotage the peaceful return of David to his throne—Sheba ben Bikri (2 Sam 20). When ben Bikri seeks to save himself from David's forces by taking refuge inside the city walls of Abel beth-Maacah,

[60] Saul's own court apparently rejects Saul's kingship as they refuse to be loyal to him in this endeavor. See Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, v. 10 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 226.

David's commander, Joab, negotiates a deal with the city: if they will toss ben Bikri's head over the city wall to Joab, he will leave the city unharmed. The citizens of Abel beth-Maacah agree to these terms, and thus David is saved from the threat of Saulide sympathizers just as he was from Saul himself.

These examples of Saulide loyalists who come out of the shadows when David is in a politically vulnerable position demonstrate that there were more Saul sympathizers during Saul's reign than the biblical account explicitly delineates. For example, a careful analysis of the Nabal account reveals evidence that Nabal too was a Saul loyalist. In the initial description of Nabal (1 Sam 25:2), he is said to be a rich man shearing sheep at his property in the region of Carmel, a locale associated with Saul. Earlier in the narrative when Saul is victorious against the Amalekites in the south, he sets up a stele in his own honor (מַצִּיב לוֹ יָד) at Carmel (1 Sam 15:12).[61] Ralph W. Klein points out that though "Saul's control over Judah was ambiguous at best, the narrator lets us surmise that Saul might be known and honored in this town."[62] Furthermore, Nabal shows his political leanings by describing David as a "servant" עָבָד who has run away from his "master" אָדוֹן (1 Sam 25:10), an obvious allusion to David's politically subservient status to Saul who is still the reigning sovereign of Israel at this time.

[61] Considering the theological implications of Saul's defeat of the Amalekites, the stele he sets up is likely dedicatory in nature. Through Samuel's prophetic command to Saul, the LORD himself commands Saul to undertake a holy war against the Amalekites based on a centuries-old injustice the Amalekites perpetrated against the Hebrews after they left Egypt. This practice of setting up dedicatory stela was common in the ANE/EMED (e.g., the Mesha Stele dedicated to Kemosh after the victory of King Mesha of Moab over Israel and the Zakkur Stele dedicated to Baal-shamayn after the victory of King Zakkur of Hamath and Luʿash over Ben-hadad's Aramean coalition).

[62] Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, v. 10 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 247.

Conversely, members of Nabal's own household are sympathetic to David. When Nabal's servants hear that he has harshly rebuffed David, they are worried about being caught up in the slaughter that will surely take place when David seeks vengeance against Nabal, and they speak poorly of Nabal but well of David to Nabal's wife, Abigail. Abigail goes even further in her support of David when she meets David with provisions in an attempt to ameliorate the sting of Nabal's rebuff, and she acknowledges David as her "master" אָדוֹן and says that the LORD is making a "lasting dynasty/house" בַּיִת נֶאֱמָן for David (1 Sam 25:24-28).[63]

Power Markers

Grasping the multi-faceted political milieu of the early monarchic period when David is rising in legitimacy and Saul is diminishing enables one to understand the regional and domestic points of friction which underlie the Nabal account. Another type

[63] Other uses of the phrase "lasting dynasty/house" בַּיִת נֶאֱמָן in 1 Samuel 2:35 and 1 Kings 11:38 help to illuminate its significance. In both instances the phrase occurs in the context of changes in leadership—priestly leadership 1 Samuel and political leadership in 1 Kings. In 1 Samuel 2:34, Eli, the priest at Shiloh, receives a prophetic message that his sons will die on the same day as a sign that his "house" בַּיִת will not endure. This pronouncement of the end of Eli's "house" is a consequence of Eli's failure to honor the LORD and uphold his cultic standards by not protesting when his sons blatantly disregard them. The LORD pronounces that in place of Eli's descendants, another man will be chosen (i.e., Samuel), and that man will receive a "lasting dynasty/house" בַּיִת נֶאֱמָן. Ironically, Samuel's two sons, Joel and Abijah, whom he appoints as judges, also fail to lead righteously so the people demand different leadership in the form of a monarch (1 Sam 8:1-5). Therefore, Samuel's "lasting house" does not last very long either. In 1 Kings 11 God brings adversaries against King Solomon because he takes many foreign wives and concubines who lead him away from true worship and into the worship of foreign deities. God's punishment of Solomon for forsaking his law is largely political: God causes discord between Israel and its regional neighbors such as Aram and Edom, and he ordains the division of Israel into two polities when Solomon's kingdom passes to Rehoboam at his death. Under the counsel of young, foolish men, Rehoboam takes a hard line when he is newly crowned, and Jeroboam, a former official from Solomon's court, leads those who refuse the harsh leadership of Rehoboam. Consequently, Jeroboam takes charge of the northern ten tribes who rebel (1 Kgs 12:1-4). Through a prophetic message, Jeroboam is promised that, like David, he will be given a "lasting dynasty/house" בַּיִת נֶאֱמָן if he will be faithful to the LORD (1 Kgs 11:38).

of related analysis which focuses on interpersonal sources of friction concerns the social power dynamics. Although obviously the biblical writer did not conceive of social power in modern theoretical terms, the details embedded in the text demonstrate that types of power were portrayed through certain "markers." For example, a biblical figure described as having a lot of property inherently had the ability to influence others who needed or wanted what the individual had.

As explained in the introduction, social psychologists French and Raven's social power types will be the categories used for the social power dimension of this analysis. To recap the information from French and Raven's research which was introduced above, they define power in terms of an agent's (O) ability to influence someone (P) within a system, with influence being defined as psychological change. The agent can be a person, a group, or an impersonal force. O exerts positive power when they achieve change in the direction of their intention and negative power when their influence elicits resistant force. For the purposes of this analysis, identifying the types of social power evident in the account will be the emphasis instead of extensively analyzing the direction or measure of influence. Of the six types of power that French and Raven identify in their research, four are evident in the Nabal account: *legitimate*, *reward*, *coercive*, and *referent*.

Legitimate Power

Legitimacy is conferred through socially recognized means, and for an individual to be conferred to the office of king in biblical Israel these means include being anointed by a recognized and/or authoritative figure, having the spirit of the LORD, and behaving in ways that are in keeping with the royal office. Though David's legitimate kingship has

not yet manifested when he encounters Nabal, the text clearly indicates that a latent royal legitimacy rests upon David at that time in that David has been anointed by a legitimate prophet, the spirit of the LORD rests upon him, and David demonstrates politically-savvy actions such as publicly honoring Saul as the LORD's anointed one while Saul is still in power.

The portrayal of David's legitimacy by these means (i.e., being anointed, having the spirit of the LORD, and behaving in ways that are in keeping with royal protocol) is important for the biblical writer to emphasize given that David later becomes king, upending the natural succession of Saul's descendants. Andrew Knapp, in his book, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, demonstrates that expressions of royal legitimacy are attested in instances where normal royal succession is broken and a ruler needs to use apologetic to defend against charges of illegitimacy.[64] There are numerous instances of this in extra-biblical ANE/EMED texts such as those legitimating Late Bronze Age Hittite rulers Telipinu and Hattusili III and Iron Age rulers Hazael of Aram, Esarhaddon of Assyria, and Nabonidus of Babylon.[65]

[64] Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient near East*. Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series, no. 4 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 28-29.

[65] For the account of Telipinu, see the *Proclamation of Telipinu* in *COS*, vol. 1, pp. 194-198 (*The Context of Scripture 1, Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003), ed. William Hallo, K. Lawson Younger, and David E. Orton.). The account of Hattusili III can be found in the *Apology of Ḫattušili III* in *COS*, vol. 1, pp 199-204. Hazael's account is found in the *Tell Dan Stele* in *COS*, vol. 2, pp161-162. For Esarhaddon's succession account see *The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period*, The RINAP Project, 2019 [http://oracc.org/rinap/Q003230/]). For the account of Nabonidus see Hanspeter Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids Von Babylon Und Kyros' Des Grossen Samt Den in Ihrem Umfeld Entstandenen Tendenzschriften: Textausgabe Und Grammatik*, Alter Orient Und Altes Testament, Bd. 256 (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 514-529. For the *sitz im leben* of each of these accounts, see Table 13 in Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient near East*. Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series, no. 4 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 365.

Anointing is an outward sign whereby a substance is applied to an object or person indicating, as P. Kyle McCarter explains, "a symbolic transfer of sanctity from the deity to an object or person and thus was essentially a sacramental act."[66] For example, according to Genesis 28:18, Jacob anoints a stone with oil in association with a vow to serve the LORD after having a dream about angels traversing between heaven and earth. Later, Moses anoints the tabernacle, furnishings, altar, and cultic implements to prepare them for regular use (Num 7:1). The prophet Samuel pours oil on Saul and kisses him in secret to anoint him as a "ruler" (*nāgîd* נָגִיד) (1 Sam 10:1), and on a separate occasion Samuel publicly designates Saul as a "king" (*melek* מֶלֶךְ)—apparently by means of drawing lots or using the Urim and Thummim—in answer to the people's demands (1 Sam 10:17-27).[67]

In the case of David, it is also Samuel who anoints him as king later in the narrative. Samuel's authority to anoint kings rested primarily in his role as a prophet. From the time Samuel was a boy serving in Shiloh under the priest Eli, Samuel heard the voice of the LORD who gave him prophetic knowledge. Due to Samuel's continued ability to hear from the LORD and convey his word to others from this cultically significant center, the Bible states that Samuel is eventually recognized as a prophet by all the people of Israel (1 Sam 3:20). Samuel also served as a judge and priest in Israel, a

[66] P. Kyle, McCarter, *I Samuel: A New Translation*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 8. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 178. Klein, based on ANE/EMED parallels, argues that anointing signifies an obligation of fidelity from the anointer to the anointed and asserts that sacred anointing at the behest of Yahweh signifies the deity's obligation or election of the king (See Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, v. 10 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 158-159).

[67] The meaning of *nāgîd* נָגִיד according to BDB is "leader, ruler, prince."

fact demonstrated by the Bible's description of his military leadership, service on a circuit from Bethel to Mizpah, and offering of sacrifices on behalf of the people (1 Sam 7). Samuel's importance in inaugurating kingship cannot be overstated—it was he who reluctantly ushered in this new office which replaced the office of judge, and it was he to whom Israel's first king answered. That Samuel anointed Saul, then his successor, David, at the direction of the LORD marks his highly authoritative status.

David's legitimacy as it related to having God's spirit was closely related to David's legitimacy which arose from his anointed status.[68] According to the Bible, when Samuel anointed David, "the spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David from that day on" (וַתִּצְלַח רוּחַ־יְהוָה אֶל־דָּוִד מֵהַיּוֹם הַהוּא וָמָעְלָה) (1 Sam 16:13). The spirit of the LORD was associated with his favor and presence. This association is demonstrated when divine favor enables David to enjoy military successes which ingratiate him to the people of Israel (1 Sam 18:14, 30) and to get supernatural guidance from the LORD on his military endeavors (1 Sam 23:1-5). Meanwhile, when Saul experiences the loss of this beneficent presence of God, it manifests in Saul's unstable mental state (1 Sam 16:14 & 18:12) and failure to hear from God about battles (1 Sam 28:6).[69] Thus, the Bible attributes David's successes to his divine legitimacy as an anointed ruler, a position

[68] See also Judges 14:6,19; 15:14; and 1 Samuel 11:6. In Judges 14, the spirit of the LORD comes upon Samson, enabling him to dismember a lion with his bare hands and kill 30 men from Ashkelon. In Judges 15, the spirit of the LORD enables Samson to escape from the rope bindings that the Philistines place on him which gives Samson the opportunity to use a donkey's jawbone as a weapon to kill 1,000 Philistine men. In 1 Samuel 11, the spirit of the LORD enrages Saul against the Ammonites and prompts him to cut a pair of oxen into pieces in order to send them throughout Israel as a warning to any Israelites who refuse to follow him into battle.

[69] Mary J. Evans attributes Saul's mental state to "depression" (*1 And 2 Samuel*. New International Biblical Commentary. Old Testament Series, 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 87).

which empowers him politically. Conversely, the loss of God's favor undermines Saul's political efficacy and legitimacy. As an agent (O), David's divine stamp of approval toward kingship gave him social power over others (P) because he was understood as an agent of God.

Reward Power

In 1 Samuel 25:2 Nabal is said to be "very great" (גָּדוֹל מְאֹד). This phrase is also used to describe Moses's status among the Egyptians in Exodus 11:3 when he is attempting to draw the Hebrew people out from under Pharaoh's control after a long stay in Egypt. Moses had previously been raised in the Egyptian royal household (Exod 2:1-10), earning him a privileged social status, and later when Moses takes on the role of leader of the Hebrew people, the LORD makes him and Aaron like a "god" and his "prophet" to Pharaoh (Exod 7:1).[70] Thus, Moses's greatness was related to his position as a member of Pharaoh's household and his imbued divine power.

In the case of Nabal, the context demonstrates that his greatness was associated primarily with his wealth. After the biblical author's statement that Nabal was "very great," a parenthetical statement in the same verse explains that he had 3,000 sheep and

[70] Nahum Sarna explains that the "god" and "prophet" phraseology here refers to Moses and Aaron having functions similar to a deity and a spokesman in their dealings with Pharaoh. This idea expands on Exodus 4:16 where God responds to Moses's objections to speaking to the elders of Israel by making a concession: Aaron, instead of Moses, will speak to them, but Moses will convey the divine message to Aaron first. In Exodus 7:1, "Moses will fill the role of God in negotiations with Pharaoh, who claimed divinity for himself. Moses' divinely endowed power and authority will expose the hollowness of that claim." *Exodus: שמות: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 36.

1,000 goats (וְלוֹ צֹאן שְׁלֹשֶׁת־אֲלָפִים וְאֶלֶף עִזִּים).[71] According to the biblical account, Nabal was also a landowner (1 Sam 25:2a), and he had shepherds and servants in his employ (vv. 7, 8, and 14). Nabal also is described as having enough provisions to hold a feast "like the feast of a king" (כְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַמֶּלֶךְ) as part of his sheep shearing festivities (v. 36).

In terms of social power, wealth equates to the ability to reward others with things that they need or want. For example, Nabal's wealth gave him the potential to grant others elite experiences (e.g., feasting), a means of livelihood (e.g., shepherding opportunities), and/or provisions (e.g., food or supplies). This is demonstrated in David's request for provisions from Nabal ("whatever your hand can find" אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדֶךָ) (1 Sam 25:8) and in the items Abigail brings from Nabal's stores to appease David (i.e., 200 loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, 100 cakes of raisins and 200 cakes of pressed figs) (1 Sam 25:18).[72]

Additionally, King Saul alludes to his own reward power when he challenges the loyalties of the royal courtiers from his home tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam 22:6-8). In Saul's attempt to stop them from continuing to hide traitorous acts against him, such as his son Jonathan's pact with David, Saul points out to his courtiers that David is not able to give them gifts of property and roles of leadership as he himself as king is able to do. Saul's

[71] By way of comparison, Abraham is described as very rich (כָּבֵד מְאֹד) in livestock, silver, and gold (בַּמִּקְנֶה בַּכֶּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב) (Gen 13:2). Here, the descriptor כָּבֵד is used instead of גָּדוֹל which is how Nabal is described. However, the semantic range of these words overlaps, and they are virtually synonymous in these contexts describing Nabal and Abraham.

[72] Mephibosheth's servant, Ziba, brings a similar cache of goods (200 loaves of bread, 100 cakes of raisins, 100 cakes of figs, and a skin of wine) to David and his retinue as they flee Jerusalem at Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam 16:1). Ziba uses these provisions to ingratiate himself to David who, upon hearing that Mephibosheth, Saul's son, stayed in Jerusalem hoping to regain the crown for himself, gives Mephibosheth's property to Ziba.

not-so-subtle reminder that he can reward his kinsmen tangibly for loyalty apparently influences Doeg who immediately reveals to Saul that he saw the priest Ahimelech give aid to David while he was fleeing from Saul.

Coercive Power

The power that is inherent when O is perceived as having the ability to harm P in some way has coercive qualities because people naturally want to avoid harm, so those who fear O in some way are likely to do what O wishes. In the case of Saul as an agent of influence, his massacre of the whole town of Nob for the alleged disloyalty of the priest Ahimelech surely sent shockwaves throughout Israel by instilling fear in all who might aid and abet David (1 Sam 22:16-19). This is evident when, soon after Saul's wholesale massacre at Nob, the Ziphites volunteer to show their loyalty to Saul by exposing David's whereabouts in their territory. The Ziphites even offer to take steps to personally deliver David to Saul (1 Sam 23:19-24).[73]

Likewise, both David's supernaturally endowed military capabilities and his band of mighty warriors gave him the potential to destroy his enemies if they did not do what he wanted, and thus he had influence over others. For example, when David spectacularly kills the mighty giant, Goliath, with a slingshot and stone, the rest of the Philistines who

[73] Walter Brueggemann interprets the Ziphites as having more fear of David than Saul in this pericope: "The Ziphites are prepared to help find David and eliminate him. Verses 19-24 consist of an offer of support (vv. 19-20) and Saul's grateful acceptance of help (vv. 21-23). Saul's answer contains the word *ḥamal*, "You have had pity on me." *Ḥamal* is the word used in 15:3, 9, 15 to describe Saul's protection of Agag the Amalekite against the ban. The act of pity in 1 Samuel 15 cost Saul his future and his throne. Now it is as though Saul remembers that costly act, as though he recognizes that his allies at Ziph have committed a similar costly act of rescue on his behalf." See *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 165.

are gathered against Israel in the Elah Valley run away and are overtaken by Israel. This was but the beginning of David's successes as an officer for Saul's troops. According to the biblical account, David also inflicts heavy losses on the Philistines who raid the town of Keilah while he is on the run from Saul, and he carries off the Philistines' livestock (1 Sam 23:1-13).

David's reputation as a formidable warrior was apparently well known when he encountered Nabal. This is demonstrated in the narrative when Nabal's servants and wife recognize that David will likely destroy Nabal's household in retaliation for his foolish refusal to accommodate David and his men. According to biblical account, Nabal's servant tells Abigail that "harm is set upon our lord and upon all his house" (כָּלְתָה הָרָעָה אֶל־אֲדֹנֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל־בֵּיתוֹ), a declaration which prompts Abigail to act quickly to prevent David's impending revenge (1 Sam 25:17). When Abigail responds by meeting David and offering provisions to him in a conciliatory effort, she reveals that news of David's fame as a warrior has also reached her. Abigail claims that "my lord fights the battles of the LORD" מִלְחֲמוֹת יְהוָה אֲדֹנִי נִלְחָם (1 Sam 25:28).

Referent Power

As mentioned above in the discussion on political milieu, in the narrative David demonstrates his personal influence by gathering to himself hundreds of followers and earning the favor of Israelites who praise him as a greater fighter than King Saul. The biblical text indicates why people are drawn to David through its characterization of

him.[74] Although David is not portrayed positively in every scenario after he becomes king (e.g., the Bathsheba account (2 Sam 11) and the taking of a forbidden census (2 Sam 24)), he is painted with numerous favorable attributes while Saul is still alive, and others take notice and are drawn to him. David is physically attractive, gifted, and a formidable warrior.

When the LORD has Samuel anoint David as Saul's eventual replacement, David is described in the text as "ruddy, with beautiful eyes, and handsome in appearance." (עִם־יְפֵה עֵינַיִם וְטוֹב רֹאִי אַדְמוֹנִי) (1 Sam 16:12).[75] This description of David's physical traits immediately precedes the episode where the LORD identifies David as the one whom Samuel will anoint. Similarly, when Saul is chosen as Israel's first king in 1 Samuel 9:2 he is described as "handsome" (טוֹב) and taller than anyone else. These examples demonstrate that appearance was linked with God's favor, despite the LORD's pronouncement that he chooses leaders by looking only on their inward qualities (1 Sam 16:7).

David's giftedness is evident in that he is commended to Saul by a courtier who cites David's musical abilities ("he is skilled with a lyre" יֹדֵעַ נַגֵּן), bravery and ability to fight ("a man of valor, a man of battle" וְגִבּוֹר חַיִל וְאִישׁ מִלְחָמָה), way with speech ("understanding of a word" נְבוֹן דָּבָר), and handsome appearance ("a man of physical

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[74] Though numerous works have been written on David's characterization, a thorough exposé of possible political motivations is found in Baruch Halpern's *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001). See also Daniel Bodi, *Demise of the Warlord: A New Look at the David Story*,(Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010).

[75] אַדְמוֹנִי "ruddy" is also used to describe Esau when he is born (Gen 25:25).

form” אִישׁ תֹּאַר) (1 Sam 16:18). Saul’s courtier also says of David that the LORD is “with him,” a notion that is associated with David’s being “very successful” (מַשְׂכִּיל מְאֹד) (1 Sam 18:14).[76]

David’s valor and fighting skills are put on display perhaps most poignantly through the biblical author’s characterization of him when he faces off with Goliath (1 Sam 17). First, there is the fact of the difference in size between Goliath and David—the narrative states that Goliath is about nine feet tall and wears layers of extremely heavy armor and battle gear (vv. 4-7) while David is a boy and is so unaccustomed to battle garb that he is unable to even use it when it is given to him (vv. 33, 38-42). Second, David matches Goliath’s bold taunts with his own even though Goliath is a professional warrior and David is a mere boy shepherd. While Goliath scorns David and threatens to turn him into carrion (v. 43), David retorts that he will cut off Goliath’s head and conquer the whole Philistine camp (v. 46). Third, Goliath has a sword, spear, and javelin while also being protected by a shield-bearer (vv. 6 & 45), but David carries only a shepherd’s stick, a slingshot, and stones (v. 40). With one stone aptly aimed at Goliath’s forehead, David kills the giant and causes a panic in the Philistine camp that quickly disintegrates before the Israelite troops.

The narrative demonstrates that Saul, Jonathan, and the people of Israel take notice of David as a formidable warrior after he defeats Goliath, and David’s reputation

[76] Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient near East*. Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series, no. 4 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 45-72. Knapp’s chapter 2, “The Rhetoric of Legitimate Succession,” describes common motifs in royal apologetic: divine election, royal prerogative/affiliation, popular acclamation, military success, the unworthy predecessor, the unworthy rival, passivity, transcendent nonretaliation, the merciful victor, and the youngest brother. Much of David’s characterization focuses on these motifs.

begins to soar. Saul brings David into his retinue; Jonathan makes a pact with him; and the women of Israel exalt him in song. When Saul appoints David as commander of a thousand (שַׂר־אָלֶף) to march at their front, Saul hopes that David will be killed on the front lines (1 Sam 18:25b). Instead "all Israel and Judah loved David, for he marched at their head" (1 Sam 18:12-16).[77] David's success relative to Saul's other officers when they are fighting against the Philistines is also mentioned along with the statement in verse 30 that David's reputation (lit. "name") was highly esteemed" (וַיִּיקַר שְׁמוֹ מְאֹד). Thus, David's many admirable traits drew others to him and gave him influence over them.

Table 2.2 Power Markers in Nabal Episode

	Nabal	David	Saul
Legitimate Power	X	David has been anointed, the spirit of the LORD rests upon him, and he demonstrates political awareness that projects royal status.	Saul is still the sitting king, and he was previously anointed by a legitimate prophet.
Reward Power	Nabal is "very great," having 3,000 sheep; 1,000 goats; property; shepherds; and servants.	X	As king, Saul is able to give gifts of property and appoint individuals to coveted leadership roles. .

[77] The etymology and meaning of the title sar (שַׂר) in שַׂר־אָלֶף is discussed in detail in Nili Sacher Fox's *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, no. 23 (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000)), 158-164.

Coercive Power	X	David has military capabilities and mighty warriors at his disposal.	Saul's massacre of the town of Nob for disloyalty demonstrates his ability, and willingness, to punish.
Referent Power	X	David is physically attractive, musically gifted, gathers hundreds of followers, and is praised publicly through song for being a great warrior.	Saul is described as taller than anyone else.

Insult and Social Significance

With the groundwork laid regarding the political situation and social power markers present in the Nabal episode, this analysis will now turn to Nabal's insulting rhetoric and its social significance. And, to understand the social impact of the insult, its audience is important to discern. In the Nabal account, there are subtle indications about audience imbedded within the narrative. For example, David's message to Nabal and Nabal's insulting retort are contained within communication relayed back and forth by David's messengers. The biblical text states that David sent "ten attendants" (עֲשָׂרָה נְעָרִים) to Nabal with a greeting and a message (1 Sam 25:5), and after hearing David's message, Nabal answers "the servants of David" (עַבְדֵי דָוִד) (1 Sam 25:10).[78]

[78] Sending messages back and forth through messengers in this way was common practice in the ANE/EMED and is well documented on excavated cuneiform tablets that contain royal correspondence

The fact that ancient messengers received the content of messages from their masters and then conveyed those messages to a recipient(s) implies that the content of the messages was, by definition, not private. When David gives the message to be delivered to Nabal, the masculine plural verb endings in verses 5-6 indicate that David gave the message to many or all of his messengers. First, David tells his attendants, "Go up to Carmel" עֲלוּ כַרְמֶלָה, with the imperative verb עלה being in the masculine plural form. The next three verbs, "go in" וּבָאתֶם, "greet/ask" וּשְׁאַלְתֶּם, and "say" וַאֲמַרְתֶּם are 2nd person masculine plural perfect consecutive verbs which carry the same imperatival force as the imperative that precedes them. Thus, multiple messengers knew the tone and content of David's request of Nabal, and these same messengers knew the tone and content of Nabal's insulting reply. Furthermore, word of Nabal's treatment of David's messengers apparently also got out in Nabal's household because in verse 14 his servant tells Abigail how Nabal "insulted them" וַיָּעַט בָּהֶם –"them" being David's messengers.

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between rulers, especially from the LBA. For the diplomatic significance of messengers between ancient polities in the LBA, see Christer Jönsson, "Diplomatic Signaling in the Amarna Letters" in *Amarna Diplomacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 191-204. Additionally, it is important to note that the terminology first used to describe David's messengers here—נְעָרִים (plural of *na'ar*) translated as "attendants"—could also have political significance. In Fox's book referenced in the previous footnote she cites both biblical and epigraphic evidence that *na'ar* was sometimes a designation with military significance. As for the epigraphic evidence, Fox mentions that the formula PN *na'ar* of PN was found twice on an inscription dating to the sixth century BCE at Arad (Arad no. 110), and these uses seem to refer to soldiers at Arad. As for biblical examples, Fox points out in footnote 38 that the term is used to describe David's fighting men, troops under the leadership of Abner and Joab, and Amalekite warriors. See Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah*. Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, no. 23 (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 182-189. In David Toshio Tsumura's commentary, *The First Book of Samuel*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007) he supports the politico-military nature of the attendants, and on page 579 he references Papyrus Anastasi I "where the Egyptian scribe uses the technical term *Nearim* for the rebel warriors in southern Canaan." See also John McDonald's article, "The Status and Role of the *Na'ar* in Israelite Society,' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 35, no. 3 (July 1976): 147-170. McDonald demonstrates that the semantic range of this word includes "squire" as well.

This public knowledge of Nabal's insult toward David and his messengers is significant because the weight of an insult's social injury increases as more people know about it.

Subversion of Self-Abasement Formula

The content of Nabal's public reply to David's messengers is fairly terse in the biblical account, but it packs several rhetorical punches that would have been easily understood as insulting to those who heard it. First, in the account Nabal uses rhetorical questions which disparage David's name ("Who is David" מִי דָוִד "and who is the son of Jesse?" וּמִי בֶן־יִשָׁי) in response to David's servants greeting Nabal "in the name of David" בְּשֵׁם דָּוִד (v. 10). As Walter Kim explains in his dissertation on verbal insults in the Hebrew Bible, Nabal's rhetorical quip here is the first part of a common ANE/EMED self-abasement rhetorical formula that has two parts, an interrogative clause and a subordinate clause:

> 1) a verbless interrogative clause that introduces the speaker
>
> "who/what is S (speaker)"
>
> 2) a subordinate clause that introduces the action between speaker and hearer
>
> "that A (addressee) should regard S (speaker)"
> "that S (speaker) should do this great deed for A (addressee)".[79]

[79] Walter Kim, "The Language of Verbal Insults in the Hebrew Bible." (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007), 226. To explain self-abasement formulas, Kim references George W . Coats, "Self-abasement and Insult Formulas," in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1970): 14-26. See also Jeremy Hutton, '"Abdi-Aširta, the Slave, the Dog': Self-Abasement and Invective in the Amarna Letters, the Lachish Letters, and 2 Sam 3:8," *Zeitschrift fur Althebraistik* 15/16 (2002/2003): 2-18.

A well-known example of this formula in the Bible is found in 2 Samuel 7:18 when David prays in response to the LORD promising him an enduring legacy: “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me this far?” In this example, there are two interrogatives included in the first part of the formula (“Who am I” and “what is my house”), and a vocative (“O Lord God”) separates them. The second part of the formula is the subordinate clause (“that you (addressee/the LORD) have brought me (speaker/David) this far?).”

In identifying the components of this two-part formula, Kim relies heavily on the approach of George W. Coats in his article, “Self-abasement and Insult Formulas,” which takes a form-critical approach. [80] In this study, Coats identifies the basic *a-b* structure of the self-abasement formula (*a* = interrogative component and *b* = subordinate clause) and its variants, such as *a-b-b* and *a-a-b*, in numerous biblical and extra-biblical examples. In *a-b-b* examples such as Exodus 3:11 ("Who am I that I should go to the Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites from Egypt?”) there is one element in the interrogative component (*a* = “Who am I?”) and two in the subordinate clause (*b* = going to Pharaoh and bringing the Israelites from Egypt). Alternately, the *a-a-b* structure is demonstrated in Judges 9:28 which has two rhetorical interrogatives and one subordinate clause (i.e., “Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him?”).

The extra-biblical examples which Coats provides also use the same *a-b* structure or its variants. For example, five Lachish letters from the Iron Age use the *a-b* structure,

[80] George W . Coats, “Self-abasement and Insult Formulas,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1970): 15.

and at least 25 El-Amarna letters from the Late Bronze Age use variants such as *a-b-a*, *a-b-b*, and *a-c-b*. In EA 116:67-69, the ruler of Byblos, a vassal of Egypt, writes to Pharaoh using a self-abasement formula with an *a-a-b* structure in his description of the treacherous deeds of a rival's sons: "Who are they, the sons of ʿAbdi-Aširta, that they have [t]aken the lands of the king for themselves?"[81] The second *a* component, using a proper name, is an appositional phrase describing the first *a* component which is only a pronoun.

Regarding Nabal's use of the self-abasement formula in his reply to David, the *a-a-b* structure applies, and an insult occurs in both parts of the *a-a* component. In the first *a* component ("Who is David?"), Nabal references David's name, and in the second *a* component which is parallel ("Who is the son of Jesse?"), Nabal identifies David by his father's name. As a subversion of the self-abasement formula from a self-directed focus to an other-directed focus, both components constitute an insult. Walter Kim explains that "When self-directed, this rhetorical question is a speaker's means of acknowledging his lower status relative to the hearer. A speaker with a different agenda, however, can manipulate the socially encoded meaning of this idiomatic utterance to pursue the very opposite effect—namely, lowering the status of the hearer relative to speaker. It then becomes a potent and widely employed insult."[82] So, Nabal's subversion of the *a-a-b* self-abasement formula in a public message (i.e., known to David's messengers and members of Nabal's own household) was meant to degrade David publicly by

[81] William L. Moran, *The Amarna letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 192.

[82] Walter Kim, "The Language of Verbal Insults in the Hebrew Bible," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007), 226.

disparaging his name and identity, traits which had previously been lauded throughout Israel.

In terms of Speech Act Theory, Nabal's rhetorical questions which subvert the self-abasement formula were performative—that is, they did something. Although in the narrative the utterances are posed as questions beginning with the interrogative pronoun מִי, which on the surface appear as requests for information, the context and force of Nabal's words demonstrate that the illocutionary force (the intention behind the actual words) was to lower David's status publicly. The perlocutionary force (effect upon the hearer) was to incite David's anger because he had been socially harmed.

Nabal's public degradation in this way was an affront to David's honor which is defined by anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers as "the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride."[83] Pitt-Rivers further explains that honor is the combination of the "ideals of a society" and "their reproduction in the individual through his aspiration to personify them." In terms of David in particular, his honor had to this point been carefully crafted through his personification of loyalty (e.g., maintaining loyalty toward Saul as the reigning sovereign), religious fidelity (e.g., fighting Israel's enemies in the name of the LORD), and socially right conduct (e.g., protecting Nabal's shepherds when they were vulnerable).

[83]Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society, The Nature of Human Society*, ed. J. G. Peristiany (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 21.

Nabal's refusal to acknowledge David as a person of honor was, in essence, a refusal to give David what he had earned through socially advantageous behavior. It is important to also note that, due to its social nature, honor is bestowed or denied in the public sphere, "in the presence of witnesses."[84] That Nabal insults David publicly through a message delivered by multiple messengers, and in earshot of his own servants, means that he tarnished David's reputation among others. Furthermore, to publicly feign ignorance of David was to withhold "diplomatic recognition" from him.[85]

In addition to the general subversion of the self-abasement formula, Nabal's nuanced manner of identifying David in it constitutes a second insult. According to the biblical text, Nabal responds to David's reference to himself as Nabal's "son" by instead calling David the "son of Jesse" (1 Sam 25:8). Based on rhetorical practices common in the ANE/EMED, David's use of familial language in communications with Nabal had political overtones and conveyed the wish for an amicable relationship, but Nabal rejected David's favor-seeking "son" language, and he used it in a negative way in order to further reject David's attempts at relationship.

There are several instances of "son of…" language having derogatory connotations in the Bible, and they illustrate the negative connotation of Nabal's use of it when referring to David:

- Saul uses "son of…" language as a sort of expletive when referring to both Jonathan and David (1 Sam 20:30-31):

[84] Ibid., 26.

[85] Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99, no. 4 (1980): 513.

> "Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send someone to bring him to me, for he must die!""

- In Isaiah's instruction to Ahaz, king of Judah, during the Syro-Ephraimite war, the prophet belittles the Israelite king, Pekah, by calling him the "son of Remaliah" (Isa 7:4):

> "Say to him, "Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah.""

A poignant example in LBA state correspondence from Hittite king Muwatalli (or Mursili III (Urhi-Teshub)) to Assyria's king, Adad-nirari I, illuminates the way similar familial language was used politically and rebuffed. In this case, the language of "brother/brotherhood" is used instead of "son":

> "And you conquered [. . .], and have become a Great King. But why do you still continue to speak about brotherhood and about seeing Mount Amanus? What is this, brotherhood? And what is this, seeing Mount Amanus? For what reason should I write to you about brotherhood? Who customarily writes to someone about brotherhood? Do those who are not on good terms customarily write to someone about brotherhood? On what account should I write to you about brotherhood? Were you and I born from one mother? As [my grandfather] and my father did not write to the King of Assyria [about brotherhood], you shall not keep writing to me [about brotherhood] and Great Kingship. [It is not my] wish."[86]

[86] Gary M. Beckman and Harry A Hoffner. *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*. 2nd ed. Writings from the Ancient World, v. 7, (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), 146-147.

In this example, the Hittite king's use of the term "brotherhood" denotes politically equal status among the rulers of the major polities of the LBA.[87] According to Hittite scholar Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., the historical background of the letter is the rising status of Adad-nirari I after he conquers the last king of the rival kingdom of Mitanni, affording him status equal to that of other "Great Kings" in the LBA international society.[88] Apparently Adad-nirari's desire in incessantly speaking of "brotherhood" with the kings of the major powers of the day (i.e., Hatti, Babylon, and Egypt) was to be acknowledged as being on their same level in a socio-political sense. As demonstrated in the Hittite king's cold reply, familial language had significant political connotations, and to rebuff the nomenclature was to rebuff the relationship.

Disparaging David's Status and Accusations of Disloyalty

The second component of Nabal's insult toward David concerns David's status relative to King Saul. At the point at which David encounters Nabal, he has already been anointed for kingship by Samuel (1 Sam 16), but Saul is still alive and persistently pursing David to eliminate him as a threat. So, David awaits the manifestation of his kingship while functioning as the leader of a band of raiding brigands hiding out in the wilderness. Nabal's statement that "there are many servants today who are breaking away

[87] In the Amarna letters "brotherhood" (Akkadian: *aḫḫūtu*) is indicative of a "friendly society" made up of major rulers of relatively equal status who had vassals. The brothers in this collective were expected to exchange gifts, remain in communication with each other, and respect each other's sovereignty. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, "Conclusion: The Beginnings of International Relations," in *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, ed. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 232-233.

[88] Harry A. Hoffner and Gary M Beckman, *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom*, Writings from the Ancient World, No. 15, (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 322-324.

from their masters” הַיּוֹם רַבּוּ עֲבָדִים הַמִּתְפָּרְצִים אִישׁ מִפְּנֵי אֲדֹנָיו strongly insinuates that David is the servant, and Saul is his master (1 Sam 25:10b). The statement also placed the blame on David for his wilderness wanderings which put him out of the reach of Saul whom Nabal viewed as David’s rightful master. The participle “breaking away” הַמִּתְפָּרְצִים which is used in this instance as a relative clause to describe David’s actions in relation to Saul, has the root פרץ. In its nominal form (פֶּרֶץ) the root means “a breach” such as that found in a wall or a “break/breaking out” such as water bursting out of a small opening.[89] The connotation of the root is that of escaping from a tight space, which, in the matter of Nabal’s description, seems to signify that David was like one running away from the proper restraint, authority, and jurisdiction of his rightful superior.

The word *eḇed* עֶבֶד (translated “servant”) which Nabal uses to describe David can have numerous meanings including a slave or servant of a household, a subject of a king or chief, or a worshipper of a deity.[90] Robert P. Gordon sees in Nabal’s words a description of David as “just a fugitive slave” of Saul, but the context (1 Sam 25), including Abigail’s acknowledgment that David is a warrior (v. 28), indicates that Nabal used the term to allude to David as Saul’s royal subject.[91] The same use occurs when Goliath taunts the soldiers of Israel and refers to them as עֲבָדִים לְשָׁאוּל “servants of Saul”

[89] See BDB entry on פֶּרֶץ which includes a breach in a wall such as in Amos 4:3. HALOT adds crack or hole, and also cites Akkadian *pe/riṣu(m)* as a cognate with attestations concerns a hole in the dyke of an irrigation channel.

[90] BDB indicates slave, servant of household, vassal, borrower, subject.

[91] Gordon, “David’s Rise and Saul’s Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24-26,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1980),” 45.

(1 Sam 17:8). And, Achish, the king of the Philistines, later calls David the "servant of Saul, king of Israel" (עֶבֶד שָׁאוּל מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל) (1 Sam 29:3).[92] In either case, Nabal emphasized David's subservience in relation to Saul. Furthermore, in using this subservience language along with the participle "breaking away" to identify David as eluding his rightful master to whom he owed loyalty, Nabal demonstrated that he had political sympathies with Saul and rejected David.

Moreover, Nabal insulted David by portraying him publicly as one who was traitorous even though David is repeatedly portrayed in the narrative as loyal to Saul. For example, previously Jonathan had defended David by telling his father, King Saul, that "his deeds benefit you greatly" מַעֲשָׂיו טוֹב־לְךָ מְאֹד. (1 Sam 19:4). Likewise, when David has the opportunity to kill Saul to defend himself and to retaliate against Saul's murderous intentions, David instead honors Saul by letting him go free (1 Sam 24 & 26).[93] Saul responds to David by admitting that David is more righteous than him (1 Sam 24:18) and by wishing well for David (1 Sam 24:20, 26:25).

Refusal to Reciprocate

The final insulting element in Nabal's reply concerns his spurning of David's requests that Nabal give provisions to his men in exchange for the protection they had previously shown to Nabal's shepherds. Nabal rejects David's request by rhetorically

[92] See Nili S. Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah.* Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, no. 23 (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 53-54.

[93] See Table 2.1 for the instances of David refusing to harm Saul because he is still the reigning sovereign.

asking, “Should I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and should I give (them) to men who come from I don’t know where?” וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶת־לַחְמִי וְאֶת־מֵימַי וְאֶת טִבְחָתִי אֲשֶׁר טָבַחְתִּי לְגֹזְזָי וְנָתַתִּי לַאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֵי מִזֶּה הֵמָּה (1 Sam 25:11). Nabal’s insult was two-fold in that he both refused to reciprocate David’s good will and disparaged David and his men as nobodies.[94]

Expectations of reciprocity in the ANE/EMED were standard, and failures of reciprocity had consequences. Proverbs 17:13 states that “If anyone returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house.” This sentiment is echoed in David’s later claim to his men that Nabal “returned to me evil instead of good” וַיָּשֶׁב־לִי רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה (1 Sam 25:21), and David considers this fact to be a good enough reason to take up arms against Nabal, a situation Abigail wisely preempts by stopping David in his tracks with loads of provisions and flattering remarks. [95]

There are many ANE/EMED textual examples that demonstrate similar socio-cultural expectations of reciprocity, but given the political overtones in the Nabal episode, the most relevant examples come from the Late Bronze Age El-Amarna corpus. In this corpus, as demonstrated above, there is frequent quarreling between rulers who call themselves “brothers,” but good political relationships between them were obligatory

[94] P. Kyle McCarter points out that at this point David had lost his place at Saul’s court in Gibeah, having been driven from there, and he had lost his royal wife, Michal (1 Sam 25:44). Nabal’s reference to David and his men as having suspect identity could have alluded to this fact. If so, the story of David gaining Abigail as a wife later on when Nabal is struck dead demonstrates that David was regaining power due to divine intervention on his behalf. See *I Samuel: A New Translation,* 1st ed. The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 402. Also, it is possible that Nabal is referencing David’s lack of ethnic association, another indication that David did not belong to a legitimate power network.

[95] Concerning David doing “good” to Nabal, see 1 Samuel 19:4 where Jonathan uses the same language to defend David against Saul.

for maintaining the balance of power. The political situation during this period was what international relations expert Rodolfo Ragionieri describes as an "anarchic international society," a milieu characterized by a multi-state system in which no one state has absolute dominion. [96] Although Egypt was a dominant power in this era (i.e., the "Amarna Period"), there were multiple other powerful states in the ANE/EMED that had a healthy respect for each other, and this respect mostly kept them engaged with each other peacefully. Thus, during the Amarna Period, diplomacy, not might, kept order.[97] Ironically, frequent quarreling seems to have been the glue that held together the brotherly bonds among the international leaders, but the quarreling was frequently quelled with appeals to the continuance of good relationships, described by various leaders as *aḫḫūtu* "brotherhood," *ṭābūtu* "friendship," or *râmu* "love."[98]

Overall, the letters between the rulers of major polities show that reciprocity was expected and was an integral part of maintaining the balance of power within their system of brotherhood. Kevin Avruch, a political anthropologist specializing in conflict resolution, analyzed this dynamic in the El-Amarna letters and found that in the international society of the LBA, the giving of gifts and ensuing expectations of reciprocity were related to determining status relative to one's political peers.[99] Thus,

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[96] Rodolfo Ragionieri, "The Amarna Age: An International Society in the Making," in *Amarna Diplomacy*, 46.

[97] Ibid., 51.

[98] "Brotherhood" was apparently more about relationship than gender. In a later diplomatic letter between Egypt and Hatti, Queen Naptera of Egypt states that she is "in a condition of peace and brotherhood" with Queen Puduhepa of Hatti. Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 2nd ed., ed. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. (Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 129.

[99] Kevin Avruch, "Reciprocity, Equality, and Status-Anxiety in the Amarna Letters" in *Amarna Diplomacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 160.

failing to reciprocate with another ruler was a potentially socially injurious act viewed as an insult, and it even threatened the political balance of power in the region.

In several letters, rulers from Babylon, Mittani, and Ḫatti express that they feel insulted by Pharaoh because he has not reciprocated fairly with them in one way or another. In EA 3, Babylonian king Kadashman-Enlil expresses to Pharaoh that he is upset about not being invited to participate in a great Egyptian festival: *ul tašpura umma alkam-ma akul u šīti* "You did not send to me saying, 'Come, eat and drink,'" (line 19).[100] And, perhaps more importantly, Pharaoh did not send Kadašman-Enlil a *šulmānu* "greeting-gift" associated with the festival (line 20). The Babylonian king's response to this slight was to invite Pharaoh to eat and drink with him, perhaps putting Pharaoh in his debt: *attā alkam-ma ittīya akul u šīti* "As for you, come, eat with me, and drink!" (lines 27-28). This expectation of reciprocal hospitality is directly applicable to the Nabal/David scenario where David expected to be included in Nabal's sheep shearing festivities in exchange for previously protecting Nabal's interests.

As revealed in EA 29, a breakdown in reciprocal gift giving between Egypt and Mittani produced anger on the part of the Mittanian king, Tushratta. Tushratta demonstrates this when he bemoans a decrease in the quality of Egyptian gifts: *arta'ub-ma … mādiš danniš anakkir* "I was furious …and am very hostile" (line 74). Tushratta apparently became angry here because Pharaoh sent him wooden statues plated in gold instead of the expected solid gold ones his father had promised, in an attempt to deceive

[100] Translations are the author's, but reconstructions follow Anson Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna Based on Collations of All Extant Tablets*, vol. 2. eds. William M. Schniedewind and Zipora Cochavi-Rainey (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015).

Tushratta. At times, the rulers who felt slighted even threatened retaliation. For example, in EA 28:12-19 Tushratta threatens to detain one of Pharaoh's best messengers, Mane.[101] Likewise, in EA 4 the Babylonian king is incensed that Pharaoh refuses to reciprocate with him by delivering an Egyptian bride to Babylon, so he threatens to refuse to send a Babylonian bride in retaliation (lines 20-22).[102] These tit-for-tat interactions illuminate the cost of refusing reciprocity, and they contextualize that same dynamic in the Nabal episode.

Table 2.3 Components of David's Message and Nabal's Reply

	David's message	Nabal's reply
David's name	וּשְׁאֶלְתֶּם־לוֹ בִּשְׁמִי "Greet him in my name."	מִי דָוִד "Who is David?"
Use of diplomatically significant familial language	תְּנָה־נָּא אֵת אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּלְבִנְךָ לְדָוִד "Please give whatever you can find to your servants, and to your son, David."	מִי בֶן־יִשָׁי "Who is the son of Jesse?"
David's status in relation to Saul		הַיּוֹם רַבּוּ עֲבָדִים הַמִּתְפָּרְצִים אִישׁ מִפְּנֵי אֲדֹנָיו

[101] Mane is mentioned frequently in other letters from Mittani to Egypt and was apparently a high-ranking messenger who negotiated and carried out preparations for an interdynastic marriage between Mittani and Egypt (EA 20:8-13). Mane's detention would have been quite politically significant.

[102] For reasons that remain somewhat obscure given the dearth of primary texts that cover the topic, pharaohs readily accepted foreign brides from the rulers of other major polities, but they would not give away Egyptian brides. For further information on Pharaoh's refusal to give an Egyptian princess to other leaders, see Samuel A. Meier, "Diplomacy and International Marriages," in *Amarna Diplomacy*, 165-173.

		"Today many servants are breaking away from their masters."
Expectation of reciprocity	עַתָּה הָרֹעִים אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ הָיוּ עִמָּנוּ לֹא הֲכְלַמְנוּם וְלֹא־נִפְקַד לָהֶם מְאוּמָה כָּל־יְמֵי הֱיוֹתָם בַּכַּרְמֶל "Now, we did not mistreat your shepherds who were with us, and nothing of theirs went missing all the time they were in Carmel."	וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶת־לַחְמִי וְאֶת־מֵימַי וְאֶת טִבְחָתִי אֲשֶׁר טָבַחְתִּי לְגֹזְזָי וְנָתַתִּי לַאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֵי מִזֶּה הֵמָּה "Should I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and should I give to people who I don't know where they come from?"

Interpretation

Interpreting the socio-political function of Nabal's insulting rhetoric will necessitate synthesizing the above data on political milieu, social power markers, and the character of the insult. To undertake this synthesis, it is first necessary to trace how the social power markers positioned Nabal and David in their context prior to the insult. Then a determination will be made as to how the insulting rhetoric operated given these dynamics, with an emphasis on political ramifications. Finally, this study will propose reasons the biblical author included these instances of insulting rhetoric.

How Social Power Markers Position Individuals

The biblical narrative demonstrates that David had the potential to influence others based on his legitimate, referent, and coercive power. David had been anointed as king when the Nabal episode occurs, though he existed in a liminal state between royal subject and king since Saul was still the *de facto* leader of Israel. This situation put David in a precarious position politically as he needed to at least appear to be loyal to Saul in order to not alienate those who supported Saul, but David also needed to survive Saul's attempts on his life until his kingship came to pass. This need to survive while on the run from Saul put David at the mercy of those, like Nabal, who could have potentially provided for him and his men while they were in the wilderness.

Although Nabal does not explicitly reference David's legitimate power in the narrative, his insults feigning ignorance of David's identity and insinuating that David is simply a soldier gone AWOL demonstrate that Nabal rejected or undervalued David's legitimacy which was bound up in his honor and anointed status. Abigail, on the other hand, testifies to David's widely known legitimacy and affirms it when she confesses to David that the LORD will bring to pass "all the good that he has spoken about you" כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר אֶת־הַטּוֹבָה עָלֶיךָ —namely, David's leadership over Israel (1 Sam 25:30-31). Along with Abigail's affirmations of David's divine right to rule, she also prophesies that David's enemies, which she indirectly identifies as Saul and Nabal, will be destroyed while David will inherit a lasting dynasty (vv. 28-29). Apparently, Abigail was more devoted to David than to her own husband—perhaps in an effort to ingratiate herself to the future ruler of Israel.

With David's referent power, which was built on charisma, leadership, and valor, he had a loyal following in Israel. People in Israel sang ditties about his fighting capabilities, he drew to himself hundreds of fighting men, and he earned favor even from those inside Saul's own household. David also knew how to negotiate the politically sensitive spot he was in with Saul by always publicly demonstrating loyalty and deference to Saul—proof of his astute intuition for politics.

In the biblical description of David's dealings with Nabal, he downplays his power in attempting to ingratiate himself to Nabal by sending him wishes for well-being and by reminding Nabal that he is indebted to David due to David's previous goodwill toward Nabal's shepherds. This penchant for doing good to others is an indicator of David's character and one of the qualities that drew others to him. David's sending ten messengers "in his name" is likely also a reminder to Nabal of David's numerous followers and his reputation. However, David's sources of power seemingly had no influence except with Nabal's servant and wife. Nabal's servants and Abigail recognized David's goodwill toward Nabal, his legitimate status, and his ability to destroy their household in retaliation, but Nabal seems impervious to these aspects in the narrative. Nabal's failure to acknowledge David's power over him and his household is reflected in his curious name נָבָל which means "fool," a fact Abigail references in her conversation with David when she tries to excuse Nabal's poor decision to reject David: "As his name

so is he. Fool (*nabal*) is his name, and foolishness (*nabalah*) is with him" כִּשְׁמוֹ כֵּן־הוּא נָבָל שְׁמוֹ וּנְבָלָה עִמּוֹ.[103]

Nabal's influence over David came from his wealth which equaled reward power, and this power is at the heart of the conflict present in the account. David, being on the run with an entourage of hundreds of men without a steady food supply, needed what Nabal had the ability to give—an abundance of provisions. In the description of Nabal's sheep-shearing festivities, he is said to have a feast "like the feast of a king" כְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַמֶּלֶךְ which indicates an excess of food and drink. Thus, Nabal had tangible power over David that, in the matrix of power in which they both existed, put him substantively above the intangible sources of David's power.

Saul's reward and coercive power also indirectly played a role in positioning Nabal over David. As has been demonstrated above, Nabal's insults toward David indicate that he was a Saul supporter. And, as reigning king, Saul was capable of rewarding those who showed loyalty and punishing those who did not. This fact is demonstrated in the narrative when Saul reminds his fellow Benjaminites that he, not David, has the ability to give them fields and vineyards and to make them commanders (1 Sam 22:6-7). This reminder prompts Doeg to offer intel against the priests of Nob whom

[103] See Walter Kim, "The Language of Verbal Insults in the Hebrew Bible," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007), 215: "The syntax has a proverbial quality of equivalence: "like X, like Y," which is probably a rhetorical device to command the common consent often associated with maxims. The total illocutionary force of the utterance is greater than merely the lexical connotations of the root נָבָל. To be called a fool is insulting enough, but to be named "Fool" augments the semantic force of the lexical imagery with the pragmatic function of address. The pragmatic role of address is reinforced by Abigail's reference to David with the honorific אֲדֹנִי "my lord", in contrast to her mere citation of the personal name of Nabal. In this agonistic context the honorific emphasizes David's superior status and power in a way that a personal, given name does not."

he claims helped David in his escape from Saul, a move that prompts Saul to command their slaughter. On the other hand, the Ziphites are influenced by Saul's coercive power when they reveal David's whereabouts to Saul and offer to bring David directly to him (1 Sam 23:19-20). Nabal likely also sought Saul's favor or, at minimum, wished to not be found guilty of aiding and abetting Saul's enemy, David.

How Insulting Rhetoric Operates Politically

Nabal's insulting rhetoric attempted to undermine David's sources of power publicly, putting Nabal's personal and political interests above David's. David (O) initiated contact with Nabal (P) by sending messengers "in his name" (drawing on his reputation/referent power and his legitimate power) with well-wishes and a request for provisions for his fighting men (drawing on his potential coercive power if conditions were not met). By reminding Nabal of his previous beneficent deeds toward Nabal's shepherds, David also drew on cultural expectations of reciprocity common in the ANE/EMED. David's message was an intentional act meant to influence Nabal to act in a way consistent with David's wishes (A = David's desired outcome). Thus, O (David as agent) exerted influence on P (Nabal) with the expected result of A (Nabal giving David provisions).

Instead of recognizing David's sources of power and coming under their influence, Nabal publicly disparaged David's identity and his men, portrayed David as a traitorous soldier, and refused to reciprocate favors with him—going against cultural norms. Thus, the result is that O exerted influence on P with the result being ~~A~~ (~~A~~ = David's wishes not being met) and B (B = Nabal insulting David). In terms of French and

Raven's model, if David's message had influenced Nabal to give him provisions, it would have been positive influence, but since David's message caused an opposite reaction, it can be understood as having had negative influence over Nabal. Moreover, presumably Nabal would not have insulted David publicly had he not requested provisions from Nabal, so David's actions prompted action by Nabal resulting in David having negative control over Nabal.

Nabal's response set off a chain reaction that he obviously did not intend, but it ended up serving David well politically. David's request for provisions had positive influence over Abigail who brought food and drink to David. She then told Nabal about the near massacre at an opportune time after he had sobered up from his feasting, and he became incapacitated temporarily before dying from divine intervention—as punishment for having insulted David. David then took the wise Abigail, the former wife of a rich Calebite, as his own wife, perhaps regaining the status he lost when his royal wife, Michal, was given to another man.

Bible's Use of Insult

The biblical author's use of Nabal's insult in the account described in 1 Samuel 25 must be understood in the context of the inclusio in which it occurs (1 Sam 24-26). As described above, the template of these three chapters shows seven points of comparison, and the second comparison equates Nabal's insults with Saul's attempts on David's life. Other parallels in the template demonstrate that Nabal is portrayed as a type of Saul, and

both are depicted as "fools" for challenging David.[104] In this way, Saul and Nabal positioned themselves against the plan of the LORD in exalting David as the duly appointed ruler of Israel, and both were spared by David who is portrayed as honorable. Ultimately, however, the LORD intervenes on David's behalf and both Nabal and Saul die as part of a divine plan that paves the way for David's kingship.

Conclusion

This analysis of 1 Samuel 25 offers evidence that the interaction between David and Nabal was politically charged and contained insulting rhetoric that has affinities with similar insults in other ANE/EMED texts of similar political character. These affinities indicate that insults to status were a common socio-political phenomenon. And, deconstructing the negotiation of power dynamics surrounding Nabal's insulting rhetoric shows how the insults functioned in their political matrix. In short, when David and Nabal interacted in their political context, a power struggle ensued whereby Nabal flouted David's power by refusing him honor and support though insulting rhetoric. Thus, David unwittingly exerted negative influence and negative control over Nabal—causing a chain reaction of responses that altered the political landscape.

[104] See 1 Samuel 26:21 where Saul describes himself as having acted foolishly for trying to kill David (הִנֵּה הִסְכַּלְתִּי). The root סכל is synonymous with the root נבל from which Nabal's name is derived.

CHAPTER THREE:
HUMILIATING DIPLOMATIC MESSENGERS
(2 SAMUEL 10)

The account of King Hanun of Ammon insulting King David's messengers in 2 Samuel 10 is the second biblical example under analysis. This selection was included in this study because it describes a highly political event involving an overt insult which Hanun carries out against David's diplomatic messengers in the public eye. Also, this account has many points of comparison with other ANE/EMED texts which describe the treatment of messengers in political contexts and the ensuing rhetoric about the significance which leaders attributed to it and associated socio-political ramifications. The ANE/EMED texts which will be analyzed for comparison include Old Babylonian letters from Mari and Babylon which demonstrate cultural context and diplomatic practice, Late Bronze Age letters from the El-Amarna corpus which describe the diplomatic use and treatment of messengers (EA 3, 20, 27, 28, 33), and a Neo Babylonian letter describing the occasion of sending messengers.

Introduction

2 Samuel 1-12, the larger literary section within which the Hanun episode occurs, can be divided roughly into two halves. The first half describes a politically transitional period—namely, David's rise to power from a tribal warlord to king over all Israel (2 Sam 1-7). According to the biblical account, this transition from warlord to king does not take place quickly, though. David is king over only the tribe of Judah for about seven years before the remaining tribes change their allegiance and install him as king over all

Israel. In the second half of the section, David solidifies his rule over all Israel by gaining victories over Israel's enemies and dealing with what is left of Saul's house (2 Sam 8-12). In this latter section, David's character is put to the test as he grapples with his own power.

David's period of transitional kingship comes after the death of David's rival, King Saul, and Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth. Saul dies as a result of his battle with the Philistines (1 Sam 31:1-4), then Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth, reigns in his place over most of Israel for two more years. After Saul's death, "Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. He made him king over Gilead, Ashur and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel" (2 Sam 2:8-9). David, however, reigns only over Judah during this transitional period, and his base of operation is in Hebron. In their book, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel*, Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes provide a political interpretation of David's reign in Hebron during the reign of Ish-Bosheth: "After the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, David proceeded immediately to seize the throne of Judah as a stepping-stone to replacing Saul as king of a united Israel, transferring his band to Hebron, the central city of the tribe of Judah. This was politically the proper place to launch a bid to replace Saul, since Judah was David's tribe and served as his power base."[105]

After Ish-Bosheth's volatile two-year reign in which his internal political struggles culminate in his murder, the Bible conveys that all Israel anoints David as king

[105] Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 51-52.

(2 Sam 4-5). After this fortuitous occurrence which finally positions David as the sole sovereign over Israel, David moves his base of operations from Hebron to Jerusalem, and his divine authority to reign is confirmed when God comes to David through a prophetic message (2 Sam 7). This message, mediated through the prophet Nathan, establishes the Davidic line for eternity. Furthermore, the prophesy promises divine intervention in the life of David's progeny who will rule after David, build the temple, and be personally instructed by the LORD (vv. 12-15a). This anointed descendant will be David's son, Solomon.

With the affirmation of God's intention to preserve David's reign and lineage in perpetuity, the narrative infers that David is then compelled to face the enemies that surrounded him in order to establish his rule throughout the larger region. This was a move with tangible and symbolic consequences. With the change in regime from Saul's line to David's line, David needed to establish his legitimacy within the borders of Israel and in the wider region by asserting himself as a formidable leader. This effort to neutralize David's enemies afforded him the opportunity to take new territory to widen his influence and provide a geographic buffer to protect Israel. In this vein, David affirmed alliances with some leaders of neighboring polities who were not inclined to fight him, and he challenged those who refused.

In David's effort to affirm his alliance with neighboring Ammon, the biblical narrative describes David sending messengers to King Hanun of the Ammonites who, according to the biblical text, had only recently become king. The specific verses which are under analysis in this chapter, 2 Samuel 10:1-7, focus on the context of David's message to Hanun in verses 1-2, the Ammonites' interpretation of David's overture and

their reaction in verses 3-4, David's care for his shamed men in verse 5, and the ensuing military response between Ammon and Israel in verses 6-7.

Translation

1 וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי־כֵן וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וַיִּמְלֹךְ חָנוּן בְּנוֹ תַּחְתָּיו׃

So after this, the king of the Ammonites died, and Hanun, his son, reigned in his place.

2 וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶעֱשֶׂה־חֶסֶד עִם־חָנוּן בֶּן־נָחָשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אָבִיו עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד לְנַחֲמוֹ בְּיַד־
עֲבָדָיו אֶל־אָבִיו וַיָּבֹאוּ עַבְדֵי דָוִד אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן׃

Then David said, “I will deal faithfully with Hanun, the son of Nahash, just as his father dealt faithfully with me.” So, David sent his servants to console him concerning his father, and the servants of David entered the land of the Ammonites.

3 וַיֹּאמְרוּ שָׂרֵי בְנֵי־עַמּוֹן אֶל־חָנוּן אֲדֹנֵיהֶם הַמְכַבֵּד דָּוִד אֶת־אָבִיךָ בְּעֵינֶיךָ כִּי־שָׁלַח לְךָ מְנַחֲמִים הֲלוֹא
בַּעֲבוּר חֲקוֹר אֶת־הָעִיר וּלְרַגְּלָהּ וּלְהָפְכָהּ שָׁלַח דָּוִד אֶת־עֲבָדָיו אֵלֶיךָ׃

But the officials of the Ammonites said to Hanun, their lord, “In your view, is David honoring your father when he sends you comforters? Did David not instead send his servants to you to explore the city—to spy it out and to overthrow it?”

4 וַיִּקַּח חָנוּן אֶת־עַבְדֵי דָוִד וַיְגַלַּח אֶת־חֲצִי זְקָנָם וַיִּכְרֹת אֶת־מַדְוֵיהֶם בַּחֲצִי עַד שְׁתוֹתֵיהֶם וַיְשַׁלְּחֵם׃

So Hanun took the servants of David and he shaved off half their beards, and he cut their garments in half up to their buttocks, and he sent them away.

5 וַיַּגִּדוּ לְדָוִד וַיִּשְׁלַח לִקְרָאתָם כִּי־הָיוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים נִכְלָמִים מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁבוּ בִירֵחוֹ עַד־יְצַמַּח
זְקַנְכֶם וְשַׁבְתֶּם׃

When David was told, he sent (messengers) to meet them, for the men were greatly humiliated. And the king said, “Stay in Jericho until your beards grow back fully, then return.”

6 וַיִּרְאוּ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן כִּי נִבְאֲשׁוּ בְּדָוִד וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ בְנֵי־עַמּוֹן וַיִּשְׂכְּרוּ אֶת־אֲרַם בֵּית־רְחוֹב וְאֶת־אֲרַם צוֹבָא
עֶשְׂרִים אֶלֶף רַגְלִי וְאֶת־מֶלֶךְ מַעֲכָה אֶלֶף אִישׁ וְאִישׁ טוֹב שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר אֶלֶף אִישׁ׃

When the Ammonites realized that they had made themselves offensive to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Arameans of Beth-Rehob and the Arameans of Zobah—20,000 foot soldiers—and the king of Maacah (with) 1,000 men, and the men of Tob—12,000 men.

7 וַיִּשְׁמַע דָּוִד וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־יוֹאָב וְאֵת כָּל־הַצָּבָא הַגִּבֹּרִים׃

When David heard, he sent Joab and all the host of the mighty men.

Political Milieu

As stated briefly in the introduction to this chapter, the Hanun episode takes place in a particular political environment which must be elucidated fully in order to accurately interpret Hanun's insult. The macro political context is the early monarchic period after David's rise to kingship over all Israel, a transition which takes place incrementally over time. The biblical text presents the transition of leadership from Saul to David as a messy and extended process because David is anointed to be king much earlier than Saul's kingship ends, and since David is not in the familial line of succession there is ambiguity about who should rightfully be king.

As a result of the angst caused by this ambiguous situation, the Bible demonstrates that two factions arise in Israel—those loyal to Saul and his house and those loyal to David and his house. The existence of these factions was discussed in the previous chapter about Nabal and David because there were indications that Nabal was a Saul loyalist, and this caused Nabal to act in an insulting manner toward David and his men (1 Sam 25). The tension between the Saulide loyalists and David also plays a part in understanding the overarching dynamics between Hanun and David, but that topic will be covered below in the analysis of the micro political context of the Hanun episode.

Another aspect of the macro political context of the Hanun episode relates to the nature of both kingship and succession in the ANE/EMED. When David sends messengers to Hanun, David's kingship has been fully realized only as a result of his rivals' deaths, and Hanun finds himself newly in power due to his own father's death. And, another son of Nahash named Shobi aids David when he flees from Absalom in his *coup* attempt (2 Sam 17:27). The Bible's mention of Nahash's son, Shobi, another

potential heir to the Ammonite throne, makes one wonder if there was some unknown contest for the Ammonite crown about which the reader is otherwise uninformed.[106]

In addition to questions about David's legitimate right to rule after Saul, the precarious state of kingship in both David's case and Hanun's case is an important dynamic to consider because any change in leadership inherently creates an environment conducive to political instability. And, after any transfer of leadership—through questionable means or rightful succession—a king's legitimacy must be proven domestically and abroad. As Mary J. Evans explains in her commentary on the book of Samuel, "The time of transfer of power is always difficult in any country, and surrounding tribes needed to consolidate or renew relationships to ensure their own security."[107]

As for David's efforts to solidify his own newly won kingship over all Israel, the biblical narrative conveys that David immediately goes on the offensive and takes Jerusalem from the Jebusites in order to move the locus of his power from Hebron to Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:1-10). Jerusalem was more centrally located between the tribes than Hebron and was a more politically and geographically advantageous base of operations given David's need to appease both the southern and northern tribes over which he now

[106] The utilization of propaganda when there is some question about a leader's right to rule is also evident in a whole genre of ANE/EMED writings called "apology" whereby rulers sought to justify their rule by, for example, excusing aggressive political moves as defensive or acting in accordance with the will of the gods. Perhaps the exemplar of this genre is the Late Bronze Age text dubbed, "The Apology of Hattusili," a piece justifying the rise of Hittite king, Hattusili III, who took the throne by force. For a description of "apology" as a genre, and the scholarship that is foundational for understanding the biblical succession narratives, see Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient near East (*Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2015), 5-17.

[107] Mary J. Evans, *1 And 2 Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 178.

ruled. In addition to Jerusalem's beneficial central location, John Bright points out another politically significant benefit David gained by taking the city—its political value in simply being a non-Israelite territory.[108] Thus, the location of Jerusalem was central and the territory itself was neutral and not tied to northern or southern loyalties. A similar motivation may have been behind King Omri's choice to move his capital from Tirzah to Samaria six years into his reign (1 Kgs 16:23-24). According to the Bible, before Omri developed Samaria into his capital, the plot of land was privately owned by a man named Shemer, thus it was a politically neutral area. By contrast, Tirzah was associated with the tumultuous rules of former Israelite kings Baasha, Elah, and Zimri (1 Kgs 15:33 & 16:6-15).

According to the Bible, after David's victory over the Jebusites King Hiram of Tyre takes notice and sends envoys to David with building supplies and craftsmen who build a proper palace for David (2 Sam 5:11). In so closely tying together David's conquest of Jerusalem and Hiram's sending of envoys, the biblical writer seems to be implying that Hiram noted David's growing influence in the region and wanted to make haste in demonstrating his fidelity toward David and Israel. The kings of Israel's other neighbors were generally not as accommodating as Hiram. For example, the Philistines, upon hearing of David's anointing over Israel, try to track him down for harm (2 Sam 5:17-25). As McCarter points out in his commentary on 2 Samuel, "according to the account itself it was David's accession to the throne of Israel, not his capture of

[108] John Bright, *A History of Israel*. 2nd ed. (London, UK: S.C.M. Press, 1972), 195.

Jerusalem, that provoked the Philistine show of force."[109] However, McCarter also points out that the Philistines were keen to prevent the melding together of Judah and Israel with the installation of David over both and his taking of the centrally located Jerusalem. Thwarting the Philistine plans, though, the text describes David regrouping at his stronghold and, with direction from the LORD, heartily striking down their troops.

David also takes up arms against other neighboring regional polities such as the Moabites, Edomites, Aramaeans, Amalekites, and Ammonites and has resounding victories over them (2 Sam 8-12). As Walter Brueggemann observes concerning David's turn to offensive measures, "the new David no longer thinks about defense but about expansion."[110] King David's plans for grandeur are realized in riches, territory, and honor during these exploits. David takes booty from Hadadezer, the king of Zobah, including 1,000 chariots (2 Sam 8:4), and he even installs garrisons in Damascus and Edom after subduing the Aramaeans and Edomites (2 Sam 8:6-13). King Tou of Hamath sends congratulatory messages and gifts to David after David's defeat of Hadadezer, Tou's rival (2 Sam 8:9-10).

After these military successes, the biblical narrative indicates that David becomes less personally engaged and takes time away from battling the Ammonites to stay home, a move which provides a glimpse into David's dark side (2 Sam 11-12).[111] These two

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[109] P. Kyle McCarter. *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 158.

[110] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 261.

[111] Much has been written about the reason for David's disengagement from battle which is given as the backdrop for his taking of Bathsheba. P. Kyle McCarter argues that "David's decision not to accompany the army is not disgraceful in itself: It may have been made in the spirit of 21:15-17 or for other reasons… After all, it is not for his failure to accompany the army to war that the king is going to be condemned; it is for what he does at home while the troops are in the field." See *II Samuel: A New*

chapters tell the famous story of David taking Bathsheba despite her being the wife of David's soldier, Uriah, the ensuing prophetic rebuke of David's sin, and the eventual enfolding of Bathsheba into David's household. However, even the Bathsheba account is framed within a military event—the Israelite besiegement of Rabbah, the Ammonite citadel city. In this besiegement, the Bible states that the Israelite commander, Joab, leads the Israelite forces for David until its destruction is imminent, then he summons David to finish off the city in order that the feat might be attributed to David and not to Joab (2 Sam 12:26-30).

Concerning the micro political context of Hanun's insult, the literary placement of the episode is the first aspect worth noting. Between the accounts of David's military victories in 2 Samuel 8 and the Bathsheba account in 2 Samuel 11-12, a demonstration of David's character is put on center stage. Chapter 9 centers on David's gracious treatment of Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, and chapter 10 frames David's interaction with Hanun, Nahash's son, in similar terms. There is thematic and lexical unity between both accounts as David is described as seeking out ways to show/do חֶסֶד (*ḥesed)* to the descendants of those toward which he felt obligation. David's propensity to act in this

Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, V. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 284-285. Uriel Simon agrees that David was at a point in his reign that he relied heavily on his underlings to take on military endeavors. See "The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb an Example of a Juridical Parable," *Biblica* 48, no. 2 (1967): 207–42. Tony Cartledge highlights another aspect of David's decision to remain home, stating "The narrator's careful location of David "on his couch" in the late afternoon implies that David is giving less attention to his work and showing more regard for his personal pleasure." See *1 & 2 Samuel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishers, 2001), 496. Daniel Bodi explores the topic of David remaining at home during a time of war against the backdrop of Amorite Bedouin "warlike ideals" which demonstrate examples of royal figures "dallying" with females instead of taking on the more favorable role of warrior. See *Demise of the Warlord: A New Look at the David Story* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 1-5.

way is consistent with his earlier treatment of Saul who did not reciprocate (1 Sam 24 & 26).

חֶסֶד has a range of meanings, especially in theological contexts, but in the context of human relationships such as the one presented in the Hanun episode, the word has connotations of mercy or kindness and carries with it the notion of relational obligation."[112] In the case of David's dealings with Mephibosheth, the text declares, "So David said, "Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness (*ḥesed*) for Jonathan's sake?"" וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד הֲכִי יֶשׁ־עוֹד אֲשֶׁר נוֹתַר לְבֵית שָׁאוּל וְאֶעֱשֶׂה עִמּוֹ חֶסֶד בַּעֲבוּר יְהוֹנָתָן (2 Sam 9:1). And, in the case of Hanun, the texts states, "So David said, I will show kindness (*ḥesed*) to Hanun son of Nahash, for his father showed kindness (*ḥesed*) to me." וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶעֱשֶׂה־חֶסֶד עִם־חָנוּן בֶּן־נָחָשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אָבִיו עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד. In his commentary on Samuel, Tony W. Cartledge translates both of these instances of *ḥesed* as "loyalty" to reflect the political realia behind them.[113]

Nelson Glueck's study on the word *ḥesed* also provides insight into its use in this episode.[114] Glueck finds that *ḥesed* "is received or shown only by those among whom a

[112] BDB indicates that it generally means treating another person with "kindness" or "doing favours and benefits." DCH defines as "loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, love, mercy." Concerning human relationships, HALOT indicates a sense of obligatory loyalty in relationships of various types. For example, HALOT mentions obligations between family members (e.g., Gen 47:29) and marriage partners (e.g., Gen 20:13). In connection with a covenant (בְּרִית), demonstrations of חֶסֶד can involve a ceremony. For a thorough treatment of the theological significance of חֶסֶד and a summary of scholarship on the word, see TWOT 698a.

[113] "In chapter 9, David was concerned with showing loyalty (*ḥesed*) to the house of Saul. In chapter 10, he desires to demonstrate *ḥesed* to the new king of Ammon. Whether domestically or internationally, David is presented as a man of loyalty." Tony W. Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishers, 2001), 487.

[114] Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967).

definite relationship exists."[115] Thus, there are mutual obligations inherent in these relationships, such as reciprocity. One such relationship that Glueck describes is that between friends, the category Glueck uses to describe Nahash and David. Glueck adds that Nahash and David's friendship "was similar to an alliance, even though there was no formal contract between them."[116] Concerning the meaning of *ḥesed* in this context, Glueck also chooses the word "loyalty," a word which conveys the expectation of mutuality.[117]

A second aspect of the micro political context relates to the laconic backstory of David and Hanun which the biblical text presents as the basis for David's relationship with the Ammonites. At face value, David sending messengers was a political overture meant to reassert the bond between Israel and Ammon which was apparently forged earlier between David and Hanun's father, Nahash. In Joyce Baldwin's commentary, she takes the text's description of David's beneficent motivation toward Hanun at face value: "David's well-intentioned embassage to the new king of Ammon initiated a whole train of events which were to his disadvantage."[118] The biblical text is not clear about what relationship was previously forged between Nahash and David, but there are some viable theories.

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[115] Ibid., 37.

[116] Ibid., 50.

[117] See also Richard S. Hess, *The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 145. Hess points out that in many places where the collocation of *'āśāh* + *ḥesed* exists (e.g., Genesis 24:12, Joshua 2:12), the emphasis is on preserving future generations.

[118] Joyce G. Baldwin, *I and II Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 228.

Evans explains, “Nahash’s past kindness to David cannot be determined. Perhaps Nahash had paid a voluntary tribute to Israel in exchange for military protection. If this was the case, one purpose of the delegation would have been to renew the terms of the agreement.”[119] A. A. Anderson points out that “David’s friendship with him may go back to the time when David was fleeing from Saul or when he was engaged in hostilities with Ish-Bosheth’s forces. In any case, friendly relationships (covenant?) must have been established between the two at some stage.”[120] Other scholars reference Nahash’s intervention on David’s behalf during the events of Absalom’s rebellion as the basis for their alliance (2 Sam 17).[121] When David goes to Mahanaim to escape Absalom, he is aided by Shobi, the son of Nahash, who brings provisions of food, bedding, and supplies to David and his followers (2 Sam 17:27-29). For this scenario to be a valid explanation of the existing relationship between Ammon and David, however, the events covered in 2 Samuel 13-20 must precede the events in chapter 10, a scenario McCarter sees as likely.[122]

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[119] Mary J. Evans, *1 And 2 Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 178.

[120] A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel, Word Biblical Commentary, V.11, (*Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 146.

[121] P. Kyle McCarter. *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 270.

[122] McCarter states, “Outside of the present passage nothing is said of a relationship between David and Nahash except in 17:27, where we are told that a son of Nahash named Shobi was among those who received David in Mahanaim and provided for him during his flight from Abishalom. If this was the act of “loyalty” (heṣed) referred to here, as seems probably, it follows that Abishalom’s rebellion, described in chaps. 13-20, was historically prior to the present events. *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 270. Joel S. Burnett’s analysis points out the connections between the house of David and Ammon with evidence such as Rehoboam’s mother being Ammonite (1 Kgs 14:21, 31), and Burnett claims that David likely replaced Hanun with his brother, Shobi. See “Transjordan: the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites,” in *The World Around the Old Testament: The People and Places of the Ancient near East*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 317.

Regardless of the nature of Nahash's prior kindness toward David, the narrative makes clear that Hanun does not follow in his father's footsteps in keeping the status quo. At the arrival of David's messengers, the Ammonite officials (שָׂרֵי בְנֵי־עַמּוֹן) who serve as Hanun's advisors are suspicious of David's intentions and take the opportunity to sow seeds of doubt in Hanun's mind about David's motives. The word which is used to describe Hanun's officials here is the plural form of שַׂר (*śar*), a word which has a wide semantic range in Hebrew. In Nili Sacher Fox's study of function-related titles in the Hebrew Bible, she defines שַׂר as "chief, ruler, commander, official," categories which can be understood in civil or military terms.[123]

In the context of 2 Samuel 10, these Ammonite officials give political advice to Hanun about how to interpret David's diplomatic actions. A related use of שַׂר is evident where Judean officials with this same designation offer judicial advice against having the prophet Jeremiah killed (Jer 26:10-16).[124] Similarly, Solomon's son Rehoboam has two sets of royal advisors when he inherits the kingship—those who had served Solomon and those who had grown up with Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12:6). Although these two groups of royal advisors which give Rehoboam contradictory counsel are described using different terms (i.e., "elders" (זְקֵנִים) and "young men" (יְלָדִים)), they function in a manner similar

[123] Nili Sacher Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, no. 23 (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 159. Fox discusses the various contexts of the term in biblical examples in pages 158-163.

[124] וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַשָּׂרִים וְכָל־הָעָם אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים וְאֶל־הַנְּבִיאִים אֵין־לָאִישׁ הַזֶּה מִשְׁפַּט־מָוֶת כִּי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ דִּבֶּר אֵלֵינוּ

to that of Hanun's officials, by offering counsel to the king and playing a part in royal politics.[125]

Power Markers

Understanding the macro and micro contexts of the Hanun episode which were explored above enables one to appreciate the political positions and vulnerabilities of both David and Hanun. When David sends messengers to Hanun, David had already risen in power in the region due to his military prowess, but he carried a lot of domestic baggage due to his long rivalry with the Saulides. The biblical narrative also reveals that David had encounters with Nahash previously in which he aided David, but David's diplomatic overture toward Hanun at the time of Nahash's death demonstrates that David did not know exactly where he stood with Ammon after Nahash's death.

As for Hanun's station at the time of the insult, he had been newly appointed to his role as king of Ammon and thus needed to prove himself to his own countrymen and to the leaders of the polities surrounding Ammon. Later in the account of Absalom's rebellion, one learns that Nahash had at least one other son, Shobi, who aided David (2 Sam 17:27). Shobi may have been Hanun's rival for the Ammonite throne, possibly calling into question Hanun's legitimacy. By default, Hanun had inherited the legacy of his father's relationship with David when he inherited the crown, but he also had officials advising him who were distrustful of David. According to the biblical account, Hanun chose to follow that advice in his dealings with David. Thus, the stage was set for a

[125] For a study on the meanings of the terms זְקֵנִים and יְלָדִים see Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah*, 63-80.

showdown between Israel (under King David's leadership) and Ammon (under King Hanun's leadership).

In addition to understanding the political context of the account, an exploration of the social power dynamics behind David and Hanun's encounter will further elucidate the meaning and significance of Hanun's insult. As a preface to the next section which will delineate the various social power types evident in the account, a brief statement about the application of French and Raven's social power model is in order. In the Hanun account, David attempts to exert some type of social influence over Hanun by initiating contact through diplomatic messengers, so in terms of French and Raven's social power framework, David is the agent (O) and Hanun is the object of David's influence (P).

Though the influence of an agent need not be intentional in French and Raven's paradigm, the mention of David's intention in the text (i.e., to show חֶסֶד *ḥesed* to Hanun) demonstrates that David did wish to influence Hanun and/or Ammon in some way. By way of review, positive influence is influence in the direction of an agent's wishes and results in an agent having positive control, and negative influence is influence in the opposite direction of an agent's wishes and results in an agent's negative control.

David's intention in initiating contact after King Nahash's death is a major source of tension in the story. The biblical narrative indicates that David wants to show sympathy to Hanun when he sends his messengers, but Hanun and his officials believe that David has nefarious motives to spy out the city. If the text accurately describes David's true intentions (i.e., to show חֶסֶד *ḥesed*) when he reached out to Hanun, David wished to influence Hanun and the Ammonites in a positive manner to continue the

goodwill between Israel and Ammon that was established in the time of Nahash. On the other hand, if it is true that David really sent messengers to spy out the city as Hanun's advisors claim in the account, the direction of influence still remains the same, but the motivation is ultimately different. In the first scenario, David wished to continue in an alliance with a neighboring polity, but in the second scenario David wished to make Ammon vulnerable to an attack by feigning friendship to keep their defenses down. Either way, Hanun was not influenced positively by David's overtures, and he returned David's messengers humiliated, surely not the result David was expecting.

Although it is important to note the direction of the influence in this episode—David (O) exerted negative influence over Hanun (P)—the main emphasis of this study is on identifying the sources of social power each of the major players possessed in order to analyze how these dynamics interacted. Context and hints within the text give indications about these sources of power. As was the case in the Nabal episode, four of French and Raven's social power types are evident in 2 Samuel 10: *legitimate*, *reward*, *coercive*, and *referent*.

Legitimate Power

The issue of legitimate power applies to both David and Hanun as they had both risen to the station of king in their respective polities when the Hanun episode takes place. From a sociological perspective, the source of power undergirding the office of leadership rests upon the perceptions of the people about the leadership position itself and how one gained the position. In speaking about the power of legitimacy in socio-political leadership in particular, anthropologist Ted C. Lewellen explains that "The legitimacy of

power derives from the group's "political culture," the people's expectations about the nature of power and how it should be attained."[126] Lewellen further applies this principle to the office of the U.S. presidency, explaining that in the United States, it is not so much the leader who the people trust in, but it is more the "legal process" by which the leader came into power. Lewellen states, "The president draws power from the Constitution, two hundred years of history, and the belief of the American people (a belief into which they have been socialized since birth) that this particular form of government is better than the alternatives."[127] Similarly, the biblical text is careful to craft an image of David as never grasping for power, but only accepting it.

As the biblical narrative describes it, David's rise to kingship was won largely through divine intervention and old-fashioned patience. Also, befitting royal apologetic the Bible generally portrays David as a man of exemplary character who was not culpable in the downfall of any of his enemies (Nabal, Saul, Abner, Amnon, et al.), advantageous though their deaths may have been to him politically.[128] Thus, David's legitimacy is compelling, even though he was not in the line of hereditary succession. In Tryggve N. D. Mettinger's analysis of the legitimation of the Israelite kings, he adopts a bifurcated view of Israelite kingship into sacral and civil components, and through this

[126] Ted C. Lewellen, *Political Anthropology: An Introduction*, (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1983), 96.

[127] Ibid., 96.

[128] Baruch Halpern sees this perspective as highly propagandistic and the work of the pro-Judah lobby. See *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 73-76.

methodological framework Mettinger analyzes David's legitimation.[129] Regarding David's civil legitimation, Mettinger points out that the "men of Judah" (אַנְשֵׁי יְהוּדָה) anoint David as king over Judah (2 Sam 2:4), and later when Ish-Bosheth's commander, Abner, defects to David, Abner confers with "the elders of Israel" (זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) and "Benjamin" (בִּנְיָמִין) (2 Sam 3:17-21).[130] When Abner reports back to David the good news that David has been accepted by all the tribes, Abner references "Israel" and "the whole house of Benjamin" (כָּל־בֵּית בִּנְיָמִן).

David's sacral legitimation is closely intertwined with his civil legitimation in the biblical account. Abner's counsel to all Israel, to encourage them to finally accept David as king, includes the reminder that the LORD had previously promised to save them militarily from the Philistines "by the hand of my servant, David" (בְּיַד דָּוִד עַבְדִּי) (2 Sam 3:18). This reminder of David's divine appointment and his militarily salvific role plays a role in influencing the people to confer kingship on David, and they say as much at his anointing (2 Sam 5:1-4). Here the people conflate David's divine election and military accomplishments under Saul as the impetus for their anointing him as king over all Israel.

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[129] See Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings*, Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series, 8 (Lund: LiberLäromedel/Gleerup, 1976), 13-18 where Mettinger acknowledges that this bifurcated view is problematic given the "high degree of cultural integration" in ancient Israel. Nevertheless, Mettinger argues that civil legitimation is indicated when the elders and people confer kingship in rituals, and sacral legitimation is indicated when a king is divinely elected. Furthermore, Mettinger distinguishes between divine kingship and sacral kingship, stating that divine kingship is different and used in a narrow sense when "the king holds position of "*deus incarnatus*" on earth."

[130] McCarter argues for an original reading of "Benjaminites" (literally "sons of Benjamin" in the MT, as the LXX^{L} and Syr. manuscripts have *bny bnymyn*. The omission of *bny* in the MT due to haplography is apparent, as McCarter points out. See note 19 on page 108 of *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984).

As for King Hanun's legitimation, the Bible does not give much information about his right to rule or the circumstances under which he came into power after his father's death. In fact, there are more questions than answers. As mentioned previously, in addition to Hanun, apparently King Nahash had another son named Shobi who is named as a supporter of David when David is fleeing from Absalom at Mahanaim (2 Sam 17:27-29). McCarter takes the position that the events surrounding Hanun's insult and the ensuing siege of Rabbah occur after, not before, Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam 17). Thus, by McCarter's estimation, Shobi offering succor to David is likely the act of loyalty/kindness by Nahash that David references later when he sends a delegation to Ammon following Nahash's death (2 Sam 10:2).[131] If this arrangement of the texts is accurate, with Absalom's rebellion occurring prior to Nahash's death, then Shobi's loyalty to David could have caused Hanun to be suspicious of David as a potential ally of his brother, a possible rival to the Ammonite throne.

As for other commentary on the relationship between Shobi and Hanun, Joyce Baldwin largely skirts the text critical issues and simply sees Shobi as a more "loyal" son than Hanun, following in his father's footsteps in his acts of kindness toward David.[132] Anderson finds another explanation for Shobi and Hanun's roles when David has dealings with the Ammonites in a military takeover described in 2 Samuel 12:30. Here David takes the crown from the unnamed Ammonite king's head when he seizes the Ammonite capital, Rabbah, and David has the crown put on his own head. The

[131] Ibid., 394.

[132] Joyce G. Baldwin, *I and II Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 268.

symbolism here is obvious—David is the overlord and there is no longer a king in Ammon. From this note that David took the Ammonite crown as his own, Anderson surmises that Shobi was in fact Hanun's brother, and "thus of the old Ammonite royal house." At the time of Shobi's kindness toward David on the occasion of Absalom's rebellion, there was no king over Ammon.[133]

Whatever the relationship between Hanun and Shobi, it is clear from the biblical account that Hanun is newly in power when David sends his messengers to Rabbah. As such, Hanun was in a period of testing with his own people and with neighboring polities, and Hanun's legitimacy to rule may have been questionable depending on the circumstances under which he rose to power. If Hanun's brother had been a rival to the Ammonite throne prior to his father's death, and he kept peace with David through amicable political dealings, then Hanun had to prove himself by asserting his own defiant will when he gained power.

Reward Power

As explained in the introductory chapter, reward power is the ability to offer benefits of some type to others in an effort to influence them. Both Hanun and David had resources at their disposal which indicates that they had the ability to influence others through rewards. Though the biblical text does not provide many explicit background facts about Hanun which one could categorize as intentional markers of power, some inferences may be made about the king's resources based on the information given about

[133] A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel, Word Biblical Commentary, V.11, (*Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 223.

his battle preparations. As for King David, prior to his interaction with Hanun the biblical text specifically mentions that he had been amassing wealth through his previous exploits.

After Hanun's insult leads to inevitable battle between Ammon and Israel, the biblical text states that the Ammonites hired (שׂכר *śakar*) Aramean troops to fight against Israel (2 Sam 10:6). 1 Chronicles 19:6, the corresponding text which finds corroboration in a 4QSam[a] fragment, states that the amount Hanun and the Ammonites paid was אֶלֶף כִּכַּר־כֶּסֶף "a thousand talents of silver," an amount equal to 38 tons or 34 metric tons.[134] This silver bought Hanun commanders, troops, chariots, and charioteers from Aramean polities.[135] Thus, Hanun's resources ultimately influenced the Arameans to get involved in the battle against David.

As for David, he too had riches with which to influence others. Although textual complexities in the book of Samuel prevent a tight chronology which would definitively place David's wars with various groups *before* his war with the Ammonites, et al, according to the biblical text David is given credit for taking much booty in his various victories (2 Sam 8). In verses 7-8, David takes "gold shields" (שִׁלְטֵי הַזָּהָב) and "a great quantity of bronze" (נְחֹשֶׁת הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד) from Hadadezer. And, in verses 10-11 David receives tribute from Tou, King of Hamath, who was the enemy of Hadadezer. This

[134] This amount of silver appears to be an exaggeration; perhaps the point of the biblical text including it is to show that even with massive amounts of riches, the enemies of David and Israel would not prevail.

[135] For textual notes on the differences between the Chronicles and Samuel versions of the hiring of forces, and the witnesses of the LXX, see P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 268.

tribute included “articles of silver, articles of gold, and articles of bronze” (כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי־זָהָב וּכְלֵי נְחֹשֶׁת). Thus, David had valuable resources which would have given him influence over other polities or individuals.

Evidence of David giving resources to individuals in order to influence them politically is described prior to David securing the throne over Judah (1 Sam 30:26-31). Here David fights the Amalekites who had been raiding the whole region of the Philistines and Judah, including Ziklag where David was residing. The Amalekites had taken David’s wives and children and burned Ziklag, forcing David to pursue them. When David overtakes them and collects various types of booty which the Amalekites had amassed in their raids, he distributes some of the spoils to the elders of Judah in various locales, and he labels the booty *brkh*, בְּרָכָה, a gift.

Brkh בְּרָכָה also means “blessing” in other contexts, but here it indicates a token of friendship or appreciation because David had enjoyed the support of the leaders of these regions when he was roaming through the region (1 Sam 30:31). In Genesis 33:11, this word is used to describe the flocks and herds which Esau offers to Jacob as a means of restoring their relationship, and in 2 Kings 5:15 Naaman offers a בְּרָכָה to Elisha as a token of appreciation for Elisha’s help in healing Naaman’s leprosy. In the case of David, his gift (בְּרָכָה) to the leaders of Judah has the effect of a reward or bribe because within a short time, they anoint David king over Judah (2 Sam 2).

Coercive Power

Coercive power is demonstrated in one's ability to influence others based on threats of causing loss or harm of some type. This type of power can be overt, as in a verbal threat, but it can also be implicit. For example, someone's reputation as ruthless or harsh can be enough to cause positive influence because others will naturally want to appease the one with power over them, in order to avoid hardship. In the case of the Hanun episode, both David and Hanun came to the table with forms of coercive power vis-à-vis their wider reputations. There is no indication that Hanun and David had actual dealings with each other before the diplomatic failure that happened as a result of David sending his messengers to the Ammonite court, but both surely knew of each other's reputation prior to their encounter.

David had a reputation inside and outside of Israelite territory as an extremely effective warrior who had the skills to destroy his enemies. David's reputation was earned early, even while fighting for Saul's forces. For example, the Bible demonstrates that when David escapes from Saul then lives among the Philistines, his reputation as a warrior was well known to them (1 Sam 29:5). Later, David soundly defeats the Amalekites and redistributes the booty in their possession (1 Sam 30), and he takes Jerusalem from the Jebusites (2 Sam 5). Then, David secures victories over the Philistines, Moabites, Edomites, and Arameans (2 Sam 8). In David's dealings with the Moabites, he kills two-thirds of them by measuring them off with a cord to count them (v. 2), and then the text states that when David overcomes 18,000 Edomites in the Salt Valley, he "made a name for himself" וַיַּעַשׂ דָּוִד שֵׁם.[136]

[136] In McCarter's notes, he argues that this phrase indicates that David built a monument to himself in that *šēm* שֵׁם means "a memorial or monument." McCarter cites Isaiah 55:13 where *šēm* is

As for Hanun's coercive power, it rested upon the torturous legacy of his father, Nahash, who had been the previous Ammonite king. Nahash earned a reputation for being a cruel leader when he besieged Jabesh-Gilead and would only agree to a treaty under the terms that he gouge out the right eye of those who lived there (1 Sam 11:1-2).[137] This threat to the Israelite city was the catalyst for Saul's confirmation as king when he came to the rescue of those in Jabesh-gilead by mustering a pan-Israelite force against the Ammonites soon after he was crowned (1 Sam 11:11-15). Halbertal and Holmes explain the political significance of this event: "As told in 1 Samuel 11, the Ammonite king Nahash offered a humiliating pact to the people of Jabesh-gilead, who were situated at the easternmost and therefore highly exposed margins of Israel's tribal settlements. The proposed pact included the gouging out of the right eye of each of the men of Jabesh-gilead, marking their defeat and subjugation in a permanent and visible facial defect that also rendered them unfit for military self-defense." That Hanun's own

parallel to "an abiding sign never cut off" (*II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 251). Furthermore, McCarter sees a correspondence to David's יָד "hand" or stela/monument in verse 3. This notion is also demonstrated in Absalom's erecting a monument for himself which is labeled the יָד of Absalom (2 Sam 18:18): וְאַבְשָׁלֹם לָקַח וַיַּצֶּב־לוֹ בְּחַיָּיו אֶת־מַצֵּבַת אֲשֶׁר בְּעֶמֶק־הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי אָמַר אֵין־לִי בֵּן בַּעֲבוּר הַזְכִּיר שְׁמִי וַיִּקְרָא לַמַּצֵּבָת עַל־שְׁמוֹ וַיִּקָּרֵא לָהּ יַד אַבְשָׁלֹם עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה׃

[137] 4QSam[a] has additional introductory information on Nahash which may help complete the picture. In this DSS account (which is included in the NRSV), Nahash had been oppressing the Gadites and Reubenites across the Jordan, gouging out their right eyes. Of these from the tribes of Gad and Reuben, 7000 escaped to Jabesh-gilead and Nahash followed them there. See Frank Moore Cross, "New Directions in the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 25, Iss. 3 , Article 2 (1985). Cross' translation of 4QSam[a] text is as follows: "[Na]hash, king of the Ammonites sorely oppressed the children of Gad and the children of Reuben, and he gouged out a[ll] their right eyes and struck ter[ror and dread] in Israel. There was not left one among the sons of Israel bey[ond] the Jordan whose right eye was no[t put o]ut by Naha[sh, king] of the children of [A]mmon, save 7000 men who [fled from] the children of Ammon and entered [J]abesh-Gilead. About a month later Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-[Gilead.] All the men of Jabesh said…" See Frank Moore Cross, "New Directions in the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 3, Article 2 (1985), 1-10, accessed February 7, 2022, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol25/iss3/2.

father dealt with his neighbors in this manner would have given Hanun himself coercive power.

Referent Power

Referent power arises from a person's positive personal characteristics which make one influential, such as charisma or faithfulness. In the case of the Hanun episode, the only source of referent power which is evident is David's character. Not enough is known about Hanun to make any judgement about his capacity to influence based on personal characteristics. In addition to the traits described in the previous chapter, including David's physical attractiveness (1 Sam 16:12), giftedness (1 Sam 16:18 & 1 Sam 18:14), and military prowess (1 Sam 17 & 18), David's character is put on display in his interactions with the rival Saulides prior to his interaction with Hanun. Though it was common for newly crowned kings in the ANE/EMED to dispose of any threats quickly to solidify their own hold on the crown, especially any descendants of the preceding sovereign, the bible records that David shows mercy to Saul's house when he takes over.

After Saul's death in the battle with the Philistines (1 Sam 31), Saul's commander, Abner, places Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth, on the throne over all the tribes except Judah because David reigns over Judah (2 Sam 2:8-11). The narrative demonstrates that eventually Abner sees the writing on the wall, and he defects to David. However, David's commander, Joab, sees conspiracy in Abner's conciliatory overtures toward David, so he secretly kills Abner. The biblical narrative describes David making a show of mourning the unjust death of Abner, an act which causes the people to view David's leadership favorably: "And all the people took note, and it was good in their

eyes, as everything the king did was good in their eyes" וְכָל־הָעָם הִכִּירוּ וַיִּיטַב בְּעֵינֵיהֶם כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּעֵינֵי כָל־הָעָם טוֹב (2 Sam 3:36).

Abner's defection also prompts two of Ish-Bosheth's commanders, Rechab and Baanah, to turn on their master, and they kill him in stealth and decapitate him (2 Sam 4:5-8). David, in a politically-savvy move in keeping with what he did previously to the messenger who claimed he killed Saul (2 Sam 1:13-16) and through his mourning of Abner's death, publicly condemns the killing of Ish-Bosheth and kills and dismembers Ish-Bosheth's killers (2 Sam 4:12). David makes this a public act by hanging Rechab's and Baanah's hands and feet in a public area, the pool at Hebron. Thus, David gained public approval by those sympathetic to the Saulides by demonstrating his disapproval of the killing of his rivals from the house of Saul.

In 2 Samuel 9, also counter to the cultural custom, David is depicted as seeking to deal faithfully (i.e., do *ḥesed* חֶסֶד) with Saul's disabled grandson, Mephibosheth. Prior to this, David had been in a very close relationship with Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan, Saul's son, and likely heir to the throne. Before Saul dies and David becomes king, the narrative describes Jonathan's loyalty to David through his symbolic gestures of giving over to David his own right to the throne. Jonathan strips off his own royal garb and all his weapons in the presence of David, and he gives them to David in an apparent symbolic transfer of power (1 Sam 18:1-4).[138] Halpern notes that "Jonathan and David

[138] Mary J. Evans interprets Jonathan's actions as the giving of gifts to make a covenant with David: "The terms of this treaty are not itemized, although later (ch. 20) Jonathan calls on David to look after his family. It seems to have been a mutual commitment to loyalty and friendship. It would have been normal for Jonathan as the higher in status to take the initiative, but no indication is given at this stage of David's response." See *1 And 2 Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 85. Walter Brueggemann states that "The action of Jonathan in giving his robe and armor is a dramatic act that seems to transfer to

become allies to the point at which Jonathan, the lawful heir to the throne, recognizes that David has been elected by Yahweh to succeed Saul."[139] After Saul and Jonathan die, however, David eschews any temptation to rid himself of the last heir from the house of Saul. Instead, David seeks Mephibosheth out—not to kill him, but to do good to him. David returns the family land to Mephibosheth and invites him tableside in his court "like one of the king's sons" כְּאַחַד מִבְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ (2 Sam 9:7-11).[140]

In publicly mourning Saul and Jonathan's death (2 Sam 1:11-12, 17-27), avenging Saul's killer (2 Sam 1:15), mourning Abner's violent death (2 Sam 3:31-39), avenging the death of Ish-Bosheth (2 Sam 4:12), and inviting Mephibosheth to eat at his table (2 Sam 9), David bolsters his own reputation as a merciful and righteous leader and brings together the competing factions. This fact, in combination with David's reputation as a formidable warrior, would have given David much referent power inside and outside of Israel. The people of Israel would have been loyal to a leader such as this, and the leaders of other polities would have known that he had widespread support.

Table 3.1 Power Markers in the Hanun Episode

	David	Hanun

David Jonathan's right to claim the throne." See *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 136.

[139] Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 19.

[140] Ibid., 342-343. Halpern sees in David's treatment of Mephibosheth a politically motivated move to squelch any possible rivalry: "he was at best a hostage at court, and sufficiently impaired to prevent his being a rallying-point for Israelites disaffected from David." Halpern also cites other ANE/EMED examples of conquerors taking hostages of vassals including Tiglath-Pileser I's taking of an enemy king's sons and family as hostages. Halpern acknowledges the text's depiction of the situation as pro-David: "His political usefulness made him a perfect candidate to serve as David's evidence that he harbored nothing but good will toward the House of Saul."

Legitimate Power	David has risen from being king over Judah to being king over all Israel through sacral (divine appointment and favor) and civil (recognized as king by "all Israel") legitimation.	Hanun is newly installed as king over Ammon after his father, Nahash, dies.
Reward Power	Through battle, David has gained booty from Hadadezer including gold shields and bronze. David also receives tribute from King Tou of Hamath including silver, bronze, and gold implements.	Hanun has the ability to hire Aramean mercenaries to fight against Israel.
Coercive Power	David's reputation as a formidable warrior against the Philistines, Moabites, Arameans, and Edomites is known throughout the region.	Hanun's father, Nahash, had the reputation of being a cruel leader (putting out the eyes of enemies). Hanun would have gained this legacy.
Referent Power	David is physically attractive, gifted, and portrayed as having positive character traits (e.g., just, not vengeful) which help him gain favor with the people.	X

Insult and Social Significance

With the political context and social power markers fully analyzed in the previous sections of this chapter, an exploration of Hanun's insult upon David's messengers and its social significance is in order. As was the case with Nabal's insult in 1 Samuel 25, audience plays a significant part in determining an insult's impact, but in the Hanun

episode indications of audience are more glaring than they were in the Nabal episode. First, David sending messengers in response to an ally's royal death was a diplomatic event which presumes some measure of public knowledge. Second, David keeping his shamed messengers in Jericho for a substantial period of time so that their beards could grow back indicates that he was attempting to avoid widespread public knowledge of the event. This act served two purposes, protecting the messengers from personal humiliation, and avoiding the political ramifications of being insulted by another king.

Sending diplomatic messengers on the occasion of an ally's death is a well-known practice in the ANE/EMED. In Samuel A. Meier's book on messengers in the ancient Semitic world, Meier points out that, "the great traumas and tragedies of life stimulate messenger activity."[141] Meier cites a Neo-Babylonian letter (*NBU* 117:6-16) as an example of this practice, explaining that "the support of extended family relationships and maintenance of social stability in such times motivate such a custom":[142]

> When I heard of the death of Rimanni-Marduk . . . and sent my messenger on his behalf (*mār šipri ana muḫḫīšu ašpuru*), my messenger didn't reach him.[143]

In the context of political allies in particular, Late Bronze Age letter EA 33 gives an account of messengers sent from Cyprus/Alashiya to Egypt on the occasion of the enthronement of a new pharaoh. According to lines 9-13 the king of Alashiya sent a

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[141] Samuel A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, No. 45 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 32.

[142] Ibid., 32.

[143] E. Ebeling, *Neubabylonische Briefe aus Uruk. Beiträge zur Keilschriftforschung und Relgionsgeschichte des Vorderen Orients* 3 (1930-1934).

message to the newly enthroned pharaoh stating: “I myself have heard [th]at you are seated on the [th]rone of the house of your father [and I] have transported [a gift of p]eace.” ([*ša-*]*ni-tam ù iš-te-mé a-na-ku* [*i-n*]*u-ma aš-ba-ta* UGU-*li* [GIŠ.G]U.ZA É *a-bi-ka* [*ù u*]*š-te-bi-ir*!(RI)-*mi* [NÍG.BA *š*]*a-la-mi*).[144] In William L. Moran’s commentary on EA 33, he states that “A change of rulers required allies to restate their expressions of friendship.”[145]

Similarly, in Amanda H. Podany’s book on formal relationships between ancient kings, she gives an example from some of the earliest diplomatic practices in recorded history—those between the rulers of major polities Ebla and Mari in the middle of the third millennium BCE. In Podany’s description of the diplomatic practices of one of Ebla’s notable kings, Irkab-damu, she states that “from the beginning of Irkab-damu’s reign official delegations traveled from Ebla to Mari and vice versa. When a king of Mari died, Irkab-damu (or perhaps his predecessor) had sent four high officials to Mari with gifts for his funeral.”[146]

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[144] Translation and transliteration follow Anson Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna Based on Collations of All Extant Tablets*, vol. 2. eds. William M. Schniedewind and Zipora Cochavi-Rainey (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 332-333.

[145] See note 4 in EA 33 in William L. Moran, *The Amarna letters* (English-language ed.), (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Moran cites also *EA* 6:8ff.; 8:8ff.; 9:7ff.; 17:51ff.; and 41:7ff. This practice of renewing alliances when a leader dies is explicitly illustrated in another LBA letter from Hittite king, Hattusili, to Kadashman-Enlil, king of Babylon, in which Hattusili explains how he threatened the high officials of Babylonia with war if they did not install the young Babylonian after the death of his father. See Leo A. Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia: Official Business, and Private Letters on Clay Tablets from Two Millennia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 139-146.

[146] Amanda H. Podany, *Brotherhood of Kings: How International Relations Shaped the Ancient Near East* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26-27. Podany cites Alfonso Archi and Maria Giovanna Biga, "A Victory Over Mari and the Fall of Ebla," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 55, no. 1 (2003): 1-44.

Although the description of David sending messengers to Ammon does not specify that David sent gifts, his overture toward Hanun on the occasion of his father's death was a diplomatic event and likely very public—in an effort to publicly demonstrate the renewal of the alliance between Ammon and Israel. The public nature of this diplomatic endeavor means that Hanun's response would have also been very public, as a demonstration to the whole community. The people of Ammon and Israel would have seen how Hanun sent back David's messengers. This notion that diplomatic messengers had a public audience is demonstrated in EA 20, a letter from Mitanni's king, Tushratta, to Pharaoh Amenhotep III, in which Tushratta describes gathering foreign guests at the visit of an Egyptian envoy in order that the guests might view the gifts pharaoh sent to him (lines 46-59).

The public nature of an insult takes the interaction to a new social level and causes greater social injury. In this way, Hanun's insult against David would have reverberated throughout the wider community and, in essence, constituted an intergroup insult—Ammon versus Israel. The two polities ceased to be allies in this instance, and instead they wenr to war with each other. Karina V. Korostelina, in her book on modern political insults, explains the significance of insults being public in that they become intergroup insults instead of simply personal insults: "Through insults, parties deprive themselves of the creation of a common meaning, resulting in painful and stressful acts of communication. Intergroup insult strips the insulted group of a positive identity and decreases its power."[147]

[147] Karina V. Korostelina, *Political Insults: How Offenses Escalate Conflict*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

Concerning the matter of public knowledge of Hanun's insult, David instructed his shaved and stripped men to stay in Jericho when he heard of their condition, for they were "greatly ashamed" (נִכְלָמִים מְאֹד) (2 Sam 10:5). Shame, according to Lyn Bechtel's study on Neo-Assyrian warfare techniques, was used in ancient military contexts for purposes of social control, and for social control to be effective there must be wide knowledge of the shameful occurrence through a community.[148] During the Neo-Assyrian threat under King Sargon in the prophet Isaiah's day, Isaiah prophesied against Egypt and Cush with an unusual sign-act (Isa 20:1-4). Isaiah, as the spokesman of the LORD, was instructed to go around "naked" and "barefoot" (עָרוֹם וְיָחֵף) in order to act out what Sargon would do to both Egypt and Cush, polities to which some such as Israel were tempted to look for rescue (Isa 20:2). Through a visual prophetic warning, the LORD declares through Isaiah that Sargon "will strip the buttocks/genitals of Egypt" וְחַשּׂוּפֵי שֵׁת מִצְרָיִם עֶרְוַת, with the result being that those who trusted in Egypt and Cush will be "ashamed" (בּוֹשׁ) and "frightened" (חָתַת) (Isa 20:5).

The prophecy against Moab in Jeremiah 48:37-39 captures an image of the social impact of shame in a politico-military context when it describes the shaving and cutting off of the Moabites' beards as a rite of mourning after defeat. The very public result is that Moab will become a "laughingstock" (שְׂחוֹק) and a "ruin" (מְחִתָּה) "to all those who

[148] Lyn Betchel, "Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 49 (1991): 47-76.

surround it" (לְכָל־סְבִיבָיו).[149] Thus, part of the effectiveness of the prophecy of Moab's downfall rests on the public impact of its predictions of shame.

Treatment of Messengers

In the ANE/EMED the practice of messengers being sent between leaders of different polities was common, with the first known written attestations of the practice being in the mid to late third millennium BCE.[150] More examples of diplomacy occurring through the use of envoys going back and forth between rulers, such as Hammurabi of Babylon and Zimri-Lim of Mari, are documented on Old Babylonian tablets from the early second millennium BCE.[151] And, perhaps the most famous corpus in which this custom is attested is the Late Bronze Age El-Amarna corpus from the mid second millennium BCE.

In addition to the Hanun episode, other biblical examples also bear witness to the practice of sending messengers. For example, when King Tou hears of David's defeat of Hadadezer, he sends his son with gifts to David (2 Sam 8:9-10). Later, during the reign of Hoshea king of Israel, the king of Assyria finds "conspiracy" קֶשֶׁר (*qešer*) in Hoshea because Hoshea stops sending tribute to him and sends messengers to Egypt instead (2 Kgs 17:3-4). This example, which explains why Assyria laid siege to Samaria leading to

[149] BDB indicates "object of derision" in this context. TWOT adds that this is an alternate form of *ṣĕḥoq* that is attested in Ugaritic for "laugh." Furthermore, TWOT adds that the verbal form at times is followed by prepositions "especially with *ʿal* "over," or *lĕ*"at"."

[150] Betrand Lafont, "International Relations in the Ancient Near East: The Birth of a Complete Diplomatic System," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12:1 (2001): 40.

[151] Amanda H. Podany, *Brotherhood of Kings: How International Relations Shaped the Ancient Near East* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 69-76.

the exile of northern tribes, demonstrates the weighty political significance messengers had and the associated implications. Sending messengers meant the political relationship was ongoing, and not sending messengers meant there was a breach.

In all these scenarios, the practice of sending messengers was part of a sophisticated diplomatic process that included the exchange of gifts, the conveyance of information, and political posturing. The integral part messengers played in this multi-faceted process meant they were often used as pawns, as is obviously the case in the Hanun account. In this vein, ancient messengers were viewed as representatives of their sender, used for political leverage, and routinely distrusted—realities which are still very much a part of modern diplomacy.

Concerning messengers serving as representatives, the messenger was an extension of the one sending him, since leaders themselves were unwilling or unable to regularly travel back and forth to other lands solely for diplomatic purposes.[152] Because kings had envoys headed to various lands, simultaneously at times, and the king's well-being was always a concern, kings needed stand-ins for diplomacy to work. For example, Betrand Lafont describes the place of diplomats in ancient Mari from the second millennium BCE: "Some of these diplomats are explicitly regarded as a king's 'personal representatives' (Akkadian: *kîma pagrim).* According to their rank, the respect owed ambassadors is measured by the prostrations necessarily addressed to them if they represent a powerful sovereign, or that they themselves must perform in front of a 'great

[152] Messengers seem to have been predominantly male, but they could have been accompanied by females being traded or brought as gifts.

king'."[153] With this context in mind, a king's treatment of another king's messengers was analogous to their personal treatment of each other. As such, a king's treatment of foreign messengers reflected his tone toward his royal counterpart.

The value this status gave to royal messengers meant that they could be used for political leverage, and apparently often were. In LBA texts especially, there are numerous references to kings holding or delaying other kings' messengers. In EA 28:12-19, Mitanni's king, Tushratta, wields threats to get his messengers back from Egypt. The king guarantees that he will detain one of Pharaoh's best messengers, Mane, if Pharaoh does not quickly send back the messengers from Mittani. In EA 3:13-22 the king of Babylon, Kadashman-Enlil, complains to Pharaoh concerning a Babylonian envoy: "Now, when I sent to you a messenger, you have held him 6 years (*i-na-na a-na-ku* DUMU *ši-ip-ri ki aš-pu-ra-ak-ku* MU.6.KAM^{v} *ta-ak-ta-la-šu*)!"[154] Complaints like these about holding messengers for extended times are plentiful in the El-Amarna letters.

On the other hand, the quick release of messengers was used to send a message or elicit favor as well. Although significant lacunae prevent a thorough translation of EA 27, the phrase *ina kallê* "post-haste" in the context of the release of messengers is evident in lines 55, 56, and 90. In this letter, King Tushratta recounts how he sent Amenhotep III's messenger, Ḫamashi, back quickly in the past and was rewarded with four sacks of

[153] Betrand Lafont, "International Relations in the Ancient Near East: The Birth of a Complete Diplomatic System," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12:1 (2001): 45. Lafont gives as an example from Elam (*Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient* (LAPO)16:368): "In Amorrite period, a regular king himself must bow to Elamite ambassadors, as these are representatives of the "great king."

[154] Translations are the author's, but transliteration follows Anson Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna Based on Collations of All Extant Tablets*, vol. 2. eds. William M. Schniedewind and Zipora Cochavi-Rainey (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

Egyptian gold. Thus, the quick release of messengers, like the delay of them, was used to negotiate diplomatic situations including procuring luxury goods.

With these messengers being representatives of another (rival) king, and because they frequently traveled back and forth between kingdoms which were already suspicious of each other, messengers were often distrusted by those who received them. After all, envoys certainly gathered all types of information as part of their duties, and they reported back to their king. This is no different than the role of modern diplomats, a scenario Michael G. Fry, Erik Goldstein, and Richard Langhorne describe in their *Guide to International Relations and Diplomacy*: "In the foreign intelligence-gathering process the relationship between espionage and diplomacy, illegality and legality, has been a complex one, with emissaries of foreign powers often viewed with suspicion by their host country."[155]

This blurring of diplomacy and espionage which manifested in the general distrust of messengers is also evident in the biblical account which describes King Hezekiah receiving a Babylonian envoy sent by King Merodach-Baladan on the occasion of Hezekiah's illness (2 Kgs 20:12-18). In keeping with ANE/EMED custom, the messengers from Babylon bring gifts with them. Much to the prophet Isaiah's chagrin, Hezekiah foolishly shows the Babylonian messengers all the treasures of Israel, and thus a Babylonian victory is prophesied.

Due to the general distrust of messengers, they were treated poorly at times despite the fact that there seemed to be an inherent sense of inviolability toward them. In

[155] Michael G. Fry, Erik Goldstein, and Richard Langhorne, *Guide to International Relations and Diplomacy* (London; New York: Continuum, 2002), 431.

Lafont's study on diplomatic immunity in the ancient Near East (a concept he admits is anachronistic), he explains that "many documents, however, show that the immunity owed diplomats was often defied. Thus, we see ambassadors sent to prison and delegations attacked, kidnapped, or even assassinated."[156]

Each one of these three characteristics of ANE/EMED messengers—that they were viewed as representatives of their sender, used for political leverage, and routinely distrusted and even mistreated—is evident in the Hanun account and constitutes a significant part of the insult Hanun perpetrates against David's messengers. Because David's messengers were understood as his personal representatives, Hanun's humiliation of them was akin to his personal humiliation of David. Symbolically, Hanun stripped and shaved David himself when he stripped and shaved his messengers. And this was done publicly for maximum socio-political effect.

As for David's messengers being used for political leverage, their public humiliation sent a political message to the people of Ammon and Israel who witnessed it, and the insult ultimately led to war between the two groups. Essentially, upon the bare chins and buttocks of David's messengers, Hanun sent a message back to David, to Israel, and to the wider social audience—that he did not honor David, and that he rejected any hint of continuing a political relationship between Ammon and Israel. Finally, Hanun's distrust of David's messengers, believing them to be spies instead of envoys with authentic condolences, was the impetus for Hanun's insult and seemingly justified the poor treatment the messengers received.

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[156] Betrand Lafont, "International Relations in the Ancient Near East: The Birth of a Complete Diplomatic System," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12:1 (2001), 46.

Shaving of Beards

Concerning the first bodily insult inflicted upon David's men, the biblical author states that Hanun shaved חֲצִי זְקָנָם "half their beards" (2 Sam 10:4). The image which is described here likely refers to one whole side of the beard being shaved completely with the other side being left intact, not simply a shortening of the beard to half its original length. To understand the significance of Hanun's shaving in this way, one must first understand the cultural significance of a full beard in the ANE/EMED. Royal iconography from many locales demonstrates that the image of a successful ruler typically included a lustrous, full beard. Michael J. Chan and Maria Metzler, in their exposition of Isaiah 11:6-9, contrast the image of the messianic "little boy" (נַעַר קָטֹן), "a young, sexually immature figure who would have lacked facial hair" with that of what was expected in a ruler, "a distinctly manly figure… his maturity and virility are represented by a full beard."[157] This imagery is obvious in Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon's victorious image on his stele from Zincirli which shows his beard as longer and fuller than his sons' beards.

A letter from about a thousand years earlier than the Neo-Assyrian period, in the Old Babylonian era, also gives a poignant example of the link between beards and manly leadership. Yasmah-Addu, one of the sons of the great Mesopotamian ruler Shamshi-Adad, ruled over the city of Mari for a time and exchanged letters with his father about

[157] See Michael J. Chan and Maria Metzler, "Lions and Leopards and Bears, O My: Re-reading Isaiah 11:6-9 in Light of Comparative Iconographic and Literary Evidence," in *Image, Text, Exegesis: Iconographic Interpretation and the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Izaak J. De Hulster and Joel M. LeMon, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 588 (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2014), 219, n.48.

matters of leadership. In a letter which hints at Yasmah-Addu's failures of leadership, the son rebuts a previous accusation from his father which included the insult, "You are a child, you are not a grown man, you have no hair on your cheek!"[158]

Though Egyptians were clean shaven, likely for purposes of hygiene or ethnic differentiation, even pharaohs are depicted in statuary and on monuments as wearing a false beard similar to the gods. For example, Tutankhamun's death mask includes a braided beard very similar to that of the god Osiris. Writing about the significance of the false beard, Josie Glausiusz explains that, "A braided and curved bronze beard from the mid-seventh century BC is associated with Osiris, the god of the underworld, and is inlaid with dark-blue glass to represent lapis lazuli, a semi-precious stone from which divine hair was said to have been made."[159] Notably, Hatshepsut, the famous female pharaoh from the New Kingdom era, also wore a false beard in her depictions, even in instances where she is depicted in female dress.

Given these examples exhibiting the importance of the beard in the ANE/EMED, the shaving of the beard in any context is a significant act. Several examples from the Bible demonstrate this. In Isaiah 15:2-4, the prophecy against Moab includes assurances that Moabites will experience the humiliation of defeat and will mourn by shaving their own heads, cutting off their own beards, wearing sackcloth, and weeping. Jeremiah 41:4-5 recounts the assassination of Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed governor at Mizpah,

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[158] Michael Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 1990), 114.

[159] Jose Glausiusz, "Body image in Ancient Egypt." *Nature*, vol. 463, no. 7277, 7 Jan. 2010, p. 34. *Gale Academic OneFile Select*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A216681907/EAIM?u=ucinc_main&sid=summon&xid=018c33d8. Accessed 5 Sept. 2021.

as the reason for eighty men shaving their own beards, tearing their own clothing, and cutting themselves. Similarly, the prophesy against Moab in Jeremiah 48:37 mentions cutting the hand, shaving the head, wearing sackcloth, and cutting the beard as the response Moab will have to its destruction.

All these examples demonstrate that the insult Hanun inflicted by forcefully shaving David's messengers' beards in 2 Samuel 10 was an attack on masculine gender identity, and since the beard is part of one's visible appearance, this was a public attack. Since the beard is a symbol of virility and victorious leadership, shaving it forcefully symbolized impotence and defeat. Saul Olyan points out that Hanun's act was also a "parody" of the normal mourning rite of shaving in that the shaving was forced upon those who came to mourn Nahash's death.[160] By contrast, mourners shave their own beards. Therefore, David's men who came to mourn Nahash's death were instead turned into an emasculated mockery of mourning.

Cutting of Garments

The specific wording used to describe Hanun's exposing of David's messengers is worth exploring in order to understand the nature of the insult. The biblical text states that, in addition to shaving half of the messengers' beards, Hanun cut their garments in half up to/as far as their שֵׁת (seat or buttocks). This also means that the messengers' genitals were exposed in the front, a scenario which Cynthia Chapman calls "an act of

[160] Saul Olyan, "Theorizing Violence in Biblical Ritual Contexts: The Case of Mourning Rites," in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion*, ed. Saul M. Olyan (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 173-174.

feminization."[161] Tony Cartledge explains the reason for the stripping in addition to shaving in his commentary on Samuel:

> "The cutting of the men's garment ("in the middle at their hips") had only one purpose: to expose the men's genitals and buttocks and so add further insult to their public degradation (cf. Isa 20:4). Together, these two actions served as a sort of "symbolic castration," a temporary but embarrassing theft of the envoys' collective masculinity. In some ancient Near Eastern folklore, there was a symbolic relationship between a man's eyes and his testicles. Since David's envoys had been accused of "spying out" the land, the Ammonite leaders may have intentionally punished them by exposing their lower set of "eyes."[162]

Furthermore, Cartledge interprets that "the purpose was status manipulation; by this action, they humiliated not only the ambassadors, but David and Israel as well, thereby raising their own status relative to David (cf. Isa 3:17; 7:20).[163]

In McCarter's commentary, he connects this double humiliation (shaving and stripping) to other biblical examples of shaving and stripping such as Isaiah 15:2, 20:4 and Jeremiah 41:5, 48:37, examples analyzed above. Furthermore, McCarter interprets the combination of shaving and stripping as emasculating, and he compares it to Oedipus gouging out his eyes after finding out his mother is the woman with whom he had been having sex.[164] In Walter Kim's dissertation on insults in the Bible, he states that "by

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[161] Cynthia R. Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter*. Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 62 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 220.

[162] Tony W. Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA.: Smyth & Helwys Publishers, 2001), 491.

[163] Ibid., 490.

[164] McCarter, *II Samuel : A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 270-271.

violating the face and the buttocks, Hanun created a shaming situation that enveloped both the front and the rear!"[165] Furthermore, Kim explains the social function of the insult with regard to Speech Act Theory:

> "The notion of face entails the modulation of appropriate social distance. The contention that insults mar the face of their target shows up in two senses. First, shaming techniques can go in the direction of coming too close, thereby infringing upon boundaries and violating *power* (e.g., Jer 51:51; 2 Sam 10:5). Second, they can stray too far, thereby ignoring social affinities and violating *solidarity* (e.g., 2 Sam 19:6; Num 12:14). In both instances, the diminishment of the receiver in some public court of appeals eventuates into the perlocutionary effect of being insulted."[166]

Nili Fox's presentation, "Dressed and Undressed: Reflexes of Power in the ANE," analyzes 2 Samuel 10 through the lens of "dress" manipulation and notes that "official garments often symbolized the position of an office holder, whether priest, royal functionary, or king, shedding or tearing the garments indicated, at least symbolically, the cancellation of an office and associated contracts."[167] Applied to the image of David's messengers in 2 Samuel 10 being stripped of their official garments (which would have been representative of their status as royal messengers), the message is clear: Hanun was

[165] Walter Kim, "The Language of Verbal Insults in the Hebrew Bible," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007), 27.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Nili S. Fox, "Dressed and Undressed: Reflexes of Power in the ANE" (presentation, ASOR annual meeting, San Francisco, CA, Nov 18, 2011). Fox cites other examples of "dress manipulation" in her presentation: "in foreshadowing the fall of Saul's dynasty the biblical writer recounts how Jonathan, Saul's son and heir, gave his garments and gear to his rival David (1 Sam 18:4); in another episode, David cut the corner of king Saul's coat (24:5-6); and even after his defeat, Saul's corpse was stripped, mutilated, and publicly displayed by his Philistine adversaries (31:9)."

symbolically stripping David of his royalty. Furthermore, Fox states that through this action, "Hanun had dissolved diplomatic relations by challenging David's masculinity, his honor and kingship."[168]

Nakedness is also associated with military defeat in ancient iconographic depictions from Mesopotamia and Egypt.[169] The Stele of Vultures, an Early Dynastic monument from the mid-third millennium BCE, celebrates city-state Lagash's victory over neighbor Umma by depicting the defeated warriors, naked and stacked one top of each other, under the watchful gaze of Lagash's clothed warriors who don headgear, kilts, and weapons.[170] Julia M. Asher-Greve and Deborah Sweeney note in their chapter, "On Nakedness, Nudity, and Gender," in *Images and Gender*: "In the Uruk period all 'soldiers' were depicted naked, but beginning in the Early Dynastic period, only enemies are rendered naked, emphasizing their humiliating situation."[171]

Fox also cites images on the Balawat Gates of Neo-Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III, which show naked prisoners of war publicly paraded by fully clothed Neo-Assyrian soldiers.[172] These naked prisoners are bound to each other by ropes around their necks, and their arms are contorted and tied behind their backs in what appears to be a very

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[168] Ibid.

[169] For a comprehensive study on this topic, see Mark D. Janzen, "The Iconography of Humiliation: The Depiction and Treatment of Bound Foreigners in New Kingdom Egypt," (PhD diss., The University of Memphis, 2013).

[170] Julia M. Asher-Greve and Deborah Sweeney, "On Nakedness, Nudity, and Gender, in *Images and Gender: Contributions to the Hermeneutics of Reading Ancient Art*. Orbis Biblicus Et Orientalis, 220, ed. Silvia Schroer (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006), 137.

[171] Ibid.

[172] Fox, "Dressed and Undressed: Reflexes of Power in the ANE," (presentation, American Schools of Oriental Research annual meeting, San Francisco, CA, Nov 18, 2011).

painful position. Similarly, the "Battlefield Palette" from the Naqada III period in Egypt (third millennium BCE) depicts prisoners with arms bound behind their backs and genitalia exposed. Although these figures appear to have narrow belts or loincloths, their penises are fully exposed.[173] In interpreting iconography showing naked prisoners, Fox cites textual evidence from Neo-Assyrian sources:

> "King Esarhaddon boasts that he restored the identity of freed prisoners by clothing their nakedness and allowing them to return home to Babylonia. It is their clothes that make them once again Babylonians (Borger, Episode 37 ll. 18-28). Assurbanipal relates how the king of Elam, Tammaritu, after fleeing in defeat, came before him naked crawling on the ground, brushing it with his beard (Streck, Assurbanipal, IV ll. 23-29). Clearly the object of attack is the enemy's masculinity. "[174]

Interpretation

Interpreting the socio-political ramifications of Hanun's multi-faceted insult requires synthesizing the above data on political milieu, social power, and the insult itself in a way that delineates the social station of both Hanun and David prior to and after the insult, and how the insult impacts their relative stations. To do this, the first step is tracing how the social power markers position Hanun and David prior to Hanun's insult, then a determination will be made as to how the insult functions within this political

[173] Julia M. Asher-Greve and Deborah Sweeney, "On Nakedness, Nudity, and Gender, in *Images and Gender: Contributions to the Hermeneutics of Reading Ancient Art*. Orbis Biblicus Et Orientalis, 220, ed. Silvia Schroer (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006), 138.

[174] Fox, "Dressed and Undressed: Reflexes of Power in the ANE," (presentation, American Schools of Oriental Research annual meeting, San Francisco, CA, Nov 18, 2011).

matrix. Finally, this study will propose reasons the Bible documented the embarrassing insult against David's men even though David is the protagonist.

How Social Power Markers Position Individuals

As stated previously, various social power dynamics are at play in the Hanun episode, especially since David and Hanun found themselves flush with newfound political power due to the expansion of their royal roles. Concerning legitimate power, both men had relatively equal status in their respective positions—David had finally gained sovereignty over all Israel after the death of Saul and his heirs, and Hanun had stepped into the Ammonite kingly role after the death of his father. This reality means that both men were in the precarious position of having to prove themselves both domestically and abroad in such a way as to maintain their power to the greatest extent possible.

This dynamic is most poignantly demonstrated in the Ammonite royal advisors' influence over Hanun. The text states that the advisors stepped in when David sent messengers, and they called into question David's true intentions. While the Bible says unequivocally that David sent the messengers to express condolences to Hanun, the Ammonite advisors surmised that David had sent the messengers as spies—to check out their land for the purposes of invading. Hanun apparently felt the political pressure and chose to act on his advisors' claims. Like Solomon's newly crowned son, Rehoboam, who caused the split of the Israelite kingdom by choosing to listen to his younger advisors in 1 Kings 12:6-15, Hanun began his new reign by following the counsel of his advisors, a decision which broke the former alliance with Israel and started war.

Concerning reward power, both leaders had resources at their disposal with David having gained booty from his exploits against the surrounding groups and Hanun having the resources to hire Aramean mercenaries. However, due to questions about the literary placement of the chapter in which David's exploits and collection of booty are recorded (2 Samuel 8), it is difficult to know specifically how much each leader had in his respective "war chest" at the time when Ammon and Israel went to war. What is apparent is that Hanun was able to purchase an alliance while there is no indication that David was able or wished to do so. When Israel went to war with Ammon it also went to war with Aram. This indicates that in the category of reward power, Hanun seems to have had more influence than David. This portrayal may have been the aim of the biblical author who wanted to demonstrate that David, with the help of the LORD, was a more formidable force than any alliance which could be bought with riches.

With regard to coercive power, David and Hanun were relatively equally positioned at the time of their encounter. David enjoyed the reputation of a formidable warrior who was ready and willing to conquer any enemy, and Hanun had a family legacy of cruel treatment of enemies due to his father's previous dealings with Jabesh-Gilead during Saul's time. Notably, due to David's close proximity to Saul by being in his court and among his troops for a period, David would have known the story of Nahash's threat which was the occasion of Saul's rise to kingship. Additionally, David alludes to some type of alliance with Nahash in 2 Samuel 10, indicating that David would have known of Nahash's cruel reputation (and Hanun's by association). Hanun also would have known about David's reputation through his father's alliance with David. The most interesting aspect of this scenario, though, is that Hanun and David appear to

have been impervious to the potential coercive influence of the other due to the "friendly" relations between David and Ammon prior to Nahash's death. David indicated no fear of Hanun when he sent messengers to Ammon, and Hanun indicated no fear of David when he sent the messengers back to David utterly humiliated.

With the understanding that both Hanun and David had relatively equal measures of both legitimate power and coercive power, and that Hanun had possibly more reward power than David, an exploration of the last source of power evident in 2 Samuel 10—referent power—is in order. Though nothing is known from the biblical witness about Hanun's charismatic influence, it is evident that David enjoyed the reputation of being able to win over his people through demonstrations of exemplary character. So, whereas Hanun appears to have had more reward power, David appears to have had more referent power. Both seem to have been equal with regard to legitimate and coercive power. It must be noted, however, that certain power types may be more influential than other power types in any given situation.

How Insult Operates Politically

As exhibited in the previous section, prior to the events in 2 Samuel 10 David and Hanun enjoyed a relative power equilibrium, so any political act that could tip the scales one way or the other could result in a power imbalance, giving one leader a political advantage over the other. In terms of French and Raven's social power models, 2 Samuel 10 demonstrates David as the agent (O) in that he took initiative in contacting Hanun (P), the person over which he wished to have influence. The cultural context of David's diplomatic act indicates that David wanted to exert positive influence (influence in the

direction of O's wishes) over Hanun through official condolences and perhaps gifts, in order to produce an outcome in line with David's wishes (A = David's desired outcome). In this scenario, A = maintaining the alliance which existed between Ammon and Israel under Nahash's tenure. This would mean that Ammon, the Transjordanian territory to Israel's east, would not constitute a threat to Israel as other entities did, and David's kingdom would maintain its security on that eastern front. However, Hanun chose to rebuff David's gesture in a most humiliating way, represented by ~~A~~ (~~A~~ = David's wishes not being met). Thus, David actually had negative influence (influence over P in the opposite direction of O's intention) over Hanun, indicating that David exerted negative control over Hanun. If Hanun had done nothing positively or negatively in response to David's messengers, David would have had no control at all over Hanun.

Given the fact that David's messengers personally represented him, their beards being shaved in half and their garments being "cut" up to the point of exposing their genitals and buttocks meant that Hanun exposed David in this same way, symbolically stripping David of his kingship and nullifying the former alliance between Ammon and Israel. Saul Olyan states that this act "functions to disaffiliate the Ammonites from David and vice versa, and this disaffiliation is signaled by the text's remark that the Ammonites had made themselves odious (*b'š*) to David through their actions (v. 6)."[175] Olyan also sees significance in the ritual mourning context of Hanun's insult, "effectively turning the

[175] Saul Olyan, "Theorizing Violence in Biblical Ritual Contexts: The Case of Mourning Rites," in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion*, ed. Saul M. Olyan (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 174.

embassy of mourning allies (the comforters) and the ruler whom they represent into nonmourning enemies.[176]

Furthermore, that Hanun committed these acts upon David's messengers, and then he "sent them away" (וַיְשַׁלְּחֵם) provides another hint about Hanun's motives. This phrase, "and then he sent them away," includes the last verb, *šlḥ* (שָׁלַח), in a chain of narrative preterite forms with Hanun as the subject: " he took" וַיִּקַּח; "and he shaved" וַיְגַלַּח; "and he cut" וַיִּכְרֹת; "and he sent them away" וַיְשַׁלְּחֵם. There is no indication here that Hanun waited for a period of time to return the messengers to David. Rather, Hanun sent the shaved and stripped messengers promptly back to David so that David (and presumably Ammon and everyone else along the messengers' return route) could see them.

In Samuel A. Meier's study of messengers in the ANE/EMED, he notes that certain protocols are evident with regard to the reception of messengers including their arrival, their presentation of the sender's message, and the receiving party's response.[177] The receiving party's response generally included interrogating the messenger, taking counsel, caring for the messenger, and returning the messenger.[178] Of these four components, the Bible does not mention any interrogation of David's messengers though it certainly could have happened, but it does mention Hanun taking counsel with his

[176] Ibid.

[177] Samuel A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, No. 45 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989). For a description of the aspects of arrival, presentation of message, and reception of message, see Meier's chapter 3 "The Messenger's Arrival," chapter 4 "Presenting the Message," and chapter 5 "After the Message is Delivered."

[178] Ibid., 203-244.

officials, an inversion of the "caring for the messenger" expectation, and the return of David's messengers. Moreover, Meier states that in addition to bringing the message to the intended recipient, the messenger's role included relaying important information back to the sender: "A messenger, therefore, typified not only the mouth of the one who sent him but his eyes and ears as well. His task was not only output in dispensing information from his master but also input in collecting data for the benefit of the one who sent him."[179] In the episode described in 2 Samuel 10, Hanun's insult was the actual, albeit symbolic, content of the message he sent back to David.

Another aspect to consider with regard to the political function of Hanun's insult is the honor/shame cultural milieu in which it occured. Many anthropologists studying the honor/shame model have seen comparisons between biblical social mores and those found in Mediterranean society, and this study will review some of those to illuminate the political function of Hanun's insult.[180] However, from a methodological standpoint it must be noted that there are within the field of anthropology reservations about generalizing Mediterranean culture in this way. Johanna Stiebert addresses this in her book, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible*, and calls for "a need for particularization: for assessing social phenomena in specified contexts."[181] Though Stiebert's book focuses on prophetic texts and not the texts covered in this study, she

[179] Ibid., 232.

[180] For a helpful summary of these anthropological studies on shame applied to biblical topics, see chapter 1. "Shame and Biblical Literature" in Johanna Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT Supplement Series 346 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 25-86.

[181] Ibid., 21.

does provide this useful methodological approach which this study will adopt as well—acknowledging the nuances of context while gleaning insights from applicable anthropological data.

In Gary Stansell's article, "Honor and Shame in the David' Narratives," he explains David's overture toward Hanun and the Ammonite response in anthropological terms.[182] Stansell states that, "in an agonistic society, any move to enter into contact with outsiders is perceived as a challenge."[183] An agonistic society is one in which human interactions are viewed in terms of challenges and responses, and Stansell sees ancient Israelite society as such a society. This understanding means that Hanun would have viewed David's sending of messengers as a challenge to his honor, and Hanun would have felt social pressure to respond in a way that bolstered his own honor, even at the expense of David's. Stansell points out that Hanun's response to David's challenge was public and symbolic.[184] Following Stiebert's warning to take context into consideration while applying anthropological data to biblical passages, it must be noted that there is no overt evidence that Hanun saw David's overture as a challenge simply because David was an outsider. However, evidence supporting Stansell's approach may be seen in that Hanun's advisors assumed that David had antagonistic motives in sending his messengers.

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[182] Gary Stansell, "Honor and Shame in the David Narratives," in *Was ist der Mensch? Beitrage zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments*, ed. Frank Crüsemann (Munich, Germany: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1992), 94-114.

[183] Ibid., 109.

[184] Ibid.

Julian Pitt-Rivers' anthropological insights on biblical events in his book, *The Fate of Shechem*, undergird Stansell's approach.[185] Pitt-Rivers uses anthropological data from the Mediterranean, and specifically modern Andalusian society, to interpret biblical concepts of honor and shame. Pitt-Rivers explains that in these cultures, challenges to honor cannot be left unaddressed if one is to maintain their honor: "To leave an affront unavenged is to leave one's honour in a state of desecration and this is therefore equivalent to cowardice."[186] However, the biblical context shows that even after being publicly humiliated, David was not the first aggressor.

According to the biblical text, the Ammonites realized that they had נִבְאֲשׁוּ "become a stench" to David after Hanun humiliated David's messengers, then they hired Arameans to fight against David. The Ammonites obviously assumed retaliation was on its way and needed help. The verbal root here *bʾš* בָּאַשׁ means literally to have a bad smell, but in its passive *Niphal* form it is also euphemistic for becoming an object of particular political ire. Other similar contexts include 1 Samuel 13:4 where the Israelites "became a stench" to the Philistines after attacking the Philistine outpost at Geba, and 2 Samuel 16:21 where Ahithophel gives advice to David's traitorous son, Absalom, about how to break with his father publicly by "becoming a stench" to David through sleeping with David's concubines in open view of all Israel. In both instances, the party who made themselves "a stench" instigated retaliation from the other party.

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[185] Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem, or, the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean*. Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology, No. 19, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[186] Ibid., 5.

In the case of Hanun's insult, the act seems to have been an attempt at shifting the otherwise equal power dynamics between David and himself (i.e., David and Hanun both come to the episode with sources of legitimate power and coercive power, while David has one for referent power and Hanun has one for reward power) in Hanun's favor. Possibly, Hanun hoped to gain power over David by neutralizing David's coercive power and referent power. In being so publicly humiliated, Hanun may have hoped that David would incur a social injury to his reputation as a formidable warrior. Additionally, Hanun not only instigated war with Israel through his actions, but he forced a reaction from David who was forced to defend his honor, thus abandoning his reputation as one who dealt graciously with even his enemies. However, as the scenario plays out in the biblical narrative with David gaining the upper hand over Hanun's coalition, David is portrayed as victorious even after being victimized.

Bible's Use of Insult

The biblical author's use of Hanun's insult in the account described in 2 Samuel 10 is mainly for the purposes of characterization, although it does describe the impetus for the war between the Ammonite-Aramean alliance and Israel. David is portrayed as following cultural custom in sending messengers to Hanun on the occasion of his father's death, to maintain the standing alliance between Ammon and Israel. David's gracious diplomacy conveys that he is politically savvy. David is then publicly wronged when Hanun shaves and strips his messengers. As Gary Stansell explains,

> "David is presented as being sensitive to the dishonor his men have experienced, which he of course shares with them as their leader. He has them remain away from

> Jerusalem until their beards grow back (v.5). But the damage has been done, as the end of the introduction indicates in v.6a: "And the Ammonites saw that they had made a stench (*nib ʿᵃšū*) with David". The verb bā'aš ("to stink", BDB, 920) is elsewhere connected with acts that bring dishonor, and here it means as much as they "had acted shamefully", as the LXX suggests (κατησχύνθησαν). But it is not for David to take revenge and defend his honor; rather, it is the Ammonites who prepare for war (vv.6bff)."[187]

In this way, the narrative places the fault for the ensuing war solely upon the Ammonites, not on David or the Israelites who are portrayed as only defending themselves.

Conclusion

This analysis of 2 Samuel 10 offers evidence that the interaction between David and Hanun was political in nature and contains an insult that has similarities with other insults in related ANE/EMED texts which describe sending and receiving messengers. These similarities indicate that insults to messengers constituted a socio-political phenomenon meant to send a message back to the leader who commissioned their trip. Analyzing the negotiation of power dynamics surrounding Hanun's insult shows how this action functioned in the political environment of David and Hanun's early reigns. In short, when Hanun refused to act according to David's wishes to reassert the alliance between Israel and Ammon, he upset the social power equilibrium that was present

[187] Gary Stansell, "Honor and Shame in the David Narratives," in *Was ist der Mensch? Beitrage zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments*, ed. Frank Crüsemann (Munich, Germany: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1992), 110.

through their relatively equal status. Thus, David unwittingly exerted negative influence and negative control over Hanun by sending his messengers—causing a military response that brought about the war between Israel and the Ammonite-Aramean coalition. This war gave yet another victory to David as the LORD's anointed while he is portrayed in the Bible as entirely innocent of instigating it, and the result is that Israel's enemies were neutralized.

CHAPTER FOUR:
SLEEPING WITH CONCUBINES
(2 SAMUEL 16)

The account of Absalom sleeping with David's concubines in 2 Samuel 16 is the third biblical example under analysis. This selection is included in this study due to both its description of a social injury in the political context of the early monarchy and its affinities with other ANE/EMED texts that provide context for analysis. These comparative texts include an Old Babylonian list of concubines in the palace at Mari, a Hittite treaty referencing the status of palace women, and a Late Bronze Age text from the El-Amarna archive describing women being used for political leverage. The political context of the insult in 2 Samuel 16 is Absalom's rebellion against his father, King David, an account which is rich in narrative descriptions of political posturing. These descriptions provide a specific socio-political matrix in which to situate the insult to determine its function. The ANE/EMED comparisons provide insight about the meaning and function of similar insults.

Introduction

The larger literary unit surrounding the pericope describing Absalom's insult includes 2 Samuel 13-20. This section focuses largely on King David's encounters with his third-born son, Absalom, who attempts a *coup d'etat* but is ultimately unsuccessful and pays with his life. Absalom is one of six sons born to David during his seven years ruling in Hebron (1 Chr 3:1-9). When the events surrounding Absalom's rebellion begin, David is firmly established as king over all Israel, and he rules from Jerusalem.

At the beginning of this section, Absalom orchestrates the murder of his oldest brother, Amnon, David's heir apparent, when he finds out that Amnon has defiled his half-sister, Tamar, by sexually violating her then dismissing her (2 Sam 13).[188] In fear for his safety after having Amnon murdered, Absalom flees to his mother's relatives in Geshur. Three years later, Absalom is called back to Israel by David's commander, Joab, who perceives that David deeply misses Absalom in his absence (2 Sam 14). However, David still does not allow Absalom to come into his presence for another two years which causes Absalom to use coercive methods to gain personal access to David. After David finally agrees to accept Absalom back into his presence, Absalom's traitorous efforts against his father begin in earnest, culminating in David fleeing from Jerusalem to escape Absalom and his followers.

On David's journey out of Jerusalem, he encounters men associated with the house of Saul who appear to take advantage of David's misfortune. First, Ziba, a servant from Saul's household, brings David provisions in a show of loyalty. Ziba reveals to David that Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth, is back in Jerusalem waiting for the kingdom to be given back over to him when David is deposed. This news influences David to give all Mephibosheth's property to Ziba (2 Sam 16:3-4). Next, a Benjaminite named Shimei

[188] It is also possible that Absalom used this as an opportunity to get rid of Amnon who would have been next in line to the Davidic throne. If, however, Absalom's motivations were to avenge Tamar, it may have been because Amnon refused to marry Tamar after raping her, an offense which may have been understood as an afront to biblical law (Deut 22:28-29). In Esther Fuchs' feminist ideological criticism of this scene, she points out that Amnon's refusal to marry Tamar seems to be a greater sin than raping her. See *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible As a Woman*. [Pbk. ed.] *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. Supplement Series, 310 (London, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 216. This interpretation does raise issues with regard to the dating of the legal texts relative to the narrative, though. In a more general sense, incestual rape was forbidden (cf. Lev 18:9 & 20:17).

curses and throws stones and dirt at David and the fleeing royal party in retaliation for David being a "man of blood" (אִישׁ הַדָּמִים), or murderer of Saulides (2 Sam 16:7).

The competing advice of two royal counselors, Ahithophel and Hushai, takes center stage next as both try to influence Absalom in his *coup* attempt (2 Sam 16:15-17:23).[189] Ahithophel is loyal to Absalom while Hushai is loyal to David, but Hushai feigns fidelity to Absalom by declaring that Absalom, as the royal son, has been chosen by the LORD and the people of Israel (2 Sam 16:18). In this way, Absalom believes he has the loyalty of both royal advisors. Absalom's insult of sleeping with David's concubines occurs within this context when Ahithophel advises Absalom to take this action to publicly humiliate his father, effectuating a final break with David (2 Sam 16:15-23).

After Absalom follows Ahithophel's advice and sleeps with David's concubines, Ahithophel also advises Absalom to quickly pursue David with 12,000 men to kill him that night. Ahithophel reasons that acting before David has a chance to organize will culminate in a more likely victory, and all the people with David will turn to Absalom when their leader is killed (2 Sam 17:1-4). Hushai, on the other hand, advises Absalom to wait and take a more calculated move using troops from "all Israel" (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל) (2 Sam 17:11).[190] Absalom decides to follow Hushai's advice, a fateful move which ultimately

[189] Ahithophel goes over to Absalom's side at the beginning of the *coup* (2 Sam 15:12), but after David flees, he sends Hushai back to Absalom in Jerusalem with the express purpose of gaining intelligence and thwarting Ahithophel's advice (2 Sam 15:32-36).

[190] McCarter explains that "the effect of the adoption of this plan will be to permit David to rest (cf. 16:14), to obtain provisions for his army (17:27-29), to organize his forces (18:1-2a), and, perhaps most importantly, to select the terrain on which the battle will be fought (18:6)." See note 8 in *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, V. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 386.

leads to several pivotal events: Ahithophel kills himself (2 Sam 17:23), David is victorious over Absalom (2 Sam 18:6-8), Absalom dies at the hands of Joab and his armor bearers (2 Sam 18:14-15), and David is restored as king over Israel (2 Sam 19-20).

Within the context of this larger narrative of Absalom's rebellion, the verses which are under analysis in this chapter (2 Sam 16:20-23) focus on Absalom's insult against David which seeks to cause a permanent political rift between Absalom and his father. Specifically, these verses describe Ahithophel's explicit advice for Absalom to sleep with David's concubines, the political rationale behind that move, and a statement about how Absalom carries it out publicly. Finally, this section ends with an authorial description of the great reputation Ahithophel had as a royal counselor.

Translation

20 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־אֲחִיתֹפֶל הָבוּ לָכֶם עֵצָה מַה־נַּעֲשֶׂה:

Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give your counsel. What should we do?"[191]

21 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲחִיתֹפֶל אֶל־אַבְשָׁלֹם בֹּוא אֶל־פִּלַגְשֵׁי אָבִיךָ אֲשֶׁר הִנִּיחַ לִשְׁמֹור הַבָּיִת וְשָׁמַע כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־נִבְאַשְׁתָּ אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְחָזְקוּ יְדֵי כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אִתָּךְ:

And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Have sex with your father's concubines which he left behind to watch the house, then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself offensive to your father, and the determination of all who are with you will become stronger."[192]

22 וַיַּטּוּ לְאַבְשָׁלוֹם הָאֹהֶל עַל־הַגָּג וַיָּבֹא אַבְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־פִּלַגְשֵׁי אָבִיו לְעֵינֵי כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Then a tent was pitched for Absalom on the roof, and Absalom had sex with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

23 וַעֲצַת אֲחִיתֹפֶל אֲשֶׁר יָעַץ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם כַּאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאַל־בִּדְבַר הָאֱלֹהִים כֵּן כָּל־עֲצַת אֲחִיתֹפֶל גַּם־לְדָוִד גַּם לְאַבְשָׁלֹם: ס

So, the counsel of Ahithophel which he gave in those days was like that of one who inquires of God. Thus, as all the counsel of Ahithophel was for David, it was also for Absalom.

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[191] The phrase הָבוּ לָכֶם עֵצָה translated here as "Give your counsel" includes the 2mp imperative ending on the verb יָהַב and the 2mp pronominal ending on the preposition לְ. Gesenius (§119s) mentions this use of the preposition after certain verbs as a *dativus ethicus* emphasizing the importance of the event for the subject. Other examples with this verb include Deut 1:13, Josh 18:4, and Judg 20:7.

[192] Matitiahu Tsevat translates נִבְאַשְׁתָּ "You have challenged" based upon other *niphal* forms of באש, thus " See "Marriage and Monarchical Legitimacy in Ugarit and Israel" in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 3, no. 3 (1958): 237-243. Tsevat argues that in political contexts this phrase indicates a provocation or challenge.

Political Milieu

In order to fully understand the significance of the insult Absalom perpetrates by sleeping with David's concubines, and how the insult operates within the specific socio-political power matrix described in the narrative, a thorough description of the political milieu is necessary. On the macro political level, this episode takes place in the early monarchic period, well after David is installed as king over all Israel and moves his base of operations from Hebron to Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:1-9). This geographic move from Hebron to Jerusalem is politically significant because it situates David's royal capital in a neutral territory not associated with either the northern or southern tribes.[193] Thus, by moving his base of operations to this location, David presents himself as an impartial ruler over all the tribes, a shrewd political move.

After David's rule is established domestically by garnering the support of all the Israelite tribes, he then subdues the neighboring enemies of Israel including the Philistines, Moabites, Arameans, Edomites, and Ammonites (2 Sam 8 & 10). As a result of David's military victories against these groups, the Bible records that he gains attention and gifts from King Hiram of Tyre (2 Sam 5:11) and King Tou of Hamath (2 Sam 8:9). King Hiram sends David gifts of cedar and craftsmen in a show of support for David's royal building project. King Tou sends his own son to David bearing gifts of

[193] David had previously taken advantage of Hebron's loyalties when he made that city its power base. See Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 51-52: "After the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, David proceeded immediately to seize the throne of Judah as a stepping-stone to replacing Saul as king of a united Israel, transferring his band to Hebron, the central city of the tribe of Judah. This was politically the proper place to launch a bid to replace Saul, since Judah was David's tribe and served as his power base." On the political significance of David's move later from Hebron to Jerusalem, see John Bright, *A History of Israel*. 2nd ed. (London: S.C.M. Press, 1972), 195."

silver, gold, and bronze items. In the context of David's rising status and military victories in the region, these acts should be understood as diplomatic overtures. Steven M. Ortiz explains that due to David's success in using a "conquer and control" policy, Hamath and Tyre, along with Philistia and northern Transjordan, were "required to accept David's hegemony."[194]

The narrative about David's rule takes a decidedly different tone when David decides to stay home instead of go war against the Ammonites during the siege of their capital, Rabbah (2 Sam 11). David's decision to disengage from battle leads to his illicit sexual encounter with another man's wife in the famous story about David and Bathsheba. In the account, Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, is an elite fighter in David's army and is off fighting with the Israelites at Rabbah when David sees Bathsheba bathing on a nearby roof and takes her for his own pleasure. When Bathsheba sends word to David that she has become pregnant as a result, David has her husband killed in battle. Afterward, David is rebuked by the prophet Nathan who proclaims to David: "the sword will never depart from your house" לֹא־תָסוּר חֶרֶב מִבֵּיתְךָ עַד־עוֹלָם (2 Sam 12:10).

In a second prophetic announcement that has great significance in contextualizing Absalom's insult against David later, Nathan also proclaims in the name of the LORD (2 Sam 12:11-12):

[194] Steven M. Ortiz, "United Monarchy: Archaeology and Literary Sources," in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess, 230-231.

הִנְנִי מֵקִים עָלֶיךָ רָעָה מִבֵּיתֶךָ וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶת־נָשֶׁיךָ לְעֵינֶיךָ וְנָתַתִּי

לְרֵעֶיךָ וְשָׁכַב עִם־נָשֶׁיךָ לְעֵינֵי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ הַזֹּאת: כִּי אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ

בַסָּתֶר וַאֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה נֶגֶד כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנֶגֶד הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:

> "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel."

From this point forward, the biblical narrator describes many troubling events in David's reign which are framed as acts of divine retribution. Most of these events involve David's own sons. In Daniel Bodi's comparison of ANE/EMED texts to biblical texts about David, Bodi states that this biblical notion of retribution was common in "all the major cultures of the Mediterranean shoreline," but Bodi specifically mentions "the motif of repeating evil acts of one's father" in both the Amorite and Hebrew cultures.[195] To demonstrate this, Bodi cites a letter from ancient Mari in the Old Babylonian period which describes a scenario where the king, Yahdun-Lim, commits a sacrilege against the god of the afterlife, Nergal. As a result, Yahdun-Lim is punished by having his son rebel against him and take his throne.[196]

As part of the narrator's description of divine judgment falling on David for his inappropriate sexual encounter with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, David

[195] Daniel Bodi, "The Story of Samuel, Saul, and David," in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess, 190-226.

[196] Ibid., 205.

experiences tragedies that mirror his own offenses. David's firstborn son, Amnon, rapes David's daughter, then two years later Absalom has Amnon killed because David is passive and does not take action with regard to Amnon (2 Sam 13).[197] At the time of year when sheep shearing is performed and the associated celebrations take place, Absalom creates an elaborate ruse to get Amnon away from Jerusalem, then Absalom orders his death (vv. 23-34). Absalom's role in having the heir apparent killed leads to Absalom fleeing to Geshur. Absalom then returns to Jerusalem several years later only to be banished from King David's presence. Eventually, though, Absalom regains the ability to appear to David personally (2 Sam 14).

According to the biblical text, Absalom takes advantage of his reinstated station in Jerusalem by planning a conspiracy (קֶשֶׁר) against David.[198] Absalom begins by publicly aggrandizing himself and ingratiating himself to the people of Israel. In a move meant to style himself in the image of a king, Absalom outfits himself with a royal retinue and takes on the kingly role of judge as he stands near the city gate where he commiserates with those who come seeking justice from the king (2 Sam 15:1-6). Halbertal and Holmes explain the political import of Absalom's actions:

> "He thus begins to peel away David's support by offering himself as the people's champion who will, unlike the king,

[197] Mary J. Evans explains the nature and possible motives for David's passivity: "Even if he was unwilling to put Amnon to death it would have been within his power to force him to marry Tamar. It may be that, being well aware of his own guilt, David felt unable to condemn Amnon. It may also be that in spite of David's great military and diplomatic successes he found taking disciplinary action against members of his family impossible." See *1 And 2 Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 193. David is also portrayed as passive when his son, Adonijah, later attempts to take over the kingdom in a manner very similar to Absalom, proclaiming himself king and taking a chariot and horses (1 Kgs 1:5-6).

[198] See especially the use of קֶשֶׁר in 2 Kings 11:14 where Athaliah recognizes the gathering of the "people of Israel" as treason. See also Ezek 22:25 and 2 Kings 15:15.

> hear their pleas and redress their grievances. Such pandering is politically costless and it has an effect on discontented suitors even when they have good reasons to be skeptical of empty promises. The seductive charm of political rhetoric and public overpromising is well-known."[199]

To seal the effect of Absalom's manipulation of the Israelites, Absalom touches and kisses any who bow to him. In doing this, the biblical author concludes that "Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel" וַיְגַנֵּב אַבְשָׁלוֹם אֶת־לֵב אַנְשֵׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל (2 Sam 15:6).

There is some question about the scope of Absalom's influence over the "people of Israel" due to the ambiguous meaning of this phrase which is sometimes used to describe all the tribes and sometimes used to describe only the northern tribes. Was Judah loyal to David while the other tribes followed Absalom? Or, had Absalom's guile swayed those in all the tribes? McCarter notes that Hushai's use of "all Israel" כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל alongside the phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" מִדָּן וְעַד־בְּאֵר שָׁבַע (2 Sam 17:11) indicates that Judah was included and implies that Absalom was able to muster troops from all the tribes.[200]

After four years of investing in his public image to win over the people, the text states that Absalom gets David's permission to go to Hebron with 200 men, under the guise of fulfilling a vow. Then, Absalom sends "secret messengers" throughout the tribes

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[199] Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 127.

[200] P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, V. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 357-358. McCarter gives four more reasons to support the notion that Absalom had a following in all the tribes, including Judah: 1) Absalom was from Hebron, capital of Judah; 2) Absalom was proclaimed to be "king of Hebron"; 3) two main leaders of the conspiracy—Ahithophel and Amasa—were from Judah; and 4) David flees from Judah when he leaves Jerusalem.

to proclaim, “Absalom is king in Hebron!” (2 Sam 15:10). Absalom also calls for David’s royal counselor, Ahithophel, and he joins Absalom in Hebron. When David hears that the people have been won over by Absalom’s traitorous plans, he and his royal court flee Jerusalem. However, David leaves behind key persons: ten concubines to guard the royal palace; priests, Zadok and Abiathar, (and their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan) to return the ark; and Hushai, the “companion of David” (רֵעֶה דָוִד), to feign loyalty to Absalom while serving as a mole for David (2 Sam 15:16, 29, & 34-36).[201]

The immediate context of Absalom’s insult, which is embedded within the larger narrative about Absalom’s rebellion, is set in Jerusalem after David leaves and Absalom arrives there. Specifically, the insult takes place within the context of the counsel of Ahithophel and Hushai (2 Sam 16:15-17:23). This pericope can be broken down in the following way:

I. Hushai as a defector (2 Sam 16:15-19)

II. Ahithophel’s first advice (2 Sam 16:20-23)

III. Ahithophel second advice (2 Sam 17:1-4)

IV. Hushai advises about battle (2 Sam 17:5-14)

V. Hushai warns David (2 Sam 17:15-21)

[201] For a discussion of the term רעה as it relates to royal service, see Nili Sacher Fox’s *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, no. 23 (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 121-128. Fox translates the term broadly as “companion,” and she cites several biblical uses of this term or lexically related terms including Genesis 26:26; 2 Samuel 15:37, 16:16, 17; 1 Kings 4:5; 1 Chronicles 27:33; and 1 Kings 16:11. Though the term is often translated “friend,” Fox nuances translations of the term to take context into consideration. In the case of Hushai, Fox (p. 122) notes that in 1 Chronicles 27 the biblical author places Hushai’s name among those of other administrators, and in 2 Samuel 15 Hushai has the role of advisor similar to that of Ahithophel. However, Fox also admits that Hushai’s intimate knowledge of the king could have been the impetus for Absalom seeking his counsel.

VI. David escapes (2 Sam 17:22)

VII. Ahithophel hangs himself (2 Sam 17:23)

Absalom sleeps with David's concubines as a direct result of Ahithophel's advice, but it is unclear if Hushai knows about this. According to the text, Absalom does not consult with Hushai until afterward, when Ahithophel counsels Absalom to pursue David in order to kill him quickly. Conversely, Hushai counsels Absalom to wait in order to amass more troops, a move that lets David gain the upper hand. Ultimately, after Absalom and the people of Israel hear both ideas, they discern that Hushai's counsel seems better than Ahithophel's counsel, and Absalom waits to act. This delay gives David an advantage as Hushai sends a message to warn him, so David has time to leave the area (2 Sam 17:21-22). That Absalom follows Hushai's advice over his own counselor's advice is an outcome that is attributed to the LORD's intervention in order to bring about Absalom's defeat (2 Sam 17:14b).

After David escapes to Mahanaim and gathers his troops, some of David's men meet Absalom's troops in the Forest of Ephraim, and 20,000 of Absalom's troops are defeated. Absalom gets his long hair entangled in tree branches, rendering him vulnerable to attack, and Joab and his men take advantage of the situation and kill Absalom brutally (2 Sam 18:7-16). As for the fate of David's ten concubines, the biblical text states that when David is restored to his place as king in Jerusalem, "he put them in a house under guard, and he provided for them, but he did not have sexual intercourse with them" וַיִּתְּנֵם בֵּית־מִשְׁמָרֶת וַיְכַלְכְּלֵם וְאֵלֵיהֶם לֹא־בָא (2 Sam 20:3).

Power Markers

Surveying the macro and micro contexts in which Absalom's insult is situated provides details about the particular political weaknesses and strengths of both David and Absalom. Though David's kingship was already established over all Israel at the time of Absalom's rebellion, his sin with Bathsheba brought about divine rebuke which set in motion many turbulent events involving David's sons. These events were foretold in Nathan's prophecies which predicted that David would experience violence and betrayal within his own household because he perpetrated the same offenses against another man's household (i.e., Uriah, David's faithful soldier). The prophesied violence begins when David's first-born, Amnon, is killed by David's third-born, Absalom, and the prophesied betrayal begins when Absalom instigates a rebellion against his father. That David's own counselor, Ahithophel, joins Absalom in this betrayal adds to David's woes.

As for Absalom, the macro and micro political contexts demonstrate that, over time, Absalom benefits from his machinations against his own brother and father, and he rises in status as a result of positioning himself as a friend of the common people. In both instances, Absalom leverages his station as a royal son and the associated privileges to carry out his desires. Regarding the killing of Amnon, Absalom's access to all the king's sons at his sheep shearing celebration in Baal Hazor gives him the opportunity to get Amnon away from Jerusalem to have him killed (2 Sam 13:23-27). And, Absalom's ability to send secret messengers from Hebron, the city where David once reigned, gives him the ability to portray himself to the people as king there as well (2 Sam 15:10-11). In the same way, at Hebron Absalom gathers to himself 200 guests including David's

counselor, Ahithophel, who give the impression of being collaborators in his *coup* (2 Sam 15:11-12).

In addition to understanding the political context of Absalom's rebellion explored above, a study of the applicable social power bases will further clarify the types of competing power sources held by significant individuals in the account. To recap the analytical model which is being used in this study to identify social power markers, social psychologists John R. P. French and Bertram Raven specify six bases of power in their research on social power: *legitimate*, *reward*, *coercive*, *referent*, *expert,* and *information*. French and Raven define power as the ability of an agent (O) to influence someone (P) within a system, and they define influence as the ability to elicit psychological change.

French and Raven also give attention to the directions of influence which are possible in power interactions to better explain how influence causes different types of reactions in a given system. If O is successful in influencing P in the direction of O's wishes, O exerts positive control over P. However, if P acts or thinks contrary to O's intentions, O exerts negative control over P. If no change in P is evident as a result of O's influence, there is neither positive nor negative control.

With regard to the direction of influence indicated in the account of Absalom sleeping with David's concubines, the biblical narrative does provide some specific information. Ahithophel's counsel to Absalom explicitly states what Ahithophel hopes will happen as a result of Absalom sleeping with David's concubines, and since Absalom carries out Ahithophel's advice, one can assume that Absalom agreed with Ahithophel's plan. Ahithophel states that by sleeping with David's concubines publicly, Absalom (O) will make himself offensive (i.e., "abhorrent, a stench") to David (P_1), and the resolve of

Absalom's followers (P_2) will then be strengthened (2 Sam 16:21).[202] In this scenario, Absalom is the agent, but there are two entities he wishes to influence by his insulting act—David and those who are already Absalom's followers.

The biblical text is not explicit in declaring David's immediate reaction to Absalom's insult, but it does indicate that when David's men go out to do battle with Absalom and his followers later, David commands his troops to "be gentle with the young man, Absalom, for my sake" לְאַט־לִי לַנַּעַר לְאַבְשָׁלוֹם (2 Sam 18:5). The portrayal of David's disposition here could indicate that he did not come to abhor (i.e., completely break ties with) Absalom as Absalom had assumed he would. As for the impact of Absalom's insult on his own followers, whether positive or negative, the biblical account gives no specific indication of that, but Absalom is said to have thousands of troops on his side (2 Sam 17:1).

Concerning the application of French and Raven's six power bases to the biblical account of Absalom's insult, a careful reading indicates that all six power types are evident (*legitimate, reward, coercive, referent, expert, information*) . Because there are several individuals who have various types of power in the events described in the wider context of Absalom's rebellion, there are multiple dimensions of competing power bases at play. This multi-dimensional dynamic creates a complex socio-political matrix.

Legitimate Power

[202] There are two entities which Ahithophel, and presumably Absalom, wish to influence. These are indicated by P = person under influence, with subscripts (i.e., P_1 and P_2).

According to French and Raven's model, legitimate power is related to the socially-recognized position of the agent (O) over others (P) in a hierarchy.[203] As such, for an agent to have influence over others based on their legitimate power, the agent needs to be recognized by others as having a position which has power, and the agent must be understood as meeting the recognized requirements for that station or role. One example of legitimate power which was given in the introductory chapter of this study is military commanders, individuals who only have power over those under them in the organization's hierarchy because they are perceived as having the authority to lead others—perhaps through training, experience, or education.

In the Bible's depiction of the early monarchic period, legitimate kingship is conferred in various ways, with the foremost example being anointing by a prophetic figure. When Saul is chosen as Israel's first king, the LORD identifies him to the prophet Samuel who confers kingship upon Saul by pouring oil on his head and pronouncing him to be the divinely chosen ruler of Israel (1 Sam 10:1). When Saul has fallen out of favor with the LORD, David is selected as the next king and Samuel pours oil over his head in the presence of his brothers (1 Sam 16:13). Because the meaning and significance of anointing is so integrally related to legitimacy in early Israel, this topic was discussed in more detail in the analysis of Nabal's insult found in chapter two. That analysis of

[203] "Thus, legitimate power in a formal organization is largely a relationship between offices rather than between persons. And the acceptance of an office as *right* is a basis for legitimate power—a judge has a right to levy fines, a foreman should assign work, a priest is justified in prescribing religious beliefs, and it is the management's prerogative to make certain decisions. However, legitimate power also involves the perceived right of the person to hold the office." John R. P. French, Jr. and Bertram H. Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," in *Studies in Social Power*, ed. D. Cartwright (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 265.

anointing is equally applicable to issues of legitimacy in the Absalom episode and does not need to be repeated here.[204] Suffice it to say, however, anointing is an outward sign of pouring oil on an individual which signifies that a special status has been conferred on the individual or transferred to the individual. The prophet, as the divine representative and mouthpiece, acts as an initiator in setting an individual apart by selecting the individual through anointing. The biblical narrative uses descriptions of anointing to convey which individuals are rightly chosen and have the LORD's favor at any given time.

Legitimacy is also conferred by participating in recognized rituals (1 Sam 11:15 & 2 Sam 5:1-3), being divinely chosen (1 Sam 10:17-21), and having a notable physical appearance (1 Sam 9:2, 16:12, & 1 Kgs 1:6).[205] In the previous two chapters of this study, David's legitimacy was explored in order to determine his station in relation to two different individuals who insult him at different times—the aristocrat, Nabal, and the newly crowned Ammonite king, Hanun. When David encounters Nabal he enjoys latent royal legitimacy because he has been anointed by a prophet, but his kingship has not been fully realized (1 Sam 25). In fact, King Saul is still in power over Israel during these events, and David is on the run from him. When David interacts with the newly crowned King Hanun by sending an envoy to Ammon, David too has only recently been crowned as king over all the tribes of Israel (2 Sam 10). However, at the time of Absalom's

[204] See the discussion of anointing in chapter two of this dissertation.

[205] For a discussion of Israelite kingship, see Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series, 8. Lund: LiberLäromedel/Gleerup, 1976).

rebellion David is well-established as king over all Israel, and his main conflict with Absalom centers on the issue of who has the right to be king (2 Sam 16). The biblical narrative alludes to David's legitimate kingship at the start of Absalom's rebellion when it describes people traveling from various tribes to the capital of Jerusalem to seek justice—a role associated with kingship (2 Sam 15:1-2), and descriptions of David's staff indicate a legitimate royal bureaucratic apparatus (2 Sam 8:16-18).[206] As for Absalom, in addition to being the king's son, he presents himself as king in Hebron, a city associated with kingship (2 Sam 15:7-12); he holds an inaugural meal (2 Sam 15:11); and he gains a loyal following (2 Sam 15:13).[207] Thus, issues of legitimate power apply to both David and Absalom.

The pivotal event in David's reign which foreshadows his troubles with Absalom is David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11), and this chapter provides hints about David's station as legitimate king over Israel. According to the biblical text, this episode happens against the backdrop of a battle against Ammon to which David sends his commander, the king's men, and the whole Israelite army, "but David stayed in Jerusalem" וְדָוִד יוֹשֵׁב בִּירוּשָׁלִָם (v. 1). Grammatically, the biblical author's fronting of the subject, וְדָוִד

[206] At the time of Absalom's rebellion, David has been ruling from Jerusalem after building it up and taking more wives (2 Sam 5). David's bureaucracy is alluded to in 2 Samuel 8:16-18 where several court officials are named (e.g., Jehoshaphat the recorder and Seraiah the scribe) in addition to the commander, Joab, and the priests.

[207] David was anointed king over Judah in Hebron (2 Sam 2:1-4) before he was also anointed over all the tribes of Israel. Absalom apparently capitalized on these royal associations with Hebron. Absalom's sacrificial meal with 200 guests is paralleled in a later *coup* attempt by Adonijah preparing a feast of sacrificial animals including oxen, fatlings, and sheep; and Bathsheba also associates this act with kingship (1 Kgs 1:9, 18-19). In another parallel, Adonijah follows in Absalom's footsteps by gathering the right people at his side to demonstrate his legitimacy through their support. Adonijah gathers a priest, the royal commander, other princes, and courtiers (1 Kgs 1:7) while Absalom gathers a royal counselor, 200 guests, and Amasa as commander (2 Sam 15:10-12 & 17:25).

"David," after a disjunctive *waw* indicates a break in the narrative preterite verbal chain which precedes it. The preceding four verbs in the narrative each follow a conjunctive *waw* and are in the *wayyiqtol* pattern, indicating a sequence of completed events.[208] The break in this narrative verbal chain indicates that the biblical author's emphasis is on what *David* did when all his men were at battle. David's choice to stay in Jerusalem leads to his taking a married woman whose husband is one of the very men David had sent out to battle.

The details of this account relate to portrayals of legitimate power because the text implies that in this episode, which precedes and foreshadows Absalom's rebellion and insult toward his father, David's kingship was established to the point that he did not have to go to battle himself anymore. David had already won crucial battles against the neighboring polities such as the Philistines, Moabites, Arameans, and Edomites at this point (2 Sam 8), and by the time David engages in an illicit relationship with Bathsheba, he completely entrusts the security of Israel to his able fighting men, one of which is Bathsheba's own husband, Uriah.

Concerning Absalom's legitimate power, his place in the line of royal succession is significant, as are his actions leading up to his sleeping with David's concubines. Absalom is apparently next in the Davidic line of succession after he has Amnon killed (2 Sam 13:23-39). In the list of sons which David sires while still ruling from Hebron, Amnon is listed first, Chileab is second, Absalom is third, and Adonijah is fourth (2 Sam

[208] Narrative preterite forms followed by the form under analysis which creates a break in the chain are indicated in bold here: וַיְהִי֙ לִתְשׁוּבַ֣ת הַשָּׁנָ֔ה לְעֵ֖ת צֵ֣את הַמַּלְאָכִ֑ים **וַיִּשְׁלַ֞ח** דָּוִ֣ד אֶת־יוֹאָ֗ב וְאֶת־עֲבָדָיו֙ עִמּ֔וֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל **וַיַּשְׁחִתוּ** אֶת־בְּנֵ֣י עַמּ֑וֹן **וַיָּצַ֖רוּ** עַל־רַבָּ֣ה **וְדָוִ֔ד** יוֹשֵׁ֖ב בִּירוּשָׁלָֽ ם׃.

3:2-4). All of these sons appear later in the books of Samuel and Kings except for Chileab. The exclusion of Chileab from later accounts may indicate that Chileab died or was not capable of being king for some reason. When David grows older, and Amnon and Absalom are no longer contenders for the throne because they are no longer living, Adonijah leads a *coup d'etat* very similar to Absalom's, but he is thwarted by those who support Solomon (1 Kgs 1).

Absalom's place in the line of succession gives him inherent legitimate power, but David is still the anointed ruler at the time of the attempted *coup* which means the two men have competing claims to the throne. Absalom seems to have used his status as heir apparent to bolster his royal image. Mary J. Evans sees a calculated strategy in Absalom's actions leading up to the *coup*, including his efforts to exude royal legitimacy by taking a chariot with 50 runners (2 Sam 15:1): "the people were going to notice that Absalom was back and be made to think that Absalom was significant. He imitated the custom of surrounding nations with his display of pomp, exploiting his own good looks. The bodyguard of **fifty men** and the showy **chariot** were different from anything known in Israel so far. Jonathan, the ostensible heir in the previous regime, was more often accompanied by one armor-bearer. Obviously Absalom wanted to be seen as a Very Important Person. If his chariot had been intended for speed he would not have insisted on its being preceded by fifty runners. The people were encouraged to look at Absalom as if he were king."[209]

[209] Mary J. Evans, *1 And 2 Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 198.

In addition to these acts of aggrandizement in the eyes of the people of Israel, the biblical text records that Absalom gets David's royal counselor, Ahithophel, and others to join him in Hebron, a strategic location which adds to Absalom's legitimacy because it has connotations of authentic kingship, David having been previously anointed there by decree of God (2 Sam 2:1-4). Next Absalom moves on the capital of Jerusalem and enters the royal palace, giving himself the appearance of more legitimacy. Meanwhile, David leaves Jerusalem, lessening his own image as an authoritative figure, and thus lessening his legitimate power.

Reward Power

As explained in the introduction to this study, reward power is the potential influence an agent has over others due to the agent's ability to give something of value to others. The reward can be legitimate (e.g., higher salary) or illegitimate (e.g., a bribe), but in order for the reward to have the ability to influence, it needs to be valued by the person whom the agent wants to influence. David, as king, still has the ability to use kingdom resources and his authority to reward others at the time of the attempted *coup*, and this gives him the means to influence others to do his wishes. For example, when David is fleeing Jerusalem, he is met by Ziba, the servant of Saul's grandson Mephibosheth, who brings David provisions of "two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs, and a skin of wine" (2 Sam 16:1).[210] Ziba tells David that

[210] Compare the provisions that Abigail brings to David: "two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs" (1 Sam 25:18). In both scenarios (Ziba bringing provisions and Abigail bringing provisions), David needs provisions for himself and his followers because he is on the move. When Abigail brings provisions, David is living in peripheral regions to escape Saul, and when Ziba brings provisions,

Mephibosheth has not come with him to provision David because he is disloyal to David and hopes the *coup* results in him, an heir of Saul, being given back the kingdom. By virtue of David's authority as king, he has the ability to reward Ziba by assigning Mephibosheth's property to Ziba, and he does so upon hearing that Mephibosheth is a traitor.[211]

Being David's heir, Absalom also wields reward power due to his royal station and resources. When Absalom stands at the entrance to the city gate and suggests to those entering that he would give them the justice they are seeking but not finding from the king, he is implying that were he king instead of David, the people would be rewarded with justice (2 Sam 15:2-4). Absalom is alluding to the king's role as judge as is evident in several accounts describing judicial proceedings over which Israelite kings presided.[212]

One example of David serving as royal judge is in the account of the wise woman from Tekoa who comes to David for justice, albeit as part of Joab's ruse to restore

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David is fleeing Absalom who is attempting to take the kingdom by force. In the case of Ziba and Abigail, it seems that the motivation for bringing the provisions is to gain something from David. Abigail's motivation is to thwart David's plans for vengeance on her foolish husband who refused to show hospitality to David, and Ziba's motivation is to gain the property of his master, Mephibosheth.

[211] When David returns to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth meets him and claims that Ziba betrayed him by refusing to assist him in fleeing with David. David then divides the property Ziba gained from Mephibosheth between Mephibosheth and Ziba (2 Sam 19:24-30).

[212] In Absalom's discussions with the people coming to Jerusalem to seek justice from the king, he tells them, "You do not have a *shomea* (שֹׁמֵעַ) from the king." This Hebrew term, *shomea*, is a participial form of the verb שמע "to hear." Thus, the literal translation of the word is "hearer," indicating that the people had no official provided by the king to hear and assess the validity of their claims. Nili Sacher Fox cites Weinfeld ("Judge and Officer," 80 n. 90) in connecting this term with Egyptian sḏm/sḏmw "to hear/hearer," also used to mean "judge." See *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah*. Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, no. 23 (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000): 167, n. 366).

Absalom after he flees from Jerusalem (2 Sam 14:1-11).[213] In this episode, the woman pretends she has a dilemma regarding her two sons who were involved in an altercation in which one killed the other, a scenario which is analogous to David banishing Absalom for having his brother killed. The woman declares that she wants mercy from the king to keep her son safe instead of handing him over to her relatives who are demanding that he pay for this murder with his life (cf. Deut 19:21). David falls for the concocted story and has compassion on the woman, promising her, "I will issue a decree on your behalf" וַאֲנִי אֶצַוֶּה עָלָיִךְ (2 Sam 14:8).

Another example of Israelite kings functioning as judges involves King Solomon who is presented with the case of two women claiming to be a child's mother and wanting possession of it (1 Kgs 3:16-28). Solomon responds that the baby will be cut in half and one half given to each of the women, a judgment which reveals the identity of the real mother who chooses to give the child away rather than see it harmed. The author's portrayal of Solomon's wisdom in giving such a shrewd judgment is obviously the main point of the story, but it still illustrates kings exercising authority over judicial issues that mattered greatly to their subjects.

As for Absalom's reward power, the biblical text provides evidence that he too had resources at his disposal with which to potentially influence others. For example,

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[213] This woman is designated in the text as a "wise woman" אִשָּׁה חֲכָמָה, and Jonadab, David's nephew, is identified in exactly the same language, i.e., a "wise man," with the addition of the adverb *mᵉōd* meaning "very" (אִישׁ חָכָם מְאֹד) in 2 Samuel 13:3. Both individuals are duplicitous: the woman from Tekoa takes part in a deceptive ruse meant to trick King David, and Jonadab encourages Amnon to deceive David by pretending to be sick in order to get access to Tamar. This descriptor, אִישׁ חָכָם "wise man," is also used to describe skilled artisans (Exod 36:1-2 & 2 Chr 2:6, 12) and it is used in juxtaposition to "fool" in wisdom literature (Prov 26:12 & 29:9).

Absalom's ability to host a sheep shearing feast, a significant event involving all the king's sons and his own attendants, indicates that Absalom had valuable resources at his disposal (2 Sam 13:23-29).[214] Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager explain in their book, *Life in Biblical Israel*, that the festivities associated with sheep shearing indicate that the owner of the sheep had gained great wealth through the wool acquired from the shearing.[215] The description of Absalom's sheep shearing feast involves heavy drinking (2 Sam 13:28) and is, thus, reminiscent of the aristocrat Nabal's sheep shearing feast where he is described as being שִׁכֹּר עַד־מְאֹד "very drunk" (1 Sam 25:36).[216] The kind of excess which both accounts describe indicates great wealth.

Coercive Power

[214] In G.R.H. Wright's article linking 1 Samuel 25 to the Dumuzi myth, he cites several extra-biblical sources such as third century Mesopotamian tablets which treat sheep shearing as a sacred event, including sacrifices and feasting. Wright cites a tablet from Lagash from c. 2,300 BCE which mentions a "sacred" structure associated with sheep shearing: "In the month (= feast?) the building for sheep-shearing." (Dangin Thureau, *Recueil de Tablettes Chaldien*, Paris 1903, p. 19). Also, royal letters from King Ammesaduqa of the Old Babylonian period reference sheep shearing in "the house of the New Year's feast" (R. Frankena, *Briefe aus dem British Museum*, Leiden 1966, pp. 39ff), though no specific connection is made between sheep shearing and the feast Wright further states, "As is almost universal in a rural economy sheep-shearing was de rigeur the occasion for a good time, it was a Yom Tob of feasting and hilarity." Furthermore, Wright argues that the sheep shearing event described in 2 Samuel 13 (at which Absalom has Amnon killed) is linked to the sheep shearing event in 1 Samuel 25 (in which Nabal is killed): "the events of both II Samuel 13 and I Samuel 25 represent a working over of a common source. Reduced to essentials this would be the record: there is an irregular sexual union (overtly or covertly incestuous) and in this connection a man is violently done to death on the occasion of merry making at a sheep shearing festival." See G. R. H. Wright, "Dumuzi at the Court of David," *Nuvem* 28 [June 1981]: 55-58.

[215] Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 113.

[216] The context of Absalom's feast is the ruse created to get Amnon away from Jerusalem in order for Absalom to have him killed.

Both David and Absalom would have had coercive power based on their ability to influence through military might. At the time of Absalom's rebellion, David has many mighty warriors accompany him out of Jerusalem including 600 Gittites, Kerethites, and Pelethites. The designation of 600 men in numerous other examples may indicate the size of a Gittite regiment (1 Sam 13:15, 14:2, & 23:13), but the Kerethites and Pelethites serve as a royal bodyguard loyal to David (2 Sam 8:18).[217] In David's last words just before his death, the leader of the Kerethites and Pelethites, Benaiah, is hailed as a great warrior who accomplished mighty deeds (2 Sam 23:20-23). Abishai, also a formidable warrior who is loyal to David, accompanies David out of Jerusalem, and he threatens violence on David's enemy, Shimei, who insults David on his way out of the city (2 Sam 16:9). The only reason David prohibits Abishai from taking vengeance on Shimei is because David perceives that Shimei may be relaying the LORD's message to him (2 Sam 16:10-12).

Hushai and Ahithophel also allude to David's military might when they give advice to Absalom about how to finalize his *coup* by killing David. Ahithophel describes a scenario where Absalom will need 12,000 troops to pursue David to the point that David will be vulnerable enough to be killed (2 Sam 17:1-2). In Hushai's counsel to Absalom, he states that Absalom and "all Israel" know that David and the fighting men with him are גִּבֹּרִים "mighty men" (2 Sam 17:8-10), so Absalom should garner the support of all the men of Israel to defeat David. Absalom agrees with Hushai's advice

[217] In 2 Samuel 8:18, these two groups are distinct from David's regular army led by his commander, Joab. The Kerethites and Pelethites are led by Benaiah who later remains loyal to David when Adonijah attempts to take the kingdom (1 Kgs 1:8). 1 Chronicles 11:22 gives more detail about the heroic deeds of Benaiah.

ultimately, demonstrating that Absalom agrees with Hushai's assessment of David's military might.

As for Absalom, when he arrives in Jerusalem the narrative states that "Absalom and all the men of Israel" וְאַבְשָׁלוֹם וְכָל־הָעָם אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל came (2 Sam 16:15). Just prior to this statement, the text describes David fleeing Jerusalem with his men while being cursed, pummeled with stones, and showered in dirt by a man from Benjamin named Shimei (v. 13). Thus, the biblical writer makes a distinct contrast between David leaving Jerusalem in disgrace and Absalom entering with the support of Israel. After Absalom sleeps with David's concubines in Jerusalem, Ahithophel counsels Absalom to overcome David and his men quickly with 12,000 troops (2 Sam 17:1). Absalom's large following indicates that he had the ability to influence others through coercion using his military might.

Referent Power

Referent power is the ability of an agent to influence others based on soft traits such as charisma or character. These admirable qualities which the agent possesses compel others to emulate the agent. At the time of Absalom's rebellion, David's referent power, which was so strong earlier in his life, had waned. The pivotal moment in David's reign was his moral failure with Bathsheba, and divine judgment resulted from David's poor choice to exploit his position in order to gain access to another man's wife. David's previous glory faded, and his household began to rupture with violence. Daniel Bodi asserts that "David appears as a man with one deep personality flaw: he was a "ladies' man." … Female figures who appear in the David narrative often play a significant role

as catalysts of change, revealing a significant and sometimes dark side of his personality."[218] The biblical writer may have used this characterization of David to highlight the expectation that kings should not act out of some sense of royal prerogative in taking other's possessions.[219]

By contrast, Absalom's referent power grows during this time. He is described physically as a regal figure, and he becomes quite popular with the people of Israel. According to the biblical text, Absalom is "greatly admired" (לְהֻלָּל מְאֹד) for his very handsome appearance, having "no blemish in him" לֹא־הָיָה בּוֹ מוּם (2 Sam 14:25-26). Additionally, Absalom has hair in abundance—weighting 200 shekels when he cuts it once a year.[220] Halbertal and Holmes explain that "Absalom's exceptional beauty was integral to his political charisma. It helped him attract popular support. In his case, as in many contemporary examples, hair became a site of narcissistic indulgence and a manifestation of enviable prowess."[221]

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[218] Daniel Bodi, "The Story of Samuel, Saul, and David," in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess, 201. For more on the importance of David's wives, see also Adele Berlin, "Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives," *JSOT* 23 (1982):69-85.

[219] This same criticism is evident in the account of Ahab taking Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. Here Jezebel, Ahab's wife, frames Naboth after he refuses to sell his vineyard to Ahab, leading to Naboth's death. Afterward, Ahab takes possession of the vineyard. In the account of David taking Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and Ahab taking Naboth's vineyard, a prophetic rebuke ensues.

[220] McCarter suggests that the mention of Absalom's hair could also indicate strength according to the account of Samson's hair being the source of his strength in Judges 16:15-17. See P. Kyle McCarter. *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, V. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 349.

[221] Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 126.

In addition to Absalom's appearance, his carefully crafted public image as a prince who commiserated with people seeking justice also gave him referent power. According to the biblical narrative, when Absalom stationed himself near the city gate to interact with the people coming into the city, he made himself very accessible to them. Mary J. Evans explains the significance of Absalom's interactions with the populace: "Absalom, having set himself apart from the people as a great prince, proceeded to treat all who came to pay their respects to him as if they were social equals. In an ironic parallel to 14:33 (where Absalom bowed down before David as king and then received his father's kiss), when the supplicants bowed down, Absalom would reach out **and kiss** them."[222]

Expert Power

As explained in the introductory chapter, expert power is the influence an agent has over others as a result of being perceived as a holder of expertise. The two counselors in the account of Absalom's rebellion are both depicted as being very shrewd in their political counsel, one for David's benefit and one for Absalom's benefit. As for Ahithophel, the Bible calls him the "counselor" (יוֹעֵץ) of David, but he changes loyalties from David to Absalom when Absalom invites him to join the group which he gathers in Hebron to name himself king (2 Sam 15:12). Ahithophel also accompanies Absalom when he overtakes Jerusalem after David leaves (2 Sam 16:15). Ahithophel is described as having counsel "like one who inquires of God" כַּאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאַל בִּדְבַר הָאֱלֹהִים (2 Sam

[222] Mary J. Evans, *1 And 2 Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 199.

16:23), and his political importance is demonstrated in that David prays that Ahithophel's counsel to Absalom would be thwarted (2 Sam 15:31).

Hushai, on the other hand, is called the "companion of David" רֵעֶה דָוִד (2 Sam 15:37).[223] Hushai's loyalty is illustrated by his actions when David leaves Jerusalem—he appears with his clothes torn and his head covered in dust just after David prays for the counsel of Ahithophel to be thwarted. After offering to go with David, Hushai agrees to take another role, that of a mole in Absalom's camp. David wants him to "frustrate" פרר the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam 15:34).[224] That Absalom requests Hushai's counsel along with Ahithophel's indicates that Hushai was understood as having specialized political knowledge (2 Sam 17:5-6). Hushai's intimate knowledge of David may have been the source of his expertise while Ahithophel's expertise stemmed from his experience at the royal court.

Information Power

Information power is related to expert power, but information power is specifically related to having access to needed information. For example, the medical advice that a physician gives is privileged information that can influence those who need it. After all, not everyone has access to medical journals or the wherewithal to discern the

[223] For a thorough treatment of this term and implications, see Nili Sacher Fox's *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, no. 23 (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000): 121-128.

[224] פרר in the *Hiphil* form (וְהֵפַרְתָּ֣ה לִּ֔י אֵ֖ת עֲצַ֣ת אֲחִיתֹ֑פֶל) takes on the connotation of making plans or advice ineffectual. See Ezra 4:5 where plans to build are frustrated by opponents.

technical language contained therein. Once information is revealed, however, the power dissipates because the information is common knowledge.

In the account of Absalom's rebellion, the conspiratorial activities themselves were powerful due to their hiddenness. For example, Absalom's secret plans to overturn David's rule indicate information power. Absalom began to ingratiate himself to the people of Israel in an attempt to win them over long before his outright *coup* attempt, but David is portrayed as being unaware of his motives until later. Mary J. Evans comments that, "David had no inkling of Absalom's real plans, no inkling that it was appropriate to speak of belonging to one side or the other. Perhaps he was encouraged by the way in which his son seemed to be making himself so popular."[225] Then when Absalom carried out his plan to announce his sudden kingship in Hebron, his motive was not even known by the 200 men who accompanied him there: "They went innocently, and they did not know anything" הֹלְכִים לְתֻמָּם וְלֹא יָדְעוּ כָּל־דָּבָר (2 Sam 15:11).

David's secret placement of Hushai within Absalom's inner circle also indicates information power. Without Absalom's knowledge, Hushai was loyal to David and gave advice that put Absalom at a disadvantage. Absalom also did not know that Hushai had agreed to send secret messages about Absalom's plans back to David, a plan which gave David an advantage. Information power is at the heart of conspiracies because information is used to lead enemies astray and thwart plans.

[225] Mary J. Evans, *1 And 2 Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 199

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Table 4.1 Power Markers in the Absalom Episode

	Absalom	David	Hushai	Ahithophel
Legitimate Power	Absalom is the king's son, is next in line of succession, presents himself as king in Hebron, and gains a loyal following including David's royal counselor, Ahithophel.	David is well-established as king over all Israel, evidenced by the description of his royal bureaucratic apparatus, his role as judge over Israel, and his ability to send others to do battle on his behalf.	X	X
Reward Power	Absalom offers himself as potential judge to the people who are disenchanted with David's role as royal judge. Absalom also has quantities of wool which indicate wealth.	David has the ability to reward Ziba with his master's property.	X	X
Coercive Power	Absalom has a large following of troops and Israelites who are loyal to him against David.	David has might warriors who accompany him out of Jerusalem (Gittites, Kerethites, and Pelethites).	X	X
Referent Power	Absalom is physically	X	X	X

	attractive, admired greatly, and has abundance hair. Absalom also ingratiates himself to the people of Israel by stationing himself as a regal figure near the city gate.			
Expert Power	X	X	Hushai is a confidant of David who knows his proclivities and acts as a mole in Absalom's presence.	Ahithophel is a royal counselor who joins Absalom in his rebellion. Ahithophel is described as having counsel "like one who inquires of God."
Information Power	Absalom's plans to take over the kingdom are hidden, a fact that gave him an advantage politically and militarily.	David secretly places Hushai in Absalom's inner circle to gain knowledge about Absalom's plans.	X	X

Insult and Social Significance

With the groundwork laid regarding the political milieu and social power markers evident in the account of Absalom's rebellion, the next aim of this study is to explore the

nature of Absalom's insult and its social significance. This aim includes matters of audience, the status and role of concubines, and biblical law concerning having sexual intercourse with one's father's wife. As was the case with the insults analyzed in the previous two chapters (i.e., Nabal's insult and Hanun's insult), the issue of audience is important in determining how Absalom's insult functions socially because it reveals the scope of the insult's impact.

The audience for Nabal's insult is not explicitly mentioned in the biblical narrative, but there are subtle indications that Nabal's insult was public knowledge. For example, the biblical narrative indicates that David's messengers took information back and forth between Nabal and David, so they would have known about the content of Nabal's insulting rhetoric toward their master (1 Sam 25:5-6). Also, Nabal's servant reveals to Abigail that those in Nabal's household knew about Nabal insulting David's messengers (1 Sam 25:14).

In the account of Hanun insulting David's diplomatic messengers, issues of audience are more pronounced in the narrative. When David hears that his messengers have been stripped and shaved while serving as royal envoys, he directs them to remain away in the border town of Jericho until their beards have grown back (2 Sam 10:5). Thus, David was very mindful of what his messengers' humiliating appearance would do to their reputation and his own.

As for Absalom's insult of sleeping with David's concubines, audience is a major—and intentional—component of the social injury, in order that the insult would

have maximum impact on Absalom's takeover of the kingdom of Israel.[226] The intended political impact of the insult is explicit in Ahithophel's counsel to Absalom: "all Israel will hear…" וְשָׁמַע כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (2 Sam 16:21). Notably, when Absalom carries out Ahithophel's advice, he performs the act in a tent set up "on the roof " עַל־הַגָּג, making sure that all Israel can *see* his insult against David as well.[227] The text states explicitly that Absalom did this "in the sight of all Israel" לְעֵינֵי כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (2 Sam 16:22b).[228] Presumably, those inhabitants of Jerusalem who saw Absalom entering the tent, and David's concubines being led in one-by-one, would then spread the word quickly throughout their communities. A. A. Anderson states that "The tent was, most likely, the bridal tent (cf. Ps 19:5[4]; Joel 2:16), and the whole proceedings were, more or less, equivalent to a royal wedding."[229] The biblical text provides no specific indications to support the idea that Absalom's tent on the palace roof was a bridal tent, but the reference

[226] In Stuart Lasine's interdisciplinary analysis of the position of biblical kings, he observes that the purpose of the public display is specifically for shaming David: "The fact that both Yahweh and the narrator of chapter 16 stress the people's *seeing* David's disgrace (2 Sam 12:11-12, 16:22) suggests that part of the purpose of this public punishment is to shame David, for sight is an essential element in the experience of shame." See *Knowing Kings: Knowledge, Power, and Narcissism in the Hebrew Bible*, Semeia Studies (Atlanta, GA.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 107.

[227] The exact wording of the verse leaves the subject ambiguous (וַיִּטּוּ לְאַבְשָׁלוֹם הָאֹהֶל עַל־הַגָּג). The verb has no subject indicated, but the 3mp form is used (i.e., "they set up/pitched"). This is commonly translated in a passive sense (i.e., "a tent was set up/pitched"). The use of the preposition לְ attached to "Absalom" indicates "for Absalom," that is, for his use.

[228] Gary Stansell elaborates on the public nature of this and other insults in biblical narratives about David and sees a pattern of honor/shame which includes a triad (i.e., the insulter, the insulted, and the audience). See "Honor and Shame in the David Narratives," in *Was ist der Mensch? Beitrdge zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments,* ed. Frank Crüsemann (Munich, Germany: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1992), 114.

[229] A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel, Word Biblical Commentary, V.11 (*Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 214.

in Joel 2:16 does indicate that a "canopy" (חֻפָּה), or some type of enclosure, was associated with brides. Whether Ahithophel instructed Absalom to have intercourse with David's wives specifically in this highly visible location is unknown, but the adviser does recognize that news would spread quickly when everyone heard about it.

Status of Concubines

Determining the status of David's concubines is important in understanding how Absalom's actions toward them would have impacted David. McCarter defines concubines as "slave women who belonged to wealthy households and bore children but did not share all the legal privileges of wives."[230] The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* defines concubines as not having the "full legal status held by the wife of first rank. It is not certain what constituted the difference in rank. Most probably it was based upon the question of whether the wife was considered a purchase, having been sold (in the strict sense) to her husband."[231] Thus, concubines were usually distinguished from primary wives in biblical accounts, and they were often treated differently.

Isabelle Hamley, in her article, "'Dis(re)membered and Unaccounted For': פילגש in the Hebrew Bible," explores the treatment of concubines mentioned in several biblical accounts: the patriarch Jacob's, concubine, Bilhah (Gen 35); the Levite's concubine who is killed in the account of the Benjaminite War (Judg 19); Saul's concubine, Rizpah, who

[230] P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, V. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 148.

[231] R. H. McGrath, "Concubine (in the Bible)." In *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 65-66. Vol. 4. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2003. *Gale eBooks* (accessed October 9, 2021).

Abner is accused of sleeping with (2 Sam 3, 21); and David's concubines.[232] In all of these accounts, the concubines are described as women who are part of a man's household, and they serve sexual and reproductive functions.[233]

In Hamley's study of these biblical figures, she concludes that the exact legal status of these women is not known due to the dearth of detailed information about them in the accounts, but she provides three words that describe their experience: "vulnerability, sexual abuse, and liminality."[234] All three of these descriptors certainly apply to David's concubines. In the biblical account, David flees Jerusalem realizing that "the city will be put to the sword" וְהִכָּה הָעִיר לְפִי־חָרֶב (2 Sam 15:14b), but the concubines are left behind in a vulnerable state. Then, the concubines are caught up in the political chess game between David and Absalom when Absalom has sexual intercourse with them in public. And, finally, the concubines are liminal figures in that their identity remains in flux due to ambiguity about who rightfully possesses them from moment to moment.

[232] Isabelle Hamley, "'Dis(Re)Membered and Unaccounted for': פילגש in the Hebrew Bible." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 42, no. 4 (2018): 415–34. Outside the mention of David's concubines in the account of Absalom's rebellion, they are mentioned in 2 Sam 5:13. Other examples of concubines include: Genesis 22:24 (Reumah); Genesis 36:12 (Timna); 1 Chronicles 1:32 (Keturah); 1 Chronicles 2:46-48 (Ephah and Maacah, Caleb's concubines); 1 Chronicles 7:14 (Manasseh's concubine); Esther 2:14 (Xerxes'concubines); and Daniel 5:23 (Belshazzar's concubines).

[233] For a study of the term "concubine" פִּלֶגֶשׁ as a non-Semitic loanword, see Benjamin J. Noonan, *Non-Semitic Loanwords in the Hebrew Bible: A Lexicon of Language Contact*. Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic, 14 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2019). Noonan points out that the etymology of the term is not clear, but it likely has an Anatolian source and has connotations of cohabitation.

[234] Ibid., 416.

The Bible explicitly describes two basic ways one could acquire a concubine—through purchase (Exod 21:7) or through capture (Deut 21:10-12). In the case of Bilhah, Jacob's father-in-law originally gives her as a שִׁפְחָה "female servant" to attend to Rachel (Gen 29:29) when Rachel marries Jacob, with Bilhah likely being understood as part of Rachel's dowry which Jacob had earned by working for her father, Laban, for seven years (Gen 29:18). But, when Rachel sees that she is not giving children to Jacob as is his other wife, Leah, Rachel gives Bilhah to Jacob as a אִשָּׁה "wife," and Jacob has children through her (Gen 30:3-4). However, these children are understood as belonging to Rachel. In the account of the Levite's concubine in the description of the Benjaminite War, she is named a פִּלֶגֶשׁ "concubine," and the text says that the Levite, who was from Ephraim, took her from her father in Bethlehem, likely as purchased property. When the biblical account introduces Rizpah, she is simply said to belong to Saul (לְשָׁאוּל פִּלֶגֶשׁ) (2 Sam 3:7), but her status as the concubine of a former king is the reason for the rift between Ish-Bosheth, Saul's son, and Abner when Abner is accused of sleeping with her.

As for David's concubines, the biblical text states that when he moved from Hebron to Jerusalem, "David took more concubines and wives," and it lists the children these women bore to David (2 Sam 5:13).[235] This reference also demonstrates that the biblical author distinguished between these two groups of women by placing them into

[235] Interestingly, the corresponding verse in 1 Chronicles 14:3 removes "concubines," perhaps in an attempt to legitimate the status of the concubines' sons. See McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary, 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984)*, 147.

two different categories.[236] Thus, though wives and concubines may have had similar roles, they were viewed as having different statuses. Though the text does not indicate a difference in status between David's wives' sons and his concubine's sons, the Chronicler's later treatment of the same passage may hint at this. The Chronicler's version deletes "concubines" altogether (1 Chr 14:3), a move Ulrich explains as an attempt to remove any questions about the legitimate pedigree of the sons.[237] Andrew E. Hill argues that these concubines were likely Jebusite women David acquired through political marriages with the Jebusite elites when he conquered Jerusalem.[238]

In addition to acquiring concubines through purchase or capture, there are biblical examples that describe leaders or kings inheriting or taking over a former king's concubines. Although this method of acquiring concubines is related to capturing them in the general sense, as mentioned in Deuteronomy 21:10-11, the practice of taking over a former king's concubines has political implications that are important in understanding Absalom's insult. Three examples that demonstrate this include the accounts of David and his wife, Ahinoam; Abner and Saul's concubine, Rizpah (2 Sam 3:6-8); and Solomon and David's concubine, Abishag (1 Kgs 2:13-25).

At the end of the Nabal account, David is mentioned as having taken Nabal's wife, Abigail, as his own after the LORD strikes down her foolish husband. The text also

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[236] MT, Codex Alexandrinus, and 4QSam[a] reads "concubines and wives," while LXX has "wives and concubines."

[237] Eugene Ulrich, *The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus*. Vol. no. 19 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 182.

[238] Andrew E. Hill, "On David's "Taking" and "Leaving" Concubines (2 Samuel 5:13; 15:16)," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 1 (2006): 135.

mentions that David had taken a woman named Ahinoam of Jezreel (1 Sam 25:43). Nothing more of Ahinoam's origin, or how David came to marry her, is mentioned, but Jon D. Levenson argues that Ahinoam is none other than Saul's former wife, named earlier in the narrative as the daughter of Ahimaaz (1 Sam 14:50).[239] Baruch Halpern joins Levenson in this line of reasoning, and they further explore the identity of Ahinoam in their article about the political significance of David's marriages.[240]

Andrew Knapp gleans insights from Levenson and Halpern's analysis to provide four examples supporting the notion that Ahinoam was Saul's former wife: 1) Ahinoam is the mother of Amnon, David's firstborn son, demonstrating she was an early wife (1 Chr 3:1); 2) Saul taking Michal from David to give her to another man may serve as evidence that this was a retaliatory act for David taking Ahinoam from Saul (1 Sam 25:44); 3) Ahinoam's disloyalty to Saul may have been the impetus for Saul calling their son, Jonathan, the "son of a perversely rebellious woman" בֶּן־נַעֲוַת הַמַּרְדּוּת (1 Sam 20:30); and 4) when Nathan rebukes David for sleeping with Bathsheba and killing her husband, he mentions that the LORD had already given David the house and wives of his "lord" אָדוֹן (Saul?), along with "all Israel and Judah" (2 Sam 12:8).[241] Despite this

[239] Jon D. Levenson, "I Samuel 25 As Literature and As History," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1978): 27.

[240] Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99, no. 4 (1980): 507-18.

[241] Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient near East*. Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series, Number 4 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 227. This translation of the phrase בֶּן־נַעֲוַת הַמַּרְדּוּת follows Knapp.

evidence, however, McCarter contends that Ahinoam was just a woman with the same name as Saul's former wife.[242]

After Saul dies and his son, Ish-Bosheth, takes over the kingdom for a short period, the biblical text mentions an altercation between Abner, Saul's military commander, and King Ish-Bosheth (2 Sam 3:6-11). The narrative frames the whole account as highly political, saying that Abner was "strengthening himself" הָיָה מִתְחַזֵּק in the house of Saul, then it mentions that Saul had a concubine named Rizpah, and that Ish-Bosheth accuses Abner of having intercourse with Saul's concubine (v. 7).[243] The MT does not indicate if the accusation is true or not, but when the narrative in the Lucianic text identifies Rizpah, it adds the statement: *kai elaben autēn abennēr* "and Abner took her."

In the biblical narrative, Abner does not directly confirm nor deny the accusation in his reply to Ish-Bosheth, but he expresses outrage, and he recounts all the ways he has been loyal to the house of Saul, such as when he protected Ish-Bosheth from David. Concerning the issue of Abner's guilt or innocence, Tony W. Cartledge states that, "Whether guilty or not, he regarded the offense as inconsequential compared to the favors

[242] P. Kyle, McCarter, *I Samuel: A New Translation*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, V. 8. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 400.

[243] Notably, the verb מִתְחַזֵּק is in the *Hithpael* form which indicates reflexive activity. Thus, Abner is described as actively strengthening himself in the house of Saul, an act which could have involved taking Saul's concubine. Tony Cartledge explains that "Apparently, one means by which Abner flexed his political muscle involved Saul's harem, which Ishbaal apparently had not taken for himself. Some writers suggest that Ishbaal had not assumed control of the harem because he was a minor, but the narrator (who claimed Ishbaal was forty years old [2 Sam 2:10] is more interested in portraying Ishbaal as inept, incompetent, and perhaps impotent." See *1 & 2 Samuel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishers, 2001), 386.

he had done for Ishbaal."[244] Abner then uses Ish-Bosheth's accusation as an excuse to defect to David, and he meets with both the elders of Israel and the Benjaminites to encourage them to join David with him (vv. 17-19).

Later in the narrative, when Solomon the son of David becomes king, he apparently still has Abishag, the concubine of David, in his care, and she becomes the focus of a confrontation between Solomon and his mother, Bathsheba, due to Bathsheba's role in requesting Abishag for David's other son, Adonijah (1 Kgs 2:13-25). Adonijah was David's fourth son after Amnon, Chileab, and Absalom, so with the other three sons out of the picture, Adonijah publicly presents himself as king and follows in Absalom's footsteps in acquiring a chariot, horses, and 50 runners to go before him (1 Kgs 1:5).[245] However, David's court is divided about who should be king—some support Adonijah while others support Solomon. After David issues an order naming Solomon as king, Adonijah is at first afraid for his life, but after he receives clemency, his feelings of being slighted emerge, and he appeals to Bathsheba to request of Solomon that David's concubine, Abishag, be given to him (1 Kgs 2:13-18).

When Bathsheba requests of Solomon that he give Abishag to Adonijah as a wife, Solomon interprets this request as part of Adonijah's plan to overtake the Davidic throne, and he resents his mother's involvement. The biblical text provides context for this scenario between the king and Adonijah by introducing Abishag as a very beautiful

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[244] See Tony W. Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishers, 2001), 387. Ishbaal is an alternate form of the name Ish-Bosheth, with the *baal* theophoric emended to בֹּשֶׁת "shame" for ideological reasons.

[245] Amnon is killed by Absalom (2 Sam 13:23-38), Chileab is never mentioned again after being named as David's second born (2 Sam 3:3), and Absalom is killed in the midst of trying to take over the kingdom (2 Sam 18:14-15).

virgin from Shunem who had previously been conscripted to serve in the royal household as a personal attendant to David in his old age (1 Kgs 1:1-4). Notably, Adonijah's request implies that Abishag was not viewed as Solomon's personal concubine or else Adonijah would not have requested her for himself. Rather, Abishag's connection to David gave her royal status, and this made Adonijah's guilty of treason.

These examples indicate that concubines who belonged to kings had great political significance due to their status. As a result of the concubines' connection to the king, they were considered royal property and thus they had symbolic meaning. The concubines' importance derived from their ability to bear royal children and provide the king with heirs. Tony W. Cartledge states that "The king's concubines—his harem—were tokens of royal authority, evidence of the king's virility. Some scholars speak of an ancient notion that kings who were sexually impotent were also considered to be politically incapacitated."[246] The importance of the royal harem's intimate connection to the king and ability to provide a pure bloodline is likely behind the Hittite injunction against communication with "women of the palace" in the LBA Treaty between Suppiluliuma I of Hatti and Huqqana of Hayasa (A iii 59'-67'):

> "Beware of a woman of the palace. Whatever sort of palace woman she might be, whether a free woman or a lady's maid, you shall not approach her, and you shall not go near her. You shall not speak a word to her. Your slave or your slave girl shall not go near her. Beware of her. When you see a palace woman, jump far out of the way and leave her a broad path. Beware of this matter of a palace woman."[247]

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[246] Tony W. Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2001), 582.

[247] See §27 in No. 3 "Treaty between Suppiluliuma I of Hatti and Huqqana of Hayasa" in Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 2nd ed., ed. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. (Atlanta GA: SBL, 1999), 32.

An additional text (A. 4636) from the Old Babylonian city, Mari, lists the same women from the harem of King Yasmah-Addu remaining in the palace population after Zimri-Lim takes over the palace in Mari.[248] Daniel Bodi explains that this textual evidence demonstrates that "most of the women who were in the service of Yasmah-Addu stayed in Mari and continued their life in the service of the next occupant of the palace, Zimrī-Līm."[249] Furthermore, Bodi cites identical numbered lists of the women's names before and after the takeover as proof that the station of these women within the palace hierarchy did not change even after a new king took over.[250] This evidence from the wider context of the ANE/EMED may illuminate the practice of transferring royal concubines from one king to another in the Hebrew Bible.[251]

Role of Royal Concubines

David's ten concubines, whom he leaves behind to "guard/keep" שׁמר the palace when he flees Jerusalem, essentially take on the role of pawns in a political game because

[248] Jean-Marie Durand, "Les dames du palais de Mari à l'époque du royaume de Haute-Mésopotamie," *MARI* 4 (1985): 385-436. For details about the records of the harem at ancient Mari, also see Jean Bottéro, André Finet, and Finet André, *Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 134-140.

[249] Daniel Bodi, "The Story of Samuel, Saul, and David," in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, eds. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 219.

[250] Ibid.

[251] Furthermore, regarding the large numbers of concubines attributed to Solomon in the Bible, Bodi argues that he likely would have inherited these from David. Bodi reasons that David would have gained a harem through females acquired in military conquests, and the account of Abishag demonstrates that Solomon inherited her. See *Demise of the Warlord: A New Look at the David Story* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 84.

of their royal status and sexuality.[252] Ahithophel's counsel reveals that Absalom taking David's concubines publicly would fundamentally alter the relationship between David and his traitorous son by making Absalom offensive to his father, and that would have wide-reaching political benefits for Absalom who wanted to secure his hold over the kingdom (2 Sam 16:21). In order to determine the social significance of Absalom's sexual conquest of the royal concubines, an analysis of their role and comparative material about similar events will be helpful.

Taking over a deposed king's concubines was apparently not unusual in the ANE/EMED, as evidenced by the previous example from Mari where the concubines in Yasmah-Addu's household maintained their stations in the palace after Zimri-Lim took over, but taking a king's concubines *in order to* depose him is an insult meant to have political ramifications. A laconic letter from the LBA El-Amarna corpus (EA 196) from Biryawaza, the ruler in Damascus, to his overlord, Pharaoh, describes what appears to be

[252] The term which Ahithophel uses in advising Absalom to "have sexual intercourse" with David's concubines is a general Hebrew term for sexual intercourse, *bô'* בוא. This verb, which literally means "enter, go in," is used in the general sense of entering a location (e.g., going into a building, tent, group of people, etc.), in addition to its use in describing sexual intercourse. Two semantic cognates for the use of בוא in a sexual sense are *škb* שכב "to lie down" + preposition *'im* (e.g., David having sexual intercourse with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:4)) and *yd'* ידע "to know" (e.g., Adam having sexual intercourse with his wife, Eve (Gen 4:1)). Violent sexual acts are usually rendered in the Bible with other lexemes such as ענה "to afflict" (in the Piel stem) or the hendiadys using שכב and ענה (e.g., Amnon raping Tamar (2 Sam 13:14)). In the account of Absalom having sexual intercourse with David's concubines, there is no indication in the text that he carried out the act with physical force toward the concubines, though he certainly could have. Similarly, there is no indication in the biblical text that David took Bathsheba forcefully, though direct or indirect coercion is likely, and imbalanced power dynamics between the two is an issue that is important to consider. For a thorough exposition of this topic, see Sandie Gravett, "Reading 'Rape' in the Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of Language," in the *JSOT* 28, no. 3 (2004): 279-299. See 2 Samuel 13:14: וַיֶּחֱזַק מִמֶּנָּה וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֹתָהּ. See also Ellen Van Wolde, "Does 'Innâ Denote Rape? a Semantic Analysis of a Controversial Word," *Vetus Testamentum* 52, no. 4 (2002): 528-544. For a thorough treatment of arguments about Bathsheba's role in the account, see Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, "Was it Rape? the David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-Examined," *Vetus Testamentum* 61 (1): 1-15. Abasili reviews textual and methodological concerns about the scholarly conversation around this topic and cautions against reading contemporary definitions of rape into biblical texts.

a similar situation. Biryawaza portrays himself as loyal vassal of Pharaoh in the letter, and he reports a desperate situation wherein he has been abandoned by an Egyptian garrison, then he claims that he is the "[one servant of] the king that remains to him" [1-*en* ÌR] ˹LUGAL˺ ˹*ša*˺ ˹*ir*˺-*ti*$_7$-*ḫa-ti*$_7$ ˹*a*˺-*n*[*a ša-šu*].[253] Moreover, Biryawaza claims that everyone who used to be loyal to Pharaoh has defected to the king of Hatti, except himself. After a section on this tablet that is badly damaged (lines 24-26), Biryawaza's letter claims that something abhorrent has happened to him. Biryawaza implicates the ruler of Ashtartu who is named Biridashwa: "my wives [and] my daughters in law and [he p]ut (them) in his lap… never has a man done such a de‹ed›." DAM.MEŠ-*ia* [*ù*] ˹É˺.GI.IA *ù* [*ša-k*]*a-an i-na* ÚR \\ *su-ni-*[*šu*] … *la-a i-pa-aš ip-*‹*ša*› *an-na* LÚ *iš-tu* ˹˺ *ri-ti*$_7$ *ša-ni-tam*.[254]

[253] Translation and transliteration follow Anson Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna Based on Collations of All Extant Tablets*, vol. 2. eds. William M. Schniedewind and Zipora Cochavi-Rainey (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 899. Moran's translation of this section is as follows: I [*am the servant of*] the ki[ng] that has [*o*]*pened the* ‹*w*›*ays* fo[r *the troops.* See EA 196 in William L. Moran, *The Amarna letters (*English-language ed.), (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). This text is quite laconic, but Rainey's translation is based on collations from the Cairo tablets, London tablets, Paris texts, and New York tablets. Biryawaza was the ruler of Damascus in the Late Bronze Age. El-Amarna letters 194-197 feature Biryawaza and describe the turmoil he faced as the leader of a buffer state between Egyptian and Hittite territory. Due to Biryawaza's loyalty to Egypt, he had skirmishes with other buffer states, Amurru and Qadesh. Biryawaza was condemned in a letter from the Babylonian king to Pharaoh (EA 7) for robbing the Babylonian caravan travelling as an envoy between Egypt and Babylon, and he is mentioned in several vassal letters such as EA 53, 129, 234, etc. For a description of the political landscape during this era, see Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, "Introduction: The Beginnings of International Relations," in *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, eds. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.), 8-9.

[254] Transliteration and translation follow Rainey. Biridashwa is also mentioned in EA 197 where he is blamed for inciting the city of Yanuʿam against Biryawaza and colluding with the ʿapiru in acts against Egypt. Edward Fay Campbell, Jr. places EA 194-197 late in the reign of Akhenaten (*The Chronology of the Amarna Letters: With Special Reference to the Hypothetical Coregency of Amenophis III and Akhenaten* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), 124.

The idiom for sexual intercourse used here (*šakan ina* ÚR *sunišu* "put in his lap") shows up in the Bible as well. For example, when Nathan speaks for the LORD in rebuking David for taking Bathsheba and killing Uriah, the LORD reminds David that he gave the wives of another man בְּחֵיקֶךָ "into your lap" (2 Sam 12:8). Saul's wives, Ahinoam and Rizpah, may be implied here, and if so, there were significant political ramifications associated with David taking them. Daniel Bodi cites a parallel in Akkadian from documents found in the city of Mari where Yasmah-Addu uses the phrase "to place in someone's lap" (*ana sūnim nadānum*) about a princess from Qaṭna in his harem.[255] In an additional example from the Bible, Micah's prophetic warning tells the audience (presumably male) not to trust even "the woman who lies in your lap" מִשֹּׁכֶבֶת חֵיקֶךָ," (Mic 7:5). A similar example may be found in the prophetic curse of a gentle-hearted man becoming evil "against the wife of his lap" בְּאֵשֶׁת חֵיקוֹ (Deut 28:54). The Hebrew word for "lap" here is חֵיק, but this term also describes the chest/breast region, therefore translators often translate it with "bosom."[256]

In the case of Absalom's rebellion, Absalom does not inherit David's concubines after defeating the king. Rather, Absalom has sexual intercourse with David's concubines *in order to* strengthen the resolve of his followers, so that his *coup* against David will be successful. David's authority as king is demonstrated even as he flees Jerusalem and Absalom enters. When David is out of the city, he is still able to grant Mephibosheth's

[255] Daniel Bodi, "The Story of Samuel, Saul, and David," in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, eds. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess, 220.

[256] *TWOT* entry 629a states that the term is often abstract, but often indicates "family intimacy."

servant, Ziba, his master's property due to Mephibosheth's supposed disloyalty to David (2 Sam 16:3-4).[257] This act is akin to a president signing legislation or issuing a pardon in his last day of office, while he still has the legitimate power to do so. Even though Absalom enters the royal palace and takes the royal concubines, he knows that he also must kill David to secure the throne (2 Sam 17:2-4, 12).

Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin interpret Absalom's act in light of ancient Israel's honor and shame culture, stating that "sexual relationships were a measure of the honor and shame of the households to which these men and women belonged. To test the stability or honor of a household, a man from another household attempted to rape one of its women."[258] Citing cultural data from Andalusia and Greece, anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers explains that one's social status in the western Mediterranean cultures is correlated to one's honor in the area of sexual behavior, and that differences exist between what is considered honorable for males and females. "Masculinity," Pitt-Rivers states, "is a term which is constantly heard in the pueblo, and the concept is expressed as the physical sexual quintessence of the male (*cojones*). The contrary notion is conveyed by the adjective *manso* which means both tame and also castrated."[259] On the other hand, for females honor is related to virtue and sexual purity, and the honor of males is

[257] When David re-enters Jerusalem, Mephibosheth claims that he has been faithful to David all along (2 Sam 19:24-28).

[258] Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *The Social World of Ancient Israel 1250-587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 180.

[259] Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society, The Nature of Human Society*, ed. J. G. Peristiany (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 45.

"involved therefore in the sexual purity of his mother, wife and daughters, and sisters, not in his own."[260]

Sexual Intercourse with Father's Wives

In addition to Absalom insulting David by publicly taking the king's concubines, there is another factor to consider in determining the insult's social significance—Absalom broke biblical law, and Israelite social mores, in sleeping with his own father's wives. Leviticus 18:8 commands "Do not uncover the nakedness of (have sexual intercourse with) your father's wife. It is the nakedness of your father" עֶרְוַת אֵשֶׁת־אָבִיךָ לֹא תְגַלֵּה עֶרְוַת אָבִיךָ הִוא. In Baruch Levine's commentary on Leviticus, he specifies that this injunction was against sexual intercourse with "a wife of his father who is not his own mother."[261]

Joyce G. Baldwin points out that, "While it may have been customary in the ancient Near East for the king of a new dynasty to take the harem of the previous monarch, it was certainly not acceptable that a son should break the taboo against intercourse with his father's wives and concubines (Lv. 18:7-8)."[262] Furthermore, Gary

[260] Ibid.

[261] Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: Ṿa-Yiḳra: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. First ed. The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 120. Levine follows Ramban is assigning the prohibition from sexual intercourse with one's own natural mother to Leviticus 18:7.

[262] Joyce G. Baldwin, *I and II Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 265.

Stansell frames Absalom's act against David's concubines as incest in line with Amnon's rape of Tamar, and he interprets Ahithophel's advice to Absalom in this light:

> "In light of Israelite law, which of course forbids sexual contact with the father's wife (Dtn 23,1 [22,20]; 27,20; Lev 18,8; 20,11), the moral outrage is obvious. And it represents a fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy (12,11f). But there is yet another dimension beside the political and legal. For Absalom utterly dishonors his father (he "uncovers his father's nakedness", Lev 18,8; 20,11) by a challenge which, to David's subsequent profound grief, finds its response in Absalom's death. That Absalom's incest with his father's concubines is understood as a shameful act which causes dishonor is emphasized by Ahithophel's prediction: "For all Israel will hear that you have made yourself stink (*nib'aštā)* with your father (v.21b)." The word *nib'aš,* as we noted above in the discussion on 2 Sam 10,6a, can indicate "the committing of a shameful act" which humiliates another person."[263]

Interpretation

Interpreting the socio-political function of Absalom's insult will necessitate synthesizing the data in the previous sections which analyzed the political milieu portrayed in the account of Absalom's rebellion, the social power bases of the individuals involved in the account, and the nature of the insult itself. To undertake this synthesis, it is first necessary to trace how the social power markers position significant individuals prior to the insult. Then a determination will be made as to how the insult operated given these dynamics, with an emphasis on political ramifications. Finally, this study will propose reasons the biblical author included the narrative about Absalom's insult.

[263] Gary Stansell, "Honor and Shame in the David Narratives," in *Was ist der Mensch? Beitrdge zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments,* ed. Frank Crüsemann (Munich, Germany: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1992), 113.

How Social Power Markers Position Individuals

At the time of Absalom's rebellion, David and Absalom are in a competition for the throne over Israel, David to keep it and Absalom to gain it. David has the advantage of being the well-established, legitimately installed king, but Absalom is the royal son next in line to the throne, and he had taken pains to gain the people's admiration in the years leading up to the rebellion.

As for reward power, the biblical text indicates that both David and Absalom had resources at their disposal. In addition to the implicit wealth that a king would be expected to possess and use to reward loyal subjects, David's authority as king also gave him the ability to grant property or favors to whomever he wished (e.g., Ziba). Although Absalom did not demonstrate this authority to grant property in the same way, his reward power is indicated when he promised the people that he would reward them through juridical means were he king instead of David. Absalom also had reward power through his wealth gained by gathering wool during shearing season. Thus, David and Absalom had different types of resources, but they were relatively equal in their ability to reward.

The coercive power of both David and Absalom is illustrated in their respective military capabilities at the time of the initiation of Absalom's takeover, and they appear to be relatively equal in this regard. David had hundreds of foreign warriors with him when he left Jerusalem, and thousands of David's troops went out to fight Absalom's men in Ephraim. These troops were split up into three companies under commanders Joab, Abishai, and Ittai. In response to threats by David's enemy, Shimei, when David and his loyalists were fleeing Jerusalem, David's commander Abishai demonstrated the ability to use force (2 Sam 16:9). Regarding Absalom's coercion power, his advisor,

Ahithophel, implied that he had access to at least 12,000 troops with which to pursue and overtake David.

Concerning referent power, David was in decline at the time of Absalom's rebellion, while Absalom's was increasing. Thus, there was an imbalance in Absalom's favor in this regard. David's enemies took advantage of his vulnerable state when he fled Jerusalem, evidenced by the account of the Benjaminite, Shimei, pelting David and members of the royal court with stones and dirt (2 Sam 16:5-14). This public degradation, against which David did not defend himself in his humbled state, made David appear weak. On the other hand, Absalom's appearance including luxurious hair and flawless good looks gave him an air of royalty, and Absalom's charisma gained him a loyal following.

In the realm of expert and information power, Absalom and David were virtually on equal standing. Although Absalom gained political ground by having access to the expertise of Ahithophel's shrewd counsel, David had Hushai as his faithful associate, and Hushai served David's interests as a mole in Absalom's inner circle. The secret information about Absalom's planned *coup d'etat* gave Absalom an advantage over David who was not privy to that knowledge, but Hushai's feigned loyalty to Absalom gave David privileged information about Absalom's plans which served to warn him in time to prepare for battle.

How Insult Operates Politically

As indicated in the previous section, there is a complex web of social power dynamics at play in the account of Absalom's rebellion. Because David has not been

completely deposed by Absalom and his followers at the time of Absalom's insult, David maintained power in most ways. David's legitimacy as king remained largely intact because he was still alive, and he still had resources at his disposal—mostly in personnel—that served his interests in remaining on the throne. However, David's ability to influence through referent power was diminished due to his weakened social image. David was under divine judgment for taking Bathsheba which resulted in turmoil within his household, and he was publicly pelted with stones and dirt while fleeing Jerusalem. What David lost in referent power, however, Absalom gained by his regal appearance, promises of justice to the people, and his charisma. Absalom also enjoyed the legitimacy of being a royal son next in line to the throne, and he had troops and a royal counselor who aided him in his strategic efforts to secure the throne.

The matrix of competing power dynamics described above indicates that before Absalom slept with David's concubines, he had a slight edge over David in terms of socio-political influence, so Absalom took David's wives in order to increase his chances of success in finishing David off. The type of power which Absalom attempted to alter most through his insult was David's legitimate power. Any king who could not protect the sexuality of his concubines would have been viewed as impotent in the political sphere, so Absalom taking David's wives attempted to diminish David's legitimacy in the sight of Israel. And, Absalom having intercourse with David's wives on the rooftop demonstrated that where David was impotent, Absalom was potent—sexually and politically.

In terms of French and Raven's social power theory as applied to Absalom's insult, Absalom is the agent (O) who attempted to wield influence over both David (P_1)

and Absalom's own followers (P_2). Ahithophel indicated that the public act of sleeping with David's concubines would make Absalom offensive to David, and therefore Absalom's followers would be strengthened. The implication, of course, is that these results would secure Absalom's attempt to take the throne from David. Halbertal and Holmes explain that, "Since the king was still alive, Ahithophel understood that a clear message had to be sent that the rebellion was irreversible, that David was weak and Absalom did not fear him, and that their breach was final. Possessing David's concubines in public had the effect of reassuring Absalom's supporters and force undecided bystanders, who were naturally waiting to see how events transpired, to choose sides."[264]

In Walter Kim's dissertation on verbal insults in the Hebrew Bible, he highlights the social significance of Absalom's insult, and he draws a lexical connection between Absalom's insult against David here and Hanun's insult against David which was covered in the previous chapter:

> "When Absalom wrests control of Jerusalem from his father, he signals his appropriation of power by pitching a tent upon the palace roof and entering into his father's harem "in the sight of all Israel" (2 Sam 16:22). The shamefulness of this act toward David is evident in Ahithophel's counsel that he "will become odious" (from בוש) to his father (v. 21). Similar language occurs in 2 Sam 10:1-8, when Hanun "made himself odious" to David by the shameful treatment of his emissaries. With brazen and open acts of defiance, Absalom and the Ammonite king

[264] Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 131-132. See also Mary J. Evans, *1 And 2 Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 209, where she states that Absalom's sleeping with David's concubines assured the people of Jerusalem that "David has been deposed." Further, "this would make it clear that there could be no neutrality and would make the population of Jerusalem likely to accept that Absalom's kingship was a *fait accompli*."

> advertise their strength and virility and, in so doing, seek to elevate their own ranks at David's expense."[265]

Kim grasps the symbolic implications of the insult in his analysis (i.e., male competitors advertising their own strength and virility), but he does not identify the power dynamics between Absalom/Hanun and David before and after the interactions in order to demonstrate how the insult actually functioned politically in the narrative. In other words, what did Absalom (and Hanun) hope to accomplish politically by "acts of defiance" which elevated "their own ranks" relative to David? Kim also posits that when Absalom sleeps with David's concubines in public, it is after Absalom has already taken the kingdom, but a more nuanced analysis demonstrates that Absalom used this act against David's concubines to instigate further political action against David.

By carrying out Ahithophel's advice to have sexual intercourse with David's concubines, Absalom (O) attempted to exert positive influence (influence in the direction of O's wishes) over David and his own followers in order to produce an outcome in line with Absalom's wishes (A = Absalom's desired outcome). In this scenario, A = Absalom experiencing a break with David and gaining more robust support for his *coup,* ultimately leading to Absalom's complete takeover of Israel.

The biblical text gives no explicit indication about how Absalom's insult was perceived by his followers or what impact it had on them, but the text does indicate that even after Absalom slept with David's concubines, David maintained his affection toward Absalom. In fact, David instructs his commanders to be gentle with Absalom

[265] Walter Kim, "The Language of Verbal Insults in the Hebrew Bible" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007), 93.

when they go out to fight him and his troops (2 Sam 18:5). In an ironic reversal, Absalom's long hair, which was a source of his referent power, contributed to his death. Absalom caught his hair in a tree when he was engaged in battle with David's men, and Joab used this opportunity to attack Absalom against David's wishes (2 Sam 18:14). Absalom's followers then fled, and David mourned the loss of his son, even to the point of wishing he had died instead of Absalom (2 Sam 19:1).

David's favorable disposition toward Absalom, even after Absalom publicly humiliated him by having sexual intercourse with his concubines on the roof of the palace, indicates that Absalom's wishes to gain power over David by becoming offensive to him were not fully realized (~~A~~ = Absalom's wishes not being met).[266] The second part of Absalom's wishes, that his followers would become more resolute after seeing him make a permanent break with David, was not realized at all (~~A~~). When Absalom died, his troops fled, and David regained the approval of the elders in being restored to the throne (2 Sam 19:41-44).

Bible's Use of Insult

The literary link between David's sin with Bathsheba and the violence and betrayal associated with his sons, including Absalom's insult of sleeping with his father's wives, is unmistakable.[267] When David has sexual intercourse with Bathsheba, then has

[266] Notably, however, the significance of Absalom's desecration of David's concubines is demonstrated in that David never sleeps with the concubines again when he is restored to the royal palace (2 Sam 20:3).

[267] From a literary perspective, A.A. Anderson suggests that the whole concubine scene may be a later interpolation into the narrative meant to demonstrate that Nathan's prophetic pronouncement against

her husband killed to cover up the scandal, he brings upon himself divine retribution (2 Sam 12:11-12). In response to David's sin, the prophet Nathan pronounces in the name of the LORD that what David did *in secret* will happen to him *in public*, namely, that David's wives will be sexually taken by another man in open view. The Hebrew indicating that David's wives will be taken "in public" is לְעֵינֵי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ which literally means, "in/before the eyes of the sun." The prepositional phrase לְעֵינֵי is often translated idiomatically as "in view of/in the sight of." Daniel Bodi cites the same phrase "in the sight/light of the sun" in land-use documents from the LBA city, Ugarit, and claims it is a legal term signifying a legitimate act.[268] In keeping with this use, the LORD passes a legal judgment on David for his sin, according to the retributive principle.[269] Thus, the biblical narrative explains Absalom's political insult in theological terms, and it resolves David's guilt without his having to be deposed.

Conclusion

This analysis of Absalom's insult against David in 2 Samuel 16 indicates that Absalom slept with David's concubines publicly as part of an attempted *coup d'etat*, and that similar occurrences of women being used as pawns in political contexts are

David had been fulfilled. See *2 Samuel, Word Biblical Commentary, V.11, (*Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 213.

[268] Daniel Bodi, *The Demise of the Warlord*: *A New Look at the David Story* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 87.

[269] This retributive principle is also seen in Job's final defense of his character when he is questioned by his friends: "If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, then may my wife grind another man's grain, and may other men sleep with her." (Job 31:9-10).

documented in other ANE/EMED sources. These affinities between the biblical account and extra-biblical texts indicate that insults were a common cultural phenomenon in political spheres of the ANE/EMED. Delineating the power dynamics that existed between David and Absalom before and after the insult shows that Absalom's insult did not have its intended effect, a clean break from David and a successful *coup d'etat*. Instead, Absalom was killed against David's wishes, and David mourned the loss of his son before returning to his throne. The biblical narrative indicates that Absalom's political maneuvering was at the direction of the LORD who used Absalom's insult to apply retribution to David who displeased the LORD by sleeping with Bathsheba and killing her husband.

CHAPTER FIVE:
CONCLUSION

The biblical accounts of the early monarchy in Israel have been read through various lenses throughout the millennia, but only relatively recently have these accounts been subject to socio-political analyses through multi-disciplinary approaches. These depictions of the early monarchy lend themselves to being analyzed in this way because they portray the era as a rather volatile socio-political realm with near-constant power struggles, and these power struggles are often described in enough narrative detail for in-depth analysis. Similarly, as ANE/EMED texts of a political nature were discovered over approximately the last century and a half, and translated to make them accessible, scholars from various disciplines have analyzed the political exchanges between rulers which are documented within them. One particularly interesting phenomenon which has been observed within the biblical accounts of the early monarchy and extra-biblical texts from the ANE/EMED is the use of insults in political environments.

Goal and Methodology

The goal of this dissertation has been to analyze three narratives containing insults in the Hebrew Bible's depiction of the early monarchy against the backdrop of similar examples from other ANE/EMED texts. The latter were utilized in order to demonstrate that insults constituted a cultural phenomenon used to negotiate power in political spheres. The methodology used in this dissertation included 1) determining the micro and macro political contexts of each insult, 2) identifying "power markers" within the texts to determine the bases of social power which individuals in each account had at their

disposal, 3) isolating the insult and determining its social significance by analyzing it alongside ANE/EMED comparative material, and 4) interpreting the insult's function within the socio-political matrix in which it occurred. Social psychologists French and Raven's six social power bases were used to identify "power markers" in biblical accounts and to analyze the type of influence revealed in each account.

This method of analysis, using French and Raven's social power theory to understand the function of insults in the Hebrew Bible's depiction of the early monarchy, is a distinct approach. Although some of this dissertation's material on insults overlaps with Walter Kim's dissertation on verbal insults in the Hebrew Bible, the goal and methodology of each differs. The goal of this study was to understand the *socio-political function* of verbal and nonverbal insults in the early monarchy, while the goal of Kim's study was to understand the *linguistic aspects* of verbal insults. While Kim's method of analysis included the use of SAT (Speech Act Theory), this dissertation used French and Raven's social power bases.

The three insults which were analyzed in this dissertation occur within the narrative accounts describing three individuals' interactions with David during various periods including his rise to kingship, his reign over all Israel, and threats to his throne. In the first account analyzed (1 Sam 25:4-11), the aristocrat Nabal insults David by both refusing to acknowledge David's identity and refusing to meet cultural expectations of reciprocal goodwill. Nabal's insult was compared to exchanges and insults found in Late Bronze Age letters between leaders of Hatti, Assyria, Mittani, Babylon, and Egypt. These letters were important in illuminating norms in diplomatic parlance and the expectation of reciprocal hospitality.

In the second account studied (2 Sam 10:1-7), the Ammonite king, Hanun, insults David by humiliating his goodwill envoys instead of practicing diplomatic reciprocity. Hanun has David's messengers' garments stripped in half and half their beards shaved before sending them back to David. The context and substance of Hanun's insult was compared to letters from the Old Babylonian, Late Bronze, and Neo Babylonian eras which highlighted the diplomatic use and treatment of messengers. Various other ANE/EMED sources were also analyzed to determine the symbolic significance of the beard and garments.

In the third account analyzed (2 Sam 16:20-23), David's son, Absalom, insults David by publicly sleeping with his father's royal concubines as part of an attempted *coup d'etat*. This was the most politically and culturally complex account analyzed because of the interplay between so many individuals (i.e., advisors, concubines, and royal successors) in the narrative. The account of Absalom's insult was analyzed against various comparative texts including an Old Babylonian list of palace concubines, a Hittite treaty which mentions the appropriate treatment of women in a royal palace and the women's implicit status, and a Late Bronze Age text from the El-Amarna archive describing women being taken sexually for political power jockeying between men.

Findings

The analysis of the first narrative selection, Nabal's insult of David in 1 Samuel 25, demonstrated that there were competing power dynamics at play when Nabal refused to acknowledge David's anointed status and provide him with provisions as David requested. Nabal was a rich man (*reward power*), evidenced by his great possessions and

ability to hold a feast. Apparently, Nabal was also a Saul sympathizer. King Saul was still in power as king over Israel at the time of Nabal's insult, but David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel, giving him a latent legitimacy. Thus, ambiguity about who had the right to rule Israel was an underlying factor in the conflict between those loyal to David and those loyal to Saul.

As for David, in addition to his status as the anointed of the LORD (*legitimate power*) he had a reputation as a mighty warrior and had many followers with military capabilities (*coercive power*). David's physical attractiveness, musical giftedness, and ability to garner a following among many Israelites demonstrated that he had the charisma to influence others (*referent power*). David's request for Nabal to reciprocate acts of goodwill and provide him with provisions likely rested on David's confidence in his own ability to persuade based on his various sources of power.

Saul, too, had sources of power at his disposal even though he was not directly involved in the interactions between Nabal and David. Saul still reigned as king over Israel at this time (*legitimate power*), and Saul's role as king gave him access to resources with which to influence others (*reward power*). On the other hand, by massacring the inhabitants of the town of Nob for disloyalty, Saul also demonstrated a willingness to influence others using fear (*coercive power*). Saul's influence over his loyalists likely played a large role in Nabal's decision to insult David instead of honor him.

Nabal's insult operated within these competing power dynamics in an attempt to lower David's status. In Nabal's response to David's initial greetings and request for provisions, Nabal subverted the self-abasement formula to deny David honor, and he refused to reciprocate the acts of kindness which David had previously showed to

Nabal's servants. The significance of Nabal's refusal to acknowledge David with familial terms of address was compared to similar rhetoric in a LBA letter from the Hittite leader to Adad-nirari I of Assyria where the Hittite king refused to call the Assyrian king "brother" in order to deny him political status. Studies of several El-Amarna letters from the kings of Babylon and Mitanni to Pharaoh demonstrated that in the ANE/EMED, refusing to reciprocate goodwill was perceived as contrary to cultural expectations to the point of instigating retaliation.

In terms of French and Raven's social power paradigm, in this biblical account David has negative influence over Nabal (i.e., causing a reaction contrary to David's wishes). However, Nabal's insult does not accomplish what he hopes it will. Instead, Nabal's own servants and his wife, Abigail, side with David when they hear how Nabal treated David. Abigail praises David for fighting the LORD's battles while disparaging her own husband as a "fool," and she brings the abundant provisions to David which Nabal had refused him. Then the LORD strikes Nabal down, avenging David and giving him the opportunity to take the wise Abigail as his own wife before he becomes king of Israel.

The analysis of the second narrative selection, Hanun's insult of David's messengers in 2 Samuel 10, demonstrated that both David and Hanun had relatively equivalent sources of power in their respective spheres of influence. Preceding David's diplomatic interactions with Hanun, David had gained kingship over all Israel after the house of Saul lost power (*legitimate power*). Afterward, David went to battle with neighboring polities such as the Philistines, Moabites, Arameans, and Edomites. Through these military exploits, David gained wealth through tribute and booty (*reward power*),

and his reputation as a formidable warrior was affirmed throughout the region (*coercive power*). With other polities which were more amicable toward David, he had attempted diplomacy instead of using force to secure his place politically. This was the case with Ammon, the Transjordanian polity with which David had established a previous relationship through a treaty with King Nahash, Hanun's father.

As for Hanun's station leading up to his interaction with David's messengers, his reign over Ammon had only just begun since King Nahash had only recently died. However, Hanun did have recognized royal status which is indicated by the fact that he had access to royal Ammonite advisors, and Hanun was in the Ammonite royal line of succession (*legitimate power*). According to the biblical narrative, when Hanun prepares for war with Israel after insulting David's messengers, he has the resources to hire mercenaries from Aram to fight on Ammon's behalf (*reward power*). Hanun also had the ability to influence others to do his bidding based upon the cruel reputation of his father who had the practice of gouging out the eyes of his enemies (*coercive power*).

Hanun's insult—shaving off the beards and stripping David's diplomatic messengers—functioned within this socio-political matrix in an attempt to socially injure David. The political context suggests that Hanun did this with the intention of breaking free from the Ammonite-Israelite alliance which his father made with David previously. The Old Babylonian, Late Bronze Age, and Neo Babylonian letters which were used to contextualize Hanun's insult describe the common practice of sending envoys on many formal and informal occasions, including the occasion of a leader's death. These letters also showed the common distrust of messengers and the political significance of the treatment of another ruler's messengers. ANE/EMED texts which were analyzed in order

to illuminate the symbolic meaning of the beard and stripping off garments revealed that Hanun's insult meant to emasculate David and sever diplomatic relations.

In terms of French and Raven's schema of social influence, in this biblical episode David acts as an agent of influence when he sends messengers to Hanun in an attempt to renew diplomatic relations with Ammon on the occasion of King Nahash's death. However, instead of graciously receiving David's messengers (and their condolences for his father's death), Hanun makes a brave political move in the opposite direction of David's wishes—he refuses to engage in diplomacy, humiliates David by shaming his representatives, and prepares for battle. This response indicates that David enacted negative influence over Hanun. This humiliation, and the fact that Hanun hired Aramean mercenaries to fight Israel, necessitates David's action to defend himself and Israel. The result is that Israel defeats Ammon.

The third analysis, Absalom's insult of David in 2 Samuel 16, revealed a complex matrix of competing social power bases involving four different individuals: David and his confidant, Hushai, and Absalom and his counselor, Ahithophel. At the time of Absalom's attempted takeover, David was firmly established as king over all Israel and had the support of an established bureaucratic apparatus (*legitimate power*). Though David's charismatic influence had waned by this point, he still had a cohort of mighty warriors at his disposal (*coercive power*), and his position as king gave him the ability to dole out benefits to those with whom he was pleased (*reward power*). Moreover, David's secret placement of Hushai in Absalom's inner circle gave him knowledge that was critical to protect his position as king (*information power*). As for David's confidant, Hushai, his personal access to David gave him intimate knowledge of David's

proclivities and tactics. Specifically, Hushai knew David's plans to elude Absalom (*expert power*).

As for Absalom, at the time of his attempted *coup* he was greatly admired and physically attractive with his luxurious hair (*referent power*). By portraying himself at the city gate as a more attentive and effective judge than David in the years leading up to the *coup,* Absalom had suggested to those coming to Jerusalem from other tribes that he could reward those who would follow him *(reward power*). Additionally, Absalom was next in the line of royal succession and had gathered a large following of supporters including David's former royal counselor, Ahithophel (*legitimate power*). Ahithophel is described in the narrative as having the uncanny ability to give counsel "like one who inquires of God" (*expert power*). In addition to gaining the loyalty and wise counsel of Ahithophel, Absalom also had thousands of troops at his bidding (*coercive power*). And, Absalom's secret schemes to take over the kingdom gave him a military and political advantage (*information power*).

Within this matrix of competing power dynamics, Absalom's insult—sexually taking David's concubines on the roof of the palace—was a public act meant to leverage the women's royal status and relationship to King David to Absalom's advantage. Specifically, Absalom's insult was intended to complete his takeover of the kingdom by demonstrating that Absalom was more sexually and politically potent than David and thus the best choice for king. This type of insult, where women are used by men in an attempt to reduce the socio-political status of other men, was also highlighted in several extra-biblical texts. The El-Amarna letter from Biryawaza to Pharaoh in which Biryawaza tells of his wives and daughters being sexually taken by an adversary,

demonstrated that women in the ANE/EMED were used as political pawns. The Old Babylonian references to women in the Mari palace demonstrated that women were protected possessions of the king and were transferrable from one ruler to another after a takeover.

When this biblical episode is viewed through the lens of French and Raven's social power theory, it is apparent that Absalom is the agent who uses an emasculating, public insult to make a complete break with David and to influence the people of Israel to support his *coup d'etat* more resolutely. Although the biblical narrative is silent on the insult's actual effect on the populace, surprisingly it portrays David as more inclined to save Absalom than punish him. David warns his troops not to harm Absalom when they pursue him, and thus Absalom actually had negative influence over David. However, Absalom's plans to take over the kingdom are thwarted when he is killed contrary to David's wishes by David's commander, Joab. In the end, Absalom's followers flee, and David is restored to his throne.

Conclusions

The analysis of these three insults against the backdrop of comparative texts demonstrated that insults were a common part of the political process in the social world of the ANE/EMED, and the events portrayed in the early monarchic period in the Hebrew Bible reflect this reality. In each instance, competing power dynamics underlie the main conflict described in the biblical narrative, and the insult attempts to alter power in favor of the one instigating the insult. In terms of the biblical author's intent, all three of these episodes convey to the reader that David was victorious over those who tried to lower his

socio-political station through insults, and he was innocent of wrongdoing. This portrayal of David is consistent with royal apologetic from the ANE/EMED.

In the Nabal episode, though David is initially furious over Nabal's insult and prepares to take vengeance by leading armed men to confront Nabal, Nabal's wife, Abigail intervenes. Abigail meets David with a speech in support of his mission and the provisions that Nabal refused to provide, and through this act of goodwill she persuades David to abandon his plans for vengeance. In a short time, the LORD strikes down Nabal to exact vengeance, so David remains innocent of bloodshed, and he takes Nabal's wife, Abigail, as his own.

In the Hanun episode, David takes care to salvage his messengers' reputation by letting the shamed men stay out of sight until their beards have grown back. Thus, David is portrayed as a sympathetic leader. Then, only after Hanun initiates a build-up of troops to fight Israel does David send out his army to fight the coalition. David's victory over this coalition provides Israel with territorial security, and it makes Aramean vassals subject to Israel instead of Aram.

When Absalom insults his father, King David, by sleeping with David's concubines on top of the royal palace as part of his attempted *coup*, David does not seek to kill Absalom in retaliation. Though David defends his position by sending troops to fight Absalom's followers, he warns the troops not to harm Absalom. Joab ignores this warning, and he and his armor bearers kill Absalom when his hair is caught in tree branches, a situation which renders Absalom unable to defend himself. Though Absalom's death enables David to regain his hold on the throne, the biblical author's

portrayal of David's public grief over his traitorous son's death reveals that, once again, David is innocent of wrongdoing.

In all three of these accounts, David's enemies attempt to harm him or thwart his plans through insults, the significance of which would have been understood well by ancient audiences. These insults which Nabal, Hanun, and Absalom use in an attempt to gain power over David portray them as the aggressors and offenders who deserve to be defeated. David, on the other hand, is characterized in such a way that his reputation remains largely untarnished even when it is clear that he benefits from the downfall of his enemies. For example, even though the Saul-sympathizer Nabal dies, and David takes his wife in 1 Samuel 25, the biblical author indicates that the LORD, not David, took vengeance on Nabal. This leaves David innocent of wrongdoing even though he benefits from Nabal's death. Likewise, even though David gains victory over the Ammonite-Aramean coalition which Hanun formed against Israel in 2 Samuel 10, the biblical narrative characterizes Hanun as the instigator. And, even though David's rival, Absalom, is killed and David's rule is affirmed after the *coup* attempt in 2 Samuel 16, the narrative paints David as the sympathetic character. The biblical author's use of insults in this way, to portray David as a relatively innocent victim of his enemies' socially injurious aggression, is in keeping with the genre of royal apologetic.

In the ANE/EMED, the genre of royal apologetic served as propaganda to defend a ruler against accusations of wrong conduct.[270] Regarding the Bible's propagandistic

[270] For a thorough description of the rhetoric of royal apologetic, see Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient near East*. Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series, no. 4 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 45-72.

portrayal of David in these accounts, the defeat of many of David's foes (such as Nabal, Hanun, and Absalom, among others) likely spurred many questions about David's character and motives among at least some ancient Israelites, and those questions may have led to outright accusations that elicited an official response.[271] Although a full discussion of the Hebrew Bible's use of royal apologetic is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the findings in this study buttress arguments supporting the biblical author's use of this propagandistic genre in the accounts of the early monarchy period. In particular, the biblical author's characterization of David demonstrates an intent to portray him sympathetically. Further scholarly analysis in this area is needed to clarify questions of genre, but this dissertation does provide a starting point. For example, the methodology used in this study could be applied in a broader sense to determine how the biblical author used various cultural phenomena, including insults, to characterize individuals in sympathetic or unsympathetic terms.

Concerning this dissertation's contribution to the reader's understanding of the three biblical texts under analysis, the application of social power theory provides further insight into the socio-political dynamics described in each account. Outlining the political milieu of each account enables the reader to situate the insults in their proper context. Identifying power bases enables the reader to recognize the types of influence which individuals in each account had at their disposal. Deconstructing each of the insults against the backdrop of comparative examples from the ANE/EMED provides the reader with an enhanced understanding about the meaning of each insult and how it caused

[271] Baruch Halpern argues that the murders of David's enemies at politically convenient times may be behind the need for the biblical author's defense of David. See *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 75-76.

social injury. And, determining how each insult functioned within its particular socio-political matrix further illuminates the motivations of each character. Understanding these aspects of biblical accounts increases the reader's ability to grasp plot and critically analyze authorial intent. Furthermore, this dissertation's methodological approach in using social power theory to analyze narratives situated in the period of the early monarchy provides the reader with a means of analysis for other biblical texts.

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