

**MICHAL, ABIGAIL AND BATHSHEBA:
An Examination of their Political Influence through
Annotated Translation and Analysis**

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements and Dedication	3
Introduction	4
Annotated Translation: Michal	12
Chapter One: Analysis of Michal's Political Influence	38
Annotated Translation: Abigail	49
Chapter Two: Analysis of Abigail's Political Influence	76
Annotated Translation: Bathsheba	86
Chapter Three: Analysis of Bathsheba's Political Influence	107
Conclusion	115
Bibliography	118

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שויתי יהוה לנגדי תמיד כי מימיני בל אמוט

“I set Adonai before me continually;
with God at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.” (Ps. 16:8)

Introduction

1. The David Saga: A Summary of the David Narrative

While David did not match his son Solomon's vast quantity of wives (1 Kings 11:3), three of David's wives stand out for their importance in the greater David saga. These three wives, Michal, Abigail and Bathsheba, appear as part of the lengthy narrative describing the life of King David from 1 Samuel 16 through 1 Kings 1. Throughout the David saga, an integral narrative in the Jewish tradition, Michal, Abigail and Bathsheba each play a key role. This thesis will closely examine the texts involving Michal, Abigail, and Bathsheba, concentrating on their political influence and abilities.

The reader first meets David in 1 Samuel 16, when God tells Samuel to anoint Jesse's youngest son as King Saul's successor (v. 1). Samuel travels to Bethlehem and anoints David, and the spirit of Adonai remains with him (v. 13). In the next verse, the reader learns that the spirit of Adonai has left King Saul, and an evil spirit begins to plague him. Soon, he requests a lyre-player to help soothe him (v. 17). His attendant recommends the skilled young David, and the king sends messengers to bring him (v. 19). David makes a great impression on King Saul, who requests that David serve him as an arms-bearer (v. 21). David also continues to soothe the king with his talented playing of the lyre, and when he does so, the evil spirit departs from Saul (v. 23).

In 1 Samuel 17, King Saul's forces prepare to battle the Philistines, whose ranks included the incredibly tall and strong Goliath. Goliath terrifies King Saul's army by challenging them to present one man who can prevail against him, or the Philistines will enslave them (vv. 8-9). David comes to the front line to bring supplies to his brothers, and he heard Goliath repeat his challenge (vv. 20-23). He also learns that King Saul will give his daughter in marriage to the man who prevails against Goliath (v. 27). David convinces the king of his abilities by explaining that, despite his young age, his shepherding experiences have given him the necessary skills to challenge Goliath (vv. 32-37). Armed only with his slingshot, David courageously approaches Goliath in the name of the God of Israel, and kills him (vv. 45-51).

In 1 Samuel 18, following the Israelite victory over the Philistines, King Saul's son Jonathan (a powerful warrior, who has previously challenged his father's authority) re-enters the narrative. The narrator explains that Jonathan loves David, and they make a pact as David becomes a mighty warrior in Saul's service (vv. 1-3). Soon, King Saul becomes jealous of David's success and fame and attempts to kill him (vv. 8-11). King Saul places him at the head of his troops, and David continues to become even more famous and successful (vv. 13-16). As a result, the king plots his death by offering his oldest daughter Merab in marriage in return for victory against the dangerous Philistines (v. 17). When David hesitates at the idea of becoming son-in-law to the king, Saul gives Merab to another man in marriage. Here Michal enters the biblical narrative, with the

narrator's announcement of her love for David (vv. 19-20). David then gives King Saul two hundred Philistine foreskins in order to marry Michal (vv. 17-30)¹.

In 1 Samuel 19, the king continues to plot against his new son-in-law. Jonathan warns David of his father's plans and tries to convince his father not to harm him (vv. 2-5).

When King Saul vows not to kill David, he returns from hiding to continue serving the King (vv. 6-7). However, after another of David's successful battles, an evil spirit of Adonai again enters the king, and he attempts to murder David. This thesis also includes a close reading of this section (vv. 9-17), in which Michal then saves her husband from her father's wrath (vv. 9-17)².

In 1 Samuel 20-21, David remains in covenant with Jonathan to protect him from King Saul and continues to hide from him. In 1 Samuel 22-23, David reunites with his father and brothers and gains a large following, while the king pursues him. In 1 Samuel 24, David has the opportunity to kill the king and resists (a similar scene occurs in ch. 26). Therefore, the king vows to no longer pursue David if he promises to keep his descendants alive. In 1 Samuel 25, Abigail persuades David not to harm her rude husband, whose flocks David and his men protected.³ This thesis examines ch. 25:3, 14-42 in close detail. In this section, Abigail not only restrains David from violence, but also predicts his future success, which includes marrying Abigail after her husband dies. At

¹: See the annotated translation of this passage beginning on p. 12 and analysis of this story beginning on p. 39.

² See the annotated translation of this passage beginning on p. 24 and analysis of this story beginning on p. 39.

³ See the annotated translation of 1 Sam. 25:3, 14-42 beginning on p. 50 and analysis of this story beginning on p. 76.

the end of the Abigail narrative, the reader learns that the king has given Michal to Palti in marriage (25:44).

In 1 Samuel 31, King Saul and three of his sons die, and in 2 Samuel 2, David becomes king of Judah. In order to increase his power, David then makes a pact with Abner on the condition that he arranges for Ish-bosheth to return Michal to him. David then begins his forty year reign as king of Israel (2 Sam. 5:1-3). He successfully brings the Ark of God to the City of David, and Michal despises him for his joyful dancing in public (2 Sam. 6:16). Michal criticizes David's public display of celebration and the narrator announces her barrenness.⁴

In 2 Samuel 7, David learns that Adonai will establish him as the head of a great house. In 2 Samuel 7-9, the narrator describes David's continued success in battle. In 2 Samuel 11, David remains at his house while Joab leaves the troops in battle, and he then seduces and impregnates the beautiful Bathsheba.⁵ This leads to David's plot to murder Bathsheba's husband, and his marriage to Bathsheba. Although God kills their first baby to punish David, she later gives birth to Solomon, whom Adonai favors (12:24). In his older days, David's eldest son Adonijah declares himself as the next King, and Bathsheba petitions David to name their son Solomon as his successor (1 Kings 1:11-23, 28-31).⁶

⁴ See the annotated translation of 2 Sam. 6:20-23 beginning on p. 34 and analysis beginning on p. 39.

⁵ See the annotated translation of 2 Sam. 11:1-6, 26-27 beginning on p. 87 and analysis of the story beginning on p. 108.

⁶ See the annotated translation of 1 Kings 1:11-23, 28-31 beginning on p. 93 and analysis of the story beginning on p. 108.

Soon before his death, David gives Solomon his final instructions, and leaves him to carry on the Davidic dynasty in Israel (1 Kings 2).

2. The Roles of Michal, Abigail and Bathsheba in the David Saga

Although Michal, Abigail and Bathsheba appear in far fewer verses than David, they each have a crucial role in this saga. Through a close study of these women and their interactions with David, one gains greater insight into David's character. They each have a role in this narrative during a pivotal turning point in David's life. However, they are not passive pit-stops on his journey; rather, they each shape and influence his journey, and the political landscape of ancient Israel. As the narrator incorporates these three characters into the overall context of the David saga, their influence helps illustrate central aspects of his character and his reign. Although each of these heroines shares the same husband, the biblical narrative portrays them each as unique and integral characters during this critical time in Jewish history.

For example, Michal enters the narrative at the very beginning of David's career, right after he slays Goliath and makes a pact with Jonathan. After she marries Michal, he is forced to go into hiding from her father, and she helps save him. Her loyalty to him, even as she acts against her powerful father, gives David the opportunity to rise to power. During his period of hiding, Abigail also saves him, this time by acting against her rich husband. Abigail's confidence, eloquence, and faith in his future power help motivate

him during his long period of hiding. One can infer that the riches and land of his new wife (not to mention her wit) help sustain David and his men on his long road to the kingship. David eventually becomes so well established as king that he stays behind while his troops go to battle. During this interlude, he sees Bathsheba, and seduces her. Finally, toward the end of David's reign/life, Bathsheba convinces him to make her son Solomon his successor.

4. Examining the Political Influence of Michal, Abigail and Bathsheba

The political influence of these three women interests me because as they were central figures in the life of the most powerful king in our historical tradition. Not only do the unique characterizations of Michal, Abigail and Bathsheba highlight different aspects of this powerful leader, they also play important political roles of their own. In various ways, these women have an impact on the establishment and the future of the great Davidic dynasty. David achieves significant power and success during his reign, and no person, especially a lowly shepherd, can rise to this level of success without the assistance of others. Although women in ancient Israel did not have the same opportunities for political success as men did, they might have influenced the political reign through their individual attributes and/or their relationships to those in the power structure. Through a close reading of the texts associated with these three women, I plan to highlight the important political roles of these women, so long in the shadow of their famous husband in traditional biblical scholarship.

5. Goals and Methods of this Thesis

Through a close reading of the texts concerning Michal, Abigail, and Bathsheba, I plan to analyze the extent of their political influence in the biblical narrative. Via an annotated translation and subsequent analysis of these texts, I hope to better understand each of their characterizations, possible motivations, and roles within the larger context of the David narrative. Throughout this work, I make extensive use of *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*⁷ in deciphering specific renderings for complicated words and phrases. In preparing my translations, I compare my work to translations such as *The David Story*⁸, *1 Samuel: Anchor Bible*⁹, *2 Samuel: Anchor Bible*¹⁰, *The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*¹¹, *The New Interpreter's Bible Vol. III*¹², and *Give us a King*¹³. In my analysis, I draw on the work of feminist biblical scholars,

⁷ Walter Baumgartner, Ludwig Koehler, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2000).

⁸ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999).

⁹ Kyle P. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: The Anchor Bible, Volume 8* (Garden City: Double Day & Company, Inc., 1984).

¹⁰ Kyle P. McCarter, Jr. *(2 Samuel: The Anchor Bible, Volume 9)*. Garden City: Double Day & Company, Inc., 1984).

¹¹ The Jewish Publication Society, trans., *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1999).

¹² Harriet Jane Olsen, ed. dir., *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume III* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

¹³ Everett Fox, *Give us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David: A New Translation of Samuel 1 and II* (Random House Inc., New York: 1999).

including Alice Bach¹⁴, Carole Meyers¹⁵, Andrea Weiss¹⁶, David J.A Clines¹⁷, and Tamara C. Eskenazi. Through a combination of my close understanding of the text and the significant influence of these sources, I plan to evaluate Michal, Abigail, and Bathsheba as individual political players, set against the background of the David saga

¹⁴ Alice Bach, *The Pleasures of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1990).

Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁵ Carole Meyers, *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, ed. by Carole Meyers and Ross Shephard Kraemer (Grand Rapids: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001).

¹⁶ Andrea Weiss, *Figurative Language in Biblical Prose Narrative: Metaphor in the Book of Samuel* (Boston: Brill, 2006).

¹⁷ David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenazi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

Annotated Translation: Michal

1 Samuel 18:17-30

17. So¹⁸ Saul said to David, “Behold my elder daughter, Merab¹⁹: I will give her to you as a wife, but be to me a brave son²⁰ and fight²¹ God’s fights. And Saul said (to himself)²², “Let my hand not be on him²³; let the hand of the Philistines be on him.

¹⁸ JPS does not include a translation of the “vav,” while Rosenberg, Alter, and Weiss translates it as “and,” and NRSV translates it as “then.” In contrast, Fox translates it “vav” here as “so,” the translation I also chose, as this word implies a causal relationship with the previous verses that outline Saul’s complicated feelings toward David, and move our narrative forward.

¹⁹ Merab is mentioned previously in 1 Sam. 14:49 in a list of Saul’s sons and two daughters. In the majority of translations she appears only once more, as her name only appears one other time in the Hebrew text (1 Sam. 18:19). However, JPS includes her in its translation of 2 Sam. 21:8: “Instead, the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons that Rizpah daughter of Aiah bore to Saul, and the five sons that Merab daughter of Saul bore to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite.” Although the Hebrew text contains Michal’s name, JPS inserts Merab’s name because the text does not mention that Michal bears Adriel sons, and therefore the five sons mentioned in this verse must belong to Merab. Zafira Ben-Barak addresses this verse in his article, “The Legal Background to the Restoration of Michal to David”: “It is usually thought that there is an error here, and that ‘Merab’ should be read instead of ‘Michal’...it is difficult to accept that there was a mistake in the name of Michal, however, and possible that the mistake is actually in the name of the second husband (who is of secondary importance in the narratives” (87). He adds that the majority of scholars believe that the Michal narrative is authentic, in contrast to their non-acceptance of the Merab narrative “as a colourless imitation...”(79).

²⁰ JPS and Rosenberg translate this phrase as “my warrior,” while Alter chooses “courageous fellow,” and NRSV chooses “serve me bravely” In contrast, Fox chooses “a son of valor,” the most literal of these translations. Koehler-Baumgartner defines this phrase in the context of this verse, as “of good family, brave (311).” Therefore, I prefer the translation “brave son” because this more accurately alludes not only to this definition but also to the inherent complexities of David and Saul’s relationship. This phrase appears throughout the biblical narrative to describe brave military men, such as in Deut. 3:18; 2 Sam. 23:20; 1 Sam. 14:52; and 1 Chr. 5:18.

²¹ JPS and Alter translate this phrase as “fight the battles of the Lord” (Fox substitutes “Lord” in his definition for “YHWH”); Rosenberg renders it as “wage the wars of the Lord,” and NRSV “fight the Lord’s battles” Weiss chooses “fight God’s battles” for his translation. Koehler-Baumgartner translates this root, here conjugated in the nifal, as “come to blows, fight” (526). I translated this phrase as “fight God’s fights” in order to reflect the repetition of the root lamed-chet-mem. Variations of this phrase in the nifal are found in only a few other biblical verses, such as: 1 Sam. 8:20 and 1 Sam. 25:28 (to keep consistency in this translation I chose the same translation for this phrase in verse 28). Weiss notes that the inclusion of this phrase indicates Saul’s desire to paint his request only as a means of honoring God, to battle for God’s sake, rather than as a means to fulfill his desires concerning David himself (288).

²² Alter comments that *amar* in this context means “thought to himself” (67), while JPS and NRSV translate it as “thought,” and Rosenberg translates it literally as “said.” Weiss and Fox resolve this issue by inserting “to himself” in parenthesis. I have chosen this translation as well, as it most specifically conveys Saul’s actions while also keeping the literal translation of *amar* as “said.” The same usage of this verb occurs in v. 21 as well, and therefore I chose the same translation of *amar* in that verse. As Alter notes, in v. 17, the reader first learns Saul’s plan concerning his daughter as he relates it to David, and only after this conversation, the reader learns his true intent. In contrast, in v. 21, the reader learns his true intentions before he reveals his new plan to David (67).

18. And David said to Saul, “Who am I and what is my life- my father’s family in Israel²⁴ - that I will be son-in-law²⁵ to the king?”

²³ This phrase, appearing twice in this verse, consists of the root hay-yud-hay in the future tense and the noun *yad*. This phrase also occurs, with the words in a slightly different order, in v. 21. JPS translates this phrase both times in this verse as “strike,” while Alter translates it both times as “hand be against.” Fox translates it in both instances as “will fall into the hands” while NRSV translates it the first time as “raise a hand,” and the second time as “deal with.” I chose the translation “hand be on” in both instances, in order to reflect the repetition in the Hebrew text, and to incorporate the literal meaning of the words in this phrase. This translation also illustrates the literary nuance of this Hebrew phrase, as it demonstrates Saul’s violent intentions toward David.

²⁴ The translations of this verse differ significantly, a fact that reflects the complex syntax of David’s reply in the Hebrew text. JPS uses dashes in its translation of David’s reply in order to clarify the unclear syntax. The JPS translation therefore reads, “Who am I and what is my life—my father’s family in Israel—that I should become Your Majesty’s son-in-law?” Weiss addresses this issue in a different way by rendering the sentence as, “And what is my life [other than] my father’s family in Israel;” he then explains: “David would seem to be playing down his family’s importance as he had his own” (288). Fox makes sense of this syntax by translating David’s reply as “who are my living-relatives, my father’s clan in Israel,” while Alter differs from this slightly with “who are my kin, my father’s clan in Israel.” Finally, NRSV translates it as “kinsfolk, my father’s family in Israel.” I chose the same translation as JPS, as it reflects both an authentic and idiomatic rendering of this complicated syntax.

²⁵ This phrase, “son-in-law” is also found in four of this narrative’s following verses (22, 23, 26, 27); thus emphasizing the political nature of this marriage. Therefore this phrase serves as a motif throughout this narrative. While Koehler-Baumgartner defines *chatan*

19. It was in the time that Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite²⁶ as a wife²⁷.

in verse 18 as “daughter’s husband,” I translate it as “son-in-law” (as does NRSV) in order to demonstrate the theme of political marriage in this narrative. I used this translation throughout this narrative in order to illustrate this important motif. Bowman notes that the political meaning of the phrase “the king’s son-in-law” becomes especially notable in verse 27, the fifth inclusion of this phrase, when David brings Saul twice the requested bride-price (*Telling*, 97).

²⁶ The narrative only mentions Adriel one other time, in 2 Sam. 21:8 (also discussed in note #2). Ben-Barak notes that several versions of his name exist, such as Palti, Paltiel, Adriel. ” (87) Brueggeman writes that the underlying strategy behind this marriage foretells David’s plot against Uriah. (138)

²⁷ JPS translates *l’eisha* as “in marriage,” but Rosenberg, Fox, NRSV and Weiss translate it as “as a wife,” a more literal translation that I also chose. While the combination of the root lamed-kuf-chet and the phrase *l’eisha* (take...as a wife) is quite common, the act of another man giving (the root nun-tav-nun) a woman “as a wife” appears less frequently, with three of these instances occurring in this narrative. This repetition demonstrates the passive role of Michal and her sister in these political marriages. Earlier in this narrative, (1 Sam.18:19), Merab “was given (conjugated in the nifal, the passive form, of nun-tav-nun)...as a wife,” and later in this narrative, (1 Sam. 18:27) Saul gave (conjugated in kal, the active form of lamed-tav-tav) Michal to David “as a wife.” Other examples of this phrase occur in Gen 29:28, when Laban gives (again conjugated in the active form of nun-tav-nun) Rachel to Jacob “as a wife;” and in Gen. 41:45, Pharaoh gives Joseph a wife using this exact same conjugation and phrasing. In a few instances in the biblical narrative, women actually give (with the same root, nun-tav-nun) their husbands other women “as a wife,” such as Sarah in Gen.16:3, and Leah in Gen. 30:9, who actually

20. And Michal, Saul's daughter, loved²⁸ David. They told Saul, and the matter was right in his eyes²⁹.

“takes” (lamed-kuf-chet) her maid Zilpah before giving (nun-tav-nun) her “as a wife” to her husband.

²⁸ Although JPS and Fox choose to translate this verb in the more romantic style as “fallen in love,” I chose the literal translation of “loved,” as did Rosenberg, Alter, NRSV and Weiss. This translation best reflects this root (aleph-hay-bet) in the kal (active) conjugation. I also do not view the romantic style as necessary, as this verb already stands out as the single biblical incidence of a woman declaring her love actively for a man/husband (mentioned again in verse 28). Bowman notes that the narrator places this phrase at the beginning of this narrative because Michal's love for David serves as the catalyst of the resulting actions. Therefore, he views Michal's expressed desire as an integral part of this narrative (103). Brueggemann points to the importance of this root (aleph-hay-bet) as a theme throughout the chapter that illustrates David's powerful lovability. (140) This theme begins with the emotionally evocative description of Jonathan's love for David in vv. 18:1, 3; 20:17. For example, JPS translates the relevant portion of 18:1 as “Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself.” In comparison to this detailed description (especially notable given the sparse descriptive style of biblical narrative), the description of Michal's love for David seems almost cold. The theme of David's lovability continues with the public love that all of Israel and Judah feel for David (I Sam. 18:16). In addition, the narrator also uses this verb (with the addition of *maod*, meaning “very”) to describe Saul's strong affection for David (16:21). Given these examples, perhaps Michal's declaration of love for David does not define her as unique, but rather again proves David's irresistible nature; yet Clines labels Michal's romantic love for David as the leitmotif of the entire Michal narrative. (131).

21. And Saul said (to himself), “I will give her to him and she will be a snare³⁰ for him and the hand of the Philistines will be on him.” So Saul said to David, “Through the second one you will become my son-in-law today.”

22. So Saul commanded his servants: “Say to David in secret³¹, “Behold the king desires³² you and all his servants love you. Now, become the king’s son-in-law.”

²⁹ JPS translates this phrase as “he was pleased.” while Weiss chooses the translation “it was right in his eyes,” and Rosenberg and NRSV choose “and the thing pleased him.” My more literal translation reflects a combination of these translations. I chose “the matter” as this is the most accurate rendering of *dvar* in this context; and “right in his eyes” as this literal translation better represents the style of biblical narrative. Notably, this phrase occurs again in verse 26 (for consistency, I chose the same translation), only this time in reference to David instead of Saul.

³⁰ JPS, Fox, Alter , NRSV and Rosenberg also translate this word as “snare” (the Koehler-Baumgartner definition, p. 560), while Weiss chose to translate this word as “hindrance.” The phrase in this verse, “to become a snare (for someone)” occurs only ten additional times in the biblical narrative, including Ex. 10:7; 23:33; and Ps. 106:36.

³¹ JPS renders this rarely-found word as “privately,” Alter renders it as “discreetly,” while Weiss, Fox, and Rosenberg render it as “secretly.” I chose “in secret” because it better connotes the emphasis on political plotting in this narrative. However, Alter defends his definition by noting, “the root of the Hebrew adverb refers to covering up, but the usual translation of “secretly” is misleading. This is not a clandestine communication but one in which the servants...must be careful to cover up their master’s real intentions” (116). This word is included only 7 times in the biblical narrative, and only 3 times in a similar context of plots, including later in the David narrative (1 Sam 24:5). In this example, this word describes David’s sly actions as he cuts Saul’s coat, in order to prove that he held himself back from killing Saul. In Judges 4:21, it describes

23. Saul's servants spoke these words in David's ears, and David said, "Is it contemptible³³ in your eyes to become the king's son-in-law, as I am a poor, contemptible man?"

Jael's actions as she moved stealthily to strike Sisera, and in Ruth 3:7, it describes Ruth's calculated actions toward Boaz in the nighttime. In each of these rare examples, this word connotes calculated plotting towards another person, and therefore they influence my understanding of this word in the present verse.

³² This verb (root: chet-fay-tzadi) appears in both this verse and in verse 25 in Kal, active form. In verse 22 the verb refers to Saul's emotions regarding David, while in verse 25 it refers to his emotions regarding the bride-price he assigns David. Therefore, JPS translates chet-pay-tzadi as "fond" in verse 22, but as "desires" in verse 25, and Fox translates it as "pleased" in verse 22 but as "pleasure" in verse 25. In contrast, Weiss translates chet-fay-tzadi as "delights" in both verses (which seems to incorporate the Koehler-Baumgartner definition in the context of these verses, p. 340). In contrast, I choose the translation of "desires" in both verses, as do both Rosenberg and Alter. I found this translation to have the more fitting connotation in both verses of this narrative, as Saul's emotions as portrayed to David in verse 22 seem to stem less from sincere affection than political plotting, and the word "desire" in verse 25 connotes his violent passion for both the Philistines, and for David. I also chose the same translation for each verse in order to reflect the repetition of this same root in the text.

³³ This root, kuf-lamed-lamed, appears in the nifal (passive) form twice in this verse. The variety of translations demonstrates the conceptual difficulty of its usage in this context. NRSV translates it in the first instance as "little thing," followed by "no repute" while JPS translates it initially as "small matter" followed by "no consequence." In contrast, McCarter translates it as "trifling thing" followed by "humble." Alter translates it as "light thing," followed by "lightly esteemed." Koehler-Baumgartner defines this root in this context as light, small, insignificant- a definition that reflects its parallel form of kuf-

24. Saul's servants told him, saying, "These are the words David spoke³⁴."

25. And Saul said, "So say to David: the King does not desire a bride-price³⁵ but a hundred foreskins³⁶ of Philistines to avenge the king's enemies." And Saul thought³⁷ to make David fall³⁸ by the hands of the Philistines.

lamed-hay. (1101) In contrast to the above translations, that view this root as directly connected to the concept of "lightness," I chose to represent the concept of contemptibility, as it reflects the result of devaluing something (equating something with a "light" value). I translated this root in both instances as "contemptible" as it represents the repetition in this verse. In addition, this translation presents the reader a clearer picture of David's complicated emotions when presented with the weighty proposition of becoming the King's son-in-law. In modern parlance, it as if he tells Saul's servants, "You might think I come from nothing, and do not deserve this honor, but I know my destiny!"

³⁴ Although JPS translates the root "daled-bet-resch" here as "answered" I chose the literal translation of "spoke," as do Rosenberg, Alter, and Weiss. NRSV "said"

³⁵³⁵ While both Weiss and Rosenberg choose the translation of "dowry," I translate it as "bride-price," as do JPS, Alter, and Fox (although Koehler-Baumgartner defines it as "bride-money" (p. 554). NRSV translates it as "marriage price." The phrase "bride-price" is more evocative of the purely business, rather than romantic, nature of this engagement. This unique bride-price in the biblical narrative seems to represent Michal to David, as he later reacquires her by mentioning this bride-price in 2 Sam 3:14 (therefore I kept this same translation of "bride-price" in that verse as well). Other rare inclusions of this word in the biblical narrative include Gen. 34:12 and Ex. 22:15-16. I chose the translation of "bride-price" because it evokes the usually accepted role of women as passive players in their own marriage and future in this cultural milieu. Susan Marks explains this phrase by noting that "the groom becomes betrothed after he gives a

betrothal gift, which is referred to (here) as a ‘bride-price.’ This implies that the wife is an object acquired by her future husband”(1159).

However, several feminist scholars note that “bride-price” does not necessarily serve as the best translation for *mohar*. For example, Eskenazi, in *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*, explains that in this socio-historical context, “Parents usually arrange the marriage (as when Shechem’s father negotiates a marriage with Dinah in Gen. 34, or when Samson asks his father and mother to get him a wife in Ju. 14:2-3).” She explains further that the groom or members of his family would bring gifts for the family of his intended, and notes that the Hebrew word *mohar*, “Is a term without the misleading commercial overtones of its usual English translation as ‘bride-price’ (127). In another explanation, she notes that this term differs from a dowry (437). Carol Meyers argues that the translation of “bride-price” is not accurate, as “the betrothal gift does not mean that the groom purchased the bride like chattel...instead, the dowry and betrothal gift (a better rendering of *mohar*) helped form alliances between the two families and provided security for the woman, who theoretically retained possession of the dowry (437).

³⁶ This narrative includes the only incidence of foreskins used as dowry throughout the biblical narrative. As Alter notes, Saul chooses his words carefully in this exchange- now communicated through others- as though his is but a small request (116). Foreskins themselves play a very important role in the Israelite religion, as circumcision identifies a man as part of the Israelite community (such as Gen. 17:14, 23; Lev. 12:3; Josh. 5:7) and lack thereof identifies the “other” (often the Philistines, such as in this verse, as well as 1Sam. 17:26; 2 Sam. 1:20; and Ju. 14:3).

³⁷ While Weiss and Rosenberg render this verb literally as “thought,” as do I, JPS renders this verb “intended,” which, while not literal, accurately describes Saul’s thought process. NRSV “planned.” As Peter D. Miscall notes, “Saul focuses on the claim of poverty in David’s protest and counters it with a unique bride price, a hundred Philistine foreskins. This time, to himself, he thinks a clear causal relation...” (Clines, *Telling*, 249)

26. So his servants told these words to David, and the matter was right in David's eyes to become the king's son-in-law. And the days had not expired.

27. And David arose and went with his men and killed³⁹ two hundred Philistine men. David brought their foreskins and paid them in full⁴⁰ to the king to become the king's son-in-law; and Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage.

³⁸ In the context of this narrative, the verb *nun-pay-lamed*, conjugated here in the *hifil*, implies to “drop” someone at the hand of someone else. As Koehler-Baumgartner defines it in the context of this verse, “to bring David to ruin through Philistine intervention (p. 710) ”With the inclusion of the word *yad* (hand), this verse incorporates similar imagery as verse 17 (see note 6), and points to the continuing theme of Saul plotting against David (without having to kill him by his own hand).

³⁹ JPS translates this root, “*nun-kaf-hay*” (conjugated here in the *hifil*) and NRSV as “killed,” while Rosenberg and Weiss translate it as “slew.” Fox and Alter both translate it as “struck-down” which seems to draw from the Koehler-Baumgartner definition of “to strike” (p.697). I chose “kill” as it is more idiomatic and therefore it better evokes the harsh, violent reality of this scene.

⁴⁰ While JPS translates this root, “*mem-lamed-aleph*” (conjugated in *piel*) as “counted out,” Alter chooses “made a full count,” Rosenberg translates it as “delivered them in full,” NRSV “given in full number” and Weiss chooses “gave them in full,” Fox chooses “paid-them-in-full” which I chose as well because this translation more accurately includes the meaning of this root as “full,”(without confusing it with other verbs, such as “to give” or “to deliver”) as it corresponds with the Koehler-Baumgartner definition: “to present completely the entire number,” (583) while also including the notion of a completed business transaction. This meaning becomes more evident when examining somewhat similar usages of this root, including Ex. 23:26; 2 Chr. 36:21 (used to describe a days’ end), Gen. 29: 27 (used to describe a weeks’ end). In these instances, a period of

28. And Saul saw and knew⁴¹ that God was with David and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him.

29. Saul grew more fearful⁴² of David, and Saul was David's enemy all the days⁴³.

time “ends,” and in our verse, the action of paying “ends,” because David “paid-them-in-full.”

⁴¹ JPS and NRSV translates this phrase as “realized”, but this translation does not indicate that the text actually contains two verbs (resh-aleph-hay and yud-daled-ayin, both conjugated in kal) to describe Saul's actions. Alter chooses “saw and marked,” which has a dramatic political connotation not necessarily found in the verb “yud-daled-ayin.” Rosenberg, Fox, and Weiss choose the more literal translation of “saw and knew,” as do I, as it indicates the nuance of this scene, as Saul first observes the situation, and then accepts it as reality. This acceptance serves as a clear transition to v. 29, in which the narrator reveals his fear of David that results from this new knowledge.

⁴² This verb, yud-resh-aleph, occurs often in the biblical narrative and usually refers to a fear/awe of God (such as 2 Kgs. 4:1), or a fear of a potential situation (often involving a group of warriors, such as in Josh. 10:2). This infinitive occurs in only this verse. Rarely, however, does this verb describe an individual man's fear of another man as it does in this verse. In 1 Sam. 18:12 the narrator first reveals Saul's fear of David (also in conjunction with God's seeming alliance with David), which seems to serve as precursor to this verse. Other examples of this rare description of a character's inner emotions toward a rival include: Gen. 32:12 (Jacob's fear of Esau), Ex. 34:30 (in which Aaron and the Israelites were scared of approaching Moses), 1 Sam. 21:13 (in which David himself fears a political opponent), 2 Sam. 3:11 (In which Ish-bosheth fears his rival Abner), and finally, 1 Kgs. 1:50 (in which the narrator reveals Adonijah's fear of Solomon).

30. The Philistine chiefs went out and every time they went out, David was more successful than all Saul's servants; his name was very valued⁴⁴.

⁴³ JPS translates this phrase as “ever after,” while Weiss translates it as “forever” and Alter provides his translation with the haunting imagery with his choice of “constant.” NRSV “from that time forward.” In contrast, Rosenberg and Fox choose the translation “all the days,” the literal translation that I also chose.

⁴⁴ JPS translates this phrase as “reputation soared” and Weiss chooses “highly respected.” NRSV “name became very great” Koehler-Baumgartner translates this root yud-kuf-resh (conjugated here in the kal form) as “to be esteemed” in the context of this verse, and Rosenberg’s, Fox’s and Alter’s translations seem to incorporate this translation. I chose the translation “valued” as this phrase stands out for itself as the only time in the biblical narrative a person’s name/reputation is valued in this way. The usually refers to the value of expensive objects, such as stone (1Kgs. 10:11 and 2 Chr. 9:1 are just two out of the numerous possible examples). However, this root is rarely used in reference to a person, with the character of Mordechai serving as the rare example (Esth.6: 3, 6, 7, 9, 11). This root appears again in this narrative in 1Sam 26:21, when David refrains from killing Saul when he has an opportunity (therefore I choose a similar translation in this verse).

1 Samuel 19:9-17, 25:44

9. And then an evil spirit of Adonai came onto Saul as he was sitting in his house, his spear in his hand, as David was playing (the lyre).

10. Saul tried⁴⁵ to strike⁴⁶ the spear through David into the wall, but he slipped away from Saul, and he struck the spear into the wall. David fled and escaped⁴⁷ on that night.

⁴⁵ The root bet-kuf-shin also has the meaning of “tried to do something” in Ex. 2: 15, 4:24 (attempted murder), Ps. 63:3 (an attempt to behold God). JPS translates bet-kuf- shin in this verse as “tried,” and Alter and Fox as “sought.”

⁴⁶ Nun- kaf-hay (conjugated in hifil) occurs twice in this verse. JPS translates this root in this verse as “pin, drove,” Alter and McCarter as “strike, struck,” and NRSV as “pin, struck.” Other examples of this verb include Gen. 4:15 (God marks Cain so he will not be struck); 8:21 (God will not “strike” down all of humanity again); 37:21 (Reuben persuades his brother not to “strike” Joseph); Ex. 2:12 (Moses “strikes” the Egyptian); Ex. 3:20 (God will “strike” the Egyptians with plagues); 1 Sam. 4:6,9,12 (God “strikes” the Ashdodites with hemorrhoids). In addition to its inclusion in 1 Sam. 18:27, the numerous examples of nun-kaf-hay in the David narrative include 1 Sam. 13:3 (Jonathan “strikes” the Philistine prefect); 1 Sam. 17:9, 25, 27, 35-36, 46, 49, 50, 57; 8: 6-7 (David “strikes” Goliath); and 1 Sam. 18:11 (Saul tries to “pin” David to the wall). The narrator also uses this verb to describe David’s victory over the Philistines only two verses earlier.

I translate nun-kay-hay as “strike, struck” in this verse in order to reflect the repetition of the root in this verse and throughout the David narrative. I do not translate this root as “kill” in order to differentiate it from the root mem-vav-tav (to die/to cause death) in vv.11, 15, 17. To “strike” might convey physical violence depending on the context, but it does not necessarily connote death. The Tanakh lists punishments for those who “strike” another and the victim dies (such as Ex. 21:12, 20; Num. 35:16-18, 21); as well

as punishments for those who “strike” another and the victim lives (such as Ex. 21:18). Also, in many examples, *nun-kay-hay* means “to strike” without the intent of physical harm. For example, in Gen. 19:11, Lot’s potential attackers were “struck down” with light. In Ex. 7:17, 20; 8:12; 17:5; Num. 20:11 Moses “strikes” objects with his rod to bring the plagues.

⁴⁷ *Mem-lamed-tet* serves as a motif in this section of Michal’s narrative, and throughout the David narrative. JPS translates it in this verse (conjugated here, and in v. 17, in nifal) as “got away,” while Alter, McCarter, and NRSV translate it as “escaped.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines it in the context of these two verses as “to flee to safety” (589). Similar examples include Gen. 19:17 (the Angel urges Lot to flee); and twice in 1 Sam. 27:1 (David plans to flee to the Philistines to escape from Saul). In v. 11 this root (conjugated in piel), is found in conjunction with *me nafshi*, a phrase that Koehler-Baumgartner defines as “to save oneself” (589). JPS translates this phrase as “run for your life,” and Alter as “get yourself away.” McCarter translates this phrase as “save yourself,” and NRSV as “save your life.” In 1 Kgs. 1:12, Bathsheba also uses this phrase to convince David to save his life as well as Solomon’s. In 2 Sam. 19:6, David’s followers save his life and those of his family members); and in 2 Sam. 19:10 David saves the lives of the people. In order to reflect the repetition of this root throughout the Michal narrative, I translate it as “escape” in each of these verses.

Mem-lamed-tet, conjugated in nifal, also occurs in vv. 12 and 18. These are the only two verses in the Tanakh in which *mem-lamed-tet* appears in conjunction with *bet-resch-chet* (conjugated in kal). Koehler-Baumgartner defines *bet-resch-chet* in the context of this verse as “to run away, to flee” (156). JPS translates this phrase as “escaped and fled,” in v. 12 and “made good his escape” in v. 18. Alter and McCarter translate it as “fled and got away,” and NRSV as “fled away and escaped.” The narrator’s description of these incidents with two similar verbs shows a departure from the usually sparse descriptive style of the biblical narrative. The narrator includes these two verbs (as well as the

11. Saul sent messengers to David’s house to guard him and kill him in the morning. But Michal his wife told David, saying, “If you do not escape for your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed.”

12. Michal lowered David down from the window and he went off, he ran away and escaped.

13. And Michael took the household idol⁴⁸ and placed it on the bed, and the tangle⁴⁹ of goat’s hair⁵⁰ she placed at its head, and covered it with clothes⁵¹.

addition of the root nun-vav-samech in v.10) to emphasize David’s ability to escape throughout this narrative.

⁴⁸ This unusual root of this noun, tav-resh-pay occurs only fourteen other times in the Tanakh (including v.16). Koehler-Baumgartner notes that while this noun also occurs in the plural form, “plurality is indicated only in 2 Kgs. 23:24; Zech.10:2” (1795). Koehler-Baumgartner defines tav-resh-pay generally as “household or family gods,” and specifically in the context of this chapter as “a life-sized image in human form, though a ceremonial mask would not be impossible; the narrator suggests that those who wanted to capture David were taken in by the deception” (1795). W.G. Balikie comments that in his view these idols represented the God of Israel, not other gods such as Baal or Ashtoreh. Therefore, he notes that their use “was not a breach of the first commandment, but it was a breach of the second” (W.G. Balikie, *Michal in the Books of Samuel*, 95).

JPS translates this noun as “household idol,” NRSV as “idol,” and Alter as “household gods.” McCarter does not translate this noun, but leaves his translation as “teraphim,” and explains “It is obvious that the *teraphim* kept in the home of David and Michal was of human size and shape” (326). I also translate tav-resh-pay here and in verse 16 as “household idol” in order to best illustrate the meaning of this unusual concept.

Michal's involvement with this household idol echoes that of Rachel in Gen. 31:19, 34-35. Alter describes the similarities between these stories by explaining; "Like Rachel, who pleads her period and does not get up from the cushions under which the *teraphim* are hidden, Michal also invokes illness (v.14) to put off the searchers. Both stories feature a daughter loyal to her husband and rebelling against a hostile father" (120). Other significant examples of this noun include 1 Sam.15:23 (Samuel compares Saul's sin of defiance to the sin of worshipping idols); and 2 Kgs.23:24 (Josiah destroys all of the idols).

⁴⁹JPS translates this rare noun *keveer* here and in v.16 as "net," while McCarter translates it in both verses as "tangle." Alter translates this noun as "twist" in both verses. Kaf-vav-yud-resch only occurs nine other times in the Tanakh, and means "strong" in these instances. For example, it describes a "strong" wind in Job. 8:2, and it describes God's strength in Job. 36:5) Due to the lack of similar usages to facilitate my understanding of this noun, I also translate it as "tangle" here and in v.16, as this best illustrates a mass of goat's hair. Also, as Michal hopes it will look like hair, "tangle" is a reasonable choice. McCarter notes that in this verse, *keveer* "Probably serves as a wig, and it may be a woven piece of material or simply an intertwined tangle of goat's hair" (326).

⁵⁰ JPS, McCarter, Alter, and NRSV translate *izim* here and in v.16 as "goat's hair." Although this noun (pluralized here and in v.16) means "goat," Koehler-Baumgartner defines it in the context of these verses as "goat hair for weaving and felt" (805). Other examples of this exact usage include: Ex.25:4; 35:6, 23, 26 (in addition to dyed yarns, "goat hair" is included in the list of acceptable gifts); and 26:7 (woven into cloth, it serves as material for the tent). Alter compares Michal's use of goat hair to the inclusion of goats in the Jacob narrative by explaining, "Michal puts goat's hair at the head of the bed because, being black or dark brown, it would look like a man's hair, but goats (and the color of their hair) are also prominent in the Jacob story" (120).

14. Saul sent messengers to take⁵² David, but she said, “He is sick.”

⁵¹ This phrase, including kaf-samech-hay (conjugated in piel), and the noun *beged*, adds a detail that the narrator does not repeat in v.16. The basic meaning of kaf-samech-hay, conjugated in piel, is “to cover,” as used in 1 Kgs.1:1 (when King David is covered with bedclothes). Koehler-Baumgartner defines kaf-samech-hay in this verse as “to clothe with” (488). Similar examples include Ezek.16:10 (describes one dressed in silks); Num. 4:5, 8, 11 (describes the proper way to cover the ark with cloth). Ezek.18:7, 16 contains the same phrase with the similar meaning of “clothe with clothing.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines *beged* in this verse as “clothes used as coverings” (108). In this verse, NRSV and Alter translates *beged* as “cloth,” while McCarter translates it as “blanket,” and NRSV as “clothes.” To keep the basic meaning of both the verb and the noun in this verse, while also considering the specific context of this verse, I translate this phrase as “clothe with clothes.” Although this translation reads awkwardly, it best describes the concept of Michal’s ruse, in which she hopes to disguise the household idol as David. Alter notes that the use of a garment here serves as a connection to, “the repeated associations of garments in the Jacob story” (120).

⁵² Alter and NRSV translate lamed-kuf-chet (conjugated in kal) as “take,” the basic meaning of this root. JPS translates it as “seize,” while McCarter translates it as “arrest.” Although this context connotes a forced taking in a political context, I kept the basic meaning of lamed-kuf-chet as “take” in my translation, in order to authentically reflect the Hebrew text. This verb often connotes the taking of another person, such as Gen. 12:5 (Abram takes Sarai and Lot from Haran); 1 Sam. 25:40 (David takes Abigail as his wife); Ju. 14:3 (Samson takes a Philistine woman as a wife); (Est. 2:7 (Mordecai takes Esther as his adopted daughter). As in the context of our verse, this verb can also connote the forced taking of a person, such as 1 Sam.17:31 (Saul makes David be brought to him); 1 Sam. 19:20 (Saul sends messengers to take David); 2 Kgs. 4.1 (children will be taken as slaves); 2 Sam.3:15 (Ish-bosheth takes Michal from her husband Paltiel); Est. 2:8 (Esther and the other young women were taken into the king’s palace), 16 (Esther was taken into the king); Gen. 12:15 (Sarai was taken into Pharaoh); and 2 Kgs.2:10 (Hezekiah’s sons will be taken to serve as eunuchs).

15. And Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, “Bring him up to me in the bed, that he may be put to death.”

16. The messengers came and there was the household idol in the bed, with the tangle of goat’s hair at its head.

17. Saul said to Michal, “Why did you deceive⁵³ me, and sent away my enemy, so that he escaped?” Michal said to Saul, “He said to me, ‘Send me free. Why should I kill you?’”

25:44. Saul gave Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Palti⁵⁴ son of Laish, from Gallim.

⁵³ JPS translates resh-mem-hay (conjugated in piel) as “play that trick on me,” while McCarter and NRSV translate it as “deceived.” Alter translates resh-mem-hay in this verse as “betrayed” and comments on the similarity between this verse and Laban’s anger when Jacob deceives him by leaving with his daughters (121). Additional examples which facilitate our understanding of this rare verb include Gen. 29:25 (Jacob exclaims his outrage that Laban tricked him into marrying Leah); and I Sam. 28:12 (the wise woman of Endor realizes Saul has deceived her). Koehler-Baumgartner translates resh-mem-hay in the context of this verse as “to betray” (1240), but I chose the translation “deceive” as it also fits the context of these similar examples.

⁵⁴ The concept of Saul giving Michal in marriage to Paltiel, while she remains married to David, necessitates explanation. As Ben-Barak notes on this occasion (and on the occasion when David takes her back in marriage); “Twice Michal is given to a different man, in the lifetime of her husband, and on both occasions by the legal authority, the king...This repeated offence against one of the sacred principles of society is in need of explanation” (*Telling*, 76). Ben-Barak compares the similarity between this story, and that of Samson’s marriage to the woman of Timnah (Ju.14-15), “As they both describe

2 Samuel 3:12-16, 6:20-23

12. And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, “To whom will the land (belong)?” Saying (further), “Make a pact with me, and look, my hand will be with you, to bring all Israel round to you.”

13. He said, “Good, I will make a pact⁵⁵ with you, but I ask one thing of you: you will not see my face⁵⁶ unless you bring Michal, Saul’s daughter, when you come to see my face.”

the disaster which was caused as a result of the giving of a man’s wife to another, albeit by her own father” (77).

⁵⁵ JPS, Alter, and McCarter translate this phrase, consisting of the verb *faf-resh-tav* (conjugated in *kal*) and the noun *bet-resh-yud-tav*, as “make a pact.” NRSV translates this phrase as “make a covenant.” Koehler-Baumgartner notes that when those two words are combined, the phrase refers to “the cutting of a sacrificial animal as is customary when making a covenant” (500); and it specifically defines *bet-resh-yud-tav* in the context of this verse as an “agreement that is being concluded” (157). Genesis 15:9 epitomizes this definition, in which Abraham makes sacrifices to God, and God makes a covenant with him. This is one of numerous examples of the narrator utilizing this phrase to describe a covenant between people and God. This phrase is also used to describe covenants made between people via certain kinds of sacrifices. In Gen. 21:27, 32 Abraham gives Abimelech cattle, and they made a pact. In 1 Sam. 11:2, Nahash suggests that he will make a pact with Israel if every Israelite will sacrifice their right eyes. In our verse, the covenant between Ish-bosheth and David depends on the exchange of human booty: the return of Michal. Other political pacts described with this phrase include 2 Sam. 5:3 (in which King David makes a political pact with the leaders of Israel); and 1 Sam. 23:18 (in which David and Jonathan make a political pact). Later in this chapter (v. 21), Abner agrees to rally Israel to make a covenant with David. As Jewish tradition centers on the covenant made between God and Israel, and “covenant” remains the chosen translation

14. David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid the bride-price⁵⁷ of one hundred Philistine foreskins."

for bet-resh-yud-tav in Jewish practice; I translate this phrase as "made a pact" in order to distinguish this as a political, not religious, agreement.

⁵⁶ Alter explains that "see my face," a phrase used twice in this verse, is "An idiom used for coming into the presence of royalty" (210). As McCarter further explains, "Those who were privileged to 'see the face' of a king on a regular basis were the members of his inner circle of personal advisors. It was a sign of favor and privilege to be granted an interview with a king or other person of high rank, and expressed exclusion from 'seeing the face' of the king was, conversely, a form of disgrace" (114). Second Samuel 14:24 includes this idiom twice to describe David's refusal to receive Absalom. In 2 Kgs. 25:19, the narrator incorporates this phrase to describes the insider status of five counselors; and in Est. 1:14, it describes the insider status of seven Persian and Median ministers. Although we do not employ this seemingly awkward idiom today, I have retained this literal rendering in both cases in order to preserve a sense of biblical literary style in my translation.

⁵⁷ JPS translates aleph-resh-shin (conjugated as piel) as "paid the bride-price," (see comment on "bride-price" in 1 Sam. 18:25) while Alter and McCarter translate it as "betrothed." NRSV translates aleph-resh-shin here as "became engaged." The concept of engagement in this context assumes that the groom has paid the bride-price, and thus officially establishes the engagement. This unusual verb appears only 9 other times in the Tanakh. Deuteronomy 22:23, 25, and 27-28 include this verb to outline the laws regarding the rape of an engaged woman. Exodus 22:15 outlines the law regarding sex with a virgin who is not engaged. Deuteronomy 20:7 maintains that if a man has become engaged, he should not enter battle until he marries his betrothed. Aleph-resh-shin also appears in Deut. 28:30, in a curse; "If you pay the bride-price for a wife, another man shall enjoy her" (JPS translation). This verb seems to describe the modern idea of romantic engagement in Hos.2:20-21, however, the "bride" in this context is Israel.

15. Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband, from⁵⁸ Paltiel son of Laish.

16. Her husband walked with her, weeping⁵⁹ as he walked after her, until Bahurim; and Abner said to him, “Go, return,” and he returned.

Koehler-Baumgartner defines the basic meaning of this verb as “to betroth a wife,” and only in the context of this verse, with the inclusion of the preposition *beh.* as “to specify the bride-price” (91). I have also translated aleph-resh-shin here as “paid the bride-price,” as this phrase directly connects to the original transaction between David and Saul earlier in this narrative. Also, as opposed to the more romantic connotation implied in the translations “engaged” or “betrothed,” this translation connotes the singularly political nature of this transaction.

⁵⁸ Translating this verse presents a syntactical challenge, as it includes the combined preposition *m'im* twice. Like Alter, I included “from” twice in this verse in order to accurately reflect the Hebrew text, and added a comma to help it flow better syntactically. In contrast, the more idiomatic translations, NRSV and JPS, only include “from” once. This parallels the phrase *et eishti et michal* in the previous verse.

⁵⁹ This verse includes hay-lamed- kaf twice, both times conjugated in kal. JPS translates this root as “walked” in the first instance, and “followed” in the second. Alter translates both of these occurrences as “went,” and NRSV translates them as “went, walked.” McCarter translates this entire phrase as “went with her, weeping behind her.” The first occurrence of hay-lamed-kaf in the context of this verse means “to walk,” the most common and basic meaning of this root. The second occurrence, in conjunction with the proposition *acharey* (meaning “after”), implies the meaning “to follow.” Other examples of hay-lamed-kaf in conjunction with *acharey* includes Gen. 32:20 (Jacob’s servants followed him in anticipation of his reunion with Esau); Pr.7:22; and Gen. 24:5, 8, 39, 61 (Rebekah follows Abraham’s servant to meet Isaac). I translate hay-lamed-kaf in both instances as “walked,” in order to illustrate this repetition and to further emphasize Paltiel’s emotional actions in this verse.

In addition to the narrator's repeated usage of hay-lamed-kaf to describe Paltiel's actions, the narrator also describes him with the verb bet-kaf-hay (conjugated in kal). JPS, McCarter, Alter and NRSV all translate bet-kaf-hay in this verse as "weeping." As Alter notes, "There is scarcely a more striking instance of the evocative compactness of biblical narrative. We know almost nothing about Paltiel. He speaks not a word of dialogue. Yet his walking after Michal, weeping all the while, intimates a devoted love that stands in contrast to David's relationship with her" (211). The biblical narrative actually includes far more examples of individual men crying than individual women. The rare examples of women weeping include 21:16 (Hagar crying in the wilderness); Ju. 11:37-38 (Samson's future wife mourning her virginity); 14:16-17 (Samson's wife fighting with Samson about the riddle); 1 Sam. 1:7-8, 10 (Hannah lamenting her barrenness); Ruth 1:9, 14 (Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah weeping); Est. 8:3 (Esther appeals to the king). In each of these contexts of emotional pain, bet-kaf-hay retains its basic meaning, "to weep."

In contrast, the Tanakh includes numerous examples of men crying, both in times of joy as well as in times of sorrow. Koehler-Baumgartner defines this verb as both "to greet," "to mourn," and its' basic meaning, "to weep," considering its context (129). For example, bet-kaf-hay can describe an emotional reaction upon a greeting or a reunion, such as in Gen. 33:4 (Esau reunites with Jacob); 29:11 (Jacob cries after kissing Rachel); Gen. 42:24; 43:40; 45:14-15, 50:17 (Joseph reunites and reconciles with his brothers); 46:29 (Joseph reunites with his father); 1 Sam. 20:41 (David and Jonathan weep upon their reunion); 1 Sam. 24:17 (Saul cries when he hears David's voice again). This verb can also describe the reaction of a mourner, such as in Gen. 23:2 (Abraham weeping after Sarah dies); 37:35 (Jacob weeps in supposed mourning for Joseph); 50:1, 4 (Joseph and the Egyptians mourn for Jacob); 1 Sam. 30:4 (David and his troops weep when they discover that their families have been taken captive); 13:36; 19:1-2 (David mourns Absalom). Finally, the most common meaning of bet-kaf-hay, "to weep," often describes men in the midst of emotional pain, such as in the context of our verse, in 2 Sam. 12:22

2 Samuel 6:20-23

20. David returned to greet⁶⁰ his house and Michal, Saul's daughter, came out to meet David; and she said, "How honored today is the king of Israel, who exposed

(in which David weeps in supplication over his sick child); and 27:38 (Esau weeps when his father gives Jacob the blessing).

In this verse, Paltiel mourns the loss of his wife. In contrast, the narrative does not record Michal's reaction to this separation, or her impending reunion with David. Regarding Palti's reaction to this unusual situation, in which he appears to be a passive participant, Ben-Barak notes, "the story emphasizes the depth of his grief and his inability to take his leave of her, but at the same time his conduct shows that he accepts the decision...when the time comes he (Paltiel) acts as a responsible citizen in accordance with custom, albeit openly showing his deep distress. This is the reason for the absence of any reaction from the leaders of Israel" (77, 89). McCarter maintains that "It certainly seems to be case that David, by citing the 'bride-price' he paid for Michal, means to state a legal basis for his demand" (McCarter 115). Alter explains this situation by writing, "Paltiel is a man whose fate is imposed on him. Michal was given to him by Saul, evidently without his initiative. He came to love her. Now he must give her up, and confronted by Saul's strongman with the peremptory order to go back, he has no choice but to go back" (211).

⁶⁰ JPS and McCarter translate bet-resh-kaf (conjugated in the piel infinitive) as "greet," while Alter and NSRV translate it as "bless." McCarter also gives credence to this translation by explaining, "David has already expressed a wish for such a blessing (6:12), which conventionally followed upon a ceremony of the sort described in the preceding verses, and he will, in fact, invoke God's blessing on his house in 7:29. But the present statement must...be taken as the ordinary language of greeting, especially in view of the fact that Michal will greet him in return" (186). In correlation with my translation of this same verb as "to greet" in 1 Sam. 25:14 (see note); I also translate bet-resh-kaf in this verse as "greet."

himself⁶¹ today in the eyes of the slavegirls of your servants like a vulgar fellow⁶² might shamelessly expose himself?⁶³”

⁶¹ This verse includes the root *gimmel-lamed-hay* three times (conjugated in *nifal*) in order to emphasize the extent of Michal’s harsh criticism. JPS and Alter use variants of “expose” twice in their translations, while McCarter uses “flaunting” once in his translation. Only the NRSV translation accurately represents the full repetition of this root in the Hebrew text. NRSV translates *gimmel-lamed-hay* twice as “uncover,” and also includes the adverb “shamelessly” to illustrate all three inclusions. Alter explains that in this context, *gimmel-lamed-hay* “Is clearly used in the sexual sense. The proud Michal’s reference to the lowly slavegirls’ enjoying the sight of David’s nakedness probably suggests an edge of sexual jealousy as well as political resentment in her rage against him” (229). This verb is part of a common biblical euphemism, “uncovering nakedness” most often describing forbidden sexual relations, such as Lev. 18:6-7, 19; 20:11, 17-20; and Deut. 23:1. Koehler- Baumgartner defines *gimmel-lamed-hay* in the context of this verse as “to expose oneself” (191-192). Genesis 9:21, in which Noah uncovers himself, is another rare example of this verb describing an individual exposing his nakedness (without necessarily connoting sexual activity). I translate this root as “expose” twice, as this word is synonymous with “uncover,” and this act is also associated with a deviant sexual act in modern parlance. Like NRSV, I also include the adverb “shamelessly,” in order to further emphasize Michal’s disgust with David as represented in the Hebrew text.

⁶² Michal uses this adjective, *resh-yud-kuf*, to compare David’s behavior to a social deviant. McCarter translates this adjective as “like some dancer,” and JPS as “riffraff.” Alter translates it as “scurrilous fellow,” and NRSV as “vulgar fellow.” This adjective usually refers to the physical emptiness of an object, such as in Ju. 7:16; Jr. 51:34; and 2 Kgs. 4:3. However it can also serve as a metaphor to describe “empty” people, such as in 2 Ch. 13:7 (describing an unruly mob). Koehler- Baumgartner defines this adjective in the context of this verse as “one of the rabble.” Other similar usages of this adjective include Deut. 32:47; Ju. 9: 4 (describing men Abimelech hired to kill his brothers); and

21. David said to Michal, “Before God, Who chose me instead of your father and instead of all his house, to appoint me ruler over God’s people Israel. I will dance⁶⁴ before God

22. and make myself even more contemptible⁶⁵ then this, and I will be low in my own eyes. But with the slavegirls about whom you spoke, with them I will be honored.

11:3 (describing men who went raiding with Jephthah). I translate resh-yud-kuf as “vulgar fellow,” as this fits within the contexts of these similar verses, as well as fitting the tone and style of Michal and David’s entire exchange.

⁶⁴ JPS and NRSV translate shin-chet-kuf (conjugated in piel) as “dance,” while Alter translates it as “play,” and McCarter as “revel.” Koehler-Baumgartner translates shin-chet-kuf in the context of this verse (and in an earlier description of David’s behavior in v.5) as “to dance, play” (1315). Examining the use of shin-chet-kuf in similar contexts helps me better understand the concept it describes in this verse. Relevant examples include 1 Sam.18:7 (women praising David while they dance); and Chr. 13:8; 15:29 (which also describes David dancing in the presence of God). In this verse, David is celebrating “before God,” and as dance remains an essential concept of religious celebration today, I also translate shin-chet-kuf in this context as “dance.” In the next verse, he explains his behavior as a celebration before God, as Alter writes that David’s continuing speech in the next verse suggests that, “unlike Michal, the simple slavegirls will understand that his gyrations before the Ark are an act of reverence and will honor him for it” (230).

⁶⁵ In this verse, David uses both a verb and an adjective to describe himself in a similarly self-deprecating way. David includes both verbs in order to emphasize the sarcasm in his reply to Michal’s criticism. JPS and Alter translate kuf-lamed-lamed (conjugated in nifal) as “dishonor.” McCarter translates it as “behaving shamelessly,” and NRSV translates it

23. And⁶⁶ to Michal, Saul's daughter, she did not have a child to the day of her death.

as “make myself contemptible.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines *kuf-lamed-lamed* in the context of this verse, as well as in 1 Sam. 18:23, as “to know oneself to be insignificant, to demean oneself” (1103). As in my translation of 1 Sam. 18:23, I also translate *kuf-lamed-lamed* here as “contemptible,” in order to reflect the change in David throughout his entire saga. In v. 23, his description of himself as “contemptible” represents a true sense of humility, while here, he uses it to throw his power in Michal’s face. As Alter notes, “As divinely elected King, David is to be the judge of what is a decorous celebration before the Lord: he seizes Michal’s sarcastic ‘honored’, turns it into a defiant ‘I will dishonour myself’ (the opposed Hebrew roots suggest etymologically ‘heavy’ and ‘light’)” (72).

David also uses the adjective *shin-pay-lamed* to describe himself. JPS translates this adjective as “low,” Alter as “debased,” while NRSV translates it as “abased.” McCarter translates it as “humiliate.” As the most common meaning of this adjective is “low,” and since “low” also implies a feeling of humiliation and debasement, I have translated *shin-pay-lamed* as “low.” This translation accurately represents the Hebrew text, while also authentically illustrating the emotions David evokes in this statement.

⁶⁶ In order to facilitate the flow of this narrative, I translate the initial *vav* in this verse as “and.” NRSV and Alter also begin this verse with “and,” while McCarter and JPS introduce this verse with “so.” Alter notes that this verse, the last one which mentions Michal, serves as an epilogue to this heated exchange, and regrets that other translators “generally destroy the fineness of this effect by rendering the initial ‘and’ as ‘so’.” The narrator states the objective fact of Michal’s barrenness- in the ancient Near East, a woman’s greatest misfortune- but carefully avoids any subordinate conjunction or syntactical signal that would indicate a clear causal connection between the fact stated and the dialogue that precedes it” (73).

Chapter One: Analysis of Michal's Political Influence

1. Introduction

Out of the three heroines studied in this thesis, Michal appears most often in the biblical narrative. By studying Michal, the reader learns that she stands out as an untraditional and outspoken heroine within the context of ancient Israel. This chapter will examine each of these appearances, and determine the extent of her political influence throughout her life. Through a close examination of her actions and speech, Michal's significant political influence comes to light. By understanding how she helps facilitate her husband David's rise to power, one can better determine how she as an individual becomes a player in the political arena of ancient Israel.

2. Michal's Marriage to David (1 Samuel 18: 17-30)

Michal first appears in the David narrative in 1 Samuel 18:17-30. In this section David pays her father, King Saul, the bride-price of two hundred Philistine foreskins and marries Michal. Michal's marriage to David comes after David refuses Saul's offer to marry her sister, Merab. Previously, Saul attempts to kill David through a marriage to Merab, which David refuses. It would be worth starting with this larger context and mentioning that the marriage is part of Saul's plan to kill David because he is jealous of him. After the narrator states that Merab "was given in marriage to Adriel the Meholathite" (v. 19), we then learn: "And Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. They told Saul, and the matter was right in his eyes.(v. 20). Although Michal's declaration of

love for David could simply serve as an expression of her emotion, the uniqueness of this act demonstrates her significant self-determination, and distinguishes her as a unique biblical heroine. Michal's assertion of love again prompts Saul's plan, motivated by his jealousy, to kill David. He manipulates David by using her as a "snare" for the politically threatening David (v. 21). Although some scholars view her merely as a passive victim of politics,⁶⁷ Michal's declaration of love comes as close as possible (in this sociopolitical context) to an active stance in the determination of her romantic and political future. As the King's daughter, she knows that her marriage will have political import. Therefore her declaration of love for the young hero David may be evidence of her interest in obtaining a powerful and influential husband, and not simply a reflection of her romantic attraction to David. One can also surmise that her interest in David evidences her interest in becoming Queen of Israel, and eventually, the Queen Mother as well.

Several aspects of the depiction of Michal in this passage stand out as unique, and indicates her role as an influential player in the David saga. . As Berlin notes, this is the only biblical occurrence of a woman choosing her husband, as opposed to the normative system of a husband choosing a wife (although she acknowledges that this marriage

⁶⁷ As Richard C. Bowman notes, "Michal is thus portrayed as a victim twice over. She is at once the victim of Saul's desire to eliminate David and the victim of David's desire to establish ties with the royal family by becoming the King's son in law."

"The Fortune of King David/the Fate of Queen Michal," in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenasi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 104.

Abby Poze Kapelovitz describes Michal as the "Daughter of one king, wife of another, the biblical Michal is a vehicle for the transfer of power. "

"Michal: A Vessel for the Desires of Others" in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenasi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 207.

could only occur with Saul's approval).⁶⁸ Clines maintains that the singularity of this occurrence during this sociopolitical context should persuade the reader of Michal's "unusual strength of mind."⁶⁹ Michal's uniqueness also becomes apparent through an examination of several lacunae in the text. For example, although the text describes most biblical heroines as beautiful,⁷⁰ the narrator does not include any physical description of Michal. Also, although other men in the Tanakh declare their love for women in the biblical narrative,⁷¹ David never reciprocates Michal's declaration of love.⁷² As Berlin observes, "David seems to have related to Michal as to man and to Jonathan as a woman. It is not a question of sexual orientation here, but a subtle suggestion, that this reflects something of the essence of these two characters. Michal is the aggressive and physical one....Jonathan is just the messenger boy. His words and deeds are certainly much less daring than Michal's."⁷³ In this way, Berlin maintains that Michal does not fulfill the expected and typical role of women in this sociopolitical period.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Adele Berlin, "Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives" in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenasi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 91.

⁶⁹ David J. A. Clines, "Michal Observed: An Introduction to Reading her Story" in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenasi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 28.

⁷⁰ Examples of heroines described as beautiful include Sarah (Gen. 12:11); Rebekah (Gen. 26:7); Rachel (Gen. 29:17); Abigail (1 Sam. 25:3); Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2); Tamar (2 Sam. 14:27); and Esther (Est. 2:7). See Berlin, p. 93.

⁷¹ This clue becomes corroborated by the evidence provided by the love men show for women in other narratives, such as Isaac's love for Rebekah (Gen. 24:67), Jacob's love for Rachel (Gen.29:18), and Samson's love for Delilah (Judg. 16:4)

⁷² Clines, 37

⁷³ Berlin, 92.

⁷⁴ Berlin, 91, 93

Other scholars agree that Michal shows personal political interest and aspirations through her declaration of love and marriage to David. The narrator does not explain why Saul gives Michal, instead of her sister Merab (whom Saul had previously designated) to David, but Clines suggests that Michal orchestrates this change. He notes the possible significance of Michal's declaration of love occurring in the verse immediately following the announcement of Merab's marriage to another man.⁷⁵ Clines suggests that Michal "sees what a good match David is and well judges that she is falling in love with the next king of Israel; that is to say, that her love is but the outward sign of an inward determination for political power and success."⁷⁶ Other scholars agree that Michal has an integral political role in this narrative, personally ensuring that David will succeed her father on the throne of Israel.⁷⁷

3. Michal Helps David Escape (I Samuel 19: 10-17)

Michal reappears in the David narrative after he evades Saul's attempt at murder, and she enables him to escape (19:10-17). Through her decisive actions and clever planning, David avoids capture, and therefore has an opportunity to build support for his eventual succession to the throne. Michal demonstrates great cunning and bravery in diverting her father, the king of Israel. Her protection of David indicates her resolve to distance herself from the Saulide regime, and to align herself political with David. By actively creating

⁷⁵ Clines, 28

⁷⁶ David J. A. Clines, "The Story of David, Wife of Michal, in Sequential Unfolding," in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenasi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 130.

⁷⁷ Bowman, 98

the diversion of the household idol and lying to her father, she demonstrates her interest in her husband's future, and as a result, her own as well. In v.11, the narrator refers to her for the first time as "David's wife" instead of "Saul's daughter," indicating her shifting alliance. These differences in Michal's designation indicate changes in her sense of identity and loyalty throughout the narrative.

Many scholars agree that Michal's orchestration of David's escape further demonstrates her characteristic strength. Clines describes Michal as the primary character in this scene, as she takes action by creating the diversion, as well as instructing David on the necessity of his escape.⁷⁸ David passively submits to her guidance without a word of response, and her words conclude this scene as well.⁷⁹ As Alter writes, "Michal is risking a great deal in order to save David. We have no idea about his feelings toward her as she does this."⁸⁰ Alter also notes that Michal's use of the household idol alludes to Rachel, whose use of idols as a diversion helps her and Jacob escape from her father Laban (Genesis 31). He explains that this allusion "reinforces our sense of Michal as a woman who renounced allegiance to her father in her devotion to her husband."⁸¹ (Gen.31). Michal's actions in this scene demonstrate her cunning, and even her ability to lie to her powerful father, in a high-pressure situation.

⁷⁸ Clines, 40

⁷⁹ Clines, 40

⁸⁰ Alter, 120

⁸¹ Robert Alter, "Characterization and the Art of Reticence" in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenasi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 68.

4. Michal's Marriage to Palti (1 Samuel 25:44)

Michal's role as a powerful political asset to David may have persuaded Saul to arrange her marriage to Palti (25:44). The reader can assume, since Palti is an unknown entity who does not appear elsewhere in the narrative, that Saul feels far less threatened by him than by his opponent David. Other scholars agree that political considerations motivate Saul's decision. For example, J. Cheryl Exum describes Saul's action as a "Move to block David from claiming the kingship through her (Michal)."⁸² While Cline argues that Michal was a submissive political pawn in this exchange (as women in this context could not change this kind of decision),⁸³ Saul may have based this decision on his fear that Michal will again use her wit and influence to further David's career.

5. Michal's Return to David (2 Samuel 3:13-16)

Eventually, David recognizes that he needs the help of Michal's political influence yet again, and therefore arranges to resume their marriage (2 Sam. 3:13-16). In fact, David will only make a pact with Ish-bosheth if he arranges Michal's return to David. In v. 14, David reminds Ish-bosheth of the substantial bride-price he paid for Michal, a symbol of her value to him. As Clines explains, this bride-price represents Michal's political worth

⁸² "Michal" in Carole Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross Shephard Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001) 126.

⁸³ Clines, 48

to David, as his connection to Saul's daughter will help David obtain power.⁸⁴ As Ben-Barak illustrates, David's determination to resume their marriage after years of neglect reflects Michal's status as a pure symbol of political power. David does not need her as his romantic partner, but rather as his means of securing his power and make his rule official.⁸⁵ In fact, Bowman emphasizes that David absolutely needs to remain married to Michal in order to make his rule legitimate. With Michal as his wife, no one can stop his full ascent to power.⁸⁶

Significantly, the narrator does not record any reaction from Michal when David's messengers take her away from Palti. The narrator describes Palti's reaction to her leaving in v. 16; "Her husband walked with her, weeping as he walked after her." Her lack of reaction, especially in contrast to Palti's effusiveness, again raises questions concerning her personal and unspoken goals. . Michal's compliance with David's messengers most likely does not signify her excitement over reuniting with her neglectful husband David. The narrator most likely details Palti's emotional response to contrast his relationship with Michal against her non-emotional relationship with David. This contrast indicates the purely political basis of her relationship with David, and it is this relationship to which she returns.

⁸⁴ Clines, 38

⁸⁵ Zafra Ben-Barak, "The Legal Background to the Restoration of Michal to David" in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenasi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 75.

⁸⁶ Bowman, 106

If Michal did harbor expectations of political influence, she likely felt great disappointment upon her return. She now “speaks as a representative of her father’s house, and by doing so, forfeits her role in the house of David.”⁸⁷ Clines explains that David refers to Michal as “Saul’s daughter” (v.13), as he now only associates her with his defeated enemy. This reference could also serve to emphasize that Michal, as Saul’s daughter, has the potential to have a child who could become a threat to David’s power. David wants to make certain that Saul’s line ends, and that he is viewed as the legitimate successor of Saul. Hence the importance of the last verse in Michal’s story: “So to her dying day Michal daughter of Saul [NOT wife of David] had not children” (6:23).

David now merely views her as a “token of good faith, a piece of Saul’s property.”⁸⁸ In their last interaction, Michal, the King’s daughter, rescues David, a poor man without a home or land.⁸⁹ Now, she returns as only the wife of an unknown man and a daughter of the vanquished (and deceased) king, while David has become a powerful man on the verge of claiming kingship over all of Israel.⁹⁰ Michal’s status changes significantly, and she no longer has the ability to assert political influence. Scholars agree that David bases his demand for Michal’s return on purely political motives. Miscall explains that establishing a relationship with a woman associated with the previous king can presuppose the transfer of power, and it is an integral and common means of transferring

⁸⁷ Exum, *Women in Scripture*, 126

⁸⁸ Clines, 136

⁸⁹ Norah Lofts, “Michal” in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenasi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal’s Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 242.

⁹⁰ Lofts, 242

power during this period.⁹¹ As Ben-Barak further notes, “David’s motives for demanding the restoration of Michal are obvious, and fit in well with his aim of obtaining complete control over Israel. His marriage to a daughter of Saul, King of Israel, would bestow legitimacy upon his rule, and would act as a bridge between two hostile factions.”⁹² Bowman also asserts that Michal’s return is crucial to David’s quest for the kingship.⁹³

6. Michal’s Confrontation with David (2 Samuel 6:20-23)

Michal expresses her frustration over her diminished influence through her notably harsh attack against David when they confront one another face to face (2 Sam. 6:20-23). Michal again shows her atypical assertiveness by publicly chastising King David when he returns home after successfully regaining the ark. Michal disproves of his risqué dancing and rejoicing in the midst of women and strongly expresses her lack of respect for him and his behavior. Brueggeman describes this heated exchange as “a conversation between the voices of two conflicting factions. The narrator treats this conversation as part of the public account of power that has important implications for the future of governance in Israel. Michal is not only David’s wife but is also something of a

⁹¹ Peter D. Miscall, “Michal and her Sisters” in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenasi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal’s Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 259.

⁹² Ben-Barak, 75

⁹³ 106

competitor as a Saulide.”⁹⁴ Perhaps at this point, Michal fully realizes her impotency in this situation, and therefore uses this public display of criticism as her only recourse.

Many scholars agree that this heated exchange results from Michal’s frustration with David’s lowly behavior, which evidences his informal vision of leadership. As she observes David’s leadership style, so different from the more refined notion of her father’s legacy, perhaps she also observes the end of her own influence and import as well. She appears to feel defeated by the failure of her initial plan of reaching power by marrying David. One can infer that her dreams have not been realized and therefore Michal responds to this disappointment in her typically direct manner. She shows no fear in publicly declaring her outrage and hate towards King David. In fact, Alter points out that perhaps she purposely waits to express her outrage before he enters the house, to ensure that his followers might hear the disapproval of Saul’s daughter. Alter describes this sarcastic exchange as a reflection of the “high-tension fusion of the personal and the political in their relationship.”⁹⁵

Michal speaks her final words in the biblical narrative during this argument. Many view her barrenness (announced by the narrator immediately following this argument, v. 23) as a punishment, either by God or by David, who might use this incident as an excuse to end their sexual relationship.⁹⁶ However, Bowman remarks that she might have made this decision herself by refusing to sleep with her husband after his disrespectful public

⁹⁴ Walter Brueggman, *First and Second Samuel Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press: Louisville, 1990) 121.

⁹⁵ Alter, in Clines, 72

⁹⁶ Alter, in Clines, 73

display. He explains, “Her estrangement from David is in part the result of her own actions and initiative. This then is her only protest against victimization.”⁹⁷ Clines also suggests that she, not David, decides to end their sexual relationship because she refuses to bear children for a man she hates.⁹⁸ Due to her political worth as Saul’s daughter, this might be her only available means of expressing her resistance and voicing her disapproval.

Whether or not she chooses to remain barren, this scene spells her literary “death,” as the biblical narrative does not mention her again after this incident (and she will not be “mentioned” through any progeny).⁹⁹ During this period, a woman’s worth depended on bearing children; but Michal will not have this opportunity to mark her (and, by extension, the Saulide) legacy. Brueggeman writes that “Michal, who thinks she is in a position of strength, is dismissed by the narrative as barren and hopeless.”¹⁰⁰ Michal, always characterized as atypical for her time, is again rendered atypical by her barrenness. Since God often rewards barren women in the Tanakh with children,¹⁰¹ Michal’s barrenness again renders her an atypical biblical heroine.

⁹⁷ 119

⁹⁸ 139

⁹⁹ Cheryl J. Exum, “Murder they Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative.” In *Telling Queen Michal’s Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation*, edited by David J.A Clines and Tamara C. Eskenazi (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 178.

¹⁰⁰ 122-123

¹⁰¹ Examples of such heroines include Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Hannah.

Annotated Translation: Abigail

1 Samuel 25:2, 14-42

25:2. There was a man in Maon whose possessions were in Carmel. The man was very great; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats, and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

3. The man's name was Nabal¹⁰² and his wife's name was Abigail. The woman was of good understanding¹⁰³ and beautiful appearance¹⁰⁴, but the man was hard¹⁰⁵ and evil in deeds.¹⁰⁶ He was a Calebite.

¹⁰² The Abigail narrative includes this name 22 times, an unusual amount of repetition considering the usually sparse nature of biblical narrative. Fox notes that in other contexts this name takes on the meaning of 'fool/foolish person' (121); while McCarter notes that "the historical figure's real name has been suppressed in order to give him a name indicative of his character" (p. 396). The narrator may include this unusual amount of repetition as a literary device to demonstrate Nabal's remarkably foolish/villainous nature, (especially given how this characterization contrasts with that of Abigail in this narrative).

In verse 25, Abigail negatively characterizes Nabal by including his name twice in her description, as JPS translates, "For he is just what his name says: His name means 'boor' and he is a boor." In contrast, Alter translates *Naval* in this verse as "base" in the first instance and "baseness" in the second. Fox juxtaposes translates it in the first instance as "Naval/vile-one" and in the second instance as "vileness," while NRSV chooses to keep "Nabal" in both places. Koehler-Baumgartner notes that Nabal could be a nickname, "meaning someone who...counts for nothing, has nothing to offer, gives no help, commands no respect, is nothing..... futile, worthless, godless...fool" (663-664). This root, nun-bet-lamed, describes a foolish, disgraceful action only five times in the rest of the Tanakh. In Deut. 32:15 it describes the Israelites, while in Jer. 14:21, Jeremiah pleads

with God not to disgrace the covenant with Israel. In Mic.7:6, the narrator describes a son disgracing his father; in Nah. 3:6 God tells the Israelites that God will disgrace them. This root is used eighteen times in the Tanakh as an adjective, but it only rarely describes another individual. For example, in 2 Sam. 13:13, Tamar uses this root to describe Amnon's future reputation in Israel; in Job. 2:10 Job admonishes his wife's speech. This root usually describes the disgraceful actions of the entire people of Israel, as in Deut. 32:6. Judging from the meaning of this root as "disgraceful" throughout these other contexts, I chose to translate it in verse 25, as "disgracefulness" in the first instance and "disgracefulness" in the second. This translation also reflects the repetition of the root while also indicating their slightly different grammatical forms.

The reader learns more about Nabal's disgraceful character in v.17, where the narrator describes Nabal as a *ben- be'leyaal*. JPS translates this phrase as "nasty fellow," Fox as "son of worthlessness," and NRSV as "ill-natured." While Alter notes that "son of worthlessness" is the literal translation, he chooses the less literal translation of "scoundrel" (as does McCarter). Koehler-Baumgartner defines this term in context of this verse as "villain" (134). Like McCarter and Alter, I also render this word as "scoundrel", for it is more idiomatic than "son of worthlessness." While this phrase appears only nine other times in the biblical narrative, only in this verse does it describe a single individual. The following examples all describe scoundrel-like actions. This phrase appears in the plural in verses such as Deut.13:14 (describing those who persuade others to worship idols), Judg.19:22 (describing those who wanted to harass an old man), 1 Sam 2:12 (describing Eli's sons, who did not follow the Lord), 10:27 (describing those who scorned Samuel), and 1 Kgs.21:10, 13 (describing those who wrongly testified against Naboth).

¹⁰³ This verse features the biblical narrative's only description of an individual as *tovat shechel*. Women in the Bible are usually praised for their looks alone, such as Rebekah (Gen. 24:10), Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2), and Tamar (2 Sam. 13:1). While David is also associated with this root, it describes "his ways" rather than his character (1 Sam 18:14).

The other rare inclusions of this word include Dan. 9:22 (God grants Daniel understanding), and Job 34:35 (Job lacks understanding). JPS and NRSV only directly translate the second word of this phrase (as “intelligent” and “clever,” respectively), while McCarter, Fox, and Alter include both words directly in their translations (as “good intelligence,” “good sense,” and “good mind,” respectively). Koehler-Baumgartner defines this phrase in the unique context of this verse as “a woman of good understanding” (1329). Considering the other uses of this rare noun, I also render this phrase as “good understanding” as it incorporates both words of the phrase into the translation, as well as authentically characterizes Abigail.

¹⁰⁴ The adjective *toar* is used only 21 times in the biblical narrative, and is rarely used to specifically describe an individual character. Rachel is describes by this same phrase in Gen. 29:17 (in opposition, in this case, to her less-beautiful sister Leah), as is Esther in 2:7. This phrase is also used to describe men such as Joseph, another significant character in the biblical narrative (Gen.39: 6), and Jesse (1 Sam 16:18) although the word *yafe* is not included in this verse. In 1 Kings 1:6, Adonijah is described as *tov toar maod*. In the context of our verse, Koehler-Baumgartner defines *toar* as “beautiful form” (1677). Our verse includes the descriptive phrase *yafat toar*, which JPS translates as “beautiful,” and McCarter translates this phrase as “lovely appearance.” Fox translates this phrase as “fair of form,” Alter translates it as “lovely looks,” and NRSV translates this phrase as “beautiful.” In order to represent the two descriptive words in this phrase, as well as imbue it with a similar connotation to the uses of *toar* listed above, I translate it as “beautiful appearance.”

¹⁰⁵ JPS and Alter translates this adjective as “hard” while NRSV translates it as “surly,” McCarter as “course,” and Fox as “rough.” This is the only time the biblical narrator uses this adjective to describe an individual. Other uses of this adjective include 1 Sam. 1:15, in which Hannah describes herself as *kasheh-ruach* (translated by JPS as “very unhappy”), and Ex. 7:3, 13:15, in which this root (kuf-shin-hay) is incorporated into a verb to describe the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. In Deut 2:30, this root describes the

25:14. Abigail, Nabal's wife, was told by one lad from (among)¹⁰⁷ the lads, saying, "Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet¹⁰⁸ our master and he swooped down on them."¹⁰⁹

hardening of King Sihon's will. This adjective is used often to describe the Israelites' stubbornness (translated by JPS in these examples as "stiffnecked"), such as in Ex. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9, and Deut. 9:6. Considering its usage in these contexts, I chose to translate *kuf-shin-hay* in this verse as "hard" as it also alludes to Nabal's stubbornness and lack of manners.

¹⁰⁶ JPS describes this phrase as "evildoer," while NRSV renders it as "mean," McCarter as "ill-behaved," and Alter and Fox as "evil in deeds." Koehler-Baumgartner translates the usage of this common adjective, unique in this exact phrase, as "evil in deeds, meaning malicious" (1251). This adjective is often used to describe the Israelites' evil-doing, particularly their idol-worship, such as in Ju. 2:19; Jer. 23:22. However, this verse contains the only instance in which the biblical narrator uses it to describe an individual's deeds. Therefore, I chose the translation "evil in deeds" because this translation includes the entirety of this phrase (which includes both an adjective and a noun) and clearly describes to the pointedly evil ways of Nabal.

¹⁰⁷ I translated the word *na-ar* as "lad" twice in order to reflect the repetition in this verse. In contrast, Alter only includes it once, and JPS, McCarter and NRSV render this phrase as "one of Nabal's young men." I added "among" to my translation of this phrase, as does Fox, to make this verse more idiomatic. I added this word in parenthesis to indicate that this exact equivalent is not found in the text.

¹⁰⁸ Fox translates this verb as "to give-blessing-of-greeting", while McCarter and NRSV translate it as "to salute," and Alter and JPS choose the translation "greet." Koehler-Baumgartner defines *bet-resch-kaf* in the context of this verse (conjugated in *piel*) as "greeting." This verb appears hundreds of times in the biblical narrative and means "to bless" in the majority of those instances, such as when God gives blessings (including

15. And the men were very good¹¹⁰ to us and we were not harmed¹¹¹ and we did not miss¹¹² anything all the days we went with them in the field.

Gen. 1:22, 28; 2:3; 5:2; 17:20; 22:18; Jud. 13:24); when people bless God (such as Gen. 24:27, 48, Ex. 18:10; Deut. 8:10; Ps.66:8, 27); and when people bless others (such as Gen. 24:60; 28:1; Ex. 12:32; Lev. 9:23). The rare instances in which this root connotes a “greeting” rather than a “blessing” are 1 Sam. 13:10 (Saul greets Samuel), 2 Sam. 8:10 (Joram greets King David) 2 Sam. 13:25 (a farewell greeting), 2 Kings 4:29; 10:15 (Jehu greets Jehonadab), and Pr. 27:14 (a morning greeting). Given these similar contexts in which bet-resh-kaf connotes a greeting, I chose to translate this root as “greet” in this verse as well.

¹⁰⁹ JPS renders this unusual verb as “spurned,” and Fox renders it as “shrieked,” while noting this as “a rare verb related to the noun for “bird of prey” i.e. “shrieker” (123).” NRSV renders this verb as “shouted insults,” and Alter as “pounced,” and McCarter as “flew. ” Koehler-Baumgartner defines ayin-yud-tet in this context (the only time it occurs with the preposition “beh”) as “to shout out, to address angrily” (816). This is one of only five times the biblical narrative includes this verb (and this root is included only rarely in its’ noun form, meaning “bird of prey,” such as in Gen. 15:11; Is. 46:11; Ezek. 39:4; Job. 28:7; Is. 18:6; Jer.12:9). In 1 Sam 14:32, 15:9 this verse describes the troops’ violent action regarding their captured booty. I translated ayin-yud-tet (conjugated in this verse in kal) as “swooped down ,” in order to include the illustrative reference to a bird of prey in the text. As Weiss explains the inclusion of this rare verb is intended to “evoke the image of a raptor descending upon its prey, the element that is central to 1 Sam. 15:9 and 14:32, and the majority of passages containing the noun *eit*” (*Figurative*, 53). She explains further, “Nothing in Nabal’s speech explicitly indicates that Nabal screamed at the messengers...instead he selects a verb that metaphorically depicts Nabal as a raptor swooping down upon his victims...” (54).

¹¹⁰ JPS translates this phrase as “friendly, ” Fox as “exceedingly good,” and Alter as “been very good. “Koehler-Baumgartner defines *tov* in this context as “friendly to us”

(371). I translated this phrase, like McCarter and NRSV, as “were very good,” as this is the most literal translation (and it also includes the translation of *maod*). This consideration is especially important with *tov*, as it appears throughout this narrative and commonly throughout the Tanakh; I want to keep this translation in place in order to authentically represent the Hebrew text.

¹¹¹ JPS translates kaf-lamed-mem (conjugated here in the passive hofal) as “harmed,” while NRSV translates it similarly as “suffered no harm,” Fox as “hurt,” Alter as “humiliated,” and McCarter as “abused.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines in this verse as “harmed” (480). This verb is found 38 times in the Tanakh, and has differing definitions considering its conceptual usage in each context. In this verse, it most likely connotes the concept of “hurt” rather than “abuse;” as this verse does not describe a personal intimate relationship which can bring about emotional shame, but rather an adversarial relationship which can result in physical injury. Therefore, I rendered it as “harmed” as this translation takes into consideration the other rare examples of this verb used to describe a similar concept. For example, in Judg. 18:7, it describes harm done against enemies. The biblical narrative uses this verb much more commonly to describe the concept of emotional abuse, such as in Num. 12:14 (in which a father spits in a daughter’s face), 1 Sam 20:34 (Jonathan suffers humiliated by his father), Is. 45:16 (the disgrace of idol-makers), and Jer. 3:3 (the shame of prostitutes).

¹¹² JPS, NRSV and Alter translate this verb, consisting of the root pay-kuf-aled, as “miss,” while Fox translates it as “did not (find),” and McCarter as “lost.” I translated it as “did not miss anything” in order to represent the Koehler-Baumgartner definition (956), to make this sentence flow better in English and to include the word *lo* in the translation. In regards to this phrase, Alter explains, “In keeping with the general practice of biblical dialogue, the servant recycles the language of David’s message to Nabal- ‘We were not humiliated and missed nothing the whole time’ – but amplifies it by adding this clause as well as the image in the next verse, ‘They were a wall around us both night and day.’ He thus makes emphatically clear that David’s men really provided protection faithfully” (Alter, 155).

16. They were a wall around us by both night and by day, all the time we were with them shepherding¹¹³ the sheep.

17. And now know and consider¹¹⁴ what you will do, because evil is resolved against our master and against all of his house, and he is a scoundrel to speak to.

18. And Abigail quickly¹¹⁵ took two hundred loaves of bread, two jugs¹¹⁶ of wine, five dressed sheep, five bushels¹¹⁷ of roasted grain, one hundred raisin cakes, and two hundred fig cakes, and set them on asses.

¹¹³ JPS and Alter translate resh-ayin-hay (conjugated in kal) as “tending,” Fox as “pasturing,” and NRSV as “keeping.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines it in this singular context as “to protect as a shepherd” (1259). I also translate it as “shepherd” as it not only describes the technical work of David’s men, but also connotes that they truly protected the flock. While the Tanakh usually includes this root as a noun, other examples of its usage as a verb includes Gen.29:7; Gen. 30:31, 36; 37:2 (describing the actions of Jacob), Ex.3:1 (describing the actions of Moses), 1 Sam. 16:11, 1 Sam. 17:15, 34; 2 Sam. 5:2 (describing the actions of David). Like Jacob and Moses before him, David role as a shepherd of flocks helped cultivate him into a shepherd of his people.

¹¹⁴ JPS translates this phrase, consisting of two verbs (yud-daled-ayin and resh-aleph-hay) as a verb and adverb in the translation “consider carefully,” while Alter translates both verbs in his translation “mark and see what you must do.” Fox translates this phrase literally as “learn and see.” I translate it (as do both McCarter and NRSV) as “know this and consider,” as it incorporates both verbs into the translation while making the sentence more understandable than the strict literal translation of “know and see.”

¹¹⁵ Alter, NRSV and Fox all translated this verb as (root mem-hay-resh, conjugated here in piel) as “hurried.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines this word as “hastily”- an adverb in the context of this verse (as well as in verse 23). Like JPS, I chose “quickly” because this

19. And she said to her lads, “Pass-through¹¹⁸ before me, here, I’ll be coming after you.” But¹¹⁹ her husband Nabal she did not tell.

translation fits well not only in this verse, but also in verses 23, 34 and 42 where this verb also appears. The frequency of this verb in this narrative signifies it as a leitmotif in the character development of Abigail, who, with the repetition of this verb, shows her to be a quick-acting and resolute individual. This verb also describes two other biblical heroines: Sarah (Gen. 18:6) and Rebekah (Gen. 24: 18, 20, 46). The parallel characteristics of Rebekah and Abigail, who both act decisively and resolutely, are especially significant.

¹¹⁶ JPS translates this phrase, *niblay yayin*, as “jars of wine.” Koehler-Baumgartner also defines this phrase as “jars of wine” in the context of this verse (664). Alter translates it as “jugs of wine,” while Fox, NRSV and McCarter all translate this phrase as “skins of wine.” Like Alter, I chose “jugs of wine” as this is the most idiomatic translation to describe a wine container in today’s parlance.

¹¹⁷ JPS, McCarter, Fox, and Alter do not translate *seah*, a word of measurement only used today in the Bible. NRSV chooses the vague translation of “measures.” Fox notes that a *seah* is “about a bushel” and therefore, I translate this term as “bushel” as today’s readers can better understand this word as a term of agricultural measurement.

¹¹⁸ JPS and McCarter both render this root, *ayin-bet-resh*, conjugated in *kal*, as “go on” (while NRSV adds additional words into its translation with the phrase “go on ahead of me”). Fox renders this verb as “cross-on,” while Alter renders it as “pass-on.” This root appears quite frequently in the Tanakh, and in the majority of these contexts it means “to pass over/through.” Examples that help the reader understand its meaning in this verse include Gen. 12:6 (Abram passes through the land), 30:32 (Jacob passing through the flock), 37:28 (Midianites pass by Joseph in the pit), Num. 21:23 (Sihon wouldn’t let Israel pass through), Deut. 9:1 (Israel will pass through the Jordan), Josh. 4:1 (Israel passed through the Jordan), 2 Kgs. 2:8 (Elijah and Elisha pass over the water on dry

20. And she mounted¹²⁰ over the ass and she was coming down¹²¹ in a covert¹²² on the mountain,¹²³ and behold, David and his men were coming down opposite¹²⁴ her and she met them.

land). I translate this verb as of “pass-through,” as it most accurately reflects the meaning of this verb as evidenced by these examples.

¹¹⁹ I translated the vav here as “but” (as do Fox, McCarter, JPS, Alter and NRSV) in order to reflect Abigail’s conscience scheming in this narrative.

¹²⁰ Although JPS, Fox, McCarter and Alter translate this verb (root resh-kaf-bet, conjugated in kal) as “riding,” (with NRSV choosing the same word in the past tense), I translate it as “mounted” as it has a more pro-active connotation. In addition, this translation reflects the Koehler-Baumgartner translation in this verse (and verse 42) as “a woman mounting a donkey” (1231). While this verb occurs throughout the Tanakh to describe men’s actions (such as in 2 Sam.13:29, 18:9), it rarely describes the actions of women. In Gen. 24:61, the narrator uses this verb to describe Rebekah and her maids mount camels, and also to describe Abigail’s actions again in verse 42 (I also translate it in that verse as “mounted” to reflect this repetition). In Ex. 4:20, Moses mounts his wife and sons on asses, (there the verb appears in the passive form). When a word occurs this infrequently in such a context, the reader should consider its inclusion quite meaningful.

¹²¹ This verb (yud-resh-daled), appears twice in this verse conjugated in the kal. Koehler-Baumgartner defines it in the context of this verse as “came down” (435). Like NRSV, I translated it as “came down” in both instances, as well as in verse 23, in order to reflect this repetition.

¹²² JPS translates this noun as “trail” while Alter, NRSV, and McCarter translate it as “the cover.” I chose “covert,” as does Fox, as it illustrates Abigail’s foresight and clever planning, and “covert” means “hiding place” as a noun, and “secret” when used as an adjective. Koehler-Baumgartner defines this noun as “protection by a mountain” (772).

21. And David said, “Surely it was in vain that I watched everything he had in the wilderness, and nothing was missing from all that was his. He has returned to me evil instead of good.

22. This will God do to David’s enemies, and even more, if I leave from all that was his in the morning one man urinating¹²⁵ on the wall.

The Tanakh includes this noun 34 additional times. Examples with a similar connotation of covert action include Deut. 13:7 (women are suspected of secretly enticing others to worship idols), Deut. 28: 57 (a woman is forced, out of desperation, to eat her placenta and offspring in secret), 2 Kgs. 11:2 (Jehosheba, King Joram’s daughter, secretly hides Ahaziah’s son Joash to protect him). In 1 Sam 19:2, Jonathan urges David to retreat to a secret place; an example that, similar to our verse, implies an intentional political plotting. Similarly, in 1 Sam. 20:5, David tells Jonathan he will “secret” (hide) himself away, and in 26:1, Saul learns exactly where David has hidden.

¹²³ JPS and Fox render *har* as “hill,” while McCarter, NRSV and Alter chose “mountain.” I also chose “mountain” as the translation of *har* as it better illustrates Abigail’s physical prowess and bravery in this context.

¹²⁴ JPS translates this verb (kuf-resh-aleph, conjugated in kal) as “appeared,” while Fox translates it as “encountered,” and Alter and NRSV both translate it as “toward her.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines this verb in this verse (as well as in verse 34) as “contrary to, opposite” (1131). I chose to translate it as “opposite,” as it adds visual interest to the narrative. However, in verses 32 and 34, I translate it as “met,” as this translation fits better within the context of these verses.

¹²⁵ While Fox and Alter translate this verb literally as “one peeing against,” and “a single pisser,” JPS and NRSV chose the more euphemistic translation of, “a single male.” Alter mentions that this unusual phrase is “a rough and vivid epithet for ‘male’ and one that occurs only in curses. Its edge of vulgarity seems perfectly right for David’s anger”

23. And Abigail saw David and quickly came down from off the ass and fell¹²⁶ before David on her face and bowed¹²⁷ to the ground.

(Alter, 156). McCarter, who renders this phrase as “Of all he has who piss against a wall,” further explains; “That is, of all the men and boys of his family and household. The expression occurs elsewhere in the same stereotyped formula, always with reference to the extermination of the male members of a family. It is well, then, that with David in this mood the intercessor from Nabal’s household is a woman!”(398). Koehler-Baumgartner notes that this verb is always used as a “contemptuous expression for masculinity” (1479). This root, shin-yud-nun, occurs only 8 other times in the Tanakh (including verse 34 in our narrative). All of these inclusions occur in the context of a similar curse, such as 2 Kgs. 9:8; 18:27; Is.36: 12; 1 Kgs.14: 10; 16:11; 21:21. I chose to translate this phrase literally in order to emphasis David’s anger, as typically one does use euphemistic wording when uttering a violent curse.

¹²⁶ JPS translated this verb as “threw herself,” while Alter and Fox both chose “flung herself, and McCarter chose “fell down. ” I, like NRSV, chose “fell before,” as this is the literal translation of this root yud-resch-daled, conjugated in kal, and it still illustrates the dramatic nature of Abigail’s action.

¹²⁷ JPS renders this verb as “bowing,” and Fox and McCarter render it as “prostrated-herself.” Alter renders this verb as “bowed” while NRSV renders this action as “fell before.” Koehler-Baumgartner also defines this root, chet-vav-hay, conjugated in hitpaal, as “bowed” (296). I also chose “bowed” as this illustrative wording best describes the dramatic nature of this conversation. The biblical narrative rarely specifically mentions a woman bowing (v. 41 contains another example). One rare example includes an unnamed woman (meant to represent Israel) bowing before the King (Ps. 45:12), and in 1 Kgs. 1:16, Bathsheba also bows to David. This verb usually describes the act of worshipping God, as in Deut. 26:10, or other gods, as in Deut. 30:17. Other, less common, examples of someone bowing to a person of higher authority include Gen. 37:7,

24. Prostrate at his feet, she said, “Mine, my lord, is the guilt¹²⁸, but let your maidservant¹²⁹ please speak in your ears, and listen to the words of your maidservant.”

9, 10 when Jacob dreams his family will bow to him (which they actually do, as described with this verb, in Gen. 42:6; 43:26, 28).

¹²⁸ JPS, Alter and NRSV choose “blame” for their translation, while Fox chooses “iniquity.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines it in this verse as “on me alone lies the guilt” (800). McCarter translates it as “guilt,” and comments that this context is “similar to 2 Sam. 14:9in both cases the meaning is simply, ‘Let any burden of blame that might arise from our conversation rest upon me and not you!’ This is the polite way of initiating a conversation with a superior...it is simply a part of the conventions of courteous and respectful behavior” (McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 398). Due to this explanation, I also chose the translation “guilt.” In addition, this word adds a level of psychological complexity, which adds to a deeper characterization of our heroine. While the biblical narrative commonly includes this verb, only rarely does it describe an individual, let alone a woman, admitting their guilt about committing a sin. In 2 Sam. 14:9, the wise woman of Tekoa confesses her sin to David using the same pattern as Abigail. In 1 Sam 20:1, David ask Jonathan what sin he has committed, while in 2 Sam. 24:10 and 1 Chr. 21:8, David readily confesses to sinning. In 2 Sam. 19:21, Shimei confesses his own sin to David. However, many examples exist, of group of people confessing their sins, such as the Israelites (Ex. 34:9; Lev. 16:1; Num. 14:9; Jer. 14:7). This verb used in different contexts can also imply punishment, such as Cain’s punishment in Gen. 4:13; and 1 Sam 28:10, in which David ensures the woman of Endor that she will not be punished.

¹²⁹ JPS translates this noun as “handmaid” in its first occurrence in this verse, and “maid” in the second, while Alter repeats the word “servant.” Fox and McCarter both repeat the word “maidservant,” the translation I chose as well in both instances. Abigail refers to herself by this lowly, humble designation throughout the narrative (verses 25, 28, 31, and 41), and therefore I continually translate it as “maidservant” to reflect this repetition and

to include both the humbling designations of “maid” and “servant” in the translation. Koehler-Baumgartner defines this noun in the context of this narrative as “a self-designation – the servants’ slave-girls” (61), and this noun serves as a leitmotif for the Abigail narrative. Another instance of a woman designating herself (or others) in this way includes Sarah, who labels Hagar with this word after she bears Abraham a child (Gen.21: 10). In Gen. 30:3, Rachel labels Bilhah with this word when she offers Bilhah to Jacob. In 2 Sam. 6:20, Michal uses this noun to describe the women surrounding David. In these instances Sarah, Rachel and Michal use this word to describe a sexually subservient slave, a connotation I believe Abigail’s self-designation hints at as well. In 1 Sam. 1:11, Hannah refers to herself in this way three times to humble herself before God, and she also describes herself this way again in verse 16. In 2 Sam. 14:15,16 the wise woman of Tekoa calls herself by this description when she speaks to David. In 2 Sam. 17, a wise woman calls herself by this description when she speaks to Joab. In 1 Kgs. 1:13, 17 Bathsheba humbles herself in this way when speaking to David. Abigail, with the use of this humbling term, puts herself in the company of these other wise heroines. The biblical narrator uses this word often to describe female slaves in general, such as in Ex. 20:10,14; 21:7, 20; Lev. 25:6, 44; and Deut. 5:14, 21.

In verse 41, Abigail uses this noun in conjunction with the noun “slave” to continue to self-deprecate herself. While JPS chooses the less-intense “maidservant” to translate this second noun, and Fox chooses, “handmaid” Alter, McCarter and NRSV chose the more accurate and evocative translations of “slavegirl” and “slave” respectively. Alter explains that Abigail labels herself in this way as “one last flourish of the etiquette of humility” (Alter, 160). I also chose the translation of slave, as it is literal as well as demonstrative of Abigail’s emotionally wrought position and humility. In v. 27, she describes herself with another noun, also meaning maidservant.

25. Please do not pay attention, my lord, to this scoundrel Nabal, for as his name is, so is he: ‘disgraceful¹³⁰’ is his name and ‘disgracefulness’ is with him. And as for me, your maidservant, I did not see my lord’s lad whom you sent.

26. And now, my lord, as Adonai lives and as you will live, Adonai has prevented¹³¹ your coming into blood-guilt¹³² by carrying out your own deliverance¹³³, so now your enemies will be as Nabal, those who seek evil against my lord.

¹³⁰ See earlier discussion of Nabal in v. 3.

¹³¹ JPS and Alter translate this verb as “kept,” while NRSV renders it as “restrained” and Fox renders it as “prevented.” I translated this verb, conjugated in kal (root: mem-nun-ayin) in both this verse and also in verse 34 as “prevented” as this choice incorporates the physicality of the word “restrain,” in a more idiomatic and easily understood way. Koehler-Baumgartner defines it as “to restrain...someone from doing something.” Other examples of this rarely used verb include Gen. 30:2, in which Jacob says that God has denied Rachel; and Num. 24:11, in which Balak tells Balaam that God withholds a reward. In 2 Sam. 3:13, Tamar tells Amnon the King will not withhold her from him.

¹³² JPS translates this phrase (including the verb “to go” and the noun “blood”) as “seeking redress by blood,” while Fox and Alter translate it as “coming into blood-guilt” NRSV does not directly translate the verb, rather NRSV translates the entire larger phrase as “restraining you from bloodguilt.” This phrase occurs again in verse 33. Koehler Baumgartner notes that when “to go” appears with “blood” it means ‘to become involved in bloodguilt’ (114). I also translate this phrase as “coming into blood-guilt” (the term “blood-guilt” meaning that one is guilty of committing an act of violence) because it is both literal, as it accurately translates and represents the verb, preposition, and noun in this phrase, but also provides an evocative and tangible description of this scene.

¹³³ Fox renders this phrase as “delivering yourself by your hand (alone)”, while NRSV and JPS do not directly translate the verb, but leave the phrase as “with your own hands.” Alter renders it as “with your own hand delivering you.” The verb in this phrase, with the root yud-shin-ayin, is conjugated here in hifil. Koehler-Baumgartner translates this verb

27. And now this blessing¹³⁴ that your maidservant has brought to my lord, give it to the lads who walk in the footsteps of my lord.

in the context of all three verses as “come to assist with “with one’s own hand” (449). Close derivations of this phrase occur again in vv. 31 and 33. In v. 31, JPS translates it as “sought redress with his own hands,” and McCarter as “gained victory by his own hand.” Alter translates it as “to have carried out his own deliverance,” while NRSV translates it as “saved himself,” and Fox as “find-deliverance by himself (alone)!” In all three verses I translate it as “carried out (his) own deliverance” as this phrase, while not completely idiomatic, is understandable and also includes a translation of the noun *yad*.

¹³⁴ JPS and NRSV translate this word as “present,” while Alter translates it as “blessing,” Fox as “token-of-blessing,” and McCarter as “gift.” On this unusual usage of the root *bet-resh-kaf*, Alter notes, “The obvious sense of ‘blessing’ in this context is ‘gift,’ but the primary meaning of the word is worth preserving for two reasons. First, it is clearly intended to answer to David’s reiterated use of ‘blessed’ in his response to Abigail. Then, as Moshe Garsiel has aptly observed, it is a key term in a network of allusions to the moment in Gen. 33:11 when Jacob is reunited with his brother Esau: Esau, too, approaches dauntingly with four hundred armed men; Jacob, like Abigail, prostrates herself before the figure he fears; and he, too, has brought with him generous tribute to be offered in conciliation, which he refers to not as a gift, but as a blessing” (Alter, *David*, 157). Koehler-Baumgartner defines this noun in this context as “a gift connected with a blessing” (161). I translate this verb as “blessing” because it reflects the primary meaning of *bet-resh-kaf*, therefore emphasizing the unusual event of a woman in the Tanakh giving a man a blessing. In addition, this word only rarely means gift, and I want to reflect the normative usage of this root in my translation. In addition to Gen. 33:11, other rare examples of this noun meaning “gift” occur in 2 Kgs. 5:15; 1 Sam. 30:26 (in which David sends Judah a present), Josh. 15:19; and Judg. 15:19 (both verses involve Achsah’s request of a gift from her father Caleb).

28. Please pardon¹³⁵ the crime¹³⁶ of your maidservant, for Adonai will surely¹³⁷ make the house of my lord enduring¹³⁸, as my lord fights God's fights, and evil will not be found in you in (all) your days.

¹³⁵ JPS and McCarter both translate this verb as “pardon,” while Alter and NRSV render this verb as “forgive,” and Fox as “bear-in-forgiveness.” McCarter comments on this usage of the root nun-shin-aleph (which means “to lift” in most contexts); “That is, forgive me for speaking further- another politeness (re: v. 24). Abigail has delivered her gift, but she has more to say. Her purpose in looking ahead to David’s career in vv. 28-30 is apparently to establish a further basis for dissuading him from wreaking vengeance on her husband” (McCarter, *I Samuel*, 398). Alter also comments on this phrase, “By way of deference, Abigail once again speaks as though the fault were hers, though she has made it quite clear that her husband alone is the guilty one ” (Alter, *David*, 157). I chose pardon as this best fits the phrase idiomatically and literally (as pardoning is literally “lifting away” a sin).

¹³⁶ JPS translates this noun as “boldness,” while Alter chose “crime,” Fox “rebellion,” McCarter “offense,” and NRSV “trespass.” In reviewing the other infrequent examples of an individual committing a *pasha* against another, I also chose “crime” as it also fits these other examples in this similar context. These examples include Gen. 31:36 (Jacob asks Laban what his crime consists of), and Gen. 50:17 (regarding the crime of Joseph’s brother against him).

¹³⁷ In order to portray the repetition of the root “ayin-shin-hay” in this verse, which connotes an emphasis, I translate this phrase as “surely” (as does Alter). Fox adds a “yes” to demonstrate this emphasis, while NRSV represents this repetition by including the word “certainly.”

¹³⁸ JPS renders this verb as “enduring,” Alter as “stalwart,” Fox and McCarter as “secure” and NRSV as “sure.” I chose to translate this root aleph-men-nun (conjugated here in nifal” as “enduring,” in order to most accurately reflect the meaning of Abigail’s prophecy concerning David’s future dynasty. Koehler-Baumgartner notes that the

29. And if anyone rises to pursue you and to seek your life, let my lord's life be bound in the bundle¹³⁹ of life with Adonai your God; and the lives of your enemies Adonai will sling from the pocket of the sling.¹⁴⁰

definition of the root in this context is “to be permanent, to endure: dynasty” (63). Alter writes that “a stalwart, or enduring, house is precisely what was promised the priestly line that was to replace the house of Eli in 1 Sam. 2:35” (Alter, 157). McCarter notes that the usage in this verse is more similar to other references to David’s dynasty in 1 Kgs. 11:38 and 2 Sam. 7:16. The biblical narrative includes a few other examples in which this verb also means “enduring,” usually in references to God’s laws (Ps. 19:8; 93:5) and covenant (Deut. 7:9; Psa. 89: 29).

¹³⁹ JPS, Alter, and NRSV all translate this phrase as “bound in the bundle” while Fox translates it as “bound up in the bond,” and McCarter translates it as “tied up in the Document of the Living.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines this verb in this context as “wrap, envelop” (1058). I also translate it as “bound in a bundle” in order to illustrate the repetition of the root in the verse (tzadi-resh-resh- conjugated first as a verb, and then a noun), while also making this unclear verse easier to understand. Regarding his translation, Alter notes, “Although some claim that *tsor* actually means document or book, a more plausible identification is the pouch in which little stones keeping a tally of live sheep were placed. Thus both this positive image and the negative one of the slingshot [later in this verse] would be associated with shepherding. *tsor* in biblical Hebrew also means stone, the object that would normally be placed in the hollow of the sling; so there is a punning cross-link between the two images (in this verse)” (158). Fox also notes, “The word ‘bond’ here may mean a ‘bundle’ i.e. a written document, as in the ancient idea of a ‘Book of Life’ (still used in liturgy today)” (126). McCarter further explains, ‘Document of the Living’ is thus the equivalent of “Book of the Living” (Ps. 69:29)this is the heavenly book in which all living people are recorded; exclusion from it means death (as explained in Ex. 32:32-33)” (399). Weiss notes that the overall point of this phrase is for Abigail to express that “David will survive and be counted among the living” (112).

Other rare examples in the biblical narrative where this verb means “to bind” include 2 Sam 20:3 (David’s bound concubines), Is. 8:16 (the binding of a message), and Hos. 13:12 (the binding of Ephraim’s guilt). In other contexts, this verb usually connotes distress or hostility, such as Gen. 32:8 (Jacob’s distress), 1 Sam. 30:6 (David’s distress). In addition to this verse, this noun form of this root only occurs seven additional times in the biblical narrative, including Gen. 42:35; Hag. 1:6 (describing money sacks- close to the idea of “bundle”), Job. 14:17 and Song 1:13 (pouch); whereas in 2 Sam. 17:13 and Amos 9:9 it refers to a pebble.

¹⁴⁰ Alter and NRSV translate this phrase as “sling from the hollow of the sling,” while JPS translates it as “sling away....as from the hollow of a sling,” and Fox as “slung-away in the hollow of a sling!” McCarter renders this phrase as “sling away in the pocket of a sling.” Regarding his translation, Alter writes, “Instead of being bound up and safely kept, their lives will be flung out into the void of extinction. (The literal sense of the preposition attached to ‘hollow’ in the Hebrew is ‘in’)” (158). McCarter notes that the beginning of the verse “References ‘Adam,’ the generic term for man, so that we should not seek in this verse a reference to any particular adversary of David, such as Saul or Absalom or still less of Goliath” (399). I kept “sling and sling” to represent the repetition in this phrase, as both words contain the same root, kuf-lamed-ayin. The verb (conjugated here in piel), that refers to the act of “slinging” appears, only five additional times in the Tanakh. These instances include Judg. 20:1 (describing the slinging prowess of a comparatively small group of Benjamites), 1 Sam. 17:49 (David’s fatal action against Goliath), Jer. 10:18 (describing an action of God).

As a noun, this root, which Koehler-Baumgartner defines as the “pocket of a sling” (1106), appears only a few more times in the biblical narrative. These instances include 2 Kgs. 3:25 (the narrator describes men throwing stones in battle as “slingers”), 1 Sam. 17:40, 50 (in reference to David’s fight with Goliath), Zech. 9:15 (describing God’s weapon), Job 41:20. and 2 Chr. 26:15. Out of these references, the majority of them

30. And when Adonai does for my lord all the good that Adonai spoke about you, and orders¹⁴¹ you to be the leader¹⁴² over Israel,

31. Do not let this be an obstacle to you or a faltering of conscience¹⁴³ to my lord, to shed blood for nothing, and for my lord to have carried out his own deliverance; let Adonai be good to my lord and you may remember your maidservant.

describe David- the sling is a motif in his narrative. Interestingly, in verse 38, Nabal becomes “like a stone.”

¹⁴¹ JPS, McCarter, Fox and Alter all translate this verb as “appoints.” In this context Koehler-Baumgartner defines this verb as “sending someone (to a place, for a task)...to call, up, appoint, order” (1011). I chose the translation of “order” because this better connotes the traditional meaning of the root “tzadi-vav-hay,” rather than “appoint” which has too professional and modern a connotation for this context. Other examples of this verb in the biblical narrative include Num. 27:19,23; Deut.31:14, 23; Josh. 1:9; 13:14; 2 Sam. 6:21; and 1 Kgs. 1:35.

¹⁴² JPS chooses to translate this word as “ruler,” while Alter, NRSV and McCarter all choose “prince” (as did Fox, but he chose to capitalize this word). I chose “leader,” as it illustrates his true future political role more accurately than the title of “prince.” Other examples of this term in similar contexts, in which it connotes “leader” rather than “prince,” include 1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1 (describing Saul), 1 Sam. 13:14; 16:6; 2 Sam. 5:3; 6:21; 7:7; 1 Chr.5:2; 11:2; 17:7; 28:4; 2 Chr. 6:5; Is.55:4 (describing David), and 1 Kgs. 1:35; 1 Chr. 29:22 (describing Solomon).

¹⁴³ JPS translates this phrase as “faltering courage,” Alter as “trepidation of the heart,” and Fox as “stumbling-block of the heart.” McCarter translates it as “stumbling block,” and NRSV chooses the modern idiom “pangs of conscience.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines the noun in the context of this phrase as a “reproach of one’s conscience” (582). I choose the translation “faltering of conscience” because it best represents the literal definition (as faltering is close to stumbling) and conscience represents heart, in modern

32. And David said to Abigail, “Blessed is Adonai, God of Israel, who sent you on this day to meet me!

33. And blessed is your good sense¹⁴⁴ and blessed are you that restrained¹⁴⁵ me on this day from coming into blood-guilt and carrying out my own deliverance.

parlance, both idiomatically and thematically (as one might say, “search your heart” interchangeably with “search your conscience.”). Weiss notes that *lev* has a range of meanings, and that this phrase could imply, “Any number of possible punishments (that) might befall David should he kill Nabal. The vaguely worded warning could imply a physical ramification, an ‘illness of the heart,’ an emotional response, such as ‘grief of the heart,’ or a range of noncorporeal consequences...” (115). Other examples where *lev* is included in phrases that refer to conscience include 1 Sam. 24:6 and 2 Sam. 24:10 (in both instances David reproaches himself). While the noun *mechshol* in this phrase only means “faltering” in the context of our verse, it means “hindrance” in Lev.19:14; Is. 57:14; Ezk. 3:20; and Ps. 119:165. It connotes an “opportunity for sin” in Ezk. 7:19; 14:3,7; 18:30; and 44:12.

¹⁴⁴ JPS renders this noun as “prudence,” while both Alter and NRSV render it as “good sense,” McCarter as “judgment,” and Fox as “discernment.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines it in this context as “feeling, discernment, sense” (377). The biblical narrative rarely includes this noun, which usually means “taste,” in similar contexts. Examples include Ps.119:66; Job 12:20; and Pr. 26:16. I render this word as “good sense” because it echoes the description of Abigail in verse one, and it matches the overall literal style of this translation.

¹⁴⁵ JPS translates this verb (kaf-lamed-aleph, conjugated in kal) as “restraining,” (Fox and McCarter translate it as “restrained”), Alter translates it as “held me back,” and NRSV as “kept me.” This verb occurs only 16 additional times in the biblical narrative. Examples in which the verb appears in a similar context, and therefore connotes a similar meaning, include Gen. 23:6 (the Hittites will not restrain Abraham from burying his dead),

34. For as Adonai the God of Israel lives who prevented me from doing evil¹⁴⁶ to you –had you not quickly come to meet me there would not have been left to Nabal by the light of morning one man urinating on the wall.

35. And David took from her hand what she had brought him, and to her he said, “Go up in peace to your house. See, I heard your plea, and granted your wish¹⁴⁷.”

Num.11:28 (Josh asks Moses to restrain Eldad and Medad), and Jer. 32:2,3 (King Zedekiah jails Jeremiah). Given these examples, I have chosen the translation of “restrained” as it fits in these other contexts as well, and describes the strength in Abigail’s actions. Also, this translation demonstrates the difference from this verb to the similarly-meaning verb in verses 26 and 34, which I translated as “prevented.”

¹⁴⁶ JPS and Alter translate this verb, root *resh-ayin-ayin* (conjugated here in the *hifil*) as “harming,” McCarter as “injuring,” and NRSV as “hurting.” Unlike these translations, I rendered it as “doing evil,” as this translation reflects the most literal definition, as well as best describes the act of murder that David almost committed. Koehler-Baumgartner states that when this root, conjugated in the *hifil*, appears with the preposition *et* (as it does in this verse), it serves as a “direct accusative” and means to “to treat someone badly” (1270). Other examples when this meaning becomes clear in the context of the biblical narrative include Gen. 19:17,19 (Lot tries to convince the people of Sodom not to do evil), Gen. 44:5 (accusing Benjamin of taking the cup), Ex. 5:23 (Pharaoh dealing evilly with the people), Num. 20:15; and Deut. 26:6 (the Egyptians were evil to the Israelites), 1 Sam. 26:21 (Saul apologizing for his wrongdoing to David), 1 Kgs. 16:25 (describing Omri’s evil-doing), 2 Kgs. 21:11 (describing King Manasseh’s evil-doing), and Ruth 1:21 (Naomi lamenting over the evil God has brought her).

¹⁴⁷ JPS translates this phrase (including the verb *nun-shin-aleph*, conjugated in *kal*) as “respected your wish,” while NRSV, Alter, and McCarter translate this phrase as “granted your petition.” Fox translates it literally as “have lifted up your face!” In this context, Koehler- Baumgartner defines *nun-shin-aleph* as “to receive someone in a

36. Abigail went to Nabal and, look, he was having a feast in his house like a king's feast,¹⁴⁸ and Nabal's heart was of good cheer,¹⁴⁹ and he was very drunk;¹⁵⁰ and she did not tell a thing to him, small or great¹⁵¹, until the light of the morning.

friendly manner, be favorably disposed towards someone" (725). Although this verb usually means "to carry/lift," (such as in Gen.13:14; 21:18; 24:16; 33:5; Lev. 11:25, 28, 40; Num.10:17, 21), this verb can also connote forgiveness, as in the following examples: Gen.18:26 (God forgives all of Sodom), 40:13 (Pharaoh will pardon Joseph), Ex. 10:17. Other examples of this exact phrase include Gen 19:21 (God grants Abraham's wish), 32:21 (Jacob hopes Esau will look kindly upon him), Mal 1:8; Job 22:26; and 42:8-9. By evaluating the meaning of this phrase within these similar contexts, I choose the translation "granted your wish."

¹⁴⁸ This verse includes a repetition of the noun *mishteh*, which Koehler-Baumgartner defines in this context as "feast" (653). The second instance of *mishteh* is followed by the description *ha-melech* (the only time in the biblical narrative that this "like a king" describes "feast.") JPS translates this phrase as "feast...feast fit for a king," while Alter and NRSV both render this phrase as "feast...like a king's feast." In order to demonstrate the repetition in this verse, I also translated this phrase as "feast...like a king's feast." McCarter renders this phrase as "banquet...like a king's banquet," and Fox as "drinking-meal...like a king's drinking-meal." Other examples of this exact usage include Est. 8:17; 9:19 (the Jews had a feast), and Gen. 21:8 (Abraham held a feast for Isaac). Examples in which *mishteh* occurs in a phrase that connotes the arranging of a feast include Gen. 29:22 (Laban makes a feast for Jacob), Gen. 40:22 (a feast for Pharaoh's birthday), 2 Sam. 3:20 (David makes a feast for Abner), and 1 Kgs. 3:15 (Solomon makes a feast). This word occurs many times throughout the Esther narrative, a narrative that also features a strong heroine figure. It specifies a celebration for women in Est.1:9, in which Vashti makes a feast for the women, and in 2:18, where King Ahasuerus makes a feast for Esther. Additional inclusions of this word in the Esther narrative include 1:3, 5; 5:4, 8, 12, 14; 6:14.

37. In the morning when the wine had gone out of¹⁵²Nabal, his wife told him these words, his heart died within him and he became like a stone.

¹⁴⁹ JPS translates this phrase as “merry mood” while Fox chose “heart was in good-humor upon him” and McCarter and NRSV chose “heart was merry.” Alter translates this phrase as “heart was of good cheer,” the translation I also chose, as it literally translates both the words *lev* and *tov*; while also describing Nabal’s disposition. While *lev* actually means the physical organ (heart) in verse 37, in verse 31 it is used in a phrase to denote “pangs of conscience. “ In this verse it connotes “disposition.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines *lev* in this phrase as “to be pleased/in a pleasant mood” (514). Other examples of phrases with *lev* and *tov* that connote a similar definition include Ju. 16:25;18:20; and 19:22.

¹⁵⁰ JPS, McCarter, and NRSV translate this phrase, *shechor ad maod*, as “very drunk,” the translation I also choose. Alter chooses the dramatic translation of “exceedingly drunk,” and Fox chose the clinical translation of “intoxicated to excess.” This adjective (root: shin-kaf-resh) has also described Hannah in 1 Sam 1:13, when Eli mistakenly believed she was drunk. Other examples of this adjective in the biblical narrative include: Is. 19:14; 24:20, Jr. 23:9; Ps. 107:27; Pr. 26:9; 1 Kgs. 16:9 (in which Zimri committed treason while drunk) and 1 Kgs. 20:16.

¹⁵¹ This phrase is an unusual inclusion of detail within the usually sparse biblical narrative. JPS and NRSV did not include the entirety of this phrase in their translation and simply translate it as “anything at all,” while Alter literally translates it as “nothing, neither great or small. ” Only McCarter and Fox’s translations reflect the accurate ordering of the words in this phrase: “thing, small or great,” and therefore I chose this literal translation as well. The narrator might have included this detail because, as Alter points out, perhaps Abigail did not deem it wise to tell Nabal this frightening news in his heavily inebriated state (Alter, *David*, 159).

¹⁵² This phrase is difficult to render in both an understandable and accurate way. The idiomatic JPS translation, “he slept off the wine,” does not accurately reflect the

38. And after ten days Adonai struck¹⁵³ Nabal and he died.

normative meaning of yud- tzadi- aleph as “to leave, to come out.” In contrast, Fox, Alter, and NRSV translate this verb literally (though not at all idiomatically) as “the wine had gone out of Nabal;” as does McCarter who translates this phrase as “when Nabal’s wine had left him.” I also choose to translate this phrase as “the wine was gone out of,” as this translation authentically represents the Hebrew text. Koehler-Baumgartner defines this singular phrase as “when the inebriation had passed” (426). The use of yud-tzadi-aleph in this fits within other rare usages of this verb to describe internal bodily functions. Examples include Ex. 21:22 (miscarriage), Ex. 32:24 (labor), Nu.11:20 (meat coming out of the nostrils), Ps. 146:4 (breath departing), and Gen. 35:18 (soul departing). This verb (which appears numerous times throughout the Tanakh) usually connotes an individual or a group’s physical departure or movement to/from a certain place, such as in Gen. 4:16 (Cain leaves the Lord and settles elsewhere), 24:63 (Isaac goes out walking), Ex. 12:51 (God brought the Israelites out of Egypt), 19:17 (Moses brought the people from the camp to the mountain), Num. 11:24 (Moses went out to report to the people), and 1 Sam. 18:5 (David went out with the troops).

¹⁵³ McCarter, NRSV and JPS translate nun-gimmel-fay (conjugated here in kal) as “struck” (the translation I also chose), while Alter and Fox translate it as “smote.” This verse presents an example of God as the initiator of this violent action. Additional inclusions of God striking others to death in the Tanakh include: Ex. 12:23, 27 (God striking down the Egyptians), 1 Sam. 26:10 (David mentions that God might strike Saul), Ps. 89:24; 2 Chr. 13:20 (God strikes down Jeroboam). The biblical narrative also includes examples of God striking people with various plagues, including: Ex. 7:27 (God instructs Moses to tell Pharaoh he will strike the Egyptians with frogs), Jos. 24:5 (God plagues the Egyptians), Is. 19:22. God strikes people with illness in several verses, including 2 Sam.12:15 (David’s first child with Bathsheba); and God strikes people with defeat in several verses, such as: 1 Sam. 4:3; 2 Chr.13:15; 14:11; and 21:14.

39. David heard that Nabal died and said, “Blessed is Adonai who championed my cause¹⁵⁴ against the shame inflicted on me at the hand of Nabal, and His servant He

¹⁵⁴ This phrase contains two occurrences of the root *resh-yud-bet* as a verb (conjugated in *kal*) followed by a noun. This repetition creates a challenge in producing an understandable translation, as evidenced by the disparity in the following translations. JPS translates this phrase as “championed my cause,” while Fox translate it as “upheld my cause,” and McCarter as “upheld my case.” NRSV translates this phrase as “judged the case,” and Alter translates it as “taken up my cause.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines this phrase in this context as “to plead someone’s (legal) cause” (124). Like JPS, I translate this phrase as “championed my cause,” as this subtly reflects the repetition in the Hebrew (as both words in the English phrase start with the letter “c”), and also reads smoothly. The biblical narrative includes other similar occurrences of this phrase (where God champions a cause), including: 1 Sam. 24:16 (David tells Saul that God will champion his own causes), Jer. 50:34; 51:36; Ps. 41:1; 74:22, and 119:154. Other examples of contexts in which this verb means “pleading someone’s cause” include 2 Sam. 15:4; Is. 1:17; and Mic. 6:1. Also, in many contexts in the Tanakh, this verb connotes a quarrel, such as in Gen. 13:7; Ex. 17:2; Num. 20:3; Deut. 1:12; and Deut. 25:1.

held back¹⁵⁵ from evil, and Nabal's evil Adonai will turn back on his head." David sent and proposed¹⁵⁶ to Abigail to take her as wife.

40. And David's servants went to Abigail, to Carmel, and spoke to her, saying, "David sent us to you to take you to him as wife."

41. She rose and bowed, her face to the ground, and said, "Behold your maidservant is a slave to wash the feet of my Lord's servants."

¹⁵⁵ This narrative contains many different verbs that all have the connotation of "held back;" this root includes the verb *chet-shin-kaf* (conjugated in *kal*). JPS and Fox translate this root as "held back," Alter and McCarter render it as "withheld," and NRSV renders it as "kept back." In Gen. 20:6, this verb has a similar connotation, as it also describes God holding someone back from sinning. In Gen. 22:12, this verb has a similar connotation in a different context, as God observes that Abraham did not hold back his son. In light of these other examples, and it because it fits best with the flow of this verse, I also chose the translation "held back."

¹⁵⁶ JPS translates *daled-bet-resch* here as "propose marriage," while Alter translates it as "spoke out." He comments, "In biblical idiom, the verb "to speak" followed by the preposition *b* instead of the usual *el* means to enter into discussion about a betrothal. David, losing no time, has certainly grasped the veiled implication of Abigail's last words to him (160)." Fox translates *daled-bet-resch* in this verse as "spoke for," NRSV translates it as "wooed," while McCarter chooses "sent word." Koehler-Baumgartner defines this verb in this context as "to propose" (210). Although this verb usually means "to speak" (the numerous examples include Gen. 8:15 (God spoke to Noah), 17:3 (God spoke to Abram), and Ex. 9:1 (God spoke to Moses), I also choose the idiomatic and modern expression "proposed," as it best explains David's actions for the modern reader.

42. Abigail quickly rose and mounted the ass, her five ladies going in her footsteps, and went after David's messengers; and became to him as wife.

Chapter Two: Analysis of Abigail's Political Influence

1. Introduction: From Michal to Abigail

As opposed to Michal's numerous appearances throughout the David narrative, Abigail only appears in one (albeit lengthy and detailed) scene (1 Sam. 25:3-43), albeit lengthy and detailed. This scene, which culminates in her marriage to David, is directly followed by King Saul giving Michal to Paltiel (v. 44). The narrator does not indicate if David's recent marriage influences Saul's decision, but this placement seems to indicate an important change in this narrative. One can infer from this sequence of events that just as Abigail gains political influence, Michal loses any hope of further political influence. As Alter notes, "Michal, last observed as a forceful initiator of action, now stands in contrast to the energetically active Abigail as an object acted upon, passed by her father from one man to another."¹⁵⁷ From the beginning of this scene, the narrator introduces Abigail as a significant heroine in order to prepare the reader for this impending shift in power.

2. Abigail's Description (1 Samuel 25: 3)

The narrator introduces Abigail by describing her with two attributes, a noteworthy occurrence considering the usually sparse style of biblical narrative. In 1 Sam. 25:3, the narrator describes her as both intelligent (the only character in the Tanakh described as

¹⁵⁷ Alter, 69-70

tovat shechel) and beautiful. Abigail takes advantage of both of these characteristics in this crucial scene. As Alter notes, “Her shrewd intelligence will be vividly demonstrated in her brilliant speech to David, and her physical attractiveness will stir his matrimonial interest in her.”¹⁵⁸ These superlatives serve as a sign of Abigail’s impending relationship with David, especially as they contrast with the negative description of her husband Nabal (also in v. 3). McCarter points out that this contrast serves as foreshadowing, as the reader will soon see David as a much more suitable match for this impressive woman.¹⁵⁹ This verse prepares the reader for the significant role Abigail will play in the David narrative.

3. Abigail Provides Provisions to David and his Men (1 Samuel 25:14-22)

Abigail first demonstrates her *tovat shechel* when David’s men complain of her husband’s harsh treatment toward them (v. 14). When David’s servant tells her about David’s violent anger at her husband, Abigail realizes this as a life and death situation. In response, Abigail “quickly” gathers and organizes generous provisions for David’s men, who have been guarding her husband’s flocks (v. 18). She does not communicate with her husband about this decision, and takes complete authority in distributing these plentiful provisions. The description of such provisions hints at the extent of her wealth,(and her access to this wealth) and perhaps she gives in excess to demonstrate her potential usefulness to the poor young hero. The description of her actions as “quick” further demonstrates her sense of confidence and decisiveness in the midst of pressure.

¹⁵⁸ Alter, 152

¹⁵⁹ McCarter, 396

McCarter notes that she follows the more prudent course than her husband Nabal by providing these provisions to David and his men. In contrast to her husband who spurns the men who came to “bless” him, she decides to provide them with a “blessing” (as she describes these provisions in v. 27).¹⁶⁰ This word sets an important tone throughout this scene, as David rewards her with a “blessing” after her speech as well (v. 32).

Abigail further demonstrates her ability to act with quick and thoughtful authority when she follows the messengers to ensure that the men will receive her generous gifts. Here, the narrator adds that she specifically decides not to inform Nabal of her departure. This decision, especially in a patriarchal culture, demonstrates her notable independence and confidence in risky situations and her dearth of confidence in her husband’s ability to respond to the situation reasonably and effectively. In this scene, the narrator describes her as mounting an ass twice (vv. 20 and 42). In addition to Abigail, only Rebekah, another strong and determined heroine, is described as mounting an animal herself although male characters do so often throughout the biblical narrative.¹⁶¹ This action points to not only her physical strength, but also to her strong convictions, and her untraditional views of appropriate behavior for women. She responds to David’s violent curse against her husband’s men (v. 22) with speed and confidence.

¹⁶⁰ McCarter, 397

¹⁶¹ See the note on this verse in the previous section.

4. Abigail's Speech (1 Samuel 25: 23-31)

Abigail's eloquent and persuasive speech to David (1 Sam. 23-31) serves as the greatest demonstration of her *tovat shechel*. Her speech seems cleverly planned out, each section building persuasively on the next. Weiss describes Abigail as executing a "well-crafted rhetorical plan."¹⁶² She begins her lengthy speech from a bowing position on the ground, thereby showing her awareness of how to best soften David's attitude towards her in this socio-historical context.¹⁶³ Bach describes this scene as an indication that Abigail "subversively" uses her "wise good-sense to control her life verbally while appearing socially dependent and compliant. The moment she encounters David, she speaks. Her determination is reflected in the series of active verbs (v. 23) which rapidly move the narrative." ¹⁶⁴

After she bows to David, Abigail begins her speech, which results in dissuading him from an act of violence that might forever mar his political career. She first shows the appropriate humility of both her position and gender in this situation, thereby lessening David's inherent suspicions of her as his enemy's wife. David can hear her plea without feeling threatened or angered, because she employs the expected social norms to her advantage. From her physical position of submission, she begins her speech, with a

¹⁶² Weiss, 125

¹⁶³ As Alter notes regarding her bowing, "Thus, her first move in this highly dangerous situation, before she speaks a word, is to demonstrate her absolute submission to David through these extravagant gestures of obeisance" (156).

¹⁶⁴ Alice, Bach, *The Pleasures of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1990) 23.

strategic and thoughtful verbal demonstration of submission. Before David has a chance to express his anger (demonstrated by his curse against her husband's men in v. 22), Abigail softens his anger by immediately placing the blame on herself. Bach explains, "Well-chosen words will wash away the villainous words spoken earlier."¹⁶⁵ She further demonstrates the appropriate humility by continually referring to herself self-deprecatingly (and slightly suggestively) as "maidservant." Through this speech, which Alter describes as "extraordinary" from her very first syllable,¹⁶⁶ Abigail bravely rescues David from his murderous instincts.

Abigail's speech continues in v. 25 with her forthright admittance of her husband's failings, an act that illustrates Abigail's wit, as well as her subtly subversive tendencies. In this context, insulting one's husband to a stranger (not to mention his enemy) would be considered an extremely atypical action. Alter describes this strategy of transferring the blame from herself to her foolish husband as successful.¹⁶⁷ Abigail insults and blames Nabal in order to distance herself from her husband, thereby distancing David's anger from her as well. Perhaps this action proves her awareness of David's reputation and political future and points to her own political ambitions. Other scholars agree with this analysis of her forthright speech. Alter mentions the unusual nature of a wife so drastically distancing herself from her spouse and his actions. He explains further, "Abigail of course wants to save her own neck, but she clearly has been chafing over her marriage with a boorish, unpleasant, and probably older man, and she sees an opportunity

¹⁶⁵ Bach, 23

¹⁶⁶ Alter, 156

¹⁶⁷ 156

here.¹⁶⁸” By insulting her husband, David understands that she does not act on Nabal’s behalf, and therefore she forges a bond between them.¹⁶⁹

In only a few verses, Abigail single-handedly saves her household from David’s wrath, saves David from committing murder, and guarantees her own successful future. While keeping in the parameters of proper social mores of the time, she finds a way to indirectly offer him guidance. For example, in v. 26, Weiss points out that Abigail relates “what she hopes will transpire in the future in the past tense, as a completed deed.” She adds, “At the end of her speech, Abigail diplomatically disguises a warning of what is at stake should David seek revenge as an expression of confidence that blood ‘shed for no cause’ will stain the career of the future monarch (v. 31).”¹⁷⁰

After first demonstrating her submissiveness to David and her distance from Nabal, she then persuades him to follow her suggested course of action. She begins discussing her vision of David’s political future in v. 28 by prophesying his future dynasty. Her prophecy of David’s success over his enemies seems to calm his anger and give him confidence. Alter agrees and notes, “Abigail deftly pitches her argument to David’s political self-interest. Once he makes the move from guerilla chieftain to monarch, he will not want his record stained by blood he has spilled. It is therefore more prudent to let God take care of his enemies.”¹⁷¹ Schwartz describes Abigail’s persuasive speech as a

¹⁶⁸ Alter, 156

¹⁶⁹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of their Stories* (Random House Inc., New York: 2002) 319.

¹⁷⁰ Weiss, 126

¹⁷¹ 158

“seduction that is entirely political, or should I say, politics is her seduction?”¹⁷² Bach explains that her prophecy has a more significant effect on David than Saul’s previous acknowledgement that he will become king (ch. 24), as Abigail’s words stop him from committing murder.

In v. 29, Abigail continues her prophecy by alluding to David’s powerful feat of defeating Goliath with a mere sling. This reference, the background for her prophecy of his powerful future, indicates her awareness of David’s past successes. In v. 30, by reminding him of his relationship with Adonai, and his greater goal of becoming king, she manages to help David put his immediate goal of taking vengeance in perspective. Tikva Frymer-Kensky puts Abigail’s prophecy in perspective by explaining, “Her words foreshadow the future kingship of David and validate the legitimacy of his rule....The historical books present six female oracles: Rahab, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and the necromancer. Together these women outline the history of Israel, punctuating it with reminders that this history was shaped and foretold by God.”¹⁷³

Abigail concludes by alluding to the personal outcome she hopes will result from this strategically crafted exchange. Her entire speech builds up to her boldly urging David to “remember your maidservant” in v. 31. Alter concurs with this assessment and explains, “These final words of Abigail’s lengthy and carefully calculated speech are strategically

¹⁷² Regina M. Schwartz, “Adultery in the House of David,” in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Alice Bach (Routledge: London, 1990) 335.

¹⁷³ Frymer-Kensky, 327.

chosen, and discreet...Abigail has matrimony in view.”¹⁷⁴ Abigail understands that she can only achieve power and influence by marrying a powerful man. Although she might have won David’s affections, she knows she can not marry him while she remains married to Nabal. Perhaps she resists telling Nabal anything “small or great” (1 Sam. 25:36) during his inebriated state, waiting instead to shock the suddenly sober Nabal with news of these events (vv. 36-38). The fact that Nabal’s death falls in between her plea to David to “remember your maidservant” and David’s forthcoming proposal of marriage may again indicate her ability to plan strategically and successfully. She appears to take advantage of Nabal’s newly sober state by perfectly planning the moment of her disclosure about David and his men, an admission that may have facilitated his death. Bach explains that Nabal’s death, which she describes as an “unseen but anticipated divine stage-managing,”¹⁷⁵ helps Abigail toward her goal of marrying David.

5. The Abigail Narrative Concludes (1 Sam. 32-42)

Abigail’s brave actions and powerful use of rhetoric change the entire course of David’s future. David responds to her impressive speech by blessing her for holding him back from incurring blood-guilt (v. 32-33). Weiss notes that he uses her own language of “lifting up her face” to imply that he will heed her plea, and that she has “convinced him not to fulfill his vow of revenge.”¹⁷⁶ Weiss further explains that Abigail’s speech sways him not to seek revenge, even after he swears before God and all his men to do so. She

¹⁷⁴ 159

¹⁷⁵ Bach, 123

¹⁷⁶ Weiss, 124

writes, “The first word of David’s response in v. 32, *baruch* (blessed) signals his positive reception of Abigail and his commendable character.”¹⁷⁷ Bach notes that when one views Abigail as the center of this narrative, she emerges as a “redeemer whose action and prophecy are necessary in assuring the future role of David, the divinely chosen monarch of Israel.”¹⁷⁸ Most importantly for Abigail, her speech convinces David to offer a proposal of marriage.¹⁷⁹

The reader can assume that David benefits from this marriage to the widower of a wealthy landowner. Not only does Abigail help raise David’s confidence and assurance of his future kingship, but their marriage may also serve to help him win support throughout Judah.¹⁸⁰ Bach notes that many view Abigail as the method by which David gains the important land south of Jerusalem.¹⁸¹ Clines agrees that David benefits greatly from this marriage in terms of status and land. He notes that this second marriage enables David to establish himself, on Abigail’s money, “as a man of class and property.”¹⁸²

Abigail’s response to David’s proposal of marriage indicates that this result was her ultimate goal. The narrator describes her as “quickly” leaving to marry David (v. 42), without even stopping to mourn Nabal. However, after her marriage, she never utters another word of dialogue. This lack of information leaves the reader to wonder at the fate of this well-spoken, ambitious, and prophetic heroine. Bellis notes that while

¹⁷⁷ Weiss, 131

¹⁷⁸ Bach, *Pleasure*, 27

¹⁷⁹ Weiss, 124

¹⁸⁰ Meyers, 43

¹⁸¹ Bach, *Pleasure*, 67

¹⁸² Clines, 140

ironically, David is definitely a better match for Abigail than the foolish Nabal, “her marriage to David silences her voice literarily and perhaps in reality as well. While married to Nabal, she has a voice and power.”¹⁸³ Bach explains that Abigail does not garner the reward of a powerful son, the “common patriarchal convention for conferring praise on a biblical woman (because she) steps outside the bounds of convention... But in exercising power and speaking in her own distinctive voice, perhaps Abigail has been guilty of the crime of female ambition. In order for male power to be restored, her voice must be stifled.”¹⁸⁴ However, one could also infer that, although the author does not include any descriptions of her future acts, that Abigail continues to employ her quick wit to positively influence David’s reign. As Abigail demonstrates political influence by rescuing David from committing murder in vain, and therefore securing the future of the Davidic monarchy, one can infer that she has the ability to take personal advantage of his successes. To what extent her rhetorical prowess and persuasive abilities serve her as one of David’s wives, the reader has to imagine. Although she does not speak again, and her son does not rise to power, perhaps Abigail, a highly unusual woman, finds her own route to political influence in her own unusual way.

¹⁸³ Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates Harlots Heroes: Women’s Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994) 112.

¹⁸⁴ Bach, *Pleasure*, 63

Annotated Translation: Bathsheba

2 Sam 11:1-6, 26-27

1. And it was at the turn of the year, at the time the kings marched out,¹⁸⁵ that David sent¹⁸⁶ Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they devastated¹⁸⁷ the Ammonites¹⁸⁸ and besieged Rabbah, but¹⁸⁹ David stayed¹⁹⁰ in Jerusalem.

¹⁸⁵ JPS and NRSV translate this verb as “go out to battle,” while Fox translates it as “going-forth,” and Alter as “sally forth.” Like McCarter in *Anchor Bible*, I chose the translation “marched out,” as it imparts the usual meaning of yud-tzadi-aleph, of “to come out, come forth, to go out,” while also including a military connotation. McCarter notes, “The ‘return of the year,’ wherever it occurs, is taken to mean springtime on the basis of the present passage, since military campaigning began after the onset of the dry season” (284-285).

¹⁸⁶ Alter notes, “The verb ‘to send’ occurs eleven times in this chapter, framing the beginning and the end. This episode...is concerned with the institutionalization of the monarchy. David, now a sedentary king removed from the field of action and endowed with a dangerous amount of leisure, is seen constantly operating through the agency of others...working through intermediaries, as the story will abundantly show, creates a whole new order of complications and unanticipated consequences” (249-250). This root, shin-lamed-chet (conjugated in kal), is defined by Koehler-Baumgartner as “to send by someone” in the context of vv.1, 3, 4, 6 (3 occurrences), and 14 (1513). According to Koehler-Baumgartner, it takes on the connotation of “commissioning someone with something” in vv.18, 22. Shin-lamed-chet also occurs in kal in vv. 27, 5, and is conjugated in piel in v. 12.

¹⁸⁷ JPS renders shin-chet-tav (conjugated in hifil) as “devastated,” while Fox renders it as “wrought-ruin” and Alter, NRSV and McCarter render it as “ravaged.” In the context of

this verse, Koehler-Baumgartner defines it as to “annihilate, exterminate” (1471). Like JPS, I also translate shin-chet-tav in this verse as “devastated,” as this translation seems to also best fit the other contexts (usually the destruction of land) of this verb when conjugated in the causative *binyan* hifil, such as: 1 Sam. 6:5 (mice destroying the land), 26:15 (describing a violent action), Gen. 6:13 (God tells Noah that God will destroy all humans with the Earth), 18:28 (God uses it twice in his acquiescence to Abraham regarding the destruction of Sodom), 19:14 (Lot warns that God will destroy the city), Deut. 9:26 (God might destroy the people), 20:19 (destruction of trees), 2 Kings 18:25 (twice, both in reference to the destruction of land).

¹⁸⁸ JPS ignores *b'nei* and translates this phrase simply as “Ammon,” while Fox translates it literally as “Children of Ammon,” and Alter, McCarter and NRSV translates it as “Ammonites.” I also translate this phrase as “Ammonites,” as the insertion of *b'nei* before a proper name connotes an entire people, and not just children.

¹⁸⁹ I translate *vav* as “but” to indicate the important contrast portrayed in this verse: David stays at home, safe, while his soldiers go off to fight.

¹⁹⁰ JPS, McCarter, and NRSV translate yud-shin-bet here as “remained,” while Fox translates it as “stayed.” Alter translates it as “sitting,” and notes, “The verb for ‘sitting’ also means ‘to stay’ (see v. 12) but it is best to preserve the literal sense here because of the pointed sequence: sitting, lying, rising, and because in biblical usage ‘to sit’ is also an antonym of ‘to go out’ (or sally forth)” (250). However, I chose the translation “stayed,” as this phrase describes David’s action (or lack thereof) during an extended period of time. Also, this choice describes a passive king staying behind his risk-taking troops.

2. And it was evening time,¹⁹¹ and David rose from his bed¹⁹² and walked about on the roof of the king's house, and saw a woman bathing¹⁹³ on the roof. The woman's appearance was very beautiful¹⁹⁴.

¹⁹¹ JPS and NRSV translate this phrase as “late one afternoon,” while Fox translates it as “around the time of sunset,” McCarter translates it as “one evening,” and Alter translates it as “eventide” and comments, “The Hebrew term *l-ayt erev* echoes ironically with (the previous phrase- ‘at the time of sallying forth’) in the previous verse. A siesta on a hot spring day would begin not long after noon, so this recumbent king has been in bed an inordinately long time” (250). Koehler-Baumgartner translates this phrase as “sunset, evening” (878). I choose “evening time” as it accurately represents the Hebrew text, which includes two nouns: *ayt* and *erev*. This especially detailed description of time, rare in the biblical narrative, also occurs in Gen. 8:11 when Noah’s dove arrives back to the ark at evening time. In Gen. 24:11, this phrase describes the time period when women (such as Rebekah) draw water.

¹⁹² JPS and NRSV translate this noun (root: shin-kaf-bet) as “couch,” while Alter and McCarter choose “bed.” Fox chooses “lying-place,” and notes, “more simply, ‘couch’ but I have sought to retain the key verb ‘lie’” (Fox, *King*, 197). Koehler-Baumgartner defines this noun here, as well as in verse 13, as “lodging-place, bed” (646). Other examples of this noun- In the contexts of Gen. 49:4, it means bed (as opposed to the noun *yud-tzadi-vav-ayin* in this verse, meaning “couch”) as well as in Ex. 7:28; 21:18; 2 Sam. 13:5, (also in conjunction with shin-kaf-bet). Leviticus 15, a section outlining the laws pertaining to women’s impurity, it references this word several times: vv. 15:4, 5, 21, 23 (set in opposition to an object one sits on); 24 (also in conjunction with the verb shin-kaf-bet three times, describing sexual relations); and 26 (used twice in this same context, once with the verb shin-kaf-bet). As the root shin-kaf-bet usually means “have sex” in biblical parlance (such as Gen. 39:10, in which Pharaoh’s wife tries to seduce Joseph), and as this act is traditionally done lying vertically in a bed, I have translated this noun as “bed.” This narrative also contains shin-kaf-bet, conjugated as a verb, in v. 4 (all the translations I consulted translate it in this context as “lay”), and vv. 9, 11, and 13.

¹⁹³ JPS, McCarter, NSRV and Alter all translate *resh-chet-tzadi* (conjugated in *kal*) as “bathing,” while Fox translates it as “washing herself.” In the context of this verse, Koehler-Baumgartner also defines it as “to bathe” (1220). The Tanakh includes numerous examples of people washing feet, including later in this narrative (v.8), as well as Gen. 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Ex. 30:19; 40:31; and 1 Sam. 25:41. However, the Tanakh includes fewer examples of bathing the entire body. Other examples include, 2 Sam 12:20 (David bathes after his son dies), 1 Kgs. 22:38 (whores bathing in blood), Lev. 14:8.9 (purification process for a leper), Lev. 15:5-8; 10-11, 13, 16 (purification process for a man who discharges semen), 18 (purification process for both men and women after sex), and 21-22, 27 (purification for anyone who comes into contact with menstrual blood). The only other inclusions in the biblical narrative of an individual woman bathing are Ex. 2:5 (Pharaoh’s daughter), and Ruth 3:3 (Naomi instructs Ruth to bathe before she visits Boaz).

¹⁹⁴ Like Abigail, the narrator also describes Bathsheba as beautiful when she first appears in the narrative. JPS, NSRV, McCarter and Alter translate this phrase as “was very beautiful” (therefore choosing not to translate the noun *mareh*); while Fox translates it as “exceedingly fair to look at.” I translate this phrase as “appearance was very beautiful” as this represents the inclusion in the Hebrew text of both *mareh* and *tov*. This translation is accurate judging from inclusions of these words within similar contexts. *Tov* is also used in conjunction with *mareh* to describe beautiful young women in Gen. 24:16; 26:7 (describing Rebekah), Est. 1:11 (describing Vashti), 2:2-3 (describing all the beautiful young virgins in Shushan), 2: 7 (describing Esther). *Mareh* is used in conjunction with *yafeh* to describe the following important biblical characters: Sarah (Gen. 12:11), Rachel (29:17), Joseph (39:6), and Tamar (2 Sam. 14:27). *Mareh* is also used as a noun also to mean “sight” or “vision” Ex. 3:3 (Moses describes the vision of the burning bush), Num. 12:6; 1 Sam. 3:15; Ezek. 1:1; and Dan. 8:15. Considering that the biblical narrative includes *mareh* to describe not only these important visions but also many biblical heroes and heroines, I included its direct translation in this verse.

3. David sent and asked after the woman, and he¹⁹⁵ said “Isn’t this Bathsheba, daughter of Eli’am, wife of Uriah the Hittite?”¹⁹⁶,

4. David sent messengers to take her¹⁹⁷ and she came to him, and he lay with her; (having just purified herself after her period¹⁹⁸), and she returned to her house.

¹⁹⁵ Ambiguity exists regarding the identity of the speaker, as the text does not specifically identify him.

¹⁹⁶ Alter addresses this method of identification by explaining, “It is unusual to identify a woman by both father and husband. The reason may be...that both men are members of David’s elite corps of warriors” (250). Fox notes that Uriah is “a high-ranking officer in David’s army (23:49). His name, ironically, is a pious Israelite one, meaning “God is my light” (199).

¹⁹⁷ JPS and Alter translate this verb as “to fetch her” while Fox translates it as “he had-her-brought.” This root, lamed-kuf-chet, (conjugated in kal), is also used when a man marries a woman. In those instances, I translate lamed-kuf-chet literally as “take” (see notes on 1 Sam. 18:19; 25:40) in order to accurately reflect the Hebrew text. Therefore, I translate lamed-kuf-chet as “take” in this verse as well, as it alludes to Bathsheba’s lack of power in this situation (and later, in becoming David’s wife). This verb is used in a similar context to describe Esther being taken to the palace in 2:8, 16; and Sarah being taken to the palace in Gen. 12:15. Ben-Barak notes that this incident hearkens back to David’s taking of Michal from Paltiel, and remarks, “The episode of David and Bathsheba is a classic example of the outrage that results from the abduction of another man’s wife. The importance of this example is manifold: it is based on historical reality, it is close in time to the events of the Michal and David episode, and the hero, David, is involved in both cases....the harsh reaction of the prophet Nathan and his condemnation of David shows that society would brook no compromise in matters of this nature” (77).

¹⁹⁸ JPS translates this phrase as “she had just purified herself after her period,” while Alter translates it as “having just cleansed herself of her impurity.” Fox addresses this issue by translating it as “now she had just purified-herself from her state of *tum’a*,” and notes; “the word *kiddesh* in other contexts denotes ‘hallowing,’ here it is simply the non-priestly word for purification.” (199). Koehler-Baumgartner defines *kuf-daled-shin* (conjugated in *hitpael*) in the singular context of this verse as consecration related to sexual intercourse (1074). In the following examples, *kuf-daled-shin* refers to the Israelites’ consecration before God (the more common usage of this root in *hitpael*): Num. 11:18; Jos. 3:5; 7:13; and 1 Sam. 16:5. In other contexts, *kuf-daled-shin* means to keep an individual sanctified, such as in Ex. 19:22 (describing priests), and Lev. 11:44; 20:7.

In regards to Fox’s choice of including the Hebrew word *tum’a* in his translation, he writes, “Bathsheva’s washing is connected to the end of her menstrual period, during which intercourse would have been forbidden (Lev. 18:19). It is significant in this story because it means that her pregnancy could not stem from her husband, who has been at the front” (199). Koehler- Baumgartner defines *tum’a* in the context of this verse as a “state of ceremonial uncleanness” (376). Other examples of this noun in regards to the ceremonial uncleanness of women include Lev. 15:25, 30 (uncleanliness of account of discharge); 18:19; Num. 5:19 (uncleanliness on account of suspected adultery); Ezk.22:15 (uncleanliness on account of incestuous relations); 24:13 (uncleanliness of account of blood); 36:17 (uncleanliness of account of menstrual blood); and Lam. 1:9 (uncleanliness on account of bodily fluids).

I translated this phrase as idiomatically (replacing *tum’a* for “period”) as possible in order to facilitate understanding for the modern reader. I also placed this phrase in parenthesis to address the fact that it seems to be a non sequitor. Although this information becomes very important for the reader just a few verses later, parenthesis help the narrative flow more smoothly.

5. And the woman became pregnant¹⁹⁹ and she sent and told²⁰⁰ David; she said, “I am pregnant.”

6. So David sent to Joab, “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent Uriah to David.

¹⁹⁹ JPS translates hay-resch-hay, conjugated here in kal, as “conceived,” while Fox and Alter translate it as “became pregnant.” I also translated this verb as “became pregnant” as this is more common to say in modern parlance than “I have conceived.” Also, the passive phrase “became pregnant” better indicates Bathsheba’s passive role in her pregnancy. Also, as this root is repeated at the end of the verse with Bathsheba’s announcement, I wanted to illustrate this repetition in my translation. Regarding this announcement, Alter notes, “Astonishingly, these are the only words Batsheva speaks in this story. In keeping with the stringent efficiency of biblical narrative, the story leaps forward from the sexual act to the discovery of pregnancy” (251). Other examples of hay-resch-hay include Gen. 16:4, in which Hagar conceives Ishmael (in vv. 16:5, 11 Hagar is described as pregnant using the same root); Gen. 21:2 in which Sarah conceives; 25:21 in which Rebekah conceives, Gen. 29:32-35, 30:17, 19 in which Leah conceives; Gen. 38:18, in which Tamar conceives (in vv. 38:24-25 Tamar is described as pregnant using the same root); Ex.2:2 (Moses’ mother conceives); Ju. 13:3, 5, 7 (Samson’s mother conceives); 1 Sam. 1:20; and 2 Sam. 2:21 (Hannah conceives).

²⁰⁰ JPS translates these two verbs, shin-lamed-chet and nun-gimmel daled as a verb and noun, “sent word,” while Alter translates this phrase as “sent and told.” Fox maintains the causative meaning of nun-gimmel-daled in the hifil in his translation; “sent and had-it-told.” I also chose to maintain the causative conjugation in my translation, although without the dashes, in order to illustrate Bathsheba’s decided actions in making this important announcement.

26. When Uriah's wife²⁰¹ heard that Uriah her husband died, she lamented²⁰² over her husband.

²⁰¹ Fox writes, "She is not called 'Bathsheba' again until David's crime has been punished by the death of her child (12:24)" (202).

²⁰² JPS translates samech-pay-daled, conjugated here in kal, as "lamented," while Fox translates it as "beat (the breast)," and Alter as "keened." Koehler-Baumgartner defines this root in the context of this verse as, "sing the lament for the dead, mourn for someone" (763). This root, included less than 30 times in the Tanakh, implies an emotional state of mourning. Examples that help us better understand its usage in our verse include: Gen. 23:2 (Abraham mourns his wife Sarah); 50:10 (used twice to describe Joseph mourning his father- this phrase also includes the root aleph-bet-lamed); 1 Sam. 25:1; 28:3 (all Israel mourned Samuel); and 2 Sam. 1:12 (David and all the men mourned Saul and Jonathan). I translated this noun as "lamented" as it illustrates Bathsheba's emotional response to her husband's death.

In addition, I chose this translation in order to distinguish this noun from the root aleph-bet-lamed that I translate as "mourning" in the next verse, to illustrate the concept of the traditional mourning period. JPS renders this root as "period of morning," while Fox renders it as "mourning-period," and Alter renders it as "mourning." This noun connotes a different concept in the mourning process, rather than the emotional reaction following a loss; aleph-bet-lamed connotes the Jewish tradition of appropriate mourning periods. We learn this from the following contexts in which this noun appears: Gen. 27:41 (mourning period for Isaac); 37:34 (Jacob observed the mourning period for his presumably dead son, Joseph); 50:10 (mourning period for Jacob- in this context its meaning of "mourning period" distinguishes it from its inclusion of samech-pay-daled as "lament"); Deut. 34:8 (mourning period for Moses); 2 Sam. 14:2 (used twice to describe the wise woman of Tekoa's pretended mourning); and 2 Sam. 19:3 (mourning period for Absalom).

27. When the mourning passed, David sent and gathered²⁰³ her toward his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. The thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of God.

1 Kings 1:11-23, 28-31

11. Nathan said to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, saying, "Have you not heard that Adonijah son of Hagith has become king, and our lord David does not know?"

12. Now, come, and I will give you counsel²⁰⁴ to save your life and the life of your son Solomon.

²⁰³ JPS and McCarter render aleph-samech-pay, conjugated here in kal, as "had her brought." Alter renders it as "gathered her." In the context of our verse Koehler-Baumgartner defines this verb as "to receive: to take home a woman" (74). However, "gathers" implies a slightly more considerate action than "takes," as it evidenced by its other uses in conjunction with the "gathering" of people. Other examples of aleph-samech-pay connoting the gathering of people includes: Gen. 29:22 (Laban gathers people for a feast); Ex. 3:16; and Num. 11:16; 21:16 (God instructs Moses to gather others); 2 Kgs. 22:20; and Jos. 2:18 (protecting a fathered family).

²⁰⁴ This phrase includes the verb (conjugated in kal) and noun form of the root yud-ayin-tzadi, a phrase which JPS renders as "take my advice," and Alter as "give you counsel." McCarter and NRSV both render it as "give you advice." Koehler-Baumgartner defines this verb as "to advise" (421). Similar usages of this verb include Ex. 18:19 (Moses' father-in-law advises him); Num. 24:14 (Balaam advises Balaak); 2 Sam 17:15 (Hushai first relays Ahithophel's advice to Absalom, and then his own advice). Koehler-Baumgartner defines this exact phrase as "to give advice" (421), as illustrated by its meaning in the context of the following examples: 2 Sam. 16:23; 17:7 (Athithophel gives

13. Go immediately to King David, and say to him, “Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your handmaid, saying, ‘Solomon your son will be king’²⁰⁵ after me, and he will sit on my throne’? So, why has Adonijah become king?”

14. Look, as you are still talking there with the king, I will come after you and fill in²⁰⁶ your words.”

advice); and 1 Kgs. 12:8,13 (Rehoboam ignores the elders’ advice). Given the similar political contexts of these examples, I have also translated this phrase as “give you counsel,” as it fits the context of this verse while also retaining a more formal biblical narrative style (as opposed to the more idiomatic “advice.”)

²⁰⁵ This verb, mem-lamed- kaf, conjugated in kal, appears twice in this verse. This repetition is significant as it indicates the important political decisions at stake in this narrative. Koehler-Baumgartner defines this verb in this context as the “formula of acclamation” (590). This formula is also included in the following verses: 2 Sam.15:10 (when Absalom is proclaimed as King); 1 Kgs. 3:7; 2 Chr. 1:8 (Solomon asks God for guidance, as he has become king).

²⁰⁶ JPS, McCarter and NRSV translate mem-lamed-aleph (conjugated in piel) as “confirm.” The basic meaning of this root is “fill,” and Koehler-Baumgartner notes that to “fulfill, carry out” is one basic meaning of this root when conjugated in piel (584). Other verses that contain mem-lamed-aleph in similar contexts include: Jr. 44:25; Ps. 20:16 (fulfilled promise). I translate this verb in this verse as “fill in” as it reflects a more literal reading of the text. In addition, in light of the overall flow of the narrative, I appreciate Alter’s explanation of his similar translation; “Many translate the Hebrew verb that means ‘to fill’ as ‘confirm.’ But in fact what Nathan will do is to complement Bathsheba’s speech, adding certain elements and not repeating certain others” (366)

15. So Bathsheba went to the king in his inner chamber²⁰⁷. And the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was waiting on the king.

16. Bathsheba bowed and did obeisance²⁰⁸ to the king, and the king said, “What troubles you?”

²⁰⁷ JPS and McCarter translate this noun, *chet-daled-resh*, as “chamber,” while NRSV translates it simply as “room.” Alter translates it as “inner chamber” and explains that the inclusion of this word may allude to a previous narrative: “At an earlier moment, a figure from David’s house, Amnon, was seen lying ill (or pretending) while a beautiful woman came to visit him in the inner chamber” (367). Koehler-Baumgartner defines this noun in our verse as “bedroom” (293). The narrator provides the reader with many details that indicate that David might be in a private, personal room in his house, as he is old, and Abishag is on hand to keep him warm. Examples of this noun used in a similar context include Ex. 7:28 (Frogs will enter Pharaoh’s palace, bedroom, and bed); 2 Sam. 4:7 (Ish-bosheth lies on his bed in his bedroom; Gen. 43:30 (describes a private room in Joseph’s house, where he cries); 2 Kgs. 9:2 (Jehu’s private room). Considering that these examples also describe private rooms of powerful men, I have also chosen the translation “inner chamber,” as it illustrates a private room, fitting for an aging king.

²⁰⁸ JPS translates this phrase, consisting of two verbs (*kuf-daled- daled*, conjugated in *kal*, and *chet-vav-hay*, conjugated in *hitpael*) as “bowed low in homage,” and McCarter translates it as “bowed and prostrated.” Alter and NRSV both illustrate the text’s inclusion of two verbs with their translation “bowed and did obeisance” (although Alter reverses the order of these verbs). Koehler-Baumgartner defines *kuf-daled-daled* as “to bow, kneel down in homage” (1065). This rare verb only occurs in conjunction with *chet-vav-hay*, for which it serves a preparatory function. This combination also appears in v. 31, and JPS, Alter, NRSV and McCarter keep their translations for this phrase similar to their translations in this verse. Other examples of this phrase which facilitate its translation in the context of this verse include Gen. 43:28 (Joseph’s brothers bow and make obeisance in him); Ex. 4:31; 12:27 (the Israelites bowed and made obeisance to

17. She said to him, “My lord, you swore²⁰⁹ by Adonai your God to your maidservant that ‘Solomon your son will be king²¹⁰ after me and he will sit on my throne.’

God); Ex. 34:8 (Moses bows and did obeisance to God); 1 Sam.24:9 (David bows and did obeisance to Saul); 1 Sam. 28:14 (Saul bows and did obeisance to Samuel); and 1 Chr. 29:20 (The people bow and did obeisance to God and to David). I have also translated this phrase, here and in v. 31, as “bowed and did obeisance,” as this translation reflects the intent that accompanies the formal act of bowing. The repetition of this phrase to describe Bathsheba’s actions in this section of her narrative arc illustrates the development of her nuanced political skills in her role as Queen Mother. Chet-vav-hay also appears in verse 23 to describe Nathan’s actions before David. JPS translates chet-vav-hay, which appears many times in the David narrative (such as in 1 Sam .25:23, 41), as “bowing low,” while Alter translates it simply as “bowed,” McCarter as “prostrated” and NRSV as “did obeisance.” I translate this verb in v. 23 as “bowed” in order to illustrate Nathan’s physical act, and to separate it from the description of Bathsheba’s physical act (coupled with “obeisance”). I also translated this verb as “bowed” in 2 Kgs. 2:19, in which King Solomon bows to Bathsheba.

²⁰⁹ This verb, shin-bet-ayin (conjugated in nifal), also occurs in vv. 29, 30, and 1 Kgs. 2:23. In each of these occasions, the majority of translators translate shin-bet-ayin as “swore,” the translation I also choose in order to portray this repetition. In this verse, v. 30, and in the next chapter, the king (David in this chapter, and Solomon in the next) swears *b’adonai*. Koehler-Baumgartner notes that with the inclusion of *b’adonai*, shin-bet-ayin is “used to introduce the name of God as the witness and guarenteer of the oath” (1398). Here, Bathsheba reminds David of an oath he made regarding the succession of this throne (although the narrative relates no such oath), and in v. 30, King David renews this oath. Other examples of this phrase in which it relates to significant political decisions include 1 Sam. 24:22 (Saul asks David to swear that he will not wipe out his name as his successor); 28:10 (Saul swears that the wise woman of Endor will not be

18. And now²¹¹, behold, Adonijah became king and now you, my lord the king, do not know it.

19. He sacrificed oxen, fatlings and sheep in abundance and called to all the king's sons, and to Abiathar the priest and to Joab, commander of the army, but to Solomon your servant he did not call.

20. And you, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are upon you to tell them who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him.

21. And it will be when my lord the king lies with his fathers, my son Solomon and I will be (regarded as) sinners²¹².

punished); 1 Kg. 2:8 (David swears he will not harm Shimei), 1 Sam. 20:42 (Jonathan swears *b'shem adonai* in his covenant with David).

²¹⁰ This root, mem-lamed-kaf, means “king,” and serves as a leitmotif in this narrative. In this verse, JPS and NRSV translates this verb (conjugated as *kal*) as “succeed...as king” while Alter and McCarter translates it as “be king after me.” In v. 18 (also conjugated in *kal*), JPS, NRSV and McCarter translate it as “become king”. In verse 30, JPS and NRSV translate it again as “succeed...as king;” while Alter again translates it as “be king after me,” and McCarter translates it as to “reign after me.” I chose to translate mem-lamed-kaf as “king” in each of these verses (including v. 15 in the following chapter), as this reflects the literal meaning of this root and holds significant political weight in this narrative.

²¹¹ This verse contains *atah*, meaning “now,” twice, and therefore my translation reflects this repetition. JPS, NRSV, McCarter and Alter, however, only translate the initial *atah*.

22. And behold, she was still speaking with the king when Nathan the prophet came.

23. They told the king, saying, “Here is Nathan the prophet.” He came before the king, and he bowed to the king, with on his face on the ground.

28. And King David answered and said, “Call me Bathsheba,” and she came before the king and stood before the king.

²¹² JPS translates this noun, chet- tet-aleph, (conjugated in the plural form), as “regarded as traitors,” while NRSV translates it as “counted offenders.” McCarter translates it as “held wrongdoers,” and Alter as “held as offenders.” All of these translations add the subject “they” and insert a phrase (such as “regarded as”) so that Bathsheba is not admitting that she and her son will be sinners/offenders, but rather, that others will regard them as such. I also added the phrase “regarded as” in order to make this phrase understandable, and I add parenthesis to demonstrate that these words do not appear in the Hebrew text. Koehler-Baumgartner defines chet-tet-aleph as “fallible, sinful, sinner” (306), and I also translate this noun as “sinners”. This root occurs throughout the Tanakh to describe “sinners” as opposed to the strictly political connotation evident in JPS’ choice of “traitors.” Other examples of this noun which facilitate our understanding of its meaning in this verse include Gen. 13:13 (describing the inhabitants of Sodom as “sinners”); 42:22 (Reuben describes the sin they have committed against Joseph); Ex. 32:30-33 (describing those who sinned by creating the golden calf) Nu.17:3; 32:14 (God calls the Israelites “sinners”); Lev. 5:10, 11, 23, 25, 16-17, 21 (regarding the sin offering); 1 Sam. 15:18 (God calls the Amalekites “sinners”); 19:4 (Jonathan asks Solomon not to sin against David, as David has not sinned against him); 2 Sam. 12:13 (God remits David’s sin); 1 Kgs. 14:16; 15:30, 34 (describing Jeroboam’s sins).

29. The king swore, saying, “As Adonai lives, who redeemed²¹³ my life from all adversity²¹⁴,

30. as I swore to you by Adonai God of Israel, saying that ‘Solomon your son will be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place’ so will I do this very day.²¹⁵”

²¹³ JPS, McCarter and Alter render this root, pay-daled-hay (conjugated in kal) as “rescued,” and NRSV renders it as “saved.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines this root in the context of this verse as “God redeems an individual” (912). David repeats this exact phrase in 2 Sam. 4: 9. Usages of this verb which connote God’s redemptive power includes Ex. 13:13, 15 (God redeems the first-born sons); Deut. 15:15; 24:18 (God redeemed the Israelites from slavery); Ps.26: 11; 31:6; 49:16 (asking for God’s redemption). This verb rarely connotes a human saving another human, such as 1 Sam. 14:45, in which the troops save Jonathan. In order to show the contrast between God’s power to “redeem” “and a human’s lesser power to “save/rescue”, I translate pay-daled-hay in this verse as “redeemed.”

²¹⁴ JPS translates this noun, tzadi-resh-hay, as “trouble,” while NRSV and McCarter translate it as “adversity.” Alter translates it as “strait.” In the context of this verse, Koehler-Baumgartner defines it as “need, distress, anxiety” (1053). Similar usages of this noun that describes God protecting David from trouble include 26:24; 2 Sam. 4:9. Other usages of this noun which facilitates our understanding of its meaning include Gen. 35:3 (God answered Jacob’s distress); 47:21 (describing Joseph’s brothers’ confinement); and 1 Sam. 10:19 (God answered the Israelites’ distress). I translate this noun as “adversity,” as it best describes David’s emotional and physical distresses that God helps him overcome.

²¹⁵ I translate the phrase *hayom hazeh* as “this very day,” (as does JPS and McCarter) as this Hebrew phrase connoting emphasis illustrates the emphatic nature of David’s statement.

31. Bathsheba bowed to the king and did obeisance, her face to the ground, and said, “May my lord king David live forever!”

1 Kings 2:12-25

12. And Solomon sat on the throne of his father David and his kingdom was firmly established²¹⁶.

13. Adonijah, son of Hagith, came to Bathsheba, mother of Solomon²¹⁷. She said, “Do you come in peace?” And he said, “In peace.”²¹⁸

²¹⁶ JPS, McCarter, and NRSV translate this root kaf- vav-nun, (conjugated in nifal) as “established.” Alter translates it as “unshaken.” This root, conjugated in hifil, also occurs in v. 24. Koehler-Baumgartner defines kaf-vav-nun in the context of these verses as “to be permanent, to endure: kingdom and throne” (464). The last two verses in this chapter include this verb to describe Solomon’s place in David’s enduring dynasty. Other verses that include this verb within a similar context include 1 Sam. 20:31 (Saul tells Jonathan that if David lives, his future kingship will not be secure); 2 Sam. 7:16; 1 Chr. 17:14 (Nathan tells David that God will secure his dynasty) 24, 26; and 1 Chr. 17:24 (David asks God to established his dynasty as he established the Israelites as God’s chosen people). I chose to translate this verb as “established” in both verses to portray this repetition, as well as to accurately demonstrate the political connotation of this action.

²¹⁷ Here, the narrator introduces Adonijah through his mother, an uncommon occurrence, as biblical characters are usually introduced through their fathers. Here, Adonijah, “son of Hagith” comes to Bathsheba, described as the “mother of Solomon.” This phrasing indicates that a character’s matrilineal lineage may have importance in this patriarchal culture, and alludes to Bathsheba’s significant influence on her son.

14. He said, “I would like to have a word with you” and she said, “Speak.”

15. He said, “You yourself knew that the kingdom was mine, and all Israel looked toward me to be king²¹⁹, yet the kingdom has turned²²⁰ and became my brother’s, for from Adonai was it his.

²¹⁸ This phrase demonstrates how “yes/no” questions are typically answered in the Bible. JPS translates Bathsheba’s use of *shalom* (meaning “peace”) as “friendly intent” and Adonijah’s use of *shalom* as “yes.” NRSV translates *shalom* literally in both instances as “peaceably” (thereby also preserving the repetition of the text). Alter and McCarter translate *shalom* as “peace” in both instances. I chose to translate this conversation in the same way, in order to illustrate the repetition in this conversation.

²¹⁹ JPS translates this phrase, which includes the root shin-yud-mem (conjugated in kal), and the possessive noun “their faces,” idiomatically as “wanted me to reign.” NRSV also translates this phrase idiomatically as “expected me to reign.” Alter translates it literally as “to me, all Israel turned their faces to become king,” as does McCarter, who translates it as “all Israel looked toward me to rule.” I chose this same translation in order to more closely reflect the Hebrew text.

²²⁰ JPS translates this phrase, which includes samech-bet-bet (conjugated as kal), with the noun “kingdom” as “kingship passed on.” NRSV translates it as “kingdom has turned,” Alter as “kingship was brought around,” and McCarter as “kingship turned away.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines the basic meaning of samech-bet-bet as “to go in a circle” (739). Like NRSV, I also translated this phrase as “kingdom has turned,” as it includes the basic meaning of this verb, while facilitating the understanding of this syntactically confusing verse.

16. And now I have one request²²¹ to ask of you- do not refuse me²²².” She said, “Speak.”

17. He said, “Please speak to Solomon the king – for he will not refuse you- to give me Abishag the Shunammite as wife.”

18. Bathsheba said, “Good, I myself will speak for you to the king.”

19. Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak with him for Adonijah. The king rose to approach her and bowed to her and sat on his throne and set²²³ a throne for the queen mother²²⁴ and she sat on his right²²⁵.

²²¹ This verse includes the conjugation of the root shin-aleph-lamed as both a noun and a verb. JPS translates this repetition as “petition, make,” while Alter translates it as “petition, ask.” NRSV translates it as “request, make,” and McCarter translates it as “request, ask.” This phrase also occurs in v. 20. Alter and McCarter translate this repetition as “request, ask,” while JPS and NRSV translate it as “request, make.” Verse 22 also includes this verb twice, and Alter, McCarter and NRSV translate it both times as “ask,” while JPS translates it both times as “request.” In order to reflect the repetition of this root, I translate each of its occurrences as a verb as “request;” and each of its occurrences as a noun as “ask.” Although using “request” in both instances would best demonstrate this repetition, this translation does not flow idiomatically. This word has significance in this section of Bathsheba’s narrative arc, as Adonijah believes she has the power to influence the king to honor his request.

²²² Although this phrase literally reads, “Do not turn your face,” JPS, Alter, McCarter and NRSV all translate this idiomatically as “do not refuse me,” the translation I also chose, both here and in the next verse, in order to make the meaning clear. This also occurs twice in v. 20.

²²³ JPS translates shin-yud-mem (conjugated in kal) as “placed,” and NRSV as “brought.” Both McCarter and Alter translate it as “set.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines shin-yud-mem in the context of this verse as “to set up” (1322). I also translate this root as “set,” to accurately reflect the Hebrew text, as it is conjugated in the active form. Also, by keeping this verb as active (rather than passive, thereby connoting that a servant completes this task) in the translation, it further illustrates the king’s respectful actions and attitude toward his mother.

²²⁴ NRSV and McCarter both translate the phrase *am hamelech* literally as “king’s mother,” while JPS and Alter translate this phrase with the official-sounding title of “queen mother.” It is significant to note that the Tanakh does not include another occurrence of this phrase. I also translate this phrase as “queen mother” in order to highlight the significance of Bathsheba’s unique position.

²²⁵ Other examples of the right side indicating an important/preferred position include Gen. 48:13-14, 17-20, in which Jacob lays his right hand on Ephraim, even though Manasseh is older. Joseph objects and attempts to switch his father’s hands, but Jacob replies, “I know, my son, I know. He too shall become a people, and he too shall be great. Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations” (JPS translation). By placing his right hand on Ephraim, he demonstrates the younger son’s superiority. Later in the biblical narrative, Moses and the Israelites sing that God splits the sea with God’s “right hand” (Ex. 5:6, 12). The Israelites are also commanded to offer the right thigh of their sacrifice (Ex. 29:22; Lev. 7:32-33; 8:25-26; 9:21; Num. 18:18). The Psalms include many references to the goodness and power of God’s right side, such as in Ps. 16:11; 17:7; 20:7; 21:9; 45:5; 48:11; 63:9; 73:23; 89:14; 98:1; 118:15; 139:10, and the importance of having God at your right hand (16:8; 110:5; 121:5).

20. She said, “I have one small request to ask of you, do not refuse me.” And the king said to her, “Ask me, my mother, for I will not refuse you.”

21. So she said, “Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah your brother as wife.”

22. King Solomon answered, saying to his mother, “And why did you request Abishag the Shunamite for Adonijah? Request the kingship for him, as he is my older brother, and Abithar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah are for him.”

23. King Solomon swore by Adonai, saying, “Thus will Adonai do to me and even more, for Adonijah has spoken this thing at (the cost of) his life.”²²⁶

24. And now, as Adonai lives, who has established me and sat me on the throne of my father David and that made me a dynasty,²²⁷ as Adonai spoke, today Adonijah will be put to death.”

²²⁶ This verse does not include a verb that means “cost of” or “risk,” but all of the translations include one of these verbs in order to make this sentence understandable. I add “cost of” to improve this verse idiomatically, and I place it in parenthesis to indicate that the Hebrew text does not include this verb.

²²⁷ All the translations render *bayit* literally as “house,” but this translation does not accurately portray its meaning in the context of this verse. Koehler-Baumgartner notes that *bayit* in this verse indicates David’s dynasty, to which “God gives descendants” (125). Similar examples where *bayit* connotes David’s dynasty include 1 Sam. 20:16 (Jonathan makes a covenant with “the house of David”); 1 Kgs. 12:26 (Jeroboam refers to David’s dynasty); 13:2 (Josiah will become part of David’s dynasty); 2 Sam. 7:27 (David prays for the fulfillment of God’s promise to establish his dynasty); and 1 Kgs. 11:38 (Jeroboam will have a dynasty like David’s). Given the similar meaning of *bayit* in these examples, I translate *bayit* here as “dynasty.”

25. And King Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he struck²²⁸ him and he died.

²²⁸ JPS, McCarter, and NRSV translate pay-gimmel-ayin (conjugated in kal) as “struck,” while Alter translates it as “stabbed.” Koehler-Baumgartner defines pay-gimmel-ayin in the context of this verse as “intending to kill” (910). Other verses in which this verb has a similar meaning include 1 Sam. 22:17 (David’s servants would not obey Saul’s command to kill the priests); 2 Sam. 1:15 (David’s attendant kills the Amalekite); 1 Kgs. 2:29, 31, 34, 46 (King Solomon gives orders to have Joab and Shimei killed). I also translate pay-gimmel-ayin in this verse as “struck,” in order to illustrate the violent nature of this politically-motivated murder.

Chapter Three: Analysis of Bathsheba's Political Influence

1. Introduction: From Abigail to Bathsheba

In contrast to Abigail, who uses her influence to establish David's rule, Bathsheba uses hers to establish her son Solomon's rule. While Bathsheba plays an active role toward the end of the David story, earlier the text depicts her as a passive character, subject to David's sexual advances. Like Michal, she changes drastically as a character through her differing roles in the David saga. Unlike Michal, who loses her political influence over the course of her life, Bathsheba gains hers towards the end of her life through her role as Queen Mother. While initially presented in the biblical narrative as a submissive sexual object, she emerges as an influential political player who, literally and figuratively, sits on King Solomon's right side.

2. Bathsheba and David's Affair (2 Samuel 11)

In her first scene in the biblical narrative (2 Samuel 11), others continually act upon Bathsheba to determine her future. Throughout this crucial episode, depicting Bathsheba's affair with David and their resulting marriage (2 Sam.11), the narrator does not include any description of her thoughts, feelings, or motivations. In fact, Berlin notes that the narrative presents her as a "complete non-person, merely an agent necessary for plot development."²²⁹ After David sees her bathing on the roof, he sends for her, and his

²²⁹ Berlin, 224

messengers bring her to the king. The narrator describes her as “very beautiful,” the factor that obviously captures David’s attention. Her beauty persuades him to seduce her, even after he learns that she is married to one of his loyal soldiers, and the daughter of another. Perhaps, through her beauty, Bathsheba actually does control some aspect of her destiny. Her beauty convinces David to enter into this illicit affair, even as her husband fights David’s battles. Bathsheba’s beauty serves to capture David’s passions while he relaxes in his palace, and this passion eventually results in Solomon’s birth.

As the narrator only records Bathsheba speaking one line in this scene, the reader is left to wonder at her emotional state and expectations. Fuchs emphasizes that “the only words Bathsheba is allowed to utter throughout the entire scene are informative and factual, they reveal nothing about her feelings or motivations...This minimal verbal expression conveys nothing about her point of view, character or inner life.”²³⁰ However, perhaps Bathsheba knows that by bearing the king’s child, she will become his wife. When she learns of her pregnancy, she becomes the actor in this scene, “sending and having it told” to David. Earlier, in v. 4, Bathsheba was the subject of the verb “to come,” and now, notably, David becomes the subject of this verb.

Her decision to send a messenger hints at her future strength as Queen Mother. The text usually includes the verb “to send,” a key word in this passage, to describe David’s actions. However, in this verse, Bathsheba is the initiator of this action. One can infer from her future characterization as a trusted counselor to her son, that these skills lay

²³⁰ Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 132-133.

latent within her in the days of her affair with David, ready for an opportunity to establish her potential power.

3. Bathsheba Secures Solomon's Kingship (1 Kings 1:11-31)

When Bathsheba returns to the biblical narrative, she finds and seizes upon the opportunity to establish power for herself and her son (1 Kings 1). By securing the kingship for her son Solomon, she also ensures her own political future as the Queen Mother. Bathsheba knows that her political future, once tied to her husband David, now depends on her son. Now, twenty years later, Bathsheba reemerges from her formerly passive past characterization, to “show herself a mistress of language- shrewd, energetic, politically astute.”²³¹ In fact, scholars compare her to Sarah and Rebekah, fellow matriarchs who also establish the destiny of their sons.²³² Through fighting for Solomon's right to the throne, she also fights for her own survival in this constantly turbulent, politically-driven society.

Although Nathan sets this scene in motion, Bathsheba takes his “counsel” and adds her own voice to this suggested speech. Just in the action of entering David's room (v. 15), she establishes herself as a changed character within a new power structure. Their positions are reversed, as previously messengers brought her passively into the powerful king's room (1 Sam. 11:4), but here she actively enters the room of the ailing king to

²³¹ Alter, 336

²³² Frymer-Kensky, .280

seize power (1 Kgs. 11:15). Like Abigail, she “bows and shows obeisance” (1 Kgs. 11:16) when greeting David. Not only does this act demonstrate her obvious awareness of appropriate behavior, but it also serves to soften David’s will toward her impending request. She chooses her words carefully, taking advantage of his weak and elderly state. Perhaps she knows that, upon seeing her, David will wistfully remembering his virile and powerful younger years. Therefore, she begins by reminding him of a demand he “made” during the time when his words were unequivocally obeyed (v. 17). After this flattery, she immediately changes tactics, gently chiding him for no longer being part of the essential power structure, and being unaware of his own son’s actions (v. 18). Then, brilliantly, she flatters his now faltering ego by urging him to make this crucial decision, as all Israel waits for him, the still powerful king, to establish the future of his dynasty (v. 21).

Other scholars agree that Bathsheba’s rhetorical brilliance showcases her considerable political gifts. Alter notes that Nathan has confidence in Bathsheba not only to communicate this important message to David, but also to persuade the ailing king of the promise he made, one that is not recorded in the biblical narrative.²³³ Alter also explains that Bathsheba improvises upon Nathan’s suggested script, and chooses words that manipulate David by “strongly evoking David’s authority, though in fact he has been out of the picture, failing and bedridden.”²³⁴ Alter further agrees that Bathsheba carefully chooses her words, as he notes with “admirable tact, she uses a decorous euphemism for dying, and expresses her perfectly plausible fear that as king, Adonijah would take

²³³ Alter, 366

²³⁴ Alter, 368

prompt steps to eliminate both her and Solomon.”²³⁵ Fuchs also agrees that Bathsheba demonstrates her considerable persuasive skills, proving herself as a well-spoken and crafty politician, as well as a strong advocate for her son.²³⁶ Ackerman writes that Solomon becomes David’s successor because of Bathsheba’s efforts.²³⁷

Soon Nathan enters, interrupting Bathsheba’s speech and bowing to King David, but he receives no acknowledgement as Bathsheba’s plea lingers in the room. Perhaps her final plea for her and Solomon’s future persuades David to take action, or perhaps he continues to feel moved by her flattery, and her reminder of his former strength. Regardless of which part of her speech moves him, it obviously does, as he ignores Nathan and calls for his wife (v. 28). In v. 30, he emphatically recalls the oath he supposedly made to Bathsheba and declares that Solomon will immediately take the throne. He may have secretly made this oath to Bathsheba, but most likely, he wants to believe he did, so that he can end his reign by enacting this significant oath. Alter explains that Bathsheba convinces David that he actually made this oath, and he even emphatically embellishes this oath by raising “Bathsheba’s language to still another level of politically efficacious resonance: Nathan had made no mention of God in invoking the vow; Bathsheba had.”²³⁸

²³⁵ Alter, 368

²³⁶ Fuchs, 168

²³⁷ Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Double Day & Company, Inc., 1998) 17.

²³⁸ Alter, 369

Bathsheba, by taking advantage of her obviously intimate knowledge of David's ego, cleverly shapes her rhetoric in order to achieve stability and power for her and her son. Alter further explains that by mentioning Adonijah's garnering of support, Bathsheba also sways David's decision to immediately place Solomon on the throne.²³⁹ As Exum writes, "In the patriarchal scheme of things, a mother's most important contribution lies in obtaining advantages for her son(s)...Bathsheba's 'reward' is to be Queen Mother- no small achievement in this royal house."²⁴⁰ David, from his weakened position, "sitting" in bed, assigns Solomon to "sit" in the throne (1 Kgs. 11:30), thereby representing a change of leadership and the establishment of a new power structure, in which Bathsheba will play an integral role.

4. Bathsheba Influences King Solomon (1 Kings 2:12-25)

Bathsheba's final interaction with David ends with her again showing obsequiousness towards him by bowing and praising him (v. 31). In the following chapter, her place in the power structure comes full circle when her son, King Solomon, bows down to her as she approaches (1 Kings 2:19). In her role as Queen Mother, she has apparently already become a significant influence upon her son's reign, as his rival Adonijah decides to approach her with his request. Alter also concludes that Adonijah thinks that Bathsheba will have significant power over the king's decisions.²⁴¹ Adonijah also mentions that King Solomon will not refuse any request she brings, a fact King Solomon confirms in v.

²³⁹ Alter, 369

²⁴⁰ Exum, "Frag" 200

²⁴¹ Alter 378

20, again indicating her important political role. Solomon also places a throne for her on his right side, a symbol of his considerable respect (v. 19).

Bathsheba shows her quick assessment of this situation by immediately asking Adonijah the nature of his approach before she agrees to do his bidding. Alter also comments upon her obviously astute suspicion of Adonijah, especially following the report that Solomon's kingdom was firmly established in v. 12.²⁴² When she approaches Solomon with this controversial request, she demands that he not refuse her, a bold demand toward the king of Israel. Also, unlike her behavior toward King David, she does not bow down to her son, perhaps indicating that she considers them as equals. Or, perhaps, she now views herself as having a more important and respected role than even the king.

While her decision to bring Adonijah's request to Solomon may initially seem to lack strategy, it actually results in further securing Solomon's reign. Alter mentions that while Adonijah "was preparing the ground for a future claim to the throne (Absalom cohabitating with David's concubines stands in the background)...he will pay the ultimate price for this miscalculation."²⁴³ Exum explains that Bathsheba's cunning action invokes enough anger in Solomon to finally persuade him to eliminate his political rival Adonijah.²⁴⁴ Alter agrees, and he writes, "As with Adonijah, there is no explanation of her motive. But given the shrewdness with which Bathsheba has acted in the previous episode, it is entirely plausible that she immediately agrees to do this favor for Adonijah

²⁴² Alter, 377

²⁴³ Alter, 378

²⁴⁴ Exum, Cheryl J. Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 200.

because she quickly realized what escapes him- that it will prove to be his death sentence, and thus a threat to her son's throne will be permanently eliminated."²⁴⁵ Adonijah's request, as communicated by Bathsheba, so enrages Solomon that he immediately sends a servant to kill him, thereby demonstrating considerable authority and determination to further secure his throne (v.25).

Although Bathsheba enters the narrative as a passive object of David's lust, by this final scene, her considerable transformation becomes obvious. As a result of her actions, David appoints Solomon as his successor, and Solomon eliminates his political enemy. Fuchs comments that through her influence in establishing Solomon's kingship, she echoes Michal's role in establishing David's. She notes that Bathsheba's major function in this scene is to protect the interest of her son, and to "pave the way to the throne just as Michal paves David's way to the throne."²⁴⁶ Bellis writes that although she may have held less influence as Abigail or Michal during her reign as Queen, she gains more political influence than either of them in her role as Queen Mother.²⁴⁷ One can infer from the intelligence she displays as Solomon's mother that in her two decades as David's wife, she learned a considerable amount about how to gain and maintain influence. Through her son's rise to power, which she facilitates, she gains and uses her personal power and influence, thereby forever changing the course of the Davidic dynasty.

²⁴⁵ Alter, 378

²⁴⁶ Fuchs, 174

²⁴⁷ 150

Conclusion

There is a cliché that states that behind every great man, there is an even greater women. In King David's case, he was lucky enough to have three greater women behind him. The word "behind" is significant, for although he could not have achieved his power and legacy without them, they largely remained minor characters. Through a close examination of these texts, the reader can infer how consequential their influence was, especially given the socio-historical context of ancient Israel. Viewed in this light, their impact as disparate individuals and as a group, becomes quite noteworthy.

Some scholars determine the overall import of these biblical heroines by examining them as members of a group. According to Bellis, Abigail, Michal and Bathsheba, with their individual characteristics and roles, together form the complete character of a royal wife. She presents Bathsheba as the ideal sexual partner, while presenting Abigail as the ideal nurturing partner. She then adds Michal into this group, whom she presents as a nontraditional, yet essential member of the group, by noting, "We are accustomed to the split between the nurturing, mothering wife and the sexy wife-mistress. To this duo is added the angry feminist, not content with subordinate roles."²⁴⁸,

Examining David's wives in this way facilitates certain perspectives and understandings about their importance. For example, each of David's wives elucidates a different image of his character and the overall Davidic narrative. The reader learns that Michal serves as

²⁴⁸ Bellis, 151

the catalyst for his launch to power, while Abigail provides him with provisions, and Bathsheba gives birth to his heir. However, in determining their characteristics in this way, one loses sight of these important women as individuals. As individuals who interact with David throughout this central narrative, they help shape not only the trajectory of his saga, but that of the Jewish people.

As individuals, each of these women makes decisions that affect the political landscape of her time. For example, Michal declares her love for David, and decides to save him despite the threat of her powerful father. Abigail quickly provides him with supplies, and also persuades him not to put his future in jeopardy by committing violence. Although Bathsheba's first encounter with David results in several negative repercussions, her acts on behalf of her son determine the future of the Davidic dynasty. While making these decisions, they each risk their positions and their lives, and one would be remiss not to take these risks into consideration when determining the impact of these heroines. Each of them, through both word and deed, have an impact on the political underpinnings that run through the books of Samuel and Kings.

Although the narrative includes relatively little information about the actions of Michal, Abigail, and Bathsheba in comparison to David, this does not indicate their lack of consequence. However, in order to learn enough about these heroines to infer the extent of their political power, the reader must examine these texts carefully. In the sparse biblical narrative, one should look at each choice in grammar, sentence structure, word choice, and context for clues. Only through a close reading of these sacred texts can one

begin to understand the impact of Michal, Abigail and Bathsheba in their socio-historical context. In doing so, one perceives not the dearth of texts describing these women, but the import of each phrase concerning each of them as individuals. One should laud not only their positive impact upon David and his dynasty, but also the fact that they achieve so much in so few verses. They may not have reached official positions of power, but they each demonstrate intelligence and political savvy. No reader of these texts can dispute that David was a powerful and successful king and leader. In their study of David and this period in ancient Israel, readers must also study these texts while continually remembering this cliché: Behind every great man there is a greater woman -- and David had three.

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