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**POLITICS AND LOVE: READING AND RE-REREADING THE DAVID  
AND JONATHAN STORY**

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**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination**

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## SYNOPSIS

Throughout the Bible, there are few stories as compelling as the relationship of Jonathan and David. This is a tale filled with military exploits, love and passion, and moments of failure. This relationship as read solely through the words of the biblical text is ambiguous in nature. One is unsure whether this relationship exists because of political, interpersonal, or homoerotic reasons.

The scholars throughout the ages examine the same terms, actions, and feelings to illustrate their reading of the relationship. Therefore, this thesis wishes to explore the wide body of work, which will assist the reader in comprehending the biblical story of Jonathan and David. The author will examine other biblical texts, Talmudic and midrashic works, medieval commentary, and modern scholarship in an attempt to understand Jonathan and David's relationship.

Each of the five chapters of this thesis will examine a different aspect of their relationship in detail. The first chapter will look at the political aspects of this relationship. Chapters two through four will address the interpersonal aspects of this and other relationships found in the Tanakh. Chapter five will explore the homoerotic nature of this relationship.

The thesis contributes to current research by illustrating the diverse amount of commentary on Jonathan and David's relationship. No author has brought biblical, midrashic, Talmudic, medieval, and current scholarship about this relationship together in one place. The diversity of this material allows for a deeper look at this relationship, to understand how each generation comprehended this relationship differently due to the type of scholarship or the current events that occurred in their day.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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In addition, throughout this long process, I can not thank my parents, Michael and Cathy Gordon, enough for their constant encouragement. Not a week would go by without one of them asking me how the thesis was coming! Their interest and support helped me push through and finish this work!

Finally, I can not thank my partner Brian enough for his love and assistance during these past few months. Although I came into this project hoping to see the love and devotion that Jonathan and David showed one another, I was constantly reminded of the support and love that we show one another. As it says: "Jonathan and David made a pact, and Jonathan loved him as himself."

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Dimensions of the Political Relationship .....	6
Chapter Two: Hallmarks of Significant Personal Relationships .....	28
Chapter Three: Other Significant Relationships that Affect Jonathan and David.....	40
Chapter Four: Pieces of Jonathan and David's Relationship which are Ambiguous ....	63
Chapter Five: Homoeroticism in Jonathan and David's Narrative .....	93
Conclusion .....	108
Bibliography .....	117

## Introduction

Throughout the Bible, there are few stories as compelling as the relationship of Jonathan and David. This is a tale filled with military exploits, love and passion, and moments of failure; indeed, this is one of the only narratives in the entire Tanakh that focuses on a relationship between two men who are not related. This short story of only a few chapters in I Samuel<sup>1</sup> has tempted scholars from the time of the Mishnah until today. The author wishes to build upon this great scholarship and add his own thoughts to the discussion about Jonathan and David's beautiful and loving relationship.

In I Samuel chapter fourteen, Jonathan, the son of King Saul, first appears on the scene. As a warrior, he achieves victory over the Philistines and becomes one of the leaders of Israel. Shortly afterwards, David, a young shepherd boy, is called into service as King Saul's musician; he plays the lyre, which comforts Saul when the evil spirit comes upon him. Even more, David volunteers to battle Goliath and as a young lad defeats Israel's greatest enemy. It is after this victory, in chapter eighteen, that Jonathan and David officially meet for the first time. At this moment וַיִּפֹּשׂ יְהוֹנָתָן וְקִשְׁרָה בְּנֶפֶשׁ דָּוִד וַיִּצְהָרְהוּ יְהוֹנָתָן כְּנַפְשׁוֹ: "Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself."<sup>2</sup> It is this powerful first meeting that causes Jonathan to cut a covenant with David, to strip off his clothes, and to provide these garments for David to wear.

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<sup>1</sup> To learn more about the Jonathan and David narrative, please see I Samuel 14:1 to II Samuel 1:27.

<sup>2</sup> I Samuel 18:1. All biblical translations are from the *JPS TANAKH* unless otherwise noted. *JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

As the story continues, David marries Michal, the daughter of Saul, and becomes a leader beloved by Israel and Judah. Saul increasingly becomes jealous of David's power and influence over his son, daughter, and the people. In chapter nineteen, Jonathan wishes to alleviate this fear, by illustrating David's loyalty. But, a similar situation also arises in chapter twenty, in which David finds Jonathan and asks for his protection. The two cut another covenant Jonathan expresses his love to David and promises to inform him of any bad news, while David agrees to look after Jonathan's descendants. As David hides in the field, Jonathan confronts Saul, who increasingly becomes angrier at Jonathan's relationship with David. Saul blows up at Jonathan, throws a spear, and calls him בֶּן-נָעֻזַת הַמֶּרְדָּת "son of a perverse, rebellious woman."<sup>3</sup> Jonathan, realizing his father's wish to kill David, runs to the meeting spot and tells David the bad news as the two kiss and cry upon each other's shoulders.

After this initial parting, Jonathan and David meet one last time in chapter twenty-three. Jonathan says to David: וְאַתָּה תִּמְלֹךְ עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶנִּי אֶהְיֶה לְךָ לְמִשְׁנָה "Do not be afraid: the hand of my father Saul will never touch you. You are going to be king over Israel and I shall be second to you..."<sup>4</sup> Alongside these words, Jonathan and David enter into their third and final covenant together. Shortly after this meeting, Jonathan and Saul are killed in a battle against the Philistines. David receives the bad news and mourns for Jonathan and Saul by rending his clothes, fasting, crying, and lamenting. He says towards the end of his lament: צַר-לִי עָלֶיךָ אָחִי יְהוֹנָתָן נָעַמְתָּ לִּי מְאֹד וְכָל-אַתָּה אֶהְבֶּתָּ לִּי מֵאַהֲבַת נָשִׁים "I grieve for you,

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<sup>3</sup> I Samuel 20:30.

<sup>4</sup> I Samuel 23:17.

My brother Jonathan, You were most dear to me. Your love was wonderful to me, More than the love of women."<sup>5</sup>

Jonathan and David's relationship as read solely through the words of the biblical text is ambiguous in nature. One is unsure whether this relationship exists because of political, interpersonal, or homoerotic reasons. The scholars throughout the ages examine the same terms, actions, and feelings found throughout this story to illustrate their reading of the relationship. Often, modern scholars will even explicitly state what type of relationship they believe exists between David and Jonathan. Therefore, this thesis wishes to explore the wide body of work, written over the last two thousand years, which will assist the reader in comprehending the biblical story of Jonathan and David. The author will examine other biblical texts, Talmudic and midrashic works, medieval commentary, and modern scholarship in an attempt to understand Jonathan and David's relationship. Each chapter of this thesis will then examine a different aspect of their relationship in detail.

The first chapter will look closely at characteristics of Jonathan and David's relationship which can be defined as exclusively political. This chapter will examine the evidence provided by the modern and medieval scholars who believe this relationship is built upon a political association. In order to understand the political aspects of this relationship, Jonathan and David's story will be compared to similar political relationships found in the Tanakh and in other Ancient Near Eastern writings. In addition, terms that dominate the story, such as *shevuah*, *brit*, and *hesed*, as well as specific actions and emotions, will be shown to have political connotations.

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<sup>5</sup> II Samuel 1:26.

The second through fourth chapters will look at Jonathan and David's interactions from the perspective of an interpersonal relationship. The second chapter begins by examining the characteristics of interpersonal relationships found throughout the Tanakh. The same evidence utilized in chapter one to prove a political association will be reread to link these ideas to an interpersonal relationship. Terms such as *brit*, *hesed*, *ahavah*, as well as certain actions and emotions will be shown to have an additional meaning besides political terminology. Modern scholarship, midrashim, medieval commentary, and other biblical stories will serve to demonstrate the similarities between Jonathan and David's relationship and other biblical interpersonal stories.

The third chapter will examine the significant relationships that surround Jonathan and David. The author believes that one is unable to understand Jonathan and David's story without studying these outside relationships. By looking closely at the relationships of Saul & Jonathan, Saul & David, and Michal & David, one will comprehend the palace life that sets the stage for this story. In addition, these outside relationships also allow the reader to comprehend the complex interactions of politics, love, and jealousy, which ultimately affect Jonathan and David's interactions with each other.

The fourth chapter examines the interpersonal aspects of Jonathan and David's relationship by highlighting many of the ambiguities of their relationship that differ from current thinking about a political association. The author will illustrate the similarities that exist between Jonathan and David and will look closely at the emotions, feelings, and actions that represent characteristics of an interpersonal relationship. The chapter will also address the ideas of equality and mutuality which are at the center of their covenant making and will reread the cutting of covenants which has been shown to be exclusively

political. As the longest chapter in this thesis, the ambiguities of their relationship will be addressed and the author will question the type of relationship that truly exists between these two men.

In recent years, the Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgender community has found that the Jonathan and David narrative fills the void of no same-sex relationships in the Bible. This fifth chapter will address aspects of David and Jonathan's relationship which can be read as homoerotic. Certain modern writers reread the covenants, actions, and feelings addressed in earlier commentaries and state that these characteristics are homoerotic. In addition, the chapter will closely examine evidence from other same-sex relationships found in Ancient Near Eastern literature. This reading will show that one can read Jonathan and David's relationship as not just political or interpersonal interactions, but also as a homoerotic love story between two men.

The relationship of Jonathan and David is overflowing with aspects of politics and love, which makes the nature of this relationship difficult to define. In the chapters to come, the author will examine the different types of thinking that have existed throughout the centuries. Throughout these chapters, the author will read and re-read the same terms, actions, and feelings, but will look at them through different perspectives. The reader will not only comprehend what type of relationship exists between Jonathan and David, but how the scholars throughout time read and re-read this story.

## **Chapter One: Dimensions of the Political Relationship**

This first chapter will examine aspects of Jonathan and David's relationship which can be defined as exclusively political. The author will compare the story of Jonathan and David to similar political relationships which are found in the Tanakh and in other Ancient Near Eastern writing. To do this, the author will first examine the numerous terms which dominate the narrative, such as: *shevuah*, *brit*, and *hesed*. All of these words have specific political meanings which will be explored in the coming paragraphs. Following this first section, Jonathan and David's actions, as well as emotions, will also be linked to expressions of a political nature. Finally, this chapter will examine Jonathan's role as mediator and David's rightful claim to the kingdom, thereby showing that this story is built upon David's rise to power.

I Samuel chapter twenty can be seen as the climax of the Jonathan and David narrative. In previous chapters, Jonathan, the young prince, and David, the valiant killer of Goliath, meet for the first time and a covenant is cut between them. Shortly afterwards, trouble brews as Saul wishes to kill David. However, it is Jonathan who takes control of the situation, while David's thoughts are completely absent from the text. It is only at the beginning of chapter twenty, that David's fears are recognized. As David flees, he rushes to Jonathan to ask for protection and to plead for his life. It is at this point in the story that Jonathan and David's relationship deepens and strengthens; it is at this moment that the majority of the oaths and covenants are made between these two men.

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible explains that an oath is needed to protect the security of a society and obligates all people to keep their promises when related to

matters of serious importance.<sup>6</sup> Oaths are linked to the terms *hishbi'a* "adjure," *nishba*, "swear," and *shevuah* "oath," which all share the common root שבע. Often there is a connection between *alah* (curse) and *shevuah*, since a curse is often a central part of an oath. Most often an oath is made in a conditional form, such as "May God, the Lord, do so to me and more also, if..."<sup>7</sup> Oaths can also be accompanied with certain holy words or holy acts, such as invoking God's<sup>8</sup> name or raising one's hands. Oaths in the Tanakh occur in a wide range of circumstances from trivial concerns to ritualistic public events, for personal relationships as well as for state or communal alliances.

The oaths found in chapter twenty bind Jonathan and David to fulfill certain obligations. Jonathan states that he will first uncover his father's wishes and will afterwards send for David, while David promises to protect Jonathan's descendents for all time. Even more, due to numerous illustrations found in I Samuel chapter twenty, these oaths constitute an oath paradigm. For example, the most frequent word associated with an oath, לְהִשָּׁבֵעַ, is found three times in I Samuel chapter twenty (20:3, 20:17, and 20:42). In addition, Jonathan's oath to David includes a conditional curse, and, even more fitting he even adds his own name (I Samuel 20:13). Finally, the phrase *Hai Adonai*, "As the Lord lives" (I Samuel 20:3, 20:21) is seen as an invocation of God's name, while God later is called in as a witness (I Samuel 20:23).

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<sup>6</sup> For further information on oaths please see *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Oath."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 577.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will refer to God in ungendered language during the discussion of material and in my personal translations. The only exception will be biblical translations from the *JPS TANAKH* or quotations from other sources, which will faithfully use the translation provided. I will translate God's name יְהוָה as "Eternal" or "Eternal One," but the term "Lord" will be used when referring to a biblical translation from the *JPS TANAKH*.

The medieval rabbinic commentators also discuss Jonathan and David's oaths of I Samuel chapter twenty. About verse 20:12, Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaqi), Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi), Joseph Caro, and Joseph Kaspi point out that **יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** "By the Lord, the God of Israel" are words found in most oaths. In addition, Rashi explains about verse 20:42 that the Eternal is a witness to the oaths which the two swore. Isaiah from Trani agrees with this assessment and states that the term **לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם** "Go in peace" (20:42) shows that David will remember the terms of their oath long into the future.

There is no question that Jonathan and David form these various oaths with one another, at this specific time, since each man is uncertain of what the future will bring. David is fearful of dying by Saul's hands and needs the support of Jonathan to save him from certain destruction. Jonathan understands that David will most certainly be king over Israel and wishes to protect himself and his descendants once David assumes the throne. Both Jonathan and David are concerned about their personal safety, but each individual's personal safety is tied to their future political success. If David does not survive Saul's attempted assassination, he will not become king over Israel. If Jonathan does not make a pact with David, his family may be destroyed once David rules the kingdom. These oaths are political, for each needs the other to ensure their personal safety as they go about their political business.

Covenants<sup>9</sup> often exist alongside oaths, sacred meals, sacrifices, or other religious acts. The formation of Jonathan and David's oaths go hand in hand with the creation of various covenants. A covenant is defined as:

A solemn promise made binding by an oath, which may be either a verbal formula or symbolic action. It is recognized by both parties as a formal act which binds the actor to fulfill his promise. Covenants may be between two parties or socio-political groups in which the covenant creates a relationship to be regulated between them.<sup>10</sup>

When God is not a participant, covenants occur between individuals who are not related by kinship such as kings and subjects, husbands and wives, and states and their representatives. In addition, there are four types of covenants pertaining to individuals or groups of people: (a) suzerainty: a superior defines a covenant and binds an inferior to these specific obligations; (b) parity: both parties are bound to the oath in which specific obligations are imposed or no obligations are imposed; (c) patron: a superior binds himself to the inferior in order to benefit the inferior; and (d) promissory: two parties establish a new relationship with each other. The words *brit* (covenant) and *karat brit* (to cut a covenant) are the most frequent terms used when making a covenant.

In I Samuel 20:16 Jonathan cuts a covenant with David: וַיַּכְרֹת יְהוֹנָתָן עִם-בֵּית דָּוִד  
“Thus has Jonathan covenanted with the house of David...” This covenant, which occurs alongside other oaths, is made between two individuals: a prince and his subject who is not related by kinship. There is no sacred meal, sacrifice, or other religious ritual. However, the intricate shooting of arrows (20:19-22, 35-40) is part of their covenant making. Although Jonathan makes the covenant with David, it is similar to a parity

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<sup>9</sup> Further information about covenants can be found in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Covenant.”

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 714.

covenant due to the obligations that each person imposes on the other. The term *karat* (to cut a covenant) is included in this phrase, although we lack the term *brit* (covenant).

One other covenant made between David and Jonathan has given biblical scholars some difficulty. Soon after meeting for the first time (I Samuel 18:3), a covenant is cut: וַיִּכְרֹת יְהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד בְּרִית בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתוֹ כִּנְפֹשׁוֹ. The first problem relates to the strange grammar in this sentence. Who makes this covenant, Jonathan alone or Jonathan and David together? If the word *et* is added to the phrase and the *vav* deleted before David's name, it can be translated as "Jonathan made a pact with David and he loved him as he loved himself."<sup>11</sup> However, if the verb *wayikrat* were plural, then it would say: "Jonathan and David made a pact and Jonathan loved him as he loved himself." The example found in I Samuel 18:3 is different from all of the other types of covenants because of its flawed grammatical construction.

Another difficulty is that the verses surrounding this covenant do not mention any oaths, details, or obligations required of David or Jonathan. Jonathan undresses, which seems peculiar and can illustrate the passing of his reign to David, but no words address this strange incident. The covenant is an anomaly, for it does not fit into any of the types of known covenants. The *brit* has aspects of a suzerainty covenant since Jonathan is in charge as the prince's son, but it also seems quite similar to a parity covenant, for in the future David and Jonathan will both be bound to this covenant.

J.A. Thompson explains that this specific covenant is one of the many covenants that David makes until he secures his reign over Israel and Judah. Thompson shows that David develops as a leader throughout I Samuel, while those in power, i.e. Saul and

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<sup>11</sup> The following translations of I Samuel 18:3 are my own.

Jonathan, begin to defer to the strengthened David.<sup>12</sup> Although it is difficult to define this covenant, one learns that the formation of this political relationship allows David to begin his ascent towards a reign over Israel and Judah.

Another term, *hesed*, translated as loyalty, mercy, or duty, is found throughout the Jonathan and David story. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld explains that there are two types of *hesed* found in the Bible: (1) A case in which there is no reason stated for the act of *hesed*. This case is often based on a close personal relationship, such as husband and wife, king and adviser, father and son, etc. (2) A case in which *hesed* is tied to some prior action.<sup>13</sup> This type of relationship is much more tenuous, such as Joseph's dealings with the cupbearer in prison or the example of King Ahab with Ben-Hadad.<sup>14</sup> The difficulty is that David and Jonathan's relationship does not fit into either of the two examples of *hesed*. There is an intimacy between the two men, but there is also a political relationship which is built around their covenants.<sup>15</sup>

Ada Taggar-Cohen demonstrates that loyalty is political by using specific illustrations from this narrative that address her point. She explains that David's words to Jonathan in I Samuel 20:1 denote disloyal behavior. מָה עָשִׂיתִי מְהֵרָעוֹנִי וּמִהֲחַטָּאתַי "What have I done, what is my crime and my guilt against your father, that he seeks my life?" Taggar-Cohen shows that חַטָּאת---a crime and עוֹן---a sin, refer to words

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<sup>12</sup> J.A. Thompson, "The Significance of the Verb Love in the David-Jonathan Narratives in I Samuel," *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 24, fasc. 3 (July 1974): 334.

<sup>13</sup> Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Loyalty and Love: The Language of Human Interconnections in the Hebrew Bible." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 22, 3 (Summer 1983): 197.

<sup>14</sup> See Genesis 40:14 and I Kings 20:31.

<sup>15</sup> Doob Sakenfeld, 198-199.

of treason against a king.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Kyle P. McCarter states that terms such as “love,” “loyalty,” and “goodness,” can also carry political nuances. For example, in I Samuel 19:4, נִדְבָר יְהוֹנָתָן בְּדָוִד טוֹב אֶל-שָׂאֵל אָבִיו, Jonathan implores his father, explaining that David has done good for him. This term describes the proper treatment of a political partner and explains that David has been loyal to King Saul.<sup>17</sup>

Taggar-Cohen also explains that specific Hittite texts relating to loyalty and disloyalty are similar to the Jonathan and David narrative.<sup>18</sup> One example, written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE, is a treaty between Tudhaliya IV, the Hittite monarch, and his cousin Kurunta, already a ruler of a vassal kingdom. In this treaty, terms such as sin, loyalty, obligation, swearing, and oaths are found. In addition, words of friendship such as dear, good, esteem, love, and benefit also occur in this treaty. These terms are similar to those found in I Samuel chapter twenty, such as חֶטְאָת—a sin, a relationship which is termed “dear,” the term “servant,” and a repetitive use of oath and love.

Although terms often used to describe love and friendship are found in Tudhaliya and Kurunta’s treaty, these words are to be understood exclusively in a political sense. In other vassal-king treaties, only the vassal takes an oath, but in this example, both Tudhaliya and Kurunta take oaths to one another. According to Taggar-Cohen, it is clear that David and Jonathan’s relationship is political. The similarities between these two relationships show that the love and friendship mentioned in the book of Samuel is a legal means for ensuring loyalty between the two. Like Tudhaliya and Kurunta’s

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<sup>16</sup> Ada Taggar-Cohen, “Political Loyalty in the Biblical Account of I Samuel XX-XXII in the Light of the Hittite Texts,” *Vetus Testamentum*, 55, 2, (2005): 253.

<sup>17</sup> Kyle P. McCarter Jr., *The Anchor Bible I Samuel* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1980), 322.

<sup>18</sup> For more information on the Hittite texts and their connection to Jonathan and David’s relationship, see Taggar-Cohen, 254-266.

relationship, both legal and political terms as well as words of friendship are used to address the *hesed* (loyalty) of their relationship.

In addition, one other term found in Jonathan and David's narrative links this relationship to the political realm. In David's lament for Jonathan (II Samuel 1:26), David says: צָרִי לִי עָלֶיךָ אָחִי יְהוֹנָתָן "I grieve for you, My brother Jonathan..." The term אָחִי (brother), when not referring to an immediate relative, often refers to a close political ally or someone whom an individual can trust. Examples of this usage are found when King Hiram calls Solomon a brother (I Kings 9:13), when Ahab addresses Ben Hadad as his brother (I Kings 20:32), and when the prophet of Israel speaks with the prophet of Judah (I Kings 13:30). These examples show that non-kin often call each other "brother" in political dealings or when they see each other as fulfilling a similar mission. In addition, in certain Egyptian treaties, two kings who are seen as equals are often called "brother."<sup>19</sup> The use of אָחִי illustrates David's understanding that Jonathan is a political equal who is trustworthy and who has a similar outlook on life.

Modern biblical scholars also cite David and Jonathan's actions, in addition to certain terms, as proof of a political focus to their relationship. In I Samuel 18:4, Jonathan undresses and offers David his royal garments and his sword. וַיִּתְּפֹשֶׁט יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־הַמָּעִיל אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ לְדָוִד וּמַדְיוֹ וְעַד־חַרְבּוֹ וְעַד־קִשְׁתּוֹ וְעַד־חֲגָרוֹ  
"Jonathan took off the cloak and tunic he was wearing and gave them to David, together with his sword, bow, and belt." Yaron Peleg suggests that Jonathan's stripping of his clothes is a symbolic transfer of power; David is now the person who acts, while

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<sup>19</sup> William L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* vol. XXV (1963): 79.

Jonathan becomes passive and dwells in the palace.<sup>20</sup> In addition, according to J.A. Thompson the passing of armor from the lesser to the greater had political implications in the Ancient Near East.<sup>21</sup>

Amongst the clothes handed to David are the *מָד* (tunic), *מַעֲלִיל* (cloak), *חֲגֹר* (belt), *חֶרֶבוֹ* (his sword), and *קֶשֶׁתוֹ* (his bow). A *מָד* is a garment for priests, prophets, and kings. Ehud wears one (Judges 3:16), Joab dresses in one as he goes out to battle (II Samuel 20:8), and Saul provides a *מָד* for David (I Samuel 17:38). The *מַעֲלִיל* is linked to royalty and priesthood; Aaron wears one (Exodus 28:4), Samuel dresses in one (I Samuel 16:27), and a King can be wrapped in one (Ezekiel 26:16). Except for II Samuel 20:8 when Joab dresses in military gear, I Samuel 18:4 is the only example in which a *מַעֲלִיל*, *מָד*, and *חֲגֹר* are mentioned together. Jonathan outdoes his father,<sup>22</sup> since he provides a variety of royal clothes and weapons that actually fit David. The political implications are clear; Jonathan hands over the most important physical aspects of his future reign to David.

The Babylonian Talmud also addresses Jonathan's abdication of the throne to David, his lesser. A discussion begins in Bava Metzia 84b-85a about three humble individuals: Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, the sons of Beteirah, and Jonathan son of Saul. The Talmud explains that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel humbles himself by stating that he is not a great man, that the sons of Beteirah appoint Hillel as *Nasi* over themselves, and that Jonathan says to David: *וְאַתָּה תִּמְלֹךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה־לְךָ לְמִשְׁנָה* "You are going to be king over Israel and I shall be second to you." (I Samuel 23:17).

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<sup>20</sup> Yaron Peleg, "Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 30.2 (2005): 181-182.

<sup>21</sup> Thompson, 335.

<sup>22</sup> Saul provides a garment and other weapons of war for David which do not fit him (I Samuel 17:38).

In the next part of the sugya, the rabbis question the authenticity of their behavior. They ask: are Jonathan and the sons of Beteirah truly humble individuals or did they recognize that the people no longer wished to follow them? The rabbis conclude that the actions of Jonathan and the sons of Beteirah are not strictly because of modesty, but because of politics and their need for self-preservation. Jonathan and the sons of Beteirah each recognize that David and Hillel, respectively, are stronger, more liked, and preferable to themselves. For it says *כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהוּדָה אָהָב אֶת־דָּוִד כִּי־הוּא יוֹצֵא נָבָא לַפְּנֵיהֶם* “All Israel and Judah loved David, for he marched at their head.”<sup>23</sup>

The sugya also links David and Jonathan’s relationship to that of Rabbi and Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel. For Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: “Don’t fear, for he is a lion, the son of a lion. And you are a lion, the son of a fox (*sheul*).” David is connected to the lion, for he is the king of the jungle and this is the sign of the tribe of Judah. Jonathan as the son of *Shaul* is connected to the word for fox, *Sheul*. The rabbis explain throughout this sugya that Jonathan is the weaker individual, a man who needs to fulfill the political act of abdication. Jonathan, both because of humility and his need for self preservation, recognizes that the people wish to follow David; through this political act, Jonathan allows David to become king.

One other act, this time performed by David, is considered to be political in scope. David offers a lament for Jonathan and Saul in II Samuel chapter one which resembles other political laments found throughout the Tanakh. It says in II Samuel 1:17: *וַיִּקְנֶן דָּוִד אֶת־הַקִּינָה הַזֹּאת עַל־שָׁאֵל וְעַל־יְהוֹנָתָן בְּנֵי* “And David intoned this dirge over Saul and his son Jonathan...” The biblical words *קָנַן קִינָה* (intone a dirge) occurs almost

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<sup>23</sup> I Samuel 18:16.

exclusively in political situations, such as the destruction of Tyre (Ezekiel 27:32) and during the end of Pharaoh's reign in Egypt (Ezekiel 32:16). Often one sings a dirge over kings, such as for Pharaoh (Ezekiel 32:16), Jeremiah for King Josiah (II Chronicles 35:25), and for the princes of Israel (Ezekiel 19:1). These laments are often sung by kings (II Samuel 3:33), by prophets (Amos 8:10), and by women (Jeremiah 9:16, 9:19). Thus, in almost every instance, the singing of a dirge occurs because of a political situation or when a hero falls.

David's mourning customs are also similar to the other political acts of grief that are found in the Bible. It says: **וַיִּחַזַק דָּוִד בְּבִגְדָיו וַיִּקְרַעֵם וְגַם כָּל־הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ** **וַיִּסְפְּדוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ וַיִּצְמְדוּ עַד־הָעֶרֶב עַל־שָׁאוּל וְעַל־יְהוֹנָתָן בְּנוֹ** **וְכָל־הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ** "David took hold of his clothes and rent them, and so did all the men with him. They lamented and wept, and they fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan..."<sup>24</sup> In a similar illustration, David orders his troops to rend their clothes, gird their sackcloth, and lament over Abner; while all the men weep, the king eats no bread until evening (II Samuel 3:31-36). In addition, there is mention of putting on sackcloth (Amos 8:10), requiring people to eat wormwood and drink bitter draft (Jeremiah 9:16), and shear their locks and sing laments on high (Jeremiah 7:29). David's lament for Jonathan and Saul is political in nature, for it resembles other dirges for political leaders as well as the mourning techniques that occur during national catastrophes.

Steven Weitzman sees this lament as a "type-scene" that illustrates David's later political and psychological decline.<sup>25</sup> The mourning for Jonathan and Saul (II Samuel

<sup>24</sup> II Samuel 1:11-12.

<sup>25</sup> According to Robert Alter, a type-scene is a series of recurrent narrative episodes with a specific set of motifs that are used repeatedly within a literary corpus to

1:1-27) is the first example of this lament type-scene which is developed throughout the book of II Samuel. It has three key moments: (a) the arrival of a messenger who reports someone died (i.e. the Amalekite); (b) a messenger's report and the listener's response (i.e. rending of clothes, weeping, fasting, etc.); (c) a mourner's verbal response to the news (i.e. the singing of a dirge).

Weitzman explains that two other laments found in II Samuel coincide with this type-scene. The first example is in II Samuel 18, the death of Absalom: (a) Joab sends two messengers to David telling him about Absalom's death; (b) David mourns, weeps, etc.; (c) The staccato stutter of "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!" In addition, the death of David's baby in II Samuel 12 is seen as a parody of the other scenes. (a) David's servants must tell him the baby has died, but fear to let him know; (b) David does not mourn the baby after it has died; (c) David says, "Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."<sup>26</sup>

Steven Weitzman believes that these three examples focus not on David's mourning for close relatives and loved ones, but actually address "public-relations ramifications, affecting how the king's constituency perceives or relates to him."<sup>27</sup> In a political context, David mourns for Jonathan and Saul in public to show that he is not responsible for their deaths. Although he receives a favorable response from his soldiers and constituents for this lament, the later scenes in II Samuel 12 and 18 are filled with inarticulate mumbling and crying which receives disapproval from the populace. Even

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develop the plot. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 47-62.

<sup>26</sup> All three examples of this type-scene relating to David's laments are explained in Steven Weitzman, "David's Lament and the Poetics of Grief in 2 Samuel." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* New Ser., vol. 85, no. 3/4. (Jan. – Apr. 1995): 345-348.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

more, the later laments address David's psychological loss as a leader and as a man who is unable to control his emotions, take charge of his family, or even focus on his populace.<sup>28</sup> This first lament for Jonathan and Saul is David's first crucial moment as a political leader and he shines brightly. His beautiful words, his mourning, and his actions are viewed favorably by his citizens and this political act allows him to wrest control of the monarchy away from the House of Saul.

Modern people assume that words such as love pertain solely to the realm of personal relationships. Certain scholars explain that the appearance of these words in the biblical narrative can be seen as just the opposite, as purely political. William L. Moran's groundbreaking research in the 1960's illuminated the connection between Deuteronomic love to political love found in other Near Eastern texts. He notes the distinctiveness of Deuteronomic love, which does not focus on parental and conjugal love. Deuteronomic love is expressed through heeding God's voice, keeping the commandments, being loyal, and serving God.<sup>29</sup>

David Sperling states that in many Near Eastern treaties, minor kings are commanded to "love their overlords wholeheartedly, just as Israel is commanded to love God."<sup>30</sup> This is consistent with Moran who says that the vassals are required to remain faithful and are compelled to love Pharaoh in order for their special status to continue in the future. Even when there is a rebellion, loyalty is expressed through the term of "love"; half of the people love one king, while the remaining half love his enemy.<sup>31</sup> Love

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 354-360.

<sup>29</sup> Moran, 78.

<sup>30</sup> S. David Sperling, "The One We Ought to Love." in Eugene Borowitz, ed., *Ehad: The Many Meanings of God is One* (Port Jefferson, NY: Sh'ma, 1989): 85.

<sup>31</sup> Moran, 80.

in this context is not an emotion found in an interpersonal relationship, but a political connection between vassal and king.

In the Tanakh, there are also other examples of this type of love, which can be defined in terms of loyalty or service. In I Kings 5:15, the root *ahav* appears in the narrative of David's relationship with Hiram of Tyre: אָהַב הָיָה חִירָם לְדָוִד כָּל-הַיָּמִים "For Hiram had always been a friend of David." This entire section (I Kings 5:15-26) speaks of the diplomatic and commercial relations between Tyre and Judah. In the past, Hiram and David united because of a political treaty, but with the death of David, Solomon needs to renew the agreement with the king from the North. Although David and Hiram are called friends and their relationship is built around the term *ahav*, these two are exclusively involved in a political enterprise with one another.

In addition, in II Samuel 19:6-7, Joab protests David's action of grieving for his rebellious son and for not concerning himself with the interests of his loyal followers.

הַבִּשְׁתָּ הַיּוֹם אֶת-פָּנַי כָּל-עַבְדֶּיךָ הַמִּמְלָטִים אֶת-נַפְשְׁךָ הַיּוֹם  
וְאֵת נַפְשׁ בְּנֶיךָ וּבָתֶּיךָ וְנַפְשׁ נְשִׂיךָ וְנַפְשׁ פְּלִגְשֶׁיךָ לְאַהֲבָה  
אֶת-שֹׂנְאֶיךָ וּלְשׂוֹנֵא אֶת-אַהֲבֶיךָ

Today you have humiliated all your followers, who this day saved your life, and the lives of your sons and daughters, and the lives of your wives and concubines, by showing love for those who hate you and hate for those who love you.

David's followers are humiliated because David demonstrates more concern for his son than for the political interests of his followers. Love is at the center of this political relationship, for David is shown as "hating those who love him."

The writers of Deuteronomy and the other books of the Bible were familiar with various Assyrian documents. They adapted the political understanding of love found in Assyrian treaties when discussing the relationship between God and Israel and when

addressing the interaction of biblical kings with their political allies. Even more, J.A. Thompson explains that *ahav* is a political term in the Jonathan and David narrative because the verb is used at the critical moments as David makes his way to the throne. For example, when David is shown to be the next king (I Samuel 16:13), Saul is said to have loved him and made him his armor bearer (I Samuel 16:21). Jonathan expresses his love for David after the killing of Goliath in which David's charisma and bravery is shown to the people (I Samuel 17:57-18:4). In addition, the people are said to have loved David (I Samuel 18:16) and Jonathan's double swearing with David (I Samuel 20:17) explains that love implies political purposes.<sup>32</sup>

David Altschuler, the eighteenth century biblical exegete who wrote two commentaries *Metzudat David* and *Metzudat Tziyon*, also addresses the political nature of love:

באהבתו אותו - ר"ל לא הוסיף להשביעו בעבור כי חשש פן לא יקיים  
דוד את הברית שמאז אולם מה שהוסיף להשביעו הוא על כי אהב אותו  
כנפשו והיה מתענג בהזכיר כי מלוך ימלוך ויהיה לאל ידו לעשות חסד:

**He loved him as he loved himself** (I Samuel 20:17). This phrase does not add anything to what was previously sworn. [Jonathan] fears that David will not establish the covenant. This was added to his oath. **He loved him as he loved himself**, for [Jonathan] desires to mention this phrase because [David] will truly rule and it will be in [David's] hand to do him kindness.<sup>33</sup>

The commentary *Metzudat David* suggests that Jonathan's love for David is purely political. Jonathan is worried that David will not establish a covenant with him once he becomes king over Israel. In order to prevent this outcome, Jonathan expresses his love, hoping that David will show him kindness in the future. According to the commentaries

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, 334-338.

<sup>33</sup> All translations of non-biblical texts are my own, including talmudic texts, midrashim, medieval commentaries, and other rabbinic materials.

of Metzudat David and the analysis of J.A. Thompson, the term love in this specific instance is not a word expressing an emotion between two friends. Instead the word love expresses a political relationship between a powerful future ruler and the weakened prince.

Biblical scholars explain that Jonathan serves a pivotal function in the Book of Samuel as a transition from Saul to David. Just as Jonathan and David's love can be politicized, so too can the foundation of their relationship be built upon Jonathan's abdication of the throne to David. According to David Jobling, Jonathan as the heir apparent, is able to relinquish his reign and become a transitional figure due to the double pattern of being *identification* and *replacement* that occurs throughout I Samuel.<sup>34</sup> In the first example in I Samuel 13-14, Saul and Jonathan are *identified* in their roles as co-commanders, but it is Jonathan who *replaces* Saul because he achieves greater things. At this point in the story, Jonathan becomes the heir to the throne and begins to achieve more power than Saul, his father.

Jonathan as the strengthened individual is now in charge and able to hand over the reign to David. At first, Saul agrees wholeheartedly with this plan of abdication as seen through a second pattern of *identification* and *replacement* in I Samuel 18:1-5. Jonathan establishes *identification* with David (18:1), "Jonathan loved him as himself" while Saul agrees with the *identification* (18:2) by adopting David into his house. Jonathan makes David his *replacement* (18:3-4) by handing over his clothing and weapons, while Saul consents to this *replacement* (18:5) by making David his general.

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<sup>34</sup> Further discussion about *identification* and *replacement* can be found in David Jobling, *I Samuel, Berit Olam Series in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press): 93-99.

As David rises to power, marries Michal, and achieves military success, all he lacks is a kingdom. Saul begins to doubt Jonathan's wish to abdicate the throne and sees David as a threat.<sup>35</sup> It is at this point in the story, in chapters 19 and 20, that Jonathan fulfills a new function, as mediator between Saul and David.<sup>36</sup> In Chapter 19:1-7, the terms "father" and "son" are unnecessarily repeated over and over again. Jobling explains that these phrases address the importance of Jonathan's role as mediator and show that Jonathan still identifies with his father. In a later scene in I Samuel 20, Saul is furious with Jonathan and rejects his mediation not with words, but by throwing his spear. Although Saul firmly disagrees with Jonathan's wish to abdicate, Jonathan as heir apparent is able throughout chapters 20 and 23 to fulfill his own wish. His *identification* with kingship is disregarded when he states to David, "May the Lord be with you, as He used to be with my father." (I Samuel 20:13) and "You are going to be king over Israel and I shall be second to you" (I Samuel 23:17).<sup>37</sup>

Julian Morgenstern also addresses Jonathan's abdication of the throne in favor of David. Morgenstern shows that throughout the story of I Samuel, Jonathan regards David as the true successor to Saul. Jonathan links David to Saul (I Samuel 20:13), strips his clothes (I Samuel 18:3-4), and protects David from Saul's attempts to kill him (I Samuel 19 and 20). Indeed, Saul even sees David as a prospective successor. Since a

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<sup>35</sup> Shimon Bakon, "Jonathan." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* vol. 23, 3 (July-Sept 1999), 146.

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan's role as mediator is found in Jobling, 96 as well as Bakon, 145.

<sup>37</sup> Continued discussion of *identification* and *replacement* found in Jobling, 93-99.

system is not set up to name a new ruler of Israel, Saul as the first king tries to have David killed.<sup>38</sup>

But what claim does David have to the throne? The medieval commentators address both Jonathan's decision to abdicate as well as David's claim to the throne. Ralbag (Rabbi Levi ben Gershom, also known as Gersonides) states in his commentary to I Samuel 18:1:

וידמה שכרת יהונתן ברית עם דוד כי ראה היותו מלך על ישראל בראותו  
טוב הצלחתו ולזה תמצא במה שיבא שאמר יהונתן לדוד ידעתי כי מלך  
תמלוך על ישראל וקמה בידך ממלכת ישראל וגם שאול אבי יודע כן  
והישיר אותם לזאת הידיעה מה שיעד להם שמואל שלא תקום הממלכה  
לשאול:

It seems that Jonathan cut a covenant with David for he saw that [David] would rule over Israel because of his success. This is found in what will come, that Jonathan said to David: I know that you will rule over Israel and the kingship of Israel will be established in your hand, and also Saul, my father, knows thus. For it was known to them, that what Samuel assigned to them, this kingdom, will not be with Saul.

Ralbag explains that at the beginning of their relationship, Jonathan knew that David would be king over Israel. At the moment they meet, Jonathan tells David that he will surely rule because Samuel has told him that the kingdom will not continue in his hands.

Radak also addresses this idea in his commentary to I Samuel 23:17:

אהיה לך למשנה - אני מבקש ממך שאהיה אני משנה לך כשתמלוך:  
ידע כן - שתמלוך והיו יודעין זה מפי השמועה שנמשח דוד למלך:

**I will be second to you.** I request from you that I will be second to you when you rule. **[Saul] knows thus.** That you will rule. They know this according to the news that David was anointed to rule.

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<sup>38</sup> Julian Morgenstern, "David and Jonathan." *Journal of Biblical Literature* vol. 78, no. 4 (Dec 1959): 322.

According to Radak, Jonathan requests to be second in charge to David.<sup>39</sup> Jonathan states that he will not rule over Israel, but that David instead will be the one in charge. Ralbag and Radak show that Jonathan wishes to abdicate the throne in favor of David. The reason for this abdication is David's claim to the kingdom because of his anointment by Samuel. According to the medieval commentators, Jonathan realizes that Samuel's word is true and that David, not he, will be king over Israel.

In addition, certain medieval commentators believe that Jonathan lacks the genes and the proper background to be king. Ralbag comments about verse I Samuel 20:30:

בן נעות המרדות ר"ל מעוותת המוסר... שהוא בן אשה שאינה ראויה  
לממשלה אבל היא מעוותת בדבר הממשלה כי אין מינה נאות לאדנות  
ובזה יאמר ביהונתן שהוא בלתי ראוי לממשלה כי הוא בוחר במה  
שימנעוהו ממלוך על ישראל והוא דוד:

**Son of perverse, rebellious woman.** It wants to say: "perverted morality"... that he is the son of a woman that is not suitable for government, for she is deformed in the things of government. And this is not a proper thing for a reign. Because of this, [Saul] says to Jonathan that he lacks suitability for government. He chose that which prevents him from being king over Israel, and this is David.

Ralbag shows that Jonathan is unfit to be ruler over Israel because of his mother. He is the son of "perverted morality" because of his mother's unsuitability in the ways of government. In addition, as Jonathan befriends David and helps him in his quest, Jonathan shows his lack of political knowledge. Saul believes that just as Jonathan's mother was unsuitable as a leader, so too does Jonathan fail as a ruler of Israel for he allows David to take over his throne.

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<sup>39</sup> Kyle McCarter explains that the language of *mishneh* (second in command) is seen in Esther 10:3 where Mordecai ranks next to King Xerxes as well as in II Chronicles 28:7 meaning "the King's second-in-command." See McCarter's comment on I Samuel 23:17.

Isaiah from Trani also expresses a similar idea in his commentary of I Samuel

20:30:

אם יראו ישראל שימלך דוד ולא תמלך אתה, מה יאמרו עליך?  
הלא אתה בן מלך! אלא יתלו הבושה באמך, שיאמרו:  
לא היה ראוי למלוכה כי לא היה מיוחס ממשפחה אמו,  
ומפני זה לא מלך אע"פ שהיה אביו מלך.

If Israel sees that David will rule and that you will not rule, what will they say to you? For you are the son of a king! Rather, they ascribe this to the embarrassment of your mother. That they said: She was not an appropriate queen. Since it was attributed through the mother's family, [Jonathan] is not the king, even though his father was king.

Isaiah from Trani believes that Jonathan's genes prevent him from becoming the next king. Jonathan lacks the necessary royal lineage because his mother is a woman of immoral character. Rashi even states that she is one of the daughters of Shiloh, a prostitute, who went forth and ensnared Saul.<sup>40</sup> Isaiah from Trani, Ralbag, and Rashi explain that Jonathan's abdication occurs because he does not have the correct moral fiber to rule effectively.

Julian Morgenstern also addresses a different reason for Jonathan's abdication and David's claim to the throne. He explains that in the Ancient Near East, kingship is traced through the mother's line, so that the successor to the throne is the son-in-law of the reigning king. Morgenstern shows that of the eight kings of Edom mentioned in Genesis 36:31-39, not one of them is the son of a reigning monarch. In this example as well as I Chronicles 1:50, the name of the wife as well as the name of her mother and maternal grandmother is provided for the last ruling king. Morgenstern believes that a warrior is given the king's daughter in marriage and this changes his status to heir of the kingdom.

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<sup>40</sup> Rashi describes the meeting of Saul and Jonathan's mother, in which the tribesmen of Benjamin kidnap the daughters of Shiloh (Judges 21). Saul does not wish to kidnap these women, but Jonathan's mother chases after him and is presumed to be a prostitute. See Rashi's commentary to I Samuel 20:30.

In the story of Jonathan and David, David's marriage to Michal, the daughter of Saul, reinforces his ambition to succeed his father-in-law.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, once David becomes king over Israel, he asks Abner to restore Michal as his wife and this strengthens his claim to the throne.<sup>42</sup> This ancient practice allows David to claim the kingdom for himself and justifies to Jonathan and everyone else that he is the correct successor to Saul.<sup>43</sup>

There is no question that the relationship of Jonathan and David is firmly in the realm of the political. Biblical scholars and medieval commentators have addressed many of the political aspects of Jonathan and David's relationship in their writing. Specific terms, such as *brit*, *hesed*, and *shevuah* are found throughout this story and are linked to other political relationships in the Tanakh. Even terms which seem firmly in the realm of the personal, such as "friend," "dear," and "brother" appear in other Ancient Near Eastern treaties. Scholars explain that Jonathan and David's actions, such as the lamenting, transferring of clothing, and behaving humbly, are comparable to other actions carried out in a political context.

In addition, the word love, which many modern people associate firmly in the realm of the personal, is linked to the political. The political nature of the term love is found throughout Ancient Near Eastern literature as well as the Bible. Scholars also believe that Jonathan and David's relationship is built upon Jonathan's abdication of the throne. Perhaps Jonathan does not possess the correct genes or even the willingness to rule effectively. Or perhaps David, through his marriage to Michal, his anointment by

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<sup>41</sup> See I Samuel 18:17-29.

<sup>42</sup> See II Samuel 3:12-16.

<sup>43</sup> Morgenstern, 322-325.

Samuel, and his approval by Jonathan, is viewed as the rightful heir to the throne. Even as the conversation concerning Jonathan and David's relationship continues to develop in upcoming chapters, it is clear that a foundation of this relationship is political.

## Chapter Two: Hallmarks of Significant Personal Relationships

The first chapter presented scholarly evidence for the political nature of Jonathan and David's relationship, based on specific terms and actions. Another view asserts that this is an interpersonal relationship built upon feelings and actions. Over the course of the next few chapters, this paper will examine Jonathan and David's interpersonal relationship. This chapter will first begin by looking at the characteristics of interpersonal relationships found in the Tanakh. Some of the same political evidence used previously will be re-examined to link David and Jonathan's story to other interpersonal relationships. At the beginning of this chapter, a term *niksherah*, which does not appear in the discussions of Jonathan and David's political relationship, will be explored. Then the political terms such as *brit*, *hesed*, and *ahavah* will be shown to have additional meanings. Following this, the differences between personal and political love will be examined. The chapter will conclude by linking the emotions of love and jealousy to one another and to interpersonal relationships.

The term נִקְשָׁרָה "being bound" is found in I Samuel 18:1 when Jonathan and David meet for the first time. It says: וַנֶּפֶשׁ יְהוֹנָתָן נִקְשָׁרָה בְּנֶפֶשׁ דָּוִד "Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David." Since "being bound" does not specifically have a political connotation, its meaning in this context is quite uncertain. David Altschuler, in his commentary Metzudat Tziyon attempts to understand the meaning of this phrase:

נקשרה - מרוב האהבה כאלו נפשו קשורה בנפשו ונתחברת בה והוא  
מלשון מליצה וכן ונפשו קשורה בנפשו (בראשית מ"ד):

**Was bound.** The majority of love is like “his soul is bound to his soul” and this is connected to the language of rhetoric of “his soul connected to his soul” (Genesis 44:30).<sup>44</sup>

Altschuler concludes that the words found in the Book of Samuel are similar to the language describing Jacob and Benjamin’s relationship. The parallel phrases of וְנָפֶשׁ יְהוֹנָתָן וְנָפֶשׁ בְּנֵימִינִי and וְנָפֶשׁ יַעֲקֹב וְנָפֶשׁ בְּנֵימִינִי are related, for in both verses the term *nefesh* (soul) as well as words derived from the root קשר *kesher* (connection) are found. The similarities in language allow the reader to examine and compare the relationship of Jacob and Benjamin to that of Jonathan and David. Benjamin is the most significant person in Jacob’s life, for if Benjamin does not safely return home, Jacob will drop dead of grief.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Jacob shows a special love for Benjamin that he shares with no other person, except possibly for Joseph. The parallel language illustrates a personal aspect to Jonathan and David’s relationship and shows the deep bond of love and devotion that the two have for one another.

Sometimes a term which is thought to be solely political can have an additional meaning when used in a different context. Yaron Peleg explains that although the term *brit* most often occurs between God and an individual, it is also utilized in a contractual relationship between husband and wife.<sup>46</sup>

וְאִמְרָתְכֶם עַל-יְמֶהָ עַל כִּי־הָיְתָה הָעֵד בֵּינֶךָ וּבֵין אִשְׁתְּךָ וְעַתָּה  
אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה בְּגָדְתָהּ בָּהּ וְהִיא חֲבֵרְתְּךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ בְּרִיתָךְ:

But you ask, ‘Because of what?’ Because the Lord is a witness between you and the wife of your youth with whom you have broken faith, though she is your partner and covenanted spouse.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Metzudat Tziyon about I Samuel 18:1.

<sup>45</sup> See Genesis 44:30-34.

<sup>46</sup> For more information about a covenant between husband and wife see Peleg, 179.

<sup>47</sup> Malachi 2:14.

In this context, *brit* does not solely speak about political matters, but also addresses a husband and wife's interpersonal relationship. Although a *brit* is often understood to be a political covenant, in this instance it addresses both the quasi-political characteristics of their marriage contract as well as the interpersonal aspects of love and partnership.

In addition, Ezekiel also addresses the interpersonal aspect of covenant making:

וְאָעֲבַר עָלֶיךָ וְאָרָאךָ וְהִנֵּה עָתִיד עַתְּ דִּדִּים וְאֶפְרַשׁ כְּנָפֵי עָלֶיךָ  
וְאֶכְסֶה עֲרוֹתְךָ וְאֶשְׁבַּע לְךָ וְאֶבְרַח בְּבְרִית אִתְּךָ נָא אֲדֹנָי ה'  
וְתִהְיֶינִי לְךָ

So I spread My robe over you and covered your nakedness, and I entered into a covenant with you by oath—declares the Lord God: thus you became Mine.<sup>48</sup>

This second example of *brit* illustrates a symbolic marriage between Jerusalem and God. This act of covenant making is not just the start of a political agreement, but is also the establishment of an interpersonal relationship. In addition, the spreading of a robe and the covering of nakedness is an intimate act which is performed not by a king, but by Jerusalem's "husband."<sup>49</sup> In this example, God enters into a political covenant with Israel, but also fulfills an intimate act normally associated with close family members. In these two examples, the term *brit* signifies both political agreements as well as interpersonal aspects to their covenant making.

*Hesed* which can be translated as duty, mercy, or loyalty has an additional meaning outside of a political context. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld explains that the word *hesed* is found three times in the book of Ruth.<sup>50</sup> The first use of *hesed* is found in Ruth

<sup>48</sup> Ezekiel 16:8.

<sup>49</sup> Discussion about the intimate act of clothing by a close family member is found in chapter four, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> For information about love and loyalty relating to the narratives of Ruth & Naomi and Jonathan & David, see: Doob Sakenfeld, 201-204.

1:8, where Naomi asks God to do *hesed* for her two daughters-in-law. In the second example in Ruth 2:20, Naomi praises the Eternal for not abandoning them by doing acts of *hesed*. Finally, in Ruth 3:10, Boaz thanks Ruth for the *hesed* she did by not marrying a younger man. In this case, Ruth was loyal to both Boaz by marrying him and to Naomi by following her wishes. In all three examples, *hesed* occurs because of the interpersonal relationships that exist between Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. These acts of *hesed* are not for political gain, but instead fulfill acts of loyalty within a familial structure.

There is also a connection between Ruth's loyalty and her love for Naomi. It states: *כִּי כֵלֶתָךְ אִשְׁרָאֵלִיבֶתְךָ וְלִדְתּוֹ אִשְׁרָאֵלִי טוֹבָה לָךְ מִשִּׁבְעָה בָנִים:* "For he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons."<sup>51</sup> Similar to the discussion of *hesed*, love has no political connotation in this story and, instead, illustrates a close personal and familial relationship. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld believes that love and *hesed* are related, for Ruth shows her love to Naomi by fulfilling acts of *hesed*. In the story of Ruth, love and loyalty are not political, but work in tandem to show the emotional aspects of a purely interpersonal relationship.

Although Jonathan and David's story is often understood to be political in nature, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld links their story to the relationship of Ruth and Naomi. She explains that a "daughter-in-law who loves you is better to you than seven sons" (Ruth 4:15) is similar to David's statement to Jonathan: "Your love was wonderful to me, More than the love of women" (II Samuel 1:26). The connection of *ahav* and *hesed* allows Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, to break established conventions to form relationships similar to those of husband to wife and son to mother. Doob Sakenfeld

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<sup>51</sup> Ruth 4:15.

shows how these acts of loyalty and love create relationships which are more precious than the traditional love relationships found throughout the Tanakh.

Similarly, a discussion found in Ozar Midrashim<sup>52</sup> addresses the uniqueness of Jonathan and David's love.

לעולם אל ישכח אדם אהבה הנקדמת בין אדם לחבירו, וצריך  
שיהיה לו בלבו, ואל יצריכו לאחרים, שהרי כן מצינו בדוד מלך  
ישראל עם יהונתן בן שאול שאהבת נפשו אהבו, ולא עוד אלא  
שכרת עמו ברית והשביעו שלא יניח אהבתו, שנאמר ויכרת יהונתן  
את דוד ברית, וכן עשה דוד עם בניו לאחר שנפטר יהונתן, שנאמר  
ויחמול דוד על מפיבשת בן יהונתן בן שאול על שבועת ה' אשר היה  
בינותם.

For all time, a person does not forget the first love he has between himself and his friend. He needs this in his heart, for they do not need others. Behold this was found with David King of Israel and Jonathan the son of Saul, that the love of his soul, was how he loved him. And not only that, but he cut with him a covenant and he swore to him that he would not disregard his love, as it says: **And Jonathan cut a covenant with David** (I Samuel 18:3) and thus David made (a covenant) with [Jonathan's] sons after Jonathan departed. As it says: **The King spared Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan son of Saul because of the oath before the Lord between the two, between David and Jonathan, son of Saul** (II Sam 21:7).

The midrash, using the example of Jonathan and David's relationship, states that a person always remembers his or her first love. It demonstrates quite clearly that Jonathan and David are united together because of friendship, not politics. The covenant made between them is not political, but instead shows the mutuality of their love for one another. As companions, the two have built a friendship that continues to exist until the next generation; David's cutting of a covenant with Jonathan's son illustrates the long lasting nature of their love.

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<sup>52</sup> This minor midrash סירא דבן סירא is found in Ozar Midrashim, page 42.

The next section of this midrash connects God's affection for Israel to Jonathan and David's love. It states that the Eternal One's fondness for Israel is similar to the love of a young couple. A quotation from Jeremiah 2:2 shows that God is a groom who loves Israel, the bride. The Midrash also includes a quotation from the book of Proverbs: *מְכַסֶּה-פָּשַׁע מִבֶּקֶשׁ אֶהְרֹג וְשֹׂנֵא בְדָבָר מִפָּרִיד אֶלָּאִי* "He who seeks love overlooks faults, but he who harps on a matter alienates his friend."<sup>53</sup> This verse addresses God's reason for overlooking Israel's faults, for "she" is God's first love. Unlike modern biblical authors who view the love between God and Israel as political in nature, the writers of this midrash show that God loves Israel as a groom loves a bride.

This midrashic passage concludes by discussing a father and son's love for one another. The text shows that a father's initial love of his son will allow for a miraculous event to happen in the future. After the father has died, the child will remember this love and will honor his father's memory. This initial love is so strong that it sustains the son and has the ability to transcend death. This Midrash addresses the issue of first love through three examples: (1) Jonathan and David, (2) God and Israel, and (3) father and son, and shows that love transcends time. Remarkably, the relationship of Jonathan and David is linked not to other political stories, but to personal familial relationships, such as bride and groom (Israel and God) and father and son. This midrash asserts that Jonathan and David's relationship is primarily about friendship and love, not politics and government.

Susan Ackerman also addresses the nature of love and builds upon the previous discussion of personal versus political love. Earlier scholars establish their arguments on

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<sup>53</sup> Proverbs 17:9.

William L. Moran's view that the love in Deuteronomy is based on political language. These authors are eager to show examples of when *ahav* carries covenantal overtones. However, Ackerman asks the question: is there a connection between political and interpersonal love found in the Tanakh? She answers her own question by illustrating the points of overlap between political and interpersonal love.<sup>54</sup> For example, *ahav* refers only to a man's love for a woman or a parent's love for a child, not a woman's love for a man or a child's love for a parent. She explains that the answer can be found in Deuteronomy, for the Eternal loves Israel, and the people are commanded to love God, but Israel never offers love to God. Indeed, even in the most obvious places such as the Book of Psalms or Second Isaiah, the people almost never express love to the Divine.

Ackerman shows that there is a connection between interpersonal and political love. It is only a hierarchically superior individual such as a husband, parent, or God who actually has the ability to love another. In the Tanakh, both personal and political love are expressed in a one sided manner by those who are more powerful. Ackerman's analysis of political and interpersonal love can be utilized to comprehend the relationship of Jonathan and David. It allows the reader to move the discussion of *ahav* out of the political sphere and to look at David and Jonathan's love in a different light. Since interpersonal and political love utilize the same verb, Jonathan and David can be seen as political partners as well as close friends or lovers. This also explains why David does not express love for Jonathan at the beginning of the story. Jonathan as heir to the throne

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<sup>54</sup> For further information about Ackerman's discussion on personal and political love, see Susan Ackerman, "The Personal is Political: Covenantal and Affectionate Love in the Hebrew Bible" *Vetus Testamentum* 52, 4 (2002): 437-458.

can state his love for David, while only after Jonathan's death can David share his likeminded affection for Jonathan.

The next section of this chapter will look at the connection between love, the quintessential emotion, and its alter ego, jealousy. Several midrashim<sup>55</sup> unite love with jealousy by referring to a verse from Song of Songs: קָשָׁה כְּשֹׂאֹל קָנָא: “For love is fierce as death, jealousy is mighty as Sheol.”<sup>56</sup> Below is the text from Shir HaShirim Rabbah:

כי עזה כמות אהבה, עזה אהבה כמות שהקב"ה אוהב אתכם הה"ד (מלאכי א') אהבתי אתכם אמר ה' וגו', קשה כשואל קנאה, בשעה שמקנאים אותו בעבודת כוכבים שלהם שנא' (דברים ל"ב) יקניאוהו בזרים, ד"א כי עזה כמות אהבה, אהבה שאהב יצחק את עשו הה"ד (בראשית ל"ה) ויאהב יצחק את עשו, קשה כשואל קנאה, שקנא עשו ליעקב שנא' (שם /בראשית/ ל"ז) וישטום עשו את יעקב, ד"א כי עזה כמות אהבה, אהבה שאהב יעקב ליוסף שנא' (שם /בראשית/ ל"ז) וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו, קשה כשואל קנאה, שקנאו בו אחיו שנא' (שם /בראשית/ ל"ז) ויקנאו בו אחיו, ד"א כי עזה כמות אהבה, אהבה שאהב יהונתן לדוד שנאמר (שמואל א' י"ח) ויאהבהו יהונתן כנפשו, קשה כשואל קנאה, קנאה שקנא שאול לדוד שנאמר (שם /שמואל א' י"ח/) ויהי שאול עוין את דוד, ד"א כי עזה כמות אהבה, אהבה שאהב האיש לאשתו שנא' (קהלת ט') ראה חיים עם אשה אשר אהבת, קשה כשואל קנאה, קנאה שמקנא לה ואומר לה אל תדברי עם איש פלוני והלכה ודברה עמו, מיד (במדבר ה') ועבר עליו רוח קנאה וקנא את אשתו, ד"א כי עזה כמות אהבה, אהבה שאהבו דודו של שמד להקב"ה שנא' (תהלים מ"ד) כי עליך הורגנו כל היום, קשה כשואל קנאה, שעתידי הקב"ה לקנא לציון קנאה גדולה הה"ד (זכריה ח') כה אמר ה' קנאתי לציון קנאה גדולה, רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבת יה, רבי ברכיה אמר כאש של מעלה לא האש מכבה למים ולא המים מכבין לאש.<sup>57</sup>

**For love is fierce as death (Song of Songs 8:6). For love is fierce as death that the Holy One Blessed is God loves you, as it is written: I have shown you love, said the Lord (Malachi 1:2). Jealousy is mighty as Sheol (Song of Songs 8:6). In the hour that they made God jealous of idol worship, they incensed God with alien things (Deut 32:16).**

<sup>55</sup> Shir HaShirim Rabbah, Chapter 8; Midrash Tanhuma (Buber) 19; Yalkut Shemoni Shir HaShirim 993.

<sup>56</sup> Song of Songs 8:6. This is my own translation, JPS translates it as “For love is fierce as death, passion is mighty as Sheol.”

<sup>57</sup> Shir HaShirim Rabbah 8.

Another opinion: **For love is fierce as death.** Love that Isaac loved Esau, as it is written: **Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste in game** (Genesis 25:28). **Jealousy is mighty as Sheol.** That Esau was jealous of Jacob, as it says, **Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob** (Genesis 27:41).

Another opinion: **For love is fierce as death.** The love that Jacob loved of Joseph, as it says: **Now Israel loved Joseph best of all of his sons** (Genesis 37:3). **Jealousy is mighty as Sheol.** **They hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him** (Genesis 37:4).

Another opinion: **For love is fierce as death.** Love that Jonathan loved for David, as it says **Jonathan loved David as himself** (I Sam 18:1). **Jealousy is mighty as Sheol,** jealousy that Saul was jealous of David, as it says, **From that day on Saul kept a jealous eye on David** (I Sam 18:9).

Another opinion: **For love is fierce as death.** Love that a man loves a woman, as it says, **Enjoy happiness with the love you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun** (Ecclesiastes 9:9). **Jealousy is mighty as Sheol,** jealousy, that he is jealous of her and says to her, do not speak with that man *peloni* and she goes and speaks with him, but a fit of jealousy comes over him and he is wrought up about his wife who has defiled herself; or if a fit of jealousy comes over one and he is wrought up about his wife although she has not defiled herself (Numbers 5:14).

The midrash explains that there is a relationship between love and jealousy. In every example, one individual loves another: God loves Israel, Isaac loves Esau, and Jonathan loves David, however, jealousy also occurs because of this love. In each case, it is the love of another or the lack of love that leads to jealousy. Although acts of idolatry and suspected adultery do not constitute love, in these cases, God and the husband are jealous that the love they express is not returned. In the other instances, the brothers, Saul, and Esau do not express their own love, but instead are jealous of the love and devotion their competitors receive. Midrash Tanhuma and Yalkut Shemoni even end with the phrase: **ומה תעשה אהבה בצד קנא?** “What impact will love have on jealousy?” These midrashim

explain that love leads to jealousy, for a strengthened love affects all parties who are involved in the relationship.

Why does jealousy occur alongside love? These midrashim focus on relationships that are similar to a triangle, in which three parties are involved. For example, God loves the people, the people worship idols, and God becomes jealous. This allows for three sides of a triangle (1) God, (2) the people, and (3) the idols. The triangle effect is especially true of the example of Jonathan and David, for Saul becomes jealous of David. The triangle addresses the connection between love and jealousy, for a third party must be involved in the relationship for jealousy to occur. Either the third party is jealous of the original couple or the third party affects one person from the original party leading to a jealous outburst by the other individual.

In addition, jealousy also exists because of some prior action. God is envious of the people's worship of idols, Esau is jealous when Jacob steals his blessing, the brothers are furious after Joseph receives the coat of many colors. There is a connection between action and emotion, for the midrashim explain that jealousy occurs after an act is performed. The only exception is for the man who suspects his wife of infidelity; no proof must be garnered, instead he just needs to suspect his wife of performing this act. Quite remarkably, it is often acts of love that lead to jealous outbursts. It was the actions of Jacob and Jonathan that enflamed the jealousy of the brothers and Saul. These midrashim explain that people's behavior can create animosity, hurt, and uneasiness; action has the ability to change pure love into enflamed jealousy.

Finally, the examples discussed in these midrashim are all interpersonal, including these found in Yalkut Shemoni:<sup>58</sup>

כי עזה כמות אהבה, אהבה שאהב יעקב את רחל שנאמר  
ויאהב יעקב את רחל, קשה כשאל קנאה שקנאה רחל באחותה  
שנאמר ותקנא רחל באחותה, ומה תעשה אהבה בצד קנאה.

דבר אחר אהבה שאהב משה ליהושע, קשה כשאל  
קנאה המקנא אתה לי.

**For Love is fierce as death** (Song of Songs 8:6). Love, that Jacob loved Rachel. As it is written: **Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel** (Genesis 29:18). **Jealousy is mighty as Sheol** (Song of Songs 8:6), that Rachel is jealous of her sister, as it says: **when Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister** (Genesis 30:1). What will change love to the side of jealousy?

Another opinion: love that Moses loved Joshua. **Jealousy is mighty as Sheol, Are you wrought up in my account?** (Numbers 11:29).

All the examples found in these midrashim are interpersonal: husband and wives (Jacob, Rachel, and Leah), father and sons (Isaac, Esau, and Jacob as well as Jacob, Joseph, and brothers), and siblings (Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, and Rachel and Leah). Even the example about God and Israel (the people worshiping idols) is not related to the political, but to the loving relationship between two partners. Indeed, even the love of Moses for Joshua, at the surface, seems to be exclusively political. However, it also addresses friendship and mentorship. Jonathan and David's relationship is compared to these other interpersonal dyads of spouses, friends, siblings, and families.

Many of the terms and actions which the political scholars use to define this relationship can have different meanings when referring to interpersonal dyads. For example, when used in a personal relationship *brit* refers to a marriage contract, *hesed*

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<sup>58</sup> Yalkut Shemoni Shir HaShirim 993.

defines family loyalty, and *ahavah* speaks of the affection one partner has for the other. In addition, modern writers such as Susan Ackerman believe that interpersonal and political love follow the same rules; this allows for the blurring between political and interpersonal relationships and connects politics and friendship to one another. These examples from relationships found throughout the Tanakh show that terms normally associated with politics can be redefined as interpersonal.

This chapter also illustrates the similarities between many of the interpersonal relationships found throughout the Tanakh and Jonathan and David's relationship. Terms such as *niksherah* and *hesed* link this story with narratives involving Ruth and Naomi as well as Jacob and Benjamin. Even more, the rabbinic commentators connect the feelings and emotions found in David and Jonathan's relationship to other stories found in the Tanakh. The emotions of love and jealousy found in Jonathan, David, and Saul's interactions are connected to various personal relationships involving siblings, parents, families, and friends. These midrashim, rabbinic writings, and modern scholarship focus not on the political aspects of these relationships. Instead, they re-interpret various political terms and connect David and Jonathan's relationship to other interpersonal relationships found throughout the Tanakh.

### Chapter Three: Other Significant Relationships that Affect Jonathan and David

This chapter will examine many of the significant relationships that surround the Jonathan and David narrative. Jonathan and David do not exist in a vacuum and are considerably affected by these other relationships. The overriding emotional concerns and political implications that play out between Jonathan and David can only fully be understood by examining these relationships. Both the political and interpersonal connections of Jonathan and Saul, David and Saul, and David and Michal will be considered to shed light on Jonathan and David's relationship.

Saul, the first king of Israel, and Jonathan, his son, have a complicated relationship filled with moments of love to incidents of extreme rage. The shifting emotions and abrupt changes from devotion to humiliation bring a level of tension and uncertainty to the reader of this story. This intricacy of emotions leads many rabbinic and modern writers to comprehend Saul and Jonathan's story in a diversity of ways.

One approach is to believe that Jonathan and Saul truly care for one another and have built a relationship of understanding and trust. At the beginning of chapter twenty, a fearful David announces to Jonathan that Saul wishes to kill him. Jonathan answers him: חֲלִילָה לֹא תָמוּת הַנֶּחָל לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה אָבִי דָבָר גָּדוֹל אוֹ דָּבָר קָטָן וְלֹא יִגְלֶה אֶת־אָזְנִי  
"Heaven Forbid! You shall not die. My father does not do anything, great or small, without disclosing it to me; why conceal this matter from me? It cannot be!"<sup>59</sup> The verse articulates an honesty and sincerity that exists between father and son. Jonathan can not fathom Saul's hiding a secret from him because the two always express their concerns candidly and openly.

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<sup>59</sup> I Samuel 20:2.

David realizes that Saul does wish to kill him and has surreptitiously kept this piece of information from his son's ears. Radak addresses Saul's reasons for hiding this secret from Jonathan:<sup>60</sup>

שלא היה מראה זה מפני השבועה שנשבע ליהונתן או כדי שלא יעצב  
יהונתן כמו שאמר לדוד והגידו לדוד מעבדי שאול האוהבי אותו כי  
בלב שאול להמיתו כי גלה להם והסתיר מיהונתן

[Saul's wish to kill David] did not appear to [Jonathan] because of the oath that [Saul] swore to Jonathan, or in order that [Saul] would not upset Jonathan. The servants of Saul told David for they loved him, that it was in Saul's heart to kill him. Saul told them and kept it a secret from Jonathan.

In addition, the commentary of Metzudat David states:<sup>61</sup>

וישבע עוד דוד ויאמר - ר"ל מתחלה אמר הנה מה שלא גלה לך הוא  
בעבור שיודע הוא אשר מצאתי חן בעיניך ולזה מסתיר ממך ללב  
תעצב.

**And David swore further:** It means that from the beginning [Saul] thought that he would not reveal it to you, for he knew that you were fond of me. For this reason he hid this from you in order that you would not be saddened.

Radak and Metzudat David demonstrate that Saul refuses to share his secret with Jonathan because he does not wish to upset or sadden his son. Saul expresses fatherly concern for his son's well being, for he knows that Jonathan cares for David. Radak even explains that Saul is unable to lie to his son's face, for he has sworn an oath in I Samuel 19:6: *כי־יִחְיֶה אֲסִיּוּמָת* "As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death!" Although the medieval commentators show that honesty and openness are not at the center of Jonathan and Saul's relationship, they do illustrate Saul's concern for his son.

In addition, the medieval commentators also discuss Jonathan's compassion for his father's outbursts and mood swings. Radak explains:<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Radak about I Samuel 20:2.

<sup>61</sup> Metzudat David about I Samuel 20:3.

היה חושב יהונתן שלא היה בלב אביו להמיתו אחר שנשבע לו ואמר  
חי ה' אם יומת ומה שהיה מטיל לו החנית אחרי השבועי ומה ששלח  
לביתו לשמרו ולהמיתו ומה שהלך אחריו עד ניות ברמה להמיתו  
היה חושב יהונתן כי מפני רוח רעה שהיתה מבעתת אותו היה רוצה  
להמיתו בעוד שהיתה בו הרוח הרעה.

Jonathan thought that it was not in his father's heart to kill [David] after [Saul] promised him and said: **As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death.** (I Samuel 19:6). But what about when [Saul] threw a spear at [David] after the oath, and what about sending him to his house to watch over him and to kill him, and what about when he went after him till Naot in Ramah to kill him? Jonathan thought that the "Evil Spirit that troubled him" was the reason that [Saul] wanted to kill [David], for there was still an evil spirit in him.

In addition, Ralbag states:<sup>63</sup>

יתכן שכבר חשב יהונתן שמה שהיה שאול רודף דוד להרגו לא יהיה  
כי אם בסבת הרוח הרעה שהיתה מבעתת אותו.

It happened that Jonathan already knew that Saul pursued David to kill him. Jonathan knew it would not happen because the evil spirit that troubled him was the reason.

Although David worries about Saul's outbursts and about Saul's desire to kill him, Jonathan is not troubled. Instead, Jonathan is calm and compassionate about his father's emotional volatility and trusts his father's word when he says that he will not harm David. Jonathan has experienced these outbursts previously and recognizes the effect of the "evil spirit" on his father's mood and actions. It is Jonathan's lifelong relationship with Saul that helps him understand his father in a way that no one else can.

Jonathan is sympathetic to his father's mood swings and Saul worries about his son's feelings, but is their relationship able to endure the tension of David's presence? David Jobling explains that Jonathan's companionship with David did not break his unity

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<sup>62</sup> Radak about I Samuel 20:2.

<sup>63</sup> Ralbag about 20:2.

with his father.<sup>64</sup> He states that the overuse of the terms “father” and “son” in I Samuel 19:1-4 stresses that their relationship continues to exist at the moment when it most seems in doubt. David also expresses a similar sentiment in his memorial poem to Saul and Jonathan. He states: שְׂאֵל וַיְהוֹנָתָן הַנְּאֻהִים וְהַנְּעִימִם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם וּבְמוֹתָם לֹא נִפְרְדּוּ  
 “Saul and Jonathan, Beloved and cherished, Never parted in life  
 or in death! They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions!”<sup>65</sup>

The commentators express interest in what the phrase לֹא נִפְרְדּוּ “never parted” truly means. Radak defines this phrase in his commentary on II Samuel 1:23:

**לֹא נִפְרְדּוּ** - ת"י לא איתפרשו מעמהון כלומר אף על פי שהיו יודעים מותם במלחמה **לֹא נִפְרְדּוּ** מעם ה' ולא נעצרו ולא נסו מן המלחמ' ויתכן פירושו **לֹא נִפְרְדּוּ** זה מזה כי כאחד מתו כמו שהיו בחייהם נאהבים זה לזה:

**Never parted.** Targum Yonatan: “They did not separate from one another.” Like it says, even though they knew they would die in war **they never parted** from the Eternal. They did not refrain and did not flee from the war. It occurs in his commentary: **they never parted** this one from the other, for like one they died. Similar to how they lived their lives, they each loved one another.

Radak explains that “never parted” refers to their inability to separate from the Eternal, even when the battle with the Philistines is quite taxing. Saul and Jonathan still believe in the Divine and do not refrain from God’s plan. But Radak also concludes with a different opinion, that “never parted” refers to Jonathan and Saul’s relationship. This view asserts that the two complete their last moments together similarly to how they lived their lives.

The commentary Metzudat David has a much different opinion of Jonathan and Saul’s relationship.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Jobling, 96-97.

<sup>65</sup> II Samuel 1:23.

**בחייהם - עודם בחיים היו נאהבים ונעימים לכל בני אדם ר"ל מאוד  
היו מקובלים על הבריות וחביבים בעיני כולם :**

**In life.** In life, they loved and delighted in each and every person. It means that they very much received all people and were well liked in the eyes of all.

He explains quite clearly that Jonathan and Saul delight and care for every person, but he explicitly fails to mention that the two love one another. The Tanakh and Jewish literature demonstrate that Jonathan and Saul are caring and compassionate and did not part at the end of their lives. However, Metzudat David and to some extent Radak illustrate that there is a limit to the love and affection that the two show one another. Radak even states that their last moments together are similar to how they lived their lives. As the reader shall see in the pages ahead, Saul and Jonathan also anger, frustrate, feel jealousy towards, and humiliate one another. These moments of ugliness are also an element of their lives together and affect the relationship between father and son.

Shimon Bakon explains that there is an undercurrent of tension between Saul and Jonathan throughout this narrative.<sup>67</sup> This tension is first seen in I Samuel 13-14, when Saul fails to acknowledge Jonathan's role in a triumph over the Philistines.

וַיִּדְּ יוֹנָתָן אֶת נָצִיב פְּלִשְׁתִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּגִבְעָה וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים  
וַיִּשְׁאוּל תִּקְעַת בְּשׁוֹפָר בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ לֵאמֹר וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ הָעִבְרִים:  
וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁמְעוּ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה שְׁאוּל אֶת־נָצִיב פְּלִשְׁתִּים  
וְגַם־נִבְאָשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּפְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיַּצְעֲקוּ הָעָם אַחֲרֵי שְׁאוּל הַגִּלְגָּל:

Jonathan struck down the Philistine prefect in Geba; and the Philistines heard about it. Saul had the ram's horn sounded throughout the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." When all Israel heard that Saul had struck down the Philistine prefect, and that Israel had incurred the wrath of the Philistines, all the people rallied to Saul at Gilgal.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Metzudat Tziyon about II Samuel 1:23.

<sup>67</sup> Further discussion of this tension is elaborated in Bakon, 143-150.

<sup>68</sup> I Samuel 13:3-4.

Robert P. Lawton states that the juxtaposition of Jonathan's striking down the Philistines and Saul's taking credit for the victory is jarring. He comments on Saul's insensitivity to Jonathan's accomplishments and wonders if Saul sees Jonathan as an extension of his own ego.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, Saul's taking credit for Jonathan's victory allows the reader to question the level of caring and compassion that Saul has for his own son.

Lawton also explains that Saul has no emotional connection to his son because he lacks concern for Jonathan's safety. After discovering that Jonathan is missing in action, Saul is absent from the dialogue and has no reaction to his son's predicament.<sup>70</sup> Lawton believes that Saul's lack of a response is unlike David's distress for his son Absalom.<sup>71</sup> In addition, in another scene later in the story, Saul expresses no emotion when he states that Jonathan must die.<sup>72</sup> Saul makes an oath stating that if anyone eats a morsel of food, they will be put to death. However, Saul never consults with God before making this oath and his words prevent the Israelites from defeating the Philistines. Jonathan, who is unaware of his father's oath, tastes a small amount of honey, which puts his life in jeopardy. Lawton believes that Saul shows no emotional attachment to Jonathan and the overuse of the phrase 'my son Jonathan' (14:39, 40, 41, 42) underscores this coldness and lack of concern.<sup>73</sup>

Jonathan expresses contempt for his father when he learns of this oath and his father's willingness to let him die:

עָכָר אָבִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ רָאִיתָ כִּי־אֲרוּ עֵינַי כִּי טָעַמְתִּי מֵעֵץ  
דָּבַשׁ הַזֶּה: אֲף־כִּי לֹא אָכַל אֲכַל הַיָּם הָעַם מִשְׁלַל אֲבִיו

<sup>69</sup> Robert Lawton. "Saul, Jonathan, and the 'Son of Jesse.'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 58 (1993): 37.

<sup>70</sup> See I Samuel 14:16-20.

<sup>71</sup> See II Samuel 18:29, 32.

<sup>72</sup> See I Samuel 14:26-45.

<sup>73</sup> Lawton, 38-40.

אֲשֶׁר מָצָא כִּי־עָתָה לֹא־רָבַתָּה מַכָּה בַּפְּלִשְׁתִּים:

My father has brought trouble on the people. See for yourselves how my eyes lit up when I tasted that bit of honey. If only the troops had eaten today of spoil captured from the enemy, the defeat of the Philistines would have been greater still.<sup>74</sup>

Jonathan articulates his ideas openly and bluntly and explains that his father has brought harm to the Israelites because of his poor leadership. Jonathan does not treat his father with respect, but instead speaks words of hostility about Saul's failures. He bemoans Saul's oath and believes that he himself would be a better ruler than his father.

Shimon Bakon explains that Jonathan's relationship with Saul becomes more contentious and fills with further hostility after David is involved. Bakon illustrates the source of this animosity, Jonathan's allegiance to David, by showing two different accounts of a story found in chapter twenty. First is David's telling Jonathan in 20:6:

אִם־פָּקַד יִפְקְדֵנִי אָבִיךָ וְאַמְרָתָּ  
נִשְׁאַל נִשְׁאַל מִמֶּנִּי דָוִד לָרוֹץ בֵּית־לָחֶם  
עִירוֹ כִּי זֶבַח הַיָּמִים שָׁם לְכָל־הַמִּשְׁפָּחָה:

If your father notes my absence you say,  
David asked permission to run down to his home town,  
Bethlehem, for the whole family has its annual sacrifice there.

The second account, found in 20:28-29, is Jonathan's retelling of the same story to Saul:

נִשְׁאַל נִשְׁאַל דָּוִד מֵעַמִּידִי עַד־בֵּית לָחֶם:  
וְאַמְרָ שְׁלַחְנִי נָא כִּי זֶבַח מִשְׁפָּחָה לָנוּ בְּעִיר  
וְהוּא צָנָה־לִּי אָחִי וְעָתָה אִם־מָצְאָתִי הֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ  
אֶמְלֹטָה נָא וְאַרְאָה אֶת־אָחִי

David begged leave of me to Bethlehem.  
He said: Please let me go, for we are going to have a family feast  
in our town and my brother has summoned me to it.  
Do me a favor, let me slip away to see my kinsmen.

Most remarkable is that Jonathan's retelling of the story differs from David's initial account. Bakon explains three reasons for these differences: 1. there are two sources for

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<sup>74</sup> I Samuel 14:29-30.

this event; 2. Jonathan's presentation is corrupt; and 3. a psychological reason in which Jonathan's nervousness betrays him into stating expressions that are dissimilar to David's initial account. For example, the term *מַעֲמָדִי* 'he begged leave of me' in English is synonymous with *מִמָּנִי*, however, the term also "conveys a sense of separating after having been together." In addition, the words *צִוָּה-לִי אָחִי* 'my brother has summoned me to it' is an extra sentence, a slip of the tongue that was not part of David's original telling. Finally, the terms *אֶמְלָטָה נָא* 'let me slip away' conveys a sense of escape or flight, dissimilar to *לָרוֹץ* which is to run or hurry.<sup>75</sup>

Bakon believes that these statements address Jonathan's confusion and nervousness and illustrate that he is a poor liar. On the other hand, can Jonathan be telling Saul the truth; that his allegiance is with David? Perhaps, at this moment of contention with his father, Jonathan does not attempt to hide behind lies and false words. Instead, he boldly expresses that he stands with David and will not allow his father to punish David unnecessarily. Jonathan states that the two have been together and that he has helped David to escape. The tension between Jonathan and Saul is pushed to the edge at this moment. Jonathan does not mince words, but explains that he is willing to lose everything with his father in order to protect David.

At this moment, when Jonathan tells his father that his allegiance is with David, the worst occurs; Saul acts out and says horrible vile words to his son:

וַיִּחַר-אַף שָׂאוֹל בִּיהוֹנָתָן וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בֶּן-נָעֻז הַמֶּרְדּוּת  
הַלּוֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי-בָחַר אַתָּה לְבִן-יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבָשָׁתָהּ וּלְבָשָׁת עֲרֹת אִמֶּךָ:

Saul flew into rage against Jonathan. "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!" he shouted. "I know that you side with the

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<sup>75</sup> Bakon, 147-148.

son of Jesse—to your shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness!"<sup>76</sup>

וַיָּטֵל שָׁאוּל אֶת־הַחֲנִית עָלָיו לְהַכּוֹת

Saul threw his spear at him to strike him down<sup>77</sup>

Why does Saul throw the spear? What do these words truly mean? Why is there tension between Jonathan and Saul throughout this entire narrative? The commentary Metzudat David answers these questions:

בן נעות המרדנות - ר"ל כאשר אמך היא נפשעת בדבר המרידה למרוד בי כן אתה בנה דומה לה לפשוע בדבר המרד: הלא ידעתי - מאז ידעתי שאתה בוחר בבן ישי להיות מולך וזה לבשתך ולבושת הגלות דופי אמך כי הלא יאמרו הבריות אין זה כ"א זנתה אמו והוא אינו בן שאול ולזה יאהב לשונאי שאול:

**Son of a perverse, rebellious woman.** It means to say that your mother committed a crime, a rebellious act, to rebel against me. Thus you, her son, are similar to her for you commit a rebellious act. **I know.** Since then, I know that you choose the son of Jesse to rule, for this is your shame and the shame that is revealed as a fault of your mother. For will not the people say: his mother prostituted herself and he is not the son of Saul for he loves Saul's enemies.<sup>78</sup>

The commentary of Metzudat David implies that Saul is furious that his son rebels against his wishes. Jonathan has committed a political act of treason by abdicating his father's throne and choosing David as his successor. Kyle McCarter illustrates that "son of" means a member of a class of people who have not shown proper allegiance to his ruler.<sup>79</sup> Jonathan and his mother are shameful because of their rebellious political act; they "prostituted" themselves by forming alliances with Saul's enemies. Jonathan, by having a close relationship with David, allows David to become the next King of Israel. One reason for the tension between Jonathan and Saul is the political ramifications of

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<sup>76</sup> I Samuel 20:30.

<sup>77</sup> I Samuel 20:33.

<sup>78</sup> Metzudat David about I Samuel 20:30.

<sup>79</sup> McCarter, 343.

their relationship. In chapters 13-14, Jonathan and Saul are at each other's throat due to a strengthened Jonathan who wishes to rule alongside or even over his father. In the example above, Jonathan and Saul are once again antagonistic due to Jonathan's wish to hand the throne over to David.

As father and son, Saul and Jonathan's relationship is not just political; the two are also connected because of their familial relationship. Radak addresses this point in his commentary about 20:30:

והוא סמוך אל המרדות כלומר מאמך היה לך זה שהיא מורדת  
ברצוני וכמו כן אתה מורד במה שאני רוצה ואוהב מה שאני שונא...  
**לבשתך ולבשת ערות אמך** - עתה יאמרו השומעים  
שאתה אוהב אדם שאני שונא כי אינך בני ויהיה זה בשתך ובשוי'  
אמך שיאמרו שונתה

And this connects to rebellious, as it says: From your mother you have this, for she rebelled against me. Similarly, you rebel against what I want and love what I hate...**To your shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness.** Now the listeners say that you love a man that I hate because you are not my son. This is your shame and the shame of your mother, for they say she is a prostitute.

Like Metzudat David, Radak believes that Saul is furious at Jonathan for defying his wishes. But the difference here is that Saul is visibly upset due to an emotional break in their relationship. Saul is extremely jealous that his son could love another individual whom he despises. Saul is ashamed of his son and wife, not because of their political allegiances, but because of their "emotional prostitution." Saul's jealousy is so severe, that his wife and son's love for another is deemed prostitution.

Steven Greenberg expresses a similar sentiment that Saul's lashing out against Jonathan is for reasons relating to the personal and political. Saul sees his son as perverse because of his erotic activity with David and also for Jonathan's wish to abdicate the throne. Saul is unable to understand why his son takes such a disinterest in

his own welfare; Jonathan's unmanly love for David could lead to David's capture of the kingdom. Steven Greenberg illustrates that the tension between Saul and Jonathan revolves around Jonathan's relationship with David. Saul is angered both because of his son's love for David and because of the political ramifications of their relationship.<sup>80</sup>

Jonathan and Saul have a complicated relationship that moves from love and compassion to anger and jealousy. The complexity of their relationship allows medieval and modern authors to address both the kindness the two have for one another as well as the hatred that occurs during their quarrels. Although father and son do seem to love one another, most of their conflicts occur in the political world of military battles and the future of the kingdom. Jonathan becomes angered at his father's disinterest in his welfare when he fights the Philistines. Later, Jonathan's decision to abdicate the throne in favor of David pushes Saul to say hateful words to his son. Although the political aspects of their relationship tear the two men from one another, at the center of this conflict is David.

A wonderful musician, David is brought into the palace to soothe Saul when he has one of his many mood swings. In addition, in I Samuel 17, David secures a major victory over Goliath and is invited to live in the palace and marry Saul's daughter Michal. From the beginning of their relationship, Saul sees David as a loyal servant whose many strengths will benefit his kingdom. However, there are also many similarities between Jonathan and Saul's interactions and those of David and Saul. This is a complex relationship that moves between love<sup>81</sup> and respect, jealousy and hatred, and

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<sup>80</sup> Rabbi Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God & Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 101-102.

<sup>81</sup> I Samuel 17:21 addresses Saul's love for David.

abandonment and fear. A review of the overriding emotions and the interactions between Saul and David will allow the reader to understand Jonathan's complex relationship with both his father and friend.

A series of midrashim have been written and rewritten regarding Saul and David's interactions with one another.<sup>82</sup> These midrashim compare the relationship of Jacob and Laban with that of Saul and David. Here is the text from Beresheit Rabbah 74:10:

ויחר ליעקב וירב בלבן, רבי עזריה בשם ר' חגי ור' יצחק בר מרון ותני לה בשם ר' חנינא בר יצחק קפדנותן של אבות ולא ענוותנותן של בנים, קפדנותן של אבות מניין, ויחר ליעקב וירב בלבן, ויען יעקב ויאמר ללבן מה פשעי ומה חטאתי כי דלקת, דא את סבור שמא מכות או פצעים יהיו שם אלא דברי פיוסים יעקב מפייס את חמיו, כי מששת את כל כלי מה מצאת מכל כלי ביתך, א"ר סימון בנוהג שבעולם חתן שהוא דר אצל חמיו אפשר לו שלא ליהנות אפילו כלי אחד אפילו סכין אחד ברם הכא מששת את כל כלי אפילו מחט אפילו צינורא לא מצאת, ולא ענוותנותן של בנים מדוד, שנאמר (שמואל א כ) ויברח דוד מגיות ברמה ויבא ויאמר לפני יונתן מה עשיתי ומה עוני ומה חטאתי לפני אביך כי מבקש את נפשי, מזכיר שפיכות דמים בפיוסו מילי דקטלא, ברם הכא כי דלקת אחרי.

Now Jacob became incensed and took up his grievance with Laban (Genesis 31:36). Rabbi Azariah in the name of Rabbi Haggai and Rabbi Isaac bar Maryon, and some teach it was in the name of Rabbi Hanina bar Isaac: **The anger of the fathers and not the meekness of the children. The anger of the fathers, from where? Now Jacob became incensed and took up his grievance against Laban. Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, "What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me?"** (Genesis 31:36). You might come to the opinion, that perhaps blows or violence would be here. Rather, these are words of conciliation. Jacob appeased his father-in-law: **You rummaged through all of my things; what have you found of all your household objects?** (Genesis 31:37). Rabbi Simon said: In our world, a groom who lives with his father-in-law is it possible for him not to benefit himself, even by just one vessel or even one knife? However, here: **You rummaged through all of my things, and you found not a needle or a hook.**

<sup>82</sup> Beresheit Rabbah 74:10; Sechel Tov (Buber) 31; Yalkut Shemoni Torah, Vayisav 130; Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 14; Midrash Aggada (Buber) 33:1; Midrash Tanhuma, Vayisa 13.

**The meekness of the children, is from David. As it says, David fled from Naioth in Ramah; he came to Jonathan and said, "What have I done, what is my crime and my guilt against your father, that he seeks my life?" (I Samuel 20:1). [David] mentions bloodshed in his appeasement, words of killing. However, here, [Jacob says], That you should pursue me. (Genesis 31:36).**

This midrash addresses both David and Jacob's challenging interactions with their fathers-in-law. Laban confronts Jacob who believes that his son-in-law stole his idols, while David hears from those in the palace that Saul pursues him in order to kill him. These two men commit no crime, yet need to prove their innocence to their fathers-in-law. This midrash looks upon Jacob favorably for the words of conciliation that he speaks to Laban. On the other hand, the midrash views David's response "he seeks my life" negatively because these are considered words of bloodshed.

Another difference between Jacob and David's response is the type of action that each initiate. Jacob shows conciliation to Laban not only by speaking favorable words, but by allowing Laban to rummage through all of his possessions. Laban has the ability to see for himself that Jacob did not seize his household idols and this gives him the ability to confirm that Jacob is not a thief. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana adds this extra line to the text:

א"ר סימון בנוהג שבעולם חתן דר אצל חמיו ועובר לצאת מבית חמיו  
איפשר שלא ימצא בידו אפילו דבר קל, וזה אפילו מחט אפילו סכין לא  
נמצ' בידו.

Rabbi Simon says: In our world a groom lives with his father-in-law before he leaves the house of his father-in-law, is it possible that [Laban] does not find in [Jacob's] hand even a small thing? But here even a needle and even a knife he did not find in [Jacob's] hand.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Pesikta De Rav Kahana Piska 14.

This extra line explains that Jacob is not caught “red-handed” with anything, not even the smallest item that is believed to be one of Laban’s possessions. David, however, does not follow Jacob’s model of conciliation and instead only articulates words of violence. David has no intention of giving Saul the opportunity to become anything less than his adversary. Instead, David is caught “red-handed” wearing Jonathan’s royal clothes and using Jonathan’s weapons. Saul has more reasons to be infuriated, since David speaks words of aggression and shows his wish for provocation.

In addition, Laban is incensed thinking that Jacob took his idols and pursues him in order to regain his stolen goods. Not only is Laban furious believing that his son-in-law robs him of a precious possession, but in the Ancient Near East, household gods protected a person and his family. Laban fears the loss not only of his pride and a valued trinket, but also safety from the evilness that surrounded him. Similarly, Saul is angered that David steals his most valuable possession, his son Jonathan. David convinces Jonathan to abdicate the throne and to support him in his quest to become king. This robs Saul of a son who protects him and the future heir to his kingdom. Laban and Saul express frustration at their sons-in-law because their vision of the future is now completely in jeopardy.

These midrashim also address a triangle phenomenon that occurs between Saul, Jonathan, and David which can be compared to Laban, Rachel, and Jacob. Rachel is put into a situation in which she must choose between her father and her husband. By having control of the stolen idols, Rachel holds the key to this disagreement and has the ability to resolve the dispute that occurs between Jacob and Laban. Jonathan is put into a similar situation, for he is triangulated between David and Saul; he is caught in the midst of a

fight between two individuals whom he loves and cares for deeply. Jonathan, like Rachel, needs to decide whom to support: his father or his friend. No longer can Jonathan play the role of mediator, but, instead he must choose to back one over the other.

Midrash Tanhuma disagrees with the view that David provokes his father-in-law; instead, it conveys a much different encounter between David and Saul.<sup>84</sup>

ויחר ליעקב וירב בלבן ויאמר מה פשעי ומה חטאתי. אמרו קפדנותם של אבות ולא פיוסין של בנים. כתיב ויחר ליעקב וירב בלבן ראה מה אמר ליה בחרות אפו לא א"ל אלא מה פשעי ומה חטאתי. ואלו דוד בפיוסו שלא אבה לשלוח יד בשאול. כתיב (שמואל א כ"ו) כי אם ה' יגפנו או ימו יבא ומת או במלחמה ירד ונספה.

**Now Jacob became incensed and took up his grievance with Laban. Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, "What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me?" (Genesis 31:36). They said: The anger of the fathers and not the appeasement of the children. As it is written: Now Jacob became incensed and took up his grievance against Laban. (Genesis 31:36). Notice what he said to him when he was quite angry. He only said: What is my crime, what is my guilt? But David in his appeasement did not wish to turn his hand against Saul. As it is written: As the Lord lives, the Lord Himself will strike him down, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go down to battle and perish. (I Samuel 26:10).**

A different perspective is offered here, David is not perceived as violent, but instead as an individual who is gentle and forgiving. The quotation from Midrash Tanhuma states: "the anger of the fathers and the appeasement of the children" which differs from "the anger of the fathers and the meekness of the children" found in the above cited midrashim.<sup>85</sup> David does not allow his temper to rise and instead believes that God will be the one to strike down Saul. In addition, there is no mention of Jonathan in this midrash, for Saul and David's interaction seems to be separate from the triangle

<sup>84</sup> Midrash Tanhuma, Vayisa 13.

<sup>85</sup> Beresheit Rabbah 74:10; Sechel Tov (Buber) 31; Yalkut Shemoni Torah, Vayisav 130; Pesikta de-Rav Kahana Piska 14; Midrash Aggada (Buber) 33:1.

phenomenon mentioned earlier. The term “father-in-law” is also not mentioned in this midrash, which illustrates the political aspect of their relationship. David is shown to be a saint who respects and values his political relationship with Saul; David does not harm him, but instead leaves everything in the hands of God.

One moment in David and Saul’s complex relationship has already been addressed, but what other experiences illustrate Saul’s feelings for David? When David and Jonathan meet for the first time, Saul senses a need to bring David into his home. וַיִּקַּח הוּא שָׂאִיל בָּיִם הָהוּא וְלֹא נָתַן לָשׁוּב בֵּית אָבִיו. “Saul took him [into his service] that day and would not let him return to his father’s house.”<sup>86</sup> The commentaries of Metzudat David and Metzudat Tziyon explain this verse:

וְלֹא נָתַן לָשׁוּב - כִּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה דְרָכּוֹ מֵאִזְ שֶׁהָיָה הוֹלֵךְ וְשָׁב:

**Would not let him return:** for it was [David’s] way to go out and return on his own.<sup>87</sup>

נָתַן - עֲנִין עֲזִיבָה כְּמוֹ וְלֹא נָתַן סִיחֹן (בְּמִדְבַּר כ"א):

**Let him:** the essence is abandonment. “Sihon would not let Israel pass through his territory” (Numbers 21:23).<sup>88</sup>

These medieval commentaries illustrate Saul’s concern that David will abandon him in the future. Saul does not want to risk losing David and therefore does not allow him to return to his father’s house. Metzudat Tziyon connects the word נָתַן “let him” to the story of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who does not allow the Israelites to pass through his land. Saul does not permit David to roam throughout his land because he fears that David will leave him.

<sup>86</sup> I Samuel 18:2.

<sup>87</sup> Metzudat David about I Samuel 18:2.

<sup>88</sup> Metzudat Tziyon about I Samuel 18:2.

Robert B. Lawton agrees that Saul is anxious, for he fears that David will abandon him. Lawton illustrates this point by looking at chapter 22:

שְׁמַעוּנָא בְּנֵי יִמִּינִי גַם־לְכַלְכֶּם יִתֵּן בְּרִי־יְשִׁי שְׂדוֹת וּכְרָמִים לְכַלְכֶּם  
 יְשִׁים שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת: כִּי קִשְׁרָתֶם בְּלִבְכֶּם עָלַי  
 וְאַיִן־גִּלְהָ אֶת־אֲזִנִּי בְּכֶרֶת־בְּנֵי עַם־בְּרִי־יְשִׁי וְאַיִן־חֲלָה מִכֶּם עָלַי  
 וְגִלְהָ אֶת־אֲזִנִּי כִּי הִקִּים בְּנֵי אֶת־עֵבְדִּי עָלַי לְאַרְבַּב כְּיוֹם הַזֶּה:

Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give fields of vineyards to everyone of you? And will he make all of you captains of thousands or captains of hundreds? Is that why all of you have conspired against me? For no one informs me when my own son makes a pact with the son of Jesse; no one is concerned for me and no one informs me when my own son has set my servant in ambush against me, as is now the case.<sup>89</sup>

According to Lawton, Saul believes that Jonathan has turned David against him and “it is the loss of David’s allegiance and affection rather than Jonathan’s that embitters him.”<sup>90</sup> Saul is most hurt by David’s rebellion and cares little about Jonathan’s actions.

In many of these chapters,<sup>91</sup> Saul repeatedly refers to David as בְּרִי־יְשִׁי “the son of Jesse.” Most often this phrase has been viewed as a term of contempt, but Lawton believes that Saul’s overuse of this term might indicate something more.<sup>92</sup> Lawton’s thesis relies on his reading of I Samuel 20:27-34:

וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרַת הַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי וַיִּפְקֹד מָקוֹם דָּוִד וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂאִיל  
 אֶל־יְהוֹנָתָן בְּנוֹ מִדּוֹעַ לֹא־בָא בְּרִי־יְשִׁי גַם־תְּמוּל גַּם־יְהוּדִים אֶל־הַלֶּחֶם:  
 וַיַּעַן וַיְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־שְׂאִיל נִשְׂאֵל נִשְׂאֵל דָּוִד מִעַמְדֵי עַד־בֵּית לֶחֶם:  
 וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂלַחֲנִי נָא כִּי זָבַח מִשְׁפָּחָה לָּנוּ בָּעִיר וְהוּא צֹוֶה־לִּי אֲחִי  
 וְעַתָּה אִם־מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אִמְלִטָּה נָא וְאָרָאָה אֶת־אָזְנִי  
 עַל־כֵּן לֹא־בָא אֶל־שְׁלֹחַן הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיַּחֲרֹאֵף שְׂאִיל בְּיְהוֹנָתָן  
 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בְּרִי־נַעֲוֹת הַמַּרְדּוֹת הַלּוֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־בָחַר אֶתְּהָ לְבְּרִי־יְשִׁי  
 לְבָשֶׁתְּךָ וּלְבִשְׁתָּ עֲרוֹת אִמָּה: כִּי כָל־הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר בְּרִי־יְשִׁי חַי  
 עַל־הָאָדָמָה לֹא תִפּוֹן אֶתְּהָ וּמִלְכּוּתְךָ וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח וְקַח אֹתוֹ אֵלַי

<sup>89</sup> I Samuel 22:7-8.

<sup>90</sup> Lawton, 36.

<sup>91</sup> See I Samuel 16, 17, 20, and 22 to see Saul’s repetitive use of בְּרִי־יְשִׁי.

<sup>92</sup> Lawton, 42 quotes Robert Alter “when a relational epithet is attached to a character, or, conversely, when a relational identity is stated without the character’s proper name, the narrator is generally telling us something substantive without recourse of explicit commentary.” See Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 180.

כִּי בַר־מוֹת הָיָא: וַיַּעַן יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־שָׂאִיִל אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו  
 לָמָּה יוֹמָת כֹּה עָשָׂה: וַיִּטֹּל שָׂאִיִל אֶת־הַחֲנִית עָלָיו  
 לְהַכּוֹתוֹ וַיֵּדַע יְהוֹנָתָן כִּי־כָלָה הִיא מִעַם אָבִיו לְהַמִּית אֶת־דָּוִד:  
 וַיָּקָם יְהוֹנָתָן מִעַם הַשְּׁלֶחַן בְּחָרִי־אָף וְלֹא־אָכַל בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא  
 הַשֵּׁנִי לַחֹם כִּי נִעְצַב אֶל־דָּוִד כִּי הִקְלִמוּ אָבִיו:

But on the day after the new moon, the second day, David's place was vacant again. So Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why didn't the son of Jesse come to the meal yesterday or today?" Jonathan answered Saul, "David begged leave of me to go to Bethlehem. He said, 'Please let me go, for we are going to have a family feast in our town and my brother has summoned me to it. Do me a favor, let me slip away to see my kinsmen.' This is why he has not come to the king's table." Saul flew into a rage against Jonathan. "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!" he shouted. "I know that you side with the son of Jesse—to your shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness! For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingship will be secure. Now then have him brought to me, for he is marked for death." But Jonathan spoke up and said to his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" At that, Saul threw his spear at him to strike him down; and Jonathan realized that his father was determined to do away with David. Jonathan rose from the table in a rage. He ate no food on the second day of the new moon, because he grieved about David, and because his father had humiliated him.

Saul continues throughout the narrative to use the term "son of Jesse," yet the narrator and Jonathan refer to him as David. Lawton explains that the utilization of this phrase, "son of Jesse," addresses Saul's bitterness that David is another man's son and not his own.<sup>93</sup> Saul is hurt that David flees from the palace and that Jonathan, his son, pits David against him. Saul is heartbroken that David abandons him and is unable to even speak David's name; instead, he calls him as "the son of Jesse."

In addition, Saul's desire for David to be his son is expressed once again as the two share their last moments together.

וַיַּכּוּר שָׂאִיִל אֶת־קוֹל דָּוִד וַיֹּאמֶר הִקּוּלָּךְ זֶה בְּנִי דָוִד  
 וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד קוֹלִי אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂאִיִל חֲטָאִיתִי שׁוּב בְּנִי־דָוִד  
 כִּי לֹא־אָרַע לָךְ עוֹד תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָה נַפְשִׁי בְּעֵינֶיךָ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה  
 הִנֵּה הַסִּפְלָתִי וְאֲשַׁנָּה הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂאִיִל אֶל־דָּוִד

<sup>93</sup> Lawton, 43.

בְּרִידָאָתָהּ בְּנִי דָוִד גַּם עָשָׂה תַעֲשֶׂה וְגַם יָכֹל תִּכְּוֹל

Saul recognized David's voice, and he asked, "Is that your voice, my son David?" And replied, "It is, my lord king" ... And Saul answered, "I am in the wrong. Come back, my son David, for I will never harm you again, seeing how you have held my life precious this day. Yes I have been a fool, and I have erred so very much." ... Saul answered David, "May you be blessed, my son David. You shall achieve and you shall prevail."<sup>94</sup>

The overuse of the term "my son" is found throughout this last interchange between David and Saul. According to Lawton, Saul believes that David is more like a son to him than his own flesh and blood, Jonathan. Although Saul's mood swings push him over the edge and at times he is infuriated with his son-in-law, his close connection with David seems to be more important than his relationship with Jonathan.<sup>95</sup>

Another minor relationship that occurs throughout the larger narrative of I and II Samuel is that of Michal and David.

וַתֵּאֱהָב מִיכָל בִּתְשָׁאֵל אֶת־דָּוִד וַיִּגְדֹּי לְשָׂאֵל וַיֵּשֶׁר הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינָיו

Now Michal daughter of Saul had fallen in love with David; and when this was reported to Saul, he was pleased.<sup>96</sup>

Michal falls suddenly and deeply in love with David, yet receives no words of encouragement from him.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, Michal's love is so unique that it is the only instance in the entire Tanakh in which a woman is described as loving a man.<sup>98</sup> According to Susan Ackerman, Michal's love for David illustrates that class trumps gender; Michal, the princess of Israel, is hierarchically superior to David the shepherd boy.<sup>99</sup> Ackerman

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<sup>94</sup> I Samuel 26:17-25.

<sup>95</sup> Lawton, 44-45.

<sup>96</sup> I Samuel 18:20.

<sup>97</sup> Peleg, 185.

<sup>98</sup> For more information about the unique qualities of Michal's love see Peleg, 185 and Ackerman, 452.

<sup>99</sup> Ackerman, 452-453.

shows that David wishes to marry Michal in order to further his monarchical ambitions and that Michal loves him because of her favorable status over him.

Besides expressing her love for David, Michal also actively helps him escape from Saul's entrapments.

וַיִּשְׁלַח שָׂאוּל מַלְאָכִים אֶל-בֵּית דָּוִד לִשְׁמֹרוֹ וְלִהְמִיתוֹ בַּבֹּקֶר  
וַתִּגְדֹּל לְדָוִד מִיכָל אִשְׁתּוֹ לֵאמֹר אִם-אֵינְךָ מְמַלֵּט אֶת-נַפְשְׁךָ הַלַּיְלָה  
מִחָר אַתָּה מוֹמֵת: וַתִּרְדּוּ מִיכָל אֶת-דָּוִד בַּעַד הַחֲלוֹן וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּבָּרַח וַיִּמָּלֵט:  
וַתִּקַּח מִיכָל אֶת-הַתְּרָפִים וַתִּשָּׂם אֶל-הַמֶּטָּה וְאֵת כְּבִיר הָעָאִים  
שָׂמָּה מִרְאֲשֹׁתָיו וַתִּכַּסּ בַּבֹּגֶד: וַיִּשְׁלַח שָׂאוּל מַלְאָכִים לִקְחַת אֶת-דָּוִד  
וַתֹּאמֶר חֲלָה הוּא: וַיִּשְׁלַח שָׂאוּל אֶת-הַמַּלְאָכִים לִרְאוֹת אֶת-דָּוִד לֵאמֹר  
הֲעָלוּ אֹתוֹ בַּמֶּטָּה אֵלַי לִהְמֹתוֹ: וַיָּבֹאוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים וְהִנֵּה הַתְּרָפִים  
אֶל-הַמֶּטָּה וּכְבִיר הָעָאִים מִרְאֲשֹׁתָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂאוּל אֶל-מִיכָל  
לָמָּה פָּכַח רַמְיָתִי וַתִּשְׁלַחִי אֶת-אֹיְבֵי וַיִּמָּלֵט וַתֹּאמֶר מִיכָל אֶל-שָׂאוּל  
הוּא-אָמַר אֵלַי שְׁלַחֵנִי לָמָּה אָמִיתָךְ:

Saul sent messengers to David's home to keep watch on him and to kill him in the morning. But David's wife Michal told him, "Unless you run for your life tonight, you will be killed tomorrow." Michal let David down from the window and he escaped and fled. Michal then took the household idol, laid it on the bed, and covered it with a cloth; and at its head she put a net of goat's hair. Saul sent messengers to seize David; but she said, "He is sick." Saul, however, sent back the messengers to see David for themselves. "Bring him up to me in the bed," he ordered, "that he may be put to death." When the messengers came, they found the household idol in the bed, with the net of goat's hair at its head. Saul said to Michal, "Why did you play that trick on me and let my enemy get away safely?" "Because," Michal answered Saul, "he said to me: 'Help me get away or I'll kill you.'"<sup>100</sup>

Michal cares so deeply for David that she decides to ignore her father's wish in order to lead David to safety. Yaron Peleg believes that unlike Jonathan's passive response, Michal is actively involved in David's rescue from Saul's clutches. She tells David bluntly that he will die; she invents a plan for his escape; and she lies boldly to her

<sup>100</sup> I Samuel 19:11-17.

father.<sup>101</sup> Michal is firmly in charge and aggressively takes control of the situation because of her love for David.

Midrash Yalkut Shemoni<sup>102</sup> disagrees with Yaron Peleg's assessment and instead likens Jonathan's actions to Michal:

שאמר הכתוב טובים שנים מן האחד, טובים שנים האוהבים את האדם, מן האחד - זו מיכל בת שאול ויהונתן, שנאמר ומיכל בת שאול אהבתהו, וביהונתן כתיב ויאהבהו ויהונתן כנפשו, מיכל ממלטת את דוד מן הבית, ויהונתן מן החוץ. והחוט המשולש, אלו ישראל, שנאמר וכל ישראל ויהודה אוהבים את דוד, לכן קורא את מיכל עגלה, שנאמר והששי יתרעם לעגלה, שלא קבלה עליה עול אביה, אלא קנטרה אותו:

It is written: **Two are better off than one, in that they have greater benefit from their earnings** (Ecclesiastes 4:9). Two lovers are better for a man. **Than One**---This is Michal, the daughter of Saul, and Jonathan. As it is written: **Michal daughter of Saul loved him** (I Samuel 18:28) and for Jonathan it is written **Jonathan loved David as himself** (I Samuel 18:1). Michal helped David escape from the house and Jonathan from outside. And the third cord---This is Israel, as it says: **All Israel and Judah loved David, for he marched at their head** (I Sam 18:16). Therefore, call Michal "Eglah" for it says: **and the sixth was Ithream, by David's wife Eglah** (II Sam 3:5). She did not accept upon herself the burden of her father, rather she rebuked him.

Michal helps David escape from the house, while Jonathan assists him from the outside. In addition, both of them care for David and are said to love him. In addition, like Jonathan, Michal actively rebukes her father and decides to side with David over her father. The two are even called האוהבים "the lovers" of David. Yalkut Shemoni explains that Michal and David are quite similar; they both are lovers of David; they both care for him and fulfill actions to help him escape; and they both choose him over their father.

This chapter addresses the relationships of Jonathan and Saul, David and Saul, and David and Michal. One major theme that occurs throughout this chapter is the

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<sup>101</sup> Peleg, 187.

<sup>102</sup> Midrash Yalkut Shemoni Tehilim 777 quotes an anonymous midrash.

similarities of these relationships. For example, Michal and David's relationship is comparable to that of Jonathan and David's. Just as Michal loves David, acts in the world to save him, and chooses him over her father, so does Jonathan. Even more shocking is that David and Saul's interactions are parallel to that of Jonathan and Saul. Saul's dealings with the two men abruptly change from true compassion and respect, to humiliation and hatred. Saul's outbursts display envy of Jonathan's relationship with David and jealousy that David is not his son. Saul also expresses anger at Jonathan for abdicating the throne and fear that David will abandon him. In addition, Jonathan and David both show compassion to Saul: Jonathan does so by understanding his father's outbursts and David by forgiving Saul for his attempted assassination. But both individuals show their feelings of anger: Jonathan expresses contempt for his dad's actions and David states words of bloodshed. David & Saul, Jonathan & Saul, Michal & David, and Jonathan & David's relationships are seen as similar due to corresponding feelings of love, anger, jealousy, and compassion.

In addition, the interactions that exist between these various dyads center on both the political and the interpersonal. Jonathan's feuds with his father address both the future of the kingdom as well as the limits of their love for each other. David's fighting with Saul focuses on both their relationship as son-in-law to father-in-law as well as king to servant. But most importantly, all of these relationships center on David's future as a king, husband, and friend. Even Jonathan and Saul's relationship becomes contentious because of the relationship that exists between Jonathan and David. Each of these relationships addresses both political and interpersonal concerns and is impacted by

David's entrance into the narrative. These stories assist the reader in comprehending Jonathan and David's relationship, for they illustrate the world in which they lived.

#### Chapter Four: Pieces of Jonathan and David's Relationship which are Ambiguous

In this chapter, the belief that Jonathan and David's relationship is solely built upon political interactions will be questioned. This chapter will demonstrate that an interpersonal relationship exists alongside their political dealings. At first, Jonathan and David's similarities will demonstrate the special bond that exists between the two of them. Afterwards, Jonathan and David's emotions, feelings, and actions will illustrate aspects of an interpersonal relationship. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the relationship that Jonathan and David create together which is fashioned around equality and mutual benefit.

When Jonathan meets David for the first time, the reader recognizes the special feelings that Jonathan has for David: וַיֵּאָהֲבֵהוּ יְהוֹנָתָן כְּנַפְשׁוֹ "Jonathan loved David as himself."<sup>103</sup> There are only six examples of כְּנַפְשׁוֹ in the entire Tanakh and two of them are found in I Samuel 18:1 and 18:3. An additional phrase is found in Deuteronomy: כִּי יִסְתִּיף אִחִיד בְּרֵאֲמֹה אוֹ-בֵן אוֹ-בִתּוֹ אוֹ | אִשְׁתּוֹ חֵיקָה אוֹ רֵעֵה אֲשֶׁר כְּנַפְשׁוֹ בְּסִתֵּר לֵאמֹר: "If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or **your friend who is as yourself**, entices you in secret saying, 'Come let us worship other gods...'"<sup>104</sup> The verse commands a person to kill those who worship other gods, even if they are close family members or friends. The Tanakh demonstrates that "your friend who is as yourself" is similar to a person's blood relatives and spouse. This verse illustrates the impact that close friends and companions have on a person's life.

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<sup>103</sup> I Samuel 18:1.

<sup>104</sup> Deuteronomy 13:7.

In another example of כְּנָפֶשׁ, Elijah learns via a message from Queen Jezebel that King Ahab has killed all of the other prophets: כֹּה־יַעֲשׂוּן אֱלֹהִים וְכֹה יוֹסִפוּן כִּי־כָעַת מָחָר: “Thus and more may the gods do if by this time tomorrow I have not made **you like one of them.**”<sup>105</sup> Elijah learns that his fate is likened to the other prophets. The term כְּנָפֶשׁ links Elijah to the other prophets of Israel because of the similar work they do. This term כְּנָפֶשׁ, found in I Samuel 18:1, 18:3, illustrates the special bond between Jonathan and David that exists from the onset of their first meeting. Similar to Deuteronomy, the relationship between two friends is shown to be at the same level or even higher than interactions between blood relatives. In addition, like Elijah and the prophets, Jonathan and David are shown to be similar to one another because of the experiences that the two undergo together.

The biblical text limits its description of Jonathan and David’s age or outward appearance; however, other details such as personality traits, strengths, and weaknesses illustrate the similarities that exist between them. Many of the commentaries, including Metzudat David, discuss these similarities when addressing Jonathan and David’s unique bond:

וּנֶפֶשׁ - ר"ל ואז בשמוע יהונתן שגם הוא בן אדם גדול נקשרה  
נפשו בנפש דוד:

**And the soul --- it appears to say: When Jonathan heard that [David] was also the son of a great man, his soul became bound up with the soul of David.**<sup>106</sup>

According to Metzudat David, Jonathan’s soul bonds to David because he hears about the greatness of David’s father, Jesse. The similarity is striking, for Jonathan is also the son

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<sup>105</sup> I Kings 19:2.

<sup>106</sup> Metzudat David about I Samuel 18:1.

of a heroic man, Saul, King of Israel. Jonathan may have found comfort knowing that David, like himself, grew up in the shadow of his father.

Robert Lawton takes this idea in another direction. He explains that David is as distant from his father as Jonathan is from Saul. Jonathan bonds with David because their fathers are both cold individuals, who show no emotion, and care little about their children's welfare. Jonathan connects with David because the two grew up in very similar households; he finally finds himself with a person who understands his living situation.<sup>107</sup> In addition, Shimon Bakon explains that Jonathan shares similar traits with David that are lacking in his relationship with Saul. Jonathan, as a religious person, trusts in God unconditionally while Saul attempts to appease God through sacrifices and fasts. In addition, Jonathan, like David, is a military hero who fights against the Philistines. Bakon shows "that when Jonathan met David he found in him a kindred spirit, leading to the immortal friendship between the two."<sup>108</sup> The emotions and feelings that Jonathan and David express to one another exemplify the special bond and the immortal friendship that the two create during their time together.

This next section will look at these emotions and feelings in an attempt to understand the impact they have on Jonathan and David's relationship with each other. In the first example, found at the end of chapter 20, Saul bemoans Jonathan's decision to support David, calling Jonathan a בן־נָעֻזת הַמְּרִדוֹת "son of a perverse rebellious woman" and throwing a spear to strike him. The text describes Jonathan's emotional outburst after hearing his father's reply: וַיִּקֶּם יְהוֹנָתָן מֵעַם הַשָּׁלָח בְּחֶרֶץ וְלֹא־אָכַל בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא הַשֶּׁנִּי

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<sup>107</sup> Lawton, 40-41.

<sup>108</sup> Bakon, 145.

Jonathan rose from the table in a rage. He ate no food on the second day of the new moon, because he was grieved about David, and because his father had humiliated him."<sup>109</sup>

Jonathan is shaken up by his father's outburst and is unable to eat any food for two full days. Two explanations are given in the biblical text for his inability to eat: 1. that he pained for David and 2. that his father humiliates him. Gersonides addresses these two reasons in his commentary about I Samuel 20:34:

כי נעצב אל דוד כי הכלימו אביו - באר בזה ששני דברים היו סבה שלא אכל יהונתן ביום החדש השני לחם האחד כי היה נעצב אל דוד שיצטרך שיפרד ממנו מפחד אביו והיא היתה הסבה היותר חזקה ולזה הקדימה והסבה השנית היא כי הכלימו אביו במה שקרא לו בן נעות המרדות :

**Because he grieved about David, and because his father had humiliated him.** This clarifies that there are two answers for the reason that he ate no food on the second day of the new moon: First--- because he pained for David who needed to separate from him because [David] feared his father. And this reason is much stronger, for this is the first. The second reason is--- **his father had humiliated him** when he called him "son of a perverse, rebellious woman."

Ralbag agrees that there are two causes for Jonathan's failure to eat. First, Jonathan grieves for David and worries that his father will harm David and second, Jonathan is humiliated by his father's outburst. Ralbag finds the prior answer more compelling since it is discussed first in the biblical text.

Rashi goes a step further and explains that Jonathan's refusal to eat relates solely to his concern for David.

נעצב אל דוד - בשביל דוד : כי הכלימו אביו - בשביל דוד :

**He was grieved about David.** For the sake of David. **And because his father had humiliated him.** For the sake of David.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> I Samuel 20:34.

Jonathan's humiliation exists not because of his father's hurtful words, but on account of his father's wish to kill David. Jonathan grieves for David because of the degrading words and actions which are directed, not towards him, but towards David. Joseph Kara also articulates a similar thought in his commentary:

**נעצב נצטער על דוד אהבו שהוא רוצה להורגו:**

**He was grieved.** He grieved for David, his love, that [Saul] wanted to kill him.<sup>110</sup>

Joseph Kara adds the term, "David, his love" to express the importance of Jonathan's relationship with David. Jonathan is hurt and pained that Saul wishes to kill someone who means so much to him. The medieval rabbis illustrate Jonathan's feelings of grief and concern for David. They show Jonathan to be an individual who feels David's anguish and is driven to such grief that he is unable to eat even a morsel of food.

The pain and grief that Jonathan experiences are related to his feelings of love and affection. Here is another account of Saul's throwing of the spear that links Jonathan's reaction to the emotion of love:

עד היכן תוכחה? רב אמר: עד הכאה, ושמואל אמר: עד קללה, ורבי יוחנן אמר: עד נזיפה. כתנאי, רבי אליעזר אומר: עד הכאה, רבי יהושע אומר: עד קללה, בן עזאי אומר: עד נזיפה. אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק, ושלשתן מקרא אחד דרשו: +שמואל א' כ' + ויחר אף שאול ביהונתן ויאמר לו בן נעות המרדות, וכתוב: +שמואל א' כ' + ויטל שאול את החנית עליו להכותו. למאן דאמר עד הכאה, דכתיב: להכותו; ולמאן דאמר עד קללה, דכתיב: +שמואל א' כ' + לבשתך ולבושת ערות אמך; ולמאן דאמר עד נזיפה, דכתיב: ויחר אף שאול. ולמ"ד נזיפה, הכתיב הכאה וקללה! שאני התם, דאגב חביבותא יתירא דהוה ביה ליהונתן בדוד, מסר נפשיה טפי.

Until what extent do you reprove? Rav said, until beating. And Shmuel said, until cursing. And Rabbi Yohanan said: until rebuking. And the Tannaim: Rabbi Eliezer said: until beating, Rabbi Yehoshua said: until cursing, Ben Azzai said: until

<sup>110</sup> Rashi about I Samuel 20:34.

<sup>111</sup> Joseph Kara about I Samuel 20:34.

rebuking. Rav Nachman bar Isaac said: The three of them are found in one biblical verse, as it is written: **Saul flew into a rage against Jonathan (20:30). And he said to him: son of a perverse, rebellious woman (20:30),** and it is written, **At that, Saul threw his spear at him to strike him down (20:33).** From where does it say, “until beating?” It is written **strike him down.** From where does it say, “until cursing?” It is written **to your shame and to the shame of your mother.** From where does it say, “until rebuking?” It is written **Saul flew into a rage.** From where does it say “until rebuking,” but it is written, “until beating” and “until cursing?” That is in another case: because for his great love for David, Jonathan risked his life even more.<sup>112</sup>

The Talmudic text addresses the extent to which one can reprove a kinsperson, student, or friend. The six rabbis give different definitions of when an individual has gone too far in his rebuke: Rav and Rabbi Eliezer say “until beating,” Shmuel and Rabbi Yehoshua say “until cursing,” and Rabbi Yohanan and Ben Azzai say “until rebuking.” Masterfully, Rav Nachman bar Isaac is able to bring all three ideas together using a biblical text, I Samuel 20:30-33. He explains that all three types of reproach are found in Saul’s reprimand of his son. Jonathan’s humiliating experience consists of his father hurling curses at him, rebuking him with angry outbursts, and beating him. Jonathan is the paradigm for reproach gone wrong because Saul goes too far with his many methods of rebuke. Jonathan risks his life and abides by these forms of punishment in order to protect David. He experiences grief and pain solely because of his great love and affection for his friend.

Rashi also addresses Jonathan’s love for David in his commentary to the Book of Psalms:

לאסור שריו בנפשו - לשון חבה הוא זה כמו ונפש יהונתן נקשרה  
בנפש דוד, כשפטר החלום חבבוהו כלם

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<sup>112</sup> Arachin 16b.

**To discipline his princes:** (A literal translation “forbidding his princes with ‘his soul,’ himself.”) This is the language of affection, like **Jonathan’s soul became bound up with the soul of David** (I Samuel 18:1). When [Joseph] interpreted the dream, they all loved him.<sup>113</sup>

Rashi explains the meaning of Psalm 105:22: **לְאַסֵּר שָׂרָיו בְּנַפְשׁוֹ וְיִזְקֶנּוּ יְחָכְמִם**: “to discipline his princes at will, to teach his elders wisdom,” which refers to Joseph’s ability to rule over Egypt. Rashi shows that the words **לְאַסֵּר שָׂרָיו בְּנַפְשׁוֹ** “to discipline his princes” is a term of affection similar to “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David.” Joseph is beloved and is accorded words of affection because of his proficiency in interpreting dreams. Rashi explains that people are beloved due to their ability to act. Therefore, Jonathan loves David due to David’s great abilities as a warrior and musician.

In addition, love is the catalyst for the covenants between Jonathan and David. For it says in I Samuel 20:17: **וַיִּסַּף יְהוֹנָתָן לְהַשְׁבִּיעַ אֶת־דָּוִד בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אוֹתוֹ כִּי־אַהֲבָתוֹ נַפְשׁוֹ אָהָבוֹ**: “Jonathan, out of his love for David, adjured him again, for he loved him as himself.” The Tanakh only states one reason for Jonathan’s oath to David: that Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. Gersonides asserts a similar view in his commentary to this verse:

והוסיף גם כן יהונתן להשביע את דוד בדרך שיהיה ברית שלום ביניהם  
מצד חוזה אהבתו אותו כי אהבת נפשו אהבו:

It also adds that **Jonathan adjured David** that there will be a peaceful covenant between them because of [Jonathan’s] strong love for [David], **for he loved him as himself**.

Gersonides believes that the foundation of Jonathan and David’s covenant is based on Jonathan’s love. It is Jonathan’s love for David that cements the relationship between the two and allows for a peaceful and long lasting covenant.

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<sup>113</sup> Rashi about Psalms 105:22.

Jonathan's love for David is so great that David even remarks: **נִפְלְאָתָה אַהֲבַתְךָ לִי** (II Samuel 1:26). Radak expresses his own thoughts about this phrase:

**מאהבת נשים** - ת"י מרחמת תרתין נשין ר"ל שתי הנשים שהיו לו לדוד אביגיל ואחינועם ואדוני אבי ז"ל פירש **מאהב' נשים** למה שהם אוהביו בין בעליהם בין בניהן שאהבתן חזקה להם:

**More than the love of women.** Targum Yonatan: "More love than two women." It wants to say: David had two wives, Abigail and Ahinoam. And my master, my father, may he be remembered for a blessing, commented: **more than the love of women.** What do [women] love? Their husbands and their children---that their love is very strong.<sup>114</sup>

According to Radak, the phrase **נִפְלְאָתָה אַהֲבַתְךָ לִי** shows that Jonathan's love is greater than the love of many women. Radak expresses the belief that Jonathan loves David with more affection than do David's two wives, Abigail and Ahinoam. Radak demonstrates that this is an extraordinary amount of love, for a woman's love for her partner and children are very great.

Gersonides goes a step further when addressing Jonathan's love for David:

**נפלאתה אהבתך לי מאהבת נשים** - ר"ל שיותר חזקה ויותר נפלאתה היתה אהב' יהונתן לדוד מאהב' הנשים לאהוביהן שהיא אהבה חזקה מאד עד שכבר יכה אותה ויקללי ולא תפיל מפני זה מאהבתו לו דבר:

**Your love was wonderful to me, more than the love of women.** It wants to say: stronger and more wondrous was the love of Jonathan for David than the love of women for their lovers. This was still a very strong love, even after he was wounded and hurt. He did not bring [David] down because of his love for [David].

Like Radak, Gersonides explains that Jonathan's love is greater than a woman's love for her lover. But, he also expresses the belief that Jonathan's love is superior because the

<sup>114</sup> Radak about II Samuel 1:26. In addition, also see Metzudat David about II Samuel 1:26.

pain and humiliation that Jonathan receives from his father does not diminish his love. Both medieval commentators explain that Jonathan has a great ability to love. This love that exists between two men is elevated above a mother's love for her children and wife's love for her partner.

The term אֶצְחָק “delights in” is an ambiguous term that has many different meanings throughout the Tanakh. As seen in the examples above, the term is used to express political relationships, fondness by family members and God, and wishes for

sexual intimacy. Metzudat David is the only pre-modern commentary to comment on חפץ בדוד in this story. **“Delight in David.** For his successes and for his goodness.”<sup>116</sup> Metzudat David states that Jonathan is fond of David due to his military success, his demeanor, and his personality. The multiple meanings of חפץ that are given here, as well as in the other examples found in the Tanakh, illustrate the complexity of Jonathan’s feelings for David. The ambiguity of this term shows that Jonathan’s feelings for David could be based upon his military success, his personality, his sexuality, or all of the above.

As seen earlier, jealousy is found throughout the broader narrative of the Book of Samuel. Saul is extremely jealous of “the son of Jesse” and of the relationship that exists between Jonathan and David. Most remarkably, the reader discovers no jealousy in Jonathan; Jonathan is a generous individual who sees David as a kindred soul rather than an adversary.<sup>117</sup> Rabbi Ovadiah ben Abraham Bartinoro addresses Jonathan’s lack of envy in his commentary to Avot 5:16:

אהבת דוד ויונתן - להשלים רצון קונם. דאמר לו יהונתן לדוד אתה  
תהיה למלך על ישראל ואני אחיה לך למשנה:

**The love of David and Jonathan.** To reconcile the will of their Master. As Jonathan said to David: **You are going to be king over Israel and I shall be second to you** (I Samuel 23:17).

Rabbi Ovadiah believes that Jonathan’s love for David is illustrated by his inability to be jealous of David’s achievements. Jonathan articulates his generosity and his lack of jealousy by offering the kingdom to David and by stating that he will serve as second-in-command.

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<sup>116</sup> Metzudat David about I Samuel 19:1.

<sup>117</sup> Bakon, 150.

Nahmanides takes this a step further and suggests Jonathan's lack of jealousy is connected to the verse "love your fellow as yourself."

וטעם ואהבת לרעך כמוך - הפלגה, כי לא יקבל לב האדם שיאהוב את חבירו כאהבתו את נפשו, ועוד שכבר בא רבי עקיבא ולמד חיין קודמין לחיי חבירך (ב"מ סב א):  
אלא מצות התורה שיאהב חבירו בכל ענין כאשר יאהב את נפשו בכל הטוב. ויתכן בעבור שלא אמר "ואהבת את רעך כמוך", והשוה אותם במלת "לרעך", וכן ואהבת לו כמוך (פסוק לד) דגר, שיהיה פירושו להשוות אהבת שניהם בדעתו, כי פעמים שיאהב אדם את רעהו בדברים ידועים להטיבו בעושר ולא בחכמה וכיוצא בזה, ואם יהיה אוהבו בכל יחפץ שיזכה רעהו האהוב לו בעושר ובנכסים וכבוד ובדעת ובחכמה, ולא שישווה אליו אבל יהיה חפץ בלבו לעולם שיהיה הוא יותר ממנו בכל טובה, ויצוה הכתוב שלא תהיה פחיתות הקנאה הזאת בלבו, אבל יאהב ברבות הטובה לחבירו כאשר אדם עושה לנפשו ולא יתן שיעורין באהבה. ועל כן אמר ביהונתן (ש"א כ יז) כי אהבת נפשו אהבו, בעבור שהסיר מדת הקנאה מלבו ואמר (שם כג יז) ואתה תמלך על ישראל וגו':

**Love your fellow as yourself.** Exaggeration, because one can not receive the heart of another---one [does not] love one's friend like one loves one's self. Already Rabbi Akiba taught, "Your life precedes the life of your friend." Rather, it is a mitzvah of the Torah to love a friend properly, similarly to how one loves oneself.

And it does not say: "You shall love your specific neighbor like yourself." Equal "them" with the word "your neighbor." And thus: **You shall love him [i.e. the specific stranger] as you love yourself** (Leviticus 19:34).

This was in his commentary: to equal the love of two people. For there are times when one loves a neighbor because of the neighbor's wealth, and not because of the neighbor's knowledge or things like this. If one loves another because this person has everything that one desires, that one loves the neighbor because of the neighbor's wealth, objects, honor, knowledge, and wisdom and is not equal to the neighbor, and if one always desires to be better than the neighbor in all things, it is commanded and it is written that one should not open the heart to jealousy, but one should love much of the goodness of the neighbor, like when a person does for a neighbor and is not given measures of love. And on this it says of Jonathan: **that he loved him as he loved himself** (I Samuel 20:17). In passing, that he removed the amount of jealousy from his heart, and he said: **You are going to be king over Israel** (I Samuel 23:17).<sup>118</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Nahmanides about Leviticus 19:17.

Ramban explains the meaning of “Love your neighbor as you love yourself” by showing that this phrase is an exaggeration. There is no possible way that people are able to love another as they love themselves. Instead, Ramban believes that “love your neighbor as you love yourself” relates to the jealousy that a person feels for another. If one is able to not be envious of a friend, one has fulfilled the commandment of loving your neighbor as you love yourself. Nahmanides believes that Jonathan’s statement to David, “You will be king over Israel” illustrates Jonathan’s lack of jealousy and also states publicly that he loves David as he loves himself.

Multiple times throughout this narrative, Jonathan expresses feelings of love for David, delights in him, and shows a complete lack of jealousy. On the other hand, there is a sense that David lacks the ability to share his emotions and feelings with Jonathan. Only in one brief moment does David articulate any sort of affection for Jonathan throughout this entire story. After Jonathan and Saul finally pass away, David recites his lament in II Samuel 1:26, צָרָה לִי עָלֶיךָ אָחִי יְהוֹנָתָן נְעֻמָּה לִי מְאֹד נִפְלְאַתָּה אֲהַבְתָּךְ לִי מֵאֲהַבַת נָשִׁים: “I grieve for you, My brother Jonathan, You were most dear to me. Your love was wonderful to me, More than the love of women.” The phrase מֵאֲהַבַת נָשִׁים: “you were most dear to me” is the only expression of affection uttered by David. Indeed, David is unable to state that he loves Jonathan, for he can only say that Jonathan’s love was more wondrous than the love of women.

Although David never states his love for Jonathan in the text, Gersonides conveys the power of David’s love in his fifty-second lesson following II Samuel chapter one.

החמשים ושנים הוא: להודיע איך הפליג הש"י אשר לו נתכנו עלילות להמציא הסבות שיגיעו דוד אל שתהיה לו המלוכה בקלות כמו שגזרה חכמתו ורצונו כי אם היה נהרג שאול לבדו הנה לחוזק אהבת דוד אל

יהונתן לא היה יכול להסכים בעצמו לעשוק הממלכה ממנו ולזה מת  
יהונתן עמו...

Lesson Fifty-two: To make known how to praise unduly the name of the most Blessed One, that there is the possibility of action from God. God's decree of wisdom and God's wish provided support for David that gave him a kingship. For if it was Saul's behavior alone, the strength of David's love for Jonathan would not allow him to take the kingdom unjustly from [Jonathan] and for this reason Jonathan died with [Saul]...

Gersonides in lesson fifty-two, expresses the belief that everything is in the hands of God and that the Eternal One wishes to make David the true ruler of Israel. However, David's love for Jonathan is so great that he will not take the kingdom away from Jonathan. David can not become king over Israel if Jonathan is still alive, thus God takes Jonathan's life so David can rule. Gersonides addresses the role of God in his fifty-second lesson, but also illustrates the extent of David's love for Jonathan.

The Mishnah also focuses on the love that Jonathan and David have for one another. This famous statement is found in Pirke Avot:

כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר בטלה דבר בטלה אהבה ושאינה תלויה בדבר  
אינה בטלה לעולם איזו היא אהבה התלויה בדבר זו אהבת אמן ותמר  
ושאינה תלויה בדבר זו אהבת דוד ויהונתן;

All love that is dependent upon something, when the thing disappears, the love disappears. But love that is not dependent upon something, this love never disappears. What is the love that depends upon something? This is the love of Amnon for Tamar. What is the love that does not depend upon something? This is the love of David and Jonathan.<sup>119</sup>

The Mishnah explains that David and Jonathan's love is an example of an eternal love that will never disappear. It is not the love between a husband and wife, child and parent, or person and God that is an example of an everlasting love, but the affection that exists between two men. Steven Greenberg states that the rabbis idealize the love between

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<sup>119</sup> Pirke Avot 5:16.

Jonathan and David because their love is viewed as independent of any mutual benefit. The rabbis regard the relationships with their all male study partners as the approach that leads them to understand something beyond themselves, God's will. The rabbis attempt to erase any erotic feelings between Jonathan and David and instead create an eternal love where there is "nothing to disappoint, no rise and fall of attraction, in short, no hot desire and deflating climax to make love volatile."<sup>120</sup>

In addition to the emotions and feelings expressed by Jonathan and David, their actions also illustrate the special bond that the two create during their time together. This next section of the chapter will examine these actions in order to further grasp the complexity of their relationship. Jonathan's first act occurs immediately after meeting David: he strips down and offers his clothing and weapons to David. Earlier in this paper,<sup>121</sup> these garments were connected to similar pieces of clothing worn by royalty and those in the priesthood; Jonathan's undressing was shown to be a symbolic transfer of power to David.

Although the stripping of clothes is viewed as an expression of their political relationship, this complex act is more than just a power transfer. Only in a couple of specific instances is a *מעיל* (cloak) provided to a biblical figure: Moses clothes Aaron (Exodus 29:5); Hannah, Samuel's mother, makes a cloak for him to wear (I Samuel 2:19); and God disrobes kings and covers them in trembling (Ezekiel 26:16). There are no examples in the Tanakh of a king dressing a future ruler in a *מעיל* (cloak), instead only those who are closest to an individual clothe him. Earlier, in I Samuel 17:38-39 Saul

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<sup>120</sup> Greenberg, 99-100.

<sup>121</sup> See the discussion about these garments being connected to royalty and priesthood in chapter one, p. 15.

attempts to dress David, but his *מִד* (tunic) is unable to fit David, while Jonathan's various pieces of clothing and weapons fit David perfectly. These examples from the Tanakh illustrate that Jonathan's undressing could be more than just a symbolic abdication of the throne. Instead, these examples demonstrate the intimacy of Jonathan's clothing of David.

The medieval commentator Radak agrees with this assessment and states that this very act illustrates Jonathan's love for David.

**וַיִּתְּפֹשֶׁט יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת הַמַּעִיל...**...ואמר בלשון התפעל כי ברצון גדול  
ובאהבה רבה התפשט בגדיו ונתנם לו:

**Jonathan took off the cloak...**Here it is said in the language of *hitpa'el*, for a great will and a great love. [Jonathan] takes off his clothes and gives them to [David].<sup>122</sup>

Radak explains that the Tanakh does not employ an ordinary verb form to describe Jonathan's undressing, but instead a *hitpa'el*, a reflexive/interactive verb form, displays Jonathan's great love and devotion for David. Jonathan's first act conveys a feeling of closeness that he shares with David, since he provides clothing in a loving fashion normally reserved just for parents and siblings.

Jonathan is an individual who works undercover and plots his tactics carefully to help David escape from his father. In I Samuel 20:12 it says:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן אֶל-דָּוִד ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי-אֶחָקֹר אֶת-אָבִי  
כָּעַתָּה | מָחָר הַשְּׁלִישִׁית וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב אֶל-דָּוִד וְלֹא-אֶזְכָּר  
אֵלַיְךָ וְגַלִּיתִי אֶת-אֲזָנְךָ:

Then Jonathan said to David. "By the Lord, the God of Israel! I will sound out my father at this time tomorrow, [or] on the third day; and if [his response] is favorable for David, I will send a message to you at once and disclose it to you.

<sup>122</sup> Radak about I Samuel 18:4.

The commentary of Metzudat Tziyon explains that the words *כִּי־אֶחְקֹר אֶת־אָבִי* “I will sound out my father” utilize language of investigation and inquiry.<sup>123</sup> In addition, Rashi and Isaiah from Trani play with verses 12 and 13 to show that Jonathan will only send a messenger to David if he is not in trouble; Jonathan sees to it that he will personally deliver the bad news to David.<sup>124</sup> Jonathan watches out for David, tells David the secrets which he hears, and covertly takes in information to bring him to safety.

In addition, Jonathan also defends David’s honor by speaking out against Saul’s malicious and hurtful words. In I Samuel 19:4 it says, *וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוֹנָתָן בְּדוֹד טוֹב אֶל־שָׁאֵל* “So Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul.” According to the commentary Metzudat Tziyon, Jonathan tells Saul about David’s merits and how he behaves as a good person.<sup>125</sup> While commenting on a similar verse, Isaiah from Trani believes Jonathan’s role to be that of communicator: Jonathan speaks for David since David is unable to express his allegiance to Saul personally.<sup>126</sup>

Jonathan also supports David by protecting his identity and location from outsiders. At the end of chapter 20, Jonathan arrives to David’s hiding place to tell him of Saul’s death decree. The commentator Radak illustrates the approach Jonathan uses to protect David’s whereabouts:

**קם מאצל הנגב** – כתרגומו קם מסט' אבן אתא דלקביל דרומ' כלומר כי דוד היה נסתר אצל האבן לצד דרומה של אבן כמו שאמר וישבת אצל האבן האזל ויונתן שם למטרה האבן לצד צפונה שלא יראה הנע' את דוד בלקטו החצים :

**Rise from by the Negeb.** Like the targum says: “[David] rose to be near the rock, in order to be placed towards the south.” As it says, because David was hiding near the stone, to the south side

<sup>123</sup> Metzudat Tziyon about I Samuel 20:12.

<sup>124</sup> Rashi about I Samuel 20:12-13 and Isaiah from Trani about I Samuel 20:13.

<sup>125</sup> Metzudat Tziyon about I Samuel 19:4.

<sup>126</sup> Isaiah from Trani about I Samuel 20:12

of the stone, like it says, **stay close to the Ezel stone** (v. 20:19). And Jonathan was there at the location of the stone, to the right side, in order that the young boy did not see David as he collected the arrows.<sup>127</sup>

Jonathan understands that the servant boy who collects the arrows could inform his father of David's location. By standing in between David and the servant, Jonathan protects David's identity from being leaked to Saul. Jonathan looks after David throughout this narrative, by speaking out against his father and by hiding David's identity and whereabouts from others.

The commentators also articulate the idea that Jonathan causes harm to himself, carried out through divine means, by associating with David. In verses 20:12-13, Jonathan explains that he will send for David after he hears the bad news from his father and if he does not יִסֵּף וְכֹחַ לַיהוָה לַיהוֹנָתָן וְכֹחַ “May the Lord do thus to Jonathan and more so...” Isaiah from Trani believes that Jonathan curses himself, for if he does not send for David after hearing the bad news, he will be punished by the Divine.<sup>128</sup> Gersonides picks up this same idea when looking at I Samuel 20:16, וַיִּכְרֹת יְהוֹנָתָן עִם־בֵּית דָּוִד וּבִקֵּשׁ יְהוָה מִיַּד אֹיְבֵי דָוִד: “Thus has Jonathan covenanted with the house of David; and may the Lord requite the enemies of David!”

וַחֲנָה כִּרְתַּת יְהוֹנָתָן גַּם כֵּן בְּרִית עִם בֵּית דָּוִד ר"ל שֶׁאֵין בְּרִיתוֹ עִם דָּוִד  
לְבַד אֲבָל עִם בֵּית דָּוִד בְּכֻלָּם לְשִׁמְרָם מֵהָרַע כְּפִי הַיְכוּלָת וְקִלְלָת  
יְהוֹנָתָן עֲצָמוֹ אִם יַעֲבֹר עַל זֶה הַבְּרִית לְבַגּוֹד בְּדָוִד וּבְבֵיתוֹ וְאָמַר  
שֶׁהֲשִׁי יִבְקֹשׁ מִיַּד אֹיְבֵי דָוִד וַיִּפְרַע מֵהֶם אִם יִבְגּוֹד בְּזֶה הַבְּרִית:

And behold Jonathan also cut a covenant with **the house of David**. It wants to say: that it is not just a covenant with David alone, but with the house of David in its entirety, for he should according to his ability protect them from harm. Jonathan curses himself if he breaches this covenant and deceives David and his house. For he said that God, the One Who is Blessed, will exact

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<sup>127</sup> Radak about I Samuel 20:41.

<sup>128</sup> Isaiah from Trani about I Samuel 20:12.

penalty from the enemies of David and punish them, if they betray this covenant.<sup>129</sup>

The Tanakh expresses the view that all enemies of David will be reprimanded by the Eternal, but Ralbag broadens this punishment to include Jonathan as well. If Jonathan revokes his covenant with the house of David, he will also cause a curse to be placed upon his own head. Jonathan foregoes his own safety by cutting this covenant because he cares about David and his future success.

Although the medieval commentators state that Jonathan defends and plans, transfers his clothing, and causes harm to himself, the Babylonian Talmud suggests that Jonathan does not do enough to assist David in his escape from Saul.

אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי יוסי בן קסמא גדולה לגימה שהרחיקה שתי משפחות מישראל שנאמר +דברים כ"ג+ על דבר אשר לא קדמו אתכם בלחם ובמים ורבי יוחנן דידה אמר מרחקת את הקרובים ומקרבת את הרחוקים ומעלמת עינים מן הרשעים ומשרה שכינה על נביאי הבעל ושגתו עולה זדון מרחקת את הקרובים מעמון ומואב ומקרבת את הרחוקים מיתרו דאמר רבי יוחנן בשכר +שמות ב'+ קראן לו ויאכל לחם זכו בני בניו וישבו בלשכת הגזית שנאמר +דברי הימים א' ב'+ ומשפחות סופרים יושבי יעבץ תרעתים שמעתים שוכתים המה הקינים הבאים מחמת אבי בית רכב וכתוב התם +שופטים א'+ ובני קיני חתן משה עלו מעיר התמרים את בני יהודה מדבר יהודה אשר בנגב ערד וילך וישב את העם ומעלמת עינים מן הרשעים ממכה ומשרה שכינה על נביאי הבעל מחבירו של עדו הנביא דכתיב +מלכים א' י"ג+ והי הם יושבים אל השלחן והי דבר ה' אל הנביא אשר השיבו ושגתה עולה זדון דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב אלמלי הלוחו יהונתן לדוד שתי ככרות לחם לא נהרגה נוב עיר חכהנים ולא נטרד דואג האדמי ולא נהרג שאול ושלושת בניו

Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma: Great is eating or drinking, that removing it, [affected] two of the families from Israel. As it says, **No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of the Lord, because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt (Deuteronomy 23:4-5).** And Rabbi Yohanan said in his own name: **"It removes the close ones, and draws near the far ones, and raises up God's eyes from the evil ones, and**

<sup>129</sup> Ralbag about I Samuel 20:14.

**causes the divine spirit upon the prophets of Baal, and one's inadvertent error raises up to conscious sin."**

**It removes the close ones.** From Ammon and Moab.

**And draws near the far ones.** As a reward for Jethro saying: **Ask him in to break bread** (Exodus 2:20), the sons of his sons merited and sat in the chamber of Hewn Stone, as it says: **The families of the scribes that dwelt at Jabez: the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites; these are the Kenites who came from Hammath, father of the house of Rechab** (I Chronicles 2:55). As it is written, **The descendants of the Kenite, the father-in-law of Moses, went up with the Judites from the City of Palms to the wilderness of Judah; and they went and settled among the people in the Negev of Arad** (Judges 1:16).

**Raises up God's eyes from the evil ones.** From Micah.

**And causes the divine spirit upon the prophets of Baal.** . From the friend of Ido the prophet. As it says, **While they were sitting at the table, the word of the Lord came to the prophet who had brought him back** (I Kings 13:20).

**One's inadvertent error raises up to conscious sin.** Rav Judah said in the name of Rav: If only Jonathan had supplied David with two loaves of bread, Nov, the city of Priests would not have been killed. Doeg the Edomite would not have been banished, and Saul and his three sons would not have been killed.<sup>130</sup>

Rabbi Yohanan addresses five different experiences of eating and drinking that relate to biblical characters. He explains that the belief that "one's inadvertent error raises up conscious sin" relates to Jonathan's failure to provide David with two loaves of bread before he escaped. If Jonathan had supplied David with bread; David would not have gone to the city of Nov to ask for assistance; this would have saved the priests of Nov from being slaughtered by Saul; which would have prevented Saul and Jonathan's death via the hand of God. Jonathan's inability to supply David with food, leads to his own death. Jonathan is perceived as one who does not do enough to help his friend and this failure causes harm to himself and his family.

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<sup>130</sup> Sanhedrin 103b-104a.

David also performs specific actions at the end of the narrative that assist the reader in understanding his relationship with Jonathan. After hearing the news that Saul and Jonathan died in battle, David tears his clothes and with his men laments and fasts.

וַיִּחַזַק דָּוִד בְּבִגְדָיו וַיִּקְרַעם וְגַם כָּל־הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ: וַיִּסְפְּדוּ  
וַיִּבְכּוּ וַיִּצְמְדוּ עַד־הָעֶרֶב עַל־שָׁאוּל וְעַל־יְהוֹנָתָן בְּנוֹ וְעַל־עַם ה' <sup>131</sup>  
וְעַל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי נָפְלוּ בַּחֶרֶב:

David took hold of his clothes and rent them, and so did all the men with him. They lamented and wept, and they fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the soldiers of the Lord and the House of Israel who had fallen by the sword..<sup>131</sup>

Ralbag discusses the manner in which David learns about the deaths and destruction of Saul, Jonathan, and the Nation of Israel.

**אשר נס העם מן המלחמה** - ספר מקרה הרע שקרה בהדרגה כראוי כדי שלא יגיע ההפעלות לשמוע כי אם בהדרגה כי זה ממה שיישיר אל סבל הרע ההוא בזולת הפעלות גדול מאד והמשל כי מי שימות אוהבו בזולת חולי קודם ידאג לו יותר ממה שידאג אם היה לו חולי קודם ויעתק אל הרע בהדרגה ולזה ספר בזה המקום ניסת העם ראשונה ואחר זה ספר מיתת קצתם יותר קשה מהניסה ואחר ספר מיתת ראשי העם בהם שאול ויהונתן בנו שהוא יותר קשה ממיתת העם:

**That the troops had fled from the battlefield.** [David] was told gradually of the bad events that happened, in order that the events were not heard all at once. This is the way he sang about the evil grief and the very great actions. Parable: A person whose loved one dies, who was not previously sick. The person worries about the loved one more than if the loved one was previously sick and arrives gradually to death. To this it addresses our story: First, the test of the nation and afterwards he was told of the death of a small part of them---it is more difficult than the test. Finally, he was told of the death of the head of the nation. Saul and Jonathan his son, and this is even more difficult than the death of the nation.<sup>132</sup>

Ralbag shows that David obtains news about the battle with the Philistines very gradually. First, he is told about the tests of the nation, afterwards he learns about the deaths of some of the men, and finally he hears that Saul and Jonathan are dead. Ralbag

<sup>131</sup> II Samuel 1:11-12.

<sup>132</sup> Ralbag about II Samuel 1:4.

explains that David needs to learn these pieces of information gradually because it would have been harder for him to find out everything at once. Thus, David hears the most difficult piece of news last: that Jonathan has passed away.

The Babylonian Talmud addresses David's mourning in two separate *sugiyot* in Mo'ed Katan. The first example in Mo'ed Katan 22b illustrates the difference between mourning for a parent and grieving for all other relatives and friends.

על כל המתים כולן - קורע טפה, על אביו ועל אמו - עד שיגלה את לבו. אמר רבי אבהו: מאי קרא - +שמואל ב' א' + ויחזק דוד בבגדיו ויקרעם ואין אחיזה פחות מטפה.

For all deceased: one rends [a garment] the length of a *tefach* [a hand-breadth of four fingers joined together]. For one's father or mother [one rends] until he exposes his heart. Rabbi Abahu said: What is the verse [that gives evidence to this thought]? **David took hold of his clothes and he rent them...** (II Samuel 1:11). And "taking hold" does not [describe] less than a *tefach*.

David's mourning technique is the paradigm used to describe the mourning customs for all individuals who are not one's parents. By using this story as evidence for *kriyah*, this *sugiyah* explicitly states that a personal relationship exists between David, Saul, and Jonathan, and also reveals the impact of their death on David.

Another example, found in Mo'ed Katan 26a,<sup>133</sup> discusses the approach one uses to mourn for a communal leader:

נשיא ואב בית דין ושמועות הרעות מנלן? - דכתיב +שמואל ב' א' + ויחזק דוד בבגדיו ויקרעם וגם כל האנשים אשר אתו ויספדו ויבכו ויצמו עד הערב על שאול ועל יהונתן בנו ועל עם ה' ועל בית ישראל כי נפלו בחרב. שאול - זה נשיא, יהונתן - זה אב בית דין, על עם ה' ועל בית ישראל - אלו שמועות הרעות. אמר ליה רב בר שבא לרב כהנא: ואימא עד דהוו כולהו! - אמר ליה: על על הפסיק הענין.

A *Nasi* (President), an *Av Bet Din* (Head of the Court), and hearing bad news, from where [do we find a proof text of how to mourn]? It is written: **David took hold of his clothes and he**

<sup>133</sup> See also Rambam Hilchot Evel 9:6; Rif about Mo'ed Katan 15b; and Radak about II Samuel 1:11.

rent them, and so did all the men with him. They lamented and wept, and they fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the soldiers of the Lord and the House of Israel who had fallen by the sword (II Samuel 1:11-12). Saul: this is the *Nasi*, Jonathan: this is *Av Bet Din*, the soldiers of the Lord and the House of Israel: this is the bad news. Rav Bar Shaba said to Rav Kahana: But does one not mourn unless all of these things happen together? He said to him: "over." "Over" explains the matter.

Unlike the other example found above, this *sugiyah* presents information about the ways in which a community is required to mourn the passing of a *Nasi* (president), an *Av Bet Din* (Head of the Court), or when hearing bad news, i.e. a catastrophe. In addition, the rabbis need an explanation for why David would tear his clothes and go through the acts of mourning for non-relatives. By making Saul the *Nasi* and Jonathan the *Av Bet Din*, the rabbis find a suitable reason for why David would tear his clothes.

Finally, in the last section of this *sugiyah*, Rav Kahana explains that one should express acts of lament even if these deaths occur separately. He states that the word *by* (over) occurs before the name of each of the individuals in the biblical text. This shows that David mourns separately for Saul, Jonathan, and the soldiers of the Lord/Nation of Israel. These two passages from Mo'ed Katan offer two reasons for David's bereavement: 1. mourning for a close friend or relative and 2. lamenting the death of a communal leader. These two passages complement each other by giving different reasons, both personal and political, for David's grief. They explain that David mourns for Jonathan because he lost a communal leader, a political acquaintance, and a close friend.

In addition to the tearing of clothes, David also expresses his grief by singing a lament קִינָה קִינָה at the end of II Samuel chapter one. As articulated earlier,<sup>134</sup> Steven Weitzman believes this lament occurs for political reasons; David sings to show the people that he has no role in Jonathan and Saul's death. Weitzman sees this story as a "type-scene" that illustrates David's psychological downfall as a leader of Israel. The other "type-scenes," the deaths of Absalom and his young child, are also viewed by Weitzman as examples of David's political mistakes.

But, one can also comprehend the mourning scenes slightly differently from Weitzman's approach. David does not mourn for Absalom and his young child solely for political reasons, for he also expresses feelings of grief after the death of his two sons, who meant so much to him. Why should the death of Jonathan be any different? "צַר־לִי עָלֶיךָ אָחִי יְהוֹנָתָן נְעֻמָּתָ לִי מְאֹד נִפְלְאַתָּה אֲהַבְתָּךְ לִי מֵאַהֲבַת נָשִׁים: "I grieve for you, My brother Jonathan, You were most dear to me. Your love was wonderful to me, More than the love of women." Just as the Talmud states that David tears his clothes for the death of a political acquaintance and a close friend, so too can the singing of this lament occur for both political and personal reasons.

In the biblical text, there are also instances in which David and Jonathan perform various actions together. After telling David about Saul's wish to kill him, Jonathan and David have an emotion filled encounter before parting ways.

הִנֵּזֶר בָּא וְדָוִד קָם מֵאֶצֶל הַנֶּגֶב וַיִּפֹּל לְאַפָּיו אֶרֶצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ שְׁלֹשׁ  
פְּעָמִים וַיִּשְׁקוּ אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וַיִּכְפוּ אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ עַד־דָּוֶד הִגְדִּיל:

When the boy got there, David emerged from his concealment by the Negeb. He flung himself face down on the ground and

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<sup>134</sup> This discussion on political aspects of David's lament occurs in chapter one, p. 16.

bowed low three times. They kissed each other and wept together; David wept the longer.<sup>135</sup>

The kissing experience is powerful and shows how overwhelming this moment is for both Jonathan and David. Throughout the Tanakh, kissing occurs during emotionally charged meetings or partings. For example, just as Isaac is about to pass away, he blesses his son Jacob, who kisses him (Genesis 27:26-27). In two other instances, long lost brothers Esau and Jacob as well as Aaron and Moses meet and kiss after not seeing each other for many years (Genesis 33:4 and Exodus 4:27). Adversaries also kiss one another before powerful meetings, such as when Joab pretends to kiss Amasa, but instead puts a sword through his belly or when David kisses his son and rival Absalom (II Samuel 20:9, 14:33).

In addition, there are also examples found throughout the Tanakh, in which individuals kiss and cry simultaneously. As the only experience between sexes, Jacob meets Rachel, kisses her, and begins weeping (Genesis 29:11). Joseph both kisses and wails after seeing his brothers and when his father passes away (Genesis 45:15, 50:1). Naomi kisses and begins crying after saying goodbye to Orpah and Ruth (Ruth 1:9, 1:14). In each one of these instances, the major characters are overwhelmed by both emotion and exhaustion; they break down after experiencing the most horrific or incredible moments of their lives. In each of these instances, one person kisses the other. Only in I Samuel 20:41 is there an equal rush of emotion for both of the major protagonists. Jonathan and David kiss and weep together, for they view their parting as insurmountable.

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<sup>135</sup> I Samuel 20:41.

The commentators also address the phrase עַד־דָּוִד הַגָּדִיל “David wept the longer” (I Samuel 20:41). Radak, Joseph Caro, Metzudat David, and Joseph Kara all explain that the phrase means: “David cried greater than Jonathan.”<sup>136</sup> Ralbag states that not only does David wail more than Jonathan, but he goes too far in his weeping:

וַיִּבְכוּ אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ עַד דָּוִד הַגָּדִיל - רִי"ל שְׂדוּד הַגָּדִיל לִבְכוֹי יוֹתֵר מִן הָרֵאוּי לוֹ לְמָה שֶׁהָיָה בּוֹ מִן הַפָּחַד מִפְּנֵי שְׂאוּל וְלֹא מֵהָרַי יְהוֹנָתָן לְשַׁלּוּחַ אֶת דָּוִד וּנִפְרְדּוּ אִישׁ מֵעַל אַחִיו :

**They kissed each other and wept together; David wept the longer.** It wants to say that David cried greater than was becoming of him because he feared Saul. Jonathan quickly sent David away and they separated each man from his brother.

Although Ralbag explains that Saul is the reason for David's weeping, the commentary Metzudat David disagrees with this assessment and states that their separation from one another causes this emotional outburst:

אֶת רֵעֵהוּ - עִם רֵעֵהוּ עַל כִּי הָיָה קָשָׁה לָחֵם הַפְּרִידָה :

**His neighbor.** With his neighbor, for it was difficult for them to separate.

According to the medieval commentators, David's crying exceeds Jonathan's and David goes too far in his weeping. David is upset about Saul's threat, but also expresses emotion because of the difficult separation from Jonathan.

The last section of this chapter will examine Jonathan and David's covenants. Although most modern scholars believe these covenants are strictly political agreements, there are many characteristics of these *britot* that are disconnected from politics. For example, as discussed in chapter one, there is a predicament in how one translates the first covenant found in I Samuel 18:3:<sup>137</sup> וַיִּקְרָת יְהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד בְּרִית בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתוֹ כְּנַפְשׁוֹ. This

<sup>136</sup> Radak, Joseph Caro, Metzudat David, and Joseph Kara about I Samuel 20:41.

<sup>137</sup> For more information about the difficulty of translating this covenant, see the discussion from chapter one, p. 10.

sentence, as it is found in the Tanakh, is grammatically flawed due to a disagreement between the singular verb and the multiple nouns. The construction of this *brit* is a challenge because the reader does not know who makes the covenant with whom; does Jonathan cut this *brit* by himself or is this a mutual covenant that Jonathan and David create together?

In addition, this is one of only a few covenants that occur alongside the word האל הנאמן שמר הברית והחסד (love). Deuteronomy 7:9 says that God is האל הנאמן שמר הברית והחסד “the steadfast God who keeps a covenant faithfully with those who love God and keep God’s commandments.” In Isaiah 56:6, God says to foreigners לאהבה את-שם ה' להיות לו לעבדים כל-שמר שבת מחללו ומחזיקים בבריתי והביאותים לאהבה את-שם ה' להיות לו לעבדים “love the name of the Lord, to be God’s servants---all who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it, and who hold fast to My covenant---I will bring them to my sacred mount.” While in Isaiah 61:8 God says, כי אני ה' אהב משפט שני גזל בעולה, ונתתי פצלם באמת וברית עולם אכרות להם “For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery with a burnt offering, I will pay them their wages faithfully, and make a covenant with them for all time.” All of these examples combine the words *ahav* + *brit* and address covenants made between the Divine and the Israelite people. The contract between Jonathan and David in I Samuel 18:3 is the one time two human beings make a covenant with each other using the word *ahavah*.

The examples above also explain what God expects from the people when a covenant is created. If they commit to doing justice, keeping the commandments, and guarding the Sabbath, God will uphold a *brit* with the people. Jonathan and David's first *brit* is not based upon any specific requirements that must be fulfilled. Shimon Bakon

explains that usually terms and conditions exist in a pact, but here there are none. Bakon states that Jonathan gives David his clothing, for he is captivated by David's courage, his faith in God, and his musical and poetic talents. According to Bakon, Jonathan elevates David into an "unconditional friendship" by offering him his princely clothes.<sup>138</sup>

The covenant of I Samuel 20 is a renewal of the first *brit* of I Samuel 18 because of David's great distress and fear for his life. Bakon explains that the second covenant is quite different from the first; it is a mutual pact in which the two parties have equal status, even if it is not explicitly stated. In addition to Jonathan's promise to help David, another clause is added in which David is sworn to protect Jonathan's descendants.<sup>139</sup> Bakon's explanation agrees with Radak's commentary to verse 20:42: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן לְדָוִד לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ שְׁנֵינוּ אֶתְּהָיוּ בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה "Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace! For we two have sworn to each other in the name of the Lord." Radak explains that the term "we two" is a duplicate phrase that strengthens the mutuality of this agreement.<sup>140</sup>

Katharine Doob Sakenfeld states that Jonathan and David's narrative does not fit neatly into her understanding of the two types of *hesed* (loyalty).<sup>141</sup> In this story, David requests *hesed* from Jonathan (20:8) because of the covenant that already exists (I Samuel 18:3). But, as seen above, Jonathan also requests *hesed* of David (20:14-15) to protect his loved ones, in a role reversal. Doob Sakenfeld explains that these two examples of *hesed* are an anomaly because David and Jonathan's relationship is quite intimate, but is

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<sup>138</sup> Bakon, 148.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 148-149.

<sup>140</sup> Radak about I Samuel 20:42.

<sup>141</sup> For further information on Doob Sakenfeld's understanding of *hesed*, see discussion of this topic in chapter one, p. 11.

also filled with many covenants (18:3, 20:8, 20:16, and 23:18).<sup>142</sup> These *britot* alongside *hesed* emphasize the ambiguous nature of David and Jonathan's relationship. They also clarify the mutuality of their covenant-making by showing that each individual has specific actions that must be completed to assist the other.

David Jobling disagrees with the statement that Jonathan and David create a mutual covenant in I Samuel 20. Jobling explains that David's addition of "your servant" in 20:8: וַעֲשֵׂתָ חֶסֶד עַל־עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְבְרִית ה' הִבַּאתָ אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ עִמָּךְ "Deal faithfully with **your servant**, since you have taken **your servant** into a covenant of the Lord with you." suggests that this is an unequal covenant, even if Jonathan wishes to create a mutual pact. Jobling even says, "David seems to be happiest relying on Jonathan as a powerful protector and suspicious of Jonathan's striving towards mutuality."<sup>143</sup> While Jonathan wishes to create a truly equal relationship by expressing his love and by providing David with his royal clothes, David uneasily points out that Jonathan is still in charge.

The final covenant, found in I Samuel 23:17-18, occurs during Jonathan and David's last interaction with one another.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִי אֶל־יִתְיָדָא כִּי לֹא תִמְצָאָךְ יָד שְׂאוּל אָבִי וְאַתָּה תִּמְלֹךְ  
עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאַנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה־לְךָ לְמִשְׁנָה וְגַם־שְׂאוּל אָבִי יָדַע כֵּן: וַיִּכְרְתוּ  
שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּרִית לִפְנֵי ה' וַיָּשֶׁב דָּוִד בְּחֶרֶשׁ וַיְהִינָתָן הָלֶךְ לְבֵיתוֹ:

[Jonathan] said to him, "Do not be afraid: the hand of my father Saul will never touch you. You are going to be king over Israel and I shall be second to you: and even my father Saul knows this is so." And the two of them entered into a pact before the Lord. David remained in Horesh, and Jonathan went home.

Bakon explains that David is in exile from Saul and his men when the covenant is renewed for the final time. Jonathan arrives to strengthen David and to give him

<sup>142</sup> Doob Sakenfeld, 197-198.

<sup>143</sup> Jobling, 163.

permission to be king over Israel; he encourages David and assures him that God will protect him.<sup>144</sup> Yaron Peleg believes that there is symmetry among the three covenants that occur throughout this narrative. In 18:3, Jonathan initiates this pact for he loved David as himself; in 20:8, David renews the covenant by reminding Jonathan of their past commitment; while it is only in the last example in 23:18 that the feelings seem to be mutual.<sup>145</sup> David Jobling agrees and states that only at this last meeting are Jonathan and David able to make a covenant together.<sup>146</sup> Even the commentary Metzudat Tziyon explains that “I shall be second to you” means that there will be two rulers.<sup>147</sup> In their final moments together, the two create a covenant that expresses their mutuality and equality as friends, allies, and political leaders.

The aspects of equality and mutuality that are found in these covenants, as well as David and Jonathan’s expression of emotion and their physical actions illustrate that this relationship is more than just a political association. From their first meeting, until David’s mournful lament, ambiguities exist throughout this story that point out their personal connection. The two bond with one another because of their similar life journeys and home environments. They express emotions such as love and affection to one another that illustrate the profound importance of this bond even when trouble brews in the palace. They act: Jonathan by plotting, causing harm to himself, and fasting; David by mourning and singing a lament. Together they prove to themselves and their community that caring for one another means more to them than anything else. Jonathan and David attempt to create a mutual relationship, a union that is about compromise and

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<sup>144</sup> Bakon, 149.

<sup>145</sup> Peleg, 171-189.

<sup>146</sup> Jobling, 164.

<sup>147</sup> Metzudat Tziyon about I Samuel 23:17.

assistance, rather than dominance and dictatorship. David and Jonathan's relationship is more than just a political relationship between a rising leader and the crown prince; instead, it is a true partnership that illustrates a close, familial, and personal connection.

## Chapter Five: Homoeroticism in Jonathan and David's Narrative

In recent years, Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgender people have found Jonathan and David's story compelling and have stressed the beautiful nature of their same-sex relationship. Although most modern authors still view Jonathan and David's relationship as strictly political, in recent years a select number of biblical scholars have addressed the homoeroticism found throughout this narrative. Since this is such a new field of study and the authors often use different evidence from the narrative to depict this homoeroticism, there is not much overlap of sources to refute or verify their points of view. In any case, this chapter will examine these sources to address the homoeroticism found throughout this narrative.

The chapter will begin by briefly introducing current thinking about homosexuality in the Bible and by examining evidence of same-sex relationships found in the Ancient Near East. In turn, this paper will connect David and Jonathan's story to other homoerotic tales found in Greek and rabbinic writings. Finally, the chapter will conclude by reexamining certain terms, emotions, and actions which have been discussed previously. Instead of looking at these terms strictly from a political or interpersonal perspective, this chapter will reexamine these ideas in light of the homoerotic ideas put forth by these contemporary writers.

Certain modern scholars state clearly that David and Jonathan's relationship is not homoerotic.<sup>148</sup> Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli believe that these scholars often refute

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<sup>148</sup> See Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 200-201; Doob Sakenfeld, 201; Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, "Saul, David, and Jonathan—The Story of a Triangle? A Contribution to the Issue of Homosexuality in

the homoeroticism of Jonathan and David's relationship by addressing the biblical prohibitions against homosexuality. The two authors explain, however, that the laws from Leviticus do not express disdain for gay relationships.<sup>149</sup> וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב אֶת-זָכָר מִשְׁכַּבִּי אִשָּׁה תוֹעֵבָה עֲשׂוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence." מוֹת יוֹמָתוֹ דְּמִיָּהֶם בָּם: "If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing; they shall be put to death—their bloodguilt is upon them."<sup>150</sup> According to Schroer and Staubli, these prescriptive regulations from Leviticus are from a much earlier time and do not match the social reality that existed when the bible was written. This idea is similar to the prohibition of making a graven image; the Bible prohibits the making of graven images, yet pictorial art is found throughout Ancient Israel.<sup>151</sup>

In addition, certain stories such as Genesis 19 (Sodom and Gomorrah) and Judges 19 (the violence of Gibeah) are also utilized by certain scholars to describe the Bible's condemnation of homosexuality. Schroer and Staubli show that the biblical writers included these laws and stories not to denounce homosexuality, but to prohibit men from satisfying their sexual desire via violent homosexual acts. According to their analysis, nowhere in the Bible is there condemnation of a gay partnership based upon love and equality; instead, the Bible rebukes brutal homosexual rape. Since, there is no

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the First Testament." In Althalya Brenner, ed., *Saul and Kings* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 2000), 22-23.

<sup>149</sup> For more information about the authors' understanding of the laws from Leviticus see Schroer and Staubli, 23-26.

<sup>150</sup> Leviticus 18:20, 20:13.

<sup>151</sup> See Exodus 20:4 and Deuteronomy 5:8.

prohibition against loving same-sex relationships, these laws and stories can not be utilized to refute a homoerotic reading of Jonathan and David's relationship.

Schroer and Staubli cite evidence from the Ancient Near East proving that various societies showed tolerance towards homosexual couples.<sup>152</sup> For example, in Egypt under the Ramessids in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, homosexuality is not named as a sin in a list of sexual transgressions. The two scholars conclude that homosexuality was tolerated and even rare gay relationships occurred during this time. In addition, Schroer and Staubli studied various pictorial documents such as tomb paintings and wall carvings that illustrate the existence of loving and devoted same-sex couples in ancient Egypt. In one illustration, a same-sex couple is depicted in the tomb of a high ranking servant during the time of the New Kingdom (c. 1365 BCE). The wall carving shows a banquet, where various married couples are depicted on the right side, but on the left end are two noblemen who are seen holding hands.

In another example, two men, Ne-anhkhnun and Khumhotep, were buried together in a tomb during the year 2350 BCE. The wall carvings depict scenes of the two men holding hands, embracing, and having their noses touch, which is understood to be a kiss and is only found in tombs of married couples or mothers and daughters. Although the two men were married to women and had their own children, these wall carvings illustrate a homoerotic relationship which was honored by their society. Schroer and Staubli believe that these examples illustrate the acceptance of same-sex couples in Egyptian society, but also show that these men were unable to receive the same status as married couples.

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<sup>152</sup> For more on the conversation on law, art, and literature, see Schroer and Staubli 31-35.

Works of literature from the Ancient Near East also depict homoerotic relationships. For example, the *Gilgamesh Epic*, an ancient Mesopotamian work, describes the friendship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Throughout the narrative, Gilgamesh dreams of making love to Enkidu, the two embrace, touch one another, and kiss. Furthermore, Gilgamesh also mourns for Enkidu after his death:

[My friend, whom I loved so dearly] who went with me through every hardship, Enkidu, whom I loved so dearly who went with me through every hardship, has succumbed to the fate of humankind...<sup>153</sup>

The language found in this mourning scene is quite similar to the words David speaks to Jonathan. Schroer and Staubli explain that the writers of the Jonathan and David narrative were probably quite familiar with the *Gilgamesh Epic* since a fragment was found in Meggido.

Schroer and Staubli also demonstrate that homoeroticism existed throughout the Mediterranean basin, especially in paedophilian relationships (same-sex relationships between student and teacher) that were found mostly in the military and in the academy. An example of this type of homoerotic love occurs in the *Iliad*, where Achilles and Patroclus' relationship is lovingly shown as a comradeship of faithfulness. It was understood in ancient Greece to be an erotic friendship in which Achilles, the younger individual, loves Patroclus, the older man who was a teacher and lover. Although not expressed in other sources, Schroer and Staubli believe there is a connection between these ideas from the *Iliad* and the Book of Samuel, for "David [is] at one time in the role

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<sup>153</sup> See Schroer and Staubli, 35. The *Gilgamesh Epic* was translated by the original authors following TUAT III, p. 665. Cf. the repetitive occurrence of the motive in *ANET* p. 89-92

of (Saul's) lover and, at another, in that of the friend who experiences the favor of (Jonathan's) faithful friendship."<sup>154</sup>

Throughout the Ancient Near East, homoerotic relationships are depicted in wall carvings, paintings, and works of literature. These works of art and culture of ancient Egypt, Babylonia, and Greece show that these societies were tolerant of same-sex relationships. In addition, these societies traded and had relations with the Israelite people and had a certain amount of influence on Israelite society. Indeed, certain aspects of the David and Jonathan narrative mirror these societies including the idea of a paedophilian relationship, the mourning found in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, and possibly the art and cultural norms practiced in Egypt.

Steven Greenberg also discusses the effect of Greek culture on the rabbinic interpretation and comprehension of same-sex love. He explains that the rabbis were influenced by the Greek philosophical idea that the love of two men was more noble and longer lasting than the love of a man and woman. Greenberg states that in antiquity, the rabbinic world was filled with homophilia, for men spent all day studying with one another in the rabbinic academies.<sup>155</sup> The rabbis who studied in *chavrutot* (pairs) created partnerships that centered on study and intellect. These were portrayed as intimate relationships in *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*: one should acquire a friend with whom one can "eat and drink, read and study, sleep and share secrets of Torah and personal secrets."<sup>156</sup> The rabbis of the Talmud were surrounded by Greek cultural ideas of paedophilia and homophilia, which influenced their understanding of the David and Jonathan narrative.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>155</sup> Greenberg, 100.

<sup>156</sup> See: *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* 8. Translation comes from Greenberg, 100.

Daniel Boyarin also addresses this connection between Greek stories and the Tanakh to later rabbinic writings. Boyarin discusses the Talmudic story<sup>157</sup> of Resh Lakish and Rabbi Yohanan and explains that “the two Rabbis are imagined as a sort of Jewish answer to such archetypical pairs as Achilles and Patroclus on one hand and David and Jonathan on the other.”<sup>158</sup> He comments on a reading by David Halperin stating that this is not just a “friendship,” but a cultural formative heroic friendship which is similar to a comrade-in-arms or companions. The rabbis of the Talmud re-interpret the war-making and homoeroticism of David and Jonathan’s relationship and connect this Resh Lakish and Rabbi Yohanan’s battles over Torah.

Boyarin also sees Rabbi Yohanan’s bereavement as a wanderer who cries out for the loss of his love, as similar to David’s final lament for Jonathan: “I grieve for you, My brother Jonathan, You were very dear to me. Your love was wonderful to me, More than the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, The weapons of war perished!” (II Samuel 1:26-27). Boyarin believes that Yohanan’s lament exemplifies one who desperately misses the man whom he loves.<sup>159</sup> Although Boyarin never states this, one sees that the Talmud creates new meaning out of the biblical story of Jonathan and David. The rabbis move from a comrade-in-arms tale to that of two Torah scholars who love one another. The rabbis of the Talmud re-interpret the homoerotic love of Jonathan and David and adapt this story to fit their times.

According to Steven Greenberg, there are no examples of open homosexual love stories that exist in the Tanakh or in the Talmud; however, instances of homoerotic love

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<sup>157</sup> Bava Metzia 84a

<sup>158</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): 135.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-136.

between two men are evident in a couple of places.<sup>160</sup> Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli agree with this assessment and strongly believe in the importance of seeking out and naming all positive same-sex role models that are found in the Bible.<sup>161</sup> They state that it is natural to see David and Jonathan as these role models because “their story awakens our sympathy.” In order to provide evidence for Jonathan and David’s homoerotic relationship, these other scholars examine ancient examples of homosexuality found in law, art, and literature.

These writers also tackle the various terms, actions, and feelings that in previous chapters were shown to have political or interpersonal meaning. They reexamine these ideas to illustrate the homoerotic nature of Jonathan and David’s relationship. For example, the word *nefesh* is usually translated as “soul.” In I Samuel 18:1 it says: וְנַפְשׁ יְהוֹנָתָן נִקְשְׁרָה בְּנַפְשׁ דָּוִד וַיֶּאֱהָבֵהוּ יְהוֹנָתָן כְּנַפְשׁוֹ “Jonathan’s soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved him as himself.” Schroer and Staubli explain that *nefesh* in this case means a “yearning throat and, in a derivative sense, the craving, drive-like and life-seeking aspects of human existence—such as the survival instinct (Prov. 16:26) or the sex drive (Gen. 34:2-3) and yearning desire.” They explain that Jonathan desires and loves David as his own life existence. This is an erotic love, similar to four occurrences of שְׁאֵהָבָה נַפְשִׁי “the one who my soul loves” (Song of Song 3:1-4).<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Greenberg, 99.

<sup>161</sup> The authors explain that since modern scholarship now believes that the biblical laws against homosexuality relate to forceful acts of rape and not homosexual partnerships, the time has come to search for positive homosexual role models. See Schroer and Staubli, 26.

<sup>162</sup> Schroer and Staubli, 28.

Two other phrases occur during Jonathan and David's initial meeting in I Samuel 18:2: וַיִּקַּח סָאֵל בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְלֹא נָתַן לְשׁוּבָה בֵּית אָבִיו: "Saul took [David] on that day and did not permit him to return to his father's house."<sup>163</sup> The term *lakach* (to take) is often used in the biblical text for the taking of a wife, while *beit aviv* (father's house) addresses the return of a wife to her father's house, only if the husband dies or if there is incompatibility between the members of the new couple.<sup>164</sup> This phrase is filled with innuendo, for just after Jonathan expresses his desire and love for David, Saul "takes" David and will not allow him to return to his "father's house."<sup>165</sup> Directly after David defeats Goliath, Jonathan and Saul are enthralled with his achievements. Jonathan expresses his love verbally while Saul shows his affection for David by taking David as a husband takes a wife.

Two additional terms, found in chapters 19 and 20, convey affection and delight, but are sometimes used to express erotic desire. It says in I Samuel 19:1: וַיְדַבֵּר סָאֵל אֶל-יוֹנָתָן בְּנוֹ וְאֶל-כָּל-עַבְדָּיו לֵהַמִּית אֶת-דָּוִד וַיְהוֹנָתָן בֶּן-סָאֵל חָפֵץ בְּדָוִד מְאֹד: "Saul urged Jonathan his son and to all his servants to kill David. But, Jonathan, the son of Saul, **delighted** very much in David."<sup>166</sup> The phrase חָפֵץ בְּ (delight in) has sexual connotations in Genesis 34:19 (Schechem's sexual delight for Dina) and Deuteronomy 21:14 (when an Israelite warrior no longer delights sexually in a female captive). These phrases address the erotic nature of "delights in" and express Jonathan's yearning desire for David.

<sup>163</sup> This is my translation. JPS states, "Saul took him [into his service] that day and would not let him return to his father's house."

<sup>164</sup> See Genesis 38:11; Leviticus 22:13; Judges 19:2.

<sup>165</sup> Peleg, 180; Schroer and Staubli, 27-28.

<sup>166</sup> This is my translation. JPS translates חָפֵץ בְּ as "fond of."

In I Samuel 20:3, another expression appears as David arrives to ask Jonathan for his support: **וַיִּשָּׁבַע עוֹד דָּוִד וַיֹּאמֶר יְדַע יְדַע אָבִיךָ כִּי־מֵצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ** “David further swore and said: “Your father truly knows **that I found favor in your eye.**”<sup>167</sup> The phrase can be understood as one who favors the other in a political agreement or a superior who shows good will to a lesser ranked individual. Schroer and Staubli state that this phrase never lost its nuance of fondness, for a similar example found in Deuteronomy 24:1 addresses a husband who no longer finds favor with his wife.<sup>168</sup> This expression is more than just political jargon, for it also addresses the love and affection that Jonathan shows David.

As Jonathan approaches Saul, to address David’s future, a storm is unleashed as Saul erupts and attacks Jonathan with vicious words and by throwing a spear:

וַיַּחַר־אַף שָׁאוּל בִּיהוֹנָתָן וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בֶן־נָעֻז הַמִּרְדּוֹת הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־בָחַר אֶתָּה לְבָן־יֹשִׁי לְבָשָׁתָךְ וּלְבָשָׁת עֲרֹנֹת אִמְךָ: כִּי כָל־הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר בָּן־יֹשִׁי חַי עַל־הָאָדָמָה לֹא תִכּוֹן אֶתָּה וּמִלְכֻתָּךְ וְעַתָּה שָׁלַח וְקַח אֹתוֹ אֵלַי כִּי בֶרֶמְזָת הוּא: וַיַּעַן יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־שָׁאוּל אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לָמָּה יוּמָת מֶה עָשָׂה: וַיִּטֹּל שָׁאוּל אֶת־הַחֲנִית עָלָיו לְהַכּוֹתוֹ וַיַּדַּע יְהוֹנָתָן כִּי־כָלָה הוּא מַעַם אָבִיו לְהָמִית אֶת־דָּוִד:

Saul flew into rage against Jonathan. “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!” he shouted. “I know that you side with the son of Jesse—to your shame, and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness! For as long as the son of Jesse lives on earth, neither you nor your kingship will be secure. Now then, have him brought to me, for he is marked for death.” But Jonathan spoke up and said to his father, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” At that, Saul threw his spear at him to strike him down; and Jonathan realized that his father was determined to do away with David.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>167</sup> This is my translation. JPS states, “David swore further, ‘Your father knows well that you are fond of me.’”

<sup>168</sup> For more discussion on *chafetz be* and *mesati chen b'enecha* see Schroer and Staubli, 27-29.

<sup>169</sup> I Samuel 20:30-33.

Steven Greenberg explains that one cannot exclude sexual meaning from these verses; Jonathan's wish to associate with David is both rebellious because of the political consequences, but also because of the shame that he brings to himself and to his mother. Greenberg believes that "mother's nakedness" is not easily understood in this context, but elsewhere in Leviticus it is used to illustrate a sexual violation. Saul is angered, not because of a friendship, but because of "his son's perverse, shameful, and naked love of David."<sup>170</sup> David Jobling believes that Saul uses very explicit language and he translates the phrase: "to the shame of your mother's genitalia." By addressing Jonathan's mother, could Saul be trying to transfer blame of Jonathan's homosexual behavior away from himself? According to Jobling, Saul's statement expresses a stereotypical belief that gay men are regarded as "momma's boys."<sup>171</sup>

Schroer and Staubli agree that Saul's blow-out with Jonathan is not solely because of a political scandal, but because of the "effrontery of this homosexual love." The phrase is similar to Leviticus 20:20, where a man has forbidden sexual relations with his uncle's wife. In this case, the Tanakh can be interpreted as stating that the uncle's nakedness is uncovered by the shame of this experience. Saul believes that this sexual affront affects not only Jonathan, but himself, and Jonathan's mother as well.<sup>172</sup> In addition, Saul shows his frustration by throwing a spear at Jonathan. Greenberg explains, that this gesture might explain what real men do: 1. penetrate women in love and 2. fight men in battle. Or perhaps in his anger, Saul says: "If you want to be penetrated by a man,

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<sup>170</sup> Greenberg, 101-102.

<sup>171</sup> Jobling, 161-162.

<sup>172</sup> Schroer and Staubli, 29-30.

then I will penetrate you.”<sup>173</sup> These modern writers provide evidence that Saul is angered and frustrated by Jonathan’s homosexual love for David.

The last terms that have homoerotic undertones occur during David’s lament for Jonathan. צר-לי עליך אחי יהונתן נעמתי לי מאוד נפלאתה אהבתך לי מאהבת נשים. Jonathan. “I grieve for you, **My brother** Jonathan, You were **most dear** to me. Your love was wonderful to me, More than the love of women” (II Samuel 1:26). Schroer and Staubli explain that in Egyptian love lyrics and in Israel, lovers were called “brother” or “sister” which allowed for a sense of relatedness. In addition, the term נעם (dear) is found in Song of Songs 1:16 and 7:7, to express the beauty of the beloved.<sup>174</sup> These phrases together with the statement “Your love was wonderful to me, More than the love of women” convey David’s feelings of love and fondness for Jonathan at the time of his death.

The word אהבה, the expression of their love, is found throughout this narrative from Jonathan’s initial words to David’s final lament. David Jobling explains that Jonathan is in love with David and takes the lead in the formation of this relationship. It is Jonathan who expresses delight, who “loves David as he loves himself,” and it is his love which guarantee’s the oath in chapter twenty. Although the Tanakh continually reminds the reader of Jonathan’s affection and love, David does not express feelings of any kind towards Jonathan. Even the final lament, “Your love was wonderful to me, More than the love of women” tells of Jonathan’s love for David, not David’s love for Jonathan.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Greenberg, 102.

<sup>174</sup> Schroer and Staubli, 30.

<sup>175</sup> Jobling, 162-164.

Steven Greenberg agrees that this lament does not express David's erotic love for Jonathan. Instead, the text states that Jonathan was very dear to David, but nothing more. Here David remembers the selflessness of Jonathan and recognizes that he received more love from Jonathan than from many of the women in his life. Greenberg even says that David was "never passionately in love with anyone, except perhaps God." He concludes by stating that the story might make more sense if Jonathan was gay, but David was not. Jonathan is the one who gets in trouble with his father, who expresses his love openly, and who dresses David in his clothes.<sup>176</sup>

The last section of this chapter will address each scholar's thoughts on the eroticism found in Jonathan and David's relationship. Each writer addresses different terms, actions, and feelings when exploring the homoerotic nature of this relationship and therefore arrives at a different conclusion to the extent sexuality plays in this relationship. First, Yaron Peleg believes that the confusion of gender roles indicates the true nature of Jonathan and David's relationship. Peleg sees David as a masculine character whose rise to power is emphasized by his strength and masculinity. Jonathan, on the other hand, is disqualified from the kingship because of his femininity. Jonathan is seen as anxious, nervous, hysterical, and is left behind in the palace, while David is calm, has careful speech, and battles Saul and other armies.

Peleg believes that the Bible portrays Jonathan as David's "female bride" by describing him as passive and effeminate. He bases his ideas on two assumptions: 1. that the Bible favors the masculine realm of diplomacy, religion, and war over the feminine domestic sphere and 2. the editor of the Tanakh prohibits sex between two men and

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<sup>176</sup> Greenberg, 104.

would be reluctant to portray a biblical hero as "gay." He also explains that Jonathan's submission is so absolute that it defies belief; biblical men never give up their privilege, even to those whom they love. Jonathan who is a distinguished warrior seems to lose all aspects of masculinity and instead retires into the palace to fulfill domestic responsibilities.<sup>177</sup>

David Jobling agrees that the Book of Samuel explores different gender roles and believes that the woman's role played by Jonathan is similar to that ascribed to Michal and Abigail. Both Jonathan and Michal: 1. love David; 2. do practical things to help him; and 3. prophesize his coming kingdom. Similarly, Jonathan mentions his love and affection for David (1 Samuel 18:1, 20), he rescues David (19:1-7, 20), and he predicts the future of David's kingdom (20:13-16, 23:17). Jonathan acts first and spends more time in David's company than do the women.<sup>178</sup> This might also be the reason for David's statement "more than the love of women." Peleg and Jobling express the belief that this story renounces normal gender roles and stresses the femininity of Jonathan's actions and David's masculinity. According to these two scholars, this story does not address the love of two men, but a love that exists between two individuals who perform roles that in other biblical narratives are reserved for males and females.

In addition, David Jobling also believes that there is nothing in this narrative that would rule out a gay relationship, while there is much evidence that would encourage a homosexual relationship between David and Jonathan. He firmly believes that a gay reading of this story is at least valid as any other reading.<sup>179</sup> Schroer and Staubli also

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<sup>177</sup> Peleg, 173-189.

<sup>178</sup> Jobling, 162.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 161.

state quite strongly that Jonathan and David shared a homoerotic and possibly a homosexual relationship with one another. They explain that homosexuality existed during biblical times and in the surrounding cultures of the Ancient Near East. It should be no coincidence that the Bible would draw upon the cultures of Egypt, Babylonia, and Greece and connect the ideas of homosexuality that existed in writing and art to the story of Jonathan and David.<sup>180</sup>

Steven Greenberg explains that nowhere in the Tanakh or the Talmud are there open homosexual relationships. The Tanakh and rabbinic commentators never state that Jonathan and David are lovers and never express the view that the two are intimately involved. Nevertheless, the eroticism, the commitment, and the mutuality of Jonathan and David's relationship are similar to that of heterosexual couples. Although Greenberg is unable to state that Jonathan and David are openly gay, he does believe that this story alongside other narratives, such as Ruth and Naomi and Resh Lakish and Rabbi Yohanan, acknowledge the love and commitment that occurs between same-sex individuals.<sup>181</sup>

These modern scholars express different understandings of Jonathan and David's relationship. Although all of the writers believe that the story has aspects of homoerotic love and each provides examples from the narrative that illustrate this homophilia, each offers a different conclusion about David and Jonathan's relationship. There is no consensus that David and Jonathan's relationship is truly built upon homosexual love. In fact, many of the examples that illustrate this homoeroticism seem shaky at best. Often, the evidence used to prove the homoerotic nature of this relationship differs from one scholar to another and there is very little overlap. These modern writers are not convincing and

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<sup>180</sup> Schroer and Staubli, 35-36.

<sup>181</sup> Greenberg, 105.

provide no firm evidence that Jonathan and David are openly gay and in a committed relationship. However, the homoerotic aspects of love, the mutuality, the various covenants, and the breaking down of gender roles allows the modern reader to believe that there is something more here than just a political relationship; in fact it provides the modern reader with a same-sex relationship that is based upon love, respect and mutual commitment.

## Conclusion

This thesis explores the diversity of opinions articulated by the scholars who comment on the relationship of Jonathan and David. In talmudic times, the medieval period, and the present day, scholars address the complex emotions, events, and actions described throughout this narrative. Although these scholars each focus on the same characters, events, and emotions, they each arrive at very different conclusions. The commentators and scholars differ in both the way they approach this narrative and in the distinct tools they use to comprehend its message. The first part of this conclusion will explore the lessons learned about these writers and their diverse methods of commentary.

The earliest sources that address the relationship of Jonathan and David are found in the Babylonian Talmud and in the midrashic texts. Often these midrashim and aggadic passages address a moment in time; they create an entire meta-story around a specific issue that occurs in the story. For example, Sanhedrin 103b-104a discusses Jonathan's failure to provide David food for his journey. The Talmud addresses this specific moment of failure, but ignores all of Jonathan's other acts of devotion for David. The Talmud feels no need to define the type of relationship that exists between David and Jonathan, but instead focuses its energy on specific moments in the story.

Even more, these aggadic texts use pieces of Jonathan and David's narrative to prove a particular point of view. In a little known midrash in Ozar Midrashim, Jonathan and David's relationship demonstrates that a person never forgets his first love. In Arachin 16b, the rabbis address the limits of rebuke by employing the story of Saul's reproof of Jonathan. By illustrating that Saul's rebuke went too far, the rabbis illustrate the appropriate amount of punishment for a crime. The writers of these aggadic texts

have no interest in describing the relationship of Jonathan and David; instead, they pluck stories from this narrative to use as evidence to prove a specific point.

Indeed, this point can be proven even more persuasively by comparing two sugiyot found in the same tractate of the Talmud. First, Mo'ed Katan 22b describes David's mourning for Jonathan as the correct approach to grieve for a loved one. While, only pages away in Mo'ed Katan 26b, the same story is found describing the bereavement of a communal leader. The Talmud utilizes David's lament for Jonathan as evidence for both political and personal acts of mourning. The Talmud never states whether David's lament for Jonathan was because of personal or political reasons. Instead, the Talmud has no difficulty using the same story to address two completely different explanations of David's grief.

Often the writers of these aggadic stories compare a moment in Jonathan and David's narrative to other stories found in Jewish literature. Bava Metzia 84b-85a describes Jonathan's humility and compares Jonathan's inauthentic behavior to the more favorable act of humility shown by Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel. In another example in Beresheit Rabbah 74:10, David's disrespect towards his father-in-law is contrasted to Jacob's act of reconciliation. These examples found throughout the Talmud and the midrashim address specific moments in the Jonathan and David narrative. In certain cases, a story can be utilized multiple times to address completely different end results. The writers of these texts do not state a uniform belief about the relationship of Jonathan and David. Instead, they compare this story to other accounts in the Tanakh or they use this story as evidence to express a certain point of view. There is no overarching

conclusion found in these texts about the extent or nature of Jonathan and David's relationship.

Centuries later, the medieval and pre-modern commentators approach this narrative much differently. Unlike the aggadic passages, they concentrate on smaller aspects of the story to assist the reader in comprehending the meaning of the text. One approach they use is to address problems of grammar. Radak employs this method in II Samuel 20:41 by explaining that a different preposition should be applied when reading the verse instead of the one that is written. Another approach they use to assist the reader in comprehending the meaning of certain words or phrases. The commentary Metzudat Tziyon about 18:2 explains that "would not let him return" has to do with abandonment. Finally, they help the reader understand the meaning of a unique word by comparing it to another verse of the Tanakh. One example in the commentary of Metzudat Tziyon about 18:1 links the word *niksherah* to a verse in Genesis. The commentators want the reader to understand this text and they accomplish this by solving complex grammatical challenges and by describing certain words and phrases. However, through their explanation of the *peshat*, they also share their point of view about the political, emotional, and personal aspects of Jonathan and David's relationship.

Another method they employ is to fill-in moments of this narrative that the biblical text glosses over. In 20:41 David rises up to meet Jonathan; Radak complements the text by showing that Jonathan protects David from being seen by standing in front of him. In addition, most of the commentators address the moment in which Saul throws the spear at Jonathan and calls him "son of a perverse, rebellious woman." Each commentator rationalizes Saul's motive behind throwing this spear by addressing

political, interpersonal, or unique perspectives. These medieval commentators insert their own thoughts into the text and assist the reader in comprehending the meaning of every unique event of this story.

Similar to the aggadic texts, the pre-modern commentators have no problem in expressing contradictory statements about specific characters or events of this story. Radak, Ralbag, and Metzudat David all discuss political aspects about their relationship, but concurrently address the friendship and love that exists between the two of them. In addition, Radak and the commentary Metzudat David state about 20:2 that Saul does not wish to hurt or sadden Jonathan; however, only verses away, the two also describe Saul's vicious and cruel words of rebuke against Jonathan.

The commentators find no need to link contradictory statements with one another to find some sort of middle ground. Instead, they look at each verse separately and have no problem expressing completely opposite points of view throughout their commentaries. Their approach addresses the fundamental meaning of each verse of the Torah. Unlike the aggadic sources, they focus on individual grammatical phrases and complex words found throughout this story. Although they have no meta-story and no overarching view of the Jonathan and David relationship, they do express their understanding of the relationship at specific points throughout their commentary. Like scientists looking through a microscope, they look at each individual verse separately and do not address the larger themes of the narrative.

The modern scholars approach this story with a fundamentally different approach; they wish to understand the relationship as an entire unit rather than as separate moments in time. First and foremost, they describe the type of relationship that occurs between

Jonathan and David: whether political, interpersonal, or homoerotic. Certain individuals such as J.A. Thompson, Ada Taggar-Cohen, Steven Weitzman, and Julian Morgenstern believe that Jonathan and David's relationship is based upon their political interactions. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld thinks that this story focuses on an interpersonal relationship between two loved ones, similar to Ruth and Naomi. Finally, Thomas Staubli, Silvia Schroer, Steven Greenberg, and Yaron Peleg concentrate their commentaries on the homoeroticism and the breaking of gender roles that occur throughout this narrative. The only writer who addresses more than one aspect of this story is David Jobling. For the most part, the modern authors attempt to define the type of relationship that exists between Jonathan and David rather than address specific moments in the narrative.

Remarkably, all scholars, regardless of their perspective, use the same evidence to prove their point. Certain terms such as covenant, loyalty, and even the word brother are understood differently depending on each scholar's perspective. Ada Taggar-Cohen using a Hittite text explains that loyalty sometimes describes a political relationship, while Katharine Doob Sakenfeld connects this term to the interpersonal loyalty that Ruth shows Naomi. In addition, these same scholars also focus on Jonathan and David's particular actions to substantiate their claims. Jobling states that the throwing of the spear shows Saul's rejection of Jonathan's mediation, while Steven Greenberg stresses Saul's anger at Jonathan's homoerotic love of David.

The love that occurs between Jonathan and David is another piece of evidence used by each group of authors. The political leaning writers believe that Jonathan and David's love is similar to the politicization of love found in Near Eastern treaties and in the Tanakh. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld compares this love to *hesed* and to the

interpersonal affection found in the book of Ruth. Finally, certain authors who address the homoerotic nature of this story compare this relationship to other examples of same-sex love found in Ancient Near Eastern literature. Each group of scholars brings forth the same pieces of evidence, but each defines these terms, actions, and feelings quite differently to fit their understanding of the narrative.

Although the writers all use similar evidence to prove their point, they often overlook certain phrases or actions that might complicate their understanding of the story. For example, only the scholars who address the homoerotic nature of this relationship speak about terms such as *lakach*, *beit aviv*, and *chafetz be*, which connect these words to a gay reading of Jonathan and David's relationship. On the other hand, only political explanations are given for specific actions such as Jonathan's stripping of his royal clothes in 18:4 and his abdication of the throne in 23:1. The writers wish to describe their comprehension of this story and use evidence which expresses their opinion most convincingly. The authors leave out the terms and actions which either do not highlight or do not address their understanding of the story.

The modern scholars look at this text as a whole unit and attempt to comprehend what type of relationship truly exists between Jonathan and David. Often, each author only speaks about the political, interpersonal, or homoerotic aspects of this relationship. Although they each address the major pieces of the narrative, certain parts of the text are not discussed if they conflict with their reading of this story. The authors' approach is to find the "true" meaning of the relationship that exists between David and Jonathan. By not broadening their perspective and by focusing on only one type of relationship, these

scholars miss out on the unique and multi-leveled interactions that occur between Jonathan and David.

This author believes that certain aspects of this story are not addressed by scholars from several different perspectives; this evidence was only brought to light through the author's own research. For example, modern scholarship states that covenants are cut because of political concerns. However, in the Tanakh, the term *brit* occurs as a marriage contract between husband and wife, which addresses both intimate and quasi-political aspects of their relationship. Plus, Jonathan and David are the only two people whose covenant is connected to the term *ahavah*. Even the word *chafetz be* is only picked up by the writers who identify homoerotic elements in the story; however, these individuals do not address the complexity of the term which addresses military success, personality, sexuality, or all of the above.

Certain key actions that occur throughout the narrative are also not tackled by the modern writers. No modern scholar addresses David and Jonathan's kissing and crying, which occurs at the end of chapter twenty. As observed by the author, kissing and crying is an intimate act that exists during charged meetings or partings. Only those who are closely related to one another: father and child, daughter and mother-in-law, and siblings weep and kiss one another. Jonathan and David, as non-kin, are the only two people in the entire Tanakh who cry and kiss simultaneously. In addition, only a political explanation is provided by the authors for Jonathan's dressing of David in his garments. Although the clothes given to David are the same as those worn by kings, priests, or prophets, the givers of the garment are always those who are closest to the recipient: parents, siblings, or God. The terms and actions which the modern commentaries do not

address are overwhelmingly connected to the interpersonal aspects of Jonathan and David's relationship. The kissing, crying, providing of clothes, and the formation of a covenant speak not just of political concerns, but of a true intimate and loving relationship.

Besides addressing new aspects of David and Jonathan's relationship which are missing from the conversation, this author also connects Jonathan and David's interactions to other relationships that occur in the Book of Samuel. For example, Jonathan and David have a similar relationship to Saul: they both have political and personal interactions, they each must deal with Saul's jealousy, and they each express kindness and anger towards Saul. In addition, although Peleg states the differences between Michal and Jonathan, no modern writer compares their similarities. By examining this interaction closely, one learns that Jonathan and Michal love David, act to save his life, and choose him over Saul. As Michal's relationship with David contains political, interpersonal, and erotic aspects, so does the relationship between Jonathan and David. These other relationships that surround Jonathan and David are as diverse and complicated as their interactions; these relationships shed light on the political, interpersonal, and erotic aspects of David and Jonathan's relationship.

All of the different perspectives given by the modern authors are valid readings of the Jonathan and David relationship. As each chapter discussed, there is evidence that proves a political, interpersonal, and homoerotic aspect of this relationship. The author, as an openly gay man, had hoped to prove that Jonathan and David's relationship was homoerotic if not openly gay. However, this perspective has the least amount of

evidence. lacks a great breadth of scholarship, and does not have the same level of overlap in evidence as do the other perspectives.

Instead, this relationship is much more complex and can not fit into one "box." As the first chapter has proven, one can not deny the political aspects of this relationship. The political terms and actions found throughout the story and the large amount of research by the modern writers prove that this is indeed a political association. But, no one can also reject the overwhelmingly powerful interpersonal aspects of Jonathan and David's relationship. The kissing and crying, the love that is shown, and the overlap between this and other relationships that exist throughout the Tanakh, also firmly support an interpersonal reading of this relationship. Although much harder to prove, the modern scholars who address the homoerotic nature of this relationship also provide glimpses of the erotic love that is ascribed to the two protagonists.

This is an ambiguous relationship that addresses the complexity of both a political association and an interpersonal relationship between two dear individuals. It is a relationship that can not be defined easily because of the diversity of experiences that occur throughout these chapters. But, the ideals of mutuality, equality, and love which shine throughout this narrative illustrate a committed relationship between two same-sex individuals. Jonathan and David's relationship is unique in the entire corpus of biblical literature. It is the only relationship between two men that deals with love, friendship, and politics which pulls the heartstrings of those who read its words. It is a relationship that, because of its complexity, allows for multiple readings.

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 34:19, 36:31-39, 37:3-4, 38:11, 40:14, 44:30, 45:15, 50:1  
 Exodus 2:20, 4:27, 20:4, 28:4, 29:5  
 Leviticus 18:20, 19:34, 20:13, 20:20, 22:13  
 Numbers 5:14, 11:29, 14:8, 21:23  
 Deuteronomy 5:18, 7:9, 13:7, 21:14, 23:4-5, 24:1, 32:16  
 Judges 1:16, 3:16, 13, 19  
 I Samuel 2:19, 13-14, 16:13, 16:21, 16:27, 17:21, 17:38-39, 17:57-18:5, 18:9  
 18:16, 18:20, 18:22, 18:28, 19:1-7, 19:11-17, 20:1-42, 22:7-8, 23:16-18  
 26:10, 26:17-25  
 II Samuel 1:1-27, 1:11-12, 1:17, 1:26, 3:5, 3:31-3:36, 12, 13:1-39, 14:33, 15:26  
 18, 19:6-7, 20:8-9  
 I Kings 5:15-26, 9:13, 13:20, 13:30, 19:2, 20:31-32  
 Isaiah 56:6, 61:8, 62:4  
 Jeremiah 2:2, 7:29, 9:16, 9:19, 9:23  
 Ezekiel 16:8, 19:1, 26:16, 27:32, 32:16,  
 Amos 8:10  
 Malachi 1:2, 2:14  
 Psalms 18:20, 105:22  
 Proverbs 16:26, 17:9  
 Song of Songs 1:16, 3:1-4, 7:7, 8:6  
 Ruth 1:8-9, 1:14, 2:20, 3:10, 4:15  
 Ecclesiastes 4:9, 9:9  
 Esther 2:14, 6:6, 6:7, 6:9, 6:11  
 I Chronicles 1:50, 2:55  
 II Chronicles 35:25

## Mishnah

Pirke Avot 5:16

## Babylonian Talmud

Arachin 16b

Bava Metzia 84a-85a

Mo'ed Katan 22b, 26a

Sanhedrin 103b-104a.

## Midrashim/Aggadic Works

Avot de Rabbi Nathan 8

Beresheit Rabbah 74:10

Midrash Aggada (Buber) 33:1;

Midrash Tanhuma (Buber) 19

Midrash Tanhuma, Vayisa 13

Ozar Midrashim (page 42) ספרא דבן סירא

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 14

Sechel Tov (Buber) 31

Shir HaShirim Rabbah 8;

Yalkut Shemoni Shir HaShirim 993.

Yalkut Shemoni Torah, Vayisav 130

Yalkut Shemoni Tehilim, 777

## Biblical Commentary

Isaiah of Trani: I Samuel 20:12, 20:13, 20:30, 20:42

Joseph Caro: I Samuel 20:12, 20:41

Joseph Kara: I Samuel 20:34, 20:41

Joseph Kaspi: I Samuel 20:12

Metzudat David (David Altschuler): I Samuel 18:1, 18:2, 19:1, 20:3, 20:17  
20:30, 20:41

Metzudat Tziyon (David Altschuler): I Samuel 18:1, 18:2, 19:4, 20:12, 23:17  
II Samuel 1:23

Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi): I Samuel 18:4, 20:2, 20:12, 20:30, 20:41, 20:42  
23:17, II Samuel 1:23, 1:11, 1:26

Ralbag (Gersonides): I Samuel 18:1, 20:2, 20:14, 20:17, 20:30, 20:34, 20:41  
II Samuel 1:4, 1:26, 1:27 (Lesson 52)

Ramban (Nachmanides): Leviticus 19:17

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaqi): I Samuel 20:12-13, 20:30, 20:34, 20:42  
II Samuel 1:26, Psalms 105:22

## Commentary on the Mishnah and Talmud

Rabbi Ovadiah ben Abraham Bartinoro on Avot 5:16

Rif: Mo'ed Katan 15b

## Law Codes

Rambam Hilchot Evel 9:6