Text Immersion:
King David

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Introduction to Text Immersion on 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings 1-2:12

King David

or How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bow (sword)[1]

The figure of King David looms large in western culture. He is a major religious figure for Judaism and Christianity, often portrayed as quite pious. David is a symbol of great leadership as well as a character for great drama. The mere mention of his name brings hundreds of images and stories to mind. These images include David as the youthful underdog in a fight with the giant Goliath, which is depicted countless times in children's books and used as a political metaphor. Then there is the mighty warrior who is successful in all he does. David builds the unified kingdom of Israel in the golden past, a kingdom wished for and searched for by Greater Israelists and archeologists. And then, there is David the man of God, to whom are promised the blessings of God forever.

Typical treatments of the David texts show a great reverence for the scriptures, and liturgical writing, in particular, tends to highlight the best reading of David's life and actions. Literary treatments, especially some of the modern works, vary their approach. Some look for the hand of the editor or specifically the Deuteronomist's hand in the editing. Others analyze the themes in light of the latest literary theory or in the context of the greater whole of the Bible.

My work in the following essays draws upon a reverence for the texts. However, I believe that while David's story is great drama, much would be lost if we did not also

[1] *Dr. Strangelove* is a perfect spoof of political and military insanity.

understand that it is filled with much humor and irony[2]. The character of David, the narrator of the story, and the editor of the completed text, all seem to know that a wink and a nod are vital to understanding the stories' messages.

In examining David's story and his relationships, I deliberately aim at recapturing some of the spirit of a tale of adventure and mischief, in lieu of the more somber rendition often bestowed upon stories as Scripture. In looking at how David lives in relationship with Saul, Jonathan, Michal and all the others, we cannot help but find drama and humor as well as warmth and sadness. In the first essay I look at David and his significant others to see the possibility of these relationships outside the framework of idealized love and marriage ("Everybody loves David"). Gender issues, sexuality concerns, and the cynicism of modern dating all are lenses used to view the text.

Second, I look at how David and Saul wrestle their way through miles of ground and hundreds of verses ("When David met Saul"). This wresting, like today's WWF matches, is for some truly serious while for others a show put on to sell seats.

In the last essay ("Bad News is Good News"), which examines David's response to the death of adversaries and offspring, humor still plays a role. But not everything in the stories merit this nearly irreverent view. David's actions are often hard and political and, in context, necessary. Still, I find that irony and humor serve as a useful perspective on his world and relationships. They also help link us with that world and time in the past and allows his very humanity to bring the story to life for us provoking us to take a closer look at our much heralded traditions.

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[2] For the appropriateness of approaching the Bible with an eye to the comic, see J. William Whedbee, The Bible and the Comic Vision (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Everybody loves David

It can be said that just about everyone loved David during his lifetime (except maybe his children but, that is a story for another paper). In particular, there are four significant relationships during David's life that the books of Samuel and Kings bring to our attention. The first of these is with the son of King Saul, Jonathan. Jonathan, from their first meeting, is taken with the handsome singer of songs and victor over Goliath (1 Samuel 18:1). Not long after we find that Jonathan is not the only member of Saul's household to fall for David. After her older sister is offered (and then retracted) as a bride to David, we find out that Michal loves David (1 Samuel 18:20). While two other women who come to marry David, Abigail and Bathsheba, are not described as loving David, the power of David's charisma is unmistakable in each of those relationships. These four relationships have many things in common with each other and a few significant differences. All of them reveal something about David—the Man and David— the King, as well as about the literary style and attitudes of the author.

David's relationship with Jonathan may seem, at first glance, to be out of place with the three women who follow. But as a literary device and as a human relationship it is very much akin to David's relationships with "his" women. There are romantic components and political aspects to the relationship between David and Jonathan, as well as certain themes, that also are interwoven into the stories of Michal, Abigail and Bathsheba. The relationship between David and Jonathan has been heralded by some as the Bible's greatest story of friendship as well as the Bible's most explicit example of homosexuality by others. Each of these characterizations has some merit but neither fully

incorporates the complexity which the narrator dramatizes. As with most of the stories of David in the books of Samuel and Kings, this story is political, emotional and open to interpretation, leaving the reader free to draw a variety of conclusions.

The story of the David and Jonathan opens just after David has slayed the giant Goliath. We read that Jonathan's *nefesh* (soul, self or life) is bound up with David's (1 Samuel 18:1). Jonathan makes a *brit* or covenant with David because he loves David as he loves his own *nefesh*. After this declaration and *brit*, Jonathan gives to David his sword, robe, bow and belt (1 Samuel 18:4). David is put in charge of soldiers and is a great success in battle. But Jonathan's father, Saul, cannot take David's success and tries to kill David. David then flees from Saul and turns to Jonathan. David asks Jonathan what he has done to Saul that Saul wants to kill him. Jonathan, who appears to be in the dark about this, says, (to paraphrase) "No way, my father tells me everything and I don't know anything about this (1 Samuel 20:2)."

Jonathan's attachment to David can be seen when David explains to Jonathan that Saul must be hiding his animosity from Jonathan because David finds favor in Jonathan's eyes. The rest of the chapter reads like an elaborate ballet between these three men as to the true nature of their relationships. In the opening movement of the dance David and Jonathan discuss whether or not Saul actually does want to harm David. (1 Samuel 20:5-11). In the next movement, David and Jonathan head for the safety of the outdoors and where Jonathan promises that he will find out and report his father's intentions. (1 Samuel 20:12-17). Jonathan offers a target practice demonstration, which will serve as code to disclose the results of his visit with Saul. This ruse involves shooting arrows, which by their landing will indicate the outcome.

The dance climaxes when Jonathan attends the new moon festival with his father (1 Samuel 20: 24-34). David misses the first festive meal but Saul assumes it is because David is ritually impure (1 Samuel 20:26). When David does not attend the second feast, Jonathan must explain his absence. Saul becomes livid. He screams at Jonathan calling him names "You son of a perverse wayward woman" (1 Samuel 20:30) and claims that Jonathan is choosing David "to your own shame and the shame of his mothers nakedness" (1 Samuel 20:31). Jonathan, he says, chooses David over his own father and the kingship. Saul then throws a spear at his son and with that Jonathan finally understands: His beloved David is in trouble indeed (1 Samuel 20:33).

The concluding movement in this dance is enacted when Jonathan goes to his rendezvous with David and he performs, as he promised, the ritual of overshooting the target (1 Samuel 20:36-37). This lets David know his life is in danger from Saul. The encore to the dance is Jonathan's and David's pas de deux which features David bowing and the two kissing each other and weeping, though David the longer[1]. (1 Samuel 20:41)

However, this is not the last meeting of the two men. In a kind of coda, Jonathan, again in opposition to his relationship with his father, comes to David in the wilderness. Jonathan strengthens David's hand and evokes God (1 Samuel 23:16). He tells David that not only will Saul not kill him but that he (David) will become king over Israel. Jonathan is only half prescient. He mistakenly predicts that he himself will be second to David and that Saul knows this (1 Samuel 23:17). Once again they enter a *brit* and Jonathan goes home (1 Samuel 23:18).

The story of Jonathan and David can be read as a purely political story: Jonathan foresees that this young upstart will be the future and therefore he throws his lot in with

[1] Translation after Robert Alter; The David Story

him. In this reading, the *brit* and other actions are just the building of political ties in order to ensure that the transition of power between Saul and David leaves a place for Jonathan. The language of love as political language is carefully described in Thompson's article on the use of Love in Samuel materials (Thompson 335). His reference to being second to David, who will be king, and the cutting of a *brit*, which is generally between a king and a vassal, all affirm this interpretation of their relationship.

But, just as deeply enmeshed in the story, is a tale of one man's love for another. As Rabbi Greenberg writes, "the story would make the most sense if Jonathan were gay but David not. Jonathan is after all the son who disappoints his father in just the ordinary way. ... Moreover he is smitten at first sight by the young David and immediately dresses him in his own clothing. The erotics of the gesture are difficult to explain away. Lastly his love of David is deemed perverse and shameful by his father (1 Samuel 20:30-31)" (Greenberg 104). Greenberg further writes that "the word *erva* used for nakedness is the word used in Leviticus and elsewhere to express sexual violation. To uncover nakedness is to have illicit sexual relations. Add to this Saul's accusation insults to Jonathan that he is perverse. Jonathan has chosen David in a perverse and shaming way that offends his mother's nakedness. Saul is not offended by a platonic friendship but by his son's perverse, shameful and naked love of David. (1 Samuel 20:30)" (Greenberg 101-102). At the very least, we can ascertain that Saul perceives a sexual dimension to the relationship. Whether he uses this language because he seeks to humiliate Jonathan by such (false) allegation or whether he says this because he believes it may be difficult to ascertain. But the evidence from Jonathan's initial response points to the later.

Much has been made about the declaration by David, in his lament over Saul and Jonathan; "I grieve for you my brother, Jonathan very dear you were to me. More wondrous your love to me than the love of women[2]" (2 Samuel 1:26).

צַר־לִי עָלֶיךָ אָחִי יְהוֹנָתָן נָעַמְתָּ לִי מְאֹד נִפְלְאַתָה אַהֲבָתְךָ
לִי מֵאַהֲבַת נָשִׁים:

How this is understood often seems to depend on where the author writing on the topic stands. Lesbian and gay writers, knowing the challenges of public affection even today, see this as a coded but clear message[3]. Many other writers tie the verse into a "warrior culture" which has tremendously strong bonds between men (Alter 201). Rabbi Greenberg writes that David "remembers Jonathan's love of him as more selfless and giving than the love he received from the women in his life" (Greenberg 104). And still others rely on the Bible's over all anti-homosexual stand as a clear indicator that here we are not talking romantic or sexual love (Anderson 19). All of these analyses fail to look at this verse in light of David's overall style in his relationships. David is not one to be forthcoming or simple in his relationships. Ambiguity and advancing a personal agenda mark David's approach. That the editor of the story of David leaves it so ambiguous that it can be read either way as a warrior's bond or a lover's lament means that as with so much about David does the answer is "Yes." Yes, he and Jonathan were fellow fighters; yes, they were rivals and, yes, they had a love more wondrous than the love of women.

In addition to this reading of the text, we will see that, on the whole, the story of David and Jonathan fits within the framework of David's other significant relations with

[2] Translation By Robert Alter, the David Story page 200
[3] June Jordan in Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible argues that Jonathan and David as a couple is hinted at even in David's ancestry being the Grandson of another 'suspect couple,' Ruth and Naomi.

spouses (though to include all 4 of them I will use the term significant others). This broader reading will reinforce a reading of this relationship as being more than political, although not as a gay relationship as we would understand it today.

Michal, Jonathan's sister, is the next of our four to fall for the charms of David and her story is open with this news. It is reported to her father Saul that she loves David (1 Samuel 18:20). Saul tells David that he can become his son-in-law thru his "second". This awkward use of Hebrew here is often assumed to mean that David is to be son in law to Saul by his second daughter. Saul had once offered his older daughter Merab to David but coming on the heals of the binding of Jonathan to David could this "second" mean "second son-in-law" his first being through Jonathan? (Townsley *www.bridges-across.org*). Another reading of the "second daughter marriage offer" is by comparison with the Jacob, Leah and Rachel story. If we hear the echo of their story in the story of David as Lawton (Lawton 40) suggests, then we need to ask why. What do we experience by this reference? Lawton suggests that it highlights differences in the David story at this moment. In the Jacob story we read that Jacob loved Rachel, so do we expect to read that David loves Michal? If so, we are surprised, as we are in any case by this biblically unique moment (the only place where we learn of a woman who loves a man), in reading that Michal loves David.

The story of Michal and David begins with the well loved David (loved by Saul, Jonathan, Israel and Judah) being offered in marriage to her older sister, Merab. When that does not work out, we read that Michal loves with David (1 Samuel 18:20). While this pleases Saul, this is not the story of a father longing to secure a happy and loving marriage for his daughter. Rather Saul views this as a possible means to ensuring

David's demise (1 Samuel 18:21). Nor does David delight in the love of this woman. He sees it as the chance to be the king's son-in-law (1 Samuel 18:26). He hurries to seal the deal in Philistine blood and quickly pays the bride price of 100 (actually 200 Philistine foreskins) (1 Samuel 18:27a), thereby completing the transaction, (1 Samuel 18:27b). Even though David never expresses affection or interest in Michal, we, once again, read that Michal loves David (1 Samuel 18:28).

Even though David is now his son-in-law and a successful warrior, Saul still wants to kill him. This is confirmed to David by Saul's son Jonathan (1 Samuel 19:2), who cannot manage to stop Saul from attacking David (1 Samuel 19:7). Unsuccessful Saul tries yet again to kill David. He even sends messengers to David's house to watch him at night and then kill him in the morning (1 Samuel 19:11a). Michal, wise to what's going on, tells David, "get out tonight for tomorrow you will be killed" (1 Samuel 19:11b). Michal is apparently stronger than your average princess of a fairytale might be for she physically lowers David out the window to assist in his escape וַתֹּרֶד מִיכַל אֶת־דָּוִד בְּעַד הַחַלּוֹן (1 Samuel 19:12).

But Michal does not stop here; she continues to help out by buying time for David. In a scene repeated by Hollywood in "Ferris Bueller's Day Off,[4]" Michal takes *teraphim* (household idols) places them in the bed, makes them look like a person and then announces that David is "sick" in bed. (1 Samuel 19:13-14). Saul sends his messengers back with orders to bring David, sickbed and all, to be killed (1 Samuel 19:15). When Michal's ruse is discovered, her father seems shocked by her loyalty to

[4] 1986 popular film Ferris Bueller is a high school smart guy who unwilling to spend the day in school when the weather is so perfect. He and his friends ditch school for a day of adventures Principal Ed Rooney doesn't believe this 'illness' for a second and is determined to catch Bueller this time.

David instead of to him. Saul knows she had a part in David's escape, and wonders why she has deceived him. She says because David said to her, "let me go or I will kill you" (1 Samuel 19:17).

Two views of this verse are particularly interesting. Robert Alter sees this verse as turning around the words and actions of just the night before when she encouraged David to go (Clines/Eskenazi 68). David Clines though, focuses on the question of love. He points out that Michal is putting these words in David's mouth precisely because she is letting him go. She loves him but he does not love her and therefore he needs her to let him go. Clines reads this as fitting the view that David deprives himself of Michal during the rest of their story rather than the one who is being deprived of her. To David she is just a member of Saul's house. She will be protected but that's all. She is covered under category of "the house of Saul or Jonathan" in David's agreements with these two men not to destroy their houses (Clines/Eskenazi 131-134).

David's escape ends the "love story" of David and Michal. David will meet with Jonathan intimately several more times but not with Michal. David Clines posits that; Michal has to jostle for space to love David among those that love him. Furthermore her words when David escapes out of her window, if not her actions, show that for David he has "escaped" from the marriage to Michal. And finally that Michal becomes noticeable in her absence and as a symbol of the house of Saul. David demonstrates a "difficulty in forming stable ties with women...he acquires them ... but does not love them... [on the other hand] he does not get tired of Jonathan" (Clines/Eskenazi 136). David and Saul will chase each other over hill and dale, encounter each other at Ein Gedi, fight some enemies, and David will agree not to destroy Saul's house (1 Samuel 24:22), before we

hear of Michal again. David even marries a couple of other women in the meantime (1 Samuel 25:42-43) which must convince Saul that David is not coming back for his daughter, Michal, since he later marries her off to Palti from Gallim (1 Samuel 25:44)

Michal does not reappear as a part David's life until David demands her back. Here too, as with the marriage itself, she is only a part of a transaction (2 Samuel 3:13). The house of David and the house of Saul are fighting each other for kingship (2 Samuel 3:12). Abner, who has been loyal to Saul and Saul's family, now wishes to switch sides. Abner tries to make a pact with David. David says fine, just give me back my wife Michal, Saul's daughter (2 Samuel 3:13). At the same time, David sends a note to his rival for the throne, Ishboseth, saying, "Give me my wife Michal" (2 Samuel 3:14). This is probably a none too subtle a threat since he mentions that he paid a hefty bride price in *dead* Philistine's foreskins for her. Michal is sent for. Her current husband, who may be the only one who loves her, follows her, crying until he is ordered to turn back (2 Samuel 3:16), and does.

What Michal thinks about this we do not know. David's words let us know he is not the pinning lover, but rather the pragmatic leader who wants his wife through whom he is rightfully tied to the kingship and house of Saul. That this is a less than romantic relationship, at least on David's part, is affirmed once more in the last act of their story. David, now king over all Israel and Judah, decides it is time to bring the ark to Jerusalem. In a grand pageant of music, sacrifice, food and dance, David comes into the city with the Ark. Michal, daughter of Saul, watches the spectacle from the window (the window she helped him out of to make his escape?). She sees not "her husband" but "King David dancing and she despised him" (2 Samuel 6:16). When David comes to his home, a

cranky Michal comes out to greet him. In sarcasm worthy of David she challenges the honor of his behavior before the slave women and vain ones (2 Samuel 6:20). His response is also cutting in tone: God chose me over your daddy, so I'll do what I want, thank you very much! (2 Samuel 6:20-21) He further tells her: you ain't seen nothin' yet; I will be "honored" among those slave girls with more dancing. (2 Samuel 6:21-22)

Apparently marriage counseling has not been discovered yet, for the story of David and Michal ends here, with the report that until her death Michal has no children. Given what just preceded, this verse is probably not an example of biblical infertility issues[5].

Michal and her brother Jonathan each profess a love of David. The word love used between people today (as opposed to loving chocolate cake, etc.) is almost exclusively reserved to express emotional connections. But in the biblical text, the meanings are manifold. In his article on the use of 'love' *ahava* in 1st Samuel, Thompson, makes an argument for the word meaning a political connection (Thompson 335). He argues that the word for 'love' in the text of Samuel needs to be understood in context. He points out that when the text tells us that Saul, Jonathan and Israel and Judah love David, these are all political statements. His argues this can be clearly seen in the use of 'love' in 1 Kings 5:15 when there it describes King Hiram of Trye's love of David as the reason for reaching out to the new King Solomon. He explains Jonathan's gesture of giving up his clothing to David as fitting into a near eastern motif of giving power to someone via giving up a robe or the like, thus having political significant. (Thompson 335)

[5] Such as encountered by the matriarchs Sarah or Rachel.

If we follow this reading then two possibilities must be considered. One that the love Michal expresses is also a political statement. She too sees the writing on the wall and loves David as a political move which thereby connects her to David's rising star. Or it's possible that political love, as Brueggemann suggests, does not nullify the emotional aspect of love (Brueggemann, Narration, 239 n 35). There are several ways the text leads the reader to believe this is not all about politics. One way is the multiple times the text tells of their love. Michal loves David, we are told twice (1 Samuel 18:20 and 28) by the text, and Jonathan loves David we are told six times (1 Samuel 18:3, 1 Samuel 20:17). Another way we are told this is not simply politics is by the echoing of the story of Rachel and Jacob (Genesis 29-31). That story is about beauty and romantic love. Here, in addition to the motif of second daughter, we have the use of a relatively rare image that of teraphim (1 Samuel 19:13). This image is used in a very similar way in the story of Rachel (Genesis 31:35). Both are instances where a daughter is "more devoted to her husband than to her father" (Lawton 425)

Neither Jonathan nor Michal can settle into a single role, neither are fully the son/daughter nor fully the partner/wife. Michal and Jonathan do not fit into any category fully. She is strong to her brother's gentleness; she helps David out a window where Jonathan is the negotiator who tries to solve by words not deeds. Even "words of love and tenderness that David might have been expected to have for Michal are all reserved for Jonathan."(Berlin 71) Their whole relationship can be seen in light of this juxtaposition of Michal as uncharacteristically "masculine" and Jonathan as "feminine" (Berlin 70). One can read everything from her declaration of love to her struggle with David over proper behavior as reflective of this contrast. Michal is the pursuer who is

limited and the guardian of the behavior of Royals. Jonathan is the pursuer who fauns and works overtime for the relationship and less the protector of the crown. Even the act of having children is juxtaposed between Jonathan and Michal. Jonathan has a son whom David will protect while "to Michal the daughter of Saul there were no children to the day of her death (2 Samuel 6:23)."

וּלְמִיכַל בַּת־שָׁאוּל לֹא־הָיָה לָהּ יֶלֶד עַד יוֹם מוֹתָהּ׃

Michal is a woman without a conventional place. "Michal does not follow the current. Described again and again as the daughter of Saul and the wife who loves David, she is neither the dutiful daughter of one king nor the supportive spouse of another." (Goldstein 123)

A common thread that runs through David's relationships with his significant others is the manner by which he 'wins' each of them. Alice Bach in her article *The Pleasure in Her Text* writes that David gains Michal through violence against the Philistines (1 Samuel 18:27). In contrast, but still linked to violence, David gains Abigail though withholding violence against Nabal (1 Samuel 25:33-40). David gains Bathsheba through violence against her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11:26-27). (Bach 122). Even Jonathan is gained by David through violence for we read that it is immediately after David kills Goliath that Jonathan falls for David (1 Samuel 18:1).

When David meets his next significant other, Abigail, he on the lam and living in the countryside with his band. Saul is always on his heels. One can imagine it is tough to earn a living or have a regular job in these circumstances. So he and him men take to supporting themselves by acting as protection to the local shepherds. We enter the scene by being introduced to one of these sheep owners, Nabal, and to his wife, Abigail. Nabal,

we learn, is wealthy, hard and an evildoer. His wife, on the other hand, is beautiful and intelligent. She is described as having smarts, טוֹבַת שֵׂכֶל (1 Samuel 25:3), a quality she shares with David who we already know has more of this than the servants of Saul (1 Samuel 18:30).

Since it is sheep shearing time and time to get paid, David sends ten young men up to see Nabal, David instructs them to greet Nabal and request that he give them what he can. After all isn't that how *protectzia* works? David's men have protected Nabal's shepherds and nothing is missing from them, so a little gratitude is in order. Nabal asks who do they think they are asking him for payment, and he sends them packing (1 Samuel 25:10-11). David doesn't take kindly to this news, he straps on some heat, (girds his swords) and he and 400 of his closest friends head out to see Nabal.

A servant, who seems as smart as Abigail, goes to her and tells her what has happened between her husband and David's men (1 Samuel 25:14-17). The servant confirms that David's men did "protect" the shepherds. With this Abigail swings into action, she loads up some food and wine and sets out to meet David. She departs without telling her husband, (why bother him when he is so busy shearing and partying?) (1 Samuel 25:4 and 25:36).

David's ride over to Nabal's place does not calm him down, rather he knows, just like any good Mafioso, that you cannot let the little slights go by or others will try it and then the whole protection racket goes down hill. So he plans to not leave a single *pisher* (pee-er) standing by morning (1 Samuel 25:22). Abigail, the quick gal that she is, intercepts David on his way and throws herself at his feet (1 Samuel 25:23-24). (my paraphrase) "My husband, what can you do, he's an idiot. If I had met your men... but

here I am now." Abigail proceeds then to smooth talk David out of his violent actions with a deft combination of obsequiousness and an appeal to David's connection to the Divine (1 Samuel 25:26-30). She reminds David that this blood on his hands won't look good on his resume later, when he becomes ruler over Israel. And by the way, when God comes through for you [David] don't forget your maid, me [Abigail] (1 Samuel 25:31).

David takes her meaning and follows her rhetorical style when he ascribes to God his choice to not kill every male in Nabal's family. He credits her arrival as worthy of blessing. Of course, he also takes the goods that she has brought to him and sends her home (1 Samuel 25:32-35). When Abigail arrives home the oblivious Nabal is having a feast fit for a king, so she puts off telling him about her day (1 Samuel 25:36). In the morning after Nabal has sobered up, Abigail tells him about her visit with David. Which results in him having a heart attack "his heart died with in him" וַיָּמָת לִבּוֹ בְּקִרְבּוֹ (1Samuel 25:37). God finishes Nabal off ten days later by striking Nabal dead (1 Samuel 25:38). David upon hearing the news thanks God for "taking care" of Nabal.

Now that the smart and beautiful Abigail is single, David sends a marriage proposal. In her same effusive, self-deprecating style she says yes "your handmaid is ready" and licky-split hops on her donkey and with 5 of her servant gals in tow goes off and becomes David's wife (1 Samuel 25:41-42).

Another thread running through these significant relationships is the play between the pursuer and the pursued. David is pursued by Jonathan, at least in terms of binding their relationship. Jonathan falls for David, makes a covenant with David, gives clothes to David and offers to mediate with Saul (1 Samuel 18 and 19). And even when David comes to Jonathan (1 Samuel 20) for assistance, Jonathan says he will do whatever it

takes for David (1 Samuel 20:4). So too Michal makes the first move by making it know that she loves David (1 Samuel 18:20). Abigail makes her move by hurrying to greet David before he gets close (1 Samuel 25:18) and inviting him to keep her in mind. David responds well to Abigail's pursuit and upon Nabal death pursues her by sending for Abigail and taking her to wife (1 Samuel 25:39). Finally however, in the case of Bathsheba, David is the only one who pursues (2 Samuel 11:3-4.) In each of these the fact that others pursue David allows him to be in charge. Will he keep his promise and *brit* with Jonathan, will he marry Michal, will he not kill Nabal and will he remember Abigail?

This all changes with Bathsheba. In this situation David holds all the initiatives because he is king and no one in the story can forget that. The story of David and Bathsheba begins when it is the time that kings go out to battle (2 Samuel 11:1). David's armies go out to fight but David stays in Jerusalem. One evening he takes a walk on his roof and sees a beautiful woman bathing. He makes inquiries about her and finds out she is Bathsheba, wife of Uriah, the Hittite (2 Samuel 11:2-3). But this news does not the end the story. On the contrary, David sends for her, sleeps with her and she returns home. "Ah, it's good to be the King.[6]" You want something and it's yours. The verse, though, hints that something more is up. Buried in this description of their tryst is a phrase letting us know that she is ritually pure after her period (2 Samuel 11:4). This information makes the next communication between them all the more poignant and ominous. Bathsheba sends just two words to David "I'm pregnant" (2 Samuel 11:5).

This news sends David into action. Actually, this causes David to send others into action. He sends to Joab, his trusted commander, to have him send for Uriah (2 Samuel

[6] "History of the World Part 1," a Mel Brooks movie

11:6). In what may be the earliest recorded attempted political cover-up of sexual improprieties, David tries to get Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife (2 Samuel 11:8 and 11:12). David tries words (2 Samuel 11:10) and whiskey (2 Samuel 11:13). But Uriah will not go. Finally David writes a letter to Joab, which he sends with Uriah (2 Samuel 11:14). In it he tells Joab to send Uriah to the front of the fighting so Uriah will be killed (2 Samuel 11:15). He does and he dies (2 Samuel 11:16-17).

When Uriah's wife (Bathsheba) hears of his death, she dutifully laments over him (2 Samuel 11:26), but her tragedy and her story do not end here. When her mourning is over, David sends for her to come to his palace and be his wife. She gives birth to David's son (2 Samuel 11:27). It becomes clear that the cover up does not work, because we read in this very same verse that God is not pleased by David's doings. God sends in God's mouthpiece, the prophet Nathan, who by parable lets David know just how much trouble he is in. It is not a pretty picture: family strife, stolen wives (2 Samuel 12:11). and even the death of the child born to David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:14)! Suddenly it is like someone walks across David's grave, God, who has acted on David's behalf and "given you [David] your master's house your master's wives and the house of Israel and Judah (2 Samuel 12:8)," is now not amused. The sword will not swerve from David's house evermore (2 Samuel 12:10). David's family and David himself will pay for David's actions here.

It is no longer enough just to be king. David fasts and pleads with God to save the child's life. But it is to no avail. Showing surprising sensitivity, David upon the death of their son, goes to Bathsheba and comforts her. He sleeps with her and they have another son, Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24).

During the many intrigues, battles and attempts to usurp the throne that follow we do not hear of Bathsheba or from her. That is, until David is quite old and he has not appointed a successor. Nathan, the same prophet who chastises David about his affair with Bathsheba (or at least about killing her husband), now works with Bathsheba to assure her son Solomon of the throne (1 Kings 1:11-13). Nathan gives Bathsheba a speech to recite to David in his chamber. David is now far from his roaming youth and even from his roof top walks. He must be attended to in his chambers. His beautiful attendant Abishag is with him when his once (and still?) beautiful wife approaches him (1 Kings 1:13).

Bathsheba, who up to this point in the text had spoken only two words, suddenly becomes eloquent. She does not merely recite Nathan's script but enhances it. She adds a Divine connection to David's supposed promised to make Solomon the king, "you yourself swore by Adonai to your maidservant that your son Solomon will become king" (1 Kings 1:17). In addition, she appeals to his sense of the grandness of the kingdom he rules by saying "all Israel looks to him [David]" to determine succession (1 Kings 1:20). Finally, she appeals to guilt; if David does not choose Solomon, she and her son will be seen as traitors (sinners) (1 Kings 1:21).

At this point Nathan shows up to reinforce all that she has said to the king (1 Kings 1:24-27). But it is not to Nathan that David gives his response. He calls for Bathsheba and it is to her that he swears (1 Kings 1:28-29). He repeats her language back to her in his oath. By God, the God of Israel, your son Solomon will succeed me (1 Kings 1:30). No time is wasted, Solomon is made king (1 Kings 1:39).

David's behavior is a change from his earlier relationships when he was not yet king. In two of the other relationships David speaks to his significant others. But David never says a word to Bathsheba and she speaks only two words 'I'm pregnant.' It is with those two words though that "the world is changed, the king does not govern." (Brueggemann, David's Truth, 51) David is no longer in control. David, who has tried to manage every other relationship, not only these four but all others, is no longer in charge. And yet, as with Abigail, he is not in charge. David is affected by each of these women, they get David to change is behavior in one case not to kill in the other to kill. Abigail affects David with words and brains while Bathsheba does so by biology and psychology as relayed through words. It seems that for the first time David has to face consequences of his actions. "David never again is the man that he was" the actions with Uriah will shift the rising star that is David to a man struggling with family and throne. (Brueggemann, David's Truth, 61) David's children will attack each other and even try to take the crown from David (2 Samuel 14, 15 and 1 Kings 1 for example). But for now David has his hands full just with the women in his life.

Among the ways David is tied to the women in his life is the fact he performs a husbandectomy on each of them. Abigail's husband is removed not obviously by David's hand but just after David's threat. Her husband is struck dead by God, which David sees as a response to David's desire (1 Samuel 25:39). Michal is taken from David and given to another, Paltiel who is later removed in the gentlest way, by threatening words. Maybe this is because David never encounters him directly (2 Samuel 3:14-16). Bathsheba's husband is surgically removed more directly by David. It is his order that leads to directly to Uriah's death in battle (2 Samuel 11:15). In addition, two of David's

significant others are linked in mourning. Bathsheba mourns loss of her husband and Michal's husband "mourns" the loss of his wife.

There are many pieces that link the four of relationships to each other. These draw our attention to how David relates to his significant others and what these relationships tell us about David. One link between just Jonathan and Abigail is their role as intermediary. Each of them give of their family's goods to David, then act as a mediator in the relationship. Jonathan hands over his own robe, etc. but these also signify the family's royal status and thus are like giving of Saul's property to David. Jonathan then acts as intermediary between Saul and David trying to keep the peace between two men to whom he is attached (1 Samuel 19 and 20) (Green 14). Jonathan succeeds once in turning his father's anger and keeping him from his desire to kill David. Abigail for her part rushes to David and gives him food and drink, her husband's property (which her husband had just refused to David and his men); in so doing she intercedes between Nabal and David, calming David and turning him from his desire to kill Nabal. In addition, Abigail's words with David "conclude with a request to be remembered when YHVH will have dealt well with David (1 Samuel 25:31). She uses wording not quite the same as Jonathan's in chapters 20 and 23 [about his ties to David] but close" (Green 17). Each also has a clandestine rendezvous with David. Jonathan meets David in the field in a prearranged meeting to let David know how Saul feels about him and if his life is in danger. Abigail, with the aid of a servant, prepares food and brings it to David to keep her husband from danger. (1 Samuel 25)

Three of David's significant others rescue him at some point (interestingly the same three that pursue David). When "David manifests a rare lack of restraint toward

the hostile Judean landowner Nabal, he is rescued by Abigail. She convinces David to abandon an action which might lead to a Judean civil war; thus he gains a foothold in Judah by peaceful means (marriage to Abigail) rather than bellicose means" (Rosenberg 137) Earlier we find that Michal rescued David from her father through the very physical act of lowering him out the window so he could escape from Saul's men (1 Samuel 19:12) :וַתֹּרֶד מִיכַל אֶת־דָּוִד בְּעַד הַחַלּוֹן וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּבְרַח וַיִּמָּלֵט. Her brother instead was a man of words; he talked Saul out of killing David 1 Samuel 19:6. And when he tries a second time to no avail to stop Saul, he tells David of his father's plans and David is able to flee to safety (1Samuel 20:42- 21:1).

David is a well loved man who marries often and usually for gain. In each of his four most significant relationships (Michal, Jonathan, Abigail and Bathsheba) David expresses his passions and his politics. These four represent building of connections and claim to the throne, though they each come with a dark side. His relationship with Bathsheba, which echoes many of the others, is a turning point in David's life that leaves its mark on the rest of the story. David's relationships with these four also show us his desires, his savvy and his emotional voids. All of this serves to make David the once great and fascinating king.

Meetings 1 Samuel 16:14-23 17:25-40 and 17:54-58

"When David Met Saul"

When Saul meets David in the first book of Samuel, we, the readers of the book, have already met David. We have read in 1 Samuel 16:11-13, how David was seen, selected and anointed by Samuel at God's behest. He was the one secretly chosen to replace Saul as King. This is the reader's introduction to David. However, from Saul's perspective there are two, rather different, reports of his first meeting with David. In the first report, David is introduced as a man who is fit for the job of music therapist to the king (1 Samuel 16:18). In the second report, he is the brash young man who offers to take on the Philistine champion Goliath (1 Samuel 17:32). Saul is introduced to David two times, each encounter responds to a specific need of Saul. .

Saul encounters David for the "first" time in 16: 17-22, (according to the chronology of the text). An evil spirit has come upon Saul and Saul is told about the young musician וְנִגֵּן בְּיָדוֹ וְטוֹב לָךְ׃ "and he [David] will play and it will be well for you". On this recommendation of one of his servants, Saul sends for David. Though they have not met and the book does not report the servant giving David's name to Saul, Saul is mysteriously privy to both David's name and occupation. He sends a personalized request to David's father

שְׁלְחָה אֵלַי אֶת־דָּוִד בִּנְךָ אֲשֶׁר בַּצֹּאן׃ "send to me your son David who is with the flocks" (1 Samuel 16:19) (Cartledge, 209). According to Saul's servant, David is a multitalented lad skilled in music, a warrior, a valiant fellow and good looking to boot (1 Samuel 16:18). David enters Saul's service and is then so loved by Saul that

Saul requests of David's father, Jesse, to let David stay on in the king's service and even "promotes" David to the position of arms bearer. (1 Samuel 16:21)

In contrast, the text's second "initial" meeting of the two men is initiated by David, not Saul. There is an imminent battle but, no Israelite is willing to go into combat. They are afraid of the formidable Philistines. On the field, opposite the Philistine's encampment, David wanders among Saul's troops. In response to Goliath's daily challenge, David inquires about the reward for the killing Goliath;

מַה־יֵּעָשֶׂה לָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַכֶּה אֶת־הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי (1 Samuel 17: 26)

"What will be done for the man who kills that Philistine"... As Alter says, David "makes patriotic pronouncements" (Alter page 195). David continues: "Who is that uncircumcised Philistine that he dares defy the ranks of the living God?"

מִי הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי הֶעָרֵל הַזֶּה כִּי חֵרֵף מַעַרְכוֹת אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים:

(1Samuel 17:26). These words are reported to Saul who then immediately sends for David. Once again David is brought to Saul as the man who can answer Saul's needs. However, this time David must present his own credentials for the job. David eloquently argues in that he is "the right man" for the job even though he is only a lad. First, he describes his own <u>personal</u> ability to fight by telling of his rescue of his father's sheep from lions and bears. "I would go after it and fight it and rescue it from its mouth. And if it attacked me, I would seize it by the beard and strike it down and kill it" (1 Samuel 17:35).

וְיָצָאתִי אַחֲרָיו וְהִכִּתִיו וְהִצַּלְתִּי מִפִּיו וַיָּקָם עָלַי וְהֶחֱזַקְתִּי בִּזְקָנוֹ וְהִכִּתִיו וַהֲמִיתִיו:

Secondly, David credits God with saving him from the lion and the bear. He then predicts that God will also save him from the Philistines. "God who saved me from lion and bear will also save me from that Philistine."

יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הִצִּלַנִי מִיַּד הָאַרְי

וּמִיַּד הַדֹּב הוּא יַצִּילַנִי מִיַּד הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי הַזֶּה

Who can resist such job qualifications? Naturally, this convinces Saul who responds by telling David to "go with God's accompaniment" (1 Samuel 17:37).

The verses in 1 Samuel 17:55-58 clearly marks this as another "first" meeting between Saul and David. We read that when David walks onto the field of battle, Saul inquires of his commander Abner, "whose son is the youth?" Abner does not know, so David is called over to reveal his lineage. Here, after his success, with Goliath's head still in hand, David is once more "introduced" or at least his lineage is revealed (again) to Saul. David tells him that he is "the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite" (1 Sam 17:58). Earlier, in the story of David as musician (1 Samuel 16:17-22), Saul was told by his own servant that David was the son of Jesse. And, after hiring David, Saul sent a message to Jesse, to let David stay at court. Thus, Saul's lack of awareness at his point stands out.

In these, the "firsts" of their many encounters, we see that author lets us know clearly that David is not like Saul. The musical therapist David is a brilliant musician with whom is the spirit of God (1 Samuel 16:18). In sharp contrast, we read that the spirit of God has departed from Saul. (1 Samuel 16:14). The warrior David is an assertive, young man. In opposition, Saul is described as being nervous and inadequate. In fact, Saul is so inadequate, that he places the armor on David in the wrong manner.

According to Gary A. Rendsburg this is a deliberate use of confused language. He translates verse 17:38 as "Saul clothed David in his body suit then he even placed a bronze helmet on his head and he clothed him with a breast plate." He goes on to point out "in the entire history of human armor, the last item to be donned is always the helmet." Therefore, as he reads the text, "one of the overall goals of the author of 1 Samuel... is to show the inadequacy of Saul" (Rendsburg, 7.2). Furthermore, once David is so attired, he cannot walk. He must take off the armor and choose his own weapons instead. In contrast to the warrior's garment of Saul, David chooses smooth stones and the shepherd's sling (1 Samuel 17:40).

Each of these meetings also initiates what will be the difficult, yet ongoing, relationship between Saul and David. There is love and devotion, as well as conflict and jealousy. When David becomes the king's musician Saul loves him (1 Samuel 16:21) and David has found favor in the king's eyes (1 Samuel 16:22). He therefore stays and is successful as a "therapist"(1 Samuel 16:23). After the encounter with Goliath, Saul takes David on for military service and once again does not let him go back to his father's house (1 Samuel 18:2). David stays and is successful as "commander"(1 Samuel 18:5). While initially David is brought in to meet Saul's needs, later David's very success will cause Saul's love to turn into a fear that will override any earlier affection.

Marriages (1 Samuel 18:17-29)

'Matchmaker, Matchmaker'

As a result of David's success (and Saul's developing fear), the relationship between David and Saul changes from friendly and warm to hostile. In spite of, or perhaps, *because* of this change, Saul gives to David the hand of his older daughter, Merab, in marriage. Two important events preceding this offer of marriage precipitate the change in the relationship between David and Saul. The first event is when women from every town come out to sing about Saul's and David's great victories. In the song, David's conquests are greater that Saul's. For Saul, this as a bad sign. He see the writing on the wall: David is getting too popular; the only thing missing now for David is the kingship (1 Samuel 18:6-12). The second event that splits the men is when, even with David's lyre playing, an evil spirit comes upon Saul and he tries to nail David to the wall. Twice!(1 Samuel 18:10).

After these events, Saul changes David's military appointment, but, once again, David is successful. He even gains the love of all Israel and Judah (1 Samuel 18:16). It is after this most recent success (an Israelite love-fest) that Saul offers David his oldest daughter Merab as a wife. He will give her to David, *if* David will be his warrior and fight the battles of God (1 Samuel 18:17a). One might wonder: isn't that what David had already been doing up to this point?

Saul's precise motives though are made crystal clear to the reader when the text continues with Saul saying/thinking "let not my hand strike him; let the hand of the Philistines strike him" (1 Samuel 18:17a). David, the ever wise of word (1 Samuel

16:18), does not reject the task but rather (as Jonathan Kirsch writes) "he responds to Saul in words so modest that they approach sarcasm. 'Who am I and what is my life that I should be son-in-law to the king?'(1 Samuel 18:18.) Whereby David foils Saul's plot simply by declaring himself unworthy" (Kirsch page 65).

These words reveal more than just clever avoidance of a difficult task; they also point out how David views the king's offer. Saul is often quite transparent, to the reader, with his thoughts. It is almost as if there was a comic strip thought balloon floating over his head, revealing his thoughts. On the other hand, David is rarely as transparent with his thoughts. David's response, though, does reveal his interests. He is neither concerned about the danger nor interested in the bride. Rather, he first perceives the issue in terms of becoming the king's son-in-law. In fact, this notion of being the king's son-in-law, is repeated 6 times in only a few verses (1 Sam. 18:18, 21ff, 26f; 22:14). This is not simply because of the lesser value of women or simply that women are to be transferred, as property, from man to man . Rather, this use of language, expresses a key element of the Saul--David dynamic; specifically, David's imminent ascent to power and kingship. David tries to mask this by protesting "just enough". In this case saying twice (to paraphrase); "no, no I can't be the king's son-in-law" (1 Samuel 18:18). This time Saul acquiesces and gives his daughter Merab to another man.

In a fortuitous turn of events, another member of Saul's family falls in love with David, namely, Michal, Saul's younger daughter. When this is reported to Saul (1 Samuel 18:20), he sees not a woman in love but trap to snare David. Again, we, the readers, can see the thought balloon over Saul's head as he says he will give Michal to David to trap him so the Philistines will kill him (1 Samuel 18:21). Saul tells David that

he can become his son-in-law through "the second one"[1](1 Samuel 18:20). This time Saul does not let David plead false modesty. Having been unsuccessful with arranging David's marriage to Merab, Saul tries another approach: this time he tries honey. Saul enlists the aid of his servants/courtiers to speak with David privately[2]. So by order of the king, Saul's courtiers tell David of the king's desire for him and that the courtiers love him. He is told that *now* is the time to become the king's son-in-law (1 Samuel 18:22). Again, David protests, asking them if it is such a trifling thing in their eyes to become the king's son in law. After all he is a poor and inconsequential man (1 Samuel 18:23). One can almost envision David turning his pockets inside out for emphasis. When the courtiers relay David's response, Saul tells them to offer David an extremely affordable, non-monetary, bride price: only 100 Philistine foreskins (1 Samuel 18:25)! Saul's motives become completely transparent to the readers as, once again, we are reminded that Saul wants David's death, a death at the hands of the Philistines.

At this point in the text, using identical language to Saul's pleasure at Michal falling in love with David, we are told that David is pleased with the idea of becoming the king's son in law. וַיִּשַּׁר הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי לְהִתְחַתֵּן בַּמֶּלֶךְ (1 Samuel 18:20 and 1 Samuel 18:26). According to McCarter, these phrases show us that "each man sees the marriage prospect as an opportunity to further his cause. For Saul it is a chance to place David in mortal danger without casting suspicion on himself. For David it is a chance to advance his position at court substantially and innocently"(McCarter, 317).

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[1] Meaning of Hebrew unclear but from what follows it seems to mean become son-in-law by marriage to Saul's second daughter Michal.

[2] It maybe worthy of note that the only other time this word בַּלָּט meaning private or discreet is used in relationship to Saul and David, is when David is secretly or discreetly cutting a piece of Saul's robe off (1 Samuel 24:5).

Additionally, this is the second time when David's motivations are revealed to the reader. Apparently, David is so pleased with his up-coming marriage that, even before the deadline expires, he has acquired not just 100 foreskins but a full 200! (1 Samuel 18:27a). Twice there is a proposal of marriage to David, the second one is successful and, at last, David becomes Saul's son-in-law. Doesn't that deserve twice the bride-price? David got up, went out and got the job done. Upon his return, he counts out for Saul the full price plus 100% to become son-in-law to the king (1 Samuel 18:27b).

After what must have been a bloody scene, Saul had no choice but to give Michal to David. All of which only serves to make Saul more afraid, thus cementing David's position as the enemy of Saul (1 Samuel 18:29). As a doublet with the beginning of this matchmaking section and the new phase in the relations of Saul and David, two events affirm their changed relationship. Again, as in 1 Samuel 18:6-12, one event has to do with women or in this case a woman; we read once more that Michal, daughter of Saul, loved David (1 Samuel 18:28b). The other event is Saul recognizing that God is with David and by extension not with Saul (1 Samuel 18:28a). These two events feed Saul's fear and distrust. The text suggests he had good reason, for yet again, David is successful. This time David is more successful than all the other officers of Saul (1 Samuel 18:29).

Many hands

#3 "Manos: Hands of Fate"[3]

The word "hand" in its many forms and meanings will be key in the story of Saul's and David's interactions. Their story will be played out in a 'hands on - hands off' game of cat and mouse. This game starts with David as a player of music (who plays by means of his hand[4]) וְנִגֵּן בְּיָדוֹ (1 Samuel 16:16), continues through the stories of David and Saul, up to the encounter with an Amalekite who claims to have killed Saul. As the text reads: לִשְׁלֹחַ יָדְךָ לְשַׁחֵת אֶת־מְשִׁיחַ יְהוָה "put forth your hand to destroy Adonai's anointed [Saul]" (2 Samuel 1:14).

In chapter 16, when Saul agrees to see a (music) therapist, David is summoned. He brings, by hand, bread, a skin of wine and a kid goat. Polzin[5] points out that these items, carried by the hand of David, correspond to the three items Saul is told (by Samuel) that he would encounter upon his anointment (1Samuel 10:3). Is David then starting anew the kingship road that Saul took? (Alter, 99). Even before David's fancy hands play the lyre, Saul loves him (1 Samuel 16:21). The power of David's playing revives Saul and turns away the evil spirit (1 Samuel 16:23). This scene may be the last gentle encounter of the hands of these two men.

In the next chapter, the hands we encounter are both earthly and divine. In David's sales pitch to Saul for the job of fighting Goliath, he credits his own skill as well as the Almighty for saving him from the wild animals which attacked his father's flock (1

[3]The title of what is considered one "The 20 worst movie titles in Hollywood history" Certainly, if were not for the Mystery Science Theater treatment of this film, nobody would have ever heard of the 1966 movie "Manos: Hands of Fate" which, when translated completely from Spanish, means "Hands: Hands of Fate".
[4] When the word "hand" in this paper represents a use of hand in the Biblical text is will be underlined.
[5] Polzin as quoted by Alter

Samuel 17:35-37a). David is saved, by God, from the paw (hand or *yad* in Hebrew) of the lion and the bear. (In modern times the lion is associated with royalty, do we have a precursor here and a another sign legitimizing David's rise to the throne?) David suggests that just as God has saved him from the hand of the lion, so too the Philistine will not be saved from the hand of David (1 Samuel 17:37b). During the battle with Goliath, David yells at him warning him that God will soon deliver his severed head into David's hands. David refers to both his own hands, as well as the "hands" of God as being "my hands" and, oh yeah, I represent the team Israel "our hands" (1 Samuel 17:45-47). The victorious David, still carrying Goliath's head in his hands, is introduced to Saul. Is this "innocent hero story" really a veiled threat to Saul? The theme of being delivered into the opponent's hands by God will play out from this point on. Both Saul and David will ask, or be asked, if their enemy (each other) is being delivered into his hands by God. The story of David's defeat of Goliath tells us who will be the ultimate victor (hint: it's not Saul).

On the heels of this battle with the Philistine, David becomes an overnight success. He is successful with the ladies (1 Samuel 18:6) as well as with the guys – at least with Saul's son Jonathan (1Samuel 18: 1). Saul becomes suspicious of David and tries to take his anger out on David with his own hands (1 Samuel 18:10). Jonathan Kirsch suggests that there are three reasons Saul turned from David: madness, politics or a meddlesome God (Kirsch 64). All three are at play the first time Saul raises his hand against David. Jonathan, the king's son and heir, has just made a pact with David (1 Samuel 18:3)-- this is the political. An evil spirit has come upon Saul-- this is the madness. The evil spirit is from God--this is our meddling Deity (1 Samuel 18:10).

Later, when it is time for their regularly scheduled session of music therapy, David plays his lyre (by hand) to calm the evil spirit. Saul, on the other hand, plays with a spear in his hand (1Samuel 18:10). The ever transparent Saul says; "let me nail David to the wall" (1Samuel 18:11). Apparently he was so inept in his actions that David was able to elude him two times.

When Saul is unsuccessful in taking David with his own hands, he tries to find a proxy. Who better than the Israelites' persistent enemy, the Philistines. This serves two purposes for Saul. First, it should get David killed and second it will not reflect negatively on Saul. After all, if Saul is successful, David will die in battle by the hands of the enemy, (might this be where David learned his behavior towards Uriah? (2 Samuel 11:15)). When Saul proposes to David a marriage, he reveals to the reader that marriage is simply a ploy to get David to fall into the hands of the enemy Philistines. Previously he wanted to strike David himself (in his music therapy session) however now, Saul reconsiders his method and wishes his hands to remain clean, by letting the hands of the Philistines be covered with David's blood instead. Three times, while bargaining over a bride price, Saul fantasizes about his desire for David's death to be יַד־פְּלִשְׁתִּים 'by the hand of the philistines' (1 Samuel 18:17,21,25).

When this new approach proves to be a failure, in fact David is not only alive but has upped Saul 100[6], there is a reprieve in the conflict between Saul and David. Jonathan negotiates a break in hostilities by calming his father's fears. But it does not last long and it ends for reasons much like the first time; that David is successful and the Divine

[6] 200 instead of 100 foreskins for a bride price

Depression falls on Saul. Saul once again takes spear in hand to kill his musician, David, once again, flees. (1Samuel 19:9)

From this point on their game of cat and mouse is taken out of the house and into the countryside. Jonathan makes one last attempt to reconcile his father and David but, he too, nearly ends up himself at the wrong end of Saul's spear (1 Samuel 20:33). As a result, David dashes out into the country side without so much as food or a weapon in hand. David's first stop is with the priest Ahimelch at Nob to get whatever is on hand (1 Samuel 21:4-9). Amazingly, the only weapon on hand is the sword David had earlier taken from Goliath. David takes it (1 Samuel 21:10).

On his flight David picks up his family and a motley crew of debtors and dissidents (1 Samuel 22:1-2). He tries to settle in Moab but the prophet Gad tells him to move on to Judah. . When Saul learns of David's whereabouts, he is, once again, a man with spear in hand (1 Samuel 22:6). After ranting about his son Jonathan's disloyalty to all who are nearby (1 Samuel 22:7-8), Saul is informed by Doeg that David was seen with the priests at Nob (1 Samuel 22:9). In telling Saul, Doeg indicts the priests of assisting David. Saul then demands his men to kill the priests because they are working "hand-in-hand" with David (their hands are with David (1 Samuel 22:17a)) but his men refuse to raise a hand (1 Samuel 22:17b) against the priests. Doeg, however, is willing. He slaughters all but one of the priests who manages to escape to David's camp.

After the bloodbath, David offers the surviving priest protection. This seems to bring with it an even better hotline to the divine. David finds out that the Philistines are attacking and gets the A-Ok from God to take on the Philistines, for God will deliver them into David's hands (1 Samuel 23:4). After this battle, Saul finds out where David

and his home boys are hanging out. Saul mistakenly believes that God has delivered David into his hands (1 Samuel 23:7)! David learns of Saul's intentions and seeks advice from God via the Ephod brought by the surviving the priest. God comes through for David and lets him know that that the locals of Keliah (whom he has just saved from the Philistines 1 Samuel 23:5) will deliver him into Saul's hands (1 Samuel 23:12)?! So David beats feet and gets out of there. Saul does not go to Keliah.

David continues hiding out in the wilderness; all the while Saul pursues him. In case we doubted, we are reassured that God will not deliver David into Saul's hands (1 Samuel 23:14). David is still the darling to at least one member of Saul's family. Jonathan visits David in his wilderness hiding place. He encourages David's hand and assures him that Saul's hand will not find him (1 Samuel 23:16-17a). Oh, and by the way, he tells David: "you are going to be king and even my father knows it" (1 Samuel 23:17b).

Unexpectedly, Saul seems to have a good day; the Ziphites decide to help out and offer to turn David over to Saul (1Samuel 23:19-20). Saul, whose luck or connections have not been so reliable as of late, tells the Ziphites to do the leg work and make sure they know where David is. Saul then comes to look for him (1 Samuel 23:22). David gets wind of this threat and heads down to Moan. In a scene worthy of great cinematography, David winds around one side of a mountain and Saul around the other. But just at the climatic moment, Saul gets a call that the Philistines are at it again and he has to leave off chasing David to go fight that fight instead. Once again, David slips through Saul's fingers. (1 Samuel 23:27-28)

After a quick battle with the Philistines, Saul is back in hot pursuit of David. Now, he is told that David and his men are at En-gedi (though probably not enjoying the near by spa and mud baths at the Dead Sea) (1 Samuel 24:2). David's men are actually in the rocks and caves on the hill side. Saul, thinking he has found the local men's room, steps into a cave to relieve himself ("uncover his feet" [1 Samuel 24:4]). David and his men happen to be in this particular cave (1 Samuel 24:4). David's men take this as being a clear sign that God has delivered Saul into David's hands (1 Samuel 24:5a). David then does take matters into his hand but in an unexpected way. He reaches over and cuts off part of Saul's robe (1 Samuel 24:5b).

According to Brueggemann, David "will not commit an act of violence, but he will leave his calling card in an unmistakable gesture." He further writes that the "narrative reads as though David intended to act without restraint but stopped out of his self-serving commitment to the royal office" (Brueggemann, David's Truth, 28-9) Brueggemann points out that David is ambiguously drawn in this story. Why David's hand is restrained is not clear. However, why he wants Saul unharmed is very clear: Saul is *The Anointed of God* and well, you cannot just go around killing the anointed of God. Wait a moment, isn't David too, the anointed of God? (1 Samuel 16:13)

Though not to be fully explored here, the vocabulary of these verses parallel some of the key phrases from the book of Ruth. When Ruth approaches Boaz on the threshing room floor she secretly בַּלָּט approaches Boaz, uncovers his feet וַתְּגַל מַרְגְּלֹתָיו and is under his robe וּפָרַשְׂתְּ כְּנָפֶךָ. David went and 'stealthily cut off the corner of Saul's cloak' וַיִּכְרֹת אֶת־כְּנַף־הַמְּעִיל אֲשֶׁר־לְשָׁאוּל בַּלָּט: when Saul was 'uncovering his

feet' לְהָסֵךְ אֶת־רַגְלָיו (1 Samuel 24:4). (The words are not the same but the meaning makes an interesting parallel.)

Back to our story, the interactions following the scene at the cave are filled with David emphasizing how he had Saul in his hands, how God had put Saul in his hands (1 Samuel 24:11), and how his hands did not harm Saul (1 Samuel 24:11). David held up the corner of Saul's robe that he had in his hand and tells Saul 'See, I could have killed you' (1 Samuel 24:12). He then steps back and reassures Saul that he will not strike the anointed one of God. Saul realizes his close call and acknowledges David's superior hand, even that David will become king over Israel (1 Samuel 24:20). Saul then strikes a deal with David in order to protect his descendents. (1 Samuel 24:22). "Through this long running play on words, skillfully interlaced throughout the account of the conflict between David and Saul, the writer makes it certain that the hand of God is with David and against Saul, clearly leaving David with the upper hand" (Cartledge page 275).

After an extended interlude where David blows his top, nearly kills a wealthy fool and gains a brilliant and beautiful wife (1 Samuel 25), we find the Ziphites once again offering David's current address to Saul (1 Samuel 26:1). Upon hearing that Saul was coming after him, David sends out scouts to find Saul first. The scene is set in darkness, just like the one in the cave, and once again Saul is vulnerable, this time because he is asleep. (1 Samuel 24:4). Abishai, who has come along with David, tells us that God has delivered Saul into David's hands, but he offers to do the deed of spearing Saul himself (1 Samuel 26:8). David rejects this and immediately says (again) that no one should strike God's anointed (1 Samuel 26:9). David says that God will strike down Saul but it won't be by David's hand (1 Samuel 26:11). Here too a symbolic act, even a symbolic

killing, takes place by the hand of David. Rather than a piece of Saul's cloak, David takes Saul's spear and water bottle right from beside his head (1 Samuel 26:12). When Saul's find out what has happened, David once again points out to Saul that his life was in his hands and yet he did not kill him(1 Samuel 26:16). Saul attempts to reconcile with David even inviting him to come back (1 Samuel 26:21). David passes on the opportunity. He ends the conversation with a reminder that God had delivered Saul into David's hands (1 Samuel 26:23) with the implication God would do it again just as God did with the lion and the bear and the Philistine (1Samuel 17:37 and 26:24).

To be on the safe side, even with the protection of the Divine, David decides this is a good time to move to the Philistine suburbs (Yes the same Philistines who are the Israelite enemies but that is another story for another time). He needs to get away from the long arm of Saul because "someday that hand of Saul won't do me any good" (1 Samuel 27:1). Sure enough, after David moves in with King Achish, Saul stops pursuing him (1 Samuel 27:4).

In a twist of fate, it is Saul who ends up the one to suffer at the hands of the Philistines. The ghost of Samuel, conjured up against Saul's own edicts (1 Samuel 28:9-11), tells Saul what we already know. The kingship is to be taken out of Saul's hands and given to David (1 Samuel 28:16-17). And, to add injury to insult, Samuel tells him God will deliver not only Saul and his sons into the hands of the Philistines but also Saul's troops (1 Samuel 28:19).

Meanwhile David has his hands full. The Amalekites have raided the village where his troops and their families were staying (1 Samuel 30:1-2). He and his men give chase and successfully recover their belongings (1 Samuel 30:18). David re-frames their

success, giving the credit to God for delivering the raiders into their hands (1 Samuel 30:23). At the same time, Saul and his men are being overrun by the Philistines (1 Samuel 31:1-2) and Saul chooses to end his own life. You could say he takes his life and death into his own hands, except he really doesn't. At the end, he tries to find a proxy to take his life but is unsuccessful. And so, in the very end, Saul cannot even raise his hand to kill himself, rather he falls to his death on his own sword (1 Samuel 31:4).

An Amalekite brings word to David of Saul's death boasting that he was the one who had killed Saul. Hearing this news, David returns to a favorite theme, claiming that it is not acceptable "to lift your hand and kill the God's anointed" (1 Samuel 24:7, 26:11, and 2 Samuel 1:14). John Goldingay in his book, Men Behaving Badly, points out that David, who has built his reputation on violence and ensured his survival on violence, now desists and has someone else to do his lynchings. The time has come to keep his hands clean (Goldingay, 198). Why this change of character? In part, because the death of the king means that the time has come for him to make a move on the throne (Goldingay, 198).

Clean hands do not insure a clean heart but further motivations on David's part will be analyzed elsewhere. The word "hand" in the Samuel texts is used in a large variety of ways. As the Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament points out the word "hand" and the uses of the hand are quite extensive throughout the Biblical text. In addition it points out that the word *yad* itself appears to be ancient. *Yad* can represent the simple act of holding something as a well as personal responsibility for an act. One's hands can assert possession and control or represent a gesture of pleading or threatening. There is a substantial use of the word *yad* in the book of 1 Samuel and a large measure of

its uses relate to the dynamic between David and Saul. The hand of Saul and the hand of David wrestle their way through the text until Saul can raise his hand no more.

The relationship between David and Saul ends far from where it began. David never plays (by hand) music again. David, the lad who rescued sheep from the mouths of lions and killed just one man in the name of God and country, now has the blood of thousands on his hands. Saul, the first king, only gets remembered in the battles which solidified the kingdom which ends up in the hands of David. And maybe the lessons David learned from Saul will manifest in his treatment of Uriah and his own children.

Bad news is Good News

Three Public Deaths

The rise and fall of royal dynasties are rarely pretty stories. Often they are filled with crises and bloodshed. King David's rise is no different. The manner in which David responds to the events surrounding his rise to power and the struggles within his house demonstrate to us he is a politically savvy man. But even the most political of animals can be a loving father and for at least a moment David is that too. The way David responds to death is a major theme in his story. This theme unfolds in both the story of David's acquisition and tenure as king and in the later episodes about David as the founder of a dynasty (Gunn, 89), where we read of the traumas to which the dynasty will fall. Specifically, there are seven deaths (three public/political and four private/personal) and a rape that reveal to the reader aspects of David's character. In each of these cases David's response to events highlight a complex man who nearly always does the right, if also, the political thing.

There are three political deaths whose timeliness helps David rise to the office of King over both Judea and Israel. The first and most obvious is the death of Saul. The second is the death of Abner, who was second in command to both Saul and to his son Ish-bosheth. And the third is the death Ish-bosheth himself. David, the great warrior, manages to never be held accountable for these deaths, even though he gains tremendously by them. In fact, as if to emphasize his clear separation from these deaths of his opponents, he orders the death of their killers. These deaths of the killers, at David's orders, are in Walter Brueggemann's eyes, deaths that use a kind of "biblical math." In equations that must equal zero, each killer's death balances out another death,

all of which serves to leave David free to pursue the kingship (Cartledge 401). David's rival dies, the killer pays, and David gets what remains – the title – king.

In the chapters leading up to Saul's death we learn of David's rise in popularity and his military success, his dealings with the Philistines and his politically significant marriages. We, the readers, know that God has long ago anointed David to be the next king, but the Judean on the street does not know. In 1 Samuel 30 David is shown to be far away from the place where Saul will fight and die. We also read of his savvy as he builds support among the people by distributing pillaged goods to them. Then in chapter 31, we read of Saul's, Jonathan's and the Israelite forces' battle, and their ultimate defeat by the Philistines.

The book of 2 Samuel opens with word of Saul's demise reaching David. We, the readers, have already been primed for David's plausible deniability of responsibility for the death. The scene opens with a man arriving in a state of mourning. David inquires of him where he has come from and what has happened. David is informed that Israelite troops fled from battle, Israelite troops died in battle, and also that Saul and Jonathan have died in the battle (2 Samuel 4). David further asks how the man knows. He responds by describing events surrounding Saul's death, with the twist that *he* has killed Saul at Saul's request. The man continues by saying he took Saul's crown and armband and brought them to David. (2 Samuel 1:11)

What happens next, David's response, is pure genius. He engages in a trifecta[1] of correct behavior: first bewail the death of the king, then avenge the death of the king and, of course, memorialize the death of the king. As Cartledge writes "one of the magical qualities of David's leadership was his uncanny ability to do the right thing at the right

[1] A system of betting in which the bettor must pick the first three winners in the correct sequence.

time with convincing integrity" (Cartledge, 352). David's first response to the news is to tear his clothes (which is repeated by his men); then they all weep, wail and fast for Saul, Jonathan, the people of God and the fallen soldiers of Israel (2 Samuel 1:12). David's second response is aimed at the bearer of the "bad news," an Amalakite (who if Saul had done his God appointed duty would not be alive? [1 Samuel 15]). David, repeating his oft mentioned (1 Samuel 24 and 26) concern about killing God's anointed one, asks of the man, "Were you not afraid to raise your hand against the anointed of God?"(2 Samuel 1:14). David has already made it clear that killing the one anointed by God is not acceptable; therefore we are not surprised when he has the self proclaimed killer of the *Anointed of God* killed. (Notice that David does not call not Saul by name but by the words which fit David too, anointed of God!) In keeping with his squeaky clean image in this scene, David keeps his hands blood free and has someone else do the killing. (2 Samuel 1:15)

וַיִּקְרָ֣א דָוִ֔ד לְאַחַ֖ד מֵהַנְּעָרִ֑ים וַיֹּ֣אמֶר גַּֽשׁ־פְּגַע־בּ֥וֹ וַיַּכֵּ֖הוּ וַיָּמֹֽת׃

"and David called one of the attendants and said to him, 'Come over and strike him!' He struck him down and he died."

The final item on David's "right-thing-to-do list" is to lament the death of the king. His lament captures many political themes. It covers the conflicts with the Philistines (who clearly know of the victory over Israel by now so what's not to tell) (2 Samuel 1:20). The lament speaks of the relationship and death of Saul and Jonathan, his son and successor? (2 Samuel 1:23). David also memorializes their prowess in battle (which made Saul at least for a while a worthy King) (2 Samuel 1:23b-25). And finally David mentions his particular ties to Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:26) (emphasizing that David

did have affection for Jonathan too) but commemorating Jonathan's love for himself "*your* love to me [David] is more wondrous..." (2 Samuel 1:26).

The lament could also be a short hand and nicely "spun" view of many aspects of David relationship with Saul and Jonathan. This only adds to our doubt about the sincere nature of David's innocence and whether he is truly grieving. David, as Robert Alter points out, was doing deeds in Gath he did not want known (Alter 199). The portrayal of Jonathan's and Saul's relationship to each other (as untroubled), rings false when we know David was a cause of a rift between them (1 Samuel 20:1-4, 20:30-34 and 22:7). The reference to women singing in the streets is a reminder of David's greater accolades than Saul in the words of a victory song (1 Samuel 18:7). In addition, Saul, as bearer of gifts for the women, rings of David's sharing the booty of his raids (1 Samuel 30:24-31). And finally, David seems to be embracing of Jonathan's affection for him and yet as David is wont to do, David shows but little of his own feelings for Jonathan.

After this wonderful demonstration of appropriate behavior over the death of the king, the very next thing that our grieving David does is turn to God for travel advice. He asks God about going to Judah, in particular, to Hebron. God tells David to go. David, two of his wives and his entire regiment go and settle in Hebron. The very next verse is most telling if read as continuing David's response to the bad news of Saul's death.

יְהוּדָה וַיָּבֹאוּ אַנְשֵׁי יְהוּדָה וַיִּמְשְׁחוּ־שָׁם אֶת־דָּוִד לְמֶלֶךְ עַל־בֵּית

"The men of Judah came and there they anointed David king over the House of Judah (2 Samuel 2:4a)." No fanfare, no discussion, just instant kingship. David then performs his first act of conciliation and consolidation. He honors the work of the men who buried Saul and who were formerly allied with Saul (2 Samuel 2:4b-6). "David's message

reflects a deft strategy built on religious and political terminology" (Cartledge 367) He honors their loyalty, asks God's blessing on them, then links himself to them by offering his goodness to them. Then to seal the deal he reminds them, oh yeah … your guy is dead and I'm the new king on the block!

כִּי־מֵת אֲדֹנֵיכֶם שָׁאוּל וְגַם־אֹתִי מָשְׁחוּ בֵית־יְהוּדָה לְמֶלֶךְ עֲלֵיהֶם׃

"For your lord Saul is dead and the House of Judah has already anointed me king over them." The men of Judah know where they stand and we know the veiled threat that lingers in the air. David kills those who bring bad news, so these folks will accept David as successor.

It is this death, the death of the anointed of God, the death of the king of Israel, to which David gives his most complicated response. "Since most, if not all, readers would be aware of the partially fictitious nature of the Amalekite's story, it seems that its primary function was to counter any possible rumor or accusations leveled against David…It would not require much imagination for some to argue that David had helped to bring about Saul's death and was duly rewarded by the Philistines" (Anderson, 10). Therefore a deft exculpation is required and delivered. Upon hearing of the next timely death, David will respond as deftly, but with lesser intensity.

David's response to the next death, the death of Abner answers the age old question, what is the sound of a guilty conscience?

נָקִי אֲנֹכִי וּמַמְלַכְתִּי מֵעִם יְהוָה עַד־עוֹלָם מִדְּמֵי אַבְנֵר בֶּן־נֵר׃

"Both I and my kingdom are forever innocent before Adonai of shedding the blood of Abner son of Ner." David has just finished negotiations with Abner to get his wife Michal (and marriage tie to the throne) back (2 Samuel 3:14). They have just negotiated

a deal where Abner was going to bring David into power over Israel (2 Samuel 3:12). So why would David have a hand in Abner's death? If we look at the broader context we see that Abner has just been in conflict with and possibly attempting to usurp the throne from the man he has made king, Ish-bosheth. Abner too was a savvy political animal, he backed Ish-bosheth. But when he saw that he was becoming a lost cause, Abner worked with the tribes of Israel to switch allegiances to David. David also had a long history of personal tension with Abner (1 Samuel 26:15). So David had reason to be suspicious of this man. Joab, David's number one man, returns from a raiding trip and finds that the man, Abner, who had killed his brother, has just been meeting with David and was allowed to go home in peace (2 Samuel 3:23). This infuriates Joab who chooses this time to exact his revenge (2 Samuel 3:24). The text makes sure that we know that David doesn't know what Joab is up to (2 Samuel 3:26). Joab follows Abner and lures him into a trap, and kills him (2 Samuel 3:27).

This time, upon hearing the "bad news" of an adversary's demise, David announces his own innocence. He then adds not only it is "not my fault" but he points his finger at Joab. David uses language, more than action, to distance himself from the crime. Not only does he say "I didn't do it," but he throws a curse upon Joab's house (2 Samuel 3:29). Then he moves into mourning mode. This time however, those around him do not spontaneously join him in mourning, as they did after Saul's death. He must order Joab and his men to engage in mourning. "David then ordered Joab and all the troops with him to rend their clothes, gird on sackcloth, and make lament before Abner; and King David himself walked behind the bier."

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־יוֹאָב וְאֶל־כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ קִרְעוּ

בִּגְדֵיכֶם וְחִגְרוּ שַׂקִּים וְסִפְדוּ לִפְנֵי אַבְנֵר וְהַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד הֹלֵךְ
אַחֲרֵי הַמִּטָּה׃

David does lament over Abner, though in much terser terms than he did over Saul and Jonathan. David must, in this instance, emphasize his own participation in mourning. He is challenged about his fasting for the dead. David swears by God to assert his true sorrow, swearing by God not to eat before sunset (2 Samuel 3:35 compare 2 Samuel 1:12). David's actions are immediately validated by "the people" who see what he has done as good (2 Samuel 3:36).

On the surface all of this can look pure of heart and action until you peal away at the text. The very next verses say how David is a gentle and a limited king, he cannot stand up to the killers of Abner (2 Samuel 3:39). It will have to be left to God to bring evil to the evil doers. Wait a minute isn't this the same guy who kills giants, defeats the Philistines, and has the killer of Saul put to death on the spot? Suddenly here we have a David who only throws his hands up in the air and says: What can I do?

Returning to Brueggemann's notion of biblical math or a balancing death, which will leave David free to pursue the kingship, we note that here, the balancing death came first. The death that balances Abner's death is the death of Joab's brother Asahel (2 Samuel 2:22-23), for whom revenge would have to be sought. If this is the case it seems to mitigate against the idea that David would have to defend himself from being accused of Abner's death. Nonetheless David's response to the news of Abner's death is still ultimately political: I did not do it (so I get to be king); we must mourn the fallen; and finally, the killer must be dealt with (even if this time we leave it to God.). David's response nicely packages what has happened to Abner and Joab for mass consumption.

And the text further tells us the people were happy to accept this marketing; all that the king had done was good in the eyes of the people (2 Samuel 3:36-7).

The third timely death in David's rise to power is of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, whom Abner helped put on the throne of Israel. After the death of Abner though, he is a frightened man and rightly so. One afternoon when he is taking a siesta, lying in his bed, (an act which in this story never bodes well for kings see e.g. 1 Samuel 26 5-10), two of his own commanders come upon him and behead him. . They then travel all night to bring the "prize" of his head to David (2 Samuel 4:7).

David, upon receiving the news and the head of his rival, once again launches into a picture perfect response. You can envision him turning to those in attendance and with a broad stage presence, saying; "Oh God who has saved me from all my troubles [like my rivals?], you know that guy who thought he brought me good news with Saul's death? I killed him; so, how much more these guys who killed an innocent man..." (my paraphrase after 2 Samuel 4:9-11) David might have waved his arm in an arc, a slight look of shock and dismay upon his face as he continues, "Oh my what else can I do...we must kill them too!" And as commanded, the lads kill the assassins of Ish-bosheth. And to assure that these king killers cannot do more or say more, they are chopped up and hung in public (2 Samuel 4:12). Another sign of David's possible complicity with the events is as subtle as ever, when "instead of sending the head back for burial David keeps Ish-bosheth head with Abner's remains in Hebron, away from the house of Saul" (2 Samuel 4:6-8). David did not repatriate the bodies of Saul and Jonathan either until after the deaths of all remaining descendants of Saul (other than the invalid Mephibosheth). (Halpern, 81)

Bad News is Bad News

Four Private Deaths and a Great Sorrow.

After the deaths of all of his real rivals to the throne, David settles into the busy life of a king. He brings the Ark to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6) and makes a long term deal with God for his family right's to the throne (2 Samuel 7). David makes more marriage alliances (2 Samuel 5) and sets up a judicial system (2 Samuel 8). David keeps his promise to his buddy Jonathan to look after his heirs (2 Samuel 9), and fights some battles (2 Samuel 10). Life is looking good. That is until David stays home from the job of war. This is when the real trouble begins for him. David switches from the political man to the personal man and the Teflon that has protected him thus far seems to fall off. When David next encounters the bad news of someone's death, it truly is bad news which follows him the rest of his days. David, upon hearing of the political deaths, invokes plausible deniability and comes out unscathed. This is not so with the deaths in his private sphere.

The first death in David's personal sphere was the death of Uriah. This is a death which is clearly caused by David. While he does not wield the sword, for here the pen is truly is mightier than the sword, David orders Bath Sheba's husband Uriah to be sent to the front in a manner that guarantees his death in battle (2 Samuel 11:15). David seemingly orders Uriah to the front in order to cover-up the affair he is having with Bath Sheba. David's response to the inevitable news of Uriah's death is striking. It is remarkable not so much for what he *does* but rather, what that he does *not* do. Joab and his messenger talk in great length about what they anticipate David's reaction might be.

Thus they set up the reader to expect an intense response from David (2 Samuel 11:18-24). However, David's response to the news is quite restrained (2 Samuel 11:25). David's only response is a specially worded comment to Joab, neutralizing the obvious moral problem of the order to kill Uriah in battle. David tells the messenger to tell Joab "don't let this thing seem evil in your eyes...for the sword is indiscriminate sometimes this way sometimes that. Fight on, fight on take the city" (2 Samuel 11:25). David seems to want to avoid thinking of himself or of Joab as having done anything evil in taking Uriah's life. He wants it to appear that the death of Uriah was nothing more than the vagaries of war (Cartledge, 504). There is no public denial of responsibility for the death of Uriah and no lamenting.

How odd it is that the one time we know for sure that a death has been directly caused by David, he does nothing to cover it up! Rather he says "war is hell" and that's the way it is. And yet, at the same time, his wording can be read as a veiled threat to Joab. "It was a reminder to Joab that his murder of Abner was not forgotten, so he had better keep his lips sealed and treat Uriah's death as an unfortunate causality resulting from enemy action (Rand, 93)." David makes this connection by using the very language Abner uses. In referring to the death of Joab's brother Abner asks, "must the sword keep devouring" תֹּאכַל חֶרֶב (2 Samuel 2:26). Similarly David says "the sword devours like this and like that" תֹּאכַל הַהֶרֶג (2 Samuel 11:25) as a response to the death of Uriah and the troops.

From here on out, though, David is changed from the Teflon hero who is insulated by a protecting God to an embattled man and particularly an embattled father. The first event to follow Uriah's death is the illness and death of the child of David's union with

Bath Sheba. Nathan, the prophet, has by parable tried, convicted and sentenced David and his family to an endless series of evil events (2 Samuel 12:1-14). These events befall David's house immediately, starting with the death of his new son (2 Samuel 12:14).

When God strikes David's son sick, David does all the right things to get the Divine to change the sentence of death. David prays, fasts and lies on the ground (2 Samuel 12:16). No urging by his servants will change David's behavior (2 Samuel 12:17). On the seventh day when the child is dead, the servants fear telling David since he was so bereft at the child's illness (2 Samuel 12:18). But when David overhears the servants whispering and understands the boy to be dead, he gets up, cleans up, bows before God and asks for food to be brought to him(2 Samuel 12:20). This puzzles his servants who ask why he is behaving as he is. David responds: while I thought I could make a difference I tried; now what is there for me do to, and will it bring the boy back? (2 Samuel 12:23).

David's behavior over the death of his son is in much contrast to the way in which be behaves in other circumstances of death. Where is the lamenting, the fasting, or the tearing of clothes? Lore Segal asks; "Is David a man of God accepting what God deals out in the way of dead babies and punishments for sin? Is he a veteran mourner who knows that grief is comforted at last? Is he a man who looks at the factness of death in the eye, swallows, and gets on with his business...? (Segal, 116). One response could be that "despite its public and political implications, the key episode in chapters 11-12 is about a private matter – about how David came to gain a wife (and a son)" (Gunn, 89). Here we read of the completing of the transition from pubic life and death to private life

and death. David will pay for this switch and "the way in which he does this is then almost caricatured in the subsequent events within his own family" (Gunn, 89).

As Joel Rosenberg points out; David seems to lack the emotional expressiveness of his encounters with others when it comes to his children. He is somewhat emotive with Jonathan and Saul, then especially expressive, even threatening toward Nabal and later toward Joab. All of these are part of his political or public behavior but toward his children and spouses we get a sense of coldness or inaccessibility, particularly toward those closest to him (Rosenberg, 136). It may not be coldness, though, but rather it may be that David becomes ineffectual in his private life.

This ineffectualness may be seen when David next receives bad news. His daughter Tamar has been raped. We are told that David's oldest son, Amnon, loves his beautiful sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1). He is both lovesick and plays sick in order to get her to come sleep with him (2 Samuel 13:2-6). Amnon even manipulates his father David, getting David to send Tamar to him. Amnon then rapes Tamar and rejects her (2 Samuel 13:14-15).

וְהַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד שָׁמַע אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּחַר לוֹ מְאֹד׃

"When King David heard about all this, he was greatly incensed" (2 Samuel 13:21). But that is all. It appears that no further response is given by David. No punishment is meted out. It appears that David fails to avenge his daughter or teach his son a lesson (Reiss, 230). As Robert Alter points out in the Qumran Samuel and the Septuagint there are additional words here; "but he [David] would not punish his son because he loved him for he was his first born." Alter reads this as an explanatory gloss; as an effort to make

sense of David's silence (Alter, 271). These additional words may be an early apology or insight into earlier reader's discomfort with David's reaction.

David, as a father, seems a lax disciplinarian; his eldest son seems not to be held accountable for his actions. But what if we read David's reaction here against the backdrop of his behavior toward others with whom he has been in contention? David does not lift a hand against Saul, Abner, Ish-bosheth or really even Uriah, David always let's others do the "wet-work[2]." Reading the story that surrounds David's response to Tamar's rape, we find a very angry Absalom, an Absalom who does not speak to Amnon and who hates him (2 Samuel 13:22). Two years after the incident, Absalom, who (we learn) has held a grudge against Amnon the whole time (2 Samuel 13:32), invites David to a feast at sheep shearing time [and who knows the danger of partying at sheep shearing time better than David! see 1 Samuel 25] (2 Samuel 13:24). David turns him down but allows himself to be convinced to send Amnon, along with his brothers, to Absalom's party.

Later it is reported to David that Absalom has killed all David's sons. We read an impersonal third person, "so *the king* arose and tore his garments and lays on the ground."

וַיָּקָם הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּקְרַע אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב אָרְצָה

Then, in words that bring us right back to the moment after Amnon's crime, when Tamar is told not to take it to heart (2 Samuel 13:20), David is told not to take it to heart what has happened, because in truth only Amnon is dead (not all David's son's) (2 Samuel

[2] WET WORK: An operation involving the shedding of blood. KGB term. : [Cf. _Mokryye Dela_, the KGB department of wet work --masakim's note] : From _The Dictionary of Espionage: Spookspeak into English_ (1986) by Henry S.A. Becket

13:33). And lastly, what is David's ultimate response to the tragedy of Tamar and the death of Amnon? He mourns all the days. He does not go after Absalom for he was consoled after Amnon's death (2 Samuel 13:39).

While David does not go after his son Absalom neither does he reconcile with him for a long time. For three years Absalom lives away, and even when he moves back to Jerusalem, another two years go by before they see each other. They only see each other when Absalom forces the issue. But immediately afterwards they kiss and make up (2 Samuel 14:33).

Right after this apparent reconciliation, Absalom makes a move on the throne by stealing the hearts of the men of Israel (2 Samuel 15: 1-6). This is the beginning of a deep rebellion which displaces David from his house and throne in Jerusalem. The revolt subjects David to treason, ridicule and difficult fighting to regain this kingdom. The rebellion which takes up 3 chapters, from 2 Samuel 15 – 18, is still not enough to alter what seems to be David's real attempt at remaining a father to at least one of his children. For in spite of Absalom's rebellion and the trauma associated with it, "David's compassion as a father transcends the law and he attempts to uphold the bond between himself and his son even at the expense of his bond with God and the nation" (Whedbee, 161).

In the midst of the fighting, David puts out the word: he does not want his son to be killed (2 Samuel 18:5). While this works to keep a common soldier from killing Absalom, it does not stop Joab (2 Samuel 18:12). Joab and his arms bearers put Absalom to death (2 Samuel 18:16). Joab, who has experience in watching David respond to the bearers of bad news, discourages Ahimaaz the son of Zadok from bringing the news of

Absalom's death to David. Joab prefers to let a foreigner take the risk and allows a Cushite to go and deliver the news (Alter, 307 n 21).

Here, at last, David is, for a moment at least, just a father and not a politician. His response to the death of his son is "one of the most poignant in literature" (Whedbee, 161) "we cannot but be moved by how the father-son bond outweighs for David his public responsibility..." (ibid). David wants to die in the place of his son (2 Samuel 19:1). For the moment everything is undone, David is inconsolable and inarticulate. "Contrast David's almost stuttering staccato of 'My son, My son...' with his eloquent lament over Saul and Jonathan" in 2 Samuel 1: 19-27 and 2 Samuel 19:6 (Whedbee, 161). David for the first time is without political wiles. It takes David's longtime right-hand-man, Joab, to bring David back to the realpolitik[3] that will save the throne for David after Absalom's defeat (2 Samuel 19:6-9).

Joab's words work like a charm and soon and, nearly for the last time, David becomes the political wizard that he once was. At each step on the road back to Jerusalem, he makes a political decision that builds back up his kingship. He appoints Amasa as the new commander to build ties with Judah damaged in the revolt. He pardons Shimei, the Benjaminite of the house of Saul, who had cursed him on his way down from Jerusalem thus healing a rift between the two houses. And he (sort of) upholds, through Mephibosheth, his tie to Jonathan. (Whedbee, 161-162).

The sword never does depart form David's house as the prophet Nathan warns. And David is never quite the man nor the king he was before these seven deaths. These death's and David's reaction show us a man who knows how to survive in the complicated politics of a new kingdom. He knows when and how to invoke the word of

[3] Politics based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations.

God. He knows when and how to do the dirty work and when to keep his hands clean. What David never seems to know is how to be a husband, a father or be at peace. David's story ends only chapters later, when his sons vie for the throne using skills they must have learned on their father's knee. But that story is for another time.

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