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David and Achish: Stories of Trickery and Ascension

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# Introduction

Heroic stories about David still resonate with school children today.

David's slaying of Goliath, his relationship with Jonathan, and his love-hate relationship with King Saul are familiar even to those who know little about the Hebrew Bible. But there are lesser known stories which give us clues to the complexity of David's character beyond these famous events in his career. The relationship of David and Achish is one of these stories, and it has enchanted me for 20 years. On the surface, the simple plot relates a hero's journey, but upon closer examination, the story reveals otherwise: David is complicated, the story complex, and the literary construction multi-layered and puzzling. In what follows, I will investigate the relationship between David and Achish, king of Gath, before David is crowned King of Judah (1 Samuel 21:11-14, 27:1-12, 28:1-2,29). In doing so, I will show that David's story is connected to a much larger story, the development of the Israelite people. I hope that my work will shed light not only on the relationship between David and Achish, but on the larger implications of blood, battle, and the path to kingship. In analyzing the redactor's motive for constructing these stories in 1 Samuel, I conclude that David's choice not to kill Saul sets a precedent that will affect future Israelite dynasties.

Because Saul pursues David in order to kill him (1 Samuel 19:11-17, 19-20, 20:31, 23:7,25, 24:1-2, 26:2,), David flees twice to Gath, in the land of the Philistines (1 Samuel 21 and 1 Samuel 27). In these two distinct episodes David encounters Achish, the King of Gath, and uses trickery to gain safety. The narrator portrays David in both episodes as a hero-underdog who succeeds because he is a trickster and ultimately a hero. In the first story, David does not begin as a trickster, but becomes one when his original approach fails. Having entered Gath as a warrior, David discovers that his reputation puts his life in jeopardy. He survives by feigning madness, making himself despicable (1 Samuel 21).

When David and Achish meet for the second time (1 Samuel 27), they have an entirely different relationship. Achish sees David as a worthy mercenary warrior who can benefit him by fighting his enemies, which include the Israelites. Achish further believes that by keeping David enslaved to him forever he will be the dominant king in the area. David's only obvious agenda, however, is to remain in the land of the Philistines outside the reach of Saul's relentless pursuit.

Achish trusts David, but David continually tricks Achish, bringing him booty from tribes other than Judah, convincing Achish that he has killed and raided his own people. David has, in fact, massacred the enemies of Israel, not the enemies of the Philistines. He wages these bloody battles against entire populations so there will be no witnesses to tell Achish the truth.

The two stories raise a number of questions in terms of the stories'

function and messages. One question a reader might pose concerns the portrait of David. Why is he depicted as a liar? How are readers to interpret his persona? Why does he go to the Philistines (of all people!) not to the king of Moab? What relation do these stories have to rise and fall of King Saul in Israel? Some questions revolve around the use the narrator makes of the people around Achish who repeatedly warn him about David. How is the reader to respond to Achish? Is he a fool or David's match? Why two stories of deception?

Perhaps the most puzzling questions--and the most difficult to answer--is this: having killed Goliath of Gath (1 Samuel 17), how did David imagine his welcome and how could he have misjudged the reception?

Some tentative answers can be proposed: David's success in pursuing and killing the enemies of Israel allows the narrator to compare and contrast David's success with Saul's failures. The biblical narrator chooses to place the story of David in the land of the Philistines, and to tell it in great detail, so no one will believe that David ever fought against his own people, or that he ever attempted a position to kill either Saul or his sons. By keeping David free of any accusations of disloyalty or of the desire to kill the king, David is poised to become king himself through a natural succession, the succession that God willed. A close reading confirms that the key issue throughout is a comparison with King Saul.

David's relations with God is the most obvious way in which these portraits are communicated. The distinctive relationship between David and Achish brings

up many provocative questions that I will attempt to deal with.

David's rise is contrasted to the deterioration and fall of Saul's kingship. During Saul's pursuit of David, David increases his power base among the Israelite people and in the ruling system. Saul experiences the exact opposite; he completely loses his power base, including the confidence of God, the prophet Samuel, and the people. He is ultimately left alone. Other dynamics, however, are at work and will be explored in the chapters ahead. David is also protected by God; he was chosen by God to be the next king. Therefore, even if he does not ask for God's help, he is shielded by God's providence.

In order to discern the meanings of the stories, I will look not only at David's actions, but I will also analyze the implied meaning behind the words which are sometimes ambiguous. I begin by discussing the significance of putting the stories of David and Achish in the biblical canon and go on to discuss the various themes found in the chapters detailing this part of David's life. The theme of David's "madness," for example, is explored in Chapter Five, and the question of David's spending an extended period of time in the land of the Philistines is also closely examined in Chapter Five. In order to understand the portrait of David we must understand what position he held there, whether or not he was independent, whether he was a fugitive under the rule of a foreign king, or if he was a slave or vassal.

Before David encounters Achish for the first time, he is greeted by Achish's servants who identify him. David is alone at this point and fears for his

life, so he pretends to be mad (I Samuel 21). When David meets Achish the second time, he is still fleeing from Saul, but now he is accompanied by his wives and his army. He dwells in the land of the Philistines under Achish's rule for a long time, possibly as servant to the king (I Samuel 27-29).

The stories of David and Achish are watershed stories told at the time of a rocky transition. The first kingship of Saul, from the Benjaminites, is being passed to David, from the tribe of Judah. This first succession is not within one family or within one tribe; this could be a time when blood is easily shed. Saul's multiple attempts to kill David fail. Later, David has the opportunity to kill Saul, but he chooses not to. In Chapter Five, I will explain why this is significant. It is important to the biblical narrator to demonstrate that when Saul is killed by the Philistines, David is not in the land of Israel but rather far away, that he has had no responsibility whatsoever for the death of Saul. Because neither Saul nor David dies at the hand of the other, this indicates that future succession should not depend upon killing the reigning king. David's hands are not sullied, and Saul does not succeed in snuffing out the life of the future king.

My goal is to present an analysis of the story of David and Achish which demonstrates David's resourcefulness as well as the significance of his being a man of honor in regard to Saul. In my investigation I utilize the tools of biblical exegesis. I have translated the biblical text into English, noting the key words. Following the translation, I examine the structure of the stories under investigation, comparing them next to other stories in the same genre. An

examination of the historical setting reviews what evidence there is historically that does or does not corroborate the text. Questions of authorship are addressed at this part. A literary analysis of the text highlights the unique skills that the biblical narrator uses in setting up the story. Finally, I offer a careful investigation of the passages themselves in order to answer the questions posed earlier. I make use of ones that shed light on the character of David, paying close attention to the various interpretations, to determine the motives of the narrator. But my goal is less a review of the literature and more a fresh reading of tantalizing stories.<sup>1</sup> In pursuing the subject I was surprised by how little attention is given to the problems with these stories.

What become evident is the stories of David and Achish are integral in the amazing trajectory of David's rise from child shepherd to the second king of Israel.

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1. The exegetical method used here loosely follows the basic exegetical tools of Form Criticism. It builds analysis by offering a translation, structure, genre analysis, setting and then attempt to elucidate "intention." Whereas Form Criticism aim at locating a text *Sitz-im Leiden* in community, the approach here is limited to seeking a literary response. The work of Robert Alter can be used to define this approach.



# Chapter One: Translation and Structure of Texts

## David's Encounters Achish for the First Time: (1 Samuel 21:11-16)

Beginning in 1 Samuel 21:11-16 we have the description of David's flight from

Saul and his first encounter with the foreign king, Achish.

ויקם דוד ויברח ביום-ההוא מפני שאול ויבא אל-אכיש מלך גת.  
ויאמרו עבדי אכיש אליו הלוא-זה דוד מלך הארץ הלוא לזה יענו במחלות לאמור הכה  
שאול באלפיו ודוד ברבבותיו. וישם דוד את-הדברים האלה בלבו וירא מאד מפני אכיש  
מלך-גת.

וישנו את-טעמו בעיניהם ויתהלל בידם ויתו על-דלתות השער ויורד רירו אל-זקנו.  
ויאמר אכיש אל-עבדיו הנה תראו איש משתגע למה תביאו אתו אלי.  
חסר משגעים אני כי-הבאתם את-זה להשתגע עלי? הזה יבוא אל-ביתי.

11. On that day David arose and fled from Saul and came to Achish, King of  
Gath. 12. And the servants of Achish said to him: "Is this not David, king of the  
land, the one that they sing as they dance: 'Saul has slain his thousands and  
David his tens of thousands'!" 13. And David took these words to heart<sup>2</sup> and  
was exceedingly frightened before Achish, King of Gath. 14. And so he

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2. בלבבו: The heart as the locus of thought: "in a wise heart wisdom will rest"  
Proverbs 14:33; "many thoughts are in the heart of a person" 19:21.

suppressed<sup>3</sup> his sanity<sup>4</sup> before them and behaved wildly<sup>5</sup> while in their hand and marked up<sup>6</sup> the doors of the gate and slobbered into his beard. 15 And Achish said to his servants: "Look here, this is one raving<sup>7</sup> fellow, why did you bring him to me? 16. Am I lacking madmen that you should bring it to rave at me? Should he come into my house?" 22:1. David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father's house heard, they joined him down there.

### Structure 1 Samuel: 21:11-16

I. Introduction	11
A. David's flight from Saul	11a
B. David's coming to Achish	11b
II. David in danger at Gath	12-16
Recognition by servants of Achish; "king of the land"	12
B. Reaction by David	13-14
1. Fear	13
2. Dissimulation	14
C. Dismissed by Achish	15-16

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- Other possibilities for "suppressed his sanity:" JPS: "concealed his good sense." Alter: "altered his good sense." Fox: "altered his demeanor."
  - טעמו**: This word has a wide semantic range. It can also mean "his taste" "his judgment" "his decision" or "his decree." Here it is used in the sense of "his judgment" insofar as he is giving the perception that he has none. "Of David when he feigned madness in the presence of Abimelech who turned him out and he left" Psalm 34:1. Used similarly in superscription to this psalm.
  - ויתהלל**: "to act madly" as also seen in Je51:7, Na 2:5, Je 50:38, Je 25:16.
  - ויתו**: "mark" Ez 9:4 "And YHWH said to him pass through the city and put a mark on the forehead of the man. . . ." Fox has "drummed." Alter has "scrabbled." JPS has: "mark."
  - משתגע**: De 29:34 "Until you are driven mad." Fox: "acting crazy." Alter: "raving mad." JPS: "raving."

## A David and Achish Reunion: 1 Samuel 27: 1-12

### Chapter 27, verses 1-12

ויאמר דוד אל-לבו עתה אספה יום-אחד ביד-שאול. אין-לי טוב כי המלט אמלט אל-ארץ פלשתים ונואש ממני שאול לבקשני עוד בכל-גבול ישראל ונמלטתי מידו. ויקם דוד ויעבור הוא ושש-מאות איש אשר עמו אל-אכיש בן-מעוך מלך גת. וישב דוד עם-אכיש בגת הוא ואנשיו איש וביתו. דוד ושתי נשיו אחינעם הזרעאלית ואביגיל אשת-נבל הכרמלית. ויוגד לשאול כי ברח דוד גת ולא יוסף עוד לבקשו. ויאמר דוד אל אכיש אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך יתנו לי מקום באחת ערי השדה ואשבה שם ולמה ישב עבדך בעיר הממלכה עמך. ויתן לו אכיש ביום ההוא את צקלג לכן היתה צקלג למלכי יהודה עד היום הזה. ויהי מספר הימים אשר ישב דוד בשדה פלשתים ימים וארבעה חדשים. ויעל דוד ואנשיו ויפשטו אל הגושרי והגרזי והעמלקי כי הנה יושבות הארץ אשר מעולם בואך שורה ועד ארץ מצרים. והכה דוד את הארץ ולא יחיה איש ואשה ולקח צאן ובקר וחמורים וגמלים ובגדים וישב ויבא אל אכיש. ויאמר אכיש אל פשטתם היום ויאמר דוד על נגב יהודה ועל נגב הירחמאלי ואל נגב הקיני. ואיש ואישה לא יחיה דוד להביא גת לאמר פן יגדו עלינו לאמר כה עשה דוד וכה משפטו כל הימים אשר ישב בשדה פלשתים. ויאמן אכיש בדוד לאמר הבאש הבאיש בעמו בישראל והיה לי לעבד עולם.

1. And David now said to himself<sup>8</sup>: "One day<sup>9</sup> I will perish<sup>10</sup> at Saul's hand. There is nothing better for me to do than<sup>11</sup> to escape<sup>12</sup> to the land of the Philistines. And Saul will then despair of seeking<sup>13</sup> me throughout

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8. Lit: "to his heart" denoting that David is speaking to himself. JPS: "to himself." Alter, Fox: "to his heart." This speaking to himself occurs twice with respect to David, both times in the Achish stories.
9. Lit: "now"; used here "at this moment, from this day on" JPS: "some day." Alter: "now" Fox: "(here) now.
10. JPS: "perish." Alter: "I shall perish." Fox: "I will be swept away."
11. Lit: "I don't have good." JPS: "The best thing for me is to." Alter, Fox: "There is nothing better for me than."
12. Emphatic form המלט ימלט. The term repeats twice here and once later in this verse to emphasize David's need to escape.
13. Lit: "to ask for permission" or "to want" or "to seek" used here as to seek, to look for. JPS: "give up hunting." Alter: "of seeking me." Fox: "of continuing to seek me."

the borders of Israel and I shall escape<sup>14</sup> his power<sup>15</sup>." 2. And David arose and crossed over, he and six hundred men with him to Achish, son of Maach, King of Gath. 3. And David stayed<sup>16</sup> with Achish in Gath, he and his men, each one with his household, David with his two wives, Achinoam the Jezreelite and Abigail wife of Nabal the Carmelite. 4. And it was told to Saul that David had fled to Gath, and he did not continue to seek<sup>17</sup>him.

5. And David said to Achish: "Please, if I have found favor in your eyes let them<sup>18</sup> give me a place in one of the cities of the field<sup>19</sup> and I will live there, why should your servant<sup>20</sup> live in the royal city with you?" 6.

And Achish gave him Ziklag on that day; therefore Ziklag came to possession of the kings of Judah until this day. 7. And so it was that the number of days<sup>21</sup> that David dwelled in the field of the Philistines was a

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14. BDB: "slip away." JPS: "escape. Alter: "get away." Fox: "escape."

15. יָדוֹ: Lit. "hand"; Je 34:3 "And you will not escape from him." Alter: "get away from him" JPS: "escape him" Fox: "escape from his hand"

16. Lit: "sat" or "settled" which denotes a degree of permanence. See: Gen. 13:12 and 19:29; Joshua 20:4; 1 Kings 11:16.

17. JPS: "pursue." Alter: "sought after." Fox: "to seek him again."

18. JPS: "let a." Alter: "let them." Fox: "let there."

19. Fox says it could be "outlying towns."

20. עַבְדְּךָ: BDB (p.714) Used as a polite address to an equal or superior status: "your servant" (Gn 18:3); his servant (1 Sam. 26:18-19); also used in addressed God, especially in prayer as Ex 14:10, Nu 11:11, Ju 125:18, 1 Sam 3:9-10. it is difficult to draw conclusions about exact status from this conventional language.

21. יָמִים could be days or years; most translators agree here on translation of one year, four months. Nu 9:22 "Whether it was two days or a month or a year."

year and four months. 8. And David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Gizrites, and the Amalekites because they were the inhabitants<sup>22</sup> of the land from Olam all the way to Shurah and the land of Egypt. 9. And David struck<sup>23</sup> the land and and he would<sup>24</sup> not leave alive any man or woman, and he took sheep and cattle and donkeys and camels and clothing and he returned and came to Achish. 10. And Achish said: "Whom did you raid today?" And David said: "The Negev of Judah, the Negev of the Jerahmeelites or the Negev of the Kenites." 11. Neither man nor woman would David allow to live to bring to Gath, saying: "Lest they report concerning us saying: 'Thus did David do and thus was his practice.'"<sup>25</sup> And this was his pattern all the days that they stayed in the fields of the Philistines. 12. And Achish believed in David thinking: "He has become abhorred<sup>26</sup> among his own people Israel and so he will be my vassal forever<sup>27</sup>."

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22. JPS, Alter: "inhabitants." Fox: "settled-folk."

23. JPS: "attacked." Alter: "struck." Fox: "would strike."

24. JPS: "he would leave no." Alter: "he left not a." Fox: "he would not leave."

25. There seems to be disagreement among translators as to the best way to translate, but all convey David's thinking. JPS: "David would leave no man or woman alive to be brought to Gath; for he thought, 'They might tell about us: David did this.'" Alter: "And neither man nor woman did David leave alive to bring to Gath thinking 'Lest they tell about us saying, 'Thus did David do.'" Fox: But no man or woman would David leave alive to bring to Gath saying, "Lest they report concerning us saying, 'Thus did David do and thus was his practice.'"

26. Lit: "to smell, to stink" meaning that he is abhorred.

27. Note contrast in translations regarding Achish: JPS: "And Achish believed in David saying: He aroused the wrath of his own people Israel and so he will be my vassal forever." Alter: "And Achish trusted David saying: 'He has

**Structure: 1 Samuel 27:1-12**

I. David "Crosses" Over to the Philistines	27:1-4
A. Introduction: David's need to escape from Saul	1
B. Notice of the move	2-3
1. David/his people move to Achish	2
2. Establishment with Achish in Gath	3
C. Conclusion: End of Saul's Pursuit	4
II. David's Possession of Philistine Town	27:5-7
A. David gets Ziklag	5-6
1. Request by David	5
2. Receives Ziklag from Achish	6a
3. Historical consequences	6b-7
III. David's Success in Deceiving Achish	27:8-12
A. David's tactics while at Ziklag	8-11
1. What David did	8-9
a. Plundered enemies	8
b. His strategy	9
(1) no human survivors	
(2) livestock plundered	
B. Achish's Investigation and David's answer	10
C. The reason why David did not leave a living soul	11
D. Outcome: David gains Achish's trust and the consequences	12

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surely become repugnant to Israel and he will be perpetual vassal.'" Fox:  
"And Achish came to trust David saying to himself: 'He has made himself  
reek to own people, to Israel, so he will be a servant to me for the ages.'"

## 1 Samuel 28:1-2

ויהי בימים ההם ויקבצו פלשתים את מחניהם לצבא להלחם בישראל ויאמר אכיש אל דוד ידוע תדע כי איתי תצא במחנה אתה ואנשיך.  
ויאמר דוד אל אכיש לכן אתה תדע את אשר יעשה עבדך ויאמר אכיש אל דוד לכן שמר לראשי אשימך כל הימים.

1. And it happened at that time that the Philistines had gathered their ranks for the army to do a battle with Israel. And said Achish to David: "You surely know that with me you will go out with my army--you and your people." 2. Said David to Achish: "Therefore you yourself will know what your servant will do." And so Achish said to David: "Therefore I will make you my chief bodyguard<sup>28</sup> for all the days."

## Structure 1 Samuel 28:1-2

- I. Preparation for Battle Between the Philistines and Israel
  - A. Achish's decides to add David to his Retinue 1
  - B. David's cryptic response 2

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28. Lit: "a guard to my head."

## 1 Samuel 29:1-11: Achish and David: The Denouement

ויקבצו פלשתים את כל מחניהם אפקה וישראל חונים בעין אשר בישראל.  
וסרני פלשתים עוברים למאות ולאלפים דוד ואנשיו עוברים באחרונה עם אכיש.  
ויאמרו שרי פלשתים מה העברים האלה ויאמר אכיש אל שרי פלשתים הלוא זה דוד  
עבד שאול מלך ישראל אשר היה איתי זה ימים או שנים ולא מצאתי בו מאומה מיום  
נפלו עד היום הזה.  
ויקצפו עליו שרי פלשתים ויאמרו לו שרי פלשתים השב את האיש וישב אל מקומו  
אשר הפקדתו שם ולא ירד עמנו במלחמה ולא יהיה לנו לשטן במלחמה ובמה  
יתרצה זה אל אדוניו הלוא בראשי האנשים ההם.  
הלוא זה דוד אשר יענו במחולות לאמר "הכה שאול באלפיו דוד ברבבותיו".  
ויקרא אכיש אל דוד ויאמר אליו חי יהוה כי ישר אתה וטוב בעיני צאתך ובואך איתי  
במחנה כי לא מצאתי בך רעה מיום בואך איתי אלי עד היום הזה ובעיני הסרנים לא  
טוב אתה.  
ועתה שוב ולך בשלום ולא תעשה רע בעיני סרני פלשתים.  
ויאמר דוד אל אכיש מה עשיתי ומה מצאת בעבדך מיום אשר הייתי לפניך עד היום  
הזה כי לא אבוא ונלחמתי באויבי אדוני המלך.  
ויען אכיש ויאמר אל דוד ידעתי כי אתה טוב בעיני כמלאך אלוהים אך שרי פלשתים  
אמרו לא יעלה עמנו במלחמה.  
ועתה השכם בבוקר, ועבדי אדניך אשר באו אתך והשכמתם בבוקר ואור לכם ולכו.  
וישכם דוד הוא ואנשיו ללכת בבקר לשוב אל ארץ פלשתים ופלשתים עלו יזרעאל.

1. And the Philistines gathered all their encampments at Aphek and Israel  
encamped at the well that was in Jezreel. 2. And the Philistine captains were  
advancing in hundreds and thousands and David and his men were advancing at  
the rear with Achish. 3. And the Philistine officers said: "What are these  
Hebrews?" And Achish said to the Philistine officers: "This is David, the servant  
of Saul, King of Israel, who was with me all these days and years and I didn't find  
anything wrong with him from the day he defected until this day." 4. And the  
Philistine officers were angry with him; and they said to him: "Send the man back;  
return him to the place that you assigned him. And let him not go down with us in  
the battle and let him not become our adversary in the war. For with what could



that fellow appease his<sup>29</sup> master if not with the heads of the men?<sup>30</sup> 5. Is this not David, the one that they sing<sup>31</sup> as they dance:

'Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands.'" 6.

And Achish called for David and said to him: "As YHVH lives, you are an honest man, and it is good in my eyes your coming with me in your going out and in your coming in with me in the camp<sup>32</sup>, for I found no evil in you<sup>33</sup> from the day you came to me until this day but<sup>34</sup> in the eyes of the captains you are not good; 7. so now<sup>35</sup> return and go in peace, and do not do anything bad in the eyes of the Philistine captains." 8 And David said to Achish: "What have I done? And what fault have you found in your servant from the day I appeared before you to this day, that I should not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" 9. And Achish answered and said to David: "I know that you are good in my eyes

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29. Bar Efrat writes that the officers continue not to use David's name, but referring to him as "his" or "his master." By not using David's name they are demonstrating their contempt for him (Bar Efrat, 355).
30. "And the Philistine officers were angry with him; and they said to him: 'Send the man back; return him to the place that you assigned him. And let him not go down with us in the battle and let him not become our adversary in the war. For with what could that fellow appease his master if not with the heads of the men?'" This is a confusing sentence in the Hebrew. There is a series of negative commands followed by a biting rhetorical question at the end. To accomplish this, there are a number of verbs and tenses that change.
31. Before the text said "sing as they dance." (21:14). Here there is no dancing.
32. JPS: "serve in my forces." Alter: "going into the fray with the camp." Fox: "in your going out and in your coming in with me in the camp."
33. JPS: "I found no fault with you." Alter: "For I have found no evil in you." Fox: "For I have not found in you (any) evil."
34. The "vav" is usually "and" but here it is "but" because of context.
35. This is not capitalized because it is a continuation of the previous sentence that ended mid-verse.

as an angel of God. However, the Philistine commanders say that you may not go up with us in battle. 10. And now get up early in the morning and your servants who came with you and you<sup>36</sup> shall get-up early, and there is light for you<sup>37</sup> and go." 11. And David got up early, he and his men to go in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines, and the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

**Structure: 1 Samuel 29:1-11 : The Upcoming War in Aphek and the Question of Dual Loyalty of David and His People**

- I. Background: Description of Israel and Philistine camp before the war 1
- II. Debates about David between Achish and Philistine leaders 2-5
  - A. Preparations: Achish army and David's people passing through Philistine camp 2
  - B. Conversations between Achish and his ministers regarding David's loyalty 3
  - D. Revolt of Philistine warriors against David 4-5
- III. Achish dismisses David 6-10
  - A. Achish dismisses and appeases David 6-7
  - B. David protests and claims loyalty 8
  - C. Achish insists on David's departure 9-10
  - D. Conclusion: David withdraws 11

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36. "You" second person plural.

37. ואור לכם: Gen. 44:3 "With the first light of morning the men were sent off with their pack animals." Could be "first light" or in the light of day. JPS: "as soon as it is light." Alter: "when it is just brightening." Fox: "where there is light for you."

# Chapter Two: Genre: The Hero's Journey

The story of David and his interactions with the King of Gath are part of a genre depicting the hero's journey, familiar from a wide variety of ancient literature<sup>38</sup>. In these stories, the hero valiantly surmounts challenges before reaching the goal. With David's depiction here and in the next story of the encounter with Achish, one finds here in the unfolding of the text a portrayal of David as an "underdog" and a "trickster." Susan Niditch writes in Underdogs and Tricksters:

The underdog and the trickster are traditional characters in a broad-cross-cultural literary corpus. I believe, however, that they held special appeal for the Israelite composers who shaped the tales of their ancestral heroes; for throughout history, Israel has had a peculiar self-image as the underdog and the trickster.

A fascinating and universal folk hero, the trickster, a subtype of the underdog, brings about change via trickery. Although biblical tricksters are much more sedate versions of the character type than the bawdy examples of West African mythology, they display some of the same ambiguities in their motivations and in the realization of their goals. They never fully gain control of the situations

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38. Legends such as Homer's *Odyssey*, King Arthur, and Robin Hood are all examples of this genre.

around them and often escape difficulties in less than noble ways. Their tales do not end with unequivocal success, but they survive to trick again--and indeed, are survivors par excellence.

To Niditch, the underdog's and trickster's marginality may be rooted in gender, age, economic or social status. The underdog gains our sympathy because the insecurity of his or her life reflects that of our own, so that when the underdog succeeds against the odds, we also vicariously succeed. The underdog climbs the ladder through cunning or physical ability. The trickster, as a traditional character type who is a marginal figure, succeeds in devious ways by deceiving those in power. (Niditch, 1).

Each underdog/trickster takes enormous personal risks. These risks are rewarded by a successful payoff, such as a positive change in circumstance, status, economic position, relationships and future. Readers can identify with these stories.

In several Davidic stories, we find some typical features of the hero as well as the underdog and the trickster, such as in David's transformation from the youngest child tending his father's flocks to the future king. We find a number of stories in which David goes through trials and faces challenges which no human being would even attempt (such as gathering 200 Philistine foreskins as a bride price to become the king's son-in-law in 1 Samuel 18). He overcomes these challenges, thus winning the support of those around him. As trickster, David escapes perilous situations by deceiving and manipulating for a "righteous

cause." The trickster reflects cunning and ingenuity, self-preservation and quick-wittedness which inevitably lead to a positive outcome.

To appreciate the representation of David as an underdog/trickster, we need to set him in the framework of other relevant texts of this genre. In the Bible, there are many "type-scenes," of underdogs and tricksters that follow generic patterns and achieve similar results. Robert Alter describes the type scene as a basic convention of biblical narrative:

There is a series of recurrent narrative episodes attached to the careers of biblical heroes that are analogous to Homeric type-scenes in that they are dependent on the manipulation of a fixed constellation of predetermined motifs. Since biblical narrative characteristically catches its protagonists only at the critical and revealing points in their lives, the biblical type-scene occurs not in the rituals of daily existence but at the crucial junctures in the lives of the heroes, from conception and birth to betrothal to deathbed (Alter, 50-51).

### **The Type-Scene of the Underdog in the Bible: David and Goliath**

As part of the hero "underdog" motif, a very young David is given power by the current authority, King Saul, to act on his behalf (1 Samuel 17:1-38). Unarmed and unidentified, with only the stones and a slingshot, David confronts the Philistine giant and fearless warrior, Goliath. This is the equivalent of the "dragon slayer" story where a human goes up against the feared mythical fire-

breathing creature. The odds are obviously against the human, just as the odds are against David going after the giant Goliath.

The text sets up the elements of a classic hero versus enemy narrative: a young, innocent, handsome boy, armed with the most primitive of weapons, against a renowned, well-armed and much-feared warrior. Goliath mocks David, further reducing his stature. Then David attacks and slays Goliath with Goliath's own sword (prevailing over the unconquerable), the weaker and younger beating the mightier and stronger. David then severs Goliath's head (with Goliath's own sword) and brings the head to Jerusalem. The underdog becomes a hero by slaying the Philistine giant, Goliath.

#### **The Type-Scene of the Trickster in the Bible: David and the King of Gath**

David has fled Saul--leaving his land and family behind and entering the land of the Philistines ruled by the King of Gath (1 Sam 21:12-16). As a fugitive, David is recognized by the king's servants and identified as David, their enemy. They do not use explicit language, but rather the king's servants ask rhetorically if this is the David the Israelite women sing about as the "killer of tens of thousands" and as the "king of the land." After he is identified, David becomes fearful and begins to act very strangely, causing Achish to believe that David is a raving madman. With the king believing thusly, David was able to leave from the king and his servants, escaping imminent danger.

David has no control over the situation above; he is at the mercy of the King's servant's and of the king himself. Therefore, in order to escape he

chooses to be a madman. What lesson can the religious person learn when he reads this trickster story of Achish and David? Perhaps the lesson is that when one's life is at stake, it may be necessary to become a trickster in order to survive. During times when people with many different cultures, customs, and beliefs surrounded the Israelites in order to differentiate between enemies and friends, the Israelites reshape themselves, or their heroes, becoming trickster/ heroes when the odds were against them or when their lives were at stake.<sup>39</sup>

#### **A Trickster Type-Scene: Tamar**

Tamar, the wife of Er, is also a trickster (Gen. 38:1-30). Judah has three sons, Ar, Onan and Shelah. Er is the eldest, but he commits evil in the eyes of YHWH and dies. Judah tells the middle son that he must marry Tamar and continue the seed of his oldest brother. Onan agrees to marry, but as he knows that his first born will be considered the son of Er, he "spills his seed" intentionally: "But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother" (Gen. 38:9)<sup>40</sup>.

YHWH kills Onan because of this action. Judah then orders Tamar to return to her father's house and wait for Shelah, his youngest son, to grow older so she can create descendants for Er. Tamar, acting according to the law of the

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39. Note, however, that David does not begin as a trickster. For details, see Intention.

40. All translation of Biblical passages are from the JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh, Second Edition, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1999. Translations of passages that are analyzed in detail are my own.

society and to the word of Judah, goes back to the house of her father and waits there for Shelah to mature. When Shelah arrives at a marriageable age, however, Judah refuses to send him to Tamar because he is afraid that this child will die, too (Gen. 38:11).

When Tamar realizes that Judah does not intend to keep his promise, she decides to perform a deceptive act. Because she cannot argue with Judah publicly, she initiates a sophisticated plan that will force Judah to honor his promise (Ararat, 83). Judah's wife dies during sheep shearing season. Tamar learns this and also learns that Judah is going toward Timnah in order to shear his sheep. Knowing Judah's route, she journeys along the same route, but in disguise, covered with a scarf. She stops in a public place along the way called בפתח עיניים "Open Eyes" on the way to Timnah. When Judah encounters her on the road, he assumes that she is a prostitute and asks her to sleep with him. Recognizing Judah, Tamar asks him for "harlot's pay" which he agrees to by promising to send her a young goat. But she refuses to sleep with him until he gives her some collateral in advance.

Judah has only his seal, his rod, and his cord with him, so he gives her these items as collateral, and she agrees to lie with him.

By lying with Judah, Tamar enacts an elaborate ruse that, to work, relies on Judah both sleeping with her and not recognizing her. Both parts of her ruse work perfectly and, after lying with Judah, Tamar becomes pregnant. (One might argue that the "hand of God" is at work in this particular conception.)



Tamar then removes her veil and puts on her widow's clothing and disappears.

When Judah returns home, he asks his friend the Adullamite to redeem the pledge from the woman. He sends the Adullamite with the goat he promised, but the Adullamite inquires about her and finds no one knowing anything about her.

After three months, a pregnant Tamar appears before Judah, and he believes that she behaved immorally. He asks the elders to take her outside and burn her alive. Tamar then brings out the items that her father-in-law left with her and tells him that she is pregnant by the man to whom these belong. Judah recognizes them and says: "She is more right than I am because of the fact that I didn't give her to my son Shelah" (Gen 38:26). Tamar eventually gives birth to the twins Perez and Zerah.

This story demonstrates the use of the power of deception in order to reclaim legal rights. If Judah had kept his word and had allowed his youngest son to marry Tamar and impregnate her in order to continue the family line, Tamar would have had no reason, and probably no moral right, to act as she did. However, because Tamar's rights are violated, and because she has no other official channels to work through, she was forced to act in an unorthodox way in order to reclaim her rights.

The biblical narrator in this story indicates that by using deception, Tamar achieves justice, though not through conventional means. Because she cannot have achieved justice by the "normal" route, she is forced to trick Judah, and in

the end she is vindicated by the words of Judah absolving her and by the birth of twins, one of whom is the progenitor of the Davidic line.

In this story, the otherwise taboo relation, that of incest, is overcome. The dramatic violation of sexual mores is deemed justified and the trickster receives praise by the deceived and (less directly) by God (the birth of twins).

Furthermore, the treachery seems to be blessed also in the Book of Ruth (Ruth 4:14).

Because Divine Providence enables Tamar, and because she chooses to comply, she was entitled to gain from her deception. Tamar, like David, does not begin as a trickster, but resorts to it with all other options fail.

#### **A Trickster Type-Scene: Abram and Pharaoh (Gen. 12:10-20)**

Less dramatic is Abram's rise and deception.<sup>41</sup> What makes this trickery troubling at first sight is that the trickster is the otherwise venerable Abram, the founding father of the people Israel. Yet no approbation is perceptible in this text. When Abram goes to Egypt with his wife (Gen. 12), he is afraid that the Egyptians will kill him and his wife, Sarai. Therefore he lies to them and tells them that Sarai is his sister. Pharaoh sees Sarai, and because she is so beautiful, he takes her as a wife. "And because of her it went well Abram. He acquired sheep, oxen, asses, male and female slaves, she-asses and camels. But YHWH afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife Abram" (Gen. 12:16-17).

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41. Two other stories like this one appear in Gen. 20 and 26.

From this deception Abram gains many material goods and expands his household greatly. But God chooses to punish Pharaoh. According to the Bible, Pharaoh is guilty of taking a married woman. The fact that he consorted with her unknowingly because Sarai and Abram concealed their true relationship does not let him off the hook. When he learns the truth, Pharaoh complains about it to Abram that he was deceived: "And Pharaoh sent for Abram and said: 'What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say she is my sister so that I took her as my wife. Now here is your wife. Take her and be gone'" (Gen. 12:18-19).

The narrator does not reveal what Abram might have said about Pharaoh's accusation. Pharaoh however, does the right thing by sending Abram away from his land. Abram gains through his deception, but he is not judged, does not apologize, and is not punished. Moreover, he and Sarai leave Egypt not only alive, but also in a much enhanced financial position.

#### **Another Trickster Type Scene: Jacob and Isaac (Gen. 27:1-31)**

According to biblical protocol, the first-born male child receives the birthright. As Esau is first-born, he is in line to receive the blessing from Isaac. However, his twin brother, Jacob, born just minutes after him, deceives their father Isaac by disguising his arm with sheep's wool so that it will resemble the hairy arm of his brother, Esau. This disguise works because Isaac is blind.

The idea of deception comes from Jacob's mother, Rebekah; he is her puppet. Though he is at-first reluctant to engage in such a deception, she hushes him and says that his curse is upon her and he should do what she asks.

Rebekah cooks food and Jacob brings it to his father. Isaac does, in fact, suspect that the person before him is not Esau, so he tries to use his senses of hearing and touch. But because Jacob disguises his voice when he identifies himself as Esau, and because he extends his "hairy" arm for Isaac to feel, Isaac is fooled. Finally, Isaac asks: "Are you Esau?" After Jacob answers in the affirmative Isaac blesses him with the birthright.

Again in this story there is no apology, no regret, no punishment, and while Jacob flees, he never loses the birthright once he has received it, nor does Isaac rescind it to give it to Esau. Jacob grows to be the patriarch who gives his name to a people.

### **Comparing Tricksters**

We can find parallels in the stories of David and Tamar that exemplify Niditch's idea of the trickster. In both of the stories David and Tamar are initially acting according to the norms of their societies. David is in the field with his father's sheep; after the victory over Goliath he becomes Saul's servant, ruling over the people. Tamar acts according to the norms of an obedient widow; doing what her father-in-law Judah instructs her to do, waiting for Judah to fulfill his promise to her, the normal course of events for someone who was twice-widowed. Tamar dons a disguise only after Judah does not fulfill his promise. She does this in order to receive justice. David, trying to save his skin, at first thinks that the king of Gath will accept him as a refugee seeking shelter. Only when he realizes he is mistaken does he feign madness. The window of opportunity is narrow both for Tamar and David: she must act in haste in order to

trick Judah; David has to act quickly in order to trick the King of Gath so that he can escape being killed. In both stories, neither person prays to God nor waits for God's intervention; rather they act according to the facts as they see them in order to create favorable outcomes.

Neither David nor Tamar is religious. Neither of them implores God to perform a miracle or intervene on their behalf. Common to each story of the trickster is that it is the trickster's own ingenuity which produces the desired result. Abram and Sarai return from Egypt alive and with booty, Tamar has children by Judah, and Judah admits that she is in the right, Jacob inherits the birthright with all its rights and privileges, and David successfully escapes from the pursuit of Saul and from under the immediate scrutiny of the King of Gath where his life was also in danger.

Like the other tricksters, David grows in stature as time goes on. Given that the four male tricksters all prove to be among the most distinguished ancestors in the biblical traditions, one is led to conclude that trickery, per se, is lauded by the writers (and then commentaries). It is here that Niditch's observations help understand why: Perhaps because Israel recognized its beginning at a time of haphazard and marginality that its leading figures undergo trickery to save themselves or position themselves.

Unlike the other male tricksters, David does not jeopardize or endanger another person through his trickery beyond the person tricked. Abram's deceptions endanger Sarah/Sarai; Jacob's trickery dispossesses his brother Esau, not only deceives his father. Moreover, David alone resorts to trickery only

in the face of imminent and clear danger to his life. These details highlight David's reluctance to use such means except as a last recourse.

# Chapter Three: Historical Setting: Examining Archaeology and Language

Scholars hotly debate the historicity of the David accounts and even the historicity of David himself. The debate about David's existence continues, unabated. Historian Baruch Halpern accepts the basic historicity of the biblical narrative and comments that the "general soundness" of the descriptions of Saul's campaigns--though less so David--is "beyond dispute" (Isser, 14). A group of scholars known as the "Minimalists" on account of their view that only a "minimal amount of history is recoverable from the biblical and archaeological evidence," disagree. They regard Van Seters as a founding father; the best-known exponents of their views are Philip Davies and Thomas L. Thompson. With respect to David "they regard the entire biblical narrative as very late and doubt the very existence of David and the united monarchy" (Isser, 16). Davies defends his position that the kingdom and tenth-ninth century dynasty of David never existed writing "I am not the only scholar who suspects that the figure of King David is about as historical as King Arthur"<sup>42</sup> (Isser, 20).

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42. Isser is quoting Davies' "'House of David' Built on Sand".

Na'aman suggests a compromise between the two arguing camps:

David and Solomon existed and information was recorded by scribes. But they were not the imperial national monarchs of Samuel-Kings. David rules a chiefdom and from his fortress at Jerusalem dominated his neighbors, just as Labayu had done in the Amarna Age from his base in Shechem. Solomon built a small temple and established a court with scribes. But this was a temporary chiefdom and it soon collapsed<sup>43</sup> (Isser, 21).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to enter these discussions or to present them conclusively. It is also not necessary to resolve it when the goal concerns the representations of David's actions and role, not historical veracity. Still, some historical information is needed in order to understand the underlying motive of the stories is based on their literary nature (which will be explored at length below).

Today the mainstream of biblical scholarship accepts the main outlines of the hypothesis, first defined by Martin Noth in 1943, that a comprehensive historical work, conventionally known as 'the Deuteronomistic history', once encompassed the books of Deuteronomy and the Early Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings). Its original scope and messages, as well as the exact date of its composition are controversial. But most scholars agree that it was written either in the late seventh century BCE or in the early exilic period. Na'aman comments:

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43. Isser is citing Na'aman's article on Jerusalem: "Cowtown or Royal Capital?" in BAR 23, no. 4 (1997): 43-47, 67.



We may therefore suggest that the author of the history, the Deuteronomist, lived in the late seventh-early sixth century BCE and that even if he was later deported to Babylonia, he was for many years an eye-witness to the reality prevailing in the Cis- and Transjordanian regions (Na'aman, 201).

The timing of the writing of these stories may "color" the understanding of the stories portrayal of historical realities. Na'aman notes that for a range of compelling reasons one cannot take what is written as an accurate history of David and the conditions in which the stories are told:

For many years the biblical history of the United Monarchy was considered a safe point of departure for the reconstruction of the history of Israel. Historians described the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon in a way that was quite similar to their biblical narratives. Since the 1990s scholars have begun to question the historicity of these narratives and to raise doubts concerning the historical authenticity of the biblical descriptions of the United Monarchy. Among the reasons for this reevaluation are: the embellished literary character of many of these narratives; the lack of archaeological evidence for a tenth-ninth-century city in Jerusalem<sup>44</sup>; the relatively late development of urbanism in the kingdom of Judah (mainly since the eighth century) (Finkelstein 2001, with earlier literature); the relatively late spread of literacy in the kingdoms

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44. Steiner 1994; Steiner *et al.* 1998; Finkelstein 199:40, with earlier literature.

of Israel and Judah (only from the eight Century BCE onward) (Jamieson-Drake 1991:149-159); Na'aman 2002: 17-31); the comparison with the development of urbanism and states and with the spread of literacy in other Syrio-Palestinian kingdoms (Mazzoni 1995:181-191; 2000: 31-59); the unifying name 'Israel' for the inhabitants of Israel and Judah (Davies 1992); the gradual development of the Israelite religion in the First Temple period; and the late date in which the history of the United Monarchy was composed. Many scholars think that the biblical descriptions of the United Monarchy can neither serve as a basis for describing the history of Israel in the tenth century BCE, nor be used as a point of departure for reconstructing the history of Israel in the ninth-eighth centuries B.C.E. (Na'aman, 200).

That is not to say that interest in discovering historical realities have kept scholars from extensively exploring various aspects of the David stories that could corroborate the existence of David or veracities in the stories. A review of some of the important efforts follows.

#### **Tel Dan Stele: The House of David**

The analysis of dating examines what scant archaeological evidence exists that may have attested to there being a figure named "David." One of the most important finds is the Tel Dan inscription discovered by A. Biran of Hebrew Union College of Jerusalem. Written in ancient Aramaic on the stele is the word בית דוד, "House of David"<sup>45</sup>. This fragmentary inscription appears to attest to the

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45. The Tel Dan Stele is not complete, thus the words are fragmentary. It is

existence of a Davidic dynasty at least as far back as the time of the stele. Even with this important find, however, whether a David, king of Israel, actually existed remains the subject of serious scholarly debate.

The Stele is problematic because only a partial inscription has been reconstituted. Fortunately, the part of the inscription on which the "House of David" had been inscribed is intact. Although the broken stele raises serious historical problems, it is one of the most important written finds in Israel. The stone is dated to the second half of the 9th century and no later than 733 BCE. Describing Hazael's victory over his enemies, the Stele was probably erected by him when he conquered Dan in the mid-9th century BCE.

According to Rofeh, it is probable that in lines 7-8 two kings of Israel and Judah, who ruled at the same time, are mentioned: Jehoram, king of Israel and

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translated as: A line by line translation by André Lemaire is as follows (with text that cannot be read due to being missing from the stele, or too damaged by erosion, represented by "[.....]"):

- 1'. [.....] and cut [.....]
- 2'. [.....] my father went up [.....] fighting at/against Ab[.....]
- 3'. And my father lay down; he went to his [fathers]. And the king of Is[ra-]
- 4'. el penetrated into my father's land[. And] Hadad made me—myself—king.
- 5'. And Hadad went in front of me[, and] I departed from [.....]
- 6'. of my kings. And I killed two [power]ful kin[gs], who harnessed two thousand chariots and two thousand horsemen. [I killed Jo]ram son of [Ahab]
- 7'. king of Israel, and I killed [Achaz]yahu son of [Joram kin]g
- 8'. of the House of David. And I set [.....]
- 9'. their land ...[.....]
- 10'. other ...[.....] and Jehu ru-
- 11'. led over Is[rael].....
- 12'. siege upon [.....]
- 13'. [.....]

Ahaziah, king of Judah, referred to as a king of the House of David. These two kings were allies and were defeated by Hazael, king of Aram-Damascus (2 Kings 8:7-15, 28; 9:24-29; 2 Chronicles 22:5) (Rofeh, 17). If the stele is authentic (its authenticity continues to be challenged) and if the reading is correct (this, too, has been questioned), it would corroborate the historicity of a Davidic dynasty and imply an actual historical figure named David. But, as it is obvious, it cannot verify any of the details about David in 1 Samuel.

### **The Philistines: Evidence of a Culture Settling in Area of Ekron at Time Before David**

To understand the role of the Philistines in David's story, it is helpful to know who they were and what relations they might have had to the Israelites whose traditions are collected in 1 Samuel. In particular, the cities of the Philistines that are the sites of the David stories are of relevance.

The term "Philistine" is applied to the Sea Peoples, probably of Aegean origin, who first appeared in the Eastern Mediterranean at the end of the 13th century BCE. These people were displaced from their original homeland as part of the extensive population movements characteristic of the Late Bronze Age. Philistia, "The Land of the Philistines," consisted of five major cities--Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron--which were united in a confederation. Four of these cities have been located, while the location of Gath, which is of critical importance to the stories examined here, remains unknown. Major excavations have established a clear stratigraphic sequence by which the initial appearance, then the flourishing, and subsequently the assimilation of the Philistines can be

traced, a process spanning most of the Iron 1 Period (c 1200-1000 BCE)<sup>46</sup>.

(Dothan, AB, v5, 329).

Since the publication of Dothan's article in the Anchor Bible, she has also written of finds at excavations at Migne-Ekron that reflect the transformation of late Philistine culture at the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the tenth centuries BCE. She tracks the appearance of the "Elaborate Style" of pottery at Ekron and connects it with the first historically recorded appearance of the Philistines. Another form of pottery appeared almost simultaneously, giving chronological evidence of the establishment of Philistine culture. She writes:

From an original core of settlement in the heart of Philistia soon after 1000 BCE, the Philistine culture crystallized and eventually spread throughout all of the southern parts of the country, gradually taking over even the places where the Egyptian and Canaanite cultures of the Late Bronze Age most tenaciously hung on (Dothan, 7).

Irrespective of the archaeological evidence and the myriad of details about Philistine culture, the description of the Israelites' encounter with the Philistines in the Bible differs, omitting much of what has been discovered. Israel Finkelstein contends that the Philistines of the Deuteronomistic History must reflect later Philistine history after the realities of the early Iron 1 had already disappeared, even from the collective memory; most probably, the writers adapted the stories

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46. The time of David is circa 1005 B.C.E. to 965 B.C.E., so it is unclear if David's rise to power took place at a corresponding diminution of the Philistines' power.

to serve their needs, that is, to enhance the ideology of the Deuteronomistic circles in seventh-century Jerusalem (Finkelstein, 133). Special features in the material culture of the Philistines--from pottery and cult (the Ashdod figurines) to burial customs--and culinary practices have no echo in the biblical text. There is no question that the Bible could have been silent on many of these characteristics, but "it is highly unlikely that it would have ignored *all* of them" (Finkelstein, 133.)

### **Gath**

Since Achish, king of Gath, is central to David's story, one seeks evidence about this city. Gath is described (Gimtu of Amarna letters) as a prominent city-state in Late Bronze Age Canaan (Finkelstein, 138). Mycenaean IIC ('monochrome') pottery found at Tell es-Safi, in the presumed location of Gath, indicates that it was inhabited from the early days of the Philistine settlement. Archaeology has not, however, provided data regarding the size and importance of the site at that time (Finkelstein, 138).

Finkelstein concludes that Gath was an important center only until the mid-ninth century BCE (Hazael's campaign) or the first half of the eighth century (if 2 Chron. 26:6 is accepted as a trustworthy account). He cites 2 Kgs 12:17 where Hazael king of Damascus campaigned in Shephelah (c. 835 BCE) and takes the city of Gath (Finkelstein, 139). This is apparently the first reliable historical reference to Gath in the Bible. At that time Gath was either an independent city-state or a city-state dominated by the Judah-Omriddes alliance, and Hazael may have assaulted it in an attempt to take control of the trade network in the south.

Na'aman suggests that Gath declined after the Hazael campaign (Finkelstein, 139). Judah may have dominated Gath in the mid-eight century. A major destruction layer at Tell es-Safi is dated by the excavator to the ninth century, though an early eighth century date is not ruled out. In the course of Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria, Gath seems to have been in Judahite hands. Gath is not mentioned in regard to the Babylonian destruction of Philistia (Finkelstein, 140).

In May 2002 the National Antiquities Authority of the State of Israel was digging in Tel Gat. Supervised by M. Cohen, the archaeologists discovered the remains of three caves and a hole carved into the stone. In two of these caves the entrance was from above--and only in one dig did the archeologists find pottery remnants, mostly cups and small tools. The finding is dated from the Iron II era and from the tenth-ninth centuries BCE. Although they did not discover human remains, Cohen believes that the caves were burial caves. There is no real evidence to corroborate that the city Gath was there, even though it is described as a city in the Bible (Cohen, 97).

### **Achish**

Finkelstein mentions that Naveh has identified the seventh-century Ikausu of Ekron with biblical Achish of Gath. Finkelstein speculates that "the Deuteronomic Historian goes out of his way to 'legitimize' Gath and its king. The story of the alliance between David and an ancient Achish may have aimed at legitimizing the relationship between the new David--Josiah--and the city of the new Achish" (Finkelstein, 134). Since Josiah is dated to late 7th century, a time associated with the Deuteronomistic Historian, this conclusion implies that writers

in Josiah's time are keen in developing a particular picture of the relationship between David and Achish, as backdrop for a contemporary agenda. The question then remains: how to understand that relationship? What do the stories of David and Achish contribute to the picture of a relationship between the two peoples at the time of Josiah?

### **Ziklag**

R.K. Harrison identifies Ziklag, the city that Achish gave to David as a gift, as Tell el-Khuweilfeh, about 8 km. (5 mi) SW of Tell Beit Mirsim (formerly identified with Debir) and some 16 km (10 mi) east of Tell esh-Sheri'a (Harrison, 484-485). This city is located in the Negev desert. Finkelstein thinks that what was important for seventh-century Judah was the claim that Ziklag was given to David (1 Samuel 27:5-6): "The main point of the story seems to be the assertion that 'Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day'" (1 Samuel 27:6)(Finkelstein, 136). The text explains how Ziklag became Judahite, and that as it was possibly situated in disputed territory with one of the Philistine city-states, but that the Judahites had a legitimate claim to the city in the seventh century.

### **Language and Scribal Arts**

It is important to remember that scribes and scribal arts were rare during the tenth century BCE, and that the development of the language was evolutionary. The evolution of biblical Hebrew is evident in the Bible itself, where similar scenes from 2 Samuel are recounted in Chronicles with Hebrew from a later period. What writings that did exist were usually the prerogative of the royal



household, for it was only royalty who could afford to have scribes. Na'aman contends that while David and Solomon existed and information was recorded by scribes, they were not imperial nations, as little remains from the tenth-century. The lack of information suggests a smaller physical scale and scope of operations than what the Bible indicates (Na'aman, 200). Na'aman's conclusion contributes to the suppositions that the stories of David and Achish are relatively late, that they served ideologies of the 7th century BCE or later. Consequently, the interpreters can conclude that the details in the stories serve a literary and political agenda, rather than a faithful record of David's rise to the throne:

David's wars with Israel's neighbors reflect a reality that is quite different from that of the seventh-early sixth century BCE. I have tried to show that the Deuteronomist worked on the basis of early sources, the earliest account--which I have termed 'the chronicle of early Israelite kings'--probably having been written in the first half of the eighth century BCE. His sources enabled him to base his work on relatively early data, some of which antedated his time by centuries. However, very little of this data may tentatively be assigned to the time of the historical David. I therefore suggest that the detailed history of David, including his wars and achievements, be left in the hands of able writers and novelists who can make full use of the magnificent narratives of the life and adventures of this great literary hero who lived and operated at the dawn of Israelite history (Na'aman, 216).

# Chapter Four: The Underdog Trickster in the Narrative: A Literary Setting

By literary setting I refer to the narrative sequence within which the stories of David and Achish are embedded. In 1 Samuel, beginning with chapter 16, two major trajectories emerge and repeatedly intersect: that of Saul and that of David. To understand the encounter between David and Achish, we need to place them in relation to the book's overarching themes and development.

Campbell provides an overview of 1 Samuel:

The overall structure of the book is centered in the monarchy, begun with Saul and established with David. The role of the prophet is central to the establishment of the monarchy; but the prophetic role goes beyond establishment, claiming the right not only to designate and dismiss certain kings, but also to exercise ultimate control over the conscience of the king. . . . Samuel's prime task in the narrative presentation was to anoint David as Israel's future king. The inauguration of the monarchy and the rejection of Saul are merely steps along the way to a major task: the anointing

of David. Brueggeman is right: "the first fifteen chapters are preparation for him [David]" (Brueggeman, 2). Once this is seen it explains why Saul gets such a rotten press from the prophets--rejected as soon as he is king, and rejected on what really must be reckoned an unfair charge (13:7b-15a). Saul's reign is wrapped up and summarized almost before it has got under way (14:47-52). Saul's definitive rejection in favor of David follows at once (15:1-35). (Campbell, 2).

Following the the prophetic motives (1 Samuel 1:1-16:13) are the political moves to establish David as king (1 Samuel 16:14-2 Samuel 8:18) (Campbell, 2).

In sharper relief, one sees that God anoints Samuel as a prophet to bring into focus the two major opposing narratives emerging in the stories of David and Saul: the one declining and the one ascending. The first narrative primarily concerns Saul who is declared the first king (1 Samuel 10:1), but it also includes Eli the high priest and Samuel the prophet (1 Samuel 3:20). Saul's decline is described in stages: at first in the eyes of God (1 Samuel 13:13-14, 15:28), then in the eyes of Samuel (1 Samuel 15:34-35), then in the eyes in the people (1 Samuel 18:16), and finally in the eyes of his family (1 Samuel 19:1-2, 12), until he dies (1 Samuel 31:5).

The second narrative concerns David who rises from the rank of shepherd to become the next king in 2 Samuel. The intersection of these two narratives occurs in the tense relationship between Saul and David. Comparing the two

stories we see how David's portrait as powerful and heroic is deliberately reflecting on Saul's story as one of weakness and failure from the beginning.

The relationship between David and Achish begins in 1 Samuel 21 and ends in 1 Samuel 29. But well before that, in the Book of Judges, we are privy to a series of events that foreshadow David's need to run away from Saul, with David having nowhere else to go other than to a foreign land, to Achish, to the King of Gath.

At the end of Judges 19 there is the story of the "concubine in Gibeah" wherein people from the Tribe of Benjamin rape and abuse a woman all night. In the morning they send her away. She comes back to her master, but does not move when her husband says "Get up" (Judges 18:28). The man returns home where he cuts up her body into twelve parts and sends them throughout the land of Israel. The tribes of Israel join together in their demand to punish those who are responsible for this horrible crime: "Come hand over those scoundrels in Gibeah so that we may put them to death and stamp out the evil from Israel (Judges 20:13). Refusing to punish members of their own tribe, the Benjaminites do not yield to the demand of their fellow Israelites. Because they hold that position, those responsible for this crime are not to be punished and the people are perilously close to a state of anarchy.

The tribes thus join together in a war against the Benjaminites. They begin by seeking and receiving God's approval. The war ends when the Benjaminites are defeated, and the narrator tells of the horrific toll inflicted on the tribe: "YHVH routed the Benjaminites before Israel. That day the Israelites slew

25,100 men of Benjamin, all of them fighting men" (Judges 20:35). Still, the Book of Judges continues with a remnant of the Tribe of Benjamin remaining, an important detail for what follows.

The Book of Judges ends with this: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased" (Judges 21:25). It is important to note the specific type of ruler foreshadowed here as saving the people is a king and that the tribe of Benjamin is guilty of a vile crime. Could such a king emerge from the Benjaminites?

The Book of Samuel begins with the same situation: the tribes are not bonded together under one moral and ethical law. 1 Samuel crystallizes the needs for ethical leadership that would consolidate the people under one wing.

God begins this process when anointing Samuel as prophet: "All Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel was trustworthy as a prophet of YHWH" (1 Samuel 3:20). This anointing creates unity among the divided tribes because Samuel is not just a leader, he is also a judge and the head of the army. During the time of the judges, a judge would appear only at certain times when there was some kind of threat, subsequently disappearing after the ordeal was over. By contrast, Samuel is a leader over a long period of time, sufficient to consolidate the anarchic situation, replacing it with a more ordered society (Amit, 180).

The narrative of decline begins with the decline of Eli's and Samuel's hegemony. Eli's line as chieftain ends as his sons are killed by Philistines in battle. This allows an opening for the creation of a new kind of ruler. His dynasty

ends. Even the prophet Samuel's dynasty degenerates: (1) his sons are not seen as acting appropriately by the people to inherit his mantle of leadership (1 Samuel 8:5) and (2) the people have seen Samuel age, along with his failure as leader of the army (1 Samuel 8:20). They want a new kind of ruler: a king.

The change that the people want is communicated to Samuel when the elders of Israel come to him saying, "You have grown old, and your sons have not followed your ways. Therefore appoint a king for us, to govern us like all other nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). In this verse are the words עתה שפטנו "Now govern us": the people do not want to wait. They see that he is old, and they want a new regime like the other nations, and that want it immediately.

Samuel is unhappy with the people's desire to replace him, as expressed by the elders. He turns to God, but God tells Samuel to do what the people desire: "You should heed the voice of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king" (1 Samuel 8:7).

Still, as is obvious, God does not approve of instituting a kingship and attempts, through Samuel, to dissuade the people from pursuing this. In 1 Samuel 8:9 YHVH tells Samuel to give the people a king, but with a warning: "Heed their demand; but warn them solemnly, and tell them about the practices of any king who will rule over them." Samuel, in turn, gives the people an extensive warning (1 Samuel 8:11-18). The warning ends with an admonition: "The day will come when you cry out because of the king whom you yourselves

have chosen; and YHVH will not answer you on that day" (1 Samuel 8:18). God will not intervene in a terrible situation which the people have brought upon themselves.

The people refuse to hear Samuel's voice, and they told him so: "'No,' they said. 'We must have a king over us, that we may be like all the other nations: let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles'" (1 Samuel 8:19). Samuel and YHVH hear the people's demand. God concedes and tells Samuel to appoint a king. All of the people then scatter back to their towns.

### **The Decline of the First King, Saul**

Saul's decline begins before he even becomes king. The narrator begins systematically to show that anointing King Saul was an error from the beginning. All of the conditions for creating and establishing a new dynasty produced a string of failures. The narrator demonstrates this from the outset of Saul's entering the picture by carefully describing the anointing process, using foreshadowing syntax: "There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of substance. He had a son whose name was Saul, an excellent young man; no one among the Israelites was handsomer than he; he was a head taller than any of the people (1 Samuel 9:1-2). What is known from the very outset of is that Saul is drawn from the weakest tribe, the Benjamenites and that he is good looking.

Saul is not from an entrenched family--rather he is from the youngest family of all the Benjamites. Given this background, the odds of Saul's

succeeding are low compared to a person from a large tribe and from a strong family. Note that the narrator says that the father was a man of substance, but refers to Saul as being "excellent" mainly for his looks, not his character. Saul is given his first mission by the narrator: to find his father's asses that have wandered away from the family farm (1 Samuel 9:3). He is to be accompanied by a servant. The mission does not succeed after three days of wandering, and Saul wants to return home without the animals (1 Samuel 9:5). The servant tries to draw Saul toward a town where there is a "man of God" who, he believes, will help them find the animals and their way back to Saul's father, and Saul agrees (1 Samuel 9:6). They ascend to the town where they meet girls at the well drawing water<sup>47</sup> (1 Samuel 9:11) and ask for the seer; the girls direct him. It is here that the narrator reveals to Samuel that Saul is God's choice to be king and tells him to anoint him as the person who will deliver the people from the Philistines (1 Samuel 9:15-16). Samuel does not seek out Saul; Saul only comes to Samuel because of his servant's prodding. He is not the underdog being sought out by the prophet, but rather, someone who only is revealed to Samuel because of circumstance. Alter notes that here Samuel reveals his access to supernatural knowledge: no one has told him that Saul was looking for asses, but Samuel knows both of the lost animals and where to find them (Alter, 50n). One of Saul's problems is solved--but now he faces being anointed as king.

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47. Meeting women at the well drawing water is an example of Alter's "type-scene." Usually it foreshadows a betrothal; in this case, it seems to be another way to underscore the oddness of what is happening to Saul.



## **Saul's Anointing: The Reluctant Shy King**

Saul's kingship begins under far from auspicious circumstances. The people of Israel are not united with the choice of Saul as king. The ceremony of anointing itself exemplifies the existing ironies. Typically an anointing ceremony takes place in the presence of all the people and is supposed to be an honorable and respectable act, conveying power to the king.

This anointing scene begins, however, with Samuel speaking to the people in Mitzpeh, telling them: "But today you have rejected your God who delivered you from all your troubles and calamities. For you said, 'No, set up a king over us!' Now station yourselves before YHVH, by your tribes and clans" (1 Samuel 10:19). Before being introduced to Saul, we learn that though he is a "head taller" than everyone else, yet Saul is nowhere to be found. Samuel asks God to reveal Saul's location, and God says that Saul is hiding among the baggage. Thus, while the people are expecting a dynamic man to replace the aging prophet, they are introduced to the shy, hidden Saul as their king.

In contrast with David, the first thing the people see is that Saul is taller than everyone else. David is smaller in stature, especially when compared with the giant, Goliath, who was "six cubits and a span" (1 Samuel 17:4). Though Saul looks as if he should be the hero, it is David who fights and kills Goliath.

After the anointing of Saul, many people rave about the new king. They acclaim him saying, "Long live the king!" (1 Samuel 10:25). Samuel explains the rule of the monarchy, writes down the explanation for the next generation, and lays the book in front of YHVH (1 Samuel 10:25). Each person returns to his

home. Saul also goes back to his home to Gibeah, but he is not alone. He goes with a group of unnamed men: "Saul also went home to Gibeah, accompanied by upstanding men whose hearts God had touched. But some scoundrels said, 'How can this fellow save us?' So they scorned him and brought him no gift. But he was as one who stayed silent" (1 Samuel 10:26-27). As discussed above, the seed for Saul's roots is planted with the rape of the Levite's concubine in Gibeah (Judges 19), the same place to which Saul as newly-anointed king returns.

We are confronted with a number of questions about these verses. Who are these people whose hearts God touches? Perhaps there needed to be a Divine Intervention for Saul to have loyalists. Why was it necessary to point out the fact that there are people who do not respect Saul from the beginning and to record Saul's non-reaction? Perhaps to show that Saul was challenged on multiple levels from the moment of his anointing. Perhaps the people that openly scoff Saul distrust him for political reasons because the king is not chosen by the "inner circle" of the tribes. Or perhaps it is the narrator's intention to demonstrate that Saul does not react in a manner befitting the first chosen king. If he does not honor and respect his own position, how can other people be expected to honor him as their king? This, indeed, is why Samuel later opposes him (1 Samuel 10:27).

#### **Saul as Warrior and Leader of the Army**

Saul comes back from herding and sees people crying. He inquires about what is wrong and discovers that Israel's ally, the Jabesh-gilead, are threatened by Nahash the Ammonite (1 Samuel 11:5). The narrator describes how the נחש

אלוהים "spirit of God" grips Saul and makes Saul exceedingly angry (1 Samuel 11:6). Saul takes two of the cattle he is herding, cuts them into pieces (similar to the story in Judges 19), and sends it to the borders of Israel warning: "Thus shall be done to the cattle of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel into battle!" (1 Samuel 11:7). The narrator portrays the people as terrified: "Terror from God fell upon the people and they came out as one man" (1 Samuel 11:7). The forces coalescing are not voluntary, and Saul is helped by his inner circle, which includes many family members. He appoints his uncle as the minister of the army, and a number of commanding positions are given to his sons and relatives (Raviv, 117-118).

Saul's army fights its first war against Nahash the Ammonite and Saul saves the people of Jabesh-gilead and consolidates the Israelites into a unified army (1 Samuel 11:11-13).

The second war the Israelites fight is against the Philistines, in Gilgal (1 Samuel 13:5). Saul as king musters 3,000 men. When they discover that the Philistines are mighty and numerous, they are afraid and hide in caves and in the wadi. Saul waits there for Samuel to come to Gilgal because he needs Samuel to sacrifice an offering to God to determine if they can win the war. But Samuel is late arriving and after seven days of waiting, most of the people begin to scatter. Unable to wait any longer, Saul makes his own sacrifice (the traditional province of Samuel), and just as he finishes, Samuel arrives.

Samuel rebukes Saul asking: "What have you done!" (1 Samuel 13:11) and pronounces his fate: "But now your dynasty will not endure. YHWH will seek

out a man after His own heart, and YHVH will appoint him ruler over His people, because you did not abide by what YHVH had commanded you" (1 Samuel 13:14).

The war against the Philistines continues in Michmas: "When all the men of Israel who were hiding in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing they too pursued them in battle. Then YHVH brought victory to Israel that day" (1 Samuel 14:22-23). Even though Saul displeases God by offering a sacrifice in place of Samuel, he leads his troops to victory. Nevertheless, he engenders the wrath of the prophet who tells him that his dynasty will not endure.

Despite the prophesy, Saul's son, Jonathan, is successful in battle against the Philistines, and his success leads the Philistines to retreat. To ensure continuing success, Saul commands the troops not to eat any food before night falls, until the battle. Jonathan, not hearing his father's order, eats a bit of honey. Saul finds out and condemns Jonathan to death. But there is a rebellion by Saul's warriors who say: "Will Jonathan die who has performed this great deliverance in Israel? Heaven forbid, as YHVH lives, that a single hair should fall to the ground. For with God he has wrought (victory) this day" (1 Samuel 14:45).

The troops' rebellion is another sign of Saul's decline. He believes that the person who disobeys him must be punished. Therefore, he is willing to sacrifice a human being, including his own son. But he is

thwarted by his own people. This sign of disobedience to the king is unheard of, for the consequences of disobeying a king at this time was certain death. Here, it renders Saul impotent<sup>48</sup>.

Still, Saul was winning the war against the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, the Philistines, and the kings of Zobah "and every place he turned he caused evil," (1 Samuel 14:47). The narrator uses the word ירשע "caused evil" instead of the ישיע which means "saved." The implication is that Saul's causing evil condemns him. He is not elevated even though he saves his people. The next verse says he was יעש חיל "profoundly successful" in the war against the Amalekites, and he saved Israel (1 Samuel 14:48). In that context, the word ירשע, causing evil, appears to be out of place<sup>49</sup>.

Saul's third war is the war of the Israelites against the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:7-9). Saul, again, wins this war, but he spares the life of King Agag of Amalek, and he permits his people to loot the spoils of their victory. According to God's will, the Amalekites were supposed to be completely destroyed in a

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48. Isser comments that this story recalls a familiar theme in Judges, this time Jephthah's oath which led to the sacrifice of his daughter (Judges 11). Criticism of Saul's rashness is highlighted again, but this time it is explicitly verbalized by his own son, who, upon learning of the oath, declares it to be a military blunder, since the men could have fought longer and more effectively if they had nourished themselves (1 Samuel 14:29-30) (Isser, 120).

49. Alter writes: "ירשע usually means to condemn someone as guilty in a court of justice. But notice that a related idiom, 'to do justice,' עשות שפטים also means to carry out punitive acts against an enemy. Apparently, the implication is that he carried out punishing expeditions against Israel's enemies to the east of the Jordan without actually conquering them, as David was to do" (Alter 85n).

genocide, but Saul allows Agag to live. Later he regrets what he has done, saying to Samuel: "I did wrong to transgress YHVH's command and your instructions, but I was afraid of the troops, and I yielded to them" (1 Samuel 15:24).

Because of Saul's behavior, God is disgusted with him and is now ready to replace him. "And Samuel said to him, 'YHVH has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you. Moreover, the Glory of Israel does not deceive or change His mind, for He is not human that He should change His mind'" (1 Samuel 15:28-29). It is at this point in his decline that Saul also completely loses the amity of the prophet: "Samuel never saw Saul again to the day of his death. But Samuel grieved over Saul, because YHVH regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:35). Although Saul wins the war and saves his people from the enemies of Israel, he is punished severely by his loss of connection to the prophet.

From this point on, there is a marked decrease in Saul's power and his kingship. Although he continues to battle the Philistines in the role as head of the army, he is not the one who fights against Goliath<sup>50</sup> and becomes the underdog/

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50. Thinking about the important role of folklore (Niditch), Alter here comments: "It is at this point that the folkloric background of the second story of David's debut becomes particularly clear. The folk-tale pattern is one that is very familiar from later, European tradition: a community is threatened by a giant, or ogre, or dragon that nobody can face. The king offers great wealth, and the hand of his daughter, to the man who can slay the giant. A young man from the provinces then appears on the scene, who in his youth and slight stature seems quite unfit for the daunting challenge, but by with wit and resourcefulness, using unexpected means, he conquers the ogre. The appeal of this archetypal folk tale no doubt made it attractive for inclusion in

hero in the type-scene (1 Samuel 17:38-55). Furthermore, no one in his army is capable of fighting against Goliath. The people and the king are paralyzed. The solution to their problem is David, a solution that is neither obvious nor logical. David is a young boy who has never fought; all his experiences have been as a shepherd. His being chosen is a sign of the transition from the legitimate ruler, Saul, to an outsider. A non-member of the power structure will be the next king.

The order of the book reflects the narrator's thinking. The kingship of Saul is a kingship that will rule for only a short period, giving way to the kingship of David who is destined to rule. Therefore the narrator brings the word of God who said in conversation with Samuel: "And YHVH said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and set out; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have decided on one of his sons to be king'" (1 Samuel 16:1). Thus God is disgusted with Saul, although his sins are no greater than those that both David and Solomon are destined to commit.

If Saul, the first king is disqualified only because of his mistakes, David's dynasty should also be disqualified because of his sins. Nevertheless, what lead to Saul's downfall and decline does not affect David in his rise, nor does it end David's future dynasty. I would suggest that this is a clear double-standard. One gets the impression that the narrator is eager to find fault in Saul, despite his successes, in order to highlight and justify David's rise to the throne. If such is

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the David narrative" (Alter, 105n).

the overriding perspective of the narrator, then it can help shed light on the apologetic agenda of the David and Achish stories. If Saul can do no right, David can do no wrong, as it were.

### **Saul: Until Now**

To summarize, Saul began his duties as a king from a place of weakness. He was from the younger family of the weakest tribe. The prophet Samuel's line has ended; he was not replaced. This signifies an important transition between powers and the transition to a different kingship. Samuel is dismayed by Saul. Like Samuel, YHWH does not approve of a kingship, but he surrenders to the demands of the people. The people, who at the beginning are accepting of the new king, slowly lose their affection for him and disapprove of him.

What, then, is the benefit of anointing Saul as the king? As the narrator points out, there are two areas where Saul succeeds. One is when the narrator gives Saul credit for creating a ruling structure where there was none; Saul creates out of nothing the paradigm that will be used by other kings who will follow him. The second is that Saul establishes a judicial system that endures as evidenced in the trial of Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub (1 Samuel 22:9-23).

### **Saul: Only Trusting Intimates**

Saul's court is largely made up of his family. The most important positions are filled by family and members of the tribe. The narrator describes the existence of a core of people at Saul's side, relatives (such as his uncle) and close confidants who help him govern (1 Samuel 14:50) (Hanoach, 117-118). The narrator gives us a vivid glimpse of Saul's increasing paranoia as his leadership



declines when he turns to his court, his most intimate and closest family and advisors, asking about Jonathan and David's relationship: "Is that why all of you have conspired against me? For no one informs me when my own son makes a pact with the son of Jesse; no one is concerned for me and no one informs me when my own son has set my servant in ambush against me, as is now the case" (1 Samuel 22:8).

### **Saul: Origins Overshadow Achievement**

Saul's origin in Benjamin and the connections to the rape of the Levite concubine in Judges 19--both through Saul's dividing an animal into 12, as in Judges 19 the woman is divided, in both instances to summon the tribes, and the mention of Gibeah--serve to cast a shadow over his early achievements.

### **David: The One Who Rises**

The narrator of the Book of Samuel shapes chapter 17, the success of David in his battle against Goliath, in two ways. First he<sup>51</sup> describes the king, Saul, who is possessed by a bad spirit, who has lost the trust of God and the prophet, and who no longer has the legitimacy to pass on his rule through his son Jonathan. He is a person who does not trust anyone and remains suspicious of all until his dying day.

Second, he describes David's rise. One of the ways in which the narrator illustrates David's suitability to succeed Saul is by resorting to a typology of a hero's journey (see Genre) in which the "prince" reaches his destination through

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51. Although the gender of the author and/or narrator is never specified, it seems likely that the person is a male.

trial by "fire," as it were. In this case, David is not a member of the power circle. He is not supposed to rule, but slowly he acquires the love of the people, the support of the army, and the support of the royal family and the king's servants (1 Samuel 18:5). King Saul stands alone as David gains legitimacy for a new dynasty. The narrator is trying to systematically show how David acquires the affection of Saul's family and the servants of the king.

In their first encounter, in preparation for David's entry into battle, Saul gives his warrior clothing to David. The clothing is symbolic of the transfer of power and the transfer of loyalty that will shift from Saul's regime to David's, changing the throne of decline to the throne of ascension. Saul's clothing does not fit David, however, because Saul is a much taller man. Saul also placed a bronze helmet on David's head and a breastplate: "And David said to Saul, 'I cannot walk in these, for I am not used to them.' So David took them off" (1 Samuel 17:38).

By David's refusing the accouterments of the warrior king, the narrator sets up the underdog type scene: "He took his stick, chose five smooth stones from the wadi, put them in the pocket of his shepherd's bag, and, sling in hand, he went towards the Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:40). In this encounter between David and Saul there are elements both of irony and absurd humor. The inexperienced young man goes to fight on behalf of a king who cannot or will not fight, and he is being sent into battle ill-prepared to succeed.

After David successfully slays Goliath, he goes to King Saul in Jerusalem. When he is in the palace, Jonathan and David become close friends. Because of

this bond, Jonathan pledges his loyalty to David by removing his coat, his arms and sword, the symbols of his role as warrior and prince, and gives them to David (1 Samuel 18:4). So the narrator systematically places David in the palace, inside the royal chamber, and with Jonathan's complicity, is immediately promoted to be the next prince.

King Saul now trusts David and places him in charge of the army. David is popular with the people, as well as with all of the troops and with Saul's servants. It is important to note here that David wins the loyalties of Saul's servants (1 Samuel 18:16), because it is another important foreshadowing of what will come when David encounters Achish, the king of Gath, and his servants.

In 1 Samuel 18:5 the narrator demonstrates that David grows in the affections and trust of two distinct units: one unit is the people, the other unit is Saul's servants (1 Samuel 18:5,16). This is important because the servants are the most loyal to Saul and some are even from Saul's family and tribe. Their approval of David is another indication that David has penetrated to the core of Saul's kingship. Saul's servants have been the only people Saul trusts (although he does challenge them with respect to David and Jonathan's relationship), and according to the narrator, their loyalties transfer to David, with Saul unaware.

#### **Saul Becomes Aware, Jealousy is Aroused**

After David returns from the battle with the Philistines, the narrator tells us of the women from the villages of Israel who sing and dance to greet King Saul with timbrels, shouting and sistrums. But their song was not what Saul expects

or wants to hear: "Saul has slain his thousands; David, his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7).<sup>52</sup> The narrator again emphasizes that it is David who has the greater success against the Philistines, not the current king.

Saul angrily says that David had success in everything that he does, and that all he lacks was the kingship. This is a strange way of noting Saul's awareness that David is a danger, not only to Israel's enemies, but to Saul's very kingship. Saul is hostile to David from this day forward, and this hostility becomes the main focus of Saul's life (1 Samuel 18:8-9).

Saul becomes possessed by an evil spirit of YHWH, and he begins to rave like a madman in his home. Using his spear, he twice tries to kill David. In other words, his hostile thoughts become action (1 Samuel 18:11).

Once again, Saul fears David: "Saul was afraid of David, for YHWH was with him and had turned away from Saul" (1 Samuel 18:12). Saul senses that his power is diminishing as he observes David's power increasing. He sees that David enjoys the favor of YHWH, a favor that he once held. In all of the verses between 1 Samuel 18:6-13 David is not portrayed as doing anything in particular that would trigger Saul's attacks. He does not listen to the women who sing songs praising him; he continues to play his lyre. The text also tells us that he eludes Saul's weapon, twice. This point is important in highlighting the narrator's perspective. On the one hand David appears to rise in popularity. On the other,

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52. This song is of critical importance both here and in the story of David and Achish for Achish's servants also know of this song, its lyrics, and its meaning. This song is used to identify David.

he is not himself guilty of anything against Saul since he himself does not encourage any such tendencies. This kind of portrayal discloses a running thread throughout the narrative: to show that David always acts correctly and never himself threatens Saul's kingship.

The narrator again stresses in 1 Samuel 18:14 that David is successful in all that he does and that YHWH is with him. He stresses in verse 18:15 that Saul is afraid of David.

"All Israel and Judah loved David, for he marched at their head" (1 Samuel 18:16). This expression "marched at their head," the leader of the people, is also mentioned in Numbers 27:15-16 with respect to Moses: "Moses spoke to YHWH saying, 'Let YHWH, Source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone over the community who shall go out before them and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in, so that YHWH's community may not be like sheep that have no shepherd.'" Moses is speaking about choosing a leader after his death. In the Samuel verse, the narrator, by using the same language, indicates that David is actually the one who leads the Israelites. He is the leader (Bar Efrat, 241).

In chapter 18, the narrator has Saul hearing the women joyously singing and dancing about David's great victories comparing his tens of thousands of victims to Saul's "thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). Saul focuses on the fact that David has everything but the kingship and "from this day on Saul kept a jealous eye on David (1 Samuel 18:9). Saul decides that the best way to rid himself of David is by having a Philistine kill him in battle, so he creates

an opportunity for David to win Saul's daughter's hand in marriage by going to battle against the Philistines and bringing back 100 foreskins (1 Samuel 18:17). Saul appeals to David to become his son-in-law. Saul has heard that Michal loves David and decides to place David in a snare by her in marriage (1 Samuel 18:21). Saul communicates to David the "bride price" through his servants: the foreskins of a hundred Philistines. The narrator explains Saul's motivation: "Saul intended to bring about David's death at the hand of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 18:25). David is pleased with the idea (1 Samuel 18:26) and goes to battle.

Similar to the Goliath story, David more than succeeds (1 Samuel 18:27). He brings back 200 foreskins. Saul's hand is forced, and he gives his daughter Michal to David as a wife. The underdog hero becomes part of the royal family. Saul had given Michal to David as a snare, only to have her become David's supporter (1 Samuel 18:27).

Again the narrator indicates that Saul realizes that YHVH is with David and reiterates Saul's fear of David. To make matters worse for Saul, although she is a princess who was "given" to David, Michal reveals her love toward David in two different verses (18:20 and 18:28). David now has the loyalties of both of Saul's children, Jonathan and Michal. The narrator again emphasizes that Saul's fear translates into Saul's hatred of David and establishes David as his implacable enemy, as the text says "כל הימים" "all the days," forever (1 Samuel 18:29). Finally, the narrator ends the chapter with yet another statement of David's success, fighting against the Philistines (not the king), raising his reputation--ויקר שמו מאד "and his reputation soared" (1 Samuel 18:30).

Saul then attempts to enlist his servants to kill David, but Jonathan tells David and devises a way to inform David about Saul's specific plans. Jonathan goes before his father and attempts to plead with him on David's behalf, reminding him of David's great success against the Philistines and appealing to Saul to "not shed the blood of an innocent man, killing David without cause" (1 Samuel 19:5).

David continues to do Saul's job, defending the land and achieving great victories. The narrator always speaks of David alone. Even though Saul promises Jonathan not to kill David, Saul attacks David yet again, and as part of the hero/underdog motif, David again eludes Saul, but this time he flees immediately.

David flees with the help of Saul's daughter, Michal, (1 Samuel 19:12) and goes before Samuel telling him *all* that Saul has done to him (1 Samuel 19:18). He then stays with Samuel at Naioth.<sup>53</sup> Saul learns David's location and sends messengers to Naioth, who, rather than speaking intelligibly, all speak in "ecstasy." King Saul, too, goes to Naioth and speaks in ecstasy, removing his clothing, lying naked all day and all night (1 Samuel 19:23-24). The text in this scene foreshadows what David will do in order to escape from his first encounter with Achish.

In the final scene leading to David's first escape to Achish, we see one more proof of Jonathan's loyalty toward David. Jonathan tells David that he will

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53. Note that David does not flee to his tribe, but rather, goes to the prophet, Samuel.

find out what Saul is planning and will let David know by means of a secret sign. The next day Jonathan goes to David who is hiding in the field and gives him the sign that he is not safe, so David flees.

According to the narrator, the ability of David to move without an escort emphasizes his ability to deal with obstacles in his way. First he must stay alive, avoiding the reach of the king's spies that are trying to kill him. Second, he has to provide food and weapons for himself in order to survive. He succeeds in doing this, although through deceit. In an episode involving Ahimelech, the priest, we see David as a trickster who intentionally lies to the priest to get what he needs--a sword (Goliath's) and bread (1 Samuel 21:3). Third, because he has to become an alternative power to the ruling king, he cannot be alone for a significant amount of time.

Carrying Goliath's sword, David escapes to Achish, but Achish's servants recognize him. Because he is afraid of the king's reaction to his presence, he acts like a madman and is sent away from the king and Gath.<sup>54</sup>

#### **David's Rise to Power (1 Samuel 22-26)**

In the chapters noted we see the narrator continuing to build David as a hero using the underlying characteristics of underdog and trickster. We also see David continuing his rapid rise, developing loyal associates, forming an inner governing structure, continuing his pursuit of the enemies of Israel, the

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54. This interaction will be dealt with at length in the "Intention" section. What follows is the intervening information about David's ascension between his first and second encounters with Achish, the king of Gath.



Philistines, and remaining innocent in relation to Saul. This makes the episode between him and Achish all the more startling--and significant. Meanwhile, Saul is continually portrayed as being single-focused, not on his job as king, but as pursuer of David, the presumed enemy of his kingship.<sup>55</sup> Saul ultimately tries to play trickster by telling David that he realizes that David will be the next king and asks for mercy for him and his family: "I know that you will become king and that the kingship over Israel will remain in your hand, so swear to me by YHVH that you will not destroy my descendants or wipe-out my name from my father's house (1 Samuel 24:21-22). The narrator continues having David swear to Saul and David and his people went up to the strongholds (1 Samuel 24:23). David cannot be tricked; he realizes that Saul can never be trusted, and if given the chance, Saul will kill him.

After David's first escape from Achish in chapter 21, he assembles people who have problems with the existing authority structure (1 Samuel 22:2). The narrator says that this initial group numbered 400. As with Saul, David's family are his most trusted intimates--his father, his brothers, and his mother. This information is of importance because David is no longer alone and now is developing a structure of his own to surround him. David is now an outlaw, yet people are gravitating toward him (1 Samuel 22:2) and he becomes a central commanding figure to them. There is no explanation by the narrator here of why this happens after the first meeting with Achish, however, as part of the structure

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55. Again it is ironic that to fight the real enemy to Saul's kingship, the Philistines, Saul is doing nothing.

of the story, it moves David to another level of being--from being a solitary person to a leader that people find appealing.<sup>56</sup> David goes to Moab to settle his parents in a secure land not involved with the warring factions. The narrator then says that the prophet Gad gives David God's instruction as to where to go. He tells him that he must return to Judah. David complies and in so doing this situates himself in the desert.<sup>57</sup>

In 1 Samuel 23:1 the narrator begins a sequence where David once again goes to fight the Philistines. He is informed by an unidentified person that the Philistines are wreaking havoc again. David consults YHWH and is told to go and fight. David asks his people to fight with him in Keilah but his people try to convince David not to open another front in the war. David consults YHWH again, and YHWH instructs him to go at once. David and his men go to war and inflict a massive defeat on the Philistines. This story demonstrates David's loyalty to the people, and examines the ways in which his loyalty outweighs the tricks he plays in order to survive.

Although David saves the people of Keilah and rescues his own future, Saul learns that David is in Keilah and he goes there, not to fight the Philistines, but to catch David. Twice David asks YHWH for an answer as to whether or not

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56. Bar Efrat says that David is similar here to Jephthah in Judges 11:3: "So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the Tob country. Men of low character gathered about Jephthah and went out raiding with him." David is not the first one within the narrative whose charisma or appeal was a force that drove people to gather around him (Bar Efrat, 279).

57. It is interesting to observe that the previous encounter David had was with Samuel when he stayed with him. Here Samuel is not to be found, yet another prophet, Gad, is identified as playing an intervening role.

the people of Keilah will deliver him to Saul (1 Samuel 23:12). God says that the people will deliver him to Saul, thus David returns to the desert out of Saul's reach. Divine intervention helps David survive.

The narrator emphasizes that Saul searches for David constantly, and that it is God who does not allow David to be captured "ולו נתנו אלוהים בידו" "And God did not allow him to be given to his hand" (1 Samuel 23:14). The narrator again emphasizes the loyalty of Jonathan to David by Jonathan's affirming (in the desert) that David will be king, that Jonathan will be his servant, and that "even my father Saul knows this is so" (1 Samuel 23:16-18).

In the next scene (1 Samuel 23:25-29), a messenger or an angel<sup>58</sup> of God intervenes and rescues David who is nearly captured by Saul. Because David is no longer the head of Saul's army, Saul has to act as the leader and provide shelter from surprise attacks from the Philistines. Because of Saul's preoccupation with David, however, Saul neglects his duties to protect his people against the Philistines, while David steps increasingly into this role. In the multiple encounters that he has against the Philistines he enjoys enormous success.<sup>59</sup>

David is now given the opportunity to kill Saul (1 Samuel 24) at En-gedi. David's people tell him that God has placed the enemy into his hand, and that he should go and do what he is supposed to do--kill Saul (1 Samuel 24:3). David

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58. מלאך can be either "messenger" or "angel" in the Hebrew.

59. Again one can see the irony here--that David in multiple battles against the Philistines is unharmed, and is said to kill tens of thousands, yet still, the greatest danger towards his life comes from Saul.

indicates that he will not kill God's anointed "כי-משיח יהוה הוא" "because he is God's anointed" (1 Samuel 24:7). This is a sign to the next generation not to kill the king. Moreover, the language that David uses parallels the language used by Samuel in David's anointing.<sup>60</sup> This idea is so important that it is repeated in verse 11 "I will not raise a hand against my lord since he is YHVH's anointed" (1 Samuel 24:11). Because David spares the life of Saul, Saul responds emotionally calling David his "son" and "more righteous than I am" (1 Samuel 24:17-19). At this point the narrator has Saul acknowledge that David will be king after him, and Saul asks David not to kill his offspring. David swears he will not. Saul returns home, and David goes to the desert. David's promise not to kill the offspring of the king is yet another sign for the next generation of how transitions between dead kings and successors, whether in the same dynasty or not, should be handled.

In every detail of narration, David's straightforward, honest dealings with Saul are emphasized. Although David repeatedly play the trickster in relation to Israel's enemies, he never (the writer emphasizes) does so with Saul. The contrast between David's honesty and respect with regard to Saul and his trickery of Achish serve to portray David as loyal not only to his people, but even to the inept king.

The writer seems to go out of his way to forestall any allegations of impropriety in David's ascension to the throne. He could have--and should have--

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60. See 1 Samuel 16:12-13

-had the throne earlier. He could have--and should have--taken it from Saul. But David is too honorable when it comes to Israel.

### **Signifying Transition: The Death of Samuel**

Chapter 25 begins with Samuel's death which is dealt with in one verse. The story is not actually about Samuel; it is about David. The announcement of Samuel's death signifies the end of an era and is another sign of the imminent transition. Mention of Samuel's death is again repeated in 1 Samuel 28:3 to reiterate the enormity of the transition. Although it is clear that Samuel had no interest in interacting with Saul, he remains the one person who had the prophetic ability to ask God for direction on Saul's behalf. Now he is gone.

The next story is that of the exceptionally wealthy Nabal and his exceptionally wise and beautiful wife, Abigail (1 Samuel 25:2-12). David's instincts are to kill and maim because he does not receive what he wants from Nabal, whose very name embodies his character: churlish. In this story, David send ten young men during sheep shearing season to ask Nabal to give David what they can because when "your shepherds have been with us; we did not harm them, nothing of theirs was missing all the time we were in Carmel" (1 Sam 25:7). In other words, David and his men protects Nabal's property, his sheep, and now he wants his cut in what could be considered a kind of "protection racket." Nabal, however, rejects the threats and belittles David: "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many slaves nowadays who run away from their masters. Should I then take my bread and my water, and the meat that I slaughtered for my own shearers, and give them to men who come from I don't

know where?" (1 Samuel: 25:10-11). David's men report back to David and enraged, David takes four hundred people with him to kill Nabal.

Nabal's workers intervene with Abigail, telling her that David's protection is actually beneficial to them:

But the men had been very friendly to us; we were not harmed, nor did we miss anything all the time that we went about with them while we were in the open. They were a wall about us both by night and by day all the time that we were with them tending the flocks. So consider carefully what you should do, for harm threatens our master and all his household; he is such a nasty fellow that no one can speak to him (1 Samuel 25:15-17).

Abigail intercepts David and his men (1 Samuel 25:23) loyalists with ample provisions: bread, wine, sheep, corn, raisins and fig cakes. She pleads with him not to harm Nabal. More importantly, however, she appeals to his future reign:

Please pardon your maid's boldness. For YHWH will grant my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of YHWH, and no wrong is ever to be found in you. And if anyone sets out to pursue you and seek your life, the life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life in the care of YHWH; but He will fling away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling. And when YHWH has accomplished for my lord all the good He has promised you,

and has appointed you ruler of Israel, do not let this be a cause of stumbling and of faltering courage to my lord that you have shed blood needlessly and that my lord sought redress with his own hands. And when YHWH prospered my lord, remember your maid" (1 Samuel 25:28-31).

David accepts her plea (her intervention, really) and blesses Abigail. (Isser, 131-132). Nabal subsequently dies and David marries this brilliant woman and inherits all of Nabal's property. In this scene we again see that the knowledge of David's rise extends far and wide, not only as a leader, but as a great leader. Abigail, like Michal before her, is a woman whose intervention saves David from great danger both to his body and to his reputation. And as with Michal, David emerges from the encounter in a greatly improved position.

Despite Saul's emotional commitment to David detailed above, the narrator tells of Saul's chasing David in chapter 26. David again has the opportunity to kill Saul, but God puts Saul and all of his people to sleep, and while they are sleeping, David is able to take Saul's spear and water jar as proof that he could have killed Saul. The narrator indicates that David told his people not to hurt the anointed of God (Saul) because God would punish those who did so. (1 Samuel 26:9) When Saul awakes there is a conversation between Saul and David which ends with Saul "blessing" David (1 Samuel: 26:25). They then separate and go their way.

The repetition of the story of David's sparing Saul's life serves two ends: it emphasizes David's respect for Saul and for the role of the king; more

importantly for this thesis, it also highlights the desperation David must feel, desperation that forces him to seek shelter where he can, even in the camp of Israel's arch-enemy.

Chapter 27 begins again with David's rightfully distrusting Saul and his blessing, and realizing that he must again escape. He returns to Gath.<sup>61</sup>

In chapter 28 we approach the resolution of the story. Achish, the king of Gath, commands that David go into battle against Israel. David is forced to agree. The narrator thus creates a tension: will David, indeed, fight against Israel, his own people?

The evening before the battle Saul has contacts Samuel's spirit through a seer who communicates with the dead. According to Samuel's spirit, the outcome of the crucial upcoming war against the Philistines will be devastating. Saul and his children will be given over "to the hand of the Philistines," and YHVH will deliver all of the Israelite forces to them (1 Samuel 28:19). This encounter with Samuel takes place during the nighttime, which is the way that the narrator demonstrates the spooky and other-worldly nature of the encounter here.

In contrast to Saul's nocturnal communication with the spirit of Samuel, it is in the light of day that the narrator returns to David in the camp of the Philistines. Achish is about to engage in a battle against Israel, presenting an untenable situation for the future king. Fortunately, Achish's top commanders

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61. To be dealt with extensively below.



force Achish to remove David from the battle camp. As David leaves the camp, the narrator repeats over and over the word for morning in Hebrew, בוקר, to emphasize that everybody in the camp and in Israel could see him leave.<sup>62</sup> By the light of day the people can see for themselves that David is not disloyal to Israel. Once again, a possible polemic may lurk behind the emphasis. "Everyone" can vouch for the fact that David does not ever fight on the side of the Philistines.

In chapter 30 David arrives in Ziklag and finds that the Amalekites had raided Ziklag, taken the women and children captive, and burned down the city. Both of David's wives had been taken captive. David's emotional state is described here: He, along with the people, weeps until there were no more tears (1 Samuel 30:3). The people who are with David decide to stone him because they feel bitter about this catastrophe.

The narrator indicates how in a volatile situation, where he is vulnerable, David asserts his faith in God: "But David sought strength in YHVH his God" (1 Samuel 30:6b). David asks God what to do, not for himself, but for his people. Although personally affected by the capture of his wives, he seeks God's guidance for the people. This is a pattern with David: he always seeks God's guidance or forgiveness on behalf of his people, much as a prophet would.

As in a double screen, the narrator places David on one battle scene, away from the one in which Saul dies. Meanwhile, back in Israel, the Philistines

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62. Also explained in Intention.

fight against Saul and he dies. At last Israel's throne is vacated. Throughout this narrative, David is presented as one who uses trickery against Israel's enemies but is always correct, devoted and devout when it comes to Israel itself and to the king. Even though he has opportunities to get the throne by killing Saul, and even though Saul threatens David's life constantly and persistently, David proves honorable. His record is free of any stains.

# Chapter Five: Intention: Tricksters and Kings

The stories<sup>63</sup> of David and his encounters with Achish, the king of Gath, allow the reader to see David use his power to trick those around him, especially Achish, in order to escape Saul, and preserve himself until he can ultimately become king of the Israelites. In these stories with Achish there are important signs indicating that David will be allowed to become king: (1) David is never disloyal to the Israelites, and therefore he preserves his right to become king, and (2) Even when David is in a position to kill Saul, he refuses to do so, preserving the bloodless transition between kings and future dynasties.

David's coming to Achish is counter-intuitive, for why would a future Israelite king escape to the land of his ferocious enemy? In chapter 21, why would he go to meet directly with an enemy foreign king and his servants who could easily kill him? Why, in chapter 27, does David go back to Achish when he had to escape the last time? Why does the king react so differently to David the second time they meet? Why does Saul continue his pursuit of David at the expense of his own rule, and fails to protect his kingdom? What role does Divine

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63. The term "Intention" appears here as an aspect of the nomenclature of exegetical categories. Although scholarly debates about the ability to determine "intention"--of either author or narrative--continue, I follow Alter and M. Sternberg in this matter. According to Sternberg, literary analysis enables readers to discern intentionality of narrative. (See The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading).

Providence play in helping David, even when David does not call upon YHVH for counsel? Finally, how does the story resolve with David's leaving Achish and the Philistines at a crucial moment when the outcome of the battle is known to the reader: that the Philistines will defeat the Israelites, killing Saul and his son, Jonathan?

These richly textured stories between David's two encounters with Achish are referenced over and over again, in echos of language and scene, in the roles that each of the main and supporting characters plays, and in sophisticated wordplay in the Hebrew that emphasizes key points.

The encounters between David and Achish form an extraordinary story about an extraordinary hero in our tradition.

## Introducing the Scene When David Flees to Gath

Before we can begin speaking about the first encounter in Gath, we must join the Biblical narrator in setting-up the story of David's fleeing. Saul's relentless pursuit gives David little option other than to escape to a place where he would be physically outside the reach of Saul. Thus David, as a fugitive from his ruling king, Saul, goes to Achish the king of Gath. Fokkelman suggests that David is trying to break the relationship pattern between himself and Saul whereby David is pursued by Saul and is given no choice other than to run away to a Philistine land (Fokkelman, 555).

Meanwhile, in pursuing David, Saul irrevocably damages his kingdom by not protecting it in the ongoing battles against the Philistines. The pattern is that Saul promises David not to hurt him in Saul's land, but then he does not keep his word. The trap Saul sets almost has Saul capturing David (1 Sam 23:26-27), but this does not succeed: "When a messenger came and told Saul 'Come quickly for the Philistines have invaded the land.'"<sup>64</sup> While the Hebrew מלאך is most often translated into the English as "messenger," it could also be read as an "angel from God," as Radak and Ralbag do. The understanding of "angel from God" fits what follows in the story where Divine Providence intervenes on David's behalf in situations where someone lacking this type of protection would not survive.

Saul returns to his land after almost capturing and killing David. He

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64. ומלאך בא אל שאול לאמר מהרה ולכה כי פשטו פלשתים על הארץ. JPS translation (1 Samuel 23:27).

reverts to his old pattern of pursuing David as his enemy. Given Saul's repeated pattern, it is no surprise that the narrator has David flee to a place where he is outside of Saul's reach. It is here we arrive at David's first encounter with Achish.

#### **I: A, B: Introduction: David Flees Saul and Comes to Achish**

"On that day David arose and fled from Saul and came to Achish, King of Gath" (1 Samuel 21:11).

As will be evident below, the narrator uses many literary devices to make important points about David. Here, however, the narrator leaves it to the reader's speculation as to whether David has given any thought as to where he is going, whether he will be recognized, whether Achish and his servants will accept him, or whether they will recognize that the sword that he is carrying had belonged to Goliath. Bar Efrat, for one, suggests that David may have gone to Achish to rent himself out as an unknown soldier, as a mercenary (Bar Efrat, 275). Perhaps the dearth of information here is emblematic of the fact that quite literally David has nowhere else left to run.

David's options are quite limited. He cannot stay anywhere where Saul could reach him. If he stays with his family, they, too would be in danger. "On that day"<sup>65</sup> is used to convey the immediacy of David's situation--there is no ambiguity about timing.

#### **Naming as Power**

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65. "ביום ההוא"

With Achish entering the picture, Saul loses the honorific of his title "king" (1 Samuel 21:11). Instead it is "King" Achish to whom David fled. This unnamng and naming of king dramatically emphasizes that the honor of being called "king" is given to a foreign ruler. One might infer that the text is suggesting that David has exchanged his loyalty from one king and land, Saul and Israel, respectively, for Achish and Gath. What we have here, however, is an introduction of Achish as a king, while Saul is merely Saul, the name, not the king, not the leader, and not the person to whom David is perceived as vassal. Naming moves key plots in the story. In vv. 11-14 Achish is called "מֶלֶךְ גֹּת" "king of Gath," and Saul is called only by his name, without the title "king." The omission of Saul's title, and the prominence of Achish as king, again and again, is one way the narrator has of telling us the centrality of Achish to this episode. Another reason that Saul has lost the designation as king is that he no longer represents a threat to David's life. Thus, in this one verse, 21:11 (1) the centrality of Achish is emphasized because he rules the land where David finds himself (2) David's relationship with Saul will continue to change.

## **II. David in Danger at Gath: Recognition by Servants of Achish "King of the Land"**

"And the servants of Achish said to him: 'Is this not David, king of the land, the one that they sing as they dance:  
'Saul has slain his thousands and  
David his tens of thousands!'" (1 Samuel 21:12).

The language 1 Samuel 21 describes how Achish's servants introduce David to the king. It is highly unusual both for what is mentioned and what is

omitted. David stands before the king and the servants. Rather than using direct, unambiguous language identifying David and explicitly telling the king that he is their enemy who had killed Goliath, the servants speak ambiguously.

The scene begins with the king's servants using the words "הלוא זה" "Is this not David." This introduction continues with a vital piece of information, that David is "מלך הארץ" "king of the land" (1 Samuel 21:12). The servants, however, omit that the land is Israel which would reveal to Achish that David was an enemy. The servants could have acted differently. They could have said: "This is David, king of Israel, your enemy, the slayer of Goliath, the much feared and renowned warrior of the Israelites. He is here alone, only with the sword of Goliath proving that he did, in fact, kill him. Your majesty, for your honor and the honor of our people, kill David, the king of Israel."

Yet the servants quote the song sung by women of Israel after the slaying of Goliath and the Philistines without mentioning who, in fact, the victims were: Goliath and thousands of Philistines, the very people that the King of Gath led.<sup>66</sup> The song was sung to David and Saul in response to that glorious situation (1 Samuel 18:7). Now the song has trapped David as it is being used to point out the fierce warrior that he has become. This song cuts two ways: on one hand, it

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66. In The David Story, Robert Alter writes that the "Philistine courtiers, unfortunately, immediately identify David and can even quote the song sung by the Israelite women after his victory over Goliath. Their characterization of him as "king of the land" is no doubt a tribute to his preeminence on the battlefield but also is an inadvertent confirmation of his clandestine election, of his displacing Saul. Appropriately, though, as Fokkelman notes, they use a somewhat vague designation instead of the more official "king of Israel." (Alter, 133n).



is a song of praise and valor. On the other hand, the narrator, by quoting the song here, shows us how David's fame, that served him so well after slaying Goliath, is now forcing him to escape from the enemy that the people are celebrating that David has slain in battle! In contrast to the moments of glory, this is a moment that lacks dignity, honor, and glory. David is trapped and is not being celebrated, but identified, if elliptically, as an enemy. David is a man on the run who feels he has no other options.

Cambell says that the servants of Achish correctly identify him as David, but use the wrong descriptor in calling him the "king of the land," something that will be, but is not yet. The irony is that because he is not yet king he is forced to flee Saul and seek refuge with Achish. Yet it is this pseudo-recognition that will require David to flee Achish and seek refuge elsewhere (Campbell, 228-229).

The king of Gath's passive response to the information is unusual. He acts as if it does not register or is insufficient to warrant any immediate action. One might even speculate whether Achish even meets David in this scene.

### **The Role of the Servant As Advisor and Informer in the Bible**

In the first encounter between David and Achish, the servants of Achish play an essential role. It is important to examine how the role of the servant acts here and in other places in the Bible. A good example is the relationship between Pharaoh and his servants. In the Book of Exodus there are a series of encounters between Pharaoh and his servants:

- "Then YHVH said to Moses: 'Go to Pharaoh for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants in order that I may display, this, my sign, among

them" (Ex. 10:1).

- "Pharaoh's servants said to him: 'How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let the man go to worship YHVH their God. Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?" (Ex. 10:7).
- "The man Moses, too, is very great in the land of Egypt in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants and in the eyes of the people" (Ex. 11:3).

The servants of a king are the ones who can influence him and his decisions. That is why Pharaoh's servants ask him a rhetorical question: "Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?" They are pointing the king toward a specific result which is to let Moses have what he wants. The only person who does not see what is happening around him is Pharaoh. Moses is aware, Aaron is aware, the servants and the people are aware, but Pharaoh does not see what has happened to Egypt as a result of the plagues.

Similarly, Achish, the king of Gath, does not see what is right in front of his eyes: David is the enemy who should therefore meet the fate of the king's enemies: execution.

Achish's servants are respectful of him by not explicitly telling him what to do, but by giving him information by which the king may infer for himself that David is before him, that David is the enemy, and that David should be killed. By saying "הלוא זה דוד" "Is it not David" they are describing him by name as a king of the land. The ambiguity could be understood as king of the land of the

Philistines or the land of Israel.<sup>67</sup> The servants attempt to sufficiently arouse the jealousy of Achish, so that he will immediately move to kill David. The use of the rhetorical question would direct--or should direct--Achish to the right conclusion. He fails, however, to respond. The king does not react in the way the servants would like.

#### **Reaction by David: Fear, Dissimulation**

"And David took these words to heart and was exceedingly frightened before Achish, King of Gath. And so he suppressed his sanity before them and behaved wildly while in their hand and marked up the doors of the gate and slobbered into his beard" (1 Samuel 21:13-14).

This scene reveals numerous aspects of how David is reacting to the servants introduction of him to the king: (1) he does not panic; (2) he creates a false impression, for which there is precedent in the Bible (Gen. 38); (3) the narrator's use of unusual language and syntax reveals the oddity of the scene; (4) this use of language contrasts with the non-use of language, as David does not speak, which is not his usual way of relating; and (5) it shows David in one of his roles as trickster.

David, the text tells us, is exceedingly frightened when faced with the prospect of Achish killing him. His fear, however, does not paralyze him. He assesses the situation and concludes that he needs to employ trickery to escape Achish and his servants. He radically changes his behavior so that he will not be perceived as a great, mighty warrior, but as someone else far from it.

#### **Creating a False Impression: Scenes from the Bible**

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67. The narrator is making a subtle point that David has already overshadowed the king of Gath himself in terms of his royal peerage.

"So he suppressed his sanity before them and behaved wildly<sup>68</sup>." Stories of false impressions are found throughout the Bible. One of the most famous is Jacob's deception of his father for the birthright. As in the Jacob story (Gen. 27), we see that the deception here in the 1 Samuel alters the direction of the narrative.

David creates his false impression by intentionally deceiving. Only in the eyes of the king and the servants did he act like a crazy person, therefore it is crucial to say "בעיניהם" "in their eyes" because David is deceiving them right there in front of them. It is not that he has truly changed within, only within the perceptions of those who observe his behavior. This is similar to a chameleon in nature that is able to change its color according to the environment and the nature of the threat it perceives. Both the chameleon and David change in order to survive.

### **Unusual Language Describing What David is Doing**

The description of what David does in these two verses warrants a closer look at the language, for in David's acting strangely, unusual words are used. A number of commentators have remarked on what טעמו, ta-amu means. According to Radak, it is his mind. Rashi believes it is his words, and Rablag thinks it means that David "changes his word in order that it will be that he is without knowledge" (Cohen, 114-115). Regardless of whose idea one chooses, David does something that radically alters how those around him perceive him.

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68. וישנו את-טעמו בעיניהם ויתהלל

וּיְתֹהֵל, yitholale, is the Hebrew verb used to describe David's demeanor--here translated as behaving wildly.<sup>69</sup> Rashi calls it "foolish;" Radak says he acted foolishly. The verb used is unusual. Rarely elsewhere does someone in the Bible behave wildly. However Zakovitch (Zakovitch, 56) sources a similar use of this verb "to make foolish":

מִפֶּן אוֹתוֹת בָּדִים וְקוֹסְמִים יִהְיוּ מְשִׁיב חַכְמִים אַחֲרָיו וְדַעְתָּם יִסְכַּל

Who annul the omens of diviners,

And make fools of the augurs;

Who turn sages back

And make nonsense of their knowledge (Isaiah 44:35).

The behavior of David is mentioned in a prophetic context! This is how one is described in the Bible when a person has the ability to reach the 'other world.' Here one could reasonably argue that David wants to persuade Achish that he is possessed by the "spirit."

In behaving wildly, David does two things associated with such ecstatic behavior. First he scratches תו, "marks" on the doors of the gate (21:14b). These are probably gashes deep enough to alter the appearance of the door as is in Ezekiel: "And YHVH said to him, 'Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put marks on the foreheads of the men who moan and groan because of the all the abominations that are committed in it'" (Ez 9:4). According to Radak, the word תו means "scratch" because a scratch can also recall the word תו. Rashi

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69. This verb is used similarly to mean "madness" in Je 51:7, Na 2:5, Je 50:38, Je 25:16, Je 50:38, Je 46:9

says וַיִּכְתֹּב is like the word ויכתוב meaning "and he wrote." R. Yosef Caro agrees with Rashi (Cohen, 114-115).

Zakovitch speculates that the mark is a kind of "a prophet's action" that will only accelerate if David is allowed to continue acting this way. The markings, whether scratchings or writings, can be interpreted as some kind of "prophetic statement" that he is inscribing on the very gates of the king! It could be seen as something that is potentially dangerous to the king or his servants. Zakovitch asserts that David is not trying to convince them that he is not David, rather, wants them to see that he is no longer a dangerous warrior; he is a prophet of the prophets (Zakovitch, 50).

In addition to the mark that David makes, he starts to gesticulate wildly. According to Targum ha Shv'im, וַיִּתֵּן means "he was drumming on the gate" as an act of madness (Bar-Efrat, 277). Perhaps it is the rapid movements of David's fingers or the use of his hands in some other way to create a racket that garners the king's attention.

David also lets saliva run down his beard (21:14c). Traditional commentaries such as Rashi's, Radak's, and Ralbag's agree that רִירוֹ is saliva. This is the other way that David wants to persuade the king and his servants that he is possessed, prophetic, or acting in a very strange/mad way. He does not have any control of his behavior or body. This is in contradiction to his servants' language which had described David as מֶלֶךְ הָאָרֶץ "king of the land." How great can a person be who is acting thusly?

**Dismissed by Achish**

"And Achish said to his servants: 'Look here, this is one raving fellow, why did you bring him to me? Am I lacking madmen that you should bring it to rave at me? Should he come into my house?'" (1 Samuel 21:15-16).

David is silent in these verses. He acts but does not speak, nor does he encourage the king to force him to speak. He is perceived as incoherent.

Therefore it is useless for Achish or his servants to try to talk with David.

Achish's response, then, is between him and his servants. David is there, but the king does not speak directly to him; he complains to his servants. The conversation does not even concern David; it concerns how well the servants are doing their job. The servants are held responsible for bringing David to the king.

The response of the king shows that Achish can be tricked and that he is completely unaware that David is tricking him! He asks his servants two rhetorical questions (a mimetic to the two rhetorical questions that his servants previously posed). The king asks if he is lacking madmen; should he come into my house? The king's assumption is that David may be able to trick the king's servants but he can not trick Achish. Achish experiences David as a madman and rejects the descriptions his servants used for David as the "king of the land."

Alter comments on the multi-valence of what is happening: the king's perception and anger, David's success at doing whatever it takes to get out of the situation, and the contrast between David's fake craziness and the real craziness of Saul. David's madness is a trick; Saul's is a true symbol of his decline (Alter, 44) and this phenomenon is integrated into the heart of the narrative (Esler, 221).

To understand the contrast between David's trick and Saul's true mental decline requires examining madness in the Biblical culture. There are not many

examples of madness in the Bible that use either the  $\gamma\text{--}\lambda\text{--}\psi$  or  $\lambda\text{--}\lambda\text{--}\eta$  roots. Both are used above in 21:11-16. Mental confusion and madness were viewed as being caused by the numinous, which is why such persons were treated with caution (Mommer, 406). References to mental diseases in the biblical literature, as elsewhere in the ancient world, are likely to be more affected by notions of the causes of these conditions than is the case for physical diseases (Sussman, 13).

In trying to uncover Saul's affliction within the context of Mediterranean Culture, Esler posits that the "malady that the ancient Israelite readers of 1 Samuel thought afflicted Saul was a well-known phenomenon within their culture" which he compares to other culturally embedded illnesses in Chinese and Spanish-American culture (Esler, 247). Still, Esler does not have sufficient information where he is able to develop a profile of Saul's illness in anything like the detail possible with examples known to us from actual case studies.

Mommer also cautions that  $\gamma\text{--}\lambda\text{--}\psi$  cannot easily be identified with modern psychology:

The first,  $\gamma\text{--}\lambda\text{--}\psi$ , refers to various objective or subjective mental disturbances that cannot be more closely identified in the sense of modern psychology, which is why the suggested meanings "crazy, raging; rage, madness" must be used with caution (Mommer, 406).

Still, Saul is portrayed by the narrator as not acting entirely in a rational fashion. In attempting to diagnose the nature of the psychological diseases that cause madness, Sussman writes that Saul suffers from "paranoia with homicidal



and suicidal tendencies accompanied by severe depression (1 Sam 16:14-16) and other psychotic components (1 Samuel 19:24) (Sussman, 13). The narrator makes clear in the verses cited above that Saul certainly has an irrational obsession with David and his possible usurpation of the throne; there is also ample description of Saul's desire to kill David (1 Samuel 18:11, 29, 19:11).

The exact nature of Saul's affliction has few analogues in the Bible, other than Nebuchadnezzar's illness (Dan 4:32-33) that Sussman suggests is of a psychosis with subsequent recovery.

Cazelles, citing Mansor (TDOT, I, 285) writes that "mad" is not the appropriate meaning for the ל-ל-ה, especially as it relates to psalms of praise; the translation should be "deceive" as the root is closely related to terms signifying "nothingness and powerlessness" (Cazelles, TDOT, 412). As it is used to describe David's trick here, deceive is a fitting definition; Cazelles goes as far as translating it as David "makes himself worthless" (Cazelles, TDOT, 412), which certainly contrasts from how David will portray himself in his next encounter with Achish. This is another nice counter-point use of language by the narrator.

Achish's words are of outrage and disgust. As Shimon Bar-Efrat has nicely observed, Achish uses the root ע-ג-ש for raving mad three times for emphasis, the first person pronoun, and the root א-ב-ה ("to bring" or "to come"). Thus David has succeeded in making himself so revolting that he arouses in Achish a primitive revulsion (Bar-Efrat, 277).

This is an extraordinary moment in the story of the founding king of Israel:

David, the glamorous young hero of the preceding episodes, is prepared to do whatever is necessary in order to survive, even if it means making himself appear repulsive. This is an even lowlier disguise than Odysseus's disguise as beggar, and it is not the last humiliating experience into which David will willingly plunge in order to survive. David feigns madness in order to survive (Alter, 134n).

David is willing to degrade himself in order to escape from Gath. The mad act occurs in a finite period of time. Once it passes, it has no lingering effect on David. The next chapter continues with David's leaving Achish and his servants. David is fully intact, as are Achish and his servants. No violence has occurred to either side.

**Second Encounter with Achish:**  
**(1 Samuel 27:1-12)**

**David Crosses Over to the Philistines (1 Samuel 27:1-4)**

**Introduction: David's Need to Escape from Saul**

"And David now said to himself: 'One day I will perish at Saul's hand. There is nothing better for me to do than to escape to the land of the Philistines. And Saul will then despair of seeking me throughout the borders of Israel and I shall escape his power'" (1 Samuel 27:1).

Using the words אל-לבו, the narrator indicates that David is thinking, literally "speaking to his heart." There is a palpable urgency: עתה (now) and יום אחד (one day) and המלט אמלט "than to escape to the land". The double-use of the root מ-ל-ט is particularly intense: It is the urgency that is driving David. He must escape from Saul's reach, and by escaping to the land of the Philistines, he will leave Saul in despair because he will be unable to catch David within the

borders of Israel.

In this verse (1 Samuel 27:1) Saul is mentioned three times: "Saul's hand," "Saul will then despair of looking for me," and "I will escape from his hand (Saul)." Each mention of Saul is connected with the ways Saul is deploying all of his power and resources toward capturing and killing David. This includes using all of his warriors, spies, servants, loyalists in order to capture David. Therefore, David has no alternative, the writer implies (in agreement with David) other than escaping to Achish. In using these terms thusly, the narrator is emphasizing the fact that David has no choice other than to flee; staying is impossible.

The narrator does not tell us, however, why David chooses Gath as the city for his refuge; nor does he enumerate any other possible place for David to escape the hand of Saul.<sup>70</sup> This choice seems odd given that the Philistines have been portrayed as Israel's arch enemies in these episodes, and given David's earlier attempt to find safety in Gath. But after returning to Israel and being there for some time, he realizes that Israel is not a place he can be, being the prey of Saul's constant pursuit. The land of the Philistines is a place of last resort. And as will be evident below David's entourage has grown by another 200 people.

The use of language in verses 27:1-2 is also telling: verse 1 is written in the

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70. In 1 Samuel 22:3-5 David, with his parents, family and 400 people, David's loyalists, went to Moab and stayed there for a period of time. There, Gad, the prophet, tells David that he must leave Moab and go back to Israel. Gad's instruction to David is that Moab is not a place that David can be. There is no other explanation.

singular, verse 2 could be written in plural, but nevertheless, the narrator defines David as singular and the 600 people as a separate entity. Instead of saying "and they rose and went" the verse is split: David AND the six hundred men with him. One can assume that if David is alone he can escape from the hand of Saul, but if he was accompanied by other people, it will be harder for him to escape from Achish who may not want to accept him. It is curious that the narrator uses in this verse the third person twice. Is it to show that David, as earlier, could have acted on his own and escaped again if he needed to? Or does it point out that if it were David AND his men, David would not have the flexibility of his earlier trick.

David has no way of knowing if his option is a good one, but with his "back against the wall" he has no choice other than to flee to enemy territory, to the enemy of Saul, and the enemy of Israel.

It is unusual that in such an important scene David is not portrayed as talking to God, but only thinking to himself.<sup>71</sup> The Bible emphasizes approaching God for guidance, so it is noteworthy here that the future king uses his own wits and does not rely on God for advice either for himself or for his entourage. Elsewhere David does turn to God.<sup>72</sup>

"There is nothing better for me to do than" <sup>73</sup> is stated in the negative in the Hebrew, but the phrase actually expresses a positive idea. Compare this to

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71. ויאמר דוד אל לבו Lit: "David said to his heart."

72. See 1 Samuel 23:2-5.

73. אין לי טוב כי Lit: "I do not have to me good because. . ."

Ecclesiastes 2:24 "אין טוב באדם" meaning that there is good in the person that he will eat and drink...the negative phrasing here also means "good." In 1 Samuel 27:1 כי לי טוב אין means there is good for me to escape to the land of the Philistines. In other words, even if it has its dangers, it will be better than the status quo.

#### **Notice of the Move: David and His People Move to Achish**

"And David arose and crossed over, he and six hundred men with him to Achish, son of Maoch, King of Gath" (1 Samuel 27:2).

The second time that David encounters Achish he is not alone: "And David arose and crossed over, he and six hundred men with him to Achish, son of Maoch, King of Gath."

Radak says: "And David arose and crossed over" is dissimilar to the first time when David ran away from Saul and came to Achish. This time he comes of his own freewill and with the permission of Achish to be there. But how can a person approach a city with 600 people and not expect a fight? There is no war; there is no resistance, and David and his people are accepted. Radak speculates by saying that perhaps David sent messengers ahead. Like Radak, R. Yishaya Miterani says that David went to Achish with full knowledge, that he sent him messengers and came to him with Achish's permission.

The notice of the move gives some insight into the kind of force that has now gathered around David. His troops are not merely a band of scattered outlaws; they are sufficiently organized to have their wives and families with them--a small army with its camp followers (Campbell, 271). In the first encounter with Achish, David acts as a crazy person, but in this second

encounter with him, David arrives with his 600 member entourage. The narrator does not say what Achish thinks about David and his large entourage now or why Achish is willing to accept him.

As before, naming is important. In 1 Samuel 27:2b Achish is identified as "King Achish, son of Maoch of Gath." Achish's name is extended to include his father, Maoch of Gath. The use of Achish's full name indicates that he is now more important than in the encounter in chapter 21, for there he was only called "Achish the king of Gath."

### **Reaffirming David's Loyalties to the Israelites**

Achish's acceptance of David is in contrast with what occurs in 1 Samuel 23:5 where "David and his men went to Keilah and fought against the Philistines; he drove off their cattle and inflicted a severe defeat on them. Thus David saved the inhabitants of Keilah." In chapter 23, David is portrayed as successfully fighting against the Philistines and inflicting heavy losses. Now he arrives at the gates of a Philistine king! There is no mention of the previous stories, such as this one where David's tremendous skills as a warrior and commander left the Philistines completely defeated. The narrator is trying to emphasize in chapter 23 that although David seeks shelter in Gath, he remains loyal to the Israelite's cause. This is critical because we now experience David under the rule of the King of Gath, a resident (יֹשֵׁב) in the territory of the Philistines. David's loyalties must never come into question if he is to ascend to the throne.

### **Establishment with Achish in Gath**

"And David stayed with Achish in Gath, he and his men, each one with his

household, David with his two wives, Achinoam the Jezreelite and Abigail wife of Nabal the Carmelite" (1 Samuel 27:3).

Again notice the consistent use of the repetitive conjunctive vav ("and") (וישב דוד עם אכיש בגת) denoting the ongoing series of actions. Here the narrator language refers to David in the singular and refers to the king in the singular, as well. Perhaps this is the narrator's way of showing that both men are at the same level, even though the text does not tell us that Achish is aware of that.

### C. Conclusion: End of Saul's Pursuit

"And it was told to Saul that David had fled to Gath, and he did not continue to seek him" (1 Samuel 27:4).

The narrator does not indicate who told Saul that David has fled to Gath, but it is important to the narrator that Saul stop his pursuit of David. There is a relationship between verses 27:1 and 27:4. In verse one we have David thinking to himself, and in verse four we have the narrator telling us what Saul did using the same language.

	שמואל א' כז, ד 1Sam 27:4	שמואל א' כז, א 1Sam27:1
escape	ברח	הימלט , אמלט
pursue	יוסף	אספה
seek	לבקשו	לבקשו
place	ארץ פלשתים	גת
said-thought-told	ויוגד	ויאמר
	Saul	David

## **II. David's Possession of Philistine Town (1 Samuel 27:5-7)**

### **A. David Gets Ziklag**

#### **1. Request by David for Ziklag**

"And David said to Achish: 'Please, if I have found favor in your eyes let them give me a place in one of the cities of the field and I will live there, why should your servant live in the royal city with you?'" (1 Samuel 27:5)

David is portrayed here as speaking to Achish as if they are on the same level, on a first-name basis. David uses these words to convey that he has done something pleasing for Achish in the past in that he asks the king politely. But David has not done anything that would have benefited Achish, raising the question: why would Achish do something for David? What kind of favor could David have found in Achish's eyes? After all, during their last encounter, he acted like a mad man, and in the intervening time he continued to hunt and kill Philistines.

David speaks to Achish because as king, Achish is the one who can make the decisions that will most affect him. Suddenly, however, there is an odd change in the language; David transforms the request from one that Achish could make alone by referring to "let them give me a place." This is an important foreshadowing for what we will see below when David is driven from Achish's camp before a battle against the Israelites (1 Samuel 29:11).

What is interesting is that perhaps this is also the narrator showing that Achish is not that powerful, or at least doesn't have the power he needs to make a momentous decision. In fact, Achish is not the king of the land, but king of Gath (remember this was the descriptor "king of the land" in 1 Samuel 21:12 that Achish's servants used to first describe David). The reference, however, could



simply be in line with known Philistine social military structure in which the five cities (Ashkelon, Gath, Gaza, Asdod, and Ekron) each had its own king but worked together.

Alter says here:

On his part David would like to establish his own headquarters and enjoy much greater freedom of movement, but given that these 600 men with multiple wives and children could easily have made up a group of two- or three-thousand people that would have, in fact, been a burdensome presence in a Philistine city (a royal city/town)" (Alter 169).

David concludes his request with a rhetorical question that really does not make sense in the context alone. There is no good reason why he shouldn't stay in the city with the king, but as we will see once the story progresses, by placing David in a city out of sight and out of communications with Achish, David can continue to pursue the enemies of the Israelites and lie to Achish about it. The lacuna in the narrative suggest the possibility that David has made an agreement with Achish before he came to Gath that he and his men would be mercenaries. By staying in the capital city he is not be useful to Achish.

#### **II A: 2,3: David Receives Ziklag from Achish and its Historical Consequences**

"And Achish gave him Ziklag on that day; therefore Ziklag came to possession of the kings of Judah until this day" (1 Samuel 27:6). "And so it was that the number of days that David dwelled in the field of the Philistines was a year and four months" (1 Samuel 27:7).

If Achish agrees to David's request, the question remains: who the "them" are in the "let them give" him a place to dwell above and whether or not Achish consulted anyone else before he made his decision to give David Ziklag. One possibility is that Achish may have consulted with the other kings of Achish. Another possibility is that perhaps David understands the politics better than Achish, and Achish is being portrayed here as acting hastily without considering all of the outcomes. The language "on that day" as seen in this verse designates immediate action.

This verse concludes by saying that "Ziklag was for the kings of Judah until this day." Radak says that in the time when the tribes entered Canaan when the land was first conquered. Ziklag belongs to Judah's tribe in Joshua 16:20: "This was the portion of the tribe of the Judites by their clan" and in verse 31: "Ziklag, Madmannah, and Sansannah." It could be that it was subsequently conquered by the Philistines but from the day that David dwelled there it remained his and his descendants...which is why it says "kings of Judah" rather than the singular "king."<sup>74</sup>

The problem with the word that is translated as "year" is that in the Hebrew it is ambiguous as to the exact amount of time. It can mean two days or more. Yet by stating a length of time such as this, the narrator answers a range of questions: How much time was David under the rule of the king of Gath, living

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74. Ziklag is mentioned again in the Bible in Nehemiah 11:28 "And in Ziklag. . .;" in 1 Chronicles 4:13 "In Bethuel, Hormah, and Ziklag. . ."; in 1 Chronicles 12:1 "The following joined David at Ziklag. . ."

among the Philistine enemies? Given the amount of time David stayed in Philistine territory, does this disqualify him from being the king of the Israelites? How long is too long to live among your enemy? And if he is welcomed, in fact, in Philistine territory, should he be the first king of the second dynasty? The answers to these questions will show that the narrator of 1 Samuel goes out of his way to show that David is fit to become king.

The narrator is trying to eliminate any kind of accusation that David stayed in the Philistine's land for a long, long time. Four months and "yamim," commonly translated as a year, is to be interpreted, therefore, as not a terribly long amount of time to be away. The narrator is telling the reader that David's time in the land of the Philistines is not meant to be, nor will it be, lengthy. The narrator is therefore foreshadowing from the beginning of this "yishuv" that it is quite impermanent.

### **III. David's Success is Deceiving Achish: 1 Samuel 27:8-12**

#### **A. David's Tactics While at Ziklag (8-11)**

##### **1. What David Did**

- (a) Plundered Enemies**
- (b) His strategy**
  - (1) no human survivors**
  - (2) livestock plundered**

"And David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Gizrites, and the Amalekites because they were the inhabitants of the land from Olam all the way to Shurah and the land of Egypt. 9 And David struck the land and and he would not leave alive any man or woman, and he took sheep and cattle and donkeys and and clothing and he returned and came to Achish" (1 Samuel 27:8-9).

David and his followers who reside in Ziklag rise against those enemies of both Israel and the Philistines that all living in the south of Israel. David does not

stop acting on behalf of the interest of the Israelites while he is residing in Ziklag. This is crucial to the overarching aim of the stories: to clear David from any suspicion of collaboration with the enemy. The challenge for the writer is a great one, but is handled deftly (see below).

#### **B. Achish's Investigation and David's Answer**

"And Achish said: 'Whom did you raid today?' And David said: 'The Negev of Judah, the Negev of the Jerahmeelites or the Negev of the Kenites'" (1 Samuel 27:10).

When David and his people rise against their enemies, they do not leave a single soul alive. But they take plenty of booty: camels, livestock, donkeys, and other things of value, such as clothing. Alter says that the narrator offers no indication of whether he thinks these massacres are morally objectionable or merely what Israel's traditional enemies deserved. A pragmatic reason for the butchery will be given in verse 11. It will be noted that David is not carrying out a ban (*cherem*) against these groups because he keeps all the livestock as booty, probably building up a base of wealth for himself and his followers (Alter, 170).

#### **Comparing David and the Amalekites to Saul and the Amalekites**

To the narrator it is critical to note that David has not left a person alive and has conducted this attack without any guidance from God or a prophet. Compare this to 1 Samuel 15:2-11 where Saul is told directly by Samuel to slaughter the Amalekites directly from the Samuel, but he leaves King Agag alive as well as the best of the sheep, oxen, and other booty, leading to the dismay of Samuel and of God. The narrator here is telling the reader that David is completing the job that Saul was instructed to do, and he does it better than Saul

did.

David takes all that he has looted directly to Achish in order to persuade the king that he raided his people (the tribes of Judah) and is therefore loyal (and profitable) to Achish. Again, we see David in the role of trickster: to prove his "loyalty" to Achish, he claims that the enemy booty comes from his own people against whom he fought, to prove that he does not have a dual loyalty. We know however, that he is only doing what he must in order to maintain his residence in Ziklag, in the Philistine territory, and by extension, to preserve his life.

The narrator also has David explicitly lying. In order to appear that he has conducted raids against his people, he mentions Negev of **Judah** as the first of his conquests and this aims to underscore David's loyalty is to the Philistine and not to Israelites.

#### **Deadly Battles are David's, Not YHVH's**

For the purpose of positioning David and his relationship to Achish, the narrator describes David's conquests as exceedingly large and deadly. Yet these are not conquests done in the name of YHVH. The text here does not mention YHVH's name. Thus, while the victories are important for building the hero motif of David, they are not used to build YHVH as the victor. Campbell writes that:

It is hardly appropriate to appeal to the motif of the YHVH war to justify the extermination. The YHVH war ban is not practiced; to the contrary, booty is specifically taken. To our modern sensitivities, it was and is morally obscene, then and now. Whether as a matter of

fact it was actually achieved may remain open to doubt. But it is necessary for the storyteller, in order to create a plausible narrative-- the narrative needs Achish to trust David!" (Campbell, 272).

One may add, however, that the narrative needs the reader to trust David. Isser comments on both the trickster and the nature of David's conquests: "The picture gives us a cross between a crafty plotter who deceives his boss and a cruel Machavellian killer who will not let innocent people pose a danger to his ambitions" (Isser, 134).

### **C. The Reason Why David Leaves No Living Souls**

"Neither man nor woman would David allow to live to bring to Gath, saying: 'Lest they report concerning us saying: 'Thus did David do and thus was his practice.' And this was his pattern all the days that they stayed in the fields of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 27:11).

David is afraid that if he leaves a single soul as witness to his actions, this person would tell Achish what David actually did.

The use of the word עלינו (on us) implies that the narrator is a member of David's loyalists because the term appears as a first person plural and only is used when there is a common identity between people. By using the word "on us," the narrator reveals to us that he is one of David's loyal subjects and that he is afraid that David would be discovered. He also indicates that he is a witness to these events and thus can vouch for their accuracy. Such editorial intrusion is unusual, but in the case of David--and this story-- it is especially important as a way of supporting the portrait of David.

### **D. Outcome: David Gains Achish's Trust and the Consequences**

"And Achish believed in David thinking: 'He has become abhorred among his own people Israel and so he will be my vassal forever'" (1 Samuel 27:12).

Achish believes that what David is telling him is the truth and that David is truly loyal to him. Isser says that Achish experiences David as "hateful to his fellow countrymen and so is bound to him forever in the service of Gath" (Isser, 133). But Isser also sees David's motivations as using his position for his own purpose. He wants to be away from Philistine supervision, so he arranges to be sent from Gath to Ziklag where he attacks everyone but Judeans, Yerahmeelites, and Kenites. This is kept secret by eliminating witnesses, systematically slaughter of all of the men and women of all the groups he defeats (Isser, 133-134).

These two words together הבאש הבאיש describe a "great stink" and a "field of abomination" (Tzvi-Segal, 212). By putting those words into the mouth of Achish, the narrator indicates that Achish believes David and believes that he cannot go back to his own people because David has been disloyal to them and raided his own tribe.

What does Achish mean by calling David his עבד עולם, which is translated here as "servant forever?" In other places in the Bible this phrase connotes a relationship between a master and a slave, for example in Job it refers to a "lifelong slave" (Job 40:28), and in Deuteronomy it describes a slave that chooses to remain a slave instead of being freed after seven years, and the master puts a sign in the slave's ear and on the door of the master's house (Deut. 15:12-18).

When David is in the state of madness, he makes a marking on the door.

This is a nice inter-textual reference to what a master does in Deuteronomy to keep a slave who does not want manumission. When a slave wants to remain a slave forever, it is the master who makes the sign on the door. The irony here is that Achish is calling David a "servant forever" but because of the marks that David made in his prior encounter with Achish it is he, like the master who controls the slave forever, who is in charge. It was, after all, because David marked the door while tricking the king that he gained his freedom and is now on the road to becoming the next king of Israel.

In Deuteronomy the slave is supposed to say to the master: "I don't want to be free." The master must accede to this wish. In the case of Achish and David, Achish is the one who decides that David will be "eved l'olam," but David does not agree. Achish who is portrayed as a king is not aware of what is happening in his realm.

This is also Machiavellian because as it may mean that David's acting as a madman may actually be premeditated. If that is the case, then there is much more to the story that the biblical narrator at the time is trying to convey. This subtle way of connecting the two seemingly different encounters with Achish makes sense. Ultimately, in both cases, it is about David's being free to impose his will.



# Chapter Six: The Epilogue to the Trickster Stories of David and Achish

## Introduction

The two episodes in which David deceives Achish, king of Gath, are followed by two more meetings between the two men. This time David's behavior is open to interpretation. Is he again going to trick Achish? A review of these two final episodes helps interpret the functions of the trickster stories in which David successfully outwits Achish the king of Gath. The analysis of the obvious trickster stories establishes David's persistent loyalty to King Saul to Israel, despite appearances to the contrary. It may well be possible that the purpose of these trickster stories is to guide the reader in the experiencing of David's last activities in the land of the Philistines. In the concluding episodes of 1 Samuel 28-29, we are not informed of David's intention. We learn that he is ready to go to battle, but is prevented from doing so. We have to surmise on who side he would have fought.

- I. **Preparation for Battle Between the Philistines and the Israelites 1 Samuel 28:1-2:**
  - A. Achish decides to add David to his retinue
  - B. David's cryptic response

"And it happened at that time that the Philistines had gathered their ranks for the army to do a battle with Israel. And said Achish to David: "You surely know that with me you will go out with my army--you and your people." 2. Said David to Achish: "Therefore you yourself will know what your servant will do." And so Achish said to David: "Therefore I will make you my chief bodyguard<sup>75</sup> for all the days" (1 Samuel 28:1-2).

These verses introduce the scene that will determine the fate of Saul, David and the people Israel in 1 Samuel 28ff. In this enigmatic conversation, one cannot tell what the outcome will be. The scene is set for David and Achish to cooperate with the upcoming war between the Philistines and Israel. Achish commands David to come with him to the Philistine camp in order to fight Israel. What makes this conversation enigmatic is that David does not reveal what he will do for Achish. And Achish gives David a position that can be a double-edged sword: as a bodyguard to a foreign king, someone who is in a high position, loyal to the king, or someone whom the king wants to have nearby in order for him to keep an eye on. So is David protecting Achish or is David in a false role? Or does Achish recognize David's strength and wants to keep his eye on him? Maybe Achish's saying that he will anoint David to be his bodyguard indicates that he does not believe David.

Why is it so important for the narrator to create this section?

Perhaps the narrator wants to dispel any rumors that may have been circulating (1 Samuel 27) about David's fighting on behalf of the Philistines against Israel. If such rumors exist, the narrator has to discredit them by creating a conversation

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75. Lit: "a guard to my head."

between David and Achish in which David's position is made clear. The narrator wants the reader to believe that David is not loyal to the king, and only because the king, Achish, commanded him to come to the camp as his army was amassing did David come. The conversation is significant insofar that David will always be loyal to the Israelites, not to the Philistines or Achish. The scene is set.

David's trickery throughout his contacts with Achish prepares readers to suppose that David's enigmatic answer is meant to mislead (compare this to Judith's response to Holofernes in Judith 12:18).<sup>76</sup>

#### **Achish and David: The Denouement**

In this thesis I focus on the two episodes in which David clearly tricks Achish (1 Samuel 21 and 27-29). What stands unambiguously in the case of these two earlier episodes is David's deceiving Achish. The second episode (1 Samuel 27-29) goes further: it illustrates David's utter commitment to his own people at the expense of Israel's enemies.

The surrounding narratives which elaborate on David's relationship with Saul consistently and persistently portray David as anything but a trickster when it comes to Saul and Israel. Rather, as Saul himself declares (1 Samuel 24:19-20a), David is exceptional in not killing his pursuer, Saul.

The analysis of these patterns and the close reading of David's encounters with Achish, taken together, function as an interpretive key to this last

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76. I thank T.C. Eskenazi for this cross reference.

encounter at the turning point in Israel's history: the change from the House of Saul to the House of David.

Although Alter calls David's possible behavior on the battlefield in the battle against Israel "imponderable" (Alter, 181), the narrator has made it clear that David will do anything and everything to help Israel and deceive its enemies. The careful reader thus "knows" in advance that David will help Israel. It also makes clear that David was away from the battlefield and could not possibly be accused of aiding the Philistines.

### **The Final Battles (1 Samuel 29:1-11)**

#### **I. The Upcoming War in Aphek and the Question of Dual Loyalty of David and His People (1 Samuel 29:1-5)**

**A. Description of Israel and Philistine Camp Before the War**  
"And the Philistines gathered all their encampments<sup>77</sup> at Aphek and Israel encamped at the well that was in Jezreel" (1 Samuel 29:1).

The narrator is again setting the scene that will challenge the perception of David's loyalty in a crucial moment because we know from chapter 28 above that Israel will be defeated by the Philistines (1 Sam 28:19) and Saul and his sons will die also in this war.

#### **II. Debates about David Between Achish and Philistine Leaders: 1**

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77. "And the Philistines gathered all their encampments," Bar Efrat comments that it is a repetition to what is said above in 1 Samuel 28:4: "The Philistines mustered and they marched to Shunem and encamped." By describing the Philistines gathering their encampments again, it connects to this verse and it shows that this is how the Philistines scale-up for a major battle. The word "encampments" being plural hints that each of the Philistine warriors came from a different place. In other words, there were not all together in one place (Bar Efrat, 353).

## **Samuel 29:2-6**

### **A. Preparations: Achish's Army and David's People Passing Through Philistine Camp**

"And the Philistine captains were advancing in hundreds and thousands and David and his men were advancing at the rear with Achish" (1 Samuel 29:2).

When Achish, as well as David and David's army, pass through the camp of the Philistines, it is obvious that everybody sees David and his people making clear that he was there. The narrator is acknowledging that yes, David is there, because this is his duty as a servant of Achish. Therefore you cannot say that he is not there or was not with the Philistines. The narrator, by creating the scene of David and Achish passing through the camp, verifies the presence of David. It is important for those reading this story to see that David is there, but something will happen to David and his people to show that they have no hand in killing the Israelites or Saul and his sons.

This is important because it establishes (1) that David is not disloyal and does not fight against his own people and (2) that David's hand is not involved in killing the king of the Israelites and (3) it reinforces the idea that succession of the Israelite kings will not come by killing the predecessor.

Campbell writes of the text's nuanced nature:

Confronted with the potentially embarrassing fact of David's having served as a Philistine mercenary, the text portrays David as driven into mercenary service rather than having freely sought it; and the text claims that, as a Philistine mercenary, David did nothing prejudicial to

his own people (Campbell, 273)<sup>78</sup>.

## **B. Conversations Between Achish and His Ministers Regarding David's Loyalty**

"And the Philistine officers said: 'What are these Hebrews<sup>79</sup>?' And Achish said to the Philistine officers: 'This is David, the servant of Saul, King of Israel, who was with me all these days and years and I didn't find anything wrong with him from the day he defected until this day'" (1 Samuel 29:3).

The Philistine officers ask Achish about "these Hebrews." The use of העברים, "these Hebrews," is typically used by the gentiles to describe the Israelites when they speak among themselves (Alter, 180). Achish answers the Philistine officers by introducing David, saying that he is a slave of King Saul, the King of Israel, who was with me "all these days and years and I have not found anything wrong with him from the day he defected until this day." Alter says that Achish means to stress that Saul's former followers and the commander have defected to the Philistine side, but the narrator's choice of words inadvertently

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78. The idea of mercenaries was known in the Ancient Near East. The subject is examined in an article "Philistine Coffins and Mercenaries" in which G. Ernest Wright details archaeological discoveries that Philistines were hired as mercenaries to protect Egyptian borders. Coffins of foreign people in Egypt have been found made in imitation of native Egyptian pottery sarcophagi (Wright, 58). This is compared to coffins found in indigenous Philistine territory that reflected the Philistine style, some of which derived from those with a background in the Greek world, the world in which the Philistines derived (Wright, 61). Given both the unique and mixed kinds of pottery, Wright quotes Dothan's conclusion regarding mixed coffin tombs at Tell el-Far'ah, that "such features point to a common cultural background probably explicable by the service of foreign mercenary groups in the Egyptian armies. Only in Palestine can these be identified with a definite ethnic group, i.e. the Philistines" (Wright, 63).

79. העברים: BDB (p. 720) either (a) put into the mouth of foreigners (Egypt. and Philist.), or (b) used to distinguish Israelites from foreigners. As (a) 1 Sam. 4:6,9, 13:19, 14:11, 29:3)

reminds the Philistine captain that David may still be loyal to the Israelites (Alter, 180).

This is the first time in the story that King Saul is called king by a foreign entity. It is ironic because we know that King Saul will die in the Philistine war against Israel<sup>80</sup> and that this war will cause David to become the king of the Israelites. Saul is not going to rule for long because the next day he is going to die. It is ironic that the title "king" lasts for a very short term.

The narrator does not call David "servant of the Philistine." Instead, he chooses to say that David is the servant of King Saul in order to emphasize that David did not cross the line again.

Achish says emphatically that "I didn't find anything wrong with him." This, ironically, emphasizes the ability of David to trick Achish. In this fashion, the narrator is saying again and again that David tricks Achish and David is now going to be in favor of the Israelites and not loyal to Achish or the Philistines as Achish would believe.

In referring to "the day he defected," the Hebrew uses the verb for falling, נפל. Alter writes נפל "fell in with me" here is in the sense that David has, in fact, defected to Achish; it is a verb that connotes a change of loyalty, of leaving one side for another. We can see נפל used as "goes over to" the other side in Jeremiah 21:9a: "Whoever remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine,

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80. There is irony here that Saul, who spared the live of Agag, the king of the Amalekites, is killed, in-turn, by an Amalekite (2 Samuel 1:8-10). In sparing a life, Saul loses his.

and by pestilence; but whoever leaves and goes over [נפל] to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live."

#### **D. Revolt of Philistine Warriors Against David**

"And the Philistine officers were angry with him; and they said to him: 'Send the man back, return him to the place that you assigned him. And let him not go down with us in the battle and let him not become our adversary in the war. For with what could that fellow appease his master if not with the heads of the men?'" (1 Samuel 29:4).

"Is this not David the one that they sing as they dance:  
'Saul has slain his thousands and  
David his tens of thousands'" (1 Samuel 29:5).

The Philistine officers here are portrayed as being extremely angry "ויקצפו" with Achish. But they do not kill David on the spot, which they were more than capable of doing (even with David's defenders.) Rather, the narrator sets-up an unusual scene whereby the officers order Achish (note the irony here of the king's officers ordering the king) to send back the man (David) to the place that the king has assigned him<sup>81</sup>. The Philistine officers emphasize that they do not want him to go with them to the war. They also do not want him to be a saboteur of their efforts. "ולא ירד עמנו במלחמה ולא יהיה" There is a double use of the לא, "no," to emphasize the great danger of David if he accompanies them to war. The Philistines commanders are smart enough to realize that they cannot trust

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81. Bar Efrat says that officers approach Achish with commanding language. They emphasize their absolute conviction that David must be sent away from the battle by repeating the words השב וישב: "Send the man back; return him to the place that you assigned him" (1 Samuel 29:4). They are not calling David by his name, rather just calling him "the man" because they want to emphasize their disapproval of him (Bar Efrat, 354).



David to fight against his own people. At the same time, even though there is this great anger and distrust and the men are ready for war, this is not a place where the Philistine officers of Achish will kill David.

During David's first encounter with Achish, the king's servants were speaking euphemistically so that the king could figure out for himself that David was a risk to him (for example, calling him "king of the land"). By contrast, here, the Philistine officers are quite explicitly asserting their firm belief that David is not only disloyal to Achish, but will be a problem if he goes with them to war. The king is left with no choice other than removing David and his men.

This scene is critical to David's future. By emphasizing the fact that David is not loyal to the Philistines and that he is not going to war with them, David is protected against claims of compromised loyalty to the Israelites. The narrator skillfully uses the Philistine officers as a counter to the servants of Achish in manipulating Achish, this time successfully, to remove David.

Alter says that the officers use a euphemism "the heads of those people" in order to avoid pronouncing a terrible fate upon themselves (Alter, 180). Yes, it is an euphemism because the narrator, by using the "heads of those people," is alluding to all of those battles that David won against the Philistines. They are indicating that David is tricking Achish. They are angry--the language here that they use indicates that the officers are again trying to lead Achish to the outcome they desire. In other words, when the officers refer to how many people David has killed, it means to prove to Achish that David is not loyal to him or the Philistines. Still, why don't they use explicit language? It remains a mystery, and

it demonstrates the skill by which the narrator continues to relate character traits that were first evident when David came to Achish the first time.

The outcome the officers want is to take David and kill him; yet they still are not completely explicit. The spirit of God is with David from the time of his anointing. The narrator may be implying that David is protected from any kind of extreme danger that could lead to his death.<sup>82</sup>

### **Head as Metaphor**

The word ראש "head" warrants closer attention. In chapter 28 when Achish anoints David to be his bodyguard he uses the words "to guard my head" (1 Samuel 28:2). In chapter 29, the officers use the same construction the "heads of the people." One can see the linkage between the "head of Achish" and the "heads of the people" (1 Samuel 29:4). Maybe this implies that if David stays in the Philistine camp, Achish's head will experience the same fate as those whom David has already killed. David will kill Achish. Again this is subtle, as if the officers are afraid to say to the king that his very life is endangered.

The officers speak again, repeating the words of the song that the women of Israel sang glorifying David (1 Samuel 29:5). Remember that the servants of Achish identified David to Achish the first time by repeating this song (1 Samuel 21:12). Because of this song, David was afraid of Achish and acted like a madman in order to escape. Now Achish's officers repeat the song in the same way. Because of David's notoriety, the narrator leads the reader to think that

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82. See 1 Sam 16:13 "and the spirit of YHVH gripped David from that day on."

David will escape from fighting against the Israelites. This is the narrator's switch-point between the talking and the action that will follow, while at the same time cleverly referring back to David's first encounter with Achish--and to his success earlier (see 21:12).

Bar Efrat writes that the first time David escapes from Gath, he escapes through deception. Here Achish will send David with apologies and praise. It is a key moment where Achish becomes aware that he cannot add David to his forces (Bar Efrat, 353).

When David comes to Achish in Samuel 27 we don't know what is the agreement between Achish and David, other than that Achish accepted David and his people to dwell among them. Maybe Achish thinks that in the future war involving Israel and the Philistines that David's advancing warriors will be helpful, if not advantage, the Philistines. Yet when the time comes, David is not allowed to proceed.

### **III. Achish Dismisses David (1 Samuel 29:6-10)<sup>83</sup>**

#### **A. Achish Dismisses and Appeases David**

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83. Campbell sees an irony that the narrator could have exploited, but did not. Achish describes David as honest and deserving to be included in the campaign (cf. 29:3, 6, 9). From ch.27, the reader or hearer knows that Achish was wrong about the past. Would he have also been wrong about the future? Given how the future unfolds, Campbell writes, we have no answer: "David's statement of commitment, claiming the right to 'fight against the enemies of my lord the king' (29:8) is ambiguous. Is 'my lord the king' Achish or Saul? The ambiguity is never put to a test. The irony of Achish's commendation 'I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God' (v. 9a) is left hanging. David and his men move south toward the land of the Philistines. The Philistines move north to battle with Israel" (Campbell, 285).

"And Achish called for David and said to him: 'As YHVH lives, you are an honest man, and it is good in my eyes your coming with me and your going out and in your coming in with me in the camp, for I found no evil in you from the day you came to me until this day but in the eyes of the captains you are not good; so now return and go in peace and do not do anything bad in the eyes of the Philistine captains'" (1 Samuel 29:6-7).

This is an odd encounter, and as before, the language indicates this. Alter notes that: "It is curious that a Philistine should be swearing by YHVH (as YHVH lives) unless, as has been argued, he is leaning over backward to adopt David's perspective" (Alter, 181). Achish basically says to David that he sees him as loyal to him and good in his eyes when he came with him in and out of his camp for various military excursions. He confirms his feeling about David absolutely--that since the day he arrived David has been nothing but good, loyal, upright, and outstanding in how he went about serving the king's needs. It also shows the two faces of David here. The narrator in chapter 27 has told us previously what David actually was doing when he left the camp and made war against Israelite enemies, killing them and bringing back booty to give to the king.

The use of the word "eyes" בעיני is symbolic of trust between two people and it echoes the words of David the second time that he came to Achish and asked for a place to live by saying "if I found favor in your eyes" (1 Samuel 27:5). There is a semi-trust relationship from the beginning between Achish and David because Achish thought that David would be disloyal to Saul and rise against the Israelites. Now Achish verifies that David has, in fact, found favor in his eyes and in so saying to David the narrator is emphasizing how much David has

completely tricked Achish. Achish here looks like an utter fool in front of all of his commanders, not to mention David. His commanders know better, as they have from the first time that David came to Achish, that David is a danger, that David is not loyal to Achish, and that David cannot fight with them because he would be a danger to them. He would do the exact opposite of what Achish expects, and the whole enterprise would collapse on the Philistines.

"And now" opens verse 7 the same way it does when David meets Achish for the second time (1 Samuel 27:1). This, too, is a crucial moment for David and his people because it is going to change David's place in the land. On that earlier occasion David went from Israel to Achish. Now he moves away from the Philistines back to Ziklag and away from the war. The narrator, by using the word ועתה, "and now" focuses on what will happen to David from this moment.

### **Achish's One Commanding Moment**

Achish's officers command him, and Achish **commands** David to leave in front of his officers. Achish's hands are tied: he has no choice. The Hebrew emphasizes this by the use of the "vav" three consecutive times:

ועתה, ולך בשלום, ולא תעשה

Achish is not asking David; he is telling David what to do with a series of commands that follow one after another. It contradicts what Achish told David immediately preceding in verse 6.<sup>84</sup> The first part of Achish's oration here is

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84. Note that I am taking these verses together, but they are split in two because verse six has Achish praising David and the second part of the

comforting and friendly; the second part is the king ordering David as to what he is to do, immediately. It is apparent that the narrator is repeating the same language in order to emphasize that Achish looks favorably upon David, but that the commanders do not want David in the war. The language is echoed in the two verses:

שמואל א' כט, ז	שמואל א' כט, ו
ובעיני	בעיני
הסרנים	סרני פלשתים
לא טוב	רע
אתה	לא תעשה

Another point that is interesting here is that Achish speaks to the ministers in verse 6, not to the commanders, but he quotes the commanders as the ones who do not want David in the war.

#### **B. David Protests and Claims Loyalty**

"And David said to Achish: 'What have I done? And what fault have you found in your servant from the day I appeared before you to this day, that I should not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?'" (1 Samuel 29:8).

Here again is David the trickster, feigning concern to the king. Alter writes:

Continuing to play the role of the perfect Philistine vassal, David protests his eagerness to fight the Israelites, though in point of fact he must be immensely relieved to escape from the intolerable position of

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thought in verse seven has Achish ordering David.

battling against his own people. As several interpreters have noticed, the words he archly chooses have a double edge because "my lord the king" could be a covert reference to Saul, in which case the "enemies" would be the armies of Achish and his confederates. Whether David, lacking this providential way out, would really have pitted himself against his own people is another imponderable in the character of this elusive figure (Alter, 181).

While David's next action may seem "imponderable" at first glance, as Alter suggests, the narrator has preempted any real doubt by the ways all the encounters with Achish are inserted. It may be, in fact, the chief purpose of the previous stories to frame this last episode so as to make this single and crucial point: David consistently tricks and deceives Achish, just as he consistently support and honors Israel and its king, King Saul.

Isser points out that:

David's declaration of loyalty and statement that he was always was ready to fight against his master's enemies (29:8) is unabashedly two-faced. . . David is removed from the battle in which Saul loses his life, whether we should credit an early royal propagandist or Dtr for this fortunate turn of the narrative. What remains consistent is the portrait of David as a deviously clever and opportunistic figure, that is, the perfect hero (Isser, 135).

Earlier Saul told David that when he encounters danger from the enemy he

will be all right: "If a man meets his enemy, does he let him go his way unharmed? Surely YHWH will reward you generously for what you have done for me this day. I know that you will become king" (1 Sam 24:19-20a). The words of Saul are coming true in this interaction. David answers Achish as he is suppose to do, demonstrating loyalty and deference. At the same time, the answer is similar to when David asks Jonathan innocently after he has fled Saul: "What have I done?" (1 Samuel 20:1). The narrator is emphasizing by using these words David's two-faced nature. He says one thing as he thinks or does another, knowing that it will turn out well for him.

### **C. Achish Insists on David's Departure 1 Samuel 29:9-10**

"And Achish answered and said to David: 'I know that you are good in my eyes as an angel of God'<sup>85</sup>. However the Philistine commanders say that you may not go up with us in battle (1 Samuel 29:9). And now get up early in the morning and your servants who came with you and you shall get-up early, and there is light for you and go" (1 Samuel 29:10).

We saw the words ידעתי "I knew" when the conversation between Achish and David was enigmatic (1 Samuel 28:1). Now the conversation is as explicit as it can be. Here Achish changes the rank of his soldiers telling David they are actually officers. He reveals the truth to David, that these men are his highest ranking officials. They have the last word. Achish repeats what they said: that David should not go to battle with them.

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85. Bar Efrat says that Achish is expressing his faith in David by using a very strong image as an "angel of God." This image also appears three times in the Bible and always connected with David: 2 Samuel 14:17,20 and 19:28 (Bar Efrat, 346).



The point here is that David is referred to as an individual figure, not as David with his hundreds of men. The narrator again emphasizes that David is the hero of the story because he is here alone, fearless before all of Achish's top warriors, before the king, and he is in an extremely dangerous situation for him.

To see David stand alone before a king, who is actually the enemy, is truly amazing. David first appeared before Achish alone. The stories have come around full circle, highlighting David's rise to prominence even in the enemy's camp. Moving from his first appearance alone in Gath to the concluding encounter in which the man who "changes his behavior" emerges triumphant.

These are Achish's last words spoken to David, giving him the final instruction that he should leave when when the first light illuminates and all can see, when all of his men will see that he is, in fact, leaving<sup>86</sup>. "Light to you" sounds unusual in the English as well as in the Hebrew. The sentence in Hebrew could be without these words and could still be perfect Hebrew. The addition of this phrase is another unusual use of language, echoing Joseph in Gen. 44:3 where it says: "With the first light of morning the men were sent off with their pack animals." Joseph sets up his brothers by sending them toward their home with a silver goblet packed inside the bag with the knowledge that he

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86. Bar Efrat, quoting Abarbanel on these verses emphasize how Achish is concerned about David's honor as he takes his leave. This is a different approach than above, where the emphasis is on making sure that people will see David leave and that he is clearly not going to battle against his people. Abarbanel does not want the Philistine warriors mocking David as he leaves, and so portrays Achish as being concerned with David's honor here (Bar Efrat, 356).

would call them back and confront them. Perhaps the narrator is suggesting that Achish knows that Ziklag is burning (1 Samuel 30:1), similar to Joseph that knows that his brothers will be forced to return to him. The narrator, having Achish act on this knowledge, may be demonstrating that David's fate is changing.

**D. Conclusion: David Withdraws**

"And David got up early, he and his men to go in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines and the Philistines marched up to Jezreel" (1 Samuel 29:11).

David is leaving with his men in the light of day when all can see. Therefore there is no ambiguity about his *not* participating in the war against Israel.

# Chapter Six: Conclusion

This thesis began as an attempt to discover the nature and purpose of two tantalizing episodes in 1 Samuel: David's deceptive encounters with Achish, king of Gath (1 Samuel 21:11-16 and 27:1-12). In analyzing these stories, both in relation to each other and to their larger context, it became apparent how the two fit into a larger pattern in the portrait of David in 1 Samuel. Far from being incidental, even playful, stories, in a hero's journey, these stories consistently and persistently paint David in a specific and important way. David is the underdog. In dealing with Israel and its reigning king he refuses any trickery. In dealing with Israel's enemies he uses trickery consistently. The stage is set for two more encounters with Achish (1 Samuel 28:1-2 and 29:1-11). the narrator leads the reader to the following significant conclusion: The only reason that David does not defend Israel in that last battle with Saul is that he has been prevented from doing so by circumstances beyond his control.

The extent to which the writer goes to make these points suggests a deliberate response to some other positions. Is the writer responding to allegations that David was on the battlefield? That he was a vassal of the Philistines, not a member of Judah or Israel? That he undermined Saul? If so, 1 Samuel intends to clear him of any such charges. In the place of such a damaging portrait, 1 Samuel presents a David who pays dearly for his loyalty,

even to the point of self degradation (1 Samuel 21:13-14), rather than usurp the throne of Israel. Moreover, even while still a fugitive he repeatedly protects Israel from the enemies, better, in fact, than did the official king, Saul. Although legitimately anointed as Israel's next king to replace Saul (2 Samuel 5:1-3), he never forces the situation. Moreover, his stay with Israel's enemies, the Philistines, is a fate necessitated by Saul's obsessive--and unjustifiable--pursuit of David.

Consequently, David's encounters with Achish (according to 1 Samuel), combine to position him as eminently worthy of the throne that he will occupy in 2 Samuel and of the heroic image that he retains despite--or because--of his trickery.

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