

‘The Authentic King David’: An Immersion Into 1Samuel 16 through 1Kings 1

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Rabbinic Ordination

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Abstract

This text immersion consists of three sections plus an introduction and conclusion. The goal of this project was to explore the life and actions of King David as presented in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, specifically regarding his relationship with three other individuals.

Section I explores the relationship between David and his first wife, Michal, and the ways in which she is manipulated by both her husband and her father during the former's rise to power. Section II examines the relationship between David and one of his later wives, Bathsheba, focusing on the balance of power between them and her eventual success at usurping him with regard to political power. Finally, Section III looks at the relationship between David and Jonathan, with a focus on the debate over whether it implies a sexual relationship or merely one which is deeply platonic. In each section, an overview of the relationship is provided, followed by an analysis of the textual interplay between the two. Using various commentaries to provide a fuller understanding of the circumstances and conditions surrounding the individual story arcs, the author then provides a conclusion for each section.

While the three sections of this project focus solely on interpersonal relationships between David and others, the bibliography provides a wider range of resources pertaining to the entire story of David as seen through the books of Samuel and 1 Kings.

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Acknowledgments

Capstone projects such as this one are meant to assess a student's ability in navigating texts and topics as we prepare to enter the rabbinate. They serve as a culmination of the time, energy, and emotion put into one's course of study, and they reflect the skills that have been gained and honed in pursuit of Ordination. Such as been my experience with this text immersion as a culmination of my time at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. During the last six years of studying here, my professors, advisors and mentors have shared great wisdom, issued great challenges, and offered me great counsel. I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank as many as I can for their guidance and love.

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Introduction

It could easily be argued that the typical Jewish view of King David, both culturally and theologically, is that of a wholly beloved, infallible, exemplary king who ruled nobly over a united nation of Israel. From a young age, religious school 6 students learn the tune and hand motions of “David Melech Yisrael”, introducing King David as an “artifact” of the Jewish people, something to admire and hold dear. Similarly, throughout childhood and into adult study, the story of the barely-mature David versus the gigantic, brutish, blood-thirsty Philistine Goliath, endears him to our people as an individual who could overcome anything, even while still a youth. The *Nevi'im*, Midrash, Mishna, and Talmud, and later medieval thinkers and theologians, regard David as the progenitor of the Messiah - the “Anointed One” of God who will appear during the apocalyptic “End of Days”¹. However, the earlier narrative of David found in the Books of Samuel stands in stark contrast to these later presentations of him. Throughout the Samuel, the relationships built by David during the course of his career vis-a-vis the rise and decline of his power and fame reflect a trait which is ‘hidden’ from sight by the later books of Chronicles and Psalms: far from the altruistic, noble poet-warrior that he is often depicted as, David is, truly, an *opportunist* in the most extreme sense of the word. The Books of Samuel paint a richer, more honest portrait of the king of Israel than later, more biased accounts - which pervade our cultural wisdom about him - would allow.

¹ Eicha Rabbah 1; Midrash Tanchuma *To/Do*; Bamidbar Rabbah 13; Sanhedrin 98a, et. al.

To a degree that would perhaps make philosopher-theologian Martin Buber feel fully validated², barely a paragraph of David's saga passes without his encountering one character or another who challenges, assists, validates, or thwarts him in his roller coaster-esque journey from farm boy to soldier, from king-in-waiting to king-in-dying. Although oftentimes (in the eyes of those who read with care the nuances and intricacies of his story arc) the same character will serve multiple roles in the shaping of David, in general, three individuals may be distinguished who perhaps best illustrate the 360-degree nature of David created by his literary personality and persona: his first wife, Michal; one of his later wives, Bathsheba; and Jonathan, the son of David's predecessor, Saul. This paper addresses these three individuals by focusing on the impact they have on David's character³ regarding the constant choices of action he makes brought on by the opportunist streak which pervades his story.

* * * * *

David's interactions with women may be characterized in a number of ways: he is a flirt and a tease, a woo-er and a manipulator, a Lothario and a Svengali. Above all else, he is, as he proves to be in so many areas of his life, an opportunist. Cliché as they may be, each of these characteristics manifest themselves throughout the adventures of his youth and during the reign of his adulthood. They indicate not only

² "*Alles wirkliche leben ist begegnung.*" English: "All real life is [in the] meeting"/"All actual life is [in the] encounter"). This is a concept proposed by Jewish theologian Martin Buber in his book *Ich und Du* ("I and Thou"), 1923.

³ "Character" can here be understood as the total distinctive features of David as an individual. His overall character is defined by the intersection of his outward persona and his internal (or private) personality.

a core aspect of his essential being, but also from where he has come in his past and to where he seems destined to be headed in his future.

The story of David can be read almost like an ancestor to modern day fairytales⁴. The namesake for the book in which his story is found, Samuel, is born to a seemingly barren women under divine circumstances - she prays hard enough and cries woefully enough that God grants her the ability to give birth to a son. That son, Samuel, is in turn given over in service to the priests of the temple and he becomes a prophet of God, eventually charged with the duty of anointing God's elected individual to serve as King of Israel. The first choice, Saul, proves reckless as a leader of humankind and deficient as a follower of God, and Samuel is again sent to anoint another. The replacement is David, the youngest in a family of seven sons. David's father, Jesse, is named and referred to not only in the course of David's narrative in the Books of Samuel and Chronicles but also in later writings which mention his place as the father of David⁵; however, no woman is ever named as the mother of the king. Though paying attention to only one parent is a common literary technique throughout the Bible, for a book such as Samuel and a lineage such as David's to ignore maternal origins is worthy of taking note.⁶ Two specific women, Michal and Bathsheba, help shed light on the question of whether or not this lack of a mother figure affected the king, and they do so in two different ways.

⁴ See John Van Seters' *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (1983), based on the works of Hermann Gunkel's theory of literary form criticism.

⁵ 1 Samuel 16; Isaiah 11:1-3, 10; 1 Chronicles 2:13-15, 29:26

⁶ David's ancestor Ruth is important enough to have her own book. Ruth's story centers around highly engaged, important women (Ruth, Naomi). The Book of Samuel - and its namesake - begins with the tale of a woman taking charge of her circumstances in life and attempting to make better the things which causes her heartache.

Part I. David and Michal

Overview

The first woman of significance David encounters is Michal, the daughter of David's royal predecessor - and nemesis - King Saul. Her subplots within the greater framework of David's storyline are intermittent to be sure, but highly important to the development of David's character and vital to his actions going forward. Michal enters David's life with a startlingly fast set of introductions: in one sentence, she is named as "Saul's daughter" and one who "loved David" - even without so much as a previous formal or informal introduction having been recorded.⁷ She is offered to David by her father after her older sister is married off to another man. However, there is a catch: in order to take her hand in matrimony, Saul requires David to slay one hundred Philistine men and bring him back their foreskins as trophies. David complies, going above and beyond what is required of him; he brings back twice the amount demanded, and collects Michal as his own trophy. She then goes silent for a few paragraphs as Saul's enmity for David manifests, only to reappear when David's life is in danger and his death seems imminent. Michal urges her husband to escape through their bedroom window, so as to avoid the agents of her father who have been sent to kill David in his sleep. She then disguises the bed using teraphim and goat's hair, so that it appears as though David is sleeping. Discovering that he has been deceived and that David has escaped, Saul questions his daughter by asking, "Why have you deceived me

⁷ 1 Samuel 18:20

like this, and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?” Michal twists the truth in her answer, proclaiming that David “said to me, ‘Let me go; why should I kill you?’”.⁸

The next time Michal's name appears is a fleeting reference that she has been re-married (or, perhaps, “re-gifted”) by her father to a man named Palti of Gallim.⁹ Her name disappears from the text again until she is forced, in perhaps one of the most heartbreaking scenes in the entire Bible, back into David's life as a bargaining chip.. She is walked back to her unloving first husband with her second husband, Palti, following behind her while weeping. He only turns away from Michal when ordered to..¹⁰ Michal's final scene takes the form of a searing rebuke of David, whom she now appears to despise. As the king dances licentiously amongst his people in an attempt to honor God for the blessings of military might and continued victory, Michal openly scolds him for doing so, accusing him of debasing the kingship in front of all of the people of Israel. She is then counter-scolded by David before the biblical text seals her fate forevermore; she disappears for good with “no child to the day of her death.”¹¹

Analysis

Michal's introduction sets the stage for the role she is born to play in the lives of both David and Saul:

⁸ 1 Samuel 19:11-17

⁹ 1 Samuel 25:44

¹⁰ 2 Samuel 3:12-16

¹¹ 2 Samuel 6:16-23

*And Michal the daughter of Saul was in love with David...*¹²

As innocuous as this introduction seems, there are three distinct parts to it which speak directly to the relationships that will shape Michal from here on out both with her father Saul and, most importantly, with David. From David's perspective, as "daughter of Saul", Michal is found, physically, in the vicinity of the current king, a position David surely wished to have given that he was aiming to be the replacement. She is also found in another place: close to Saul's heart and directly related to the continuity of his lineage. Physical closeness to Michal also places David closer to Jonathan, who has already pledged his love and devotion (and, therefore, *loyalty*) to David¹³. The relationships that David has formed with Jonathan and Michal offer him a "safe zone" in the house of Saul; he is surrounded by supporters in the middle of a possibly hostile political minefield. It is also a foot in the door, and perhaps even a leg up, to the psychological game in which he engages with Saul. In order to win Michal's hand in marriage, David is required to bring Saul "the foreskins of a hundred Philistines, as vengeance on the king's enemies'...[but in truth] Saul intended to bring about David's death at the hands of the Philistines."¹⁴ To prove not only his worth as Michal's husband but also his military and tactical superiority over Saul, David brings twice the amount of foreskins to his new father-in-law. This "gives him right of succession, though Saul's own sons

¹² 1 Samuel 18:20

¹³ 1 Samuel 18:3-4. Whether or not this implies a sexual or physical relationship between the two younger men will be addressed in Part III of this paper. It will address the complicated and often re-imagined relationship between David and Jonathan, specifically with regard to the question of their individual sexualities and the possible sexual relationship between them.

¹⁴ 1 Sam. 18:25

have precedence.”¹⁵ It also shows, once again, that Michal is not the prize in this contest, but rather the trophy; the real prize is power and prestige.

The second piece to Michal's introduction pertains to her feelings toward David. She has developed feelings of love for him without ever having interacted with him previously.¹⁶ David's reputation has preceded him all the way to the women of the royal family, and this shows something about David's charisma and popularity; he is able to draw in even those who should be the most stalwart supporters of Saul, a characteristic which will continually aid him in seizing moments of political opportunity. But there is a catch to this emotional draw toward David, he does not at all appear to love her back. No mention is made of any feelings toward Michal, not about her beauty, her strength, her political position, or about the fact that she is the “second place” prize after her older sister was married off to someone else. “Love” does not seem to register for David, nor do “affection” or even “lust”. The partnership offered to him is simply taken as an opportunity to real greater political power and prestige.

Finally, the third part of Michal's introduction requires consideration from Saul's point of view. Why, exactly, was he “pleased” at having David wiggle his way into the royal family? At first, he thought to use Michal as “a snare for [David], so that the Philistines may kill him.”¹⁷ Perhaps having David next to Michal is also something

¹⁵ JSB commentary on 1 Sam. 18:27.

¹⁶ This stands in contrast to the love that Jonathan develops for David after witnessing his military victory on the battlefield and hearing him speak to Saul regarding those victories. Michal seems to have fallen in love with the *idea* of David, whereas Jonathan falls in love with *the person* of David. See Part III for more on David and Jonathan.

¹⁷ 1Sam 18:21

strategic. Now, Saul can now keep an eye on this upstart youth who has his eye on the throne and the backing of God to strengthen him. In this case, too, Michal is nothing to the men of the house but a prize to be won, or, perhaps, a trophy to be given which *represents* the prize to be won. And that, in brief, is the role that Michal is set up to play from the very beginning, an object passed between two men jockeying for power. But, she is not an object without a voice or a brain; she is simply naive and blinded by the love (or, perhaps, “infatuation”) she feels for the king-in-waiting.

It is this blinding infatuation which leads to the most active moment of Michal's entire narrative. Although it is unclear whether or not Michal yet realizes that she is merely a game piece in the battle between David and Saul, it seems likely that she recognizes how advantageous it is to support her husband over her father. After David narrowly escapes Saul's in-person attempt on his life, Michal assists David in escaping a mortal threat once again. Having nearly been run through with Saul's spear in light of an “evil spirit” descending upon Saul¹⁸, David finds himself vulnerable to Saul's agents even in his own home., David is saved only when Michal lowers him to the ground through a window. She then arranges his bed so it appears as though David is sleeping in it, which is discovered by Saul's men only when the “hit” has been attempted. This raises the question of whether or not Michal still feels “love” for David, or if she is simply too wrapped up in his success at this point (and hopeful that it will ensure her own success in the future) to abandon him. Scholar Katherine Sakenfeld describes her as, “a woman who makes some

¹⁸ 1 Samuel 19:10

effort to shape her future. She defies her father, rescues her husband, and eventually defies her husband [too]. She is a woman of emotion, as is seen in her “love” for David...”¹⁹ In other words, it leads one to wonder if her relationship with David has taken the form of a *loving* wife, or a *dutiful* wife? Either way, she proves to be a help to David and a hindrance to Saul, to the point where she uses outright lies - “[H]e said to me: ‘Help me get away or I’ll kill you - to justify her actions when confronted by her father.²⁰

As David makes his escape, one may wonder how long it will be until he returns to this house of lies, deceit and domestic dissonance. After all, he has incurred Saul’s wrath before, and he has returned before, but this time things have changed. Saul is no longer in a position of control as he has been before, having lost standing in the eyes of his children to David. Hence, his murderous actions are becoming more frequent and more intense. And for his part, David shows no signs of wanting to return anyway; he goes on to engage in a whole array of other adventures and schemes with a host of other companions and players, and though all of his travels and experiences, he never so much as contacts his wife in order to thank her or let her know that he is safe. Perhaps it may be expected that a loving and/or loyal husband would send word to his wife through his allies to assure her that he was okay. With Michal, though, he simply leaves and does not look back. Having used her to gain access to the royal family and build up his own bonafides,

¹⁹ Bellis, Alice Ogden. *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2007. p128.

²⁰ The relationship between David and Michal to which this portion of text points is described, in its entirety, as “a puzzling one” by Jo Ann Hackett. Hackett writes that although “[w]hen she first appears in the story she loves David...[in the end] Michal [is] both a sexual and a family tragedy.” *Women’s Bible Commentary*, pp. 97-98.

David apparently sees no further need to include Michal in his life. He simply goes where he desires, on to the next adventure, and on to the next woman. Eventually Saul gives her away in marriage. Again she is *given*, in a passive, objectified way,²¹ to another man, Palti, to be his wife. Luckily, this union seems to be a better fit, as the text will soon recognize their relationship as one of genuine love and affection. But all is not well with Michal's story, there is no "happily ever after" on her horizon. It seems that David is not through with her just yet.

Following the death of Saul, David engages in treaty negotiations with Avner to conglomerate even more power.—Yet David refuses to allow the talks to move forward unless Michal is returned to him. Thus, she is unceremoniously pulled from her home and marched back to David; her new husband followed weeping, and only ceased when ordered to by Avner. In this heartbreaking scene, David is again revealed to be an opportunist with no care for Michal's wants or needs. He once again uses Michal as a trophy, signifying his defeat of Saul and his offspring by reclaiming her as his possession, thus adding insult to injury. But there is a major difference this time around. With years of constant scorn and no closure between Michal and her first husband, she no longer seems able to convince herself that he is lovable or even worth the effort to succeed politically. Rather, at the first chance she gets, she openly and brazenly calls him out in defiance and disgust for his poor, un-king-like, un-Jewish²² character. When David is finally made ruler of the United

²¹ 1 Samuel 25:44. Although the verb נתן is written in the perfect past tense *qal* from the point of view of Saul, the action is performed on the passive Michal.

²² Although the words "Jewish" and "Jew" were not used at this time to describe a co-religionist of the Hebraic people of Israel and Judah, it is used here to describe David's affiliation with the religion which eventually bore its name.

Kingdom of Israel and Judah, and the people set forth with a parade to bring the Ark up to the City of David, David dances before them as many of the other Israelites do. He is clothed scantily, and he writhes and undulates in ecstasy in order to, as he sees it, give honor to God. Michal, though, sees it another way, She castigates her husband for acting “as one of the riffraff”, not as a king should. In her eyes, he is one of the lowly, base men who have no place upon the throne of Israel. And his retort strengthens her argument. Instead of replying in some sort of kingly, dignified way, he simply owns up to his lecherous desire, declaring it acceptable because it brings honor to him in the eyes of the “slave girls,” if not to his wife. Childish though it may be, it is enough to end the conversation, and it is the last exchange the biblical text records between the two of them.

This final encounter leads to the final sentence associated with Michal in the Books of Samuel; mirroring her opening line, the text states simply, “*So to her dying day, Michal daughter of Saul had no children.*” This closing bookend to the life of Michal is as powerful a statement as it is brief. From the hopeful, lovestruck princess she once was, she now ends her story as a childless, love-starved, barren queen, not quite a cuckquean, yet also not in any position of power or prestige as the wife of the queen. And certainly, without a doubt, not happy. To compound her misery even more, this last mention also indicates one final victory that David has won using Michal as a pawn. With no children until her dying day, the royal lineage of Saul, despite the fact that he does have a grandson through his own son, Jonathan, comes to an end, never again to rise up and challenge David’s power or

authority. From here on out, it is David's offspring from other women who will attempt to lay claims of legitimacy to the throne of Israel.

It seems that although the prevailing notion of David is that "all of Israel and Judah loved [him]"²³, there is one significant person who feels exactly the opposite - the daughter of the former king, who could, following her father and brother's deaths, be seen as the last remaining symbol of the kingdom of Israel. Michal's opposition to David, and the rifts and tears in their relationships, stem from their opposing senses of honor; as is noted in one commentary to the Books of Samuel,

Honor in Michal's view consists of external dignified behavior; in David's view, of devotion to lofty ideas. But Michal's sarcasm [in this exchange] springs from pent-up pain and bitterness. In the past she loved David, helped him to escape, and even deceived her father for his sake (1 Sam. 18.20, 28; 19.11-17). Then Saul gave her to Paltiel, who fervently loved her (2 Sam. 3.15-16). After many years David demanded her back, for utilitarian reasons, and she found herself one of his many wives. There is no hint that David ever loved her [in return].²⁴

The relationship built, and then destroyed, and then "built" again," between David and Michal is tumultuous, uneven, and pitiful. From its very inception, it is lopsided in light of the fact that only one party seems to show any sort of emotion. After the start, until the sad, wistful final line involving both of them, it is a downward spiral of dysfunction and deceit. Although not all of David's relationships with women are constructed in quite such a way, there are some similarities that bind Michal's story to others.

²³ 1 Samuel 18:16

²⁴ Jewish Study Bible, commentary on 2 Sam. 6:20.

Summary

Michal represents David's ability to manipulate those who feel attracted to him, whether it is an attraction to his looks or his power. While she *does* actively participate in the things which ultimately bring her heartache, Michal is, for the most part, the innocent victim in her mini-saga with David. She *acts*, but she rarely - if ever - displays any *power* (the only time she truly seems to have power over anyone, is when she lies to her father Saul in order to justify helping David escape Saul's attempted hit on his (David's) life. Instead, her entire story presents a "represent[ation of the] battle between the houses of Saul and David."²⁵ However, this outcome of Michal's should not be thought of as a representation of a wider trend of power distribution between David and other women in his life. Each character with whom he interacts - especially women - show another side to David's persona, for better or for worse. Perhaps no better example of this claim exists than the comparison between the *lack* of power from which Michal suffers, and the *delayed* or *eventual* power with which one of David's other wives, Bathsheba, is destined to display.

* * * *

²⁵ Bellis, 128.

Part II. David and Bathsheba

Overview

Much like the story of David and Michal, the saga of David and Bathsheba takes place scattered across numerous chapters throughout two different books of the Bible. Bathsheba is first introduced in 2 Samuel 11. While lounging on the roof one evening, David sees Bathsheba bathing. He asks about her, summons her, and takes her to bed, all in a matter of three sentences²⁶. As a result of the encounter she conceives, and despite David's best attempts, he is unable to cover up the adulterous affair by convincing others it could be Bathsheba's child by her husband.²⁷ Since he runs the risk of having his licentious behavior found out, David resorts to setting up Uriah to be killed in battle. With him out of the picture, David takes Bathsheba as his wife.

In reaction to this death-causing set up, the prophet Nathan - who is loyal to David, but more loyal to God - rebukes David for his immoral, unethical behavior. As a result of David's sins, the child which Bathsheba bears (for whom neither a name or a gender is assigned) is stricken with illness from birth and dies only a few days later²⁸. David and Bathsheba separately mourn for their lost child, and then David, purportedly in an attempt to "comfort" his wife, again brings her to his bed. Again

²⁶ 2 Samuel 11:2-4

²⁷ 2 Samuel 11:8-13

²⁸ 2 Samuel 12:15-19

she conceives, but this time her baby is born healthy, and Bathsheba (not David, the father and king) names him Solomon²⁹.

As with the David-Michal saga, there is now a long interlude before Bathsheba's next appearance in the narrative. After years have passed, as David lays in his bed, decrepit and impotent, Bathsheba is summoned to help resolve as serious a political crisis one could imagine happening at the end of an era of ruler's reign. While no official successor has been designated to take over after David, one of his sons, Adonijah (the son of Haggit, another of David's other wives) declares himself to be the next king and begins asserting his power. Bathsheba is called on by the prophet Nathan, who supports the candidacy of her son Solomon, to manipulate her husband into 'remembering' that he has promised the throne to Solomon. Of course no such promise has ever been uttered, but through Bathsheba's and Nathan's schemes David declares Solomon's legitimacy.³⁰ As such, Bathsheba becomes Queen Mother. She is heard from again later in the Bible as a player in the Solomonic saga, but she is no longer referenced during the (brief) remainder of David's life. Unlike Michal, her story ends without any indication of how she lived out the rest of her life; it presents as open-ended, but also with a certain level of closure nonetheless.

²⁹ Solomon (שלמה) is also known as *Yedidiya* (ידידיה); the root of his name דיד is related to the root of his father's name, דוד. See also footnote #52.

³⁰ 1 Kings 1:30

Analysis

Bathsheba's introduction comes as David, having recently sent forth his troops to battle with neighboring nations³¹, perambulates one evening upon the roof of his palace and takes in the sight of his neighbor as she bathes on the roof of her own home. Lillian R. Klein notes with interest that the word *erev* ("evening") is used, which may suggest that Bathsheba has chosen to reveal herself to wandering eyes "when she could be seen, rather than in the obscurity of the night."³² When David inquires of his staff to find out who this intriguing, eye-catching woman is, Bathsheba is identified by both her parentage ("the daughter of Eliam") and her marriage ("the wife of Uriah the Hittite"). Interestingly, this identification is not made as a statement, but rather as a rhetorical question: *"Is she not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam [and] the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"*³³ This grammatical structure may well indicate that David is already aware of who Bathsheba is (since one might assume that the King knows who his neighbors are), and is choosing his words carefully to indicate he wishes to have her join him in the privacy of his chambers.³⁴

Following this brief introduction, the action between David and Bathsheba becomes rapid fire, and is constructed in various forms of both active and passive verbs. First, David acts *upon* Bathsheba ("he took her"³⁵), but then she responds in

³¹ 2 Sam. 11:1

³² Brenner, 49.

³³ The sentence is constructed using the word "לא" ('no' or 'not') preceded by the letter ה, a Hebrew grammatical structure which changes the format of the sentence into a question (i.e. "Is [she] not...?")

³⁴ Similar to the rhetorical use of questions that are still often employed, i.e. "Well well, who do we have here?" There may be no question as to whom the person actually is, but rather an indication that the presence of this individual has sparked a certain interest.

³⁵ 2 Sam. 11:4 *Heb.* יקחה

an equally active way (“she came to him”³⁶, rather than a passive “she was brought to him”). Yet before the sentence is completed, David takes control again (“he lay with her”³⁷), followed by Bathsheba’s now *passive* response to this sexual union: she “was purified from her [ritual] uncleanness.” Finally, in an active manner, Bathsheba makes her own way back to her home (“she returned to her house”).³⁸

It is important to remember that all of this action occurs in one sentence.

As Klein notes, “the reader is alerted to excess verbiage, bordering on redundancy...”³⁹ And while each of the verbs indicates that it is David who holds the power in this sequence, Klein cites an observation by Randall Bailey that,

Bathsheba’s ‘actions are not in the hiph’il verb forms, which would suggest that she was being “caused to act”. Rather they are in the *qal*, she comes and returns...a willing and equal partner to the events which transpire.’⁴⁰

Bathsheba’s power, then, has already taken on a different form than Michal’s: while both women take actions that are both active and passive, the difference is that one (Michal) tends to be *reactive* while the other (Bathsheba) appears to be more *proactive*.

Bathsheba conceives, something which is also not passively ascribed to her (i.e. she did not “become pregnant”).⁴¹ Following this development, in a rapid-fire sort of way she performs three more actions *on her own*:

³⁶ *ibid.* Heb. תבוא עליו

³⁷ *ibid.* Heb. ישכב עמה

³⁸ *ibid.* Heb. וְהָיָא מִתְקַדְּשֶׁת מִטְמְאָתָהּ וְתָשֹׁב אֶל בֵּיתָהּ

³⁹ Brenner, 49.

⁴⁰ Bailey, *David in Love and War*, p.88; quoted by Klein in Brenner, 49.

⁴¹ 2 Samuel 11:5

*“...and she sent, and she told David, and she said, ‘I am pregnant.’”*⁴²

It appears that there is more to the power dynamic between David and Bathsheba than either prevailing wisdom (i.e. *the king can do whatever he wants*) or Hollywood⁴³ (i.e. Bathsheba is a seductress who manipulates the king) would have us think. The back-and-forth between these two individuals indicates a dance of sorts between David's asserting royal privilege and authority on the one hand and Bathsheba's taking control of a less-than-desirable situation on the other. Some have argued that Bathsheba's "complicity with the king's wishes may be regarded as her attempt to bear a child rather than merely [participate] in an adulterous (lustful act)"⁴⁴, but the ambiguity of the situation and the mishmash of active and passive verbs which describe it work to create a confusing and vague relationship between the king and his neighbor's wife. True, Bathsheba's act of bathing on her rooftop in the first place causes one to stop and wonder why she would do such a thing, but it is also difficult to imagine that she willfully put herself at the mercy of the king's libido and ultimate control.

Having been informed by Bathsheba that she is pregnant, David attempts to do damage control and create the illusion that nothing inappropriate has happened. He brings Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, back from the battlefield and implores him to visit his wife and take comfort in her arms and in their marital bed. Uriah, a convincingly upstanding individual whose loyalty to the king and to his fellow troops becomes apparent in his few lines of dialogue, refuses to do so, in order to remain

⁴² 2 Samuel 11:5

⁴³ "David and Bathsheba", 1951

⁴⁴ Brenner, 49.

morally and spiritually supportive of his brothers-in-arms who are not as lucky as he to be given a similar furlough. David, realizing that he is now in even more danger of being found out as an adulterer, manipulates Uriah's position as a front-line soldier in order to all but guarantee that he should die in battle⁴⁵. With Uriah disposed of (at the indirect but not-totally-passive behest of the king), Bathsheba becomes a widow, and therefore eligible for the king to take in marriage himself. Doing so has now removed any unseemly bias against Bathsheba carrying his child.

Bathsheba hears about Uriah's death and mourns him. Even though she had previously gone along with David's advances (whether out of necessity or by choice), she still seems to express at least a modicum of affection for her husband, as it is noted that she actively mourns his death.⁴⁶ But before much mourning can take place, Bathsheba is once again acted upon by agents of the king: she is "gathered...to his house"⁴⁷, and the official act of becoming his wife appears forced upon her. Whether she ultimately enjoys her new position as wife of the king is debatable, but the text makes it clear that she is once again a passive player in the whimsical desires of David.

One might think that, having disposed of even this non-threatening "enemy" (Uriah), that the saga of David and Bathsheba might come to some sort of close - but this assumption would discount the fact that David has committed

⁴⁵ Compounding the immoral action of committing adultery is the fact that it occurred with one of his soldier's wife, and after having sent his troops into battle while he remained behind in order to luxuriate in his comfortable royal lifestyle.

⁴⁶ 2 Samuel 11:26

⁴⁷ 2 Samuel 11:26-27; the Hebrew indicates an active verb on David's part rather than a passive one on Bathsheba's part.

offenses not only in the eyes of the law of his own kingdom, but to the ethical parameters which God made part of the reason for replacing David's predecessor in the first place. God, who loves David, rebukes him harshly through the prophet Nathan for having "scorned Me and...taken [Bathsheba] as your wife."⁴⁸ As punishment for his immoral, adulterous ways, God grants only a cursedly short life to the baby (who is notably unnamed and un-gendered) to whom Bathsheba gives birth shortly thereafter. When the child is born and until it eventually dies, the story becomes focused on *David's* mourning period, not at all about Bathsheba's. While this focus informs the reader about whom the narrative of 2 Samuel is truly about (David), it may also indicate something about the relationship between David and Bathsheba. This becomes even more nuanced, as we will see shortly, when it is revealed how David eventually does try to comfort his wife over the loss of their child.

David pleads with God to save the child's life. He fasts and prays and he removes himself from the comforts of his royal lifestyle in order to show outwardly that which he is feeling internally⁴⁹ Eventually, though, the child succumbs to its cursed state of birth, and David is made aware of the child's death⁵⁰ He bewails the news, and is attended to by his servants. But interestingly (and sadly), Bathsheba is

⁴⁸ 2 Samuel 12:10

⁴⁹ 2 Samuel 12:17: *And David entreated God on behalf of the child; and David fasted a fast, and he came and laid down and slept on the floor.* (translation mine)

⁵⁰ It is notable that, while David is never directly informed of his child's death, he is able to perceive that fact by the way his attendants gather around him and whisper amongst themselves. David asks, almost rhetorically, if the child has died, and only then is he given a direct answer in the affirmative. Perhaps this is meant to mirror his earlier rhetorical questioning of who Bathsheba was - the very impetus for the situation he now finds himself in.

nowhere to be found in this scene; whether she is undergoing her own mourning or not (it is obviously highly probable that she was, even if it was not recorded or mentioned by the author of the text), it is worth pointing out that such a key player in this entire episode is absent through this highly emotional scene.

In coming to terms with the loss of their child, David shows signs of tenderness when it is noted that he goes to comfort his wife as she herself grieves.⁵¹ However, this tenderness is short lived as David's libido again rears its head; in the same sentence as he comes to comfort her (and in the same breath, should one read the text aloud), David also takes his wife to his bed again, and she gives birth to another child, this time definitively identified as a son. She names him Solomon, and he is revealed to have inherited the same place in the eyes of God as his father: God "loved him."⁵²

Following the birth of Solomon, Bathsheba disappears from the text for quite some time. It is not until the very end of King David's life (and narrative) that she is called on again to take part in the goings-on of the royal family.⁵³ Though her son, Solomon, is beloved by God, another of David's sons, Adonijah, declares himself his father's successor and begins to build a political coalition to solidify his claim.

Nathan, along with other military and political leaders still loyal to David and firmly

⁵¹ 2 Sam. 12:24

⁵² *ibid.* It is worth comparing the circumstances from which the unnamed, un-gendered first child of David and Bathsheba is born to those in from which Solomon is conceived and born. The former is a child of lust and adulterous behavior; the latter is conceived in a state of comfort and compassion. Klein comments that "[i]mplicitly, the offspring of compassion and desire is more suitable to become a king than the product of casual carnal lust." She rightfully contextualizes the two different sexual unions as having different ultimate purposes, as well as thoughtfully distinguishing between "lust" and "desire." See footnote #29.

⁵³ 1 Kings 1:11ff

part of “Team Solomon”, call on Bathsheba to help them manipulate David into giving legitimacy to Solomon and put an end to the family in-fighting. In doing so, the text offers a final example of how strongly Bathsheba’s power - both over David as well as over the wider goings-on of the royal world - contrasts to that of Michal (or any of David’s other women). Bathsheba does not only *possess* power; she becomes a *broker* of a long-suppressed power which she has possessed since her first interaction with David on the rooftop.

Nathan implores Bathsheba to take part in the scheme of succession by planting ideas in David’s head that he had already promised Solomon the throne after his own death⁵⁴. She is instructed on what to say to him and how to say it, in order that later on others may ‘remind’ David of his promise and have them declared favorable by the still-living (albeit decrepit) king. In doing so, Bathsheba not only places Solomon in the seat of power, but also does so for herself; after all, “Queen Mother” is no small-potatoes position to hold. Additionally, Nathan reminds her that by working in concert with him and Solomon’s other supporters, she will in fact be saving her (and Solomon’s) lives, since the consequence of Adonijah’s usurpation may very well lead to his killing off his half-brother and step-mother.

Suddenly, Bathsheba finds herself in a position of a greater amount of leveraged power than perhaps ever before over David. Not only is he feeble of mind and therefore easy to manipulate, but only a few verses earlier he is described as physically unable to keep himself warm, and therefore requires the company of

⁵⁴ 1 Kings 1:13-14

another body (Abishag, a young Shunammite girl) to help him do so⁵⁵. This may not, at first glance, appear to have any impact on his later interaction with Bathsheba, but it leads one to wonder what Bathsheba might think as she entered the room to play Nathan's political games against her husband. Perhaps she scowls inwardly (or outwardly) at yet another woman being brought into the king's bedchamber; perhaps she snickers at the thought of this once-mighty, virile warrior as now merely a shell of himself, unable to keep his body temperature (or *other* parts of his body, as the text alludes to) at an appropriately elevated state. In either case, Bathsheba has now re-assumed an active role in her interactions with David: she is a political operative with a mission to accomplish. Her triumph will bring about either a smooth transfer of power to the rightful heir of the throne, or a successful *coup d'etat* which will place her son on the king's chair. In either case, she herself will reap the rewards.

Summary

Bathsheba represents a formidable opponent to King David outside of the military realm. While the rest of the women in his life are used as pawns in his attempt to seize and consolidate political power, Bathsheba matches these tactics by gaining and consolidating political power of her own. As seen through her active participation in the events of her relationship with David, Bathsheba's power becomes apparent early on, but remains muted through most of her encounters with David. It is not until the last of these encounters that she allows it to become

⁵⁵ 1 Kings 1:1-4

manifest to its fullest degree; by way of her strategic placement within David's domestic sphere and her cunning, bold moves within his political sphere, she becomes one of the most important players in the continuation and strengthening of the Davidic line.

* * * *

David's relationships with the women in his life, and specifically with Michal and Bathsheba, are constructs of *opportunity* of politics, lust, and necessity. Perhaps the greatest difference between the two women, though, lays in how each women is able to match his opportunistic tactics and parry his power plays. What brings the narratives together, though, is in what these two women with whom David shares significant moments of his life reveal about his personality. Both of Michal and Bathsheba, and the examples given here regarding their relationships as well as countless other example one may find from David's wider narrative, are devoid of any emotional element. As Tikvah Frymer-Kensky notes, "Nowhere do we read 'David loved her'. David knows about love...[b]ut David, whose very name probably means 'beloved,' doesn't love."⁵⁶ But this deficiency on David's part does not extend to everyone with whom he interacts. There is one person in David's life whose love and affection become highly important, even to the point of causing great lamenting and mourning upon his passing, and even though David's own expression of love do not appear to mirror or match: Jonathan, Saul's son.

* * * *

⁵⁶ Frymer-Kensky, 145.

Part III. David and Jonathan

Overview

Unlike both Michal and Bathsheba, Jonathan enters the biblical narrative before his first encounter with David. As Saul's son and presumptive heir, Jonathan has already made a name for himself a successful warrior in his father's army, and is destined to become as strong a leader as his father - until, that is, his father is rejected and his heir-apparent status is usurped by David's anointing. Through Saul's misdeeds, the sins of the father wreak havoc on the trajectory (and, it is assumed, ambitions) of the son; with the replacement of Saul by David as king, Jonathan also appears to fall out of God's favor and instead becomes a has-been.

The story of David and Jonathan is challenging, intriguing, and tender. The first encounter as described by the biblical text takes place after David's defeat of Goliath. Saul summons David and asks for his identification. As soon as the words are out of David's mouth, Jonathan falls in love with David and becomes "attached" to him, soul to soul.⁵⁷ In doing so, Jonathan simultaneously *uncoupled* himself from his father politically, placing himself squarely in David's camp. As will be addressed shortly, it is after this point that Jonathan no longer engages in military goings-on himself, and becomes solely subservient to and supportive of David instead.

As David's popularity and prestige rises in the eyes of Jonathan (and, concurrently, Michal), it wanes in the eyes of Saul. Jealous and fearful of David, Saul discusses with his allies the option of killing and thus removing him as a political and military threat. However, upon hearing this, Jonathan's desire for David

⁵⁷ 1 Samuel 18:1-4

pushes him to confront his father's requests, and he intercedes to convince Saul to abandon such thoughts. Saul listens to his son, and the plan is put on hold - at least for the moment. Following further successes by David on the battlefield, Saul again turns a murderous eye to the young king-in-waiting, this time without successful intervention by Jonathan.

Having taken flight from Saul's attempts on his life (with the help of Michal⁵⁸), and having taken counsel with Samuel before again encountering Saul, David returns to be with Jonathan and questions what he has done to merit such hatred and fear of death from the king. Jonathan assures him that if there were a plan in action to kill David, that he (Jonathan) would know about it, for "[m]y father will not do a great thing or a small thing⁵⁹ [against you, David] without revealing it to me⁶⁰ -- and why would my father hide this thing from me? There is nothing [to fear]."⁶¹

David, though, is unconvinced and explains his belief that Saul has lied to Jonathan in order to avoid any deceit on the part of his son, whose favor he (Saul) knows he no longer possesses⁶². Together, the two create a plan to uncover Saul's true feelings, after which Jonathan will report to David whether his life is truly in danger or not.

Jonathan again swears his loyalty to David in love, and the plan is set. David is to hide during the feast of Rosh Hodesh, and when it is discovered whether Saul

⁵⁸ See *Part I: David and Michal*

⁵⁹ i.e. *he will not take any action against you*

⁶⁰ lit. *revealing it to my eyes*

⁶¹ 1 Samuel 20:2

⁶² 1 Samuel 20:3-10

is angered or not about his absence from the royal banquet, Jonathan will inform him as such using secret methods of communication. However, this discovery of Saul's true feelings goes farther than had previously been thought: when discerning that Jonathan has aided David in remaining safe from any danger, Saul declares his disdain for Jonathan as well, and verbally attacks his own son in response to having been thwarted again. Jonathan, seeing the measures to which his father is willing to go in order to hurt his beloved David, removes himself angrily from his father's feast, and goes to tell David of what he has learned.⁶³ It is during this stealthily planned meeting - almost tryst-like in nature - that the two men encounter each other for the last time.

Their reunification is short, but heavy with meaning and emotion. Jonathan, feeling a bond with David that so many - including his sister - have similarly felt, reveals that Saul's hatred for David does indeed still burn hot, and that David is still in mortal danger. David, bound to Jonathan by a kind of loyalty unseen and unheard of between himself and any other character within his story arc, prostrates himself before Jonathan, not once but three times, in gratitude and worry. They proceed to "[kiss] each other and [cry] one with the other" as they vow that they will always be connected to each other through God. Eventually David leaves and Jonathan returns to the city.⁶⁴ The two do not meet again in person, but they do, in a way, share a final scene together. Following Jonathan's death at the hands of the Philistines (on the same day and the same field as Saul takes his own life)⁶⁵, David

⁶³ 1 Samuel 20:30-34

⁶⁴ 1 Samuel 20:41-42

⁶⁵ 1 Samuel 31:2-6

mourns and sings a lament to both men - but especially to Jonathan, whose love and support he insinuates were the most valuable of all to him. He praises the might and speed and abilities of his beloved friend, forgoing any mention of the fact that no more significant obstacles stand in his way to ascending the throne of Israel. Jonathan's love is described as "pleasant...[and] more wondrous...than a woman's love."⁶⁶ Thus, with death separating them, ends their physical relationship.⁶⁷

Analysis

Perhaps the best way to examine the relationship between David and Jonathan is to look through at it through a "queer lens"; that is, to examine this unique and gripping duo from the point of view that their relationship may very well represent the presence of a gay "power couple" in the Bible. It has become popular, especially in recent years with so much literary queering of biblical texts becoming more and more acceptable and popular, to read David and Jonathan's relationship as a decidedly homosexual one. Some scholars have attempted to showcase the not-so-hidden sexual relationship that David and Jonathan shared together using textual proof; others have attempted to prove that what existed between the two men was more complex than simply assigning the label of "gay" or "straight" to it, and that a sexual relationship is not inherently described in their narrative. In either case, the power structure which took shape between them was both influenced *by* and influential *of* the power possessed by each man.

⁶⁶ 2 Samuel 1:26

⁶⁷ A "physical" relationship does not inherently imply a sexual one; rather, since Jonathan has died, there is no longer any contact between the two other than David's later tenderness toward Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, in 2 Samuel chapters 4 and 9.

In his book *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in the Biblical World*, Tom Horner argues that the two men did, in fact, engage not only in homosexual behavior but in a gay relationship. In describing their different-yet-similar individual circumstances -- Jonathan a wealthy aristocrat, David an attractive youth, and both of them glorified military heroes -- Horner insists that it was “natural” for the two men to find each other and become a couple.⁶⁸ He dismisses the idea that they were simply two good friends who had a best-friendship surpassing all others, writing

...when the two men come from a society that for two hundred years had lived in the shadow of the Philistine culture, which accepted homosexuality; when they find themselves in a social context that was thoroughly military in the Eastern sense; when one of them -- who is the social superior of the two -- publicly makes a display of love; when the two of them make a lifetime pact openly; when they meet secretly and kiss each other and shed copious tears at parting; when one of them proclaims that his love for the other surpassed his love for women -- and *all* this is present in the David-Jonathan liaisons -- we have every reason to believe that a homosexual relationship existed.⁶⁹

Furthermore, contrary to the power dynamic which the two eventually created (and which will be written about at length in this section), Horner believes it logical that it was Jonathan who initiated the relationship, not David.⁷⁰

Acceptance of such biblical homoeroticism and homosexuality does not come easily to all who study it, even those who *do* accept the existence of a unique bond between the two men. The greatest doubt comes from those who either immediately assume that such a relationship would violate biblical prohibitions against male

⁶⁸ Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1978. p.26

⁶⁹ *ibid.* 28

⁷⁰ Horner maintains that “heroic love affairs in the ancient East were between two persons of equal rank. But there was no other youth in Israel who was precisely of Jonathan’s station...David was from a good family, but he was certainly not royalty. Therefore, it was only natural that Jonathan act as the initiator; David never could have.” *ibid.*, 28.

homosexuality⁷¹, or that the true nature of David and Jonathan's relationship is not one of physical love, but rather of best friends and brothers-in-arms. But Horner indicates that the relationship between the two is what ultimately justifies Saul's suspicion-cum-hatred of David. The king can handle the fact that God demands that he be replaced as ruler; what he cannot handle is that it is a beautiful young gay man who is to be the replacement. Horner chalks it up to an inherent "bedouin aversion to homosexuality."⁷² As to the reasons why, if such a relationship was both not totally unheard of and not even something to be looked down upon by the general public of the day, Horner notes that Jonathan and David's relationship is mainly complicated not by the fact that they each desire the love of another man, but by feelings of loyalty to their wives and families. In other words, it is not a lack of connection between the two men which continually force them to push away the chance of coming together as a couple, but rather a feeling of responsibility to *others* first. An understanding of these loyalties also offers justification for the fact that, similar to David's relationship shared with Michal, Jonathan is the only one of the pair who outwardly expresses his love and desire to be with David as a sexual and emotional partner. Horner thoughtfully counters this notion, writing,

Motives are frequently mixed in human situations. Who are we to demand that everyone's motives always be pure - until we have first examined our own? The question here is not which one loved the most but whether the two of them loved each other both *physically* and spiritually. And the answer is: yes, they did. This is proved by David himself, as much as by anyone else, in the very moving elegy he wrote for Saul and Jonathan after the report of their deaths in battle against the Philistines...(34)

⁷¹ cf. Leviticus 18:22, 20:13

⁷² Horner, 32.

Horner confesses that many homosexuals (or those who display homosexual tendencies) *are* looked down upon because of their sexual relationships with other men, even in a time and place where such relationships would be deemed acceptable. However, this condescension is not because of their *gender*, but because of the manner in which they do or do not express their 'manliness' while engaging in such behavior. True, he believes, many men were degraded for taking part in homosexual relationships, but most were not. This was because "...this type of homosexuality had nothing to do with effeminacy. Such men were warrior friends. They were, of course, aware of extremely effeminate men who were exclusively homosexual, and these men were looked down upon -- not because of their homosexuality but because of their effeminacy..." He continues,

...[I]n this heroic and lusty period of Israel's history, "real men" did not pass their time spinning thread and weaving cloth. There might have been those who did, but such men were not considered to be manly. They might engage in homosexuality -- and most likely did -- but they would not be thought worthy of heroic love. (38)

In Horner's understanding of the time and place in which these stories were constructed, homosexual love was both typical as well as (to an extent) accepted. And as he surmises, "...Israel's greatest king and hero did have such an affair and he made no secret about it...he boasted about it in his famous lament which is not of undoubted authorship but, because of its majestic language and depth of feeling, is one of the poetic gems of world literature."⁷³

Such a treatment of the story of David and Jonathan (especially coming from Horner, an ordained Episcopalian priest) is heartening to those who seek liberation

⁷³ Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, 38.

and acceptance of the LGBT community within the religious world, but it certainly does not clear a direct path to such acceptance. There are those who would immediately dismiss such ideas as revisionist (at best) or blasphemous (at worst), and there are others would explain the relationship between David and Jonathan in other ways, albeit still somewhat boundary-pushing. An example of a compelling “alternative queer reading” of these texts can be found in the writing of Yaron Peleg.

Peleg concurs with Horner’s understanding that the relationship between David and Jonathan is somewhat unique in the canon of biblical literature; however, his treatment of the text considers their relationship as one less focused on male homosexuality and much more focused on the manipulation of gender roles. He writes that “...by describing [Jonathan] as passive and effeminate the text does not suggest that [he] is ‘homosexual’, but rather that he is a ‘woman’ and, as such, unqualified for kingship according to the ancient Israelite tradition.”⁷⁴ Such a disqualification becomes even more highly important when considering all that David has gone through to dismantle Saul’s claims to power and set himself up as the true leader of the day.

Peleg convincingly describes the relationship between the two men as one in which they battle for power by way of gender roles - or, to be more precise, the way in which David manipulates Jonathan into submitting to the traditional role of *woman* or *wife* in order to discredit him as a viable successor to Saul, and to further himself in the eyes of the nation. Peleg states his assumption that “[1 and 2 Samuel are] literary text[s] whose pseudo-historiographic nature privileges the masculine

⁷⁴ Yaron Peleg. “Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30, no. 2 (2005). p171.

realm...over the feminine domestic sphere.” As such, by casting David in the ‘male’ or ‘husband’ role, he is automatically more powerful than Jonathan. This is necessary, Peleg argues, because of earlier implications that David himself was somewhat feminine in looks and demeanor⁷⁵.

Supporting Peleg’s assertion that the use and manipulation of gender roles in the main thrust of David and Jonathan’s relationship is the fact that each man has, through such manipulation, done a 180-degree turn from the beginning of their own narratives until the end. Prior to his interactions with David, Jonathan is seen as a powerful lieutenant in his father’s army, a skilled warrior who oozes manliness on the battlefield and (it is assumed) political prowess off of it. By contrast, David is introduced as undoubtedly male, but a feminized male: he is pretty to look at⁷⁶, he serves his brothers food and drink⁷⁷, and he serves as a musician in Saul’s court⁷⁸ (a profession often taken by women). It is not until he is literally dressed up in military garb (by Saul) that he begins his ‘ascent’ toward manliness - and it is only during that ascent that he begins to steer Jonathan’s masculinity ‘downward’ toward femininity in order that the two do not clash and come to political or military blows. It is either by stroke of luck or by ingeniously charismatic actions that Jonathan falls in love with David; regardless of how it happens, in one fell swoop David has not only

⁷⁵ 1 Samuel 16:12; 17:42

⁷⁶ *ibid* 16:12

⁷⁷ *ibid* 17:17-18

⁷⁸ *ibid* 16:23

gained the ultimate insider to Saul's political realm, but also removed the greatest threat to his own pathway to the throne.⁷⁹

While the essence of the relationship between David and Jonathan is ambiguous and debatable, what is clear is that, in the end, there are true feelings of love and appreciation toward each of the men from the other. Jonathan outwardly and openly shows his affection for David, while David's displays are much more muted (though, in this author's opinion, no less meaningful).

Summary

Without a doubt, the relationship between David and Jonathan is unique from all others within David's narrative. While Michal and Bathsheba both possess different amounts and different kinds of power in contrast to David, they still remain 'game pieces' in his eyes; they are objects to be used and be acted upon, not loved and appreciated. This is clearly *not* the case with Jonathan, to whom David never explicitly states his love, but does so rather implicitly on numerous occasions. However, the relationship between the two men is still one of opportunism and power-grabbing on David's part. Horner makes a convincing argument that Jonathan's romantic feelings for David are not only present but genuinely strong; he makes a less convincing argument that David returns those feelings (or at least as strongly). Peleg, though, fails to fully discredit the possibility of a relationship between the two that is both sexual and romantic; in fact, he seems intent on glossing over the emotional connection present within their relationship altogether.

⁷⁹ Peleg, *Love At First Sight* 184.

What is obvious, though, as both scholars have pointed out, is that a power structure formed which defined the reasons why David ultimately became king and Jonathan did not. In both scholars views, a certain type of relationship between two men existed which emasculated one party. This is precisely what happened to Jonathan, regardless of the emotions which may or may not have passed between him and David. It is this type of relationship -- portraying David as the "male" and Jonathan as the "female" (or, perhaps, "un-male") -- which David seemed desirous of, in an attempt to strengthen his own political position and ultimately take his place as king of Israel. However, it more accurately reflects the totality of their interactions and dialogues to recognize the pointedly physical nature of their relationship as well; one should not simply ignore the dramatic emotional and sexual tension encased in their scenes together.

* * * *

Conclusion

An Author's Anecdote:

In the middle of reading, researching, and writing about the story of King David as seen through the books of Samuel and Kings, I had to visit the dentist for a check-up. While waiting in my little cubicle, the hygienist and I began talking about my schoolwork, and when I mentioned the topic of this paper and about looking for “the real King David”, her response came as a surprise to me -- “It was all Bathsheba’s fault.” Now, not only was I shocked that a person outside the religious-professional or academic world could name another member of David’s entourage, but I was also taken aback by the intensity of her answer; she was absolutely certain that David was of no fault in his encounter with Bathsheba. I countered her claim gently, saying, “Well...it’s not so simple. He was also a bit of a manipulator and a player - so we can’t really blame her altogether.”

She was not impressed with my reply; in fact, she shut down quite quickly and fully on the topic of biblical study, and for the rest of our time together stuck to one- or two-word answers about what was going on in my mouth. I took the hint that we should move on from the conversation, but I could not help but register the discomfort she felt at my challenging her cemented understandings of such a central biblical character.

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As interesting as that exchange was, it was not altogether mystifying. Regardless of what specific faith community my dental hygienist belongs to, in her eyes I had taken something sacrosanct and had the *chutzpah* to put it under a microscope. This can, of course, cause consternation even to the most enlightened

individual. Every community which is bound together by religion, nationality, creed, or any other criteria, needs *cultural artifacts* to strengthen their bond. In America, for example, we place men such as Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln on a cultural pedestal, pointing to them when we need a reason to puff out our collective chests and feel pride in our leaders of old. Likewise in the American gay community, figures like Harvey Milk play a similar role. What we do *not* like is when they are taken off of those pedestals and examined for who they really were. That is, we do not like hearing that Washington never chopped down a cherry tree because of his innate sense of honest, or that Jefferson kept (and impregnated) slaves at the same time as he was writing the Declaration of Independence. Such is also the case for many when examining closely the life and times of King David throughout the books of Samuel and Kings.

King David, as presented in those books, was an opportunist and a manipulator who rarely (if ever) felt love for anyone besides himself. While he was the recipient of many others' affections, he never quite doled out the same for those around him, even those he felt closest to. This emotional disconnect led him to a life of lying, adultery and even complicity in murder. To those of us whose religion seems so wrapped up in his success story and look to him with loving eyes, none of this feels good; in fact, it is quite a sobering realization after years of singing children's songs and making mention of him in various rites and rituals which bind our community together.

But it is honest. It makes David not just an artifact of our community, but an *authentic* artifact - one which we may still hold dear, even if that adoration comes

with a layer of skepticism. And what should the King of Israel be if not an example to whom each of his followers can feel a human connection? What is the point of a story like David's -- rising from farm boy to military hero to political mastermind -- if there is not an element of humanity pervading it, complementing but never defeating a sense of how "real" he was? In laying out the historiographic facts of David's narrative, our community gains a great perspective on who he was and why he should continue to be held in such high regard. He becomes a more relatable figure, and a more interesting subject of dedicated study for Jews throughout the worldwide community.

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