

DAVID'S WIVES

INTRODUCTION:

David is Israel's second king. He establishes a reign that will last for over four hundred years. David's rise to the throne and the direction of his dynasty is enhanced and abetted through several of his wives.

The first of David's wives was Michal, the daughter of King Saul; followed by Ahinoam, the wife of King Saul and the mother of Amnon and Jonathan; Abigail, mother of Kileab; Maacah, mother of Absalom and Tamar and daughter of King Talmai of Geshur; Haggith, mother of Adonijah, Eglah, mother of Ithream and Abital, mother of Shephatiah. David's last wife was Bathsheba, mother of Solomon.

Marrying Saul's daughter clearly enabled David to become an insider into the dynasty of Saul and marrying Saul's wife further enhanced the Saulide connection. Abigail, the wealthy widow of Nabal helped David in his first critical political power position, controlling Hebron; she may have also been David's sister.

Marrying Maacah daughter of Talmai, King of Geshur, bestowed upon David power in a Geshur, a neighboring land and geopolitical enemy of Israel.¹ Descendants of Maacah and Absalom became Kings of Judah (Abiya and Asa - I Kings 15:2,10; II Ch. 11:20,15:16).²

Haggith's son Adonijah, by then the oldest of David's male heirs, attempted to take the monarchy close to the end of his father's lifetime. Bathsheba succeeded in outmaneuvering Adonijah and having her son Solomon succeed David his father as King. Later Adinojah was killed by Solomon. Unfortunately we know little about Haggith and her potential value to David as a marriage partner and equally about his wives Abital or Eglah. In a midrash Eglah is Michal; she was given this name because, contrary to her father's will, she helped David to escape from Saul.³

¹ Spanier, Ktziah, 'The Queen Mother in the Judean Royal Court: Maacah – A Case Study' in Brenner, Athalya, *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, (Sheffield, Sheffield University Press), 1994.

² Abraham's brother Nahor had a child named Maacah from a concubine named Reumah. This, of course was centuries earlier but it is possible that this Maacah was a distant descendant of Abraham (Gen. 22:24).

³ Midrash Rabbah Psalms 59.4. Eglah means heifer. Just as a heifer resists taking on a yoke, so Michal rebuffed the yoke of her father Saul.

These five of David's wives appear to have been instrumental, even pivotal in his quest for power - Michal, Abigail, Ahinoam, Maacah and Bathsheba. David's marriages are motivated by politics and power.

David's marriages are not motivated by the concept of lifelong affection, or some kind of romantic ideals. In many or most cases, they are politically motivated. 'In the societies of the ancient Near East, a woman's sexuality was generally under the control of a man in her family. A father controlled his daughter's sexuality, and a husband his wife's. The marriage of a young woman was a matter of negotiation and financial arrangements between the groom and . . . the father or leading male of the bride's family . . . Among royal families, not only financial but also political matters had to be negotiated.'⁴

David understands these alliances as ways in which he can gain influence and authority. Early on in his career, he has his eye on the throne, and these marriages are ways for him either to gain or to exercise control of his self-perceived destiny.

MICHAL: FIRST LOVE

The Early Michal:

David's first marriage is contracted in the days when he is a young hero at the court of King Saul. He is the 'wonder boy' shepherd who overnight soothes Saul's depressive nature and suddenly becomes a warrior, a slayer of giants (1 Sam 16:14-23; 17:1 ff.)

David's successes and popularity among the people distresses and vexes Saul, for the women, sing, dance, and chant, 'Saul has slain his thousands! David, his tens of thousands!' (1 Sam 18:7). Saul clearly fears that David seeks the kingship, saying 'what more can he have but the kingdom' (18:8). In an attempt to suborn David, Saul offers him one of his daughters in marriage, Merab, if David will become one of Saul's warriors. While Saul offers Merab, at the same time he thinks (and expects) that David will die in the attempt. David's reaction, on the face of it is laudable. He accepts this offer, but says that he is undeserving of the honor of becoming the king's son-in-law. David understands that this is a way for him to get closer to the seat of power. Since the monarchy was so new an institution for Israel, it was not clear that a direct dynastic succession through the male biological line was the only way to become the ruler. Further, some time before,

⁴ Jo Ann Hackett, '1 and 2 Samuel: The Women's Bible Commentary', Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. (London: SPCK, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), pg. 90.

David had been secretly anointed by the king maker/king breaker prophet Samuel (1 Sam 16:11-13). In that narrative, in literally succeeding verses, the text explains that ‘the spirit of the LORD gripped David from that day on’ and ‘the spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul’ (1 Sam 16:13-14).

Contrary to Saul’s expectations, David succeeds in his military mission. In the event however, Saul marries Merab off to someone else without an explanation.⁵ In the meantime, Michal another daughter of Saul ‘had fallen in love with David’ (18:20). When Saul learned of this, he is pleased, because he thinks that he can bribe David with a marriage to Michal. Saul conveys the message that the bride price would be the foreskins of a hundred Philistines, as vengeance on the king’s enemies. As beforehand with Merab, Saul expects that David would either fail in this endeavor, or fall in battle, thereby eliminating what Saul sees as a serious threat to his rule. ‘Saul thought: “I will give her to him, and she can serve as a snare for him, so that the Philistines may kill him”’ (18:21).⁶

Commenting on this situation, the biblical scholar, J. Cheryl Exum writes: ‘But why should it matter to Saul that Michal loves David? What do the woman’s feelings have to do with it? Saul had already tempted David with his older daughter Merab — where love is not mentioned — but he gave her to another (18:17-19). In fact, the reward for killing Goliath was rumored to be marriage to the king’s daughter (1 Sam 17:25). Thus for the charmed third time, David has a chance at what Saul seems unwilling to let him have. From Saul’s perspective, Michal’s love for David may be convenient but otherwise largely gratuitous. I think it is largely gratuitous from David’s perspective as well. The situation is one in which the men’s political considerations are paramount, while regarding the woman, we hear only that she loves. Already the text perpetuates a familiar stereotype: men are motivated by ambition, whereas women respond on a personal level. It would be much more to Saul’s advantage if David loved Michal — but that is precisely what the text leaves unsaid, suggesting that David’s motives

⁵ The Septuagint Codex Vaticanus does not include the Merab marriage proposal. McCarter suggests it may have come from a later redactor, See P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel*, Anchor Bible 8 (AB), (New York: Doubleday, 1980) pgs. 306-308.

⁶ As translated by J. Cheryl Exum stating she is following the Hebrew; ‘instead of becoming a snare to David, Michal’s love becomes a snare to Saul.’ J. Cheryl Exum, “Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative,” in Alice Bach, editor, *The Pleasure of Her Text*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), pg. 50.

are as purely political as Saul's. Note that the text tells us "it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law," not that it pleased him to have Michal as his wife. Saul even appears to recognize the threat Michal's love for David poses for him, When Saul saw and knew that YHWH was with David, and that Michal Saul's daughter loved him, Saul was still more afraid of David, and rightly so, for in the next chapter, Michal defies her father by helping David escape Saul's attempt on his life' (19:11-17).⁷

Michal's expressed affection for David (1 Sam 18: 20, 28) is a unique instance in the Bible.⁸ As Exum points out, there is no indication that this love is reciprocated on David's part; only that he is quite willing to wed the princess in order to become the king's son-in-law (noted three times – (18:18, 23, 26), and thus entering into the royal family. This alliance does not make him an heir apparent; Saul's son Jonathan holds that place, but it puts David in a powerful and dangerous position.

David achieves Saul's stated bride price for the groom of one hundred foreskins, and he doubled those numbers. There is something bordering between sexual humor and distaste for one's enemies in King Saul's demand of this particular item; for the Philistines are known infamously in the Bible as the uncircumcised. When David marries Michal we are told 'When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that Michal . . . loved him, Saul grew still more afraid of David; and Saul was David's enemy ever after' (18:28-29). What an intriguing juxtaposition; Saul is more afraid of David because God and Michal favor David his son-in-law! Saul realizes his daughter's love is counterproductive to his intent. In truth, Saul's intuition is well founded. David will succeed him on the throne.

When Saul later sought to slay David, Michal assists her husband to escape, thereby risking her father's unpredictable and often violent wrath (19:10). Michal herself remains in the palace. Did Michal expect her husband to return shortly? David, despite meeting with Jonathan presumably near the palace does not return for her for many years (20:1-42). When David once again seeks out Michal, Saul will be dead, and David will be negotiating for the throne of all Israel.

Saul expects his daughter Michal to protect the 'family dynastic business' by being loyal to her father the king. He is shocked to learn that her first

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Prior to this we are told Saul loved David (16:21), Jonathan loved David (18:1, 3) and all Israel loved David (18:16), all using the same Hebrew root 'ahava'. Thus the ahava that Michal expresses for David may be different that the modern notion of romantic love between a man and a woman.

loyalty is to her new husband. Saul may have 'controlled his daughter's sexuality' but he could not control her affections. As the first ruler for these tribes, Saul lacks a history of dynastic succession. To make matters worse, Jonathan the heir presumptive already accepts David as his brother and the likely heir to the throne (18:3-4). Jonathan later makes a covenant of protection between himself and David (20:14-15). Both Michal and Jonathan protect David against Saul's pursuit and violence. David has the best of both worlds: marriage to the king's daughter, and a strong bond with the king's son.

The biblical narrative then turns to other matters. It follows David at Nob, Gath, Adullam, and other locales. As shall be noted below, David's marriage to Abigail comes in these chapters, as does a note that Saul gave Michal to Palti son of Laish as a wife (again, controlling her sexuality, if not her loyalty). The book of First Samuel concludes with the death of Saul and Jonathan amidst the ongoing battles with the Philistine enemies. Michal does not reappear as a figure for several years.

When the text turns again to Michal and David, the focus is negotiations aimed primarily at attaining reconciliation between Judea and the northern tribes (later known as the kingdom of Israel) who followed the Saulide dynasty, supporting Saul's son Ish-boshet.

The Later Michal:

Seven years passed by with enmity between the two kingdoms, that of Ish-boshet in the north, and that of David, reigning over Judah in Hebron. The Davidic forces have a clear ascendancy in military victories. Meantime, there are internal tensions in the House of Ish-boshet that result in Abner, Ish-boshet's general wishing to defect to the House of David (2 Sam 3). Abner promises to bring all Israel to David's side. David suggests that as part of this defection Abner needs to bring Michal with him, which he does.⁹ David sent this demand with the explanation that he had, after all paid for Michal with the foreskins of many Philistines. David expects Michal to be valuable to his gaining the allegiance of the northern tribes. In addition, his demand for 'the return of Michal was certainly the hope that that a male issue would unite the claims of his house and Saul's – a vain hope as it turned out.'¹⁰

⁹ In the event, Michal's brother the monarch Ish-boshet does not seem to object, as he orders her to be taken to David seemingly giving David authority over him (2 Sam 3:15).

¹⁰ John Bright, 'A History of Israel', (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), pg. 177.

Though the book of Samuel informs the reader that Michal's second husband, Palti reacted with great dismay, wailing and lamenting, nothing is stated about Michal's reaction to this radical change of affairs. The narrator creates a tragic triangular symmetry telling us that Michal loves David and implicitly that Palti loves Michal but does not tell us if either love is reciprocated. Shortly after Michal rejoins David, the text explains that 'David took more concubines and wives' and that he fathers sons and daughters (2 Sam 5:13).

Nothing more is said of Michal's relationship with David until the great day when the Ark was brought up to Jerusalem. It was a day for celebration, complete with sacrifices and blasts of the shofar. David himself led the procession, dressed in a linen ephod worn by priests. He whirled and danced with great ecstasy. David's decision to bring the Ark to Jerusalem was the pretext for his desire to create Jerusalem as the national religious center for the united kingdom. In chapter seven David tells the prophet Nathan that he intends to build a proper house for the Ark, and Nathan encourages David in this endeavor. Nonetheless, that night God's word comes to Nathan and explains that David will not achieve this goal, rather that it will fall to one of his sons, after David has died. God does explain, however, that there will be a long Davidic dynasty (2 Sam 7:16).

When Michal was brought back from Palti she is identified as the daughter of Saul, and not as the wife of David (2 Sam 3:14). Earlier she was referred to as David's wife (1 Sam 19:11; 25:44). Michal's dilemma is that she is the daughter of Saul the former ruler, and the wife of the present sovereign. During her lifetime, Saul and David fought bitterly over the kingdom, and as noted before, following Saul's death there was a long drawn out civil war as to who would be Saul's legitimate successor.

The text relates that as the Ark of the LORD entered the city, 'Michal daughter of Saul looked out the window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the LORD; and she despised him for it' (2 Sam 6:16).

When David comes to bless his house/family Michal does not even wait for him to enter the palace, but stands in public view in the doorway, blocking him. In a stunningly bitter and sarcastic attack, she pours out her rage and venom. In the only example of dialogue she has directly with David, she rages, 'Didn't the king of Israel do himself honor today – exposing himself in the sight of all the slavegirls of his subjects, as one of the riffraff might expose himself!' These are very strong words to describe this situation. This is remarkably scornful and sexually debasing language towards her husband and king from a once loving wife. She accuses him of exposing himself to the lowest of the low, the female servants of his male servants.

To what does Michal allude when she says that David 'exposed' himself? While some commentators suggest David was scantily clad, the text does not support this contention, but rather says that David was wearing an ephod, a priestly robe. As described in Exodus 28:6 ff. priests wore the ephod, 'a kind of pinafore composed of two pieces of linen joined at the shoulder by straps.' Perhaps, originally it was a kind of loincloth 'expressly prescribed to contrast with the cultic nakedness in other nations.'¹¹ Further, as explained in Exodus, the priests wore 'linen britches to cover their nakedness; [extending] from the hips to the thighs' (Ex. 28:42). Given the fact that David was leading the procession of the holy Ark to Jerusalem, he would have chosen to be properly clothed.

Did Michal feel that David was not properly dressed for the occasion, that he should have been wearing a royal robe? Was there some lingering anger that David had illegitimately usurped the kingship from her father and his descendants?

David's supposed nakedness was not the issue. Michal may resent David tearing her away from a husband who did love her. She senses that David's demand to bring her to Jerusalem is not out of love for her as a person but rather as valuable dynastic property and a pawn in his political game. She feels an inner conflict between her loyalty to her father, and his memory, and her two husbands, one loving and one manipulating.

David is mortified and angered. His response to Michal matches her bitterness and sarcasm. He says that God had chosen him over her father and over her father's house, and made him prince over all Israel. David adds that he would find honor among those she had scorned (2 Sam 6:21-22).

When earlier, Saul sent messengers to assassinate David. Michal helped David escape, and disguised his presence in their bed with some household idols/*teraphim* (1 Sam 19:13).¹² Ironically, it is the selfsame

¹¹ 'The Torah: A Modern Commentary Revised Edition', Original editor, W. Gunther Plaut; Revised edition editor, David E. S. Stein, (New York: [Union for Reform Judaism] URJ, 2006), pg. 563.

¹² 'Teraphim' are a form of household idol most notably used by Laban, Rachel's father and Jacob's adversary (Gen. 31:19-42). Rachel steals her father gods presumably to dilute his power against her husband Jacob, at least psychologically. Rachel is the loved wife of Jacob (Gen. 29:18), and the mother of Benjamin, therefore a direct ancestress of Michal. By contrast, David comes from the tribe of Judah, whose ancestress is Leah the unloved wife of Jacob (Gen. 29:31). Jacob loved Rachel and Michal

Michal who once loved David, is now the person that criticizes him for his public display when he brought the sacred Ark to Jerusalem.

A review of Michal's story reveals that only twice does she appear as an agent in her own right, here and in 1 Samuel 19, where she saves David's life. Elsewhere she neither speaks nor initiates action but is rather the object of the political machinations of the two men, her father and her husband, locked in bitter rivalry over the kingship. When used as a symbol to represent their conflicting interests, Michal is referred to as both Saul's daughter and David's wife (1 Sam 18:20, 27, 28; 25:44; 2 Sam 3:13, 14). The intense nature of the Saulide-Davidic rivalry, however, the exclusiveness of each's claim to the throne, makes it impossible for Michal to belong to both houses at once. She becomes a victim of their prolonged conflict, and her two attempts to act autonomously by choosing her own allegiances result only in her own losses. In 1 Samuel 19, Michal is called "David's wife," for she allies herself with her husband over against her father. She orchestrates David's escape into freedom by letting him down through the window when Saul seeks to kill him. But she thereby, in effect, loses her husband, who does not come back for her or seek her return to him until it is politically expedient. In 2 Samuel 6, she becomes once again 'Saul's daughter', for she speaks as the representative of her father's house, and by doing so, forfeits her role in the house of King David.¹³

The passage concludes with a remark that Michal remained childless all her life. Is there a connection between these matters? Was her barrenness a punishment for her attack on her husband and king; alternatively, perhaps David never cohabitated with her again.

The rabbis had some ambiguous thoughts about Michal. They associated her barrenness as a sign of divine disfavor for her criticism of David.¹⁴ Yet, she is praised for her saving David's life, and she is favorably compared with her brother Jonathan. Jonathan saved David's life outside of the palace (1 Sam 20) just as Michal had done this in the palace, in the previous biblical chapter.¹⁵ Further, Michal adopted the children of her late sister Merab, and reared the children in her own right.¹⁶

loved David, unique incidents in the Hebrew Bible. Both women used teraphim, idols, to help their respective beloved husbands, each one who is favored by God.

¹³ Exum, 'Murder They Wrote,' pgs. 51-52.

¹⁴ Midrash Rabbah Num. 4.20; Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 21a.

¹⁵ Midrash Rabbah Psalms 59.1.

¹⁶ Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 19b.

In a very clever bit of reasoning, the rabbis deduce that contrary to the plain meaning of the text, Michal did have a child. The text says ‘So, to her dying day Michal daughter of Saul had no children’ – *lo hayah la yeled ad yom motah* – which could mean, she did not have a child until the day of her death, that is to say, she died in childbirth.¹⁷

Michal was very beautiful, and a contender for one of the most beautiful women in the world.¹⁸ Finally, tradition associates Michal with religious piety, for she wears *tefillin* (phylacteries).¹⁹

ABIGAIL: POWER

Abigail the wife of Nabal, a wealthy landowner in the area of Hebron, is the centerpiece of 1 Samuel 25. This chapter tells the story of an inventive, beautiful, and strong-willed woman. Termed ‘extraordinarily enterprising and practical’²⁰ she is her own person. Her husband certainly does not ‘control’ Abigail’s sexuality. The background for this narrative finds David as a kind of outlaw who offers ‘protection’ for Nabal’s shepherds when they are off with their flocks in the wilderness. At sheep shearing time, David sends ten of his men to Nabal asking for his protection payment. Nabal rudely dismisses this request, saying, ‘Who is David?’ and why should I pay attention to him? When David’s men return to him with this news, he wastes no time organizing several hundred of his warriors. David fully intends to punish Nabal and his retainers (1 Sam 25:12-13). Meantime, one of Nabal’s young men informs Abigail about these turn of events. She immediately takes charge of the situation. Without informing her husband, she packages up a generous amount of food, loads them on asses, and sends them to David. She then follows riding an ass, and meets David along the trail. She placates David, praising him and prophesizes that God will reward David with an everlasting house. She also predicts that he will rule over Israel. Through her efforts, she prevents David from taking on a bloodguilt. The next day she informs Nabal, who appears to suffer a stroke, and who then dies ten days later. The chapter concludes with Abigail becoming David’s wife.

Early in the chapter, after noting Nabal’s wealth, the narrative contrasts husband and wife. ‘The woman was intelligent and beautiful, but the man . . . was a hard man and an evildoer . . . he was a *kalbo* [*khaf-lamed-*

¹⁷ Midrash Rabbah Gen. 82.7; Midrash Rabbah Num. 4.20.

¹⁸ Babylonian Talmud Megillah 15a.

¹⁹ Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 96a.

²⁰ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pg. 120.

bet-vav] (vs. 3).²¹ While *'kalbo'* is often translated as Calebite, someone from the family of Caleb, that would require in Hebrew the definite article, *ha-kalbo*.²² Without that, it reads he was a *kalbo*, a dog.

By this point in his career, David's name was familiar to many, and his status as first a hero and then his rebellion against Saul was commonplace knowledge. Nabal's question, 'Who is David?' is rhetorical and imprudent. Coincidentally, Abigail realizes the limitations of her husband. Nabal's name is his fame, for Nabal translates as Fool or Boor, and a boorish fool he is. When she meets David she describes Nabal as a worthless/wretched man, and then adds, 'For he is just what his name says: His name means "boor" and he is a boor' (verse 25).

Abigail calls her provisions a 'blessing' to David and states that the Lord will build for you a 'secure house . . . [and] has appointed you ruler over Israel (1 Sam. 25:28, 30) and David responds 'Blessed be your prudence, and blessed be you yourself for restraining me from seeking redress in blood by my own hands' (1 Sam 25:33).

Abigail is the first person to declare publically that David will rule as king since Samuel's anointing of David in chapter sixteen was done secretly, and in private (1 Sam 16:1 ff; 11-13). Could Abigail have known of this event?

Only two Abigail's appear in the Hebrew Bible; one when Absalom appoints as his commander Amasa, the son of Abigail (2 Sam. 17:25; 1 Chr. 2:16). It is understandable that Absalom would want an old Hebron family to back his coup; but 'What is the probability that the only two people of this name would be not only contemporaries but sister-in-laws?'²³

Could Abigail be David's own sister? What do we know of David's parents – very little; in fact we do not know his mother's name. It is clear from the text that David lacks a good relationship with his father (1 Sam. 16:6-12) and conflicts with the brothers (1 Sam. 17:13-30). As a result of these Jewish midrashic commentators developed a 'mother fantasy' about David's birth; after all someone needed to love David, whose name to love; was he named by his mother?

²¹ The letters are khaf-lamed-bet-vav, while the reading is kha-li-bi – which would translate as Calebite.

²² Ellen van Wolde, "A Leader Led By A Lady: David and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25," *Zeitschrift Fur Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 114.3 (2002), pg. 357.

²³ Levenson, Jon, D. and Halpern, Baruch, 'The Political Imports of David's Marriages', *JBL*, 1980, Vol. 99/4, pg. 511.

One version suggests that David was born out of a fantastic form of a 'wedlock' story. In this David's mother masqueraded herself up as Jesse's mistress and became pregnant with David; hence he was much younger than his brothers.²⁴ That is an intriguing comparison to Leah masquerading as Rachel. Was the mother unloved (as was Leah) and the mistress loved? Does it also suggest that the unnamed mother of David like Leah not longer was intimate with husband? In another version the mother was accused of adultery, and David became the families slave.²⁵ While these are clearly elaborate Midrashic mythology, they are attempting to explain David's lack of a positive father and a missing mother image.

Thus Abigail could have been David's half sister; there is a tradition of marrying half sisters. Abraham said to Abimelech of his wife Sarah 'she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother' (Gen. 20:12). Olyan states 'there can be little doubt that Abigail, David's sister and Abigail, David's wife and previously the wife of Nabal, are the same individual'.²⁶

Abigail is beautiful and intelligent. Likewise, she is cunning and brave. She is a "take charge" person. She recognizes power, and she understands power. Alice Bach sums up Abigail's impressive rhetorical encounter with David as a tour de force.

'[Abigail controls] her life verbally while appearing socially dependent and compliant. The moment she encounters David, she speaks. Her determination is reflected in the series of active verbs (v 23) which rapidly move the narrative . . . She *hastened* and *got down from* the donkey and *fell* before David on her face and *bowed* to the ground.

The first speech is hers. Before David can articulate the anger, which the reader has heard him express to his men as Abigail was riding toward him, she delivers a series of beseeching demands, orchestrated to absorb the insults her husband had spoken. Well-chosen words will wash away the villainous words spoken earlier.

'upon me, my lord, be the guilt; . . . let your maidservant speak . . . hear the words of your maidservant' . . . Let your maidservant arrange for the gift to be given' (1 Sam. 25:24,27).

²⁴ Ginzberg, Louis, 'Legends of the Bible', (Philadelphia, JPS, 1975) pg. 533.

²⁵ Op. cit. pg. 534.

²⁶ Olyan, Saul, 'Zadok's Origin and the Tribal Politics of David', JBL, 1982, Vol. 101; pg. 191.

Calling herself "maidservant," *'amateka* or *shiphateka*, synonyms delineating a lower-class woman of no power, Abigail reflects the opposite in her actions: the text has informed us that Abigail is a wealthy woman, and now we see her in charge, comfortably issuing orders, while at the same time deflecting male anger. One suspects she has spoken equally soothing words to her husband to still his rages. There is no reply from David. The scene continues to belong to Abigail. After offering the gift of nourishment for him and his men, she proffers a greater gift: spiritual nourishment in the form of the prophecy endorsing David's destiny to reign as the chosen one of God.²⁷ Once she is assured that David has no further violent intentions toward Nabal, she dissociates herself from this husband, who she concedes has no hope of survival (vv 25-26), and seeks to link herself with David. 'When YHWH has made good his promises to my lord, may you remember your maidservant' (v 31).

Throughout her speech, Abigail continues to emphasize a power hierarchy, repeatedly calling David *adoni* and herself *'amateka/shiphateka*. While her actions show that she is accustomed to controlling situations, her words assure David that she is handing over power to him. Abigail's cloying humility is a result of her belief in her own words of prophecy. Her deference to the landless pauper underscores David's position as prince in disguise. We are in no doubt that Abigail would not herald a rogue with words suited to royalty . . .

A central illustration of her verbal power is provided in Abigail's prophecy . . . that David will become the next king of Israel [and] her words have a . . . powerful effect on David . . . they stop him from committing a violent act.²⁸

David listens carefully and blesses her. When her husband subsequently dies of 'natural' causes, David marries her and inherits Nabal's valuable

²⁷ An endnote at this point in Bach's chapter reads, "In this central scene, vv 14-35, Kyle McCarter's sensitive translation reads with Vaticanus against Alexandrinus and Venetus and against MT, eliminating the name of Nabal. Thus, the name Nabal is not spoken by either the servants, Abigail, or David, until the potentially violent situation has been resolved. The loss of his name reflects the loss of his status, as well as his importance to the story. By removing his name, McCarter has emphasized the loss of the power Nabal possessed at the beginning of the narrative. See McCarter, I Samuel, pgs. 306-308.

²⁸ Alice Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," in Alice Bach, editor, *The Pleasures of Her Text, Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), pgs. 26-27.

estate. David through Nabal's widow gains some legitimacy and for a time rules the territory of Hebron. Nonetheless, fearing for his life, David eventually flees to Gath. Later he will return to Hebron, and as the husband of Abigail will rule there for many years. He was anointed King of Judah there, and negotiated with Abner for control of the remainder of the tribes. He took Michal there. From Hebron he captured Jerusalem and made it the capital of Israel (2 Sam 2-5).

Abigail's beauty is praised in the rabbinic literature. Alongside Sarah, Rahab, and Esther, she is one of the four most beautiful women in the world. She inspired desire.²⁹ The holy spirit, *Ruah haKodesh* alighted upon her when she told David that he would be bound up in the bonds of eternal life.³⁰

Abigail is credited with being a prophet for foreseeing David's kingship.³¹ Likewise, Abigail's wisdom is praised by the rabbis,³² as is her piety.³³ In her piety she is known as the 'eshet hayil' – capable wife - of Proverbs (31:10).

While 'Abigail did more good for David than all the sacrifices in the world' because she saved him from bloodguilt, nonetheless she is not without reprimand. When she approached David and asked him to remember her (1 Sam 25:31) she exceeded her boundaries. David credits God for her actions, not her, though he tells her that she is worthy of blessing.³⁴

AHINOAM: THE QUEEN

'[Abigail] went after the messengers of David and became his wife. David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel; both became his wives' (1 Sam. 25:42-43). King Saul's wife was named Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz (1 Sam. 14:50); who is this Ahinoam? If she is Saul's wife then David marrying her would be tantamount to a declaration of his intent to usurp Saul's power and replace him as king.

Could this also explain what fuels Michal's rage at David in 2 Samuel 6:16-20; Michal finding her mother in David's bed.

²⁹ Babylonian Talmud Megillah 15a.

³⁰ Midrash Rabbah Ecclesiastes 3.21.

³¹ Babylonian Talmud Megillah 14a.

³² Babylonian Talmud Megillah 14a-b.

³³ Mishna Sanhedrin 2.4; Babylonian Talmud Baba Metzia 115a.

³⁴ Midrash Rabbah Psalms 53.1.

Is it reasonable that these are two different women with the same very odd name; the brother of Noam? (The name Ahimaatz appears one of the more popular names in the Bible. It appears as three different persons, one the father of Ahinoam, secondly the son of Zadok who wishes to run to tell David of Absalom's death - 2 Sam. 18:19 and third Solomon's son-in-law – 1 Kings 4:15.) Given the uniqueness of the name it appears possible that David married Saul's wife.³⁵ But Saul is still alive!³⁶ In the following verse we are told that David married Ahinoam and Saul arranges a second marriage for Michal to Palti ben-Laish (25:43-44). Was Saul reacting to David's kidnapping his wife? Was the narrator applying the Talmudic principle of *midah q'neged midah*, ('measure for measure'? Or as the proverb says 'what is good for the goose is good for the gander'?

When Nathan, the prophet admonishes David for having taken Bathsheba he says in the name of God 'I gave you your master's household and your master's wives into your arms' (2 Sam. 12:8). The master is clearly Saul. What does 'wives' imply if not that Ahinoam, wife of Saul, became David's wife? After Saul and Ish-bosheth's deaths David may have taken their concubines but nothing in the text suggests that. The only known concubine of Saul, Rizpah was taken by Abner (3:7) and David allowed her children (as well as Merab's) to be killed by the Gibeonites (2 Sam. 21:8-9). In one of Saul's angry outbursts against Jonathan he calls him the 'son of a rebellious woman . . . to the shame of your mother nakedness' (1 Sam. 20:30); the latter phrase refers to adultery. Is Saul referring to his wife who went with David?³⁷

Did David with his enormous charm and magnetic charisma succeed in seducing Michal and Ahinoam? Is it possible that Michal's rage noted above is a reaction to finding her mother in David's bed? Did David inherit or kidnap Saul's wife and then marry her as a partial means of obtaining his kingship?

Alternatively if Ahinoam is not Saul's wife David's taking additional wives could be considered by Saul and Michal as a rejection of the Saulide connection and the creation of a new alliance with Abigail and Hebron.

³⁵ Jon Levenson, CBQ, pgs. 27-28 and James C. Vandererkam, David's Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal, Journal of Biblical Literature, vol. 99/4, 1980, pg. 528.

³⁶ The order of events in the bible are not considered necessarily valid as it is not intended as history.

³⁷ Levenson and Halpern, JBL, pg. 515; also Jon D. Levenson, '1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History,' Catholic Bible Quarterly, 40.1 (1978), pg. 27.

As Jo Ann Hackett stated 'Because the text does not identify Ahinoam more explicitly, these possibilities [that they are the same person] must remain speculations, however tantalizing'.³⁸

MAACAH – A PRINCESS

Maacah, David's fourth wife was the daughter of Talmai, King of Geshur. The major city of Geshur was Tel Masos an important Philistine trading center, bordering on Hebron. A relationship with Geshur would have been important for the Hebron state that David established after marrying Abigail and taking over her property.

Maacah is the mother of Absalom who attempted the most serious rebellion against David. The rebellion came several years after his half brother Amnon (daughter of Ahinoam), then the heir apparent to his father, raped his half sister and the full sister to Absalom. After waiting two years Absalom had Amnon killed at a feast he had arranged for all of David's sons (2 Sam. 13:23-29).³⁹ Absalom fled to Geshur and stayed at the palace of his maternal grandfather for three years until Joab (David's military advisor) convinced David to allow his return to Jerusalem. After two more years David allowed Joab to reconcile him with Absalom and they saw each other. After two additional years Absalom went to Hebron and raised an army and rebelled against his father. His rebellion was almost successful; 'the hearts of the Israelites have gone after Absalom' (2 Sam. 15:13).

BATHSHEBA: LUST

The Early Bathsheba:

The events of David's liaison with and subsequent marriage to Bathsheba are among the most morally problematic events in David's life. The terms rape, coercion, power imbalance, seduction, sexual harassment, never mind adultery, treachery, betrayal and outright murder are all relevant words to describe what certainly begins as a very sordid time in this monarch's life. The fact that the Bathsheba affair appears only in the book of Samuel, and not in Chronicles, which essentially covers much of the same timeframe, is instructive in its own right.⁴⁰ For the Chronicler, the

³⁸ Hackett, pg. 92.

³⁹ Moshe Reiss, "Strife in the household of David" Jewish Bible Quarterly Oct. 2000.

⁴⁰ Bathsheba's name does not even appear in Chronicles. Though reference is made to the mother of Solomon, she is called Bath-shua, and there her father is called Ammiel (1 Chron. 3:5). In Samuel, she is the daughter of Eliam (2 Sam 11:3).

Bathsheba affair was an embarrassment, something to be excised from the royal record.

Briefly described, Bathsheba's rise to power as David's wife begins when the monarch literally sees her from his rooftop. She was bathing, perhaps purifying herself following her menstrual period (2 Sam 11:2, 4). David inquires about her, and finds out that she is the wife of one of his prominent soldiers, Uriah the Hittite, who conveniently is off fighting a war on David's behalf. The text makes clear that David is no longer a warrior, 'when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him' (2 Sam. 11:1).

Bathsheba's wedded state notwithstanding, 'David sent messengers to fetch her; she came to him and he lay with her – she . . . conceived, and [later] sent word to David, "I am pregnant"' (2 Sam 11:4-5).⁴¹ (She sent messengers just as David had.) David, certainly anxious to conceal this liaison orders her husband to return home. David expects Uriah to cohabit with his wife and thus it will appear that he is the father of the unborn child. The warrior refuses, claiming that he is on official military duty. When David questions why this behavior, he responds that it is unthinkable for him to go to the pleasures of his home and wife while Israel and its Ark are in danger of war. Uriah, a Hittite shows himself to be a loyal citizen (despite not being a Hebrew), a self-sacrificing soldier, one of David's elite guards.⁴² Alternatively, could it be that Uriah suspected his wife and David's cuckolding?⁴³ The text of course, is criticizing David for not leading his army in battle and instead sleeping with the wife of one of his soldiers who is engaging the enemy. When that tack fails, David send a message to his chief general Joab, that Joab should place Uriah in the thick of the battle so that the Hittite will be killed, and so it happens.

⁴¹ We do not know how long Bathsheba had been married to Uriah but she appears to have been a childless woman until David. Lillian R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther, Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), pg. 56.

⁴² 'Uriah was one of David's elite warriors, the Thirty (2 Sam. 23:39); it does not follow that from his designation as 'the Hittite' that he was a mercenary or even a foreigner. That fact that he has a good Yahwistic name ('Uriya, 'Yahveh is my light') suggests that he was born in Israel.' P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel, Anchor Bible*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), pg. 285 n. 3.

⁴³ George G. Nicol, 'David, Abigail and Bathsheba, Nabal and Uriah: Transformations Within a Triangle,' *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, 12.1 (1998), pgs. 138-143.

Upon learning of her husband's death, Bathsheba mourns him, but then David sends for her, lays with her (the Hebrew is 'harvested her'), she becomes his wife and bears his son (2 Sam 11:26-27).

Did Bathsheba understand the relationship between her husband's death and David? How did she reconcile herself to her husband's death/murder? The Bible is silent on these matters.

The next chapter features the prophet Nathan reprimanding King David for this adulterous union. Nathan purposely disguises the details of the story, and David in self-righteous anger condemns the supposed villain, only to find out, in Nathan's words, 'That man is you!' (2 Sam 12:7). The upshot is that some time later the child of this adulterous union becomes seriously ill. David entreats God on the child's behalf, but to no avail. The age of the child at his death is not addressed. Some time later, David sleeps again with Bathsheba and she bears another son, whom she names Solomon.

What of this young and beautiful woman-married-to-Uriah who was taken to David's bed? Did she go willingly? Was this an example of a woman who lusted for charismatic David, or lusted for power, even as David clearly lusted physically for her? Was she a latter-day Abigail (who also was married when she met David), who saw this as an opportunity to become the king's mistress, and perhaps his wife? 'David sent messengers to fetch her; she came to him and he lay with her' (2 Sam 11:4).

Broadly, there are two schools of thought on this subject. Some scholars, both male and female, suggest that Bathsheba is at least as interested in David, as he is interested in her. They suggest that it is unclear whether any force, or minimal persuasion was exerted on the part of David. A modern scholar writes of 'Bathsheba's complicity in the sexual adventure' but notes that her motivation may be to bear a child – for she seems to have been childless before her encounter with David – 'rather than merely participate in an adulterous (lustful) act.'⁴⁴ Another raises the 'possible element of female flirtation.'⁴⁵ Did Bathsheba plan, or agree to this liaison; thus is she equally guilty of adultery? Did she not know that the king could see her bathing from his roof? Why would she stand naked and bathe potentially in sight of the king if he were on his roof? Might it be considered that she seduced him?

⁴⁴ Klein, *Sexual Politics*, pg. 56. This chapter, 'Bathsheba Revealed,' appeared earlier in Athalya Brenner, Editor, *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), pgs. 47-64.

⁴⁵ Hans William Hertzberg, I and II Samuel, Trans. J. S. Bowden, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), pg. 309.

Those who see her complicit in this affair follow the reasoning that the text 'suggests a woman who has her eye on the main chance, and it is possible that opportunism, not merely passive submission, explains the behavior here.'⁴⁶ Perhaps she was working toward a 'political marriage' and so was 'a willing and equal partner to the events which transpire.'⁴⁷

Another author writes that there 'is no evidence that she is ever less than a willing participant in their adultery.'⁴⁸ Yet, a different source hints at the power differential between David and Bathsheba. Though these authors claim, 'that she came at his request and without any hesitation . . . in any case the greatest guilt rests upon David . . . that he did not resist the temptation to the lust of the flesh.'⁴⁹

Other scholars, often feminists both female and male, see the early Bathsheba as someone caught up in an intrigue not of her own making. 'Bathsheba is pictured as almost entirely passive in this episode . . . she is always spoken of in the third person . . . The narrative does not seem to hold her responsible for her actions with David, and the punishment that is meted out, that their child should die, is aimed by Yahweh and Nathan at David, not Bathsheba.'⁵⁰ A common interpretation is that David exploited his power as ruler, and simply took Bathsheba because he could do so. In short, he sexually exploited even raped Bathsheba.⁵¹ As one scholar noted, 'David is hardly passive: He is a *taker* . . . The king who *takes* is the king of I Sam 8:11-17, about whom the prophet Samuel warned the people'

⁴⁶ Robert Alter, 'The David Story: A Translation with Commentary', (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), pg. 251.

⁴⁷ Randall C. Bailey, 'David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12'. Supplement series 75. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), pg. 88.

⁴⁸ George G. Nicol in 'The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba: Some Observations on Ambiguity in Biblical Narrative,' Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 73 (March 1997), pg. 50.

⁴⁹ C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, 'Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel', Trans. James Martin, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 [1872]), pg. 383.

⁵⁰ Hackett, pg. 92.

⁵¹ Alice Bach, Women, 'Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pgs. 137, 149-150. See David Jobling who writes of 'David's rape of Bathsheba, a married woman, and his murder of her husband.' 'Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry: 1 Samuel', (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), pg. 160.

(emphasis in original).⁵² Put another way, 'Bathsheba [is] a casualty of David's sexual imperialism.'⁵³ She can be seen is a victim of Power Rape.⁵⁴

The Hebrew of 2 Samuel 11:4 is so ambiguous, that either explanation is possible. As has been suggested, there are "an elaborate system of gaps between what is told and what must be inferred [and this] has been artfully contrived to leave us with at least two conflicting, mutually complicating interpretations of the motives and states of knowledge of the principal characters."⁵⁵

Bathsheba is named as the daughter of Eliam (2 Sam. 11: 3) himself the son of Ahithophel one of David's counselors (2 Sam. 23:34); a powerful family. In Chronicles she is called Bat Shua daughter of Ammiel (I Ch. 3:5). (The Hebrew spelling of the names Eliam and Ammiel are identical the same letters are merely scrambled and re-arranged.)

Ahitophel an advisor of David went over to Absalom's side during his attempted coup d'etat. His advice to Absalom to immediately attack David was rejected; the text suggests that had it been taken Absalom would have succeeded in defeating David (2 Sam. 16:20-17:22).

Did Ahitophel rejection of David and joining Absalom have to do with his disappointment at the way David treated his granddaughter Bathsheba and son-in-law Uriel? Did he think his grand daughter had been sexually exploited and his son-in-law allowed to die? In the rebellion Ahithopel recommended to Absalom that he publicly go into his father's concubines (2 Sam. 16:21). Was this his revenge? When Absalom failed Ahithopel hung himself (2 Sam. 17:23).

The Later Bathsheba:

Perhaps twenty or more years pass. Bathsheba and Solomon drop out of sight. The biblical text focuses instead on the complicated life of David, including wars and rebellions. Then, in the opening two chapters of 1

⁵² McCarter, II Samuel, pg. 290.

⁵³ Bach, 'The Pleasure of Her Text,' pg. 36.

⁵⁴ That Bathsheba is the victim of a Power Rape is argued convincingly by Richard M. Davidson, 'Did King David Rape Bathsheba?: A Case Study in Narrative,' Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 17/2 (Autumn 2006), pp. 81-95, see in particular pgs. 82, 87.

⁵⁵ Alter, Biblical Narrative, 18. See also Meir Sternberg, 'The Poetics of Biblical Narrative', (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1985), pgs. 190-222.

Kings, Bathsheba reappears. Through some careful machinations where she is aided and abetted by, of all people, the prophet Nathan (who earlier had harsh words about her liaison with David), Bathsheba sees to it that her son Solomon will succeed David upon the monarch's death.

Over the twenty years, Bathsheba certainly found her voice, and the mature woman presented in Kings is very politically astute. While a good case can be made that the early Bathsheba was an innocent, or at worst, a bit naïve, the Bathsheba of the book of Kings is someone who knows how to make her way through the corridors of power. She clearly has friends, and knows how to influence events. One motivating factor for her was she understood that if she did not act for her son Solomon, and for herself, that their very lives were in danger. It likely was act or be killed so that they would not be a threat to another faction who desired the throne.

The context for Bathsheba's reappearance (in the first chapter of First Kings) is that Haggith's son Adonijah went about boasting that he would succeed his father who clearly was in decline.

.Adonijah [David's eldest living son] . . . conferred with [David's chief general] Joab . . .and with the priest Abiathar, and they supported Adonijah; but the high priest Zadok ⁵⁶ , Benaiah [another prominent

⁵⁶**David appoints an unknown Priest Zadok from Hebron as one of his High Priests (2 Sam. 20:25). Zadok is noted as the son of Ahitub, son of Ahimelech, son of Abiathar who was a descendant of Eli, the priest at Shiloh (2 Sam. 8:17) who trained Samuel (1 Sam. Chapters 2-3). Josephus stated that Zadok was from the house of Eleazor, the third son of Aaron. However others see Zadok as a Jebusite priest co-opted by David into the Israelite religion. In this version he is related to Malkizedek. While this for obvious reasons is controversial, it has support. (H.R.Hall, 'Melchizedek and Zadok' in Peake, A.S., ed. 'The People and the Book' (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1925); Bentzen, Aage, 'Studier over det zadokiiske praesteskabs historie' (Kobenhavn, G.E.C. 1931); Rowley, 'Zadok'; Olyan, Saul, 'Zadok's Origin and the Tribal Politics of David', JBL, 1982, Vol. 101; Hauer, 'Who was Zadok'.)It was first elaborated by Hall in a 1938 article. He suggests that when David put the Ark in Jerusalem and took the tent and 'set it in its place' (2 Sam. 6:17), the place was the Jesubite sanctuary. Later in the Absalom rebellion David says to Zadok carry the Ark back to Jerusalem and place it in 'its dwelling place' (2 Sam. 15:25). Zadok is very important together with the prophet Nathan as well as Bathsheba in negotiating that Solomon will succeed his father David over his half brother Adonijah. Was this because Solomon was a Jerusalemite and therefore more supportive of the Jebusites than would Adonijah a supporter of the Hebron/Judaeans?**

general], the prophet Nathan, Shimei and Rei, and David's own fighting men did not side with Adonijah. Adonijah made a [celebratory] sacrificial feast of sheep, oxen, and fatlings . . . he invited all his brother princes and all the king's courtiers of the tribe of Judah, but he did not invite the prophet Nathan, or Benaiah, or the fighting men, or his brother Solomon' (1 Kings 1:5, 7-10).

At least two factions were engaged in a rivalry for the succession to David's throne. One group was exclusively from the tribe of Judah including David's nephew and primary military advisor Joab. A second opposing group contained Benjaminites, including Shimei who was a powerful captain of men of Benjamin who joined with David after the Absalom revolt (2 Sam 19:17). This second group was joined by Nathan and the 'mighty men' from David's tribe of Judah.

The prophet Nathan urges Bathsheba to inform David of Adonijah's attempt to usurp the succession without the monarch's knowledge. He tells her to act, lest she forfeit her life and that of Solomon. Nathan then shares insider knowledge, for there is no such previous dialogue in the biblical text. Nathan says to Bathsheba:

'Go immediately to King David and say to him, "Did not you, O lord king, swear to your maidservant: 'Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit upon my throne'? Then why has Adonijah become king?"' (1 Kings 1:13)

Nathan then shrewdly follows this advice with the statement that as soon as she has said this to David, Nathan himself will join Bathsheba and David and confirm this conversation.

Not only does Bathsheba go to see David, but also she elaborates eloquently and suggests to David that his will is being usurped by Adonijah's hasty action. She then suggests to David he must choose now or she and her son may well face their death.

As scholars have noted, a difficulty is that nowhere in the biblical text does it say or imply that David promised the succession to Solomon. Did David promise this, or did Nathan being a prophet, forecast what was to be?

In Bathsheba's repetition of Nathan's instructions, she introduces one small but revealing addition: she claims that David swore to her about

Solomon's succession 'by the Lord [his] God,' which would indicate a higher order of binding solemnity to the vow (1 Kings 1:17). Then Nathan enters and states 'You have not told your servants who should sit in the throne of my lord the King after him' (27). This is clearly not a designation of Adijonah as the successor king. David after he has been persuaded by Bathsheba and Nathan that he did make such a vow says 'As I swore to you by the Lord of Israel, "Solomon your son will reign after me"' (30) giving that solemn vow the concluding flourish of an official pronouncement.⁵⁷

Bathsheba's visit to David is successful. Solomon is proclaimed ruler and Adonijah has to back down from his claim. In the next chapter, Adonijah displays incredible naïveté when he asks Bathsheba the Queen Mother (!) to go to her son Solomon the king, and to ask Solomon to give Abishag the Shunnamite, David's latest female companion, to him (Adonijah) as a wife. In the context of biblical thought, this would be tantamount to saying that Adonijah was the rightful successor to David. Solomon immediately grasps the situation. He states that this is the equivalent of insurrection and a revolt against the lawful throne. Consequently, from his perspective he wisely orders Adonijah's immediate execution (1 Kings 2:13-25).

When Bathsheba entered the biblical stage, one way to understand her role is that of a passive figure, overwhelmed by the call of the king. Whether she welcomed David's approach, or even sought out his attention, is a matter of speculation as noted earlier in this article.

Here, in First Kings she acts decisively and judiciously. She is a woman on a mission. She knows what she wants, and she is determined to achieve her goals. In protecting her son (and her own life), Bathsheba is direct, resourceful and calculating. She clearly outmaneuvers Adonijah, his mother Haggith and his supporters.

In the final scene where she appears, Solomon bows to his mother and has a throne brought for her to sit on his right (1 Kings 2:19). Bathsheba is clearly the most successful of David's wives.

In the opening scenes, David's lust for Bathsheba is evident. Bathsheba's lust for David, or her lust for power, or her lust for both David and power, is a matter of speculation. In the matter of the royal succession, Bathsheba's lust for power, and certainly her strong desire to have Solomon succeed his father on the throne, is evident.

⁵⁷ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, pgs. 98-99.

David's behavior regarding Bathsheba presented serious problems for the traditional rabbis. The vast majority adopted an apologetic stance. They whitewashed the adulterous union suggesting that in those days soldiers wrote out a bill of divorce before they went into battle. Therefore, technically Uriah and Bathsheba were not married at the time she got pregnant by David. This same source accuses Uriah of insubordination for disobeying his king and not visiting Bathsheba.⁵⁸ A different source quotes two rabbinic opinions, which suggest that Bathsheba was preordained to marry David from the very six days of creation. The only fault was that he had intercourse with her before she became his legitimate wife.⁵⁹

Yet, another rabbinic source considers David's affair with Bathsheba and his causing Uriah's death to be two of David's sins.⁶⁰ One well known medieval commentator rejected the apologetics and simply accepted that David sinned five times, including having adulterous relations, attempting to distort the parentage of the child, shedding blood, bringing about Uriah's death by Israel's enemies, and marrying Bathsheba after only a short period of time.⁶¹

A different rabbinic source puts the blame of this encounter entirely on David. In this case, David asked that God test him as God had tested Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God does test David, but he fails and commits adultery with Bathsheba. In this source, Bathsheba was modestly bathing behind a screen. David, however, takes an arrow and shoots it, unintentionally breaking down that screen, or perhaps knocking it over, and sees Bathsheba naked.⁶²

The rabbis do suggest that in her later life, Bathsheba was concerned with religious matters, for she chastised Solomon for his not being attentive to his religious duties.⁶³

CONCLUSION:

⁵⁸ Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 56a and Baba Metzia 59a.

⁵⁹ Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 107a.

⁶⁰ Babylonian Talmud Yoma 22b and Yoma 66b.

⁶¹ Comment on 2 Samuel 11:4 by Isaac Abravanel, (1437-1508); A. J. Rosenberg, Editor, M. C. Sovesky, Translation and Commentary, Samuel 2, (New York: Judaica Press, 1981 [1978]), pg. 317.

⁶² Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 107a.

⁶³ Midrash Rabbah Lev. 12.5; Midrash Rabbah Num. 10.4.

David's relationship with women is surprising and problematical as a model for a Hebrew leader; eight wives and ten concubines he seem to resemble a profile of an Oriental Monarch rather than of a righteous leader. Robert Alter suggest David is the 'first full length portrait of a Machievellian Prince in Western literature'.⁶⁴ From a literature perspective women seem defined 'as foils for David's development'⁶⁵ not as separate individuals with the possible exception of Abigail.

Are the narratives of David history, as we understand history today? The authors of this article consider the Bible a text, inspired by God, and written by human beings, women and men searching for an understanding of their relationship with the divine. Yet, this is a special kind of history. Historical reporting in the commonly understood sense of history is not the central goal of the biblical text. 'Although the first large part of its text, Genesis through Kings, does recount a kind of history of the Israelite people, from its origins down to the sixth century B.C.E., it is history with a purpose: an account of the dealings of Israel with its God . . . In the end, the Bible is primarily concerned with who Israel is and what its obligations are. Some history can be gleaned from the text, but the historian must do his/her work with great care.'⁶⁶

Further, rabbinic commentators and interpreters have not always accepted the same view or logic we modern readers accept. "They assumed that the Bible was a fundamentally cryptic text: that is, when it said A, often it might really mean B. . . Interpreters also assumed that the Bible was a book of lessons directed to readers in their own day. It may seem to talk about the past, but it is not fundamentally history."⁶⁷

All five of David's marriages assisted his rise to power, Michal and Ahinoam, Queen and Princess, Abigail, a power in Hebron and Maacah, the Princess of the neighboring land. These marriages increased his power and his eventual reign and helped him gain ascendancy over Saul and his descendants. 'Bathsheba came from a politically influential family.'⁶⁸ Her father (and late husband) are part of The Thirty, David's Counselors/Special Body Guards (2 Sam 11:3; 23:34,39). These wives assured that the Davidic line would continue through his designated successor.

⁶⁴ Alter, David Story, Pg. XVIII.

⁶⁵ Alice Bach, Women, 'Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative' (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997) pgs. 145-146.

⁶⁶ Everett Fox, 'The Bible and Its World, The Schocken Guide to Jewish Books', ed. Barry W. Holtz, (New York: Schocken, 1992), pgs. 29-30.

⁶⁷ James L. Kugel, 'How To Read The Bible', (New York: Free Press, 2007), pgs. 14-15.

⁶⁸ Bailey, 'David in Love and War', pg. 87.

As a young man David was anointed by Samuel in view of his entire family and “the spirit of the LORD gripped David from that day on” (1 Sam 16:13). Yet he never seemed to embrace that act. He aggressively sought out power in order to guarantee his rule. Did David not understand that being anointed by Samuel guaranteed his future kingship? Was he too impatient to let God’s plan materialize?

In terms of David’s wives, even though there are only ‘fragmented episodes about the women, there are full reports of how David gets these wives: Michal through violence against the Philistines; Abigail through withholding violence against Nabal; Bathsheba through violence against Uriah.’⁶⁹ Bach does not in her article does not mention Ahinoam nor Maacah.

David also taught his son and successor Solomon, the importance of political marriages. Solomon married women from the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonites, Hittites, Egyptians and many other lands.
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Absalom named his daughter after his mother Maacah. She married Solomon’s son Rehoboam and consolidated Bathsheba’s power base (the Jerusalemites) with the Hebronites. Given that Absalom was long since dead did Maacah, the mother help arrange this marriage? Rehoboam also married another grand daughter of David; Mahalot the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David as well as a David’s niece Abigail the daughter of Eliab, David’s brother (2 Chron. 11:18-20); all this no doubt approved by Solomon. One might ask why Rehobaum, a grandson of David needed further connections with David; if there where any doubt as to Solomon’s paternity – could Uriel, the Hittite be Solomon’s father – then absolute connections with David might be considered necessary.

Thus we have inter-dynastic as well as intra-dynastic marriages building up the Davidic House.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Bach, ‘The Pleasure of Her Text,’ pg. 36.

⁷⁰ A. Malamat, ‘Aspects of the Foreign Policies of David and Solomon’, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Jan. 1983, XXII/1, Pg. 8-18..

⁷¹ Hermann Michael Niemann, ‘Choosing Brides for the Crown Prince’, *VT* 2006, Vol. 56