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ABSTRACT

SEXUALITY AND POLITICS : THE MOTIF OF THE DISPLACED HUSBAND IN 1-2 SAMUEL

John A. Kessler, Ontario Theological Seminary, Toronto, Ontario,
Canada.

In 1-2 Samuel, three of David's marriages involve the displacement of the male protagonist and the subsequent appropriation of the latter's wife. This study (1) traces the dramatic progression in these three "displacement accounts" (1 Sam 25; 2 Sam 3: 1-16; 2 Sam 11-12) and (2) discusses their narrative and theological function. A clear dramatic progression emerges via each account's characterization of David, of the displaced husband, and of the ambiance of the ruptured marriage. In 1 Sam 25 David acts honourably, the dissolved marriage is negatively portrayed, and the displaced male is vilified. 2 Sam 3: 1-16 is more critical of David. David who has six other wives, acts from political motives, and occasions great sorrow and humiliation for the male protagonist, for whom the termination of the marriage represents great loss. Significant parallels exist between the

humiliation of Paltiel and Tamar. In 2 Sam 11-12, David is vilified, the male protagonist is idealized and the former conjugal relationship is portrayed as intimate and warm. When read together, these three accounts, despite their disparate origins, relate to three broader theological preoccupations in the Deuteronomistic History. (1) The narratives reflect deuteronomistic anti-monarchical sentiment, specifically in relation to royal polygamy. (2) The narratives manifest two competing views of marriage and sexuality. One view sees them as a means of defining political status, akin to the instances in Samuel-Kings where individuals display their superiority through the sexual appropriation of their rivals' wives. The other views them as a locus of nurture and attachment. Given that the text associates both visions with YHWH, hermeneutical reflection is required to determine whether one or the other is affirmed or critiqued. (3) The narratives portray an individual who sins grievously against YHWH, yet is allowed to live, albeit under judgment. Such a perspective would be particularly apposite for an exilic audience.

SEXUALITY AND POLITICS : THE MOTIF OF THE DISPLACED HUSBAND IN 1-2 SAMUEL

A common response of those who undertake a close reading of 1-2 Samuel is the dichotomy between the David of the confessional statements of both the biblical text and the church, and the character of the man David that appears in the narrative.¹ David is called a man after Yahweh's own heart (1 Sam 13:14), and given such honorific titles such as the servant of Yahweh² and the anointed of Yahweh.³ The NT is equally eulogistic in its praise of David.⁴ Yet despite these positive statements, the narratives paint a very different portrait of David. Recent scholarly literature has underlined the narrative's

¹ The literature on this point is extensive and the scholarly path well worn. See, for example, D. L. Petersen, "Portraits of David: Canonical and Otherwise", Interpretation 40 (1986): 130-142; L. G. Perdue, "Is There Anyone Left of the House of Saul ...?: Ambiguity and the Characterization of David in the Succession Narrative", JSOT 30 (1984): 67-84.

² 2 Sam 3:18; 7:5.8.26.

³ 2 Sam 12:7; 22:51; 23:1.

critique of David for his ruthless political ambition⁵ and his ineptitude in family relationships,⁶ both of which impinge on each other.⁷

It is of significant note that in the course of his career David appropriates to himself the wives of three other men (Abigail, Michal, Bathsheba). This appropriation is accomplished by means of the “displacement” of the three husbands in question (Nabal, Paltiel,

⁴ Lk 20:41; Ac 13:22-36.

⁵So, for example, J. D. Levenson, “1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History”, in Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives, ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros-Louis, pp. 220-242, Nashville: Abingdon, 1982; J. D. Levenson, and B. Halpern. “The Political Import of David's Marriages”, JBL 99 (1980): 507-18; N.P. Lemche, “David's Rise”, JSOT 10 (1978): 2-25.

⁶ J. W. Whedbee, “On Divine and Human Bonds: The Tragedy of the House of David”, in Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs, ed. G. M. Tucker, D. L. Petersen, and R. R. Wilson. pp. 147-165, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988; Petersen, “Portraits”, p. 137-38.

⁷ D. M. Gunn, “In Security: The David of Biblical Narrative”, in Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus, ed. J. C. Exum. pp. 133-51. Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1989.

Uriah) and the dissolution of the existing family units.⁸ Even more striking is the fact that, despite the disparate origins and differing purposes of the narratives of these three “displacement” marriages, these three episodes appear to constitute a clear progression and to carry significant theological import. This study will attempt: (1) to trace the dramatic progression in these three “displacement narratives”; and, (2) to inquire after their narrative and theological function in the text as we have it.

I. DRAMATIC PROGRESSION IN THE NARRATIVES OF DAVID’S “DISPLACEMENT” MARRIAGES

A clear narrative/dramatic progression is evident when one observes three features of the marriages dissolved by David: (1) the characterization of David; (2) the characterization of the displaced male protagonist; and, (3) the portrayal of the ambiance of the relationship between the displaced male and his wife. It might be objected that such a reading is inappropriate given the disparate

⁸ A very few commentators, such as Lemche, “David’s Rise”, p. 7, have noted this phenomenon in passing, but without comment.

origins of the material.⁹ One can, however, account for the narrative progression on the basis of subsequent redactional activity, or even the fruit of pure chance when the narratives were placed together. It may even be that source critical readings simply “miss the forest in their pursuit of the trees”.¹⁰ Some of the contrasting features of the Abigail and Bathsheba narratives have been noted.¹¹ This study will

⁹ Generally, the Abigail narrative is said to be part of the History of David’s Rise, the Uriah/Bathsheba section, a part of the Throne Succession Narrative, and the Michal stories of composite and diverse origin. See Lemche, “David’s Rise”, p. 2-5; R. P. Gordon “David's Rise and Saul's Demise : Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24-26”, TB 31 (1980): 37-41; P. Kyle McCarter Jr., 1 Samuel. AB, New York: Doubleday, 1980, p. 27-30 and idem 11 Samuel. AB, New York: Doubleday, 1984, p. 4-13. McCarter appears to attribute all of the Michal material to the History of David’s Rise, with the exception of 6:20-23. With Rost and others he considers 6:20-23 to have no clear connection to the rest of 2 Sam 6. He takes no clear position on its origin.

¹⁰ As suggested by I. Provan, with regard to the issue of wisdom in 1 Ki 1-6, SBL, San Francisco, 1997.

¹¹ Levenson, “1 Samuel 25”, p. 237; Gunn, “David of Biblical Narrative”, p. 139; M. Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative. Bloomington: Indiana

seek to integrate the Michal/Paltiel material into the discussion and note the overall progression that appears.

A. 1 Sam 25. Abigail/Nabal/David

The first triangle occurs in 1 Sam 25. Abigail and Nabal form the union which will be dissolved. Nabal, the displaced male is clearly *vilified* in the text. The relationship between Nabal and Abigail is one of *disrespect, alienation and hostility*. The reader sees these characteristics primarily (though not exclusively) through the eyes of Abigail, by means of her description of her husband. David's activity is *irreproachable*. His stance is one of *passivity* in that the displacement of the husband is the result of divine intervention. David is innocent in the matter; he waits for Yahweh to act.

The text unfolds as follows. Nabal is introduced as an extremely rich man (25:2). The contrast between Nabal and Abigail is put in stark relief by their relative characterizations 25:3. Abigail is intelligent and beautiful.¹² The use of the adjectival phrase “of good understanding”

University Press, 1987, p. 357; A. Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983, p. 25-31.

¹² tobat-sekel.

before beautiful adumbrates Abigail's activity in the narrative, and underlines her function as a wisdom figure.¹³

By contrast, Nabal is a harsh man¹⁴ whose deeds violate expected behavioural norms.¹⁵ As Abigail's wisdom unfolds in the subsequent narrative, so does Nabal's lack thereof. The latter's socially offensive behaviour is manifested by his refusal to recompense David's men for the protection afforded to his shepherds (v. 14-16, 21). According to Lemche and Gunn, David is running what

¹³ For tobat sekel as a wisdom attribute cf. the closely related phrase skl tob in Ps 111:10; Pr 13:15 and 2 Chr 30:22. Cf. also skl in Pr 12:8; 16:22; 23:9; 1 Chr 22: 12 and 2 Chr 2:11.

¹⁴ qsh, which in Samuel-Kings usually designates harshness of speech or intent, 1 Sam 20:10; 1 Ki 12: 13; 1 Ki 14:6, cf. Gordon, "David's Rise" p. 50-51 who notes the contrast between the designations of Abigail and Nabal, the meaning of nbl, and its relationship to wisdom concepts in general.

¹⁵ Cf. Dt 28: 20; Jr 4: 4; 7:5; 23:2.22; Hos 9:15; Ps 28:4 where the terms r' and m'lllym are paired and describe covenant violation. The narrator probably uses the expression here to express violation of expected social duties.

amounts to a protection racket¹⁶ and his request for his herdsmen is simply an extortion demand. Levenson affirms that David may have provoked the conflict with Nabal due to the latter's great wealth.¹⁷ I will return to the question of the legitimacy of this reconstruction below.

The narrator's estimation of Nabal (v.3) is reinforced by one of his own herdsmen who characterizes him as a "son of Belial" to whom no one can talk (v. 17). This places Nabal, in the context of 1-2 Samuel with such reprobates as Eli's sons (I Sam 2: 12), the ingrates who snubbed Saul's anointing (I Sam 10: 27) or those who were unwilling to share spoils with their companions (I Sam 30: 22). The negative characterization of Nabal is complete when his own wife repeats the servants' designation adding to it the paronomasia with reference to nabalah and her husband's name (v 25).¹⁸ The fact that nabalah (usually translated "foolishness") is no benign or amusing

¹⁶ D. A. Gunn, The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story. JSOT Supplement 14, Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1980, p. 96; Lemche, "David's Rise" p. 12.

¹⁷ Levenson, "I Samuel 25", p. 240-41.

¹⁸ On the word play, and meaning of nabalah here see Gordon, "David's Rise", p. 50-51.

quality in 1-2 Samuel is underlined by its use with reference to the act of incestual rape in 2 Sam 13: 12 (Amnon and Tamar). Abigail furthermore curses David's enemies with the fate of being "like Nabal" adumbrating the latter's untimely demise (v. 26).¹⁹

The text goes to great pains to exculpate David, and to attribute Nabal's undoing to his own folly and the hand of Yahweh. Abigail declares David to be blessed of Yahweh and heir to the throne (v. 28), and curses David's enemies (v. 26). As a result of Abigail's impassioned entreaty, David relents from the vengeance which he has planned to exact upon the household of Nabal and thereby stays free of bloodguilt and evil (v. 32-34). Nabal meanwhile enjoys a banquet fit for a king (v. 36).²⁰ The next morning, however, when his own wife²¹ apprises²² him of her actions, the impact is such that his

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 49-50.

²⁰ The use of melek here is not fortuitous. Nabal, like Saul is unfit to be king, even though he fancies himself to be worthy of a royal banquet.

²¹ Nabal's own wife's "flirting with his enemy", constitutes a major loss of honour for him. This is similar to the theme of the attachment of the members of Saul's house, specifically his own children Jonathan and Michal, to David, (cf. C. J. Exum, Tragedy and Biblical Narrative, Cambridge: Cambridge

heart which had, the night before been "merry with wine" dies within him.²³ Yet the text will not even allow Abigail to carry responsibility for Nabal's demise. As if to further distance Abigail and David from Nabal's death, the narrator affirms the latter to be the result of divine intervention. Thus, ten days later Yahweh smites Him and he dies (v. 37-38). David has been clearly vindicated by Yahweh (v. 39), and asks Abigail to be his wife (v. 40). David is thus rewarded for his restraint and innocent of blood (cf. 25: 42).

As noted above, this reconstruction is at great variance from that of those, such as Lemche, Gunn, and in some sense Levenson²⁴

University Press, 1992), which heightens the humiliation of Saul's rejection. The same dynamic comes into play here as Abigail herself informs Nabal of her beneficence to David.

²² The text is quite circumspect about what she actually says, using the very general ha debarim ha'elleh. We are thus in some doubt as to what provoked Nabal's heart attack. Whatever the case may be, it is his dullness of heart, confronted by the activity of his wife which produces the shock which incapacitates him.

²³ Heb : wayyamot libbo.

²⁴ See references above in notes 16 and 17.

who view David's activities here with a more cynical eye. Specifically it is affirmed that: (1) David's request of Nabal was nothing more than simple extortion; (2) the entire conflict with Nabal and subsequent marriage to Abigail was politically motivated; and, (3) David's response to Nabal was illegitimate and revealed the evil of his character. Regarding affirmations (1) and (2) it should be clearly noted that these reconstructions discern the self-serving nature of David's action through assumptions regarding that which lies "behind" the text rather than through the text. What is at issue here, however, is not the putative historical realities behind the text but the ideological lens through which the narrator desires the audience to look. We find no narrative clue in 1 Sam 25 that David's deportment is illegitimate. Rather the response of the herdsman and Abigail underscore the reasonable nature of David's request and the culturally offensive and irrational character of Nabal's refusal.

Objection (3) is most clearly expressed by Levenson in the section of his article dealing with the literary dimension of I Sam 25. He suggests that David's response to Nabal is "the very first revelation of evil in David's character. . . . The David, whom we glimpsed ominously but momentarily in I Samuel 25, dominates the

pivotal episode of Bathsheba and Uriah . . .".²⁵ Gunn takes a similar approach.²⁶ In our estimation this is unlikely for three reasons: (1) David's response to Nabal is rooted in the categories of shame and honour. To defend one's honour would be seen by the audience as being of a qualitatively different order than the adultery and murder of 2 Sam 11.²⁷ Abigail's suggestion that David restrain his anger in view of a higher goal is entirely in line with the general wisdom teaching on restraint of anger in cases of dispute (Pr 15: 1 etc.) or violation of honour (Ecc 6: 8-9 etc.). (2) As Gordon has demonstrated I Sam 24, 25, and 26 use the technique of narrative analogy whereby from "chapter 24 on the narrator is at great pains to show that, despite the

²⁵ Levenson, "I Samuel 25", p. 236.

²⁶ Gunn, "The David of Biblical Narrative", p. 139.

²⁷ On the categories of shame and honour see the essays in Semeia 68, 1996, (Honor and Shame in the World of the Bible), especially J. K. Chance, "The Anthropology of Honor and Shame: Culture, Values and Practice" Semeia 68 (1996): 139-152, and G. S. Stansell, "Honor and Shame in the David Narratives", Semeia 68 (1996): 55-80. Also see the insightful essay by K. Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject -- Honor, Object -- Shame?" ISOT 67 (1995): 87-107.

opportunities given, David did not take the law into his own hands. . . .The point is made in Abigail's speech that bloodguilt for anyone - even for a Nabal - could cast a shadow over David's throne at a later stage".²⁸ (3) Reading I Sam 25 as the first adumbration of David's evil would runs against the general tenor of this section of 1 Samuel, which, it is generally conceded is primarily concerned to exculpate David in his attainment of the throne.²⁹

As the section concludes, the narrator adds two parenthetical circumstantial details around this marriage to Abigail (v. 42-43): (1) David had also married Ahinoam; and, (2) Saul had given Michal to Paltiel. The fact that these two events transpire before David's marriage to Abigail is underscored grammatically by the use of two disjunctive clauses beginning with the personal names Ahinoam and Saul (the perfects in each clause thus having a pluperfect value),³⁰ as well as by the redactional comment that both Ahinoam and Abigail were his wives. Levenson and Halpern add to this the observation

²⁸ Gordon, "David's Rise", p. 39-40, 41.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 43, 52; Lemche, "David's Rise", p. 2.

³⁰ GKC, 106f.

that Ahinoam's name generally precedes Abigail's.³¹ These two bits of information serve put David's recent actions in a positive light in two regards: (1) David has not gone out collecting women indiscriminately. Although married to Ahinoam, Yahweh has vindicated him and given to him³² his enemy's wife, a beautiful, wise and intelligent woman; and, (2) David had not behaved dishonourably toward Michal, the woman who loved him and saved his life. The reader has no idea of when Saul gave Michal to Paltiel, nor whether David was aware of it. Nonetheless, the giving of Michal to Paltiel by Saul³³ has the effect of distancing David from any immediate connection to her. For the reader, Michal, at this juncture, no longer retains the functional status of David's wife.³⁴ This distancing

³¹ Levenson-Halpern, "David's Marriages", p. 513-14.

³² Cf. 2 Sam 12: 8. The significance of access to one's enemies wives will be discussed below.

³³ David rejects the right of Saul to give Michal to Paltiel, and thus the legitimacy of that union (2 Sam 3: 14). His stated reason, however, does not relate to his love for her but to his purchase of her, at great risk. Royal prerogative is clearly implied, cf. Exum, Narrative, p. 83.

³⁴ Exum, Tragedy, p. 82-83 and Clines, "The Story of Michal", p.131-32,

effectively sets the stage for David's subsequent actions regarding Michal.

B. 2 Samuel 3: 1-16. Michal/Paltiel/David

comment on the ironic dimensions of the narrative regarding Michal's ruse and David's departure. We agree that the text and the broader narrative present this as a definitive parting. It may even be possible that Michal realizes that this is a final good-bye. They are also correct in stating that David could have sent for Michal and made her a part of his retinue. Yet one wonders whether the narrator intends the hearers to pose this question at this juncture in the story. It seems to this writer that 1 Sam 18 to 25 stress Saul's insane and escalating jealousy of David, and the latter's innocence and loyalty (cf. Gordon, "David's Rise", *passim*). On a dramatic level, then, the audience may be meant to assume that Michal as a character belongs to the sphere of Saul and his influence. This is a sphere to which David can no longer return and from which he may not extricate his wife. The giving of Michal to Paltiel by Saul stresses the fact that, until the situation changes radically, Michal must remain in this sphere. Perhaps the reader is meant to assume that only after the death of Saul has the balance of power sufficiently shifted so as to permit the demand for the return of Michal.

The second union dissolved around David is that of Palti(el) and Michal. In contrast to Nabal who is vilified, Paltiel is *humiliated* in the text. The relationship between Paltiel and Michal is characterized as one of *deep attachment*. The vehicle of this perspective of the relationship is the behaviour of Paltiel when Michal is taken from him. In contrast to his marriage to Abigail, David is no longer passive, but *active at a distance*. His action in demanding Michal, while not entirely illegitimate, is certainly *suspect*.

The text unfolds as follows. 2 Sam 3 opens with a note regarding David's expanding family. We now learn that David has taken four other wives in addition to Ahinoam and Abigail (2 Sam 3: 2-5).³⁵ Abner wishes to ally himself with David. As a test of the former's good faith, David demands that he arrange Michal's return to him (2 Sam 3: 12f). This Abner does, and in doing so he severs the marriage that has been established by Saul. The act is clearly a political one on David's part. He demonstrates his authority by denying to Saul the right to appropriate Michal to another. Political power manifested

³⁵ We find Clines' suggestion ("Michal's Story, p. 135-36), that this list reflects serial polygamy interesting, but dubious.

through marriage or sexual access is, as we have seen, an important one in this narrative, and one to which we will return.

The legal status of Michal's marriage to Paltiel is ambiguous and complex. The narrative neither clearly affirms Saul's right to give Michal to Paltiel nor David's right to demand her back. Legitimate arguments could be made for both points of view;(David's abandonment constituted a divorce; David's bride price could not be abrogated). Ben-Barak's evidence regarding ANE practice with reference to missing husbands unlikely to return, while historically significant, is of secondary importance from a literary point of view.³⁶ What is at issue is not so much the legality of David's demand, but the narrator's ethical assessment of it.

In our opinion there are several textual clues regarding this assessment. Despite the fact that 2 Sam 1-8 is overwhelmingly positive regarding David's political exploits, 2 Sam 3: 2-16 provides a subtle yet striking countercurrent to the surrounding material. This

³⁶ Z. Ben-Barak, "The Legal Background to the Restoration of Michal to David" in J. A. Emerton, ed. Studies in the Historical Books of the Old Testament, SVT 30, Leiden: Brill, 1979, pp. 15-29.

can be seen in each of the three sections into which 3:1-16 falls.³⁷ In vv. 2-5 the narrator provides further details regarding David's expanding family. It is noteworthy that this mention of David's other wives and children precedes his demand for the restoration of Michal (cf. 1 Sam 25: 43-44 where such a notice follows his marriage to Abigail). Thus the audience approaches David's demand for Michal in v. 12f with the freshly acquired knowledge that the man who will deprive Paltiel of his one cherished wife already has six other wives. This motif, as is well known, re-appears in 2 Sam 11-12, with infinitely greater intensity.

The second section, vv. 6-11 describes Abner's disaffection with Ish-Bosheth. What is significant here, is that Abner and Ish-Bosheth quarrel over the same issue that will alienate Absalom and David (2 Sam 16: 20-23), and Solomon and Adonijah (1 Ki 2: 13-25): male displacement and sexual access to one's rival's wives or concubines. Abner dismisses his politically audacious act as "an offense

³⁷ The three sections are: v. 1-5; 6-11; and 12-16. The passage would appear to fit too well into its context to constitute a separate source. Nonetheless, its content would appear to be more critical of David than any other passage in the History of David's Rise.

concerning a woman”³⁸(v.8). Abner’s initiative, in slightly different guise, will be repeated in the following section.

In the third section, vv. 12-16, the reader’s uneasiness with David reaches its fullest expression. In response to Abner’s offer of allegiance, David demands the return of Michal. He describes her as “the daughter of Saul”, leaving his political purposes undisguised. His request has ultimately nothing to do with Michal as a person; she functions as an incidental pawn.³⁹ In vv. 14-15 there is an interesting play on the status of Michal. While David calls Michal “isshi” (my wife,

³⁸ ‘aon ha’issah. The wording here is interesting. We restore to the MT, with McCarter the ‘l, but find no need to delete the definite article, given that the concubine in question has been mentioned in v. 7 (cf. GKC 126d), or that the reference may be to “woman” as a general class or category (cf. GKC 126g,m,r). While it is altogether possible that ‘aon here carries its usual sense of guilt or wrong doing (thus, “You have found fault with me over an offense concerning the/this woman), it is also possible that ‘aon carries the sense of jealousy, which it does in 1 Sam 18: 9, thus rendering, “You have found fault with me because of jealousy regarding this woman.”

³⁹ Exum, Tragedy, p. 83.

3: 14), the narrator identifies her husband ('ish) as Paltiel (3:15).⁴⁰ Furthermore, in v. 15, the MT with its *lectio difficilior*, that is the repetition of me'im (from [her⁴¹]husband, from Paltiel) would appear to stress the tearing away which David's demand produced. In v. 16, this *déchirement* is expressed dramatically in the details of Michal's return to David. The scene is poignant. Paltiel is not mentioned by name, simply called "her husband".⁴² The text, by its skillful use of two infinitive absolutes (halok, bakoh) and two prepositions ('ittah, 'hryeha), depicts the painful public humiliation of Paltiel at Michal's departure in three ways: (1) He walks just behind her (cf. the traditional eastern practice of the woman walking behind the man. (2) He weeps loud and long in public. It is highly significant that virtually the same vocabulary and construction are used to describe Tamar's humiliation and walk to her home after the rape by Amnon (2 Sam 13: 19). (3) The use of the two infinitive absolutes (stressing the ongoing

⁴⁰ This stands in contrast to 1 Sam 25: 44 where the narrator describes her as David's wife, when she is given to Paltiel.

⁴¹ The 3fs pronominal suffix on wayiqqaheha most likely does "double duty", and is to be implied with reference to 'ish.

⁴² Cf. the use of 'issah for Bathsheba during the narrative of 2 Sam 11.

nature of the activity described) and the mention of Bahurim imply that Paltiel follows Michal for a significant distance.⁴³ Abner intervenes and using only two abrupt imperatives⁴⁴ sends him home. A very similar, double imperative construction is found, significantly, in Amnon's dismissal of Tamar in 2 Sam 13:15b.⁴⁵ Abner addresses Paltiel as one might command a dog. Paradigmatically speaking, the fact that Abner's words are recounted in direct discourse means that there would have been several ways in which the narrator could have softened them, had such been the intent (for example a suffixed -na',⁴⁶ or a circumlocution with a jussive and nephes). Thus, the narrator has chosen to give Abner's words their harshest formulation, thereby increasing the humiliation of Paltiel, and possibly the

⁴³ The geographical data here is difficult. Even if one accepts the MT's Bahurim it is difficult to know the starting point of the journey. Was it Gibeon, cf. 2 Sam 2:12ff (at least 10 km from Bahurim) or Mahanaim (a significant distance further). On the textual issue see McCarter, II Samuel, p. 108, 115-116.

⁴⁴ From the verbs h1k and swb.

⁴⁵ Here the verbs are qwm and h1k.

sympathies of the audience. In the verse's final word, Paltiel, who is now neither named nor described as Michal's husband, submits in silence to Abner, and returns, like Tamar, to face his own humiliation and shame.⁴⁷

This powerful and moving image of Paltiel, faced with the loss of the wife he loves,⁴⁸ would appear to serve two purposes. First, unlike Nabal who is vilified, Paltiel is *victimized*. This stance arouses the reader's sympathies. Paltiel's conjugal union has been dissolved by forces beyond his control. Second, David, who in the Nabal episode

⁴⁶ See C. L. Miller, The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis. HSM, Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1996, p. 77-78.

⁴⁷ A. Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983, p. 24-25, sees Paltiel as a feminine figure. He is certainly portrayed as powerless in the situation, but what could an individual Israelite do in the midst of internecine royal strife? Furthermore, what exactly does she mean by feminine? See the critique of such language in Exum, Tragedy, p. 72-73.

⁴⁸ Paltiel's love for Michal is "shown" rather than spoken. It is clearly present in the passage, cf. J. C. Exum, and J. W. Whedbee. "Isaac, Samson, and Saul: Reflections on the Comic and Tragic Visions". Semeia 32 (1989):26.

acted honourably and received a wife from Yahweh, now actively demands a wife. Who is responsible for Paltiel's sorrow? The reader must choose: is it Saul's fault, or David's? The actions of both figures have brought about the dissolution of a marriage, and both have acted with similar political motivations. The evidence cited above would appear to indicate that the narrator is beginning to move the audience toward a critical appraisal of David's actions. Furthermore, it appears to this writer that one element of the presentation merits special attention: the mention of David's subsequent wives and children *before* his demand that Michal be returned to him. Thus, he who has many wives deprives a man his one wife, whom he loves. In a very real sense 2 Sam 3 is a subtle adumbration of Nathan's parable. The villainy of Israel's king, which will come to flower in the Bathsheba narrative, is seen here in embryo.

C. 2 Samuel 11-12. Bathsheba/Uriah/David

In the third triangle the progression is complete. Unlike Nabal who is *vilified*, or Paltiel who is *victimized*, Uriah *idealized*. He is portrayed as good beyond belief. He is the perfect foil for David,⁴⁹ who

⁴⁹ Sternberg, *Poetics*, p. 208.

now is *villified*. Here Israel's king is portrayed as the embodiment of deceit and self interest. David is present and active, but *illegitimately* so. The relationship between Uriah and Bathsheba is portrayed as *tender and intimate*. The vehicle for the portrayal is neither the reflections of the wife (cf. Abigail), nor the actions of the displaced husband (cf. Paltiel), but rather a parable (2 Sam 12:1-4).

The narrator underlines the contrast between David and Uriah at every possible juncture. Uriah is a gentile, most probably a foreign mercenary. Despite his long absence, and the sexual deprivation implied,⁵⁰ he will not have relations with his wife. Uriah's explanation for this refusal in 11: 11 appears to imply: (1) a desire to remain in a state of ritual purity and thus be fit for war; and, (2) a desire to express his solidarity with the troops, and Joab, but most supremely the ark. Concern for the ark is a critical test of piety in 1-2 Samuel. In 1 Sam 4: 18 bad news regarding the ark occasions Eli's death, and in 4: 21 the naming of Icabod. Even intoxication cannot break Uriah's resolve. His loyalty and goodness are beyond question.

⁵⁰ David is of course aware of such strictures, having been subject to them himself, (1 Sam 21: 4-5), Clines, "Michal's Story", p. 132.

David, by contrast, is everything Uriah is not. Next to the David of 2 Sam 11, even Nabal looks like a saint. Far from being concerned for the ark and the troops, David remains in Jerusalem, happens to behold a very beautiful woman performing⁵¹ a ritual washing⁵² thus signaling the end of her menstruation. He brings her to his house, sleeps with her and sends her on her way. (Here again, the activity of David will be reflected in the Tamar narrative). When her pregnancy is announced to him, he attempts to cover his involvement through the

⁵¹ There is no reason to assume that Bathsheba was naked. Women in the east can wash in public without nudity. Public nudity was viewed as abhorrent and humiliating (cf. Hos 2:10). It seems unlikely that we are to seriously envisage a naked woman in public view on the slopes of Jerusalem's eastern hill.

⁵² The 3 circumstantial clauses in 11: 1-3 reflect the 3 circumstances which entangle David and prove to be his undoing: (1) v. 1, "Now David stayed in Jerusalem . . ."; (2) v. 2b "Now the woman was exceedingly beautiful"; (3) v. 4 "Now she had just finished her post-menstrual purification rites. . ." (i.e. she was fertile, and David was clearly the father). The participle of v. 4 must refer to the bathing of v. 1, cf. Sternberg, *Poetics*, p. 198, esp. n. 13., and the commentaries.

recall of Uriah, and when this fails, has the virtuous warrior put to death, sending the orders for his own execution in his own hand.

Despite the fact that David has told Joab not to let "the thing be evil in his eyes" (2 Sam 11: 25), in 11: 27 for the first time in the section, the narrator's voice is heard declaring David's actions to be "evil in the sight of Yahweh", and prompting the sending of Nathan. The parable of Nathan in 12: 1-4 furthers the dramatic development of the text in two ways: (1) It creates further sympathy in the reader for Uriah by focusing upon the disparity between himself and the King. The latter is a powerful man with many wives, the former a relatively insignificant one, with only one; and, (2) the reader is overwhelmed by the tenderness and intimacy of the relationship between Bathsheba and Uriah that is implied in the parable. The subtle reversal in the parable (in the parable the lamb is killed, whereas in the narrative Uriah is killed) underscores David's violence against *both* members of the family. Both Uriah and Bathsheba are victims of his royal power and lust. In the narrative, she is simply ha 'issah (the woman) who is sent for and who assumes no active role other than to inform David of her pregnancy. In the parable, by contrast, she is the one wife of her husband, precious and of great value in his eyes. Although she ends

up as David's wife, on a deeper level, like the lamb of the parable she metaphorically taken and slaughtered.

II. NARRATIVE AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

A clear progression emerges when one compares these three texts. At the outset David is a victim of Saul's murderous plots, fleeing for his life. He refuses to exact culturally acceptable personal vengeance and Yahweh intervenes against his enemy and gives the latter's wife into his hand. At mid-point, David's political prerogatives deprive a fellow Israelite of his one spouse, to whom he is deeply attached. At the conclusion, David, like Saul is guilty of treachery against those who are loyal to him. It is only because of the mercy of Yahweh that he does not share the fate of Nabal or Saul.

At this point an obvious question arises: what purpose does this progression serve in the narrative as a whole? At its simplest, the three "displacement marriages" mark the stages of the progressive ethical deterioration of an individual and the ensuing tragic results. This, in and of itself, would constitute a deeply moving and tragic drama. Yet, from a theological perspective, we suggest that the progression makes three points.

First, this critique of David is consistent with the anti-monarchical concerns of the Deuteronomistic History. David serves as an illustration of the abuses of the monarchy which were particularly offensive to deuteronomistic circles (Dt 17: 14-20; 1 Sam 8: 10-18). David's polygamy may be contrasted with the requirement that Israel's king "must not take many wives"(Dt 17: 17), and is reminiscent of the warning that a king would take the daughters for his own purposes (1 Sam 8: 13). Thus, deuteronomistic circles viewed the institution of the monarchy, especially as it related to its polygamy and use of political marriage as especially dangerous and suspect. It would appear that while such circles were prepared to tolerate polygamy and concubinage as a concomitant of the royal lifestyle, they viewed these practices as inherently inimical to Yahweh's ultimate will for life, and detrimental to those involved.

Second, these texts appear to reflect upon two competing visions of sexuality and marriage. According to one vision, sexual appropriation may be used as a means of defining political status.⁵³ In 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings this theme appears frequently. An

⁵³ On this practice in general, see M. Tsevat, "Marriage and Monarchical Legitimacy in Ugarit and Israel" JSS 3 (1958): 23-243.

individual displays his supremacy over his rival via the sexual appropriation of those to whom the latter has sexual access (2 Sam 3: 6; 12: 8; 16: 20-23; 1 Ki 2: 13-25). David's descent into chaos and fragmentation involves his appropriation of the wives of others, and he, in turn, suffers the ignominy of the public sexual appropriation of his own concubines by another (2 Sam 12: 11-12; 16:20-23).⁵⁴ In our view, the events of the narrative form an implicit critique of the entire use of sexuality as a political tool. It is highly probable that the view of marriage and sexuality held in priestly and deuteronomistic circles, especially during the exile, would be profoundly inimical to such practices.

⁵⁴ It is clear that the sexual contact with a third party rendered the woman ineligible for sexual contact with her prior husband cf. Dt 24:1-4; Jr 3:1. But what is the basis of this ineligibility? It is hard to escape the sense that the notions of sex as territorial delimitation (so in 1 and 2 Sam) and perhaps also the aversion to returning to a partner so “defiled”(cf. Jr 3:1) are not at play. It may be that, on a more concrete level, in the chronological development of the concept of defilement, bodily fluids give material expression to the notion of delimitation.

The alternative vision is reflected in the dramatis personae of Paltiel and Uriah, and in the parable of Nathan. Here marriage is monogamous rather than polygamous. It is a locus of tenderness and attachment (Paltiel to Michal; the poor man to his lamb), rather than a political tool. It provides nurture and comfort. Its dissolution brings severe emotional grief. This perspective is echoed in other narrative passages (e.g. Ru 1: 9; 1 Sam 1: 8) as well as both wisdom (Pr 5: 15-20; Ecc. 9: 9) and prophetic traditions (Ezek 24: 15).

At this point, a hermeneutical comment is in order. It should be noted that, what is at issue here is not simply a question of one vision which is being affirmed in the narrative, and another which is dismissed. Through Nathan, Yahweh states that He has given to David the wives of his master (2 Sam 12: 7) and as punishment, will give David's wives to his companion (12: 11). Thus Yahweh is clearly associated with the "political" use of sexuality. Yet, in the same context, there is an implicit affirmation of the inherent goodness of the marital union portrayed in the parable of 12: 1-4. Both visions, then, are specifically related to the activity of Israel's God. However, the turn of events described in the text would appear to indicate that the text affirms the latter vision to be most deeply reflective of the purposes of Yahweh. Hermeneutically speaking, then, it may be

appropriate to say that while Yahweh may be associated with a variety of motifs in a text, some of these may be more profoundly affirmed than others. Thus, J. Goldingay's question, "Can we affirm some viewpoints and criticize others"⁵⁵ may still be answered in the affirmative, even if the question is limited to a single literary unit.

Third, there is an inherent tension in the narrative's presentation of David. On one hand, Yahweh is consistently with him. He never falls victim to the divine abandonment which Saul experienced. On the other hand, he is the author of great evil and suffers profoundly for the violation of the fundamental bonds of human existence, as Whedbee has demonstrated.⁵⁶ The fact that David (be he literary or historical) was a man who knew and loved Yahweh and yet sinned so greatly, makes both a gripping story and a profound statement on the reality of evil in the life of even Yahweh's greatest servants. David, a man far greater in spiritual stature than any implied reader, sinned grievously and did what was displeasing in the eyes of Yahweh. Yet Yahweh forgave his sin, and granted him a

⁵⁵ J. Goldingay, Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, p. 97-133.

⁵⁶ Whedbee, "Bonds", p. 147-165.

reprieve from death, and, suffering notwithstanding, the possibility of a continuing existence. Such a message would hardly be lost on an exilic audience. The intense darkness with which David is portrayed serves to reinforce the foundational theology of grace which brought to David, as it did to Israel in exile, the possibility of continued relationship with Yahweh despite grievous failure.⁵⁷

John Kessler
Ontario Theological Seminary
25 Ballyconnor Ct.
Toronto, ON M2M 4B3

⁵⁷ On the relationship between sin, grace and consequence in 2 Sam see W. Brueggemann, "On Coping with Curse: A Study of 2 Sam 16:5-14", CBO 36 (1974): 175-192.