David, Avigail and Batsheva:
Tales of Leadership and Temptation
I Samuel 25; II Samuel 11-12

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Dierdre Luzwick – Nathan enters David’s Chambers (USA, The Surrealistic Bible, 1976)
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II SAMUEL 11-12
Adapted from the translation by Everett Fox in *Give Us a King*¹

**Historical Prologue: Springtime in Jerusalem - II Samuel 11:**

1 Now it was at the turning of the year, at the time of kings/messengers going-forth, that David sent Yo'av and his servants with him, and all Israel. They laid waste to the Children of Ammon and besieged Rabba, while David stayed in Jerusalem.

**Act I. David and Batsheva**

**Scene 1- David sees a woman**

2 Now it was around the time of sunset that David arose from his lying-place/couch and went walking on the roof of the king's house, and he looked at a woman washing herself - from on the roof. The woman was very good-looking!

**Scene 2- Sending for Batsheva**

3 David sent and enquired about the woman: He said: “Isn't this Bat-Sheva, daughter of Eli'am, wife of Uriah the Hittite?”

4 David sent messengers, and he took her, she came to him and he lay with her - now she had just purified-herself from her state of tum’a - then she returned to her house.

**Act II: David and Uriah**

**Scene 1- Sending for Uriah**

5 The woman became pregnant, she sent and had-it-told to David, she said: “I am pregnant!”

6 So David sent (word) to Yo'av: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Yo'av sent Uriah to David.

7 When Uriah came to him, David inquired after the shalom/well-being of Yo’av, the shalom/well-being of the fighting-people, and the shalom/well-being of the battle,

8 then David said to Uriah: “Go-down to your house and wash your feet!”

¹ The editor has changed many translations to make them closer to the Hebrew original which is in line with Everett Fox’s philosophy of translation. In the process the editor consulted with other translations like Tikvah Frymer Kensky, Robert Alter and the new JPS.
Uriah went out of the king's house, 
and after him went out a portion from the king, 
9 but Uriah lay down at the entrance to the king's house, with all his lord's servants, 
he did not go-down to his house.

Scene 2 – Uriah: A man of honor
10 They told David, saying: “Uriah has not gone-down to his house.”

David said to Uriah: “Isn't it from a (long) journey that you have come? 
Why haven't you gone-down to your house?”

11 Uriah said to David:
“The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in sukkot, 
And my lord Yo'av and my lord's servants are camping 
on the face of the open-field 
and I, I should come into my house 
to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? 
By your very life, by your being, if I were I do this thing ... !”

12 David said to Uriah:
“Stay here today as well; tomorrow I will send you back.”
So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem on that day and on the morrow.. 
13 David had him called, and he ate and drank in his presence, 
and he made him intoxicated. 
And he went out at sunset to lie down in his lying-place with his lord's servants; 
but to his house he did not go-down.

Scene 3- Uriah is sent off with a letter
14 So it was in the morning that David wrote a letter to Yo'av 
and he sent it by the hand of Uriah;

15 He wrote in the letter, saying; 
“Put Uriah right up at the front (= the face) of the battle, the strongest-point, 
and turn-back behind him, so that he is struck-down and dies.”

Act III: Aftermath

Scene 1 - Executing the Mission of the Letter and 
Reporting Cynically of a Mission Accomplished
16 So it was, when Yo'av was keeping guard on the city, 
that he placed Uriah at the place where he knew that there were men of valor. 
17 When the men of the city went out to do battle with Yo'av, 
and some of the people fell from among David's servants, 
and there also died Uriah the Hittite. 
18 Then Yo'av sent and had David told all the details of the battle,
19 he charged the messenger, saying:
“When you have finished reporting everything about the battle to the king:
20 if the king's anger starts up and he says to you: 'Why did you draw-near the city
to do battle? Didn't you know that they would shoot down from on the wall?
21 Who struck-down Avimelekh son of Yerubboshet--wasn't it a woman, (who) threw
down on him a riding millstone from on the wall,
so that he died at Tevetz?
For what (reason) did you approach the wall?’ –
Then you are to say: 'Also your servant Uriah the Hittite died.'" 

Scene 2- a Cynical Report of a Mission Accomplished and
the King’s Hypocritical Words of Comfort for Yoav
22 The messenger went off, he came and told David
all that Yo'av had sent him (to say).
23 The messenger said to David:
“Indeed, the men were mightier than we, they went out at us into the open-field;
we were upon them, up to the entrance to the gate,
24 but the shooters shot down at your servants from on the wall,
so that there died (some) of the king's servants,
and also your servant Uriah the Hittite died.”

25 David said to the messenger:
“Say thus to Yo'av: ‘Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes,
for like-this and like-that the sword devours!
Strengthen your battle against the city and destroy it! And (you) strengthen him!’”

Scene 3- Batsheva mourns and then remarries – A False Happy Ending
26 When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead,
she beat her breast for her lord.

27 And when the mourning-period was past,
David sent and had her brought to his house.
She became his wife, and she bore him a son.
Il Samuel 12

Judgment and Retribution

Epilogue of II Sam 11 and Prologue of II Sam 12 - God Sees
But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of YHWH,

Scene 1- God sends a messenger with a parable and a prophecy
12:1 YHWH sent Natan to David,
he came to him and said to him:

“There were two men in a certain town, one rich and one poor.
2 The rich-one had flocks and herds, exceedingly many,
3 while the poor-one had nothing at all except for one little lamb which he had bought.
He kept-it-alive, and it grew up with him, together with his children:
from his morsel it would eat, from his cup it would drink, in his bosom it would lie,
it became to him like a daughter/ bat.

4 And there came a traveler (= walker, journey-goer) to the rich man,
but he thought-it-a-pity to take from his flocks or from his herds,
to make (something ready) for the guest who had come to him,
so he took the poor man’s lamb and made-it-ready
for the man who had come to him.”

5 David's anger flared up against the man exceedingly, he said to Natan:
“By the life of YHWH,
indeed, a son of death is the man who does this!
6 And for the lamb he shall pay fourfold,
because he did this thing, and since he had no pity!”

7 Natan said to David:
“YOU are the man!”

Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel:
“I myself anointed you king over Israel,
I myself rescued you from the hand of Sha’ul,
8 I gave you the house of your lord, and the women of your lord into your bosom,
I gave you the House of Israel and Judah
and as if (that were) too little, I would have added yet this and that to you.
9 Why have you despised the word of YHWH to do what is evil in my eyes?
Uriah the Hittite you have struck-down by the sword,
his wife you have taken for yourself as a wife
him you have killed by the sword of the Children of Ammon.
10 So now-
the sword shall not depart from your house for the ages,
because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be a wife for you!”
11 Thus says YHWH:
“Here, I will raise up against your (person) evil from your house,
I will take-away your women from before your eyes,
I will give (them) to your fellow and he will lie with your wives, under the eyes of this sun.
12 For you, you did it in secret,
but I, I will do this thing in front of all Israel and in front of the sun.

13 David said to Natan: I have sinned against YHWH!
Natan said to David:
“YHWH himself has transferred your sin---you will not die;
14 nevertheless, because you have scorned, yes, scorned ‘YHWH's enemies’ by (doing) this thing,
the son himself - who is born to you: he must die, yes, die.”

15 Natan went back to his house.

**Scene 2- The Punishment is executed**
And YHWH struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David,
so that he became ill.
16 And David implored God on behalf of the boy, David fasted a fast;
whenever he came (home) he would spend-the-night lying upon the ground.
17 The elders of his house arose about him to raise him up from the ground,
but he was unwilling and would not take food with them.
18 Now it was on the seventh day that the child died.
David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said:
“Here, while the child was alive, we spoke to him
but he did not hearken to our voice;
so how can we say to him: "The child is dead?" - He might do evil!"

19 When David saw that his servants were whispering (among themselves),
David understood that the child was dead.
David said to his servants: “Is the child dead?”
They said: “He is dead.”

20 Then David arose from the ground,
he washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes,
and he came into the house of YHWH and prostrated himself; then he came (back) to his house, requested that they put food before him, and ate.
21 His servants said to him:
“What (kind of) thing is this that you have done?
For the sake of the living child, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead,
you arise and eat food!
22 He said: As long as the child was still alive, I fasted and wept,
for I said (to myself): Who knows, perhaps YHWH will be gracious to me,
and the child will live!
23 But now he is dead - why should I fast? Can I make him return again?
I may go to him, but he will not return to me.”
Epilogue: The Comfort of a New Child – True Happy Ending

24 And David comforted Bat-Sheva his wife, he came to her and lay with her; She bore a son and called his name Shlomo/His Peace = Shalom.

25 But YHWH loved him, and he had (a message) sent by the hand of Natan the prophet:

“He called his name Yedidya/Beloved of YHWH for YHWH loved him.”
לא וְאֶת אֶלְכֹד אֲנִי אֶת יָּקָּּם דָּוִד מֵהָאָרֶץ וַיִרְחַץ וַיָּסֶךְ, וַיְחַלֵף שִמְלֹתָו, וַיָּבֹא בֵית יִשְרָאֵל וִיהוּדָה; רֹאשׁ דָּוִד; וּשְׁלַל הָּעִיר הוֹצִיא, הַרְבֵה מְאֹד.

בֵיתוֹ; כִי אָמַרְתִי מִי יוֹדֵعַ, יחנני (וְחַנַנִי) יְהוָה וְחַי הַיָּלֶד. וַיְהִי בַיוֹם הַשְבִיעִי, וַיָּמָת הַיָּלֶד; וַיִרְאוּ עַבְדֵי דָוִד לְהַגִיד לוֹ כִי -- בשעון יְוהֶה, בַעֲבוּר, יְהוָה. שְׁמוֹ, יְדִידְיָהוּ אָלַיָו, כִּבְשַת הָאִישׁ הָרָאשׁ, וַיַעֲשֶהָ, לָאִישׁ הַבָּא אֵלָיו. לא תָּמוּת.

וַיָּבָא בֵית יִשְרָאֵל וִיהוּדָה; וְלֹא אָבָּה, וְלֹא עַכְוָב, כִּי בֶּן דָוִד, גַם הַיְּהוָא, אִשָּׁה. אֵשֶת אוּרִי הַחִתִי, לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לְאִשָּׁה. בַּעֲבוּר, יְהוָה.

וַיְבַקֵשׁ דָוִד אֶת אֶת אֵלֶה אִוֹבֵי יְהוָה, בַדָּבָר, הַזֶּה; גַם, הַבֵּית יִשְרָאֵל וִיהוּדָה; וְלֹא אָבָּה, וְלֹא עַכְוָב, כִּי בֶּן דָוִד, גַם הַיְּהוָא, אִשָּׁה. אֵשֶת אוּרִי הַחִתִי, לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לְאִשָּׁה. בַּעֲבוּר, יְהוָה.

וַיֹּאמֶר נָּתָן אֶל יִשְרָאֵל, וְאָנֹכִי האחת קטנה אשר קנה, וַתִּגְדַל עימו בֵית יִשְרָאֵל וִיהוּדָה; וְאָלֹם נָּתָן, אֶל הָּאָרֶץ, וַיִּקְרָּא שְׁמִי עָלֶיהָ; עָלֶיהָ, וַתְהִי, עַל הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה, וְעַל, אֲשֶׁר לֹא נָּתָּן, אֶל הָּאָרֶץ, וַיִּיָּשָר מְאֹד.

וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת נָּתָּן בָּּאָרֶץ, וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת נָּתָּן בָּּאָרֶץ, וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת נָּתָּן בָּּאָרֶץ, וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת נָּתָּן בָּּאָרֶץ, וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת נָּתָּן בָּּאָרֶץ. וַיָּבֹא בֵית יִשְרָאֵל וִיהוּדָה; וְלֹא אָבָּה, וְלֹא עַכְוָב, כִּי בֶּן דָוִד, גַם הַיְּהוָא, אִשָּׁה. אֵשֶת אוּרִי הַחִתִי, לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לְאִשָּׁה. בַּעֲבוּר, יְהוָה.

וַיָּנָס אֶלְכֹד אֲנִי אֶת יָּקָּם דָוִד מֵהָאָרֶץ, וַיִּגְלִיל שְׁמוֹ, יְדִידְיָהוּ אָלַיָו, כִּבְשַת הָּאִישׁ הָרָאשׁ, וַיָּשָר מְאֹד. דָוִד, אַתָּה הָּאִישׁ; וַיִּקְרָּא אֶת שְׁמִי עָלֶיהָ, עָלָהּ, וַתְהִי, עַל הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה, וְעַל, אֲשֶׁר לֹא נָּתָּן, אֶל הָּאָרֶץ, וַיִּיָּשָר מְאֹד.
Introductions: Thematic, Educational and Structural

A Thematic Introduction

King David leadership is tried and tested by temptations associated with his interaction with his wives – Batsheva and Avigail. In both cases David is overwhelmed with passion – one sexual and one vengeful, but both involve male ego and power. In both cases David is deeply involved in killing the husband and in both cases he ends up marrying the widow. Both stories display brilliant rhetorical skills of moral argument and the invocation of the Divine calling to leadership to oppose the abuse of power. In both cases David’s greatness is his ability to learn, to reflect, to show restraint before the intended murder or to do teshuvah after the murder.

Three themes will intersect in this study guide:

a. The political leader’s character in the face of temptations is both archetypal for all human beings since Adam and Eve were tempted and “fell” and specific to the concentration of power typical of a monarch.

b. The “male gaze” and the “male rage” are foregrounded in the complex relationships to women described by these narratives.

c. The power of persuasion – “speaking truth to power” (tocheicha) – as a primary Biblical approach to power and as a tool to bring about moral change, teshuvah.

The chief method of inquiry will be literary, broadly understood – not historical. Pshat and derash, close text reading, commentary and artistic retellings, will be the methodology brought to the conversation with the Tanakh. The Biblical narrative invites this literary method concerned with interpretation from alternating “points of view” – Divine and human, male and female, leaders and followers, insiders and outsiders. It leads us to the moment when David can “see” himself and his behavior in an alternative light thanks to a literary fiction exceptionally well performed by the noted “actor” Nathan, God’s spokesperson.

Biblical Introduction to Leadership and Temptation

In Gan Eden the complex of ideas is knowledge, power and libidinal temptation:

The snake emphasized the godlike power of knowledge, to be God’s equal, the hubris of a servant become a master thus transgressing boundaries. But there is loss of home in losing one’s place in a hierarchy. Violating limits was part of the lure, but the punishment was to reestablish limits, to expel the violators from the closed and safe space of the garden.

The woman was equally attracted by knowledge and by the visual beauty of the tree. Touching and eating involve tactile pleasure. But instead of producing the knowledge which is power and expanded possibilities, it produced shame, awareness of the body’s vulnerabilities and awareness of mortality – what distinguishes us from the Divine. All this led to nakedness and shame led to a cover-up, the birth of rationalization and then the blaming of others (Genesis 3).

Surprisingly body and mind are not contrasted but rather knowledge usually associate with the mind leads to self-awareness of the body and its limitations. Knowledge is associated with pleasure, with eating and touching. Good and evil mind and body are co-implicated and that is the core knowledge, self-knowledge which is gained, not power and pleasure. Here is the knowledge of Ecclesiastes. Kohelet speaks of
knowledge producing pain! That knowledge of alienation also generates a sense of individuated self - separate from God, from the earth and from one's spouse, as reflected in Adam's use of the word "anochi." In distancing himself from responsibility for his own acts and blaming it on the now separated-off wife and God.

Painfully the godlike qualities of tzelem Elohim in Genesis 1:26 which involve the ability to rule, power, as well s to know and to create – to be godlike – are portrayed as revolt, as loss of innocence, as hubris.

This complex of ideas in Gan Eden is played out partially in various key narratives like Joseph and David:

**Power** is central to Joseph's dreams of greatness – to be king. But his dreams and his hubris in telling them to his brothers lead to his downfall. Then he then finds out that his economic administrative abilities will give him power in Potiphar's home. But that position of power above Egyptian slaves and just below the master as well as his extraordinary physical beauty (like his mother's) make him an object of temptation to Potiphar's wife and perhaps she is a temptation to him.

**Physical desire and attraction** play a sophisticated role in the Joseph story. The status of tempted and object of attraction switch off here in an unstable way. Ultimately Joseph resists the temptation to which David succumb. In fact David initiated the seduction and David unlike Joseph is the commander in chief – not the second in command. Both are really under the command of God which would have helped them when faced with temptation.

**Knowledge** is power both in the Garden and in Joseph's life but unlike the woman in the Garden, Joseph does not consciously choose to take knowledge as a tool to become godlike. He simply discovers his God-given knowledge to interpret dreams, to make political-economic policies to thwart the dreams' dire implications of famine and to administrate in a way that serves to aggrandize his ruler's power and enslave all of Egypt.

Like the Garden there is an attempted cover-up – the brother's hiding their crime from their father and from our Father in heaven. It too is the result of guilt but the cover-up is to no avail. Knowledge will out and confession is necessary for growth.

Later Joseph discovers his power over his bowing brothers deriving both from being a viceroy and from being in the know about who they are and what they did in the past – selling him into slavery. Here Joseph dares to play God in order to test the brother and help them reach *self-knowledge* that is curative rather than corrupting.

Joseph too is cured by *self-knowledge*, knowing his relationship to his brothers, knowing God gave him his powerful knowledge, his timely opportunity to shine before Pharaoh and to save his family from famine. Thus Joseph has sense of shlichut, of Divine calling becoming a messenger of God. Therefore his childish dreams of self-aggrandizement do not corrupt his character even though they are fulfilled beyond any Judean king of David's dynasty.

Here is in a nutshell is also a partial parable of David and Batsheva. **Power** is not a result of sin but it is lost because David knows no limits to his power. Like the woman so too David *knows* perfectly well what is forbidden – whatever his unverbalized rationalizations. This beautiful woman is married within his inner circle of soldiers and advisors. Yet he needs no persuading or deceiving or seducing to respond to her physical beauty. He grabs her for mixed motives never made explicit: sexuality, a demonstration of his power to disregard limits, pleasure and pride may all be interrelated. By contrast David becomes the serpent seducing Uriah to sleep with his own wife but to no avail. Tempted and tempter are interchanged.

Afterward David's need to coverup shows some shame though no moral remorse. The **escalating attempt to coverup** of course leads to unforeseen circumstances that show the limitation of human forethought and the unintended consequences of human initiative. It is a laughable assumption especially typical of the powerful, that humans control their own fate. The hubris of a human being beyond limits comes up against
limits – the inability of David to prevent the pregnancy or to convince Uriah to go home or to keep things secret from God.

Our Students’ and our own Dreams and Temptations

What are our students’ perceived temptations? Are they like Joseph dreaming as 17 year olds of ruling the world, of being worshiped by those around them and above them in the family hierarchy? Do they dream of sexual conquests and being pleased using other people as instruments to their pleasure without taking responsibility for the other as a person? Do they simply dream of a world without responsibility and without boundaries?

Our students while not all leaders have increasing power as do many of their parents. The American world of advertising suggest that power – especially financial should be translated into instant gratification of physical pleasures, of whims and titillations for the bored – like David the underemployed king sleeping late in the palace, while his army fights abroad. We Americans are lured by a siren song - to be all you can be, to do all you can do, to cross every boundary in the name of experience and expanded knowledge but also in the name of the exuberance of our individual powerful self displayed and tested. There is no God above, no consequences, no living with boundaries. This is freedom’s siren call. What makes this temptation and the serpent’s temptation so interesting is that it represents not pure evil but powerful self-assertion in the name of values we do approve – when limited and balanced.

To dream of new possibilities and to expand our capacity and to enjoy our achievements is a value both in American society and in part of the Tanakh when the dreams coincide with God’s dreams of greatness for us. Recall God’s call to Abraham to found a great nation and God's promises to make David's dynasty great. Power and dream fulfillment and even fame are not intrinsically sinful temptations. This perspective makes provocative and unjust and demeaning the very restriction on eating from any tree let alone the Tree of Knowledge that will make us Godlike in knowledge and perhaps creativity.

What then is wrong with those dreams?

Clearly in the Joseph story his dream is built on the submission of brother and parent. That arrogant hierarchical stance is a violation of American egalitarian principles. In the David and Batsheva story, it is even harder for the reader to empathize with David? What ideals is he living out? Is sexual fantasy a value? For many Americans the answer may be yes under the loosely interpreted Constitutional right to pursue happiness. Yet his lack of sensitivity both to law and to the woman and to her husband, David’s soldier who is at war at David’s request, makes it a hard case to make. It moves the focus to control of passions, not a principled debate of good values. David’s temptations involve the power to hurt others without any immediate consequences to himself hence even in liberal ethos it is wrong.
An Educators’ Introduction: A Generative Topic

The story of David is what educators call a “generative topic.” In the “less is more” educational theory of the Coalition of Essential Schools initiated by Theodore Sizer, author of Horace’s Compromise, education must prefer the development of deep understandings over the coverage of broad swaths of knowledge. To do so, many fewer topics may be chosen but what is taught must have a generative power:

- to convey the central theme, principles and methods of its discipline,
- to capture the interest and evoke the high student and teacher energy that can be invested in careful analysis and creative interpretation, and
- to provide “enduring understandings” and “essential questions” into human life that have relevance – transferability to many other realms.

Therefore this curricular resource unit returns to this perennial favorite – King David (with special focus on the temptations of leadership associated with his interaction with his wives – Batsheva and Avigail). The literary artfulness of these paired stories is exemplary. The moral issues as well as the political concerns are pervasive in every age. The gender issues mixing power and sexuality are very contemporary. These stories have generated and continue to generate new interpretations (rabbinic, scholarly and psychological) and literary, artistic and dramatic performances (midrash – classical and modern). Thus it is a classic for self-understanding for Jews, Christians and Western civilization.

A generative topic is, as we noted above, shaped by an intersection of:
A. Disciplinary study, B. Student-teacher interest and C. Enduring understandings and Essential Questions of life. That fits our text and topic. For example:

A. Disciplines

The subject matter of these chapters can be illuminated by many academic disciplines, so David and Batsheva are central paradigmatic texts.

HISTORY. The stories of David are one of the first examples of historical writing preserved anywhere, yet it is surprisingly modern in style. It exemplifies, inspires and embodies a now popular-style history written or reconstructed in the form of a biographical novel with both a Shakespearean concern for character and morality and a humanist-nationalist concern to leave a political legacy. Recently many great American “founding fathers” from Ben Franklin and John Adams to Abraham Lincoln have been written up in this fashion by reputable scholars who are also gifted writers with novelistic talents. The gap in form and content between the history and novel writing have closed considerably over the last generation.

COMMUNITY FORMATION. Bernard Anderson has written a great deal in the field of nationalism about “imagined communities” born not of common blood or even common land but of the a common story whatever its historical authenticity that has captured the proposed community’s members. The story does more to create the community than the “facts” on the ground. David is that nation-maker, that core story of origins and futures, both for Jews and for Christians. He is a paradigmatic figure of communal identity, though not necessarily a paragon of virtue. His canonic place in the later Tanakh (Psalms, Chronicles) and rabbinic tradition as well as the New Testament makes him the foreshadowing of the messianic figure who will hopefully descend from him. His role in Zionist cultural and national revival is central. (See even today the political uses of David’s dynasty in Israeli plays, poetry and art).

POLITICAL THOUGHT. The relations between David and his wives teach much about political leadership in theory as well as in practice. The prophet Samuel, in his opposition to the transformation of Israel into a monarchy (I Samuel 8 and 12), envisons the implicit or explicit “constitutional” powers of a king in terms of the corruption of power and the ex-appropriation of the property and persons of the members of kingdom. The rest of the Books of Samuel and Kings are a grand political experiment with monarchy which seems to prove Samuel’s sagacious warning to be true.

Deuteronomy 17 mandates the constitutional monarch to be educated by the Torah he writes, studies and carries with him. Here the Divine voice is heard through the legal source of the monarch’s legitimacy. The law is above the ruler and limits not only his actions but seeks to educate his heart. The Jewish
constitutional limits on the royal authority are defined in terms of restricting military concentration of power (horses), financial accumulation (money) derived by war or taxation or perhaps bribery, and -most important for our focus – restriction on multiplying women lest they lead his heart astray. This political theory identifies temptations that may corrupt the leader’s heart and seeks to preempt them both through education and through delimiting the passion of a ruler to accumulate (See King Solomon’s portrayal in Kohelet). These laws read like “conflict of interests” laws that do not permit the ruler to have the kind of property holdings that might lead him to favor his/her own holdings over those of others.

However the relationships of rulers and women in Judges and Samuel and Kings reflect the problem of men of power. There is no simple calculus of numbers that determines if “one’s heart will go astray. The women are not always the temptresses but often just the object of male fantasies. Sometimes the women are in fact the ones who help men overcome their temptations. The narratives are so much richer and more nuanced that this clichéd legal stricture in Deuteronomy 17.

**GENDER STUDIES.** The relatively new discipline of gender studies and the feminist interpretations of the Bible find the story of David and Batsheva to be a generative topic. It both evokes cultural stereotypes about gender that must be examined critically and it shapes and reinforces those stereotypes. However critical readings and literary rewritings may undermine that standard view and turn God’s and Nathan’s critique of David’s ethical behavior into a gender critique.

**LITERATURE.** From the outset of the contemporary literary approach to the Bible, Robert Alter has led the way in the United States with his close reading and new translation and commentary on David and Batsheva, as have Menahem Perry, Meir Sternberg and Yair Zakovitch in Israel and Fokkelman in Europe. The artfulness of the David stories (along with Joseph saga) makes it one of the first prose narrative creations in history and still one of the greatest. The prolific theoretical creativity in the field of hermeneutics has produced ever more sophisticated literary analyses of Biblical stories.

**MIDRASH.** One of the latest and still least developed disciplines in the academic realm but one of the longest traditions of interpretation has been midrash – the imaginative “rewritings” (in any artistic form) of the Biblical or other canonical text. In its academic form this disciplinary approach has been inspired by Hans Gadamer who speaks of the history of reception of a text. Communities of interpreters of a classic re-interpret and re-represent or retell or extrapolate or on or interpolate into the canonic story. David’s secondary uses and reformulations are legion both in the past and again in the present.

**B. Student-teacher interest**

David Perkins in *Smart Schools* describes the complex thinking activities necessary for achieving deep self-reflective understandings – about methodology, concepts, ethical challenges and one’s own learning and thinking style. These cannot be done in low energy learning environment. However an educational format that produces a “high energy educational economy” and rewards greater investment in thinking, sharing and creating can support such a search for understanding. Here the story of David and Batsheva has that power to arouse energies –

- because of the glamour of politics and sex and their centrality to Western culture,
- because of their gender significance for teenagers newly awakening to these realms who are deeply invested personally in their emergent masculinity and femininity
- because of the old and new literary midrash in music, art, movies and poetry that appeal to the left brain of ourselves and our students
- because power and temptation, individual freedom and its limits when it hurts others are central questions to the lives of the financially-endowed and ambitious young people and their high-powered parents
- because the story has been read in so many ways and it is so sophisticated and filled with psychological interest, it invites students to make their own meanings and at the same time to find fellow travelers in the ongoing multi-generational community of *parshanim.*
C. Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions of Life

The Harvard education project of Understanding by Design bids us define for the teacher and the student from the beginning, in the middle and in the assessment at the end, the enduring understandings and essential questions that guide and motivate the learning.

MORALITY OF A LEADER AND POLITICS.

- Biblical and post biblical Judaism are about tikkun olam, about shaping a society – including centrally its politics. Hence Protestant notions of religions are primarily about spiritual inwardedness and the American belief in separation of Church and State should not lead Jews to separate religious concerns and actions from political realm.
- The calling to become a leader is important as an educational goal as also the Divine calling to critique political leaders.
- Judaism is about character building in the face of tests in the real world. Not perfection or innocence is the primary goal but reflective practice – ongoing learning from stories, from tocheicha, from law and from our own errors.
- Leaders as wielders of power are more subject to temptation and therefore need moral education and moral self-critical character building. “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

How do we balance the need for effective leadership with the dangers that centralized power will be used to exploit both the outsiders - foreign others - and the insiders - citizens?

How do we educate decision-makers to value morally restrained behavior in the face of the need to survive politically?

How do we educate a character blessed with the political virtue of ambition, necessary to motivate most leaders, and the temptations to "overdo" it, that surround the political concentration of power?

What are the kind of checks and balances necessary for good government?

What is the role and the how-to of moral suasion, protest, advice, tocheicha, in counseling or influencing decision-makers? Why and how and by what right does one intervene in the political process?

LITERATURE AND MIDRASH

- There is an intergenerational community of interpreters – pshat and midrash – which invites us to join and which makes the study of Torah a centrally defining practice of Jewishness. Interpretation is a collaborative endeavor of hypothesizing and arguing, of imagining alternatives and fruitful comparisons.
- The study of classics is the ideal of Renaissance education based on a constant return to the study of classics. Uncovering or making meaning out of the classics is valuable and valid ways of expressing our membership in the Jewish and general community of culture.
- Both objective listening to and active uncovering of the messages of the Torah, both according to accepted disciplinary methods and subjective personalizing of the Torah for its message to me and to today are valid and valuable. Both the critical and the imaginative side of the human being are Jewish ideals of learning and living.

How does literary form convey meaning? The medium is the message!

What techniques empower the reader/commentator to uncover meanings and to justify their readings as better readings?
How does the text inspire reinterpretations in artistic ways?

How do we evaluate artistic retellings as forms of interpretation?
HISTORY-WRITING

- History-writing is always dependent on the perspective of the writer and the reader. Present and envisioned future shape the retelling of the past.
- Reciprocally and paradoxically the picture of the past also shapes the community’s identity. In that sense we are studying David’s stories because they do or may shape our imagined and our real community – past, present and future.

How does point of view shape our description of the events? How else could the same story be retold from a different point of view?

What are the interests and values of the writer and the reader beyond merely describing what happened? How does the description of the past become a prescription for the future? (Note we assume a writer would not write or a community preserve or reread a text if they did not have interests and values to promote.)

GENDER and ETHICS.

Judaism has struggled with conflicting but highly charged images of women and of men. Narratives shape our sense of self as men and women and vice versa our experience of gender shapes our reading of the text.

Women have played central roles in the political life of the Jewish people even when not official office holders. Sometimes they have been objects of desire and competition, sometimes competitors for power themselves or for their relatives, and sometimes they have been wise counselors guiding and correcting the official wielders of power.

How are men-women relationships portrayed both in the original Biblical text and in all its representations? How do we project our stereotypes onto the text and how does the text undermine and destabilize our usual perceptions?

What counter-narratives have feminist readers uncovered or reframed or invented and what affect does that alternative view have on our self-perception and our relationship to Torah?

A Structural Introduction

EXERCISE: Narrative analysis requires a sense of plot and character development. Nehama Leibovitz often asked her students to outline the Biblical chapter and given them titles and subtitles. Try your hand at her assignment for our II Samuel 11 – all or part of it. Here are two such outlines from leading scholars sensitive to literary art. Compare them to your own divisions.
The structure of II Samuel 11 is one of sin, followed by unforeseen complications, followed by an escalation to greater sins to cover up for the first sin and its complication.

**Scene One – David and Batsheva - II Sam. 11:2-6**
A. David has intercourse with Batsheva
B. Batsheva reports her pregnancy
C. David calls Uriah back from the front

**Scene Two – David and Uriah - II Sam. 11:6b-15**
A. First attempt to send Uriah back to Batsheva,
B. Uriah refuses
A. Second attempt to send Uriah back getting him drunk and trying to push him to violate his oath
B. Uriah refuses
C. David sends Uriah with the death letter

**Scene Three – David and Yoav – II Sam. 16-25**
A. Uriah is sent to the most dangerous part of the front to die alone
B. More soldiers die as well and the battle is lost, hence David will be angered for foolish military tactics
C. David dismisses his concern for his soldiers’ lives and attributes it to the vagaries of the sword

**Scene Four - David and Batsheva marry to “legalize” the child – II Sam 11:26-27**
A. The sin seems to have been successfully contained, even swept under the rug, even its fruit integrated in the palace along with Batsheva. The one-night stand turned into a coronation of a queen and the unwanted fetus into another heir to the throne
B. However God sees all that has been done and judges it harshly. Later Nathan will express God's anger at David's taking another man's wife, an unintended consequence of the original sexual attraction but one that will lead God to curse David so that his own son Avshalom will take his concubines.

Shimon Bar Efrat, *Mikrah L’Yisrael: Shmuel*

The structure of II Sam. 11 shows us the main characters:

A. David responds to Batsheva – II Sam 11:2-5
B. David tries to manipulate Uriah – II Sam 11:6-13
C. David responds to the report of the death of Uriah in words – II Sam 11:14-25
D. David responds to the report of the death of Uriah in actions – marrying Batsheva – II Sam 11:26-27

BUT God reacts differently – II Sam 11:27b

David must be the main character because he appears in all four sections. Batsheva is the first and the last section, but she is almost never quoted and we see her only in brief summaries of her being treated as an object by David. Generally she called Uriah’s wife but seldom Batsheva. She seems to have no inner subjective life and no independent agency.

Uriah however is presented to us through extensive speeches in high language showing his values in contrast to David. The narrator does not evaluate David’s horrendous acts directly but by contrast with Uriah the foreigner, the subject, David is indirectly but roundly condemned. For Uriah prefers principle to pleasure, control of desires to their satisfaction, solidarity to selfishness, service to self-service. The repeating root – *shachav* – appears 4 times: David lies down twice but Uriah refuses to lie down with his wife using that verb.

Then God sends his messenger, Natan, whose name means to ‘give’ in order to criticize David for being a “taker” even though God has already ‘given’ him so much.
Openers –
Tempting the Student: Enticements to Gaze More Attentively

The opener – *at ptakh lo* – is the way to bring student and Torah into an interactive dialogue where the student feels this text is important, that it is interesting, that it is controversial, that it is worth a second look, worthy of inquiry, and that it may be a surprising encounter when reading it. Each teacher must find his/her way into the text and into the hearts of the students as well as how to build a bridge from the past into the present and from the present back into the past. Then beyond this initial enticement there is the hard work of analyzing and evaluating and then listening to what the text is telling us about our lives.

Here are some random openers which are developed in greater depth in the body of the unit but can be used to whet the student’s appetite. That curiosity, that *Eros* to learn, that emotional and intellectual provocation is the starting point.

**Opener #1 – Cover-up - The Anatomy of a Crime**

The Tanakh is X-rated and its most famous “affair,” its classic sexual scandal, is the David and Batsheva story.

There is the **personal side** – each of us has known sins which we kept secret. We have invested a great deal to cover them up and we may not have known what we were getting into when we did these indiscretions or worse. The anatomy of crime is as concerned with what happened after the misdeed as what led to doing it the first place. In II Sam 11-12 many, many less words are spent on the “hot night” together than on all the efforts to “fix” things afterwards. One opener involves recalling or presenting a cover-up case and then identifying its features before comparing what we discovered with the classic Biblical case. TV shows, both criminal investigations and situation comedies, offer many examples of the unforeseen complications after an embarrassing action and the twists and turns of making it “go away.”

Haya Ben Natan, whose educational exercises appear in the Educators’ chapter below, suggests we use a Biblical proverb to unpack II Samuel 11, so perhaps an analysis of its pithy structure will be a key for the **student to unpack the narrative**. That way we read the narrative, not just to know what happened plot-wise, which many of them know, but how this is a typical affair and cover-up.

*Proverbs 30: 18-20*

“Three things are beyond me, four I cannot fathom.
How an eagle makes it way over the sky;
How a snake makes it way over a rock;
How a ship makes its way through the high seas;
How a man has his way with a maiden?”

Such is the way of the adulteress:  
She eats, she wipes her mouth,
And she says: “I have done no wrong!”

There is also the **political** side of the scandal and its cover-up. Newspapers are filled with these scandals but the most famous ones have to do with presidents – especially Nixon’s Watergate and Clinton’s Monica-gate that almost led to their impeachment. An opener can connect up the students to the classic American political cover-up and its comparison to the classic Biblical political cover-up. See the newspaper article below: Is Adultery a Political Sin in Today’s Politics? Perhaps see a movie about Watergate and the role of the investigative reporter (Woodward and Bernstein) with a comparison to the prophetic protestor Nathan (or Elijah in the story of Navot and his vineyard).

**Opener #2 – A Big Simulation: Putting David on Trial**

Another kind of opener defines the **assessment**, the final performance that all the learning is to lead to. If the assessment is important to them or interesting enough, then it gives a clear rationale for why the
student should invest in this text. Putting David on trial involves juicy roles performed before an audience, creative group activity, constructivist thinking and a chance to be critical of an authority figure – David – as well as a competition between defender and prosecutors before a panel of judges. See Diane Lavin's elaborate and clearly defined exercise in putting David on trial. She devotes 12 weeks to this unit, but her results are exceptional with 8th graders. Sometimes one indepth unit is worth that much curricular time in terms of its educational effect.

Opener #3 - Simulation: Producing a Movie

A similar opener takes its format from Hollywood rather from the courtroom. As in the courtroom, there are explicit ways of doing a movie that will lead the students to read the text very closely, to evaluate good guys and bad guys and to translate that into a dramatic mode. Here the visual is as important as the verbal so multiple intelligences as well as learning styles are involved. While putting David on trial emphasizes the moral reading of the text and rational argumentation, making a movie develops the midrashic skills of filling gaps imaginatively and working on character development. Even if a school cannot literally create their own movie, the class can do key steps towards a movie – casting, screen play writing, an actor’s workshop to put on specific scenes. See the guidelines below in "Screenplay Exercise on David and Batsheva."

Then a finale might involve comparing their own work with two Hollywood versions of David and Batsheva. In the later chapters we have compared Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward’s David and Bathsheba (1951) with Woody Allen’s, Crimes and Misdemeanors. There is also a Richard Gere reenactment of the story.

Opener # 4 – Gender Perspectives: Love, Loyalty and Seduction

Adolescent students are very concerned about male-female relationships as well as stereotypes about predatory men and seductive women. What is truly masculine? What is truly feminine? How is attraction related to love? How is love in tension with loyalty and friendship? Movies, art, novels, commentaries have also used Batsheva, Uriah and David to explore these relationships. These issues will lead the students to interpret and evaluate Bathsheva's behavior in radically different ways allowing the teacher to explore how interpretation is an uneasy balance between textual hints and conventional presuppositions. We suggest a script of the dialogue between David and Batsheva from Susan Hayward and Gregory Peck (1959) as an entree to the text study.

Uriah: My only desire is to serve my king,
David: I might believe that, but you have a wife.
U: My wife is nothing sire, beside my duty....
D: A woman does not always share her husband's devotion to duty. Have you ever tried to think of things from her point of view?
U: No sire.
D: Well supposing her wishes and yours come into conflict?
U: A woman's wishes cannot conflict with her husband's, sire. That is the law.
D: The law. The law can only control what we do, not what we think. What does your wife think, Uriah?
U: I do not know, sire.
D: Is it possible that you believe she does not think or feel? A woman is flesh and blood, Uriah, like us. Perhaps even more so because we give her so little to think of but matters of the flesh. In all our history, only a handful of women have been permitted to write their names beside the men. Miriam, Deborah, Jael, one or two more. A woman's occupation is her husband and her life is her love. But if her husband rejects her love, if he puts another love before it, if he denies her the only meaning her life can have, is it not understandable that she seeks a meaning for it elsewhere?

David to Bathsheba: Uriah is a fool. When I looked on you from my terrace tonight, I knew that every future moment spent away from you would be a moment lost. Yet he has found only six days for you in seven months. The perfume of his beloved is the stink of war. Does he think that a man was made only to know the agony of battle? Does he call that manhood?
Has he no blood, no heart?... Be thankful that I'm not Pharaoh. At least I can console myself with the thought that your modesty matches your beauty.

Bathsheba: Perhaps you would prefer truth to modesty, sire. Before you went away, I used to watch you every evening as you walked on your terrace. Always at the same hour, always alone. Today I heard you had returned.

D: And you knew that I...

B: You'd be on your terrace tonight? Yes. I had heard that never had the king found a woman to please him. I dared to hope I might be that woman.

D: Why are you telling me this now? Why not before?

B: Because, first I had to know what was in your heart. If the law of Moses is to be broken, David, let us break it in full understanding of what we want from each other.

Opener #5 – Voyage in the Footsteps of the Characters - Point of View

Family therapy and Biblical narrative share the concern for how the same event can be seen and evaluated from multiple perspectives. This recalls the Israeli popular song “What you see from her, you cannot see from there – ma she roim mi sham, lo roim mi-kaan.” Haya ben Natan has developed a technique that delves into multiple perspectives and provides a way of personalizing the student’s connection to character as well as stretching to see the other person’s point of view as well.

This group activity of inquiry invites each student to go on a “Voyage in the footsteps of one’s Character.” The goal is to move from a summary judgment of the character based on what happened to a close reading of what is said and what is left unsaid, then to an empathy with his/her inner world and then back to evaluation.

STEPS:
1) Choose a character from our story whom you wish to follow and into his/her head you wish to get.
   David/Bathsheba/Yoav/Uriah
2) Read the chapter line by line to collect information about your character’s interests, motives, personality, background, relation to all other characters etc
3) Lay out four (or five) big poster boards each with the name of one of the characters and ask students to gather around their choice into “character groups.”
4) One or two representatives of each group form new “encounter groups” with representatives from each character. Each student must then present their character in first person “I” language. (For example, I was bathing on a cool night and really enjoying the water, when suddenly I felt someone’s eyes on me) but no questions or interactions yet.
5) Now the group enters the “World of Truthfulness.” Here every other character may ask in-character questions to the other characters. Here we explore what was hidden – what did you think when you heard Uriah was killed? What did you feel when you received the note “I am pregnant”? Here characters may confront one another emotionally: confess, accuse, cry, defend, and plead. Here characters may come back from the dead (like Uriah) and ask questions they would never dare to ask when alive, since now they are safe and they know all that has happened.
6) The other character is now asked to answer truthfully to his/her character, filling in gaps as necessary and filling out the character.

Details of this approach can be found below.

Opener #6 – Art as Commentary: Two Wives, are they better than One?

Since we live in such a visual world, art can open up the heart and the imagination of our students before delving into the more abstract verbal world of the unilluminated Tanakh. Find on the internet or in the appended “Art as Midrash” unit, examples of artistic renditions of David's three main wives - Michal, Bathsheba and Avigail. Retell the story of each as we look at the paintings to see how she is portrayed. What does each tell us, not only about herself, but about David as a leader and lover?

- Read Deuteronomy 17:14-17 on the restriction of number of wives for a king. Why wives? Why a quantitative criterion rather than a qualitative one?
- List the roles in our society for a wife - especially for a First Lady of a political leader. Do these apply to David's wives? What do you think a spouse's role should be in
consulting about the professional responsibility of their partner in life? This topic will be explored in depth as regards Bathsheva, Avigail and Jezebel.

Opener # 7 – Who is the true hero of the narrative? Who is the villain?
Making a Map of Character Types

The goal of this opener is three-fold:

a. review the story
b. take an angle that focuses on character, not plot, though students are more used to the "what happened summary"
c. ask them to begin to evaluate these characters ethically because the answer depends on our definition of the hero and heroism.

Candidates:

URIAH. If the hero is an ethical paragon, then Uriah is our hero and he gives the most idealistic speech. However he loses so he is not the hero in the sense of overcoming. He may be a tragic hero for the gap between his ideals and his naiveté and reality, but we do not get to see the inner dilemmas or the final enlightenment that make him a deeper hero.

BATHSEVA is not a heroine but at best a stock character who attracts David's attention.

NATHAN is a moral hero who overcomes fear to go tell the truth to the king. He is also successful in making morality a viable option in the world of politics. He convinces the king to repent. But the narrative does not give us a window into his feelings about what he is doing.

DAVID is the hero in two senses. First he succeeds in overcoming all his obstacles, taking the beautiful object of his desire, covering up his crime – at least temporarily in II Sam. 11 – and marrying the beautiful trophy wife. Second in II Sam. 12 David struggles inwardly to admit his sin and to repent genuinely.

Jack Riemer suggests a more surprising and sophisticated candidate for the hero of our story.

"No one knows the name of the author of this Biblical tale and can say for sure when it was edited or when it entered the Book of Samuel. But this much we can say for sure: Whenever it was written and whenever it was redacted, it was done in the time when a descendant of the House of David was on the throne. There was never any other kind of king in Judah, for Judah lived by the tradition that only a descendant of the House of David was eligible to be king. Whoever that king from the House of David was, he allowed this story about the great sin of his ancestor to be told, to be recorded, and to be included in the book of Samuel! He chose not to censor it and not to execute its author. For this, he deserves our respect.

Who are the heroes of the biblical tale? The one who had the courage to tell it and the king who had the graciousness to allow it to be told."

Do you agree? Let us examine the story and see which candidate for hero makes the most sense. :

In fact, we can map all our characters in a quick review of our story, by asking the students to classify each character on a typical grid of character- types in literature:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTER Categories:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Round (like Jacob who has an inner life and choice and develops or Jacob) <strong>versus</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat Characters (like Batsheva, Avishag)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock Type Stereotypical Character (like David in Chronicles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agents (angels)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Opener #8 – The Pilgrimage of the Word

Review the story following at least five words or word pairs (opposites) that repeat often and see how their use changes in course of the story and how they shape our reading of the story. Then give the story a name based on your key words.

For example, לִתְשׁוּבַת וַתָּשָּׁׁב . цאש . מַלְאָכִים -עֲבָּׁדָּי , עִמּוֹ . לְעֵת . וָּׁמֵת . וְחֵי . shows the cross purposes of David and Uriah. Uriah swears by David's life not to betray his men at war and not to go down to his wife. David sends to make sure Uriah will die. Then when David's son from Batsheva falls ill, David prays for his life but he too dies as a punishment for David. A title might be "By Your Life! No by your life!"

לִתְשׁוּבַת וַתָּשָּׁׁב . цאש . מַלְאָכִים -עֲבָּׁדָּי , עִמּוֹ . לְעֵת . וָּׁמֵת . וְחֵי . Seeing is evaluating. David seesBathsheva and takes her. David tells Yoav not to see the death of soldiers including Uriah in negative light, but God sees all and disapproves. The contrast of moral judgment and moral rationalization is stark. A story title might be "I'll be seeing you or I won't be seeing you"

לִתְשׁוּבַת וַתָּשָּׁׁב . цאש . מַלְאָכִים -עֲבָּׁדָּי . The story has spatial vertical context and a metaphoric value association with being higher or lower. David is above all at the top of the hierarchy and above the city in the palace and on top of the roof. Batheva is down below in David's sexual conquest and in her social status. Uriah however refuses to go down to his wife to do what the king already did because Uriah maintains the moral highground refusing be degraded to David's level. A title might be: "Upstairs Downstairs"

לִתְשׁוּבַת וַתָּשָּׁׁב . цאש . מַלְאָכִים -עֲבָּׁדָּי . God gives so much to David as his prphet – Natan = giver – says, but David is a taker as Samuel wanred that kings would be. A title might be form Job: "God has given and God has taken, Blessed be the name of God."

לִתְשׁוּבַת וַתָּשָּׁׁב . цאש . מַלְאָכִים -עֲבָּׁדָּי . The word for lying down gradually gains moral force. At first david lies on his bed. Then he lies WITH Batsheva. But Uriah refuses to lie with his wife but rather lies on the steps of king's palace to show solidarity with the men lying in the battle field. David is punished with the illness of his son from Batsheva, so David lies down in mourning and supplication and refrains form intercourse with his new wife Batsheva until after the child has died. Title might be: "Lying Down on the Job."
I. David’s Temptation: Political Readings

David and Batsheva: The Turning Point by Walter Brueggemann,
David in and out of Control by Everett Fox
Story Told Without Affect by Meir Sternberg

Historical Prologue: Springtime in Jerusalem
II Samuel 11:1 Now it was at the turning of the year, at the time of kings/messengers going-forth, that David sent Yo'av and his servants with him, and all Israel: they destroyed (many of) the Children of Ammon and besieged Rabba, while David stayed in Jerusalem.

Act I. David and Batsheva
Scene 1- David sees a woman
2 Now it was around the time of sunset that David arose from his lying-place/couch and went walking on the roof of the king’s house, and he looked at a woman washing herself; from on the roof.

Scene 2- Sending for Batsheva
3 David sent and enquired about the woman:
He said: Isn't this Bat-Sheva, daughter of Eli'am, wife of Uriah the Hittite?

4 David sent messengers, and he took her, she came to him and he lay with her - now she had just purified herself from her state of tum’a\(^2\) -, then she returned to her house.

David and Batsheva: The Turning Point by Walter Brueggemann,
(First and Second Samuel, pp. 271 – 277 and David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory, p. 56-61)

We are now at the pivotal turning point in the narrative plot of the books of Samuel. We are also invited into the presence of delicate, subtle art. We are at the threshold of deep, aching psychology, and at the same time we are about to witness a most ruthless political performance. In this narrative we are in the presence of greatness. For David and for Israel, we are at a moment of no return. Innocence is never to be retrieved. From now on the life of David is marked, and all Israel must live with that mark. We pause before this artistic rendering, because this text has the power and the subtlety to address us. If we face this text at all, we are soon invited behind all the critical, scholarly questions to face the harder questions of human desire and human power - desire with all its delight, power with all its potential for death.

\(^2\) Tikva Frimer Kensky translates this line in the present tense: “She was purifying herself from impurity” implying that Batsheva’s bashes again after any act of intercourse as was mandated by Leviticus 15:18 since intercourse makes one impure and mandates a ritual bath. Nowhere in Torah does menstruation or even childbirth require a ritual bath, so the first bath was probably just a bath, not a mikveh. Of course it is ironic to try to purify oneself from illicit sex by waters which can at best remove the impurity of a natural blood flow, not adultery.
The writer has cut very, very deep into the strange web of foolishness, fear, and fidelity that comprises the human map. **This narrative is more than we want to know about David and more than we can bear to understand about ourselves.** We might wish the story about David could be "untold." David's memory cannot be unwritten (though the editor of I Chronicles 20:1-3 gave it a try by skipping this story).

The text is placed at the exact point where the narrative shifts from public triumph (II Sam. 5-10) to personal pathos, now to be spun out in the narrative that follows (II Sam. 12-20). It is the abrupt transition from a life under blessing to a life under curse. It is the intrusion of a sin into the life of David (and Israel) that cuts so sharply that it rivals in power the "original" act of Adam and Eve.

**The Language of II Samuel 11**

This story of public warfare is changed decisively, however, by the narrator's words: "David stayed in Jerusalem" (II Samuel 11:1 cf. 18:3). David was not in the action but stays behind to initiate other action. These four words at the end of the verse change the subject of the narrative. All the terror of war and the confusion of battle are bracketed out, making way for another kind of terror and confusion. There is a powerful silence back in Jerusalem with this king, who now seems so settled and sure that his mind-body can wander from the military action. David has ceased to be a chieftain and now relies on agents to do his work. He has ceased to be the king requested by Israel who would "go out and come in for the battles of God" (II Samuel 8:20).

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**Yigal Ariel** in *Oz Melech*, p. 202, understands the beginning of the corruption not in David's personal decision to remain behind at home in the palace while his men fight God's battle, but the institutional division of power typical of a small nation state turning into a hierarchical empire. II Samuel 8:15 describes the official division of labor once David became king of both Judah and Israel at the end of the civil war. "David does mishpat utzedakah and Yoav ben Tzruria is in charge of the army." Later during Avshalom's rebellion, David's men tell him explicitly not to participate in the battles because it is too dangerous and if he is killed then the "light of Israel will be extinguished." (II Sam. 21:17). Further the nature of David's wars has now changed from a War of Independence against the Philistines, to a civil war and now to expansionist imperialist wars for spoils and the extension of power over neighboring countries – such as II Sam 10-12 about the conquest of Ammon. War has become a state function of foreign policy rather than a religious and national mission (Avigail had spoken of David fighting God's wars – I Sam. 25:28). Read II Samuel 12:29-30 which describes the enormous gold crown of the King of Ammon which David ceremoniously donned after Yoav's victory as well as all the spoils. That is the literary as well as political-military context in which David conducts the affair around Batsheva.

David can now use the bureaucratic jargon in asking Uriah how is "shalom hamilchama – the peace of the war?" (II Sam. 11:7) without even sensing the irony of such an attitude to life and death matters that have now become routine state functions. How ironic and tragic that David does not fulfill the function he was assigned in II Samuel 8:15 "David does mishpat utzedakah." In that role Nathan approaches David in II Sam 12:1 but David has violated his sacred duty and become not only a corrupt commander-in-chief but a corrupt king qua judge.

The action is quick. The verbs rush as the passion of David rushed. He sent; he took; he lay (v. 4). The royal deed of self-indulgence does not take very long. There is no adornment to the action. The woman then gets some verbs: she returned, she conceived. The action is so stark. There is nothing but action. There is no conversation. There is no hint of caring, of affection, of love - only lust. David does not call her by name, does not even speak to her. At the end of the encounter she is only "the woman" (v. 5). The verb

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3 The term *melachim* spelled with an aleph may refer to royal messengers who dominate the story or it may be fuller spelling of kings, since kings usually go out to war in the spring after the rainy season in the middle east. But David does not do what kings are supposed to being doing as commanders-in-chief. However he does do what kings do in their palaces, he sleeps in the afternoon just as Saul’s son sleeps in the afternoon (II Samuel 4:5)
that finally counts is "conceived." But the telling verb is "he took her." Long ago Samuel had warned that kings are takers (I Sam. 8:11-19). David Gunn (1975) calls it "grasping." Mostly David has not had to take. He had everything gladly given to him by YHWH by Jonathan, by Abigail, by his adoring followers.

We have before us in chapter 11 a transformed David, however. Now he is in control. He can have whatever he wants, no restraint, no second thoughts, no reservations, no justification. He takes simply because he can. He is at the culmination of his enormous power.

The action, almost the only action in this long account, happens here and it happens very quickly. The royal action is governed by powerful verbs. David holds all the initiative, because he is king, and no one in the story must forget that: It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose [qum] from his couch ... The entire narrative happens between qum and shuv: David "arose" and Bathsheba "returned." End of narrative. King in charge. Just an afternoon's lark...

However "the woman conceived" lies outside the administration of the king. Now, only now, does she speak. This is her first speech. There is no speech in the midst of the seizure, no consent, no resistance... She says only two words, "I'm pregnant" (harah anoki). The world is changed. The king does not govern. An irretrievable act of public implication is now done, and utterly beyond recall. The cover-up must begin.

David is not the last person to have his world shattered by this message. Nonetheless the world-shattering words of Bathsheba completely nullify the royal power of David. David had been in control. Now, in an instant, as long as this message takes, his control ends. Notice "the woman" makes no demand or threat. Her words say enough.

In the First Resolution- II Sam.11:6-11 David is a man of action and decision. No pause. He does not vacillate. Problems are for solving. David knows immediately what to do. Three times in II Sam. 11: 6 we have the sovereign verb "send = shalakh." He had already sent twice in II Sam. 11: 3-5: "David sent and inquired"; "David sent messengers, and took her." Sending, royal sending, is what had caused the problem, and now David will resolve it by some more sending:
1) "So David sent word to Joab, 2) 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' 3)And Jacob sent Uriah to David." The three uses of "send" are matched in verse 7 by three uses of shalom, the shalom of Joab, the shalom of the people, the shalom of the war. David engages in typical talk between military men, the man in the field and the man in command. However it is easier to win a war than it is to cover up an affair with a woman. Public power will not solve personal issues.

In II Samuel 11:6-13 David acts with characteristic quickness and decisiveness. There is no vacillation, no debate, no "saying in his heart." David acts (v. 6). He sends to Joab. Who else? David sends word to the front, proposing to reach a public solution to a personal dilemma. Uriah is summoned (v. 6) and he comes (v. 7). Uriah is a man responsive to authority.

David offers Uriah a personal break from the public act of war, tries to draw him into the personal dilemma. Uriah is given a furlough to get his wife pregnant (II Sam.11:8-13). David says, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." That is enough. The euphemism is understood by these men from the barracks. The use of the euphemism evidences that the cover-up is under way.

The general (Uriah) is not preoccupied with personal problems or personal lust, however, and therefore refuses the king's generosity. Uriah has national-religious, not personal, issues. Everything Uriah cares about is at risk. In that context Uriah will not eat, drink, or lie at ease. The incongruity between their risk and his comfort would be too great and would cause him to betray his very identity. The narrative portrays Uriah, quite in contrast to David, as a principled man. Uriah will not sleep with his wife while the war continues. How different David, who sleeps with the wife of another man while that man is risking his life for David in a war that was David's war. Uriah's words indict David. Uriah the Hittite, a foreigner, is not even a child of the Torah. But he is faithful. It is a stunning moment of disclosure and contrast.
Unwittingly he refuses to participate in the king's rather innocuous resolution. That resolution would have hurt no one, only a misidentified father. **David is not malicious. He simply wants out, in order to survive.**

The exchange between general (Uriah) and commander (David) is governed by the verb "to go down" (yarad):

- II Sam.11: 8, David: "Go down to your house"
- II Sam.11: 9, Narrator: "[Uriah] did not go down to his house"
- II Sam.11: 10, Messengers: "[Messengers] told David 'Uriah did not go down to his house.'
  David said to Uriah, '. . . Why did you not go down to your house?'"

In the middle of the conversation David understands that this tactic will not work. Without changing the tone of voice or missing a beat, David is driven to more desperate action. He will not beg his general, because kings do not beg generals. He buys him another drink and sends him off. David's mind is already on the next stratagem, way ahead of his advisors who must have known something since they reported "He did not go down" (II Sam.11: 13). **Uriah has missed his chance. With a great king you get only one chance.** Now that chance is gone. It is time to move to the next measure of jeopardy.

The play on "go down" (yarad) shows that **David has lost control.** In II Sam.11: 8 he says "Go down," but in II Sam.11: 13 the narrator concludes shrewdly with a wink, Uriah "did not go down to his house." In that moment **David has become a frantic man.** His governance is endangered by his guilt, and by his recalcitrant, overly zealous general. David must proceed carefully, however, for the last thing he needs is to arouse the suspicion of Uriah.

The first resolution did not work, although it was not terribly objectionable. It was only an act of cleverness. A second resolution is offered in 2 Sam. 11:14-25-this one much more ominous. It is an act of desperation. II Sam.11: 13 says that "in the evening" Uriah lay on his couch. II Sam.11: 14 begins "in the morning." The time has passed quickly (narrative time). We do not need to watch the doomed man sleep. **While Uriah slept, David wrote a letter,** sometime between evening and morning. We are not told what happened in the night. By sunrise David is a man full of resolve. He knows what to do. The irony is high. **The innocent, obedient man sleeps. But the wicked devise evil on their beds, all night long if necessary.** (Micah 2:1)

**David's second strategy of cover-up** begins, as in verse 6, with Joab (v. 14). When all else fails, there is Joab. David sends a letter (vv. 14-15). The order is so ominous that it must be in writing. Joab is tough and knowing enough that he will not be made a scapegoat over such an order unless it is in writing. David understands Joab and does not flinch from creating a document that would stand against him in court. David is shamelessly desperate. Not only does he drink with Uriah, replicating friendship, but now he sends Uriah to the front. Uriah must carry the letter that is his own death warrant. The letter is a precise suggestion of how to get Uriah conveniently killed, so that the pregnancy can be assigned to Uriah without protest.

David wrote a letter. He has to issue a formal command. Joab would not undertake such a treachery except on explicit command. He wanted a **written order,** so that he would not be blamed later. David does not flinch. He knows the fine art of the carefully evasive order. Again the verbs of action prevail: "David wrote, [he] sent, . . . he wrote" (w. 14-15). He is in charge. He can control Joab. He could not control Uriah. He could not control his passion. He could not control the mystery of pregnancy. But at least Joab will obey, like a good soldier. The command is explicit. It must have been confidential, "for the eyes of the general only."

- II Sam.11: 14-15: the order is given: "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting . . . that he may be struck down, and die"
- II Sam.11: 16-17: the execution of the order with the terse ending: "Uriah the Hittite was slain also"

Joab does not make an inquiry about the king's order. Joab does not need to know everything. He knows enough. Joab can read between the lines of the dispatch. Joab knows what is expected. He executes the king's order obediently and effectively (v. 16). Joab is the kind of hatchet man every king
must have, someone who acts always in the interest of the king without scruple or reservation. Joab puts Uriah not only where the fighting is heaviest but where the toughest opponents are. Along with others, Uriah is killed. The second attempt at cover-up works easily and quickly.

In II Sam.11: 18-24 the report is made to David. In this narrative, Joab understands exactly what he faces. Is it not remarkable that it takes only two verses to execute! But it takes seven verses to frame a report that is properly ambiguous, with proper duplicity. The report to the king of this battle skirmish must be prepared carefully (vv. 18-21). The report is more important and more delicate than the act itself. Powerful people must frame press notices very carefully. Joab takes time to tell the messenger (press officer) exactly what to say (vv. 18-21). Joab is aware that he has used what was militarily a foolish strategy. He does not want to be blamed for such a strategy. He makes sure that David understands such a strategy was necessary for the elimination of Uriah.

David cannot get straight data. The layers of deception read like U.S. intelligence reports from Vietnam, in which everyone lied about the real war. The messenger's deception does not matter, because David does not want true reports in this case. David wants only one thing. He cuts through all the verbiage, only half listening, to see about this single line in the report. The messenger has taken his cue from Joab. He saves the crucial line until the end: "Uriah the Hittite is also dead" (v. 24).

David exhales slowly with relief. Never mind about the other deaths, the rest of the report. The one thing that needed to happen has happened. The pregnancy is reassigned. David is free of the burden. The truth has been concealed. The guilt is passed. The monarchy is saved. II Sam.11: 25: the response of David is given. He is now satisfied. The resolution works. David imagines that the misdeed of II Sam.11: 25 is now behind him.

David's response to the successful report of Uriah's death is less than noble: "Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes" (II Sam.11: 25). The wording may mean do not let it "trouble" you, do not worry, do not feel guilty. But the text shows the king sorting out moral matters. He announces that it is not evil (ra), and the reason it is not evil (ra) is that it is the way of war. The death of Uriah is not exceptional and the commander of a mighty army cannot blink over that. It just happens, indiscriminately, now this one and now that one, for war is no respecter of persons.

Too bad David's response in II Sam.18 to the death of Absalom did not so positively value indiscriminate death in war. There also the messenger brings the news. There also the messenger has reason to think the king will be pleased. But of course he is much more positive about the death of Uriah than the death of Absalom. He is not able to be so coldly philosophical when it is not a Hittite, but his own son.

Even in the dismissal of the death report, however, David knows better, because he had contrived it. Joab knows better, because he had implemented it, and he knew exactly what he was doing. The narrator knows better. We know as much as we can stomach about this David who stayed home. We know about the public use of power for personal ends. We know something about ourselves. We know at least as much as we can stomach about ourselves. We sense here that David's truth is not unlike our own.

This episode comes to a quick end in II Sam.11: 26-27.... She is only "wife of Uriah," and the phrase hangs like an unresolved judgment over the entire scene-over David as well as the woman. No amount of royal cunning or ruthlessness will change her real identity. David is unable to change her real identity as the wife of another man, now slain.

The second surprise at the end of this episode is this: "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (v. 27). This is the first mention of YHWH. The narrative could end here without mention of YHWH. David imagined the story could be played out in autonomy, without reference to YHWH. But YHWH will appear, at the last minute, in order to keep the story going. Whenever YHWH appears, sooner or later, his appearance marks the decisive moment. YHWH will not be eliminated from the narrative. Even if he comes very late to the scene of the crime, his coming triggers everything that follows. Note that the concluding formula, "The thing was evil in the eyes
Where is Uriah?

David wishes away Uriah and wants to cover up his death, but the text will not let him be forgotten so easily. Recurrent words that make Uriah and his death unforgettable

Walter Brueggemann: The references to Uriah.
The narrator has shaped the account so that Uriah and not David is the real actor, even though he does not do anything:

II Sam.11: 15: concerning the order, "Set Uriah in the forefront"
II Sam.11: 17: concerning the execution, "Uriah the Hittite is dead also"
II Sam.11: 21: in the report (say to the king), "Uriah the Hittite is dead also"
II Sam.11: 24: in the report, "Uriah the Hittite is dead also"

It is worth noting that in the last three uses, II Sam.11: 17, 21, 24, the particle "also" (gam) is used. Uriah is "also" dead, as an afterthought-"Oh, by the way . . . " The narrator does not want to call too much attention to the Hittite commander, but the narrator also does not want the point to be missed. The most ironic mention of Uriah is in II Sam.11: 14. The letter, the order which mandated his own death, is carried by the innocent, loyal, noble Uriah. Is there nothing to which David will not stoop for the cover-up? Is there no shame? As recent memory confirms, the cover-up goes way beyond the crime in its shameless, scandalous course.

The word "death" (mut) dominates the narrative:

II Sam.11: 15: "that he may be struck down and die"
II Sam.11: 17: "Uriah the Hittite is dead also"
II Sam.11: 21: "Uriah the Hittite is dead also"
II Sam.11: 24: "Some of the king's servants are dead; and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also"

Five times the note is sounded. The narrative is not intended to transmit information, because the story line is well known. The narrative is an imaginative work designed to trace out the truth about David, who can command armies and manage public opinion, but who cannot order his life or govern the gift of life entrusted to him. He is obviously much better at death than at life. And the statement is so subtle, because that fact is a surprise to David, who perhaps thought himself to be "pro-life." The narrative shows David as bearer and agent of death.
The section begins with demonstrations everywhere of David's power. ...Into this moment of triumph the Bible inserts the turning point of II Samuel and one of the greatest of all biblical tales: the story of David and Bat-Sheva. While later Jewish tradition, both in the biblical book of Chronicles (which omits this story) and in the Talmud (which whitewashes David), clearly found it difficult to reconcile the important symbolic figure of David with the way he appears in this story, the Book of Samuel features it dramatically as the root of much that is to follow, and lavishes a good deal of artistic attention and skill upon it.

It is, like so many central biblical tales, constructed on a foundation of leading-words - in this case, "lie" and "send." Rather than being mere signposts, these words undergo what Phyllis Trible suggestively calls a "pilgrimage"; they are transformed within the story, and bring us along on the journey.

From the initially neutral "lying-place," David's rooftop couch, we are taken to the crime, where he "lies" with Bat-Sheva (II Samuel 11:4). The verb next appears in Uriah's righteous refusal to go back home in the midst of the war "and I, I should come into my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?" (II Sam. 11:11). It then becomes part of David's punishment: "I will take away your women.... your fellow ... will lie with your women" (II Sam. 12:11). The ending moments of the story trace David's movement back into the realm of forgiveness and resolution, with his "lying upon the ground" (II Sam. 12:16), pleading for his son's life, and his final, legitimate "lying" with Bat-Sheva, which results in the conception of the promised heir, Shelomo. Thus an initially neutral term becomes the vehicle for a well-trodden biblical journey of sin and repentance.

The other key word, "send," has a parallel function. Eleven times (in twenty-six verses), messages and people are sent, almost always by David, the master manipulator. The long arm of royal power reaches into the home of a private citizen and to the battlefield; the king is seemingly able to move his subjects around like chess pieces. Much, but not all, of the sending is successful, but it is in any event countered by the divine hand in II Sam. 12:1 ("So YHWH sent Natan to David"). Despite David's well-thought-out plans, he cannot in the end stand up to God's sending - a phrase that is almost always connected to prophets in the Bible. Natan's mission is a classic one, with prophet pitted against king. It will be structurally repeated (along with parallel circumstances) in the great encounter between Eliyyahu (Elijah) and Ah'av (Ahab) in I Kings 21. In our story, it is only when David's repentance is accepted, and his punishment doled out, that we encounter the last "sending" of the sequence, in which God approves of the new son.
Story Told Without Affect by Meir Sternberg
(Gaps, Ambiguity, and the Reading Process, from The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, p. 186)

Leave (as in despair)
Moral and end and motive in the air;
Nice contradiction between fact and fact
Will make the whole read human and exact.

Robert Graves, "The Devil's Advice to Story-Tellers"

The Literary Work as a System of Gaps

To understand a literary work, we have to answer, in the course of reading, a series of such questions as:

- What is happening or has happened, and why?
- What connects the present event or situation to what went before, and how do both relate to what will probably come after?
- What are the features, motives, or designs of this or that character?
- How does he view his fellow characters and what norms govern the existence and conduct of all?

It is the set of answers given that enables the reader to reconstruct the field of reality devised by the text, to make sense of the represented world.

Yet a closer look at the text will reveal how few of the answers to these questions have been explicitly provided there: it is the reader himself who has supplied them, some temporarily, partially, or tentatively, and some wholly and finally. The world of situations and dramas constructed by the reader - causal sequence and all - is far from identical with what he encounters in the form of overt statement. From the viewpoint of what is directly given in the language, the literary work consists of bits and fragments to be linked and pieced together in the process of reading: it establishes a system of gaps that must be filled in. This gap-filling ranges from simple linkages of elements, which the reader performs automatically, to intricate networks that are figured out consciously, laboriously, hesitantly, and with constant modifications in the light of additional information disclosed in later stages of the reading.

The Story of David and Bathsheba: On the Narrator's Reticence and Omissions

II Samuel 11 tells a brutal and shocking story, which exposes the king's twofold crime. But the chapter does not call the ugly deeds by their names. The chain of events is presented in a neutral manner, as it were, without comment or judgment: these the narrator leaves to the reader. Such a method does not simply follow from the biblical norm of narration.

Compare this chapter with, say, the opening of Job. There the narrator time and again resorts to moralistic epithets ("perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil") and value judgments ("in all this Job sinned not"); here, he gives no direct moral characterization of David or his actions. Nor does he delegate this task to his dramatis personae. After all, a narrator averse to direct and explicit condemnation of the hero's villainy can still put the words of judgment into the mouths of other characters and use their reaction to mold the reader's. Such a delegation of judgment indeed marks the immediate sequel to the Bathsheba affair: the rape of Tamar by her brother Amnon. Tamar brands her brother's assault as "outrage," upbraids him for the "great wrong" he has done her, and departs weeping aloud, with ashes on her head.

The narrator limits himself in another direction as well. He presents external occurrences alone, deeds and words, leaving his agents' inner lives opaque - even though in a dramatic narrative of this type it is precisely the motives and thoughts of the characters that interest the reader most. To under-

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4 Uriel Simon disagrees with Meir Stenberg's claim that the narrator has chosen not to condemn David's actions. The role of Uriah's speeches about loyalty to God and to David's men point up by ironic contrast David's betrayal of all involved. The indirect but literarily sophisticated way of making the point is preferable and typical of the Biblical storyteller.
stand what is going on, the reader must assume here the existence of emotions, passions, fears, and scheming; but he can infer them, if at all, from externals alone. He must puzzle over enigmas like: Does Uriah know? and this is not easy to resolve - as well as provide answers to relatively simple questions like: Why does David summon Uriah to Jerusalem? The narrator himself, however, evades all explicit formulation of hidden thoughts and designs, thus creating the central gaps in the plot sequence.

Again, this reticence on the narrator's part is not the law of biblical narrative. The Bible, to be sure, does not linger on mental processes, nor, except by indirection, does it go so deep as to expose their undercurrents. Still, it is interspersed with inside views like "David understood that the child was dead" (2 Sam 12:19) or "Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her" (2 Sam 13:15). In contrast, the tale of David and Bathsheba not only elides those states of mind (e.g., the king's designs on Uriah) that are as crucial to its plot as to its morality.

The suppression of essentials, the narrator's pseudo-objectivity, and the tone rendering the horror as if it were an everyday matter: all these create an extreme ironic discordance between the tale's mode of presentation and the action itself, as reconstructed and evaluated by the reader.
II. The Enigmatic Batsheva and the Male Gaze: Gendered Readings

Two Approaches to an Enigmatic Woman
The Inquiry Method and a Close Text Analysis of Motives
The Questions about Batsheva: A Minimalist Description Evokes Imagination
Bathsheba Goes Bathing in Hollywood
Testing the Hypotheses about David and Batsheva's Relationship
The Male Gaze: A Feminist Critique of David and a Call to Cultural Self-Criticism
The Male Gaze in Art, Film and Bible by Howard Eilberg-Schwartz
Raped by the Pen, *Fragmented Women* by Cheryl Exum
Male Sexuality and Political Effectiveness

Giacomo Manzu – From the Window (Italy, second half of the 20th century)
**David sees a woman**
II Samuel 11:2 Now it was around the time of sunset that David arose from his lying-place/couch and went walking on the roof of the king's house, and he looked at a woman washing herself; from on the roof. the woman was very good-looking.

**Sending for Batsheva**
3 David sent and enquired about the woman:
He said: Isn't this Bat-Sheva, daughter of Eli'am, wife of Uriah the Hittite?

4 David sent messengers, and he took her, she came to him and he lay with her - now she had just purified-herself from her state of tum’a -, then she returned to her house.

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**Two Approaches to an Enigmatic Woman**

First we begin our inquiry by raising our own questions about David and Batsheva’s relationship that arise from close text reading. Then we proceed to offer two different inquiry approaches to this ambiguous story.

One is a careful text **analysis of motives** analyzing various hypotheses of commentators and **constructing the most plausible reading** closest to the text’s explicit statements, **closest to our assumptions about human character and rational pursuit of self-interest**. Neutrality and objectivity are the central values in this inquiry as well as the ability to prove one’s hypothesis from the text of II Sam. 11. It seeks to use the text as window into the author’s world.

The other approach is charged by a **feminist outrage** at an ongoing exploitation of women and corruption of the male ego. It asks not how the text gives us a window into the past but how the literary retelling shapes our responses to women and men even today. It begs us to face the value issues and cultural presuppositions out of which we build our “plausible” hypotheses of what “really” happened.
The Inquiry Method and a Close Text Analysis of Motives

Our attitudes to Batsheva serve as a Rorschach test to our assumptions about extramarital affairs between men – especially men of power – and women – especially beautiful women.5

Explore those **first impression attitudes** after reading the first text **II Samuel 11:2-6**. Ask students to jot down their first thoughts or visual images and then develop a discussion. Do not ask for proof from the text but how we imagine the text? How we feel about it intuitively?

Then gather and compare the responses and formulate questions that involve more than one alternative hypothesis.

![Jan Steen – Batsheva and the Letter (Holland, b.1626)](image)

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5 **Set Induction.** Prepare the students; interest by bringing newspaper articles, movies, TV shows that describe extramarital affairs in which one of participants is married to another person. Who is portrayed as starting the affair? Is it mutual or a onesided seduction? Is it love or mere sex? Is about sex or about power? Draw up categories of affairs. Then ask yourself what you think about these affairs – your emotional gut reaction and your considered moral position.

Exercise: Consider yourself asking and answering a Dear Abby column about this topic. What would you advise a young man? A young woman? Compare your advice to **Proverbs 7** which is written as a warning to one’s son to avoid a seductive foreign woman.
The Questions about Batsheva: A Minimalist Description Evokes Imagination

1- The Bath of Bathsheba. Femme Fatal or Exploited Woman? Did Bathsheba bath in public in order to entice David to sleep with her or was she the victim of the male gaze, of the hierarchical power of a ruler taking advantage of a servant’s wife?

2- Pregnancy – Oops or Love's child or “Now I gotya”? An accident of unprotected sex or a plot of lovers or a plot of an ambitious social climber?

3- Lover of Uriah and/or of David? Is Bathsheba a character whose feelings don’t matter? Did she love her husband? Did she love David? Did she co-plot with David her husband’s deception? His death? Did she feel sorry for his death?

4- Sex and Marriage. Why does David marry Bathsheba? David’s sex drive or David’s love or David’s precaution against scandal? Was David in love with Bathsheba in love at first sight? Did David’s plan to kill Uriah reflect his feeling for Bathsheba? Why in the end did David marry Bathsheba? Did David ever develop a mature love for Bathsheba?

The texts about Bathsheva and David from which to formulate our hypotheses and marshal our evidence and our interpretations:

II Samuel 11:2-6 – David spies Bathsheva and sleeps with her

II Samuel 11: 26-27 – Bathsheva mourns Uriah and then David brings Bathsheva home

II Samuel 12:1-3 – Nathan’s Parable of the Lamb

II Samuel 12: 15-18 David fasts and prays for the life of his first son from Bathsheva

II Samuel 12:24 -25 David comforts Bathsheva and as a result Solomon is born

I Kings 1: 11-17 Bathsheva recalls to David his oath to crown Solomon her son after him

- In groups or in hevruta, examine several questions and this time marshal evidence for each hypothesis even though they are incompatible. Do not yet develop your own position. Perhaps groups can work in the jigsaw method researching different texts and bringing back a pro/con report summarized on a chart.

- Discuss and outline arguments with their evidence from the text and from human experience. Carefully distinguish between what the text says explicitly and what it might imply after analysis.

- Now develop an argument that most makes sense to you. Perhaps conduct a debate or even a mini-trial of Bathsheva.

- Consider how to cast Bathsheva for a movie – which actresses? How in particular would you shape the bathing scene?

- Consider the issues that David Gunn, feminist commentator, raises about this scene which is portrayed in the 1951 Hollywood movie about David and Bathsheva.
Bathsheba Goes bathing in Hollywood
By David Gunn

I wonder, then, if the bathing scene [in the 1951 movie of David and Bathsheba] may not be viewed as an emblem of the ambiguities of the film, the genre, and the social order of the early fifties as it related to women. Does Bathsheba beckon David or her women viewers? Does she beckon at all? As she turns, her eyes seem fleetingly to meet the camera. Is her gaze towards David, or the viewer? Or nowhere in particular - her own space?

What about that solid screen? Does it invite the male gaze behind it to contemplate her nakedness? Or does it mark off her body as her own to give? Her boundary-to be crossed at her choice? Does the screen signal that her body is a source of vulnerability, needing protection? Or does it constitute a shield for battle, signaling that the body behind it has a power over the man?

If so, what (given the movie’s outcome) is the moral nature of that power?
Is she a victim? A survivor?
A schemer? A femme fatale? A femme forte? All or none of the above?
Can she slip out from behind the viewer’s labels as easily as she can slip out from behind the screen?

The “Bath” In History

- “Go take a bath” means today take care of your hygiene and behave like a cultured person, not like an animal.
- In the Bible it meant purify yourself from the flowing liquids of natural life that stand for illness or death – blood, semen, pus etc. It returned the human being to the rebirth of water, to purity and allowed him/her to visit the Temple which required a state of physical/ritual purity. One reason Uriah may not have gone home to sleep with Bathsheva during the battle is that the semen would have made him impure, while the military camp with the presence of God and the ark must be preserved as a holy impurity-free zone.
- In the Greco-Rome world the bathhouses like the later Turkish baths were places for pleasurable social interaction, not merely hygiene. They had no religious significance per se.
- In the Middle Ages after the Black Plague baths were to be avoided, especially public baths, because of the fear of contagion.

6 In medieval Books of Hours commissioned and used by wealthy women, Bathsheba is often shown in the bath as David peeks at her. She is meant to learn how dangerous being exposed to the male gaze can be. Then David is shown on bended knee pleading for penance. Confession is the way to forgiveness.
- Yet in the 1700s “taking the waters” meaning bathing in a mineral bath at a spa was concerned curative.
- In the 1800s middle class homes could afford more rooms and they distinguished between the front and back of the house, between the living rooms and the privies. A woman’s bathroom was “a sanctuary into which no one (except her personal servants), not even a loved husband, should penetrate.” In that sense if David was a peeping Tom peering into Bathsheba’s bathroom, he was doing something extremely inappropriate.
- How are bathrooms portrayed today in contemporary media?

Julius Schnorr, David & Bathsheva, 1851
Testing the Hypotheses about David and Batsheva’s Relationship

**Exercise:** At every stage pg this complex affair, the characters may be judged either charitably or cynically, positively or negatively, depending on one's presuppositions and one's explications of textual hints. After each subsection, consider the questions and reflect on the positive and negative readings.

(The discussion summarizing various commentators on these questions of motive and character is based on Chaya Shraga Ben-Ayun, *Neshot David* - 2005).

1 - The Bath of Bathsheba. Femme Fatal or Exploited Woman?

Did Batsheva bathe in public in order to entice David to sleep with her or was she the victim of the male gaze, of the hierarchal power of a ruler taking advantage of servant’s wife?

**II Samuel 11:2-6 – David spies Batsheva and sleeps with her**

**Act I. David and Batsheva**

**Scene 1 - David sees a woman**

2 Now it was around the time of sunset that David arose from his lying-place/couch and went walking on the roof of the king's house, and he looked at a woman washing herself; from on the roof.

the woman was very good-looking.

**Scene 2- Sending for Batsheva**

3 David sent and enquired about the woman:

He said: Isn't this Bat-Sheva, daughter of Eli'am, wife of Uriah the Hittite?

4 David sent messengers, and he took her, she came to him and he lay with her

- now she had just purified-herself from her state of tum'a -,

then she returned to her house.

**Act II: David and Uriah**

**Scene 1- Sending for Uriah**

5 The woman became pregnant, she sent and had-it-told to David, she said: I am pregnant!

6 So David sent (word) to Yo'av:

Send me Uriah the Hittite.

And Yo'av sent Uriah to David.
Negative view of Batsheva as a seductress
a- she bathed on her roof or at least in a place clearly visible through her window for the king on his roof which was a social location where people often spent time.
b- she knew she was just completing her menstrual cycle and most fertile, yet she did not struggle to avoid the intercourse
c- the royal messengers took her but it says "she came" with the double entendre that hints at coming into him sexually of her own free will
d- David lay with her immediately without needing words of persuasion and without any description of force or pain (Hamor with Dinah in Genesis 34:2 says vayianeha; Amnon with Tamar in II Samuel 13:14 says vayhazek mimena vayianeha). The same phrase for lying with her is sued for David comforting Batsheva later in the narrative (II Samuel 12:24-25).

Positive view of Batsheva as a Victim
a- David, not Batheva, is on the roof, though Batsheva could have been more careful knowing she lived near enough to the king's roof for him to see how beautiful she was. Still generally the mikvehs archeologists have found from a later period are basement baths that would not easily have been seen from outside on the roof.
b- Batsheva is not described as repeating this act of self-exposure to draw attention but rather doing it according to the menstrual cycle of purification nor did she bathe in daylight but towards dusk (l'et erev) when it is harder to be seen
c- Batsheva takes the initiative to leave when intercourse is over, not seeking to stay with her "catch" and she makes no attempt to contact him again until she discovers her pregnancy several months later. She is not still seeing David regularly or perhaps at all, otherwise she would not have had to send a messenger to tell him of her pregnancy.
d- Being described as “beautiful” in the Bible means there is always trouble brewing because beauty motivates attempts to take that beauty by force. However it is never the source of beauty's fault. So Sarah’s beauty attracts Pharaoh, Joseph’s attracts Potiphar’s wife, Tamar attracts Amnon’s sick obsession, so Batsheva is also a likely victim, not seductress.

Tikvah Frymer Kensky (Reading the Women of the Bible, p144-6) argues for Batsheva’s innocence even if she was bathing on the roof. It is David’s knowing disregard of the marital status of Batsheva which is the focus of interest.

Some modern readers have been very suspicious of Bathsheba, questioning her motives for being on her roof and suggesting that she went up to entice the king. But this suspicion is not warranted. If she wanted to bathe, where else would she be? It is spring, when the cisterns and water jugs on the roof stand full of the winter's rain. And when better to bathe but in the cool of late afternoon, after the day's work is done? To say that Bathsheba set out to entice the king is to say that violated women “were asking for it” because they smiled, or wore tight clothes, or went to a club. Bathsheba is enjoying a private moment - she thinks - and we violate it the moment we stop to contemplate her beauty.

The beauty of a woman is often a spur to male action. In the Bible, often men like to acquire beautiful, things. And beautiful women. Abram said to Sarai, “Indeed I know that you are beautiful” (Gen. 12.11) and this knowledge made him afraid that the Egyptians would want her, as indeed they did. Now, just as the king of Egypt reacted to Sarai’s beauty, David, king of Israel, reacts to Bathsheba’s. The story is conspicuous for what it does not say. Nowhere do we read, David loved her.” David knows about love. Michal loved him in her youth (I Sam. 18:20), as did Jonathan (I Sam. 20:17). But David, whose very name probably means "beloved,” doesn't love. For him it is enough that she is beautiful.

II Sam. 11:3-5:
David sent to enquire about the woman.
And he said, "Isn't that Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, wife Uriah the Hittite?"
David gets his answer: it is Bathsheba, a married woman, which should be enough to end the story before it begins. A married woman is off limits to other men; even in his worst nightmare, Abram never expected the Egyptians to take his wife without killing him first. And he was right, for when Pharaoh learned that Sarah was Abram’s wife; he was horrified and immediately gave her back. When Abimelech king of Gerar took Sarah, he had a vision that he would die for taking a man's wife, and when he told his court, they were all horrified. In the social order of Israel and the ancient world, *adultery was a serious transgression*. Ancient texts from Ugarit and Egypt call it “the great sin,” and the law codes prescribe death for the adulterous parties. But David is not stopped by the knowledge that Bathsheba is married, and does not leave her alone.

There have always been kings who considered themselves exempt from strictures against adultery, from ancient patriarchal conceptions that the woman might belong to her husband, because all subjects belong to the king! And whatever the king desires should be his. So Bathsheba's married state might not make a great difference to the imperial and imperious David, who told Michal that he could do whatever he would.

Bathsheba is not simply any married woman. Both her father, Eliam, and her husband, Uriah, are members of David’s trusted inner “circle of thirty.” They have been with him since his outlaw days, and Eliam was the son of the counselor Ahitophel (II Sam. 23:34) [who becomes the advisor to Absalom’s revolt against David and encourages him to sleep with David’s concubines on that same roof! – II Sam. 16:20-24]. To take Bathsheba is to violate the trust of a loyal lieutenant. But none of this matters: David sent envoys and took her. The story gives us no explanation for this bizarre action, shows us no motive, no deliberation, and no hesitation. It doesn't even tell us whether *David disregards the seriousness of adultery and his long-standing relationship with his wife, or whether these are the factors that made him act…*. It was not clandestine ...

Bathsheba comes into the palace in sight of those who are bringing her and those who guard the entrance. David does not feel that he has to sneak her in. The king can act and the people will accept.

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### 2- Pregnancy – “Now I gotya” or Love’s child or Oops?

An accident of unprotected sex or a plot of lovers or a plot of an ambitious social climber?

**Negative. Bathsheva plotted to catch David.**

She had motive. Her husband as we see when he comes home for few days was less interested in her than in his fellow soldiers, his king, his cause and his God. He had no time or interest even to visit her on his unexpected furlough. Uriah was only a foreigner – a Hittite, while Batsheva came from a well-placed family of the advisor Ahitophel. She had set her social sights on upgrading herself.

She knew she was at her most fruitful after purifying herself from her niddah but David did not realize that. That is why the fact that her bath was purification from niddah is only mentioned after he slept with her. She had power knowing she could become pregnant and realized the power it gave over him. She did not have to persuade him but just let him know she was pregnant. David was afraid to be caught in his indiscretion and Bathsheva believed he would be forced to get rid of her husband. David in fact marries her immediately after the mourning period for Uriah. Like Tamar and in the same words of Gen 38:25, Bathsheva declares “I am pregnant” to the man who caused the pregnancy and like Tamar she seduced David into the pregnancy using his desire for a casual onetime sexual encounter.

Or at least she enjoyed the sex without guilt. Then she comes back to David only when things get messy.

**Negative or Neutral.** David and Bathsheva plotted this child together out of love. David knew what an important family she came from for he inquired about her before summoning her. Beauty was not enough for him. Or perhaps love at first sight was so strong that he wanted her even though he knew this could be complicated socially, unlike sex with a country girl. That first night he may have won her over with his promise to make her son king – that is the *midrash shem* on Bat-sheva’s name – “daughter of the oath”
mentioned in I Kings 1: 11-17 when Batsheva recalls to David his oath to crown Solomon “your son” (bneich) after him.

Or maybe they loved each other naively and blindly and they did not see far enough into the future that there could be complications. However when Batsheva discovered her pregnancy she was confident David’s love for her would lead him to save her, not to have her disposed of.

Positive. Oops! Batsheva is an innocent victim.

Her bath was timed not to attract David on the roof but to purify herself when her niddah was over. She made no attempt to contact David after she got up and left his bed. She only contacted him because she realized her life was in danger as well as David’s by the law of adultery (Genesis 38 – Tamar and Judah and Deuteronomy 22:23-29). She felt not power but danger and she ran to David the victimizer to be her savior because she had no one to turn to and he too was implicated since so many people knew from all the royal messengers David used. She could not tell her husband and expect understanding.

On the other hand, maybe Batsheva is a passive victim who emerges from her trauma and tries to defend herself actively. Like Tamar and in the same words of Gen 38:25 she declares confidently of her innocence - “I am pregnant” - to the man who caused the pregnancy. She turns the tables on David who has sent her messengers to inquire about her and to take her from her home and now she acts the royal part and she sends messengers to force David to do something (II Samuel 11:5).

Criminologists distinguish between rape out of pathological desire or pathological power (Amnon with Tamar) and rape out of exploitation of one’s superior status to take advantage of those dependent. David seems to be the latter and now Batsheva turns the tables by showing David how he has endangered his own superior status. He can no longer lie and pretend he did nothing.

Naomi Harris Rosenblatt, What are you going to do about this? After the Apple, pp. 167

Though David is infatuated with Bathsheba, he is not about to snatch a wife permanently away from her husband. Bathsheba’s devastating note, however, the first recorded communication between the two, demands new thinking. The note consists of only three words, "I am pregnant," but its subtext is "What are you going to do about this?" The terse message offers a first glimpse into Bathsheba’s forceful and defiant character. From this note David understands that Bathsheba will not simply vanish. She is no scullery maid, to be used and discarded. She will not be ignored or acquiesce to the role of a “woman scorned.” She expects David, the man with the power, who is her lover and happens to be the king, to extricate her and her unborn child from her dangerous situation.

She has no alternative. Her tone is matter-of-fact. She does not grovel, beg, or flatter, even though she knows that the penalty for adultery at that time and place is stoning. If David does not intervene, she and their child will die a hideously painful and public death.

True to his nature, David takes immediate action to contain the damage; the pregnancy is becoming visible. He settles on a plan of cover-up to disguise the baby’s royal paternity.
3- Batsheva - a lover of Uriah and/or of David? Is Batsheva a character whose feelings don’t matter? Did she love her husband? Did she love David? Did she co-plot with David her husband’s deception? His death? Did she feel sorry for his death? Examine II Samuel 11: 26-27 and II Samuel 12:1-3

Batsheva mourns and then remarries – A False Happy Ending
II Sam. 11:26 When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband was dead, she beat her breast for her lord.

27 And when the mourning-period was past, David sent and had her brought to his house. She became his wife, and she bore him a son.

God sends a messenger with a parable
12:1 YHWH sent Natan to David, he came to him and said to him: There were two men in a certain town, one rich and one poor.
2 The rich-one had flocks and herds, exceedingly many,
3 while the poor-one had nothing at all except for one little lamb which he had bought. He kept-it-alive and it grew up with him, together with his children: from his morsel it would eat, from his cup it would drink, in his bosom it would lie, it became like a daughter/bat to him.

Negative: Batsheva has no relations to Uriah because he has no relation to her.
Her husband as we see when he comes home for few days (II Samuel 11:10-11) was less interested in her than in his fellow soldiers, his king, his cause and his God. He had no time or interest even to visit her on his unexpected furlough. Her mourning after his death is perfunctory without any added expressions of grief such as in the descriptions of David for Avshalom (II Samuel 19:1-5) or Jacob for Joseph (Gen 37:34-35) or Abraham for Sarah.

II Samuel 11:26 emphasizes Batsheva’s formal relationship to Uriah – “her husband, his wife, her owner/baal.” The text never tells us or shows us anything about their positive relationship.

Positive: Batsheva loved her husband.
She never took an initiative to come back to David, she certainly never plotted to have him killed, Nathan never blamed her for that, and Nathan’s description of the lamb’s relationship to the poor man is meant to evoke their loving relationship (II Samuel 12:1-4). Batsheva could never expect love from a king with so many women at his disposal.
4- Sex leads to Marriage.

What motivates David - his sex drive or his love? Why did David try to kill Uriah? Why did David marry Batsheva? Did David ever develop a love for Batsheva?

Loss of the Child of Adultery
15 Natan went back to his house.
And YHWH smote the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, so that he became ill.
16 And David implored God on behalf of the boy, David fasted; when he came (home) he would spend-the-night lying upon the ground.
17 The elders of his house arose about him to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not take food with them.
18 Now it was on the seventh day that the child died.
David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said: Here, while the child was alive, we spoke to him but he did not hearken to our voice; so how can we say to him: The child is dead? He might do evil!

19 When David saw that his servants were whispering (among themselves), David understood that the child was dead.
David said to his servants:
Is the child dead?
They said: he is dead.

The Comfort of a New Child – True Happy Ending

II Samuel 11:20 Then David arose from the ground, he washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes, and he came into the house of YHWH and prostrated himself; then he came (back) to his house, requested that they put food before him, and ate.
21 His servants said to him:
What (kind of) thing is this that you have done?
For the sake of the living child, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you arise and eat food!
22 He said: As long as the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said (to myself): Who knows, perhaps YHWH will be gracious to me, and the child will live!
23 But now he is dead - why should I fast? Can I make him return again?
I may go to him, but he will not return to me.
24 And David comforted Bat-Sheva his wife, he came to her and lay with her; She bore a son and called his name Shlomo/His Peace (= Shalom).

Negative: Sex and complications

a - David was motivated by her beauty. It was a passing fancy as Nathan emphasizes in his parable about the man who came to visit the rich man who had to be entertained. There was no attempted follow-up after the quick conquest.
b- When David heard that Batsheva was pregnant he did not try to keep her or his baby for himself but to shove her off on her husband as soon as possible.
c- David only married her to keep a lid on his cover-up lest she talk.
Positive: David's love grew.
Chaya Shraga Ben-Ayun in her book *Neshot David* (2005) argues forcefully that David originally felt or at least developed real concern and then love for Batsheva.

a- Initially he did try to retract the relationship and cover-up by enticing Uriah back to his home. But he never considered ignoring Batsheva's call for help though as king he would have been less threatened than she as an adulterous wife. He never considers having her removed by stealth either before or after Uriah’s death.

b- David by contrast with his son Amnon never considers kicking Batsheva out and sending her away which might have been a reaction to his now satisfied purely sexual desire.

c- He married Batsheva immediately (even though legally Jewish tradition later explicitly forbids marriage to one with whom one has committed adultery) and even though politically he could have made her a mere concubine. The term used is "bringing her home" = *vayaesfah l'beito* which has strong connotations of care for the weak (collecting a lost animal – Deuteronomy 22:2; taking in an abandoned child with mother or father – Psalm 27:10; being taken in for hospitality - Judges 19:15, 18)

d- David mourned excessively over his illicit son from Batsheva. He pleaed with God by fasting to rescind the death sentence. But this would not have been a significant punishment by God, had David cared nothing for Batsheva or their unplanned child.

e- David went to comfort Batsheva immediately after the child’s death – an act of love and compassion – that produces a much beloved replacement – Shlomo. Now Batsheva is named “David’s wife” (II Samuel 12:24) while the first child is identified as "the child born of Uriah’s wife to David" (II Samuel 12:15). Now God speaks of a child of love – "Yedidya = God love him" and God’s restored love is a blessing on this union and its fruit. Shlomo’s name may also mean "to replace, to make up for a loss" (*hashlim*), just as Shet’s name and function is the child to replace Abel after his murder.

In short, David does more for this woman than for any other. The oath to make Solomon king after him may well have been part of David’s act of comforting Batsheva. Whatever his original feelings, they grew into a rich love and compassion and a commitment to their offspring. That, more than love at first sight, is real love.

In II Samuel 12:24 *when Shlomo is born, who names him?* According to the *keri* it is Batsheva who names this child as her comfort, her completion, after such pain from war and death. According to the *ketiv* it is David who names for him as a kind of rainbow promising renewed peace after Nathan has cursed him with unending war. But it is God through Nathan who renames him Yedidya for *Yedidya is a sign of renewed love in the God-man-woman-child- Israel relationship.*

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**Naomi Harris Rosenblatt, From Lust to Love via Mourning, After the Apple, pp 173**

"David consoled Bathsheba, his wife, and he came to her and lay with her, and she bore a son and called his name Solomon, and God loved him."

The king has murdered and the king has lied [and the child of their passion has died at God's hands], but Bathsheba is still able to stir in him a tenderness we have not witnessed before. In her grief Bathsheba turns to David for consolation and leans on him for strength and understanding. Men are more likely to find solace and support in sexual intimacy, but David understands that a mother's needs are different. The biblical narrator makes a point of telling us that first David consoles Bathsheba and only then do they resume their sexual relationship.

David and Bathsheba move beyond simple lust, as every couple must if their partnership is to endure. They share their grief with an emotional intensity that David has not found with any of his other wives. Paradoxically, the death of their son ushers in a lifelong partnership that will mature and deepen through the years.

All too often the opposite occurs. Many marriages disintegrate after a child dies because husbands and wives grieve differently and deal with pain in separate ways. One may need to express feelings at length and the other may need to repress them. One may blame the other for the tragedy, undermining their partnership with guilt and accusations. ...
Somehow Bathsheba changes herself from a mere sexual object into a partner in David’s collection of wives – not concubines, not out of political calculations - the usual basis for royal marriages, but in defiance of it: out of love alone. [Ultimately she has the power to convince David to have her son crowned David’s heir.]

Frank Pitman in *Private Lies* writes: “In our society monogamy is the ideal and infidelity the primary threat to marriage. It is deceit, the cover-up, the web of lies that are the most difficult for the betrayed partner to come to terms with. **It is not so much who one lies with but who one lies to.**”

**Exercise:** Write a diary or a dialogue of David and Bathsheva after the death of Uriah and the death of their son. What might they say to one another? Did Bathsheba ever know David has Uriah killed? Does she discover it only after Natan’s accusations. In one version of the diary? dialogue express anger and guilt and blame and in the other express consolation and mutual understanding.

**Summary Exercise:** Summarize the hypotheses studied – cynical or charitable - by writing a movie review of these dialogues below from the *David and Bathsheba* movie from 1951 compared with the Biblical text as analyzed.

The scene is between David and Uriah whom the king has summoned from the battlefield upon learning that Bathsheba is pregnant. David invites the soldier to speak with him alone. After assuring David that Joab, the general, is confident of success, Uriah seeks permission to return to the field. David replies that there will be dispatches for him to take back and suggests that he might desire to stay in Jerusalem longer.

**U:** My only desire is to serve my king,
**D:** I might believe that, but you have a wife.
**U:** My wife is nothing sire, beside my duty....
**D:** A woman does not always share her husband’s devotion to duty. Have you ever tried to think of things from her point of view?
**U:** No sire.
**D:** Well supposing her wishes and yours come into conflict?
**U:** A woman’s wishes cannot conflict with her husband’s, sire. That is the law.
**D:** The law. The law can only control what we do, not what we think. What does your wife think, Uriah?
**U:** I do not know, sire.
**D:** Is it possible that you believe she does not think or feel? A woman is flesh and blood, Uriah, like us. Perhaps even more so because we give her so little to think of but matters of the flesh. In all our history, only a handful of women have been permitted to write their names beside the men. Miriam, Deborah, Jael, one or two more. A woman’s occupation is her husband and her life is her love. But if her husband rejects her love, if he puts another love before it, if he denies her the only meaning her life can have, is it not understandable that she seeks a meaning for it elsewhere?

Dialogue of David and Bathsheva after David has spoken to Uriah who refused to go home to his wife:

**D:** Uriah is a fool. When I looked on you from my terrace tonight, I knew that every future moment spent away from you would be a moment lost. Yet he has found only six days for you in seven months. The perfume of his beloved is the stink of war. Does he think that a man was made only to know the agony of battle? Does he call that manhood? Has he no blood, no heart?... Be thankful that I’m not Pharaoh. At least I can console myself with the thought that your modesty matches your beauty.
B: Perhaps you would prefer truth to modesty, sire. Before you went away, I used to watch you every evening as you walked on your terrace. Always at the same hour, always alone. Today I heard you had returned.
D: And you knew that I...
B: You'd be on your terrace tonight? Yes. I had heard that never had the king found a woman to please him. I dared to hope I might be that woman.
D: Why are you telling me this now? Why not before?
B: Because, first I had to know what was in your heart. If the law of Moses is to be broken, David, let us break it in full understanding of what we want from each other.

- Did you learn anything of a new way to read the original text’s intent from the movie version? Explain.
- How would you change the dialogue to express your viewpoint on the Biblical text?
- How would you rewrite it to attract the largest film audience today?
- What modern western worldview of men and women led the screenwriter to portray the David, Uriah and Batsheva relationship as he did?
The Male Gaze: A Feminist Critique of David and A Call to Cultural Self-Criticism

“He looked at a woman bathing ... and the woman was very good-looking!”
(Il Sam. 11:2)

Given the enigmatic, severely minimalist portrayal of the woman Batsheva and of the act of intercourse, our seemingly rational, objective construction of the motives of the characters turns out to become easily a projection on the half-baked story. Some of the contemporary commentators brought below fulminate against commentators and artists who project cultural stereotypes of the seductive woman on Batsheva’s description in the text. As Cheryl Exum puts it, Bathsheva has been raped again by the “pen” – by the way the Biblical text has portrayed her and many commentators have done in writing more texts about her. Many of us and our students may also have read Batsheva’s behavior as suspect as the text presents her. The feminist critique agrees that we have been seduced by the ambiguous text with its innuendos intended to entice us. However whether we read Batsheva as a love story or a seduction story, we contribute to the dangerous stereotypes that dominate books and film and male and female psyches to this day. II Samuel 11 should prod us to self-reflection on these issues of gender which are especially important to adolescents as well as adults in Western society.

Nathan challenged David to reread his own life story in the light of a parable and then summon up the courage to self-accusation. The feminist critique (not limited by any means to women commentators) asks us to read the Batsheva story and apply its moral outrage as seen through God’s eyes to our own views, not to simply project our own values on the story as if the text has legitimated them. II Samuel 11, as Menachem Perry and Meir Sternberg have shown, presents the quick succession of events in minimalist, value neutral language especially the David and Batsheva tale. Hence the author invites us to project our feeling and motives. What are those presuppositions about men and women?

An Educational Opening and a Caveat

Teaching this feminist approach might best begin:
- with magazine or TV images of women used for advertising.
- with articles about politician’s sexual “indiscretions” – Clinton, for example or any man in a position of authority such as priests, rabbis or teachers
- with newspaper reports of horrendous but now frequent tales of date rape of young girls by young adolescents, even in school settings.
- with the classical art of the Bathsheva story

All these ideas are subject to the concerns for modesty and seriousness in a classroom of mixed sex adolescents. As sensitive as these issues are, they need to be addressed by the educators of adolescents in our highly sexualized western consumer society – if the teacher and the class atmosphere allow it. Precisely the indirect approach – interpreting an ancient text - may allow students to “cover up” these shame-arousing topics and yet allow them to open up and discuss them, obliquely projected back on to Biblical figures.

The male gaze, with which II Samuel 11 begins, turns a leisurely walk into a violent turning point in the dynasty of David and young Israel. It is not an innocent voyeurism. It is dangerous precisely because it is so ubiquitous in their society and still in ours. In fact our Western society has commercialized and therefore legitimated and aroused a culture of voyeurism that often shades off into sexual exploits – both consensual, commercial and forcible. The article below sums up not only the contemporary “obsession” with men staring at women but also some of its Biblical expressions – too many and too pervasive to be written off as incidental.
Gazing is enough to generate desire. That "the gaze" and desire are intimately linked has been amply demonstrated by recent art and film critics. John Berger in his *Ways of Seeing* describes the relationship of the gaze, power, and heterosexual desire in European paintings of the nude. "Men act and women appear. . . . Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight."...

Laura Mulvey makes similar arguments about film: It is the male heterosexual gaze that directs the view of the camera. The film's viewers are thus invited to gaze upon women as objects of desire. "The male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like."

For similar reasons, it is considered erotic when a woman removes her glasses in films. She is casting off her position as spectator and becoming instead the object of the gaze.

The male gaze and desire were also linked in the ancient Israelite imagination:

- Abram, for example, worries about the beauty of Sarai as they enter Egypt, and his fears are born out when the Egyptians see Sarai's beauty and take her into Pharaoh's court (Gen. 12: 11, 14).
- Shechem, son of Hamor, sees Dinah and rapes her (Gen. 34:2).
- Judah sees the daughter of a Canaanite woman and he marries her and cohabits with her (Gen. 38:2).
- From his rooftop, David sees Bathsheba bathing and desires her (II Sam. r 11:2-4)
- There are of course, exceptions to the male who gazes. Potiphar's wife, for example, casts her eyes on Joseph and desires him (Gen.. 39: 7), but the narrator condemns her behavior. Indeed, this reversal of desire signifies the harlot (see Ezekiel. 23:26).
- An interesting exception is the Song of Songs in which the woman's gaze is not problematic (5:10). But in biblical texts, the desirous gaze and the gaze that beholds beauty is generally the gaze of a man looking at a woman.7

**Introduction to Cheryl Exum's "Raped by the Pen"**

In the next selection of the feminist critique, Cheryl Exum seeks to scandalize us by calling Bathsheba's "affair" – a rape. This act is reprehensible notwithstanding the subsequent marriage as a cover-up and God's approval of the illustrious heir of this illicit union, Solomon. The rape is not only David taking advantage of his power but the text's own innuendos and the commentators rush to condemn Bathsheva as a seductress. We ourselves are implicated in this chauvinist reading to the text.

Let us try to hear what she has to say even if her tone is at times self-righteous and her critique of the Tanakh is unsparing, for Nathan's critique of David and all who follow in his footsteps is no less discomforting and accusatory. Nathan did mean not only that David is "the man" – *Ata Halsh* – but also that we the readers, the Jewish descendants of Judah, are also implicated – men and women.

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7 It may be on occasion a woman who gazes at a male, but it is never a man gazing at another man.; Thus the prohibition on Ham's seeing his father is intended to direct the male gaze away from the male to the female body. Furthermore, it is Noah's passivity, his taking of what was regarded as the female's position, that makes the viewing of his nakedness so problematic. An Israelite male who gazed at God was like Ham, who looked at his naked father. Israelite men were expected to the Semites, virtuous sons of Shem who avert their gaze from their father in heaven.
“Raped by the Pen” by Cheryl Exum, Fragmented Women, p. 171ff

Male domination of the female body is the basic material reality of women's lives; and all struggle for dignity and self-determination is rooted in the struggle for actual control of one's own body, especially control over physical access to one's own body.

Andrea Dworkin

The ‘Rape’ of Bathsheba

In what sense is Bathsheba raped? The account is remarkably brief:

David sent messengers and took her. She came to him and he lay with her, while she was purifying herself from her uncleanness. Then she returned to her house (2 Sam. 11:4).

The encounter takes place in a context of aggression and violence - war with Ammon during which David stays at home. Given the long-standing and integral association of war with rape... is the embeddedness of this account in that of the Ammonite war a hint that force is used here? The text seems ambivalent on the matter. 'Sent' and 'took' indicate aggression on David's part; on the other hand, the two verbs of which Bathsheba is the subject, 'came' and 'returned', are not what one would expect if resistance were involved. The king sends for a subject and she obeys. His position of power gives him an advantage: he 'takes'. Does she know for what purpose she is summoned? Sexual extortion can take many forms, and coercion can be exerted subtly, making women feel they must agree to sex. Is it, then, against her will that David has sex with Bathsheba? Whereas some commentators recognize Bathsheba's status as passive object, rare is the commentator who would go so far as to describe this encounter as rape....

In what sense is Bathsheba raped?

The question is not whether or not she could have resisted. The point is not what Bathsheba might have done or felt; the point is we are not allowed access to her point of view. There is no attempted seduction recounted, which would give the woman a role, even if one in which she is manipulated. The denial of subjectivity is an important factor in rape, where the victim is objectified and, indeed, the aim is to destroy her subjectivity. The issue of force versus consent is crucial for constructing the woman's point of view, and it is never raised. By denying her subjectivity, the narrator symbolically rapes Bathsheba, and by withholding her point of view, he presents an ambiguous portrayal that leaves her vulnerable to the charge of seduction. ...Should we blame Bathsheba for appearing on the scene naked, when it is the narrator who has chosen to portray her this way? The narrator who disrobes Bathsheba and depicts her as the object of David's lust is the real perpetrator of the crime against Bathsheba...

We also are forced to participate. By introducing Bathsheba to us through David's eyes, the narrator puts us in the position of voyeurs:

... he looked/gazed from the roof a woman bathing, and the woman was very good-looking (II Sam 11:2).

The narrator controls our gaze; we cannot look away from the bathing woman but must consider her appearance: "very good-looking." And we presume she is naked, or nearly so; at any rate, we are forced to think about it, to disrobe or partially robe her mentally. Is not this gaze a violation, an invasion of her person as well as her privacy? Nakedness makes her more vulnerable, and being observed in such a private, intimate activity as bathing, attending to the body, accentuates the body's vulnerability to David's and our shared gaze. A woman is touching herself and a man is watching. The viewing is one-sided, giving him the advantage and the position of power: he sees her but she does not see him.
Looking at the female body is both a cultural preoccupation and an accepted expression of male sexuality. Art, film, and pornography provide constant reminders that men are aroused by watching a woman touch herself. And if Bathsheba is purifying herself after her menstrual period, we can guess where she is touching. Readers of this text are watching a man watching a woman touch herself, and I suspect male and female readers react differently to the scene. For my part, I am uncomfortable being put in the position of voyeur, watching a naked woman being watched.

Nor are we and David the only voyeurs: 'Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?' (v. 3). It is not clear who says these words, whether David or an attendant, but, in any event, 'Is this not Bathsheba?' suggests that someone else is looking too.

I said that the encounter is brief. This is no love story. David and Bathsheba do not have sex again until after she has become his wife. ...The scene is the biblical equivalent of "wham bam, thank you, ma'am" – "He sent, he took, she came, he lay, she returned"....

If force is played down in II Sam. 11, it is not utterly edited out – “he took her,” the text says.... The aftermath of the encounter suggests force. When David's children reenact his crimes as part of his punishment, David's adultery with Bathsheba is replayed as rape, not once but twice. Following closely upon this scene, Amnon rapes his sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13), who, like Bathsheba, is beautiful (13.1) and, like Bathsheba, is objectified (II Sam.13.17). Then Absalom does in the sight of the sun and all Israel what David had done in secret, he openly rapes ten of David's wives in a tent pitched for him on the roof – the roof, of course serving as a reminder that this is where David's crime began (II Sam. 12.11-12; 16.21-22).

Male Sexuality and Political Effectiveness - Notes on Daniel Boyarin

In many ways in the Bible sexual “taking” of women is a sign of political power and legitimacy. So for example, Avner wants to take Shaul's concubine; David insists on taking back Michal his wife as the price of reconciliation with Shaul’s son’s army; Abshalom takes David’s concubines on the roof and Adoniyahu wants Avishag. Lack of sexual prowess is a symbol of political weakness as in the description of David unable to make love with Avishag, his beautiful bedwarmer, and subsequently described as not knowing what is going on in his own court as Adoniyahu to tries to take the crown away.

Yet Samuel already warned us against kings who would “take” our daughters and our sons according to the law of royal monarchs - ‘like all the nations’ (I Sam. 8). Further Nathan’s critique of David is that God does not want illicit taking of women. That is what brings down David’s house and begins a civil war as it did with the concubine in Givah (Judges 19). Amnon imitates his father David by taking his brother’s sister illicitly and Avshalom responds by killing Amnon and later rebelling against his father who set so poor an example and never reined in his beloved beautiful sons. Avshalom tries to kill and replace David in a punishment predicted obliquely by Nathan himself. These crimes are committed in civilian life with the background of David’s war of conquest – not defense – against Amnon. Yet even in the case of war against one’s enemies the Torah seeks to control our desire to exhibit our power sexually. In Deuteronomy 21:10-14 where war is associated with raping women, as an otherwise legitimate form of acquisition of human property, the law seeks to control that desire to exhibit male power over one’s enemy by raping their women. The law demands that intercourse be delayed and placed within a marital relationship, not one of ownership of a slave woman.

In our story of Bathsheba, the Divine objection to “taking women illicitly” is punishable by a threat to the body politic. It reiterates the message to Avimelech and Pharaoh in Genesis when they took Abram’s and Isaac’s wife. But this contrasts with the implicit ethos of the male leadership that sexuality is not only a privilege of
rulers but a site for self-proclaimed legitimacy and demonstrated political prowess. That problematic Biblical male ethos is well-described by Daniel Boyarin⁸:

**Roman sexual discourse was pervaded with images of violence.** The penis itself was most commonly figured as a weapon. Amy Richlin has given abundant examples to support the Roman cultural identification of the **phallus as a weapon** and this is considered by the Romans a "positive" representation: "All these patterns depend on a scale of values in which the [male leader’s] figure is top or best and the other figures are subordinate; *militat monis amans*, with a big gun. The image of the phallus as weapon is a common one." A nice, and relatively decorous, example can be cited from Ovid, who after a bout of impotence was moved to write:

> Why do you lie there full of modesty, o worst part of me? So I have been taken in by your promises before.    
> You’re cheating your master; caught weaponless because of you [*per te deprensus inermis*]

Although in later Hebrew the regular term for penis is “weapon,” this is never the case in biblical or Talmudic usage; agricultural metaphors are the most common ones. [In modern Hebrew an armed robbery is called *shod mezuyan* – robbery with phallus]

**Sexual activity and potency were considered homologous with political effectivity.** The weak emperors had inactive sexual lives and were cuckolds; the powerful emperors had active sexual lives and cuckolded others (Richlin, *Garden*, 88-89). According to at least one poem of Martial, moreover, an unsatisfactory husband, a “cinaedus” is described as “unwarlike [*imbelles*]” and “soft [*molles*],” and as Richlin comments, this refers “both to their lovemaking and their way of life” (Richlin, *Garden*, 139). Clearly the implication is that a satisfying male sexuality will be “warlike.”

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⁸ “Dis/Owning the Imperial Phallus: Male Sexuality and Power in Early Christianity and Judaism” which appears in an early manuscript of *Carnal Israel*
III. The Men Face Off (David and Uriah) and the Men Cover-up (David and Yoav)

Royal Speeches – Persuasion and Subterfuge
The Men Face Off – Part One: David and Uriah
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Royal Speeches – Persuasion and Subterfuge
The David-Uriah and David-Yoav dialogues are so long and rich in allusion, such high rhetoric, in contrast to the almost wordless and adjectiveless so called “love” story between David and Batsheva. They involve verbal persuasion and verbal subterfuge continuing the tradition initiated in the Tanakh by the snake’s conversation with the woman and then Adam’s with God. However neither David nor Batsheva employ any word play to engage in their illicit sexual foray — unlike Adam who burst into poetry when discovering woman (Gen. 2). In our story words are born out of the need to cover-up just as in Adam’s rationalizations to God (Gen 3). In relation to Batsheva a simple directive, a royal command to a messenger is sufficient, but now David’s power is compromised and he himself must resort to devious, indirect speech.9

9 A comparison of speeches in Genesis and II Samuel would be very enlightening. An exercise would be to reword these elaborate acts of persuasion.
The Men Face Off – Part One: David and Uriah

Scene 1- Sending for Uriah
5 The woman became pregnant, she sent and had-it-told to David, she said: “I am pregnant!”

6 So David sent (word) to Yo'av: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Yo'av sent Uriah to David.

7 When Uriah came to him, David inquired after the shalom/well-being of Yo'av, the shalom/well-being of the fighting-people, and the shalom/well-being of the battle,

8 then David said to Uriah: “Go-down to your house and wash your feet!”
Uriah went out of the king's house, and after him went out a portion from the king, 9 but Uriah lay down at the entrance to the king's house, with all his lord's servants, he did not go-down to his house.

Scene 2 – Uriah: A man of honor
10 They told David, saying: “Uriah has not gone-down to his house.”

David said to Uriah: “Isn't it from a (long) journey that you have come? Why haven’t you gone-down to your house?”

11 Uriah said to David:
“The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in sukkot, And my lord Yo'av and my lord's servants are camping on the face of the open-field and I, I should come into my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your very life, by your being, if I were I do this thing ... !”

12 David said to Uriah: “Stay here today as well; tomorrow I will send you back.”
So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem on that day and on the morrow..
13 David had him called, and he ate and drank in his presence, and he made him intoxicated.
And he went out at sunset to lie down in his lying-place with his lord's servants; but to his house he did not go-down.
The Wake Up Call: “I am pregnant!” Beware of My Husband!

In the sexual affair David has acted without explanation and even without subterfuge and certainly without hesitation in taking a woman he knows to be married and to be well-connected to Eliam son of Ahitophel and to one of David’s famous 30 Heroes. Tikva Frymer Kensky, Reading the Women of the Bible, (pp. 143-156) suggests he was just testing the limits, wondering if a king is limited in any way. But now the consequences become obvious and David must act quickly:

Pregnancy changes everything. Even though people might see a woman come to the palace and stay with the king for a day, they could shrug off the evidence and go on with their lives. A baby makes such an idea impossible. A wife’s pregnancy while her husband is gone is undeniable evidence that she has not been faithful. Bathsheba’s pregnancy cannot simply be ignored.

‘Adultery `is a capital offense in the Bible, ...Both the laws of Hammurabi (ca. 1760 B.C.E.) and the Middle Assyrian laws (1100 BCE) consider that an adulterous wife should be thrown in the river. However much she might have been intimidated by kingship, she was not forcibly raped, and so common understanding would condemn her as an adulteress. She knows that she cannot stay silent. As David sent for her, now she sends to him. ...

The stakes are not as high for David, who has brazenly acted as if the law of adultery doesn't concern him. He has openly brought Bathsheba to the palace for a liaison, and he should not have any problem riding out whatever scandalous talk her pregnancy would bring. But even though his position may make him invincible, Bathsheba is very vulnerable.

Her stark words to David, the only words she says in the story, make it imperative that he do something. And so he takes action. He brings Uriah back to the palace to render a report on the war, and then sends him home for the night. Uriah's return home would accomplish several things. It would muddy the evidence and make it possible for everyone to presume that the child was his. It would also solidify Bathsheba's relationship to Uriah and remind him of the joys of the marital home. For it is he who holds Bathsheba's fate in his hands. In ancient times, the head of the household had enormous power over the members of his household, power that extended to life and death. No one could stop Abraham from killing Isaac, or Jephthah from killing his daughter. In these early days of King David, the patriarchs may still have had this power, for the state did not become truly centralized until the time of Solomon. If so, Bathsheba will be in danger precisely from her husband, Uriah. When Judah heard that Tamar was pregnant, he ordered her to be burned; Uriah may do something similar to Bathsheba. Even if the monarchy in Israel had already succeeded in taking the power of death from the patriarchs, Bathsheba is still the one at risk. Both an adulterous wife and her lover are to be put to death, but only when they are convicted by witnesses or caught in flagrante. A pregnancy may "prove" the woman's adultery, but it does not indict the father, and public rumor would not be sufficient to convict a man. Once again, it is the woman who is in danger.

There is a way out of this perilous situation. Uriah, even if he is no longer has the power of death may still have the power to give Bathsheba her life. Ancient Near Eastern laws which also prescribe the death penalty for adultery, often allowed a husband to pardon his wife on the proviso that if he spares her, he also spares her lover. The sage’s advice in Proverbs hints that Israel also allowed a husband to spare his wife and her lover, at least where there is not enough evidence to convict: "the fury of the husband will be passionate; he will show no pity on his day of vengeance. He will not have regard for any ransom. He will refuse your bribe, however great" (Prov. 6:34-35). The stakes are very high. If Uriah sleeps with his wife, he will assume that the baby was conceived that night. Even if he doesn't sleep with her, the public will assume that the baby is his. There will be no scandal to disgrace Uriah as a cuckold, and he will be able to pardon Bathsheba without dishonoring himself. But in order for Bathsheba to be safe, Uriah must go home.

Uriah does not go home. Instead, he sleeps publicly in the gate of the palace amid all the king's servants. This seems rather odd, and it raises the question of just how unsuspecting he is.
...Matters are not private around a palace, and David is told that Uriah slept at the gate. When David asks him why he did not go home, his answer reveals his sense of principle. "How can I," he exclaims, "eat and drink and enjoy my wife while the soldiers and my general are in the field and the ark lives in a shack?" Uriah is a man of piety. And a man with a strict sense of justice. A man of principle and a man of honor. Such a man can be dangerous. He will not be willing to lie down and play the cuckold, even if there is no public scandal. And just as he is unlikely to go through the motions of claiming paternity, he is unlikely to pardon Bathsheba. He might even feel that he has to avenge himself by committing a grand crime of honor, killing Bathsheba and possibly David himself.

Uriah's speech is full of hints that he will not let the majesty of a king override his own sense of honor. He refers to "My lord Joab and my lord's servants." In addressing the king, should he not say, "Joab, my lord's servant, and all my lord's servants"? The king should be "my lord," not the general, and one of his subjects should also make it clear that the fighting men are the king's servants and not "my lord's servants" right after "my lord Joab." Uriah concludes his speech with another subtlety, positioning himself vis-à-vis David: "By your very life," he says, a proper form of oath for kings and gods. But he doesn't add the polite "my lord the king." There is nothing servile about Uriah. He has, after all, been with David a long time. "He knew him when," and he knew him when David himself would have been out in the fields.

David tries again. He has Uriah stay another night, and plies him with liquor. But even inebriated, Uriah does not go home. His sense of honor overcomes even his drunkenness. He is also disregarding his king's direct commands. There is no telling what he will do once he hears publicly that Bathsheba is pregnant.

The very next morning, David instructs Joab to send Uriah into the thick of battle so that he dies. What Abraham once feared that Pharaoh would do to him, David will have Joab arrange for Uriah.
While Meir Sternberg argues that II Sam 11 intentionally avoids any direct value judgment on David's behavior saving that for Nathan's parable, Uriel Simon suggest that the explicit role of Uriah's behavior and his eloquent speeches is to condemn David by implicit comparison. Irony achieves better results than explicit condemnation:

- David perfunctorily and perhaps cynically asks Uriah about the shalom – repeated three times – of the troops, but David cares not a bit about them. In fact, the shalom of Uriah and David will be threatened if Uriah does not go home to make the cover-up work. David will be cursed by Nathan with war from his home – specifically through the rebellion of his ironically named son Av-Shalom. David will only achieve a promise of Shalom in the Batsheva story at the end when he repents and produces Shlomo his second son named after peace.

- Ironically David says in II Sam 11:8 to Uriah: “Go-down to your house and wash your feet!” Abarbanel identifies this as euphemism for having sex and it recalls David seeing Bathsheva “washing” (rochtzet) (II Sam 11:2) which led to his own sexual fantasies and his affair. As result of David's washing his feet with Batsheva, he will be punished with the death of the son of the illicit union and he will mourn preemptively as the child dies and David will refrain until after the death to bath himself (II Sam 12: 20).

- A further irony is that Uriah is described as “sitting = yoshiev in Jerusalem” (II Sam 11:12) and refusing to have intercourse with his wife, while David - lacking in solidarity with his soldiers in the field or the ark - is described with the same words “sitting = yoshiev in Jerusalem” (II Sam 11:1) but he does have intercourse with Uriah’s wife. Uriah’s sworn refusal to go home until the ark of God has returned from the field is reminiscent of Psalm 132:1-5 where David himself swears not to rest in his own house until God's ark rests in Jerusalem and in exchange God promises a secure dynasty. But ironically in the Bathsheva affair, David asks Uriah to put his own home comforts ahead of the ark's. That sin becomes a threat to David's dynasty.

- Irony that David treid tw approaches to solve his problem with Uriah. First her could not convince Uriah to give in to hedonism and private interest and sleep with his wife on his furlough, but his second solution was to exploit Uriah's absolute loyalty and self-sacrifice. He would take letter to Yoav about killing Uriah, but he woud not breach its secrecy. Then Uriah would volunteer to attack Rabat Amon even if he must get close to the wall and tus be exposed to death.

Psalm 132:1-5

1 LORD, remember for David all his affliction;
2 How he swore to the LORD, and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:
3 'I will not come into the tent of my house, nor go up into the bed that is spread for me;
4 I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to mine eyelids;
5 Until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling-place for the Mighty One of Jacob.'

- Simon also notes that Uriah’s special loyalty to his own lord – Yoav – is reinforced by the an alternative rescension to this Masoratic text II Sam. 11:6 that adds: “nosei keli Yoav” – “Yoav's arms bearer” (4Qumran Sam a and in Josephus's retelling of the story.

- The irony of David’s chosen method to kill off Uriah by the sword of the enemy under the guise of a heroic battle, is surprisingly similar and yet different to Shaul’s deceit in trying to get David to get himself killed by the Philistines in order to win Shaul's daughter's hand. I Samuel 18:17

10 Summarized by the editor from Uriel Simon in his Hebrew book Kriyah Sifrutit BaMikrah: Sipurei HaNevi'imm p, 120ff
describes Shaul’s plot to offer Meirav his oldest daughter in marriage to David the commoner in exchange for 100 foreskins of dead Philistines. Shaul opines that “my hand will be innocent of killing, for the hand of the Philistines will take him out.” David also used deceit related to marriage to entice his overly patriotic soldier Uriah to go fight and die. So the sword of the Philistines will be responsible for the death of David’s enemies – not David’s hands which remain pure.
“Uriah knows” versus "Uriah does not know" – Gaps, Ambiguities and the Reading Process by Meir Sternberg

Exercise: What do think: Does Uriah Know?

Divide the class up in two groups that must reread the text again and list each bit of evidence that can help their side only. Ask them to sit on two sides of the room according to their assigned side.
Then whip back and forth between the sides asking each time for another point for and then against the hypothesis that Uriah must know until all the arguments have been rehearsed once.
Ask the students to summarize by arranging the reasons one against the other in a chart with evidence for the text.
In the end ask students to vote according to their own views of the pshat and to indicate the most convincing reason they found.

Now examine Meir Sternberg’s controversial theory that the Tanakh wanted to leave both options open to maximize the readers’ interest, that is to keep the reader guessing and hypothesizing and searching for clues as one does when reading an Agatha Christie murder mystery.

Does Uriah know of his wife's infidelity and pregnancy?
by Meir Sternberg, “Gaps, Ambiguities and the Reading Process” [in II Samuel 11], The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, p.201-209

The text does not permit any univocal answer: both affirmative and negative hypotheses arise with a legitimate claim to gap-filling. Each of these hypotheses is indicated and reinforced by a good number of arguments, while other arguments draw attention to its flaws and support the rival answer. And each hypothesis sheds a different light on details in the text and organizes them into a different plot. The narrative deliberately creates this impossibility of deciding between the two alternative systems of gap-filling. It demands that both be maintained simultaneously, and thus profits from their tense interaction.

Does Not Know:

The possibility that Uriah knows nothing appears to the reader quite reasonable at the end of verse in view of the secrecy that has cloaked the love affair between the king and Bathsheba - “and she returned to her house” (see also the later words of Nathan, “thou didst secretly”). For Uriah, encamped far away from home, to know of his wife's doings, there has to be someone to bear tales, in the army camp or at least in Jerusalem. But if the news of Bathsheba's adultery and pregnancy has leaked, there is not much point to David's cover-up operation, designed to make it appear that Uriah is the child's father. The fact that Uriah is summoned to Jerusalem argues that David is convinced of his ignorance. The reader is thus encouraged to assume the same...

Does Know

Uriah, on his arrival in Jerusalem, has probably learned of the affair (and if not of Bathsheba's pregnancy, then at least of her infidelity). A number of people are in on the secret, for David used messengers to summon Bathsheba to him, and so in turn did Bathsheba to inform him of her pregnancy. It is even possible that David knows about the gossip circulating in the city and realizes that suspicion will turn into certainty when it becomes apparent that Bathsheba is pregnant even though her husband has been away for months; and precisely for this reason, to squelch what is at the moment no more than rumor, he tries to get Uriah into bed with his wife.
So during his three days (and nights) at the palace, Uriah may have picked up some news. If the narrative wished to establish his ignorance, finally, it would resort to some formula like "and Uriah did not know."

[Does Not Know]
Uriah never accuses the king of infidelity. He refuses to go to his wife not to foil David’s cover-up, but out of idealism. If he knew then such a prim moralist would never let David get away with this betrayal of everything Uriah believes in. Yoav, not Uriah, is the realist and pragmatist. David would never have sent the letter with Uriah if he feared Uriah knew the truth because the letter would be evidence against the king.

**Does Know**

If Uriah does not know he would not be so hutzpadik to hint to the king self-righteously that the idea of going back to his wife is a travesty of loyalty to God and to the army. After all Uriah knows that the king himself stayed at home sleeping in his bed. So he must be making a tongue in cheek moral attack on the king whom he cannot attack directly for his adultery. That is why he so glibly rejects a royal order to go home even though he is portrayed as so loyal to the king.

**EXERCISE: Modern novelists** have rewritten the story to show Uriah knows, so they think this psychologically and narratively a real option. Read one of their versions and evaluate what you think of their portrayal of Uriah as knowing or not knowing what was happening with his wife and his king.

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**Moshe Shamir - Kivsat Harash – The Poorman's Ewe Lamb**

*Shamir’s popular novel of 1956 critiqued the Israeli establishment that had strayed from its idealism to become a pragmatic and power hungry body politic.*

And if a man says to you: "Here are the strong on this side and over there down below we, the weak," ask him: Which is the strong and which is the weak? Shall the man who cannot stay alive without killing be called strong? He is weakest of all. …Not by war shall truth be tested….

An evil deed is evil, even though the loftiest motives engendered it, even if it results in the greatest good. Even the man who is forced to sin, sins; even the man who saves life by his sin, sins. Should you seek to save a life by sinning, save it; but you cease to be numbered among the righteous in the land….

*Uriah the Hittite writes in his diary:*

The years are spread before me now. I can see at a glance the point that separated the good years from the evil. The good years lasted until Hebron; the bad years started on the day David became king over Judah. They grew worse when he was crowned king over Israel [the northern tribes], worse still when he proclaimed Jerusalem his city, and worse again when he became the ruler of many lands and nations, conquering, victorious, and the mightiest of kings. Until Hebron, David was my beloved friend. When he was anointed in Hebron, he became my beloved king, and he is my beloved king to this day. For David is good, great and wise. Even now when I am being sent to my death at his command, I cannot refrain from singing his praises. He is my blood. …What I went out to seek on the borders of distant kingdoms, I found in the land of Canaan, among the tribes of the Hebrews.
Rembrandt, Uriah and David
Men Face Off – Part Two: David and Yoav

*Uriah is sent off with a letter*

14 So it was in the morning that David wrote a letter to Yo'av and he sent it by the hand of Uriah;

15 He wrote in the letter, saying; “Put Uriah right up at the front (= the face) of the battle, the strongest-point, and turn-back behind him, so that he is struck-down and dies.”

*Act III: Aftermath -
Scene 1 - Executing the Mission of the Letter and a Cynical Report of Mission Accomplished*

16 So it was, when Yo'av was keeping guard on the city, that he placed Uriah at the place where he knew that there were men of valor.

17 When the men of the city went out to do battle with Yo'av, and some of the people fell from among David's servants, and there also died Uriah the Hittite.

18 Then Yo'av sent and had David told all the details of the battle,

19 he charged the messenger, saying:

“When you have finished reporting everything about the battle to the king, if the king's anger starts up and he says to you: 'Why did you draw-near the city to do battle? Didn't you know that they would shoot down from on the wall? Who struck-down Avimelekh son of Yerubboshet--wasn't it a woman, (who) threw down on him a riding millstone from on the wall, so that he died at Tevetz? For what (reason) did you approach the wall?' – Then you are to say: ‘Also your servant Uriah the Hittite died.’”

*Scene 2- a Cynical Report of a Mission Accomplished and the King’s Hypocritical Words of Comfort for Yoav*

22 The messenger went off, he came and told David all that Yo'av had sent him (to say).

23 The messenger said to David:

“Indeed, the men were mightier than we, they went out at us into the open-field;

we were upon them, up to the entrance to the gate,

24 but the shooters shot down at your servants from on the wall, so that there died (some) of the king's servants, and also your servant Uriah the Hittite died.”

25 David said to the messenger:

“Say thus to Yo'av: ‘Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes, for like-this and like-that the sword devours! Strengthen your battle against the city and destroy it! And (you) strengthen him!’”
Male Bonding, Betrayal and the Life of a “Band of Brothers”

Mieke Bal adds a gendered interpretation to the dialogues of David and his soldiers – Uriah his companion and hero of David’s youthful exploits (II Sam. 23:39; I Chronicles 1:41) and Yoav his cousin and chief of staff. The issue is how a woman gets between men and turns loyalty into betrayal. The betrayal begins when David the king who is meant “to go out to battle before us” (I Sam. 8:20) with his soldiers at the turning of the year decides to remain at home in the city. Then he steals a well-known soldier’s wife, taking her in a double transgression – treating a loyal soldier’s wife as spoils, turning a city into a battlefield where rape as conquest is expected warfare (Judges 5:30 – “Won’t they find and divide up spoils, a womb or two per male head?”).

Then to cover-up David appeals ironically to macho male solidarity inviting Uriah to do what most “real men” would do – take advantage of a furlough to sleep with their wives and get drunk.

When Uriah refuses two nights running to return to his wife out of religious and military values, then David turns those virtues of military solidarity into sources of weakness. First, Uriah’s absolute loyalty is exploited to carry the secret letter for his own execution knowing he would never open it himself. Second, Uriah’s courage as one of the 30 giborim means that he will happily cover for him. But he also must convince him to betray his own soldier – Uriah – and, given the need for convincing cover-up 11, to betray other soldiers who must die to make it look like an accident. Yoav betrays his men and his professional calling as well as his God to prove his loyalty to David. David has transgressed the division between private and public – using the state and military hierarchy to pursue his pleasures and his political cover-up.

In the process Yoav - now knowing David to be a ruthless betrayer - prepares his own alibi lest David put the blame for the lost battle and the lost lives on Yoav. Yoav suggests to his messenger to tell David an elaborate chain of events to explain how the soldiers got so close to that wall that any soldier would have known that was foolish and fatal even if the enemy were a mere woman (II Sam. 11:18-21). It is scandalous that Yoav is correct in believing that when the king is upset at the loss of a battle that he will be pacified by hearing an old friend, a comrade –in-arms and a valiant soldier has also been killed. David’s private political gain makes up for the national loss.

11 Baruch Halpern in David’s Secret Demons compares David’s plot to strand Uriah in a fatal situation to Bill Cosby’s routine describing how at his alma mater Temple the coach would “hang him out to dry” when facing a stronger, fiercer team. The coach relay the following play: “Cosby up the middle and the rest of the team off the field.”
Exercise: Research the notion of male bonding especially in war. Think of the title and content of the movie “Band of Brothers.” Consider the idea of “blood brothers” connected to the childhood ceremony of mixing blood where each pierces his finger and exchanges blood. See Joshua 4 where Joshua the general conducts a mass brit milah for all his military age soldiers thus bonding them in a brit = bond. How does this male bonding still affect our society? How does this notion contribute to the esprit de corps of an army unit where soldiers are willing to risk or lay down their lives to save a friend? There are many stories and songs about this loyalty in the Israeli army. Give an example. What factors might lead to violate this sacred blood brotherhood.

Breaching the City Walls: Transgressions of the Borders

The David and Bathsheba story is set in the midst of a battle of David’s armies in the field besieging and finally penetrating the city walls of Rabbah, the capital of Ammon. The repetition of the words send / shalach and went / yatzah teach us that David’s rule has become imperial both in its hierarchical mediated chain of command and its spatial diffusion from the center – Jerusalem the new capital to the periphery. These movements across borders threaten to bring transgression and chaos to the new order.

Mieke Bal in *Lethal Love* notes that the story is laid out in spatial distinctions that get violated. David is in Jerusalem, while the army and the people are abroad in Ammon across the river. Center versus periphery and city versus field is the horizontal tension. David is up on the roof at the top of the city and the hierarchy over-“seeing” the civilian population down below– the noncombatants left without their menfolk to protect them. Bathsheba is inside her house – not on the roof – but David the conqueror penetrates her walls, perhaps through her window and spies on her. He sends forth messengers to find out about her and then to take her back. He brings her to breach his royal walls, to enter the royal chamberbed and to breach her vows to her husband who is far away. Thereby David transgresses against his loyalty to his soldiers in the field who are forbidden to have sexual relations apparently. The king should not violate his trust to care for the women and children left behind. (Recall David’s men earlier who were so upset that they almost killed Uriah who sent too close to a wall of the other capital city – Rabbat Ammon( = today’s Amman in Jordan) which he is meant to breach.

Exercise: Draw a map of the spatial and social structure of the plot. Who goes from where to where? What walls are breached or not breached?
Yoav’s Irony and Analogy: The Covert Messages between Co-conspirators by Meir Sternberg
“Gaps, Ambiguities and the Reading Process” [in II Samuel 11], The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, p. 218-222

Yoav’s Analogy to the Story of Abimelech and the Woman

Joab's message ...anticipates David's spontaneous reaction to the report and provides his man with a clincher [to avoid the king's wrath at the unnecessary loss of a battle and of soldiers]. Yet instead of contenting himself with a succinct outline of the future dialogue - which is all that the messenger needs - Joab gets carried away by his flow of words spoken in David's name. His utterance is lengthy and disordered:

I Sam. 25: 18 Then Yo'av sent and had David told all the details of the battle,
19 he charged the messenger, saying:
“When you have finished reporting everything about the battle to the king,
20 if the king's anger starts up and he says to you: 'Why did you draw near the city to do battle?
Didn't you know that they would shoot down from on the wall?
21 Who struck-down Avimelekh son of Yeruboshet--wasn't it a woman,
(who) threw down on him a riding millstone from on the wall,
so that he died at Tevetz?
For what (reason) did you approach the wall?’ —
Then you are to say: ‘Also your servant Uriah the Hittite died.’”

These words suggest a picture of a general who not only gives his messenger the contents of the king's anticipated response but also acts the part of the king, expressively mimicking the intonations and speech patterns of royalty in rage. ...The divergence from factual dryness, culminating in the appearance of this analogy, finds its realistic motivation in the context of utterance. After all, the speaker imitates the mode of speech appropriate to a king agitated by a military reverse: such news will naturally elicit a royal diatribe, including a reference to the “classic” example in this connection.

Thus motivated, the analogy performs different functions (1) in the characters' dialogue and (2) in the narrator’s text. The analogy-by-retrospect [Abimlech] indeed forms a striking parallel to developments in the narrative present [David-Bathsheva].

(1) It is not just that both stories deal with a war leading to a siege; in both the besiegers approach the city and as a result suffer losses beside the wall. This is what the messenger surely understood, and what Joab meant him to understand.

(2) But to appreciate the role played by the same elements within the narrator's text.... In a closed analogy... where the relevant aspects of similarity are stated, still leaves some aspects open. For every analogy contains a number of autonomous and loose elements (some irrelevant and some even incongruous), which "officially" remain outside the play of equivalences. Unstructured within the limited context, such elements may yet gain relevance from the broader context...... The reader is always apt to hesitate, to wonder just how far the analogy extends and to try to draw into it the autonomous materials as well. The official linkage or integration is made within the local context; but since a literary text is an enclosed world and hence invites maximal patterning on the fundamental assumption that this world is controlled and unified, the reader tends to anchor even the loose details in the immediate or some wider context of similitude.

Consider the materials that do not “officially” enter into the analogy between the Abimelech and the David and Bathsheba battle scenes:

a- the status of the fallen besieger (king is NOT equivalent to commoner),
b - the identity and sex of the person who fells him (woman is NOT equivalent to archer),
c- the place of the action (Thebez is NOT equivalent to Rabbah), etc.
But these outsiders beautifully fall into pattern within the broader context, so as to promote the tale’s general ironic tendencies. The story of Abimelech, formally invoked as a parallel to the story of the war at Rabbah, also turns out to be an ironic parallel to the story of the king in his city.

Both kings, David and Abimelech, fall because of a woman. In still another sense, so does Uriah. What is more, the notorious incident of Abimelech's death bears - for both Joab and the reader - connotations of a disgrace brought on royalty at a woman's hand:

A certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head and smashed his skull. And he called hastily to the young man his armor-bearer and said to him, “Draw your sword and kill me, lest it be said of me: ‘A woman killed him’”. (Judges 9:53-54)

These pejorative connotations of Warrior King Laid Low by Woman shared by the David and Bathsheba and the Abimelech stories, to the exclusion of the military setback at Rabbah, centering in Uriah's honorable death. Moreover, Abimelech tried to cover up the disgrace for fear that the rumor would spread among the people (“slay me, lest it be said of me... . . .”); but to little avail. The very reference Joab now makes to the incident attests that what Abimelech feared most has indeed befallen him: he has become a byword for a king's shameful downfall at a woman's hands. This feature likewise recurs in the David story, but not in the Joab and Uriah subplot. David too makes desperate efforts to save face, but with so little success that the whole inglorious episode has been perpetuated (in the text before us) as an even more classic memento.

"Unofficially," then, a telling analogy to the David and Bathsheba affair emerges here. Yet even with the unofficial linkages performed, some autonomous materials remain.

1- For example,... the king's "fall" in one case assumes the form of being killed by a woman and in the other of killing because of a woman.
2- David, God's anointed and a great king, is otherwise poles apart from a petty thug like Abimelech. ....Yet David being likened to Abimelech has ...the effect of diminishing his image.
3- The more so since Abimelech fell at a woman's hands while at the head of his army: David falls at a woman's hands precisely because he plays truant from war.

Since the narrator does not reveal the inner world of his characters, there is no telling to what extent Joab himself appreciates its implications. Does Joab know of David's personal imbroglio and slips into his mime - which seems to be directed at something else - another concealed barb (again, as a completely private joke, since the messenger does not suspect a thing)?

Or does Joab make an innocent imitation and the omniscient narrator quotes it in order to construct, together with the reader, an additional pattern behind Joab's back? ...Joab may then be serving either as a conscious agent or merely as an unwitting vehicle of the text's machinations. If previously Uriah was exploited as a conductor of irony, now Joab performs a similar function.

David's Words of Comfort: Three-levels of Coded Message

(I Sam. 25: 25) “David said to the messenger, Thus shall you say to Joab: Let not this thing be evil in your eyes, for the sword devours now one man and now another: make your battle stronger against the city, and overthrow it. And encourage him.”

[Three levels of reading David's message to Yoav are suggested in this triply coded secret message:]

1- That David, instead of flying into a passion replies "Let not this thing be evil in your eyes," is surely taken by the messenger as the success of his diplomacy. What this innocent hears are words of comfort and encouragement, directed by a forgiving king to the commander of his army after a temporary setback ("Don't take your failure to heart").

2- But to us these words ironically signify almost the reverse: a disguised appeal to that commander not to bear his master any grudge ("Don't take my transgressions, and your
involvement, to heart") nor to regret the number of casualties he has been forced to suffer in order to satisfy a king's caprice.

3- Or else words of comfort indeed, but with a view to consoling the commander in the field for having been driven to stage an abortive battle and to make unnecessary sacrifices.

4 - Whatever the nuances, the king's covert message certainly indicates retroactive approval of the change of plan. Moreover, "Let not this thing be evil in your eyes" nominally refers to the fortune of war; but the reader, knowing what lies behind this battle, shifts or widens the reference. For he spots a closer (and ironic) linkage between the end of one message and the beginning of another: "Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also"-"Let not this thing be evil in your eyes."

5-David is speaking to himself, making excuses to himself that Uriah and other men would have died in war anyway. (Judah in Crimes and Misdemeanors does something similar)

Hence the words purporting to bring comfort ("Don't take it to heart") show another face as understated congratulations ("Good!" or "Thanks!").

Another double message is implicit in: "For the sword devours now one man and now another":

1- be taken by the innocent messenger as a sigh of fellow-feeling on the king's part: "What can you do? ... These things happen ... In war many good men are killed; don't lose heart, but carry on and win."

2- But to anyone in the know, these elegiac-sounding words convey a cynical subtext: "Do not grieve overmuch at the loss of good men. No matter how you look at it, the sword greedily devours soldiers. Why should you care, then, if a few more have been devoured together with Uriah?

If, previously, David appeared in a "humane" light in comparison with Joab ( II Samuel 3:39), now even this dubious merit has finally been taken away from him.

Paul Hardy, The Killing of Uriah
Flashback to Yoav’s Career: A Hard Man versus a Soft man?

Yoav is a remarkable figure and David’s turning to Yoav to eliminate David’s personal problem is very symbolic as well as practical. Yoav and his two brothers Asael and Avishai, sons of Truria, are “fighters” – fearless, talented, bloodthirsty, ruthless and yet absolutely loyal to David. Avishai accompanies David alone into Saul’s camp and wants to assassinate Saul right then and there but David must restrain him in the name of respect for the messiah, the anointed of God and the long-term view on how to become the leader of all of Israel. Subsequently when Saul is dead and David is king of Judah but not of the north, there is civil war between David’s and Saul’s loyalists. The young Asael goes after Avner general of Saul’s son’s armies and is killed by the older general. When Avner decides to end the civil war and join David’s camp, then Avner assassinates Avner accusing him of being untrustworthy to David, making good on his obligation to execute the blood guilt of his brother and probably assuring his own role as chief of staff which David may have promised to Avner.

David disassociates himself from this killing and mourns Avner publicly. He declares that he is a "soft man while the children of Truria are harsh men" and David cannot control them. Yet many commentators still suspect David of playing a duplicitous role – implicitly or explicitly interested in the death of Avner but blaming Yoav.

Others praise David for being a peacemaker in a time of civil war by overcoming the blood feud between the north and the south, the principle of goel hadam must be transcended.

Yet David as king pursues his own son Avshalom for killing Amnon. Ironically Yoav is the one trying to overcome this vendetta and he instructs the wise woman from Tekoa to play act a case that argues that David must forgive Avshalom for killing Amnon. She challenges the blood feud justice system as self-destructive.

When Avshalom returns and organizes a revolt against David, Yoav and Avishai remain loyal to David. As David flees Jerusalem, he is cursed by Shimi from the House of Saul who calls David “a man who sheds blood – ish damim. Yet when Avishai wishes to kill Shimi in defense of the honor of the king, David restrains him again proving he is not an ish damim and showing by contrast that Avishai is quick tempered and concerned for honor at the expense of political compromise, but also absolutely loyal to his beleaguered king. David explains his restraint as a humbling act of contrition for causing the sin that led to Avshalom’s revolt. David’s softness to his enemies is extended to his son Avshalom who is trying to kill his father. David tells Yoav not to kill his son. Yet Yoav does kill Avshalom and shames the hysterically sobbing David into acting like the leader of a now victorious side in a civil war. David swallows his pain and parades as if accepting his army’s great victory led by Yoav.

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12 What was Yoav’s greatest sin?

Yoav’s sin was to violate his soldierly duty to Uriah for sake of following King David’s orders and preserving his own political skin. In the past Yoav had shown a higher loyalty to God and exemplary soldierly solidarity. For example, in an earlier stage of the multi-year war with Ammon, the armies of Yoav and his brother Avishai had been forced to separate to face simultaneously the greater forces of Aram and Ammon and had sworn that if they would come to each other’s aid in time of trouble. They then committed their heroic battle to defend their people and the cities of their Lord. Ultimately they both won victories. (II Samuel 10:9-12). However in the second battle with Ammon Yoav betrays Uriah and never mentions the cause of God in the battle. (cited in Yaaqov Medan, David and Bathsheba, p. 67)

Yoav cannot claim to be David’s loyal servant who is just following orders. Morally and legally such an argument violates the later rabbinic principle: “No one can claim – as legal defense - to be merely the messenger of another to do evil” (ein shaliach lidvar avreira TB Kiddushin 43a). Biblically, other military officers, perhaps Avner and Amasa, commanded by King Saul to kill the innocent priests of Nov and their families accused of aiding and abetting a fugitive David, refused his direct order and survived politically (I Samuel 22:17). Politically, Yoav cannot consistently paint himself as a mechanically obedient servant of David. Yoav does not respect David’s orders when he kills Avner, Amasa and Avshalom. (cited in Yaaqov Medan, David and Bathsheba, p. 69-70). Perhaps Yoav was happy to see David who always condemned Yoav’s harsh pragmatism needing Yoav’s dirty political skills.
As David gives Solomon his last political will and testament, David does become the ruthless political shedder of his internal enemies’ blood. He insists that Yoav be killed for shedding blood in times of peace – when generals Avner and Amasa were making peace with David. David does not mention Yoav’s killing of Avshalom though that reverberates in the background.

In short David and Yoav who are cousins share a long history and long personal and principled conflict. David often postures as the peacemaker (with Avner), but sometimes Yoav is the peacemaker (with Avshalom and the woman of Tekoa). Yoav is the hard pragmatist who trusts no one, but David too knows how to be ruthless against political enemies – especially before his death. Neither trusted the other yet David ultimately betrays Yoav, while Yoav remains with David despite a nearly successful revolt and ultimately saves David’s life and his kingdom. For David to turn to Yoav to be his hit-man and betray a loyal soldier and to make a personal embarrassment disappear in a ruthless way designed to safeguard his power and his reputation is no surprise. Yet it tells us how David has strayed from his self-professed ideal of himself as a soft man when David is in trouble. For Yoav it is a lesson about what David is capable of doing and David proves he has not repented from such tactics when he gives Solomon the advice to execute Yoav.

II Samuel 3:12-16, 22-33, 38

12 And Abner sent messengers to David straightway, saying: ‘Whose is the land?’ saying also: ‘Make your league with me, and, behold, my hand shall be with you, to bring over all Israel to you.’ 13 And he said: ‘Well; I will make an alliance with you; but one thing I require, that is, you shall not see my face, until you first bring Michal Saul’s daughter, when you come to see my face.’ 14 And David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth Saul’s son, saying: ‘Deliver me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines.’
15 And Ish-bosheth sent, and took her from her husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish. 16 And her husband went with her, weeping as he went, and followed her to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him: ‘Go, return’; and he returned.

20 So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty men with him. And David made Abner and the men that were with him a feast. 21 And Abner said unto David: ‘I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel unto my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and so that you may reign over all that you desire.’ And David sent Abner away; and he went in peace. 22 And, behold, the servants of David and Joab came from a foray, and brought in a great spoil with them; but Abner was not with David in Hebron; for he had sent him away, and he was gone in peace. 23 When Joab and all the host that was with him were come, they told Joab, saying: ‘Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has sent him away, and he is gone in peace.’ 24 Then Joab came to the king, and said: ‘What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto you; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? 25 You know that Avner the son of Ner came to deceive you, and to know your ins and outs, and to know all that you are doing.’ 26 And when Joab was come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from Bor-sirah; but David knew it not. 27 And when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there in the groin, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother. 28 And afterward when David heard it, he said: ‘I and my kingdom are guiltless before the LORD for ever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner; 29 let it fall upon the head of Joab, and upon all his father’s house; and let there not fall from the house of Joab one that has an issue, or that is a leper, or that lean on a staff, or that lack daughter. 30 So Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle.
31 And David said to Joab, and to all the people that were with him: ‘Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and wail before Abner.’ And King David followed the bier. 32 And they buried Abner in Hebron; and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept. 33 And the king lamented for Abner, and said: Should Abner die as a churl dies? 34 Your hands were not bound, nor your feet put into fetters; as a man falls before the children of iniquity, so did you fall. And all the people wept again over him. 35 And all the people came to cause David to eat bread while it was yet day; but David swore, saying: ‘God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or aught else, till the sun be down.’
And the king said to his servants: 'Know that there is a prince in the land. Stones of Zeruiah are too hard for me; the LORD reward the evildoer according to his wickedness.'
1 Now the days of David drew near to death and he charged Solomon his son, saying: 2 ‘I go the way of all the earth; be strong and show your self a man…. 5 Know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two generals of Israel, Abner the son of Ner and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war on his belt and on his boots. 6 Do shrewdly and let not his aged head go down to the grave in peace.
IV. Articles of Impeachment for King David – Bathsheva Gate and Watergate

Introduction – The Torah and the Constitutional Monarch
The Articles of Impeachment
The Indictment
Is Adultery a Political Sin in Today's Politics?
Women and the Body Politic – Private is also Public
Legions of Women, but little Scandal until Clinton by Tom Skotnick

At the end of Chapter 11 after David has successfully completed his Bathsheva affair after facing many complications and requiring much ingenuity and aggressive action with many co-conspirators, the epilogue reads: "But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of YHWH."

Now it is our turn to apply our own judgment to David just before seeing God’s judgment. We will do so in the spirit of the American democratic tradition of impeachment that has its conceptual roots in our famous chapter.

Exercise: We begin our transition from what seems like David's successful cover-up of his affair to David’s expose by God’s messenger Nathan. Just before seeing Nathan’s charge sheet we suggest an exercise drawn from the American political system – preparation of articles of impeachment by a special prosecutor. The dramatic moral and political significance of the Watergate scandal and the subsequent near impeachment of the president who was forced to resign is perhaps the closest America comes to the Bathsheva affair that almost brought down David’s dynasty and that informs the Biblical political education in II Samuel.

After the exercise which involves a review of II Sam 11, we proceed to a detailed literary and political analysis of II Sam. 12.

An Introduction- Civics Education and Jewish Political Thought

Jewish tradition is not only about ritual or personal ethics, about religious worship or family lifecycles. The Tanakh is the story of God’s political dream that a spiritual-ethical vision can be realized in a kingdom of God on earth, in a people with power. David and Solomon represent the highest fulfillment of that intention and yet they too fail dramatically and in their wake the house of David slowly declines morally, religiously and politically until its defeat and exile is the climax of the book of Kings. The loss of monarchy, political independence, and the loss of their land, exile, casts a giant shadow over the Jewish people and colors their understanding of human power. Knowing the disappointing "ending" – at least until political power is returned under the Maccabees in 141 BCE and in modern day Israel in 1948 CE – probably also colors the retrospective telling of the story of King David's ascendance, the rise of his dynasty which would fall over 400 years later in 586 BCE.

Giving our students Jewish civic education can serve them as active citizens of the Jewish, Israeli and Western societies to which they hopefully feel an affiliation. It addresses the tendency in Protestant countries to affirm separation of religion and state not institutionally but conceptually. While they are many good reasons for the disestablishment of religion as a law-giving body, there is no reason that religion should have something to say to politics and vice versa. That is along Jewish tradition to be reinforced by studying the David and Bathsheva story. That religion in our age can still be a force for democratic critique of office holders and for encouragement to involvement in ethically motivated political visions rather than only a source for religious coercion and totalitarianism is not self-evident.
Although the genre of David and Batsheva story is formally as a narrative rather than as a work of political theory or law, it may be seen as a historical test case in a debate about the proper form of Jewish government. The story is located at the fulcrum of David's career perched between his miraculous rise to rule, his successful efforts to overcome a civil war and unite his kingdom with a new capital, a ritual political and legal center, on one side, and on the other side, the long decline into a renewed civil war born out of David's dynastic house and stopped only temporarily by Solomon's ruthless consolidation of power and his Pharaoh-like hierarchical rule. After Solomon the civil war commences again and the long demise of monarchy and of Judea and Samaria continues until exile. David's corruption of monarchical power sets the pattern even though his religious spirit and courage to confess show a way to renaissance and tikun which his royal descendants seldom followed.

Interspersed in the narrative of Samuel are meta-reflections about monarchy:

1- On one pole of the continuum is I Samuel 8 where Samuel the prophet condemns monarchy in toto, not only as a rejection of God, a theological rebellion, but as a fundamentally corrupt form of government called Mishpat haMelech in an ironic sense. For the so-called “justice” of the king is to take and to take and to take from the people whom he is supposed to be protecting from foreign exploitation. He takes their daughters – as in Batsheva’s case – and he takes their vineyards as in Navot's case. By contrast, Samuel the prophet in I Samuel 12 takes pride in never having taken anything from his people whom he judged – shofet. Practically Samuel has no alternative to suggest. His own sons, like Eli the priest's before him, have become corrupt bribe takers. Yet Shmuel warns that the monarchy will simply expand and institutionalize that systematic theft from the people. The story of Batsheva gives Samuel a chance to say: I told you so. Sadly, it is also the beginning of new hamas, a new moral corruption that will lead to God’s new flood – the overrunning of Judea by Babylonia.

2- II Samuel 7 offers the other end of the continuum as Nathan the prophet – ironically David's accuser in the Batsheva affair – declares David’s monarchy an embodiment of the Divine Right of Kings. That dynasty will not be subject to Divine recall or impeachment as in the case of Shaul due to malfeasance in office. This multigenerational rule is unconditionally chosen by Divine will, just as God chose Israel for no good of their own (Deuteronomy 7). Nathan even suggests prematurely that David build the Temple, but God dismisses that Temple, that bayit – a sign of permanence, like David’s bayit – his dynasty – which represents that transition to permanence.

Ironically the Batsheva affair shows that David is not worthy of unconditional legitimacy. Nathan must be embarrassed that he had chosen David and crowned his dynasty with a sacred aura. Nathan himself calls David on his embarrassing desecration of God's name by acting so high-handedly out of such hubris after he were above the law. Perhaps his theory of kingship even contributed to David’s unrestrained hubris. His approach may be seen as discredited by contrast to Batsheva affair.

3- Deuteronomy 17 neither demonizes monarchy nor makes it sacred and even messianic. It makes monarchy, as in the eyes of Abarbanel – optional. If the people wish it, then they must follow a certain constitutional protocol. Abarbanel prefers the Venetian republic to the Spanish monarchy of Ferdinand and Isabella for whom he worked. Yet this form of government may well be corrupted. It requires precautions:

(a) Deuteronomy 17 establishes legal controls for political temptations, what are later called fences around the Torah. Like the restriction in modern democracies on accepting large campaign fund contributions from potentially interested lobbyists even if no actual favor was granted, so the king is forbidden to accumulate wealth, horses or women lest they turn his head with hubris.

According to Deuteronomy 17 women are particularly dangerous to the human heart. All forms of exaggerated accumulation – money, horses (royal extravagance or military might) and women can corrupt but only after the proviso about multiplying women does the Torah add " lest they lead your heart astray." In the case of King Solomon, whose story is retold using the precautionary language of Deuteronomy 17, women represent foreign and therefore idolatrous influences such as Solomon’s diplomatic marriage to Pharaoh's daughter who built a temple to idolatry in Jerusalem. The women are symbols for Solomon's own attraction to the cultures of the superpowers with which he wishes to associate. In Deuteronomy 7 the Canaanite women represent a lure to idolatry on the civilian level. Women like Queen Jezebel married to King Ahab offers him sinful advice about disregarding the legal rights of loyal citizens like Navot. Then she
manipulates and corrupts the law system to convict Navot on false charges and confiscate foe the king his vineyard. She introduces an absolutist monarchial model borrowed from the surrounding nations, not a constitutional monarchy reigned in by morality and traditional law. In the case of Batsheva the woman is wholly passive yet her beauty is sufficient to corrupt the king into committing adultery with her and murdering her husband. Women represent beautiful objects like silver and gold and sources of power like horses to be taken by self-assertive men like political leaders. For Maimonides the monarch's wives also represent a misuse of public time devoted to private pleasures. Torah and duty are matters of night and day. But women are not always snares leading us to prefer libido over reason. Avigail's story in 1 Samuel 25 shows how a woman can persuade the king to rule over his own yetzer hara. Women can be provocative sex objects or sources of political, moral and religious vision and self-restraint.

(b) A second strategy to counteract the extreme concentration of power in the hands of one person is to teach the monarch to see himself as an office holder, upholding the law or Constitution. Actively copying a Torah and studying it daily is designed to teach the king that he is subject to the laws of the Torah. That is also designed to shape a humble heart that serves the people rather than ruling over them as instruments of personal or state pomp and power. Only the heart, Ivav, the character or conscience of the ruler can avoid corruption, so beware of distractions and ensnarements. No form of government as such can stop the corruption, though institutional checks and balances would have made the control of the monarchy much more effective.

The rabbis read the attempt to educate the heart of the king to be law-abiding as a directive for civic education for every Jew. They read the term "mishne Torah" not as copy of the Torah but as a second Torah implying that every Jew must write his own Torah and study it daily, but the monarch must write a second one to rein in his desires even more. All citizens have power and so all need a character education to control their desires and to maintain their allegiance to the law.
Introduction – The Torah and the Constitutional Monarch

The Watergate Affair in which President Nixon was forced to resign was a landmark for the American democracy which is worthy of study even though our students are too young to remember any of it. It reiterated the American Constitutional system where the President rules not by his personal status as a leader but only as an officeholder sworn to uphold the Constitution (as in the presidential ceremony of swearing in on Inauguration Day). Not only is the political leader subject to the law rather than above the law, but this authority is wholly conditional on continuing to uphold the law. His being chosen by the people does not raise the leader above the constitution which also derives its authority from the people. Moreover the system of checks and balances separates judicial, legislative and executive functions.

The articles of impeachment offer a regularized system for removing a malfeasant president by indictment in the House and trial in the Senate. The Clintongate over Monica Lewinsky made this legal arrangement clear yet again. A guide at the Israeli Supreme Court tells the anecdote that when money was donated by the Rothschild foundation to build the Israeli Supreme Court building in Jerusalem, there was a stipulation that the Supreme Court be built near the Knesset but on a hill higher than the Knesset to physically symbolize that the rule of law is above politics. When Abraham challenged God in the Sodom affair – “Shall not the Judge of the whole earth do justly?” he established the principle that justice is above religious authority as well.

Why raise this American lesson in good citizenship and good government in the context of David and Batsheva?

Three reasons offer us three focal points for this unit:

1- THE IDEALISM OF POLITICS. Day schools are about integrating the Jewish and American identity. Here is a natural bridge between Jewish studies and American studies, between American and Jewish identity. In both cases the deep connection between religion and politics becomes apparent. Though Americans often think of Judaism along with Protestantism as a religion in the sense of a private spiritual moment involving only metaphysical beliefs and rituals, Biblical Judaism at the very least is deeply concerned with government, with the dangers of corruption, and with embodying on earth a model society. The king is God’s representative on earth – the messiah in the political sense of a leader with a vision and with a mission – subject to the law of the Torah.

Thus to reinforce the notion that Judaism is about Tikkun Olam and politics whether in Israel or in America – not merely about lifecycle rites, Torah study and personal prayer – is an essential message for the high school student. Also politics is not only about pork-barreling compromising among special interest groups and personal power for politicians but about justice.

2- DEMOCRACY ala America and ala the Tanakh. American notions of democracy derive not only from Greek models but from English political theories nourished on the study of the Biblical covenant. Both Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were not only religiously informed political theorists but engaged in careful Bible study to develop their notions of the social contract. They noted the way the Torah was promulgated at Sinai and depended on the will of the people as whole. Deuteronomy 29:9-12 speaks of each individual accepting the covenant. John Locke used these notions to justify the impeachment and the beheading of Charles the First for violating the social contract. As Locke put it, a people has the right of rebellion if the authority of its laws and its government derive from the will of the people rooted in their individual freedom. These notions clearly influenced the American founding fathers, along of course with French Enlightenment notions like Montesquieu’s theory of the separation of powers. Separation of religion and state does not mean that the religion is not concerned with political issues but only that its influence should not be coercive on the individual beliefs of conscience of the citizens.

Thus the Biblical notions that the king is under law, that the king is only an office holder, that the king should serve the people not exploit them and that the king can be removed from his office for malfeasance feed into American and Israeli democratic theory and practice.
An important task related to the study of David and Batsheva is to clarify similarities and differences between the two political systems – modern democratic and biblical - when they are working properly. For example, David is chosen by "Divine right" – chosen by God through the prophets Samuel and then Natan. However unlike the theory of Divine right in English monarchial law this does not put the king over the law but under the law. The king was expected to write his own copy of the Torah, read it daily and subject himself to that Divine Constitutional law book whose authority comes both from God and from the people at Sinai (Deuteronomy 17). Divine right means God’s right to remove the king for malfeasance. Further the Biblical kings were chosen, at least at the foundation of each dynasty, by the people – David was crowned by the people of Judah in Hebron and seven years later by the northern tribes of Israel as well. Unfortunately Israel had no system of human checks and balances, no legal way to remove a king from office. The prophets could delegitimate a king with public sermons from God, the people could rebel against the king and another pretender to the throne could kill the king, but non-hereditary succession was never regulated merely by legal actions. But conceptually it can be argued that articles of impeachment are a direct reflection of its political theory.

3- CORRUPTION and COVERUP. Given the democratic and Biblical theory of political power, leaders know they may be held accountable for their acts of corruption. Not only when there are elections but anytime they may be criticized by the standards of their office. Hence the leaders learn the art of public relations and of subterfuge to hide their misdeeds. Nixon and Clinton were subject to criticism in particular not only for the illegal or immoral behavior but for the denial under oath of the truth of these affairs. The role of investigative journalists and political protest was essential to break through the cover-ups which were financed and orchestrated from high places using the levers of power not to serve the people but to protect the leader from judicial scrutiny and the loss of popular support.

David was also a popular king whose name means beloved and throughout I Samuel everyone is reported to have been in love with him, the women singers, the people, Jonathan and Michal and even Shaul who loved David even as he was jealous of him.

David too valued God’s support – Samuel who "anointed" him (the origin of the word messiah), the priest through whom he sought oracles from the Urim v Tumim before each battle, the Ark of God before which David danced bringing it as a source of legitimacy and blessing to his new capital (II Sam. 6) , the Psalms that David wrote, and Natan's status as the official prophet of the dynasty and of Jerusalem the capital and the one who foresaw the building of the Temple which David wanted (II Samuel 7).

Therefore David has good reasons to worry about his status in the eyes of God and the people. After all God had delegitimized Shaul and the people of the northern Israel had conducted a long civil war against David. It is probably that concern that led David to commit a greater crime to cover up the affair with Batsheva than the affair itself. If we can grade adultery and murder on a scale of severity, then murder via the corrupting of the army and an intentional loss of battle is worse than a crime of passion.

Cover-up is the special political crime of democratic regimes though any regime seeks to defend it s credibility by selective control of information.

The political greatness of I and II Samuel is precisely that they pull no punches in criticizing the political leaders – even though they are chosen by God and even though they brought national prosperity, independence and even empire. Unlike Chronicles that “conveniently” skips the whole Batsheva story in its desire to eulogize the dynasty of David and his Temple, Psalms and Samuel offers deep critique precisely because its religious worldview is tied to the political interests of the dynasty.

The political greatness of God and Natan is that they find a way to protest David’s corruption. Without merely removing him from office, they bring David to self-criticism and partial tikkun.
Exercise: The Articles of Impeachment

1- You are a committee of lawyers of the Jewish parliament of the days of King David. (In fact we do not know if the body of 70 elders established under Moshe in Numbers 11 continued to function but let us assume it did). You are adopting the rules of the US Constitution to prepare articles of impeachment.  
2- assign students to learn about laws of impeachment and the Watergate and Clinton gate cases.  
3- assign students to research Biblical constitutional law in Deuteronomy 17 with commentators and in I Samuel 8 where Samuel lays out the royal prerogatives of all the nations around Israel. Some rabbis and scholars think that was accepted also for Jewish kings. Explore these laws of monarchy in Jewish tradition as well as drawing upon American law of impeachment to prepare King David's articles of Impeachment.  

4- OPTIONAL: study the cover-up and corruption of Ahab in killing Navot by trumping up treason charges against him (I Kings 21). How was the legal system misused to advance personal interests of the king? Why didn't Ahab just take the land by right of being the king?  
5- Study II Samuel 11 and to see what crimes or other reasons you can find to impeach David.  
NOTE: We will not restrict our critique of David to actual crimes but also to evidence that he is no longer a worthy leader and in democratic regime he should not be chosen for another term of office.  

6- Study the parable of II Sam. 12 and the punishments to compare the crimes pointed out by God and Natan and those you discovered in II Sam 11.  
7- You may also invite witnesses like Uriah (back from the dead like Samuel to give evidence) or Batsheva or Yoav etc to give a deposition of their personal testimony and include that in your case.  
8- Optional: Divide up the lawyers into defense and prosecution
Deuteronomy 17 - The Law of the Monarch

18 You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice.

19 You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just.

20 Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

14 If after you have entered the land that the LORD your God has given you, and occupied it and settled in it, you decide, "I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me."

15 you shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by the Lord your God.

Be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people; you must not set a foreigner over you, one who is not your kinsman.

16 Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the LORD has warned you, "You must not go back that way again."

17 And he shall not have many wives, lest his heart go astray; nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess.

18 When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching [Torah] written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests.

19 Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life, so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God, to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching as well as these laws.

20 Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the Instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel.
The Sermon about the Tyrannical Potential of Monarchy – I Samuel 8 and 12

Shmuel's Mishpat Hamelech:

Rabbi Yehuda – This speech is exaggerated rhetoric to threaten the people [either because Shmuel is trying to dissuade them or] because it is a mitzvah in Deut. 17 to promote the awe/terror of the king's power [in order to rule the people].
‫הלכות מלכים ומלחמות פרק ג‬
‫א בעת שיישב המלך על כיסא מלכותו‪ ,‬כותב לו ספר תורה לשמו‬
‫ב ‪--‬כותב שני ספרי תורה‪ :‬אחד מניחו בבית גנזיו‪ ,‬שהוא מצווה בו ככל אחד מישראל; והשני לא יזוז מלפניו‪ ,‬אלא בעת‬
‫שייכנס לבית הכיסא‪ ,‬או למרחץ‪ ,‬או למקום שאין ראוי לקריאה‪.‬‬
‫יוצא למלחמה והוא עימו‪ ,‬נכנס והוא עימו‪ ,‬יושב בדין והוא עימו‪ ,‬מסב והוא כנגדו‪--‬שנאמר "והייתה עימו‪ ,‬וקרא בו כל ימי‬
‫חייו" (דברים יז‪,‬יט)‪.‬‬
‫ג [ב] "לא ירבה לו נשים" (דברים יז‪,‬יז)‪--‬מפי השמועה למדו שהוא לוקח עד שמונה עשרה נשים‪ ,‬בין הנשים בין הפילגשים‪,‬‬
‫הכול שמונה עשרה‪.‬‬
‫ד [ג] ו"לא ירבה לו סוסים" (דברים יז‪,‬טז) אלא כדי מרכבתו; אפילו סוס אחד פנוי להיות רץ לפניו כדרך שעושין שאר‬
‫המלכים‪ ,‬אסור‪.‬‬
‫ה [ד] ולא ירבה לו כסף וזהב להניח בגנזיו ולהתגאות בו או להתנאות בו‪ ,‬אלא כדי שייתן לחיילות שלו ולעבדיו‬
‫ולשמשיו‪ .‬וכל כסף וזהב שירבה לאוצר בית ה'‪ ,‬ולהיות שם מוכן לצורכי הציבור ולמלחמותם‪--‬הרי זה מצוה להרבותו;‬
‫ואין אסור אלא להרבות לעצמו בבית גנזיו‪ ,‬שנאמר "לא ירבה לו" (דברים יז‪,‬יז)‪ .‬ואם הרבה‪ ,‬לוקה‪.‬‬
‫ו [ה] המלך אסור לשתות דרך שכרות‪ ,‬שנאמר "אל למלכים‪ ,‬שתה יין" (משלי לא‪,‬ד)‪ .‬אלא יהיה עוסק בתורה ובצורכי‬
‫ישראל‪ ,‬ביום ובלילה‪--‬שנאמר "והייתה עימו‪ ,‬וקרא בו כל ימי חייו" (דברים יז‪,‬יט)‪.‬‬
‫[ו] וכן לא יהיה שטוף בנשים‪ :‬אפילו לא הייתה לו אלא אחת‪--‬לא יהיה מצוי אצלה תמיד כשאר הטיפשים‪ ,‬שנאמר "אל‬
‫תיתן לנשים‪ ,‬חילך" (משלי לא‪,‬ג)‪ .‬על הסרת ליבו הקפידה תורה‪ ,‬שנאמר "ולא יסור לבבו" (דברים יז‪,‬יז)‪--‬שליבו‪ ,‬הוא לב‬
‫כל קהל ישראל; ולפיכך דיבקו הכתוב בתורה יתר משאר העם‪ ,‬שנאמר "כל ימי חייו"‪.‬‬
‫הלכות מלכים ומלחמות פרק ב‬
‫א כבוד גדול נוהגין במלך‪ ,‬ומשימין לו אימה ויראה בלב כל אדם‪--‬שנאמר "שום תשים עליך מלך" (דברים יז‪,‬טו)‪ ,‬שתהיה אימתו‬
‫עליך‪ .‬אין רוכבין על סוסו‪ ,‬ואין יושבין על כיסאו‪ ,‬ואין משתמשין בשרביטו‪ ,‬ולא בכתרו‪ ,‬ולא באחד מכל כלי תשמישו; וכשהוא מת‪,‬‬
‫כולן נשרפין לפניו‪.‬‬
‫‪ ,‬בזמן שיהיה המלך בביתו לבדו הוא ועבדיו‪ ,‬יעשה זה וכיוצא בו בצנעה‪ .‬אבל בפרהסיה בפני העם‪--‬לא יעשה‪ ,‬ולא יעמוד מפני‬
‫אדם‪ ,‬ולא ידבר רכות‪ ,‬ולא יקרא לאדם אלא בשמו‪ ,‬כדי שתהיה יראתו בלב הכול‪.‬‬
‫ט [ו] כדרך שחלק לו הכתוב הכבוד הגדול‪ ,‬וחייב הכול בכבודו‪--‬כך ציווה להיות ליבו בקרבו שפל וחלל‪ ,‬שנאמר "וליבי‪ ,‬חלל‬
‫בקרבי" (תהילים קט‪,‬כב)‪ .‬ולא ינהוג גסות לב בישראל יתר מ דיי‪ ,‬שנאמר "לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו" (דברים יז‪,‬כ‪).‬‬
‫י ויהיה חונן ומרחם לקטנם וגדולם‪ ,‬וייצא ויבוא בחפציהם ובטובתם‪ ,‬ויחוס על כבוד קטן שבקטניהם‪ .‬וכשמדבר אל כל הקהל‬
‫בלשון רבים‪ ,‬ידבר רכות‪ --‬שנאמר "שמעוני אחיי ועמי" (דברי הימים א כח‪,‬ב)‪ ,‬ואומר "אם תהיה לעבד לעם הזה" (ראה מלכים א‬
‫יב‪,‬ז‪).‬‬
‫יא לעולם יתנהג בענווה יתרה‪ --‬אין לנו גדול ממשה רבנו‪ ,‬והרי הוא אומר "ונחנו מה" (שמות טז‪,‬ז; שמות טז‪,‬ח)‪ .‬ויסבול טורחם‬
‫ומשאם ותלונותם וקצפם "כאשר יישא האומן את היונק" (במדבר יא‪,‬יב)‪ .‬רועה קראו הכתוב‪" ,‬לרעות‪ ,‬ביעקוב עבדו" (ראה‬
‫תהילים עח‪,‬עא ); ודרכו של רועה‪ ,‬מפורש בקבלה "כרועה‪ ,‬עדרו ירעה‪ ,‬בזרועו יקבץ טלאים‪ ,‬ובחיקו יישא; עלות‪ ,‬ינהל" (ישעיהו‬
‫מ‪,‬יא ‪).‬‬

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Maimonides Laws of Kings, Book of Judges Chapter 2-3

1. The king is to be accorded great honor. The attitude of his subjects toward him should be one of awe and reverence, as it is said: “You shall in set him king over you” (Deut. 17:15), implying that his awe should be over you. No commoner may ride on his horse, sit on his throne, make use of his scepter or crown, or any of his general utensils. At his death, these objects are burned in his honor. Nor is anyone but a king to make use of his menservants, maidservants, or attendants. Therefore Abishag would have been permitted to Solomon but was forbidden to Adonijah.

2. A commoner is never permitted to have relations with a king’s wife. Not even a king may marry the widow or the divorced wife of another king.

5....So too, it is incumbent upon the king to give honor to students of the Torah. When the members of the Sanhedrin and Sages of Israel visit him, he shall rise before them and seat them at his side. This is the way Jehoshaphat the King of Judah acted. When he saw even the disciple of a scholar, he rose from his throne, kissed him, called him, “my teacher, my master.” This humble attitude becomes the king in the privacy of his home only, when none but he and his servants are there. He may not act thus in public, he may not rise before any man, nor be soft of speech, nor call anyone but by his name, so that his fear be in the hearts of all.

6. Just as Torah accords great honor to the king and bids all pay him honor, so it bids him cultivate a humble and lowly spirit, as it is written: “And my heart is humbled within me” (Ps. 109: 22). He must not exercise his authority in a supercilious manner, as it is said: “that his heart be not lifted up above his brothers” (Deut. 17:20). He should deal graciously and compassionately with the small and the great, conduct their affairs in their best interests; be wary of the honor of even the lowliest. When he addresses the public collectively, he shall use gentle language, as did David when he said: “Hear me, my brothers, and my, people” (I Chron. 28). It is also written: “if you will be a servant to this people this day . . . then they will be your servants forever” (I Kings 12:7).

At all times, his conduct should be marked by a spirit of great humility. None was greater than Moses, our teacher; yet he said: “And who are we? Your murmurings are not against us” (Exod. 16:8). He should put up with the complaints, burdens, grumblings, and anger of the people as a nursing father puts up with a sucking child. The Bible styles the king “shepherd,” [as it is written]: “to be shepherd over Jacob His People” (Ps. 78: 71). The way in which a shepherd acts is explicitly stated in the prophetic text: “Even as a shepherd that feeds his flock, that gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom and gently leads those who are nursing” (Isaiah 40: 11).

CHAPTER III

1. As soon as the king ascends the throne, he must write a scroll of the Law for himself, in addition to the one which his ancestors have left him. He is to have it corrected by the court of seventy-one from the scroll in the Temple Court. If his father left him no scroll or it was lost, he must write two copies; one, the writing (of which is obligatory upon every Jew) he shall place in his treasure-house, and the other is to be with him all the time, except when he enters the toilet or bathhouse or any other place where it is improper to read it. When he goes forth to war, it shall be with him; when he returns (from war), it shall be with him; when he sits in judgment, it shall be with him; when he sits down to eat, it shall be before him, as it is said: “And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life” (Deut. 17: 19).

2. “He shall not multiply wives to himself” (Deut. 17:17) It has been learned by tradition that he may not have more than eighteen wives, including concubines. If he adds a single one to this number and has relations with her, he is flogged. But he may divorce one and marry another in her place.

3. ”He shall not multiply horses to himself” - only as many as are required for his chariot (Mishna Sanhedrin 2). He is forbidden to add even one idle horse to run before him, as other kings do. If he adds, he is flogged.
4. Nor shall he multiply to himself silver and gold to store them away in his treasury in order to satisfy his pride and vainglory, but only enough to pay the army, servants, and attendants. It is commendable, however, to store silver and gold in the treasury of the House of the Lord, in order to provide for the needs of the community and for war purposes. He is forbidden only to fill his own coffers, as it is said: "And he shall not multiply to himself" (Deut. 17: 17). If he does, he is flogged.

5. The king is forbidden to drink to the point of intoxication, as it is written: "It is not for kings to drink wine" (Prov. 31: 4). He shall be occupied day and night with the study of the Law and the needs of Israel, as it is said: "And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life" (Deut. 17: 19).

6. So too, he must not indulge in sexual excess. Even if he has only one wife, he shall not have frequent relations with her, as fools do, for it is written: "Give not your strength to women" (Prov. 31:3).

Torah lays particular stress on (the danger) of his heart being turned away from God, as it is said; "that his heart not turn away" (Deut. 17:17) for his heart is the heart of the whole congregation of Israel. Therefore Torah exhorts him more than any other Israelite to cleave to the Law, as it is said: "all the days of his life" (Deut. 17: 19).

7. We have already stated that the kings of the House of David may be judged and testified against. But with respect to the kings of Israel, the Rabbis enacted that they neither judge nor be judged, neither testify nor be testified against, because they are arrogant, and (if they be treated as commoners) the cause of religion would suffer.

8. The king is empowered to put to death anyone who rebels against him. Even if any of his subjects is ordered by him to go to a certain place and he does not go, or is ordered to stay home and fails to do so, he is culpable.

Avraham Ibn Ezra (quoted in Rabenu Bahya) comments on “Do not increase silver and gold” (Deuteronomy 17) that the point is to prevent the ruler from oppressing Israel with heavy taxation as did King Solomon. For wealth is similar to fire. The more trees you add the bigger the flame. Thus Israel rebelled against Solomon's son Rehavam and stoned his tax master.

Ramban comments on Deuteronomy 17: 20 "that his heart should not be lifted up above his brothers" that it hints that the Torah forbids any arrogance...even in kings.

Sefer Hinuch Positive Mitzvah 98 comments on Deuteronomy 17: 15 "You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother." For those from the seed of Israel are supposed to be merciful, so they will have mercy on the people and not oppress them in any area. So the ruler will love truth, justice and honesty – like the family of Abraham. ..From this root principle we learn that it is forbidden to appoint leaders who are cruel or evil.
The Indictment

1- adultery.
Not only does David commit adultery but he convinces Batsheva to join him though she does not seem to have taken any initiative nor did she object vociferously.

Tikva Frymer Kensky:
**Middle Assyrian laws** call for the rape of the married rapist’s wife. There is a poetic justice here: David stopped to see Batsheba from the roof and Avshalom slept with the women of David on the roof. And the person who suggested that Avshalom do this? Ahitophel, David’s sage, father of Eliam, grandfather of Batsheba.

Exodus 20 – The Ten Commandments

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; your neighbor’s wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is your neighbor’s.

Deuteronomy 22:22

22 If a man be found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they shall both of them die, the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel.

23 If there be a young woman that is a virgin betrothed to a man, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; 24 then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them with stones so that they die: the young woman, because she did not cry out, being in the city; and the man, because he slept with his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away the evil from your midst.

25 But if the man find the young woman that is betrothed in the field, and the man take hold of her, and lie with her; 26 then to the young woman you shall do nothing; there is in the young woman no sin worthy of death; for as when a man rises against his neighbor, and kills him, even so is this matter.

27 For he found her in the field; the betrothed young woman cried out, and there was none to save her.

דברים פרק ככ

ככ כי יהיה נערה חיה, מטרשה לאיש; ומקנאה אישה בוער, ושכב עמה. דר חולהו שא-שינהו, שא-שעורה._chunk

בראשית פרק יב

ככ כי א المقدس יקץ האיש; אשת-터שאתה, התחייה-בח היא, ושכבה עמה; ומקנאה שא-שיכב, שא-שעורה._chunk

ככ כי אם בישהו, ממקשה, חוער השמיא, איהם מושיש, ליה.
Genesis 12:10 - Pharaoh’s Willingness to Kill Abraham and Take his Beautiful Wife?

And there was a famine in the land; and Abram went down into Egypt to reside there; for the famine was harsh in the land. 11 When he came near to Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife:

'Now, I know that you are a good-looking woman. 12 And when the Egyptians see you, they will say: This is his wife; and they will kill me, but you they will keep alive. 13 Say, please, that you are my sister; that it may be well with me for your sake, and that my soul may live because of you.'

14 When Abram was came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very good-looking. 15 And the princes of Pharaoh saw her, and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 And he dealt well with Abram for her sake; and he had sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and she-asses, and camels. 17 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. 18 And Pharaoh called Abram, and said: "What is this that you have done to me? why didn't you tell me that she was your wife? 19 Why did you say: "She is my sister" so that I took her to be my wife? Now here is your wife, take her, and go!'

ברשות פרכ ח


2 - murder

Not only killing a man with premeditation but enticing another person to sin and killing other soldiers in unjustified collateral damage. The law of the Israeli army states that a soldier may not obey a clearly immoral order, so neither David nor Yoav lack responsibility.

Exodus Ten Commandments 20: 13 and 21:12-14

12 Anyone striking a person, so that he dies, shall surely be put to death. 13 And if a person has not lay in ambush, but God caused it to come to hand; then I will appoint you a place where he may flee. 14 But if a person comes with premeditation upon his neighbor, to kill him with guile; you shall take him even from my altar [sanctuary], so that he may die.

3 – violating an oath.

Not only did David have an implicit oath of loyalty to the Torah which he accepted presumably in becoming king under the law of Deut. 17, but he explicitly tried to get Uriah to get so drunk that he would violate Uriah’s oath to God not to sleep with his wife (II Sam. 11: 11-13)

Exodus Ten Commandments 20: 7
4- lack of solidarity with his army in battle that led to betrayal of an old friend, of a soldier, both by the adultery and murder

5- abuse of the state apparatus for private purposes – using messengers to bring Batsheva to the capital, to use intelligence services to inquire about her, to use mail service to deliver illegal orders

6- do not covet another’s wife
   Exodus Ten Commandments 20: 14
   II Samuel 12– God accuses David of greed since he could have had as many women as he wanted, so why take his neighbor’s only wife

7- multiplying wives who will lead one’s heart astray from the Torah
   Deuteronomy 17: 17
   II Samuel 12– God accuses David of taking women illicitly when he could married them legally

8- violating the Constitutional Torah that he supposed to study and uphold
   Deuteronomy 17: 18-19

9- arrogance and holding himself above his people
   Deuteronomy 17: 20

10 – do not exploit the ger = convert, resident alien – Uriah the Hittite was a resident alien and it appears he was a convert since his name and his statements to David show him to be a profoundly religious person
   Leviticus 19: 33-34

11- failure to be a military leader who goes out to battle – instead David caused a foolish, costly military defeat intentionally as a personal cover-up
   II Sam. 8: 19-20

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13 David’s choice to remain in Jerusalem enjoying himself, while his soldiers and the ark are fighting David’s battles is his first sin, a failure of solidarity with the nation as a whole. After all Moshe criticized the 2 ½ tribes that wished to settle comfortably in the East bank of the Jordan, while “your brothers go off to war” on the West bank (Numbers 32:6). Malbim comments: “The Tanakh hints that the Batsheva affair came as a result of David’s sitting in his house and not going to fight in God’s wars. ...He feasted the royally and enjoyed pleasures and did not devote himself to public duties. Rather he went for a walk on the king’s roof and then the came the sin.” David’s failing can be compared to Joshua’s defeat at Ai. Rashi explains: “Joshua will go before the people and inherit the land” (Deuteronomy 3:28) means “that they will inherit the land only if he goes before them in battle. But when Joshua sent the people to take the Ai [without bothering to lead them for he thought: “why weary the whole people with such small enemy (Joshua 7:3)’ especially after Joshua had just had the great victory over Jericho] then ‘The people of Ai defeated them.” When Joshua fell on his face to pray, God said: ‘You get up!’ How can stand in your pace and send my sons to war? Didn’t I tell Moshe your teacher: If he goes before them – they will cross successfully, if not – they will not make it across [into the promise land].” Similarly David was overconfident and felt no need to lead the battle with Ammon, so he sent Yoav to do it alone. In the days of Joshua that same hubris affected Achan who “violated (maal) the sacred property of Jericho” (– Joshua 7:1). In the days of David, David himself violated the sacred wives of his married soldiers, just the adulterer is said to violate (ma’al) the sotah’s sacred status (Numbers 5:12) (from Yaaqov Medan, David and Bathsheba, p. 79 -81,89, 93)

14 Why did Natan wait until David had already married Batsheva and after she gave birth to the child of their adultery, before confronting David with his crime? David’s graver sin was not the sin of passion that led to one night of adultery nor even his desperate coverup by having Uriah killed. But, Natan says: “You took his wife to be your wife!” (II Samuel 12:9). This was Ahab and Jezebel’s sin to kill Navot to take his vineyard. Elijah says: “Have you murdered and inherited?” (I Kings  21:18). (from Yaaqov Medan, David and Bathsheba, p.95)
12- do not lie – do not steal – do not exploit the poor - Leviticus 19: 11 –
When David steals Uriah’s wife, he misleads Uriah, and takes advantage of his loyalty to send the letter of execution with him. He has exploited an ethnic stranger.

13- desecrating God’s name which the king as messiah bears – II Sam 12

14- hypocrisy – David presented himself as humble and soft and caring about his people, but here he is just as hard and he is pleased such a hard henchman when it is convenient.
Is Adultery a Political Sin in Today’s Politics?

Women and the Body Politic – Private is also Public

The final political lessons of the Batsheva and Avigail stories reflect not on the personalities involved but on the basic rules of political stability based on law. Nathan’s curses fall not only on David as in the death of his child and heir but on all of Israel through the sword that will plague his house = his dynasty from within = civil war.

Clearly the Tanakh argues that a political leader’s private vices – Clinton for example with Monica Lewinsky – have a direct effect on the public realm of their leadership. In Deuteronomy 17 the connection of women to leadership is through their potentially distracting affect on the leader’s heart or mind.

However the whole distinction of public and private especially in relation to women may be misplaced when applied to David’s era or even to our own where so many sons of political leaders continue in their footsteps (Kennedy, Bush, Sharon, and Herzog).

Regina Schwartz has applied Claude Levi Strauss’s anthropological structuralism to illuminate the way in which the treatment of women in the Tanakh makes for political unity or political chaos and civil war. The primary example as pointed out by Mieke Bal in Death and Dissymmetry on the book of Judges is the civil war between Benjamin and the other tribes sparked by the rape of a fellow Israelite man’s concubine in violation of hospitality duties of all fellow Israelites. Her body was cut up into 12 pieces to show the whole body politic must come together to make this wrong right or else there would be permanent chaos and hence “dismemberment” of the body politic.

Legions of Women, but little Scandal until Clinton by Tom Skotnick
Sunday Herald, June 8, 1997, regarding to Clinton sexual scandals while in office

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton is not the first US leader to be touched by scandal and innuendo. Yet, in more than 200 years, the list of White House transgressors is surprisingly short, which is either a reflection on their character or capacity for secrecy.

The first president on whom there was any public taint was Thomas Jefferson, one of the authors of the Declaration of Independence, who was rumored to have fathered a child to his favorite black slave, Sally Hemmings.

Grover Cleveland had a reputation for scrupulous honesty in public office that propelled him from the New York governor’s mansion to the presidency. However, he was lucky to have survived an accusation of having fathered a child out of wedlock before going on in 1892 to become the only president to win a second time after having been defeated.

President Warren Harding could probably teach Clinton a thing or two about scandal. He invited his mistresses to stay during his short two-year term of office.

America’s longest serving president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, had two mistresses in his tenure: Daisy Suckley and Lucy Mercer. Wife Eleanor Roosevelt was so accommodating she moved into a second bedroom in the White House, so FDR could meet his mistresses without fear of intrusion.

Several years before he became president, Dwight Eisenhower had an affair with his military driver, Kay Summersby, while he was commanding Allied troops in Europe during World War II. At the time, his marriage to Mamie was said to be in trouble.

Mamie weathered the betrayal, continuing to play the role for which she believed she was born - that of everloving wife. “Ike runs the country and I turn the lamb chops,” she said of their marriage.
John F. Kennedy is at the head of the scandal hall of fame. Kennedy's libido was said to be out of control - Clinton has been compared with him - and aside from two mistresses, mob girl Judith Exner and Hollywood bombshell. Marilyn Monroe, Kennedy slept with legions of women. In his book, *All Too Human: The Love Story of Jack and Jackie Kennedy*, Ed Klein writes that a gentleman's agreement between the White House press gallery and the president meant his behavior could continue unchecked. Klein said Kennedy slept with White House staffers, wives of friends and assorted starlets, while Jackie responded by immersing herself in her children and redecorating the White House. She also carried on huge flirtations with Fiat heir Gianni Agnelli and Ari Onassis, whom she later married.

However, for Clinton it has become one of a long list of sexual allegations. In 1994, a number of Arkansas state troopers told the *American Spectator* magazine Clinton was a serial adulterer and had been throughout his marriage to Hillary. They said while he was governor he had liaisons with the wife of a prominent judge, a Little Rock reporter, a former state employee, a cosmetics clerk and cabaret singer Jennifer Flowers, who saw Clinton three times a week for 12 years. "Later he told me that he researched the subject in the Bible," state trooper Larry Patterson told *American Spectator*. "And oral sex isn't considered adultery."
V. God’s Point of View and Nathan’s Prophetic Call: The Power of a Story within a Story

The Structure of II Samuel 12: How will David React?
II Samuel 12 - Judgment and Retribution - Translation
Walter Brueggemann, Interpretation: Samuel, God speaks and humans listen!
The Gap between the Mashal and Nimshal
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Biblical Analogies to David and Batsheva: Compare, Contrast and Judge
Exercise: Tocheicha Workshop– The Art of Moral Criticism
The Jewish Attitude Towards …Civil Disobedience by David Golinkin

Rabbis Make Speeches to American Presidents by Jack Riemer
The Structure of II Samuel 12: How will David React? How will God React?

Shimon Bar Efrat (Mikra L’Yisrael:Shmuel) presents the structure of II Sam. 12 as a series of tests of David’s emotional-moral-religious reactions to his responsibility for crimes. This is wholly unlike II Sam. 11 which portrays David's horrendous crimes with neutral language and whose plotline is driven by David’s ingenious attempts to solve complications and to successfully cover-up his sexual affair with beautiful women about whom he expresses no feelings nor does he express any feelings about having his loyal subject and comrade in arms killed. The only royal emotion discussed is anger at bad military planning, but Yoav’s fears are unfounded for David accepts the death of his soldiers and the failure in battle with philosophic equanimity – that is “the way of the sword,” he says.

However in II Sam. 12 after hearing Nathan's parable, David responds honestly, directly, spontaneously without any cover-up or put-on:

- **II Sam. 12: 1-6** Nathan’s parable, which David thinks is a real case for the king to judge, evokes an explosion of righteous anger deriving from his empathy with the victim and his disgust with the perpetrator’s lack of hemla = mercy.

- **II Sam. 12: 7-13** Nathan’s nimshal and his prophecy in God's name of the curses that will befall David evokes David’s confession – short, submissive without any excuses or requests for mercy. Nathan’s two word “You are the man” is matched by David’s two word admission “I have sinned to God.”

- **II Sam. 12: 13-17** Nathan rescinds the death penalty on David which he himself had pronounced and yet announces the death penalty on David and Batsheva’s son who falls ill. This evokes David’s fasting and self-obedience by lying on the ground.

- **II Sam. 12: 18- 24** David intuits from the elders that his son has died. Then he surprises everyone by returning to life with zest and comforting his wife for her loss. Batsheva to whom he had never before shown any emotions is now called “David’s wife” – not Uriah’s wife. David comes to her bed for her sake, rather than as in II Sam 11 when he had her dragged to his bed for his sake.

Now after all David’s responses, how does God respond?

- **II Sam. 12: 13** David’s confession elicited God’s rescinding the death penalty for David.

- **II Sam. 12:24-25** David does penance by fasting, accepts the death of his first son from Batsheva and then comforts his wife who then gives birth to their second son – Solomon. Now this evokes God’s changed emotional response. Rather than God’s anger at David and his condemnation of their first son to death, we have God loving Solomon and sending Nathan to rename him Yedidya – a sign that God has forgiven David and now loves David again and approves of the continued marriage with Batsheva.
Epilogue of II Sam 11 and Prologue of II Sam 12 - God Sees
But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of YHWH,

Scene 1- God sends a messenger with a parable
12:1 YHWH sent Natan to David, he came to him and said to him:

“There were two men in a certain town, one rich and one poor. 
2 The rich-one had flocks and herds, exceedingly many, 
3 while the poor-one had nothing at all except for one little lamb which he had bought. 
He kept-it-alive, and it grew up with him, together with his children: from his morsel it would eat, from his cup it would drink, in his bosom it would lie,
it became to him like a daughter/ bat.

4 And there came a traveler (= walker, journey-goer) to the rich man, 
but he thought-it-a-pity to take from his flocks or from his herds, to make (something ready) for the guest who had come to him, 
so he took the poor man's lamb and made-it-ready for the man who had come to him.”

5 David's anger flared up against the man exceedingly, he said to Natan: 
“By the life of YHWH, 
indeed, a son of death is the man who does this! 
6 And for the lamb he shall pay fourfold, 
because he did this thing, and since he had no pity!”

Mashal followed by Nimshal- The Parable Unmasked
7 Natan said to David: “YOU are the man!”

II Samuel 12:1-7- Ironies

How ironic and tragic that David does not fulfill the function he was assigned in II Samuel 8:15 “David does mishpat utzedakah and Yoav was in charge of the army.” How ironic that he interferes in Yoav’s job to cause an unnecessary military defeat and to turn his general into a betrayer of his own soldiers. It was under the royal role as final arbiter of justice and mercy that Nathan approaches David in II Sam 12:1 (II Sam 15:2 – “Every person with a riv = a legal issue would come to the king for justice”). But David has violated his sacred duty and become not only a corrupt commander-in-chief but a corrupt king qua judge as well. However David is not yet cynical enough or self-aware enough to know he has lost his right to these sacred titles.

David does yet know that Nathan is coming in his role as God’s messenger, the role of prophet who anoints but also removes dynastic power from malfeasants (I Sam 2:27 -36 and 3:10-14 for deposing Eli the priest and I Sam. 15:26 for deposing Saul and II Sam 7 for granting David an eternal dynasty).
God speaks and humans listen! by Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation: Samuel*

David thought no one would notice, [he told Yoav “not to see” the turn of events in battle that killed Uriah in a bad light], but he failed to reckon with the seeing eyes of YHWH.\(^\text{15}\) [David had sent his words to Yoav, but failed to consider] the discerning word of Nathan. In II Samuel 11, David "sent" (12 times shalach in verses 3, 4, 14, 16).

Now, in 12:1, YHWH sends. David no longer sends; he only receives. He has no option. Nathan, the one who is sent, engages David and David must listen. Astonishingly, even in his growing cynicism, David must wait and listen to this awesome voice from outside royal perception.

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**Gerhard Von Rad – Divine Intervention in the Story of David**

Bruggemann points out that Von Rad the Bible commentator is right in describing the Davidic stories as ones in which human beings act without Divine intervention. It seems that all is merely a human story of cause and effect without any overt miracles.

Yet there are explicit Divine interventions three times in the causal chain:

- II Sam. 11.27 – God sees David’s actions with Bathsheva as being evil and God sends Nathan to make his case. That yields David’s repentance.
- II Sam 12.24 God sends Nathan to rename Shlomo Yedidya and thus explicitly express his reconciliation with David and implicitly his approval of Solomon as a potential heir.
- II Sam 17.14 God misleads Avshalom into accepting the deceitful advice of Hushai over the insights of Ahitophel thus leading to the defeat of Avshalom and the rescue of David and his dynasty.

Each intervention is gentle, compared to earlier stories, but God’s hand is revealed.

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**The Parable**

The parable is clear and simple II Sam. 12: 1-4). There were two men, one rich and one poor.

- The rich man is not very interesting. It does not take long to describe and dismiss him. He had everything - period. End of description.
- The poor man occupies our attention. He had one female lamb. The lamb was his whole property, his livelihood. The narrative takes great time to sketch the poor man clearly and vividly. This one lamb was like a treasured daughter, which he nurtured and to which he gave food and drink from his own cup. This precious lamb lies in the man's bosom, treasured and safe.

The rich man needed lunch. He did not want to kill his own sheep, even though he had plenty of herds and flocks. The rich man is quite ingenious. He took the lamb-daughter of the poor man.

The word calls attention to itself: "He took." It is the word Samuel used in 8:11-19 to anticipate the self-centered king, because only kings take. It is the word reporting David's action in 11:4. David took Bathsheba. The rich man took the lamb and ate it for dinner. He took what was not his and treated it as if it were his own.

[By contrast, Nathan's name means "give" and he brings God's word about how much God has "given" to David and why David has no reason to "take" illicitly]. Nathan's story is subtle in its wording. It obviously makes an economic contrast between great and little. With the words "lie" and "took," however, there is also

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\(^\text{15}\) Uriel Simon notes that Yoav had gone to battle relying on God’s judgment i.e. the Divine eyes = “Be strong and be strengthened for our people and for the cities of God for Adonai will do what is good in the Divine eyes” (II Sam10:12). But Yoav has relied on David’s self-interest and now weakened they have lost not only Uriah but other soldiers, servants of David. David says "do not let it be bad in your eyes," Yoav, for that is the way of war to take causalities. But now it is very bad in the eyes of God. So David’s repeated emphasis on being strong – without God, without loyalty to our people and our city - will not be adequate.
an accusation of rape. The rich man raped the daughter-like treasure of the poor man. This is a tale of
cynicism, selfishness, destruction, and greed.

[The rich man and David share the lack of hemla = mercy, compassion except ironically the "mercy' for
one’s own possessions that should not be diminished when one can take those of a neighbor with no
consequences. (Shaul also showed false mercy in refraining from killing Agag and his sheep). David lacked
mercy for Uriah’s one and only wife and for the other soldiers killed along with Uriah in the intentionally
bungled military attack. Yet David, in his angry response to the parable before he knew it was a parable
about him, showed great mercy for the poorman entitled the rash.

Why? Perhaps David saw himself as the poorman since he,
in contrast with Shaul, had had nothing. He
came from a family without aristocratic status, the seventh or eighth child always overlooked, the little David
against Goliath who like Shaul was very tall and military. David calls himself ish rash in I Sam. 18:23 when
devaluing himself before King Shaul who persecuted and pursued him for no reason. That natural self-
identification with the underdog is what blinded David to his having become a richman – heartless
and predatory. So Nathan’s explication of the parable – “You are the man”– the richman – not the poorman
this time –was so shocking to David’s self-image.]

The narrative struggles with **how truth shall speak to power**. The prophet addresses the king. Such
speech is dangerous business, especially to address a king so cynical and desperate. The parable is the
right strategy, for it permits the king to draw his own unavoidable conclusion. David could rightly discern
the parable. What he does not discern is how the parable touches his own situation.

In verse 7 there is a **daring change of rhetoric**. Now the address of Nathan is bold and direct. There is no
more artistic finesse. Now there is direct prophetic speech. It is a **high-risk moment**. Yet the word must be
uttered, even to this David who most likely is surrounded by yes-men. Prophetic speech is still permitted in
Israel, for such speech is constitutive of Israel's self-discernment. A king must not only tolerate but heed a
prophet. The essential interpretation of the self-indicting parable is made in the succinct statement of verse
7: "You are the man!"

The parable does its powerful work. David’s response is immediate, indignant, and on target. David is
properly appalled at the crassness of the rich man who acts in ways that are economically and sexually
destructive. The rich man receives a harsh royal indictment (v. 5). The king, accustomed to conducting
judicial procedure, indicts and sentences (cf. 15:1-6). Death is in order. Reparation must be made.

### The Gap between the Mashal and Nimshal

The mashal and nimshal do not come together cleanly. There is a gap that typically occurs in many Biblical
and Rabbinic mashal/nimshal pairs. But in this case we have three legs of comparison: the story of
David and Batsheva / the parable by Nathan / the explication of the parable in God’s name. A careful
reading shows that the mashal (II Sam 12:1-4), the nimshal (II Sam 11) and the Divine sentencing with its
rationale (II Sam 12:7-12), each describe David’s sins differently and would lead to a different charges.

Shimon Bar Efrat *(Mikrah L'Yisrael:Shmuel)* summarizes the implicit charges based on the mashal itself:

- Robbery.
- Exploitation of the poor and the weak by the rich and powerful. The terminology is economic –
  ashir / rash.
- The contrasting personality of giving and stinginess: the poor gives from his cup and his loaf to his
  one and only poor lamb, but the rich takes from the poor for a passing stranger even though he
  has so much of his own to give.
- Corrupt emotions. The poor knows compassion, while the rich knows an ironic compassion lest he
  take he own possessions, his own sheep, but no compassion for his neighbor.

*But how does this fit the nimshal? Will David be able to recognize himself in the parable?*

Tikvah Frymer Kensky *(Reading the Women of the Bible, p. 154 -5):*
“You are the man,” says Nathan. There is no doubt that David is the rich man who killed the lamb. But the rest of the parable is not as transparent: who is the poor man, and who is the lamb, and what has David done that is so wrong? The conventional wisdom has always been that Uriah is the poor man, and Bathsheba the lamb. But David has not killed Uriah’s sheep, and he has not killed Uriah’s wife. Even if we were to assume that the Bible equates adultery, or “killing the marriage,” with killing the lamb, if Uriah is the poor man, then the parable ignores the actual killing, paying no attention to the fact that David killed Uriah by proxy. Nathan specifically condemns David for the murder when he unvels the parable. Nor does the parable ignore the murder, but our own gender stereotyping leads us astray.

Bathsheba is the poor man, the one whose husband lies in her lap and eats from her bread until David, who has many wives, has him killed. As a result, says God, the sword will not leave David's house.

Shimon Bar Efrat (Mikrah L’Yisrael: Shmuel) disagrees with Tikvah Frymer Kensky. He says one should not expect a perfect fit between mashal and nimshal because its purpose is to fool David so it must not be too transparent. What are the differences? Can we explicate them?

- The reason for the rich man taking the lamb is different than in the Biblical story. David is motivated by passing lust, while the rich man is just cheap about hosting some passing guest. Rashi quotes Genesis Rabbah on Gen. 4: “The passerby is an image for the Yetzer Hara which begins as a mere passerby and then the guest becomes a resident lodger and finally it becomes an “Ish” – Baal Habayit – the master of the house.” The guest is David’s yetzer hara. It is like a passerby for David since he does not want a permanent relationship with Batshева, but when aroused it must be satisfied. The term for the guest – helekh recalls David’s hithalekh on the roof – his restlessness is his yetzer hara. The midrash says that the yetzer hara comes like a passing guest – helekh – but turns into a live-in guest – oreiach – and finally becomes a commanding personage – haish.
- The action done to the lamb is to slaughter it, but David does not kill Batshева. Perhaps we might suggest that the mashal is meant to be read in two ways – both the lamb as Batshева for her name is bat and yet also that the lamb is Uriah who is slaughtered for a frivolous reason.
- The loving concern of the poor man of his lamb has no parallel in the nimshal from II Sam 11. Batshева shows no love for Uriah though she mourns his death, Uriah shows no love for Batshева. When David tells him to eat, drink and sleep with his wife, Uriah refuses: “I should come into my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?” (II Sam. 11:10). So perhaps the mashal is designed to evoke David’s compassion with a stereotyped picture of an idyllic love relationship, while the real relationship is more complex.

Uriah shows no love for Batshева, but rather represents the patriotic soldier and worshipper of God who puts his army, his ark and his ruler above his personal joys just as a soldier is meant to leave his home to risk his life for national and religious wars.

Uriel Simon notes that:
1. the nimshal focuses on David’s betrayal of a fellow soldier whose wife he does not want to steal but merely use for a night and return to him for the cover-up.
2. Nathan’s mashal focuses on David’s insensitivity to a fellow man especially a weaker undefended fellowman in stealing from him his sheep but the sheep not the fellowman is slaughtered.
3. But in God’s sentence David’s sin is to God – bein adam lamakom. David is ungrateful for all he has received. David has Uriah killed in war in order to steal his wife, just as Jezebel had Navot executed on trumped up charges to clear the way to legally expropriate his vineyard.

16 The Nimshal’s critique of David for ingratitude to God and subsequent hillul hashem through theft is reminiscent of the prophet’s critique of Eli’s sons for stealing from the Temple sacrifices and sleeping with the women pilgrims. In 1 Sam 2:7 -36 the phrase “I gave to your family dynasty all ishei benai yisrael” (1 Sam. 2:28) may be punning on 11 Sam. 12:8 “I gave you nishei adonecha.” Sacrifices and wives are made analogous because both are sacred and both are taken illicitly and the result is bizayon = desecration of God’s name – 1 Sam 2:30 and II Sam. 12:10. Both men were promised Divine covenants (II Sam 7:16 and I Sam. 35) and both will lose them due to their attitude to women as commodities.
Yaaqov Medan suggest that David himself read the mashal as nimshal for his relationship with Shaul.

Why did David identify so strongly with the poor man (rash) in the parable and condemn so strongly the rich man who after all just stole and killed a lamb?

David sees himself as the poor man and King Shaul as the rich man who stole his beloved lamb – Michal from him and gave her to Paltiel ben Laish (I Samuel 25:44). Recall that David was the poor person from the margins of society, the youngest son of an unimportant family, who felt overwhelmed by the offer to marry the king’s daughter: “David said: Is it light in your eyes to marry into the royal family, seeing I am a light-weight in honor and a poor man (rash)!” (I Samuel 18:24). After Shaul’s death, David demanded Michal whom he had purchased by endangering his life fighting the Philistines be returned. The ironically Natan reminds David that he is really like Shaul in that David stole Batsheva from Uriah. (from Yaaqov Medan, *David and Bathsheba*, p.123)

In short, a mashal is always a simplification of a complex case. This case is interpreted multiple times to extract every aspect of this ramified sin. Even in response to the mashal itself David decrees two independent punishments – one for theft and one for murder – one a legal judgment and one an emotional condemnation of the richman’s colossal insensitivity. Yet both become legal judgments when God speaks.

**II Samuel 12:7- Pronouncing Sentence and Confessing Guilt**

7b Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel:
“I myself anointed you king over Israel,
I myself rescued you from the hand of Sha’ul,
8 I gave you the house of your lord, and the women of your lord into your bosom,
I gave you the House of Israel and Judah
and as if (that were) too little, I would have added yet this and that to you.
9 Why have you despised the word of YHWH to do what is evil in my eyes?
Uriah the Hittite you have struck-down by the sword,
his wife you have taken for yourself as a wife
him you have killed by the sword of the Children of Ammon.
10 So now-
the sword shall not depart from your house for the ages,
because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be a wife for you!”
11 Thus says YHWH:
“Here, I will raise up against your (person) evil from your house,
I will take-away your women from before your eyes,
I will give (them) to your fellow and he will lie with your wives, under the eyes of this sun.
12 For you, you did it in secret,
but I, I will do this thing in front of all Israel and in front of the sun.

13 David said to Natan: **I have sinned against YHWH!**

Natan said to David:
“YHWH himself has transferred your sin---you will not die;

14 nevertheless, because you have scorned, yes,
scorned ‘YHWH's enemies' by (doing) this thing, the son himself - who is born to you: he must die, yes, die.”

15 Natan went back to his house.
God speaks and humans listen by Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation: Samuel,*

[Nathan has been speaking on his own in the mashal and in his explication – "you are the man!" However now he disappears as a mediator and lets God speak directly - introduced by the messenger’s formula for quotation: “Thus says. ”]

12:7-I5a contains a long speech placed in the mouth of YHWH, interrupted only by a second messenger formula (“Thus says the LORD”) in verse 11.

**REVIEW OF PAST GIFTS.** YHWH begins by reviewing past gracious action toward David (vv. 7b-8). This action is dominated by the verb "give." (Note the contrast to "take.") The recital closely parallels 7:8-11. God has been faithful and will do more for David in the future. The reference to "master's house" and "master's wives" refers to David's displacement of Saul, which David accomplished with YHWH's sanction (v. 8). [God speaks in "I" language because David's sin is both ingratitude to God the great giver and despising/shaming God]

**INDICTMENT.** From this review YHWH proceeds to the indictment (v. 9) [using the rhetorical language for drawing logical conclusions - "Now / v'ata.]. The indictment indicates that David imagined himself autonomous, not responsive to YHWH's governing word. The reference to "evil in his eyes" looks back to the comment of 11:27. The particulars of the indictment are in the verbs "smite. take, kill." The three commandments David violated are the prohibitions on killing, adultery, and coveting. In this series of verbs, the verb "take" - the verb of adultery and coveting - is framed by the two verbs of killing. David has violated crucial claims of the Torah. He has also violated the gifts of YHWH and the deep commitment YHWH has made to him.

**THE SENTENCE OF THE LAWSUIT** (vv. 10-12) is introduced by a standard "therefore" and is massive in its threat, far-reaching in its scope. The sentence ordains a "sword" over David, David's house and David's family for all time to come. David's Jerusalem establishment shall never be free of conflict, trouble, and destructiveness. The sentence fits the affront. It was by the sword (albeit of the Ammonites, v. 9) that David did his killing work. The sword also provides David with the rationale to excuse his action (v. 25).

Now a long destiny of sword-shaped life is promised. It played out in the bloody history of David's sons and, indeed, in the long course of the monarchy until the coming of deathly Babylon (II Kings 24-25). One might not expect one single act and its cover-up to hover so ominously and for so long. Such a hovering of danger from YHWH belongs to the world of prophetic reality. That way of discerning ongoing life is in sharp contrast to the royal notion of reality, in which there is no such moral coherence or such long-term moral seriousness. For prophetic reality, the rule of YHWH pervades even royal actions, whereas the king imagined himself immune from the demanding governance of YHWH. In the royal narrative of chapter 11 and the prophetic verdict of chapter 12, the text juxtaposes these two views of historical reality. David has been seduced by the royal view; the king now is shown to be answerable to the covenantal prophetic reality, which he cannot escape.

In I Samuel 15:28 (cf. 28:17), David had been the "neighbor" who was better than Saul and who thus would receive the throne. In II Samuel 12:11, David's son Absalom is the "neighbor" who will rise up out of David's own house, claim the throne, and preempt David's wives in a way to humiliate David (cf. 16:20-22). **David seized Bathsheba secretly; Absalom will seize David's wives publicly, for all to see.** The royal answering for David's affront will be long and costly.

**CONFESSION.** David's response in verse 13 is remarkable: "I have sinned." We might conclude David has no option; he was caught red-handed and had to confess. But in fact he did not have to confess. A lesser man - perhaps his son Solomon - would not have confessed but would have eliminated the prophet instead. The elimination of Nathan could have been easily done, but David did not move against Nathan. David's confession comes very late, but at least David has submitted. In the eleventh hour, David acknowledges himself to be a child of the Torah.
[The confession is a psychological break with the cover-up. David has been trying to escape culpability from his one-night stand with Batsheva. One sin led to another (aveirah goreret aveirah), the plot thickened with the unintended consequences of each of David's actions. The more control David tried to exert, the more his lack of control of the destructive inner dynamic of sin became apparent.

However at the end of Chapter 11 there is an illusion – ephemeral as David will see – that David has succeeded, that his ruthless escalation of violence to eradicate his problem and to protect his name has covered up the problem with an honorable marriage and a first child.

Now when confronted by Natan with the inescapability of the consequences of David's own initiatives, David stops the further complications, the snowball affect of his cover-up, by admitting his guilt to God. God had played no role at all in David's attempt to cover-up. He had thought this was an earthly affair only between men, but he missed the vertical implication. God's heavenly mandate for the kingship was conditional on David's horizontal relations with his people.]

There is not much to celebrate about David in this narrative. The narrator nevertheless wants us to notice two things about this portrayal of David.

- First, concerning David, it is evident that David still has a considerable degree of moral courage and sensitivity. He is able to face up to his real situation.
- Second, it is not too late for David's repentance. David is a man who is still willing and able to cast himself on YHWH's mercy (cf. 24:14). YHWH is a God who will extend mercy to such a person. By the end of the narrative, David has abandoned his presumed moral autonomy of 11:2-5 and has resubmitted to the covenantal governance of Israel's faith.

David's confession consists in only two words (12:13), "I have sinned against YHWH" (hata'ati l'Yhwh). David's words correspond in terseness and directness to the words of Nathan (v. 7), "You are the man" ('attah ha'is). The words of Nathan and David are precipitated by the two words of Bathsheba (11:5), "I am pregnant" (harah anoki), words that are equally terse and direct. The entire narrative is caught in these three phrases.

- The first phrase of Bathsheba introduces the moral affront (11:5); David is indicted.
- The second, from Nathan, identifies David and his affront (12:7).
- In the last, David submits and turns to the only source of comfort and help (12:13).

These three terse statements by Bathsheba, Nathan, and David may be simple words to utter. They are, however, very costly and risky for each speaker in turn. In their utterance we watch David being dismantled before the massive claim of Israel's torah. We watch how costly David's words are in verse 13, as we watched the anguish of a Richard Nixon in Watergate who could not speak these same words, and we watch the deathliness of refusal. But David was able! He is not unscarred. Indeed, David will never be whole and free again. But he can live, and he begins anew. There is cost (v. 14), but David may live (v. 13). The narrative is about the high price of receiving life when we are seduced by our imagined moral and ethical autonomy. The cost is the son born out of this royal sordidness (11:27).

[Nathan immediately rescinds David's punishment of death, though that is not an explicit part of God's sentence but part of David's own explicit self-sentencing when he condemned the rich man. But do we agree that David should be also easily forgiven? Do we believe that words are enough even if sincere? Here a Trial of David might result in an alternative verdict. But the point of II Sam 12 is that teshuvah has a power to bring about amnesty – not justice - when guilt is deeply felt and honestly admitted.

The inner Biblical echo of David's words are Saul's confession in I Sam. 15:24:

"I have sinned for I violated God's words and yours BUT I was afraid of the people and I obeyed their voice and now forgive my sin and come back with me and I will bow down to God."

David said only two words "hatati laAdonai." No excuses. No request for leniency. That confession shows more inner transformation than Saul's attempt to avoid consequences.
Scene 2- The Punishment is being executed and David Reacts

15 And YHWH smote the child that Uriah’s wife had borne to David, so that he became ill.
16 And David implored God on behalf of the boy; David fasted a fast; whenever he came (home) he would spend-the-night lying upon the ground.
17 The elders of his house arose about him to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not take food with them.
18 Now it was on the seventh day that the child died.
David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said:
“Here, while the child was alive, we spoke to him but he did not hearken to our voice; so how can we say to him: The child is dead? He might do evil!”

19 When David saw that his servants were whispering (among themselves), David understood that the child was dead.
David said to his servants:
“Is the child dead?”
They said: “He is dead.”

20 Then David arose from the ground, he washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes, and he came into the house of YHWH and prostrated himself; then he came (back) to his house, requested that they put food before him, and ate.
21 His servants said to him:
“What (kind of) thing is this that you have done? For the sake of the living child, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you arise and eat food!
22 He said: As long as the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said (to myself): Who knows, perhaps YHWH will be gracious to me, and the child will live!
23 But now he is dead-why should I fast? Can I make him return again? I may go to him, but he will not return to me.”

Walter Brueggemann, Interpretation: Samuel, God speaks and humans listen!

12:15b-23. Nathan had assessed the cost of the child (II Sam. 12:14). The child will die. This family is now permanently in the presence of death. This narrative portrays the remarkable pathos and freedom of David. That is the wonder of David, before whom Israel never ceases to be amazed. He has just been incredibly cynical, and Israel denies nothing of that. In the midst of David’s cynical self-serving, however, there is a powerful grandeur about him. These verses show David’s capacity for a human gesture that is marked by nobility. David knows when to weep and when to relinquish his grief (cf. Eccl. 3:4). The child does not die immediately (v. 18). The child, much treasured by David, came to David at great cost, great humiliation, great shame and dismantling. This is the child he tried to pawn off on Uriah. Now the child is sick and David wills him life with all his power. He fasts and prays (v. 16). David's advisers do not need to report the child's death to David (vv. 18-19); he already knows. He is a master discerner of human reality. The advisers fear to tell him, but he anticipates their telling. As he finally told himself of his guilt vv. 5-6, now he tells himself of his loss.
With the death of the child, it is time for a great show of grief; but not for David (v. 28). Painful as is his grief, David moves quickly from the feeble realm of death to the vitality of life. He dresses, he worships, and he eats (v. 20). He resumes life. His advisers did not expect his great grief earlier. nor did they expect him to shake off the grief so soon (v. 21). David is a man of vigor and of faith, however. He is not fatalistic but he will live boldly in the present, ready to turn loose of what is lost and face life where he now is. No doubt this episode is reported to show that the cost assessed by Nathan did indeed have to be paid (v. 14). Along with that dutiful report, though, we learn again of David. He persistently outdistances all normal expectations and all reasonable narrative renderings. Israel knows that David is greater than the stories we are able to tell about him.

Did David get Off too Lightly? by Yaaqov Medan (summarized by editor)

What was David’s sin and punishment compared to Shaul? Why did Shaul lose his kingdom and David got off so easy with a two word confession?

Yaaqov Medan admits that it looks like David got off easy. David confessed: "I sinned to God" and Nathan says he will not be killed and then immediately after the first son of Batsheva dies, then God says he loves the second son Shlomo and by implication God and Nathan are reconciled with David and the continued marriage with the adulteress Batsheva.

Abarbanel explains that David admitted his sin readily, while Saul tried to blame others and coverup. In Psalm 51 David’s prayer for teshuva for his sin with Batsheva is deeply expressive of remorse. Saul’s sin of coverup and blaming others is like Adam’s and Cain’s. So is David’s in killing Uriah, but ultimately he accepts responsibility

But Medan thinks David did receive a very serious punishment and his reconciliation came only after much suffering.

(1) Nathan warned that a sword would devour his dynasty from within (II Samuel 12:10). In fact, Amnon, Avshalom and Tamar and later Adoniyahu are all part of that blood bath of fratricide and rape that David could not prevent because he had set such a bad example. The punishment was intrinsic and natural in its causal effect for David’s sin made it impossible for him to be judge and an educator in his own house. Some say David’s punishment for the rich man of paying four times over is fulfilled in the death of four of his sons.

(2) David’s sin was like the sons of Eli the High Priest who slept with women and desecrated God’s name, so the dynasty was ended. That is what Nathan says will happen to David. His wives will be taken and publicly used. That can only happen when a new king takes over from the old by force as does Avshalom. Nathan says David himself got Shaul’s wife – probably Ritzpa bat Aya as a gift from God (II Samuel 12:7-8). So the punishment of raping his concubines is a token of the violent takeover of his royal house. Only after David is exiled by Avshalom and accepts his suffering as God’s just punishment, does God give David a chance to regain his throne having lost it and Jerusalem and the ark (as did Eli’s sons) to Avshalom’s rebellion.

(3) Even though continues to serve as titular king and regains his throne after the revolt, in fact, he has lost any real power or will to power. He does not judge or control his sons and Avshalom is correct to say there is no justice in his kingdom. He does not control Yoav who kills Avshalom, he does react as a victorious king when Avshalom is killed but as a mourning father. David does not ask for Avishag but she is given to him by his servants. Only at the end of his life at the urging of Nathan and Batsheva and out of his love for Shlomo does he rouse himself to take power long enough to enthrone Shlomo against Adoniyahu and the court that had taken over his royal powers de facto.

(4) David’s reconciliation with God does not come until he suffers and shows deep acceptance of his sin. First, David accepts the curses of Shimei ben Gera and the exile from Jerusalem as his well-deserved punishment and hands his fate over to God’s mercy (II Samuel 15:24-26). Second, the birth of Shlomo does not occur immediately after the death of Batsheva’s first son, even though it is reported there. It may have occurred many years later, perhaps even after the cathartic death of Avshalom. Batsheva had four children before Shlomo including her first child who died, as it says in I Chronicles 3:5 (parallel to II Samuel 5:14): “These are the children born to David in Jerusalem: Shama, Shovav, Nathan and Shlomo – the four born to Shua daughter of Ami-el = Sheva bat Eli-am.” Note that Batsheva names a child after Nathan and then Nathan brings the good news that God loves Shlomo and calls him “Yedidya,” another name for David. (a-d-v-d). That happened many years after David has suffered and learned his lesson the hard way, not immediately after saying “I have sinned to God.”

(from Yaaqov Medan, David and Batsheba, p.133, 137- 140, 143-145)
Epilogue: The Comfort of a New Child – True Happy Ending

24 And David comforted Bat-Sheva his wife, he came to her and lay with her; She bore a son and called his name Shlomo/His Peace = Shalom.
25 But YHWH loved him, and he had (a message) sent by the hand of Natan the prophet:
“He called his name Yedidya/Beloved of YHWH for YHWH loved him.”

God speaks and humans listen! by Walter Brueggemann

12: 24-25. In a brief but intentional and well-placed note, a second son is born to this ill-wrought marriage. The second son is legitimately conceived in wedlock. Now Bathsheba is "his wife." Perhaps the grieved death has overcome the label "wife of Uriah." The birth of this new son is not only another birth recorded to indicate that the immediate curse is past; it is the birth, the birth that will dominate the entire story to come. The child’s name is Solomon, derived from shalom (shalom). He is loved and treasured by YHWH.

The placement of Solomon’s birth in the narrative is stunning. Solomon is born so close to the sordidness, still within the echo of the prophetic lawsuit. Nonetheless, life begins again for this family. This God has an amazing capacity to work more life at the border of death, to act in promise-keeping ways (cf. 7:12 just when the promise seems exhausted. The account of David and Bathsheba is a tale of alienation and judgment; in its midst, however, are gestures of grace made by YHWH. This birth is marked by YHWH’s love, not anger (cf. Ps. 103:9-14).

David’s Learns to Love Others by Noam Zion

God’s love is a response not only to David’s confession but to David's compassion. After the confession in II Sam 12:13, Nathan immediately announces the cancellation of the death sentence for David. But there is no Divine love or favor. David’s sin according to the parable was the rich man’s lack of compassion for the poor man, for the beloved lamb. The poor man showed love for the lamb by feeding him and hugging him like daughter. The rich man showed only the false compassion for wasting his own sheep on the guest. Now David’s yeshiva is his ability to show genuine compassion first for his deathly ill son (like the lamb who was fed and hugged by the poor man) but David’s concern for his son is as shown by denying himself food, drink and lying in a good bed. Thus David shows also his belated empathy with Uriah who had refused to eat, drink and sleep with his wife out of loyalty to God, Israel and the soldiers.

But David had also sinned towards BatSheva who was just a sexy body he had brought by force from her house to his bed, just an instrument of his machinations whom he collected from her house and brought to the palace to keep her quiet. But now she becomes a bereaved wife, David’s bereaved wife who suffered because of him two “mournings” – for her husband and for her son. Now David comforts her, he comes to her – not she to him – and he brings her a second child. (When Adam wanted to comfort himself and Eve for the murder of Abel, he knew her and she bore Shet = a replacement for Abel – Genesis 4:25-26 who became a worshipper of God). The child’s name Shlomo may also mean the replacement, the completion after the loss of the first child. David shows love in a way he has never shown love for any of his wives. David whose name means love or beloved, was loved by all but never reciprocated that love except for Yonatan. Now he shows love, he shows compassion, so it says God loved the new son, the new product of David and Bathsheva’s totally changed relationship. God sends Nathan to rename Shlomo as Yedidya – the beloved whose root is the same as David’s name, implying David again is beloved. Love breeds love and God not only forgives but falls in love again with David. This will not wipe out the crime nor prevent further
prophesied crimes, the rebellion and the sword that will arise from David’s house, but it offers hope for the next generation – for Shlomo who will live in shalom.

David’s Fall: For Love of a Woman or of a Son?

What motivated the extreme mourning for his bastard son when he fell ill?
Yaaqov Medan argues that the David’s extreme attempt to save his son with Batsheva was the key to understanding David’s whole behavior in the narrative. The one-night stand with Batsheva was not love, but when he discovered she was carrying his baby he became fiercely paternal. Thinking Uriah might kill his son, he removed Uriah. Caring for his son, he married pregnant Batsheva – rather than rejecting her, as did Amnon after raping Tamar. Even though he accepted his guilt before Natan, he would not give up on saving his son. His protest against the prophet’s proclaimed punishment is like King Hezkiyahu who unlike David is successful in evoking God’s mercy despite Isaiah, the prophet’s death sentence (II Kings 20:1-6). After the son’s death he comforted Batsheva by having another son with her – Shlomo. David was always soft-hearted for his sons, even at the expense of morality. He loved Amnon and never rebuked him for the rape. He loved and forgave Avshalom for killing Amnon and even when Avshalom rebelled and tried to kill David, David said he would have been happy to die in place of his son’s Avshalom. However when Adoniyahu tried to take Avshalom’s place (II Samuel 15:and I Kings 1:5-6), David roused himself from his old age and his passivity and his self-pity to oppose his whole court and crown Shlomo his beloved son who came to replace both the lost first child of Batsheva and the lost child – Avshalom. David instructs Shlomo over and over to follow God’s ways and to protect himself from his father’s enemies. (from Yaaqov Medan, David and Bathsheba, p. 99-102)

Rav Amnon Bazak\(^{17}\) argues, by contrast, that David never loved Shlomo but only his beautiful sons. It is God who loved Shlomo and only at the end of his life did David come to recognize the moral choice was to love Shlomo, not his other pretty-boys sons.

II Samuel 12: 24 And David comforted Bat-Sheva his wife, he came to her and lay with her; She bore a son and called his name Shlomo/His Peace = Shalom. 25 But YHWH loved him, and he had (a message) sent by the hand of Natan the prophet: "He called his name Yedidya/Beloved of YHWH for YHWH loved him."

While Abraham loved Isaac (Genesis 22: 2), Jacob loved his son Joseph (Genesis 37:3) and David loved and therefore mourned deeply Amnon (II Smauel 13: 32-39) and Avshalom (II Samuel 19: 1), it does not say he loved Shlomo. By contrast, God does love Shlomo who is renamed – Yedidya as God’s beloved. For David, Shlomo is the son of "peace" who compensates Batsheva for the loss of her first child to God’s punishment of David. David made an oath to Batsheva that Shlomo would be king, but that was perhaps just to placate her and his conscience. We hear nothing of Batsehva or Shlomo after the affair until David on his deathbed is confronted again by Natan and Batsheva asking for David to live up to his oath to enthrone Shlomo. David has good reason to repress his memory of Shlomo, Batsheva and the whole sordid affair.

David who himself is described as having been beautiful (I Samuel 16:12) prefers the beauty – a corrupting beauty - of Amnon and Avshalom (II Samuel 14:25-26) – just as he was morally indiscriminate when overcome by the beauty of Batsheva. That beauty and the uncritical love of their father led to the sons’ hubris (II Samuel 15:1). When those sons die, then David becomes passive, nostalgic, unable to take any initiative. His son Adoniyahu imitates Avshalom in his beauty, in his arrogance, in his desire to usurp his father's throne while his father is still alive and yet "his father did not rebuke him his whole life saying 'why are doing that?' and Adoniyahu was very good looking and he was born right after Avshalom" (I Kings 1:5-6). David is so absorbed by external beauty that he fails to see what God tried to teach the prophet Shmuel when Shmuel was sent to anoint a king to replace the tall handsome Shaul.

"Do not look at his physical image or his height for I have despised him. Do not look as do humans, for humans look with their eyes, but God looks to the heart" (I Samuel 16:7)

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\(^{17}\) Bazak gave a lecture at Har Etzion Yeshiva in summer 2008 which was reported to me second hand by my daughter Eden.
However David realizes his error and does teshuvah when Batsheva and Natan remind him of his mraol obligation to Shlomo. More important, he realizes that his Divinely mandated dynasty must be led by a son of wisdom and peace, not by sons of arrogant beauty who bering strife and war. Thus Shlomo, whose father and mother were both surpassingly physically beautiful, produce a son whose physical image evokes no response from his father. But Shlomo is the mroal choice of God and ultimately David. Then David pulls himself together to emerge from his passivity which is not a result of senility but perhaps his clinical depression after the death of his sons. He amske his will be known and entrones his son – the one who he should have loved in the first place.

Marc Chagall, David and Batsheva
The Genre of a Parable

Uriel Simon and Walter Brueggemann both reflect on the significance of Nathan’s literary creation - the mashal or parable.

A. Uriel Simon and the Judicial Mashal/Parable

How is Yotam’s parable (Judges 9:7 ff), Isaiah’s mashal of the vineyard (Isaiah 5:3-4), and Aesop’s fables different than Nathan’s parable (II Sam 12:1-4), the woman from Tekoa before David (II Sam.1-23) and the soldier before Ahab (I Kings 20:35-43)?

In Yotam’s parable and almost all prophetic use of parables, the listener knows immediately that the story is a literary fiction and its style suggests such a fiction. They also know they must seek its political analogy. They are asked to see things in a new perspective and understand them. However judicial parables which are brought by common people or their representatives before a king intentionally hide their fictional character and their immediate analogy. It is essential to mislead the king into thinking this is a real case for the king to decide. The king is caught off guard by the flattery of being asked to use his intelligence to discern the moral truth – “for the king is like an angel of God discerning good and evil” (II Sam. 24:17). Once the king decides he may even strengthen his rendering of a judgment with an oath (as did David twice, II Sam. 12:5 and II Sam 14:11). Now the storyteller pulls the rabbit out of the hat to reveal the true analogy and true subtext that makes the fictional story transparent. Only through this subterfuge – recall David also used subterfuge to try and trick Uriah into going home – has the supplicant achieved the self-judgment of the king reinforced by an oath to God which now automatically applies to the king’s own transgressions.

Uriel Simon found a curious parallel to the parable in the Bedouin law of “Adaya” that reflects the sacred value of hospitality (parallel to Abraham’s and Lot’s response to a drop-in guests). When a surprise guest arrives – as did for the richman in the parable – then a Bedouin shepherd without means may temporarily without permission take a lamb from his neighbor. Of course later he must replace what was taken but it is not considered theft. However one may never take a special lamb indicated by a bell or a decorative charm or one that has grown up in the home tent. If a special lamb is taken it counts as theft and it must be replaced four-fold – just as David ruled. Thus we see that pet lamb as one described by Nathan was real possibility. But the richman has no reason to take another’s lamb – special or not – if he had his own flocks available.
B. Walter Brueggemann\(^{18}\) - Why a Parable, Not a Letter? 
The Royal Written Word versus the Divine Spoken Word, 
The Letter versus the Prophecy, Royal Messenger versus Divine Messenger

“The Medium is the Message” – Marshall McLuhan

David had presumed himself immune from the Torah, as kings always are tempted to presume, [even though they are commended to write down and read regularly the written Torah. This may be meant as an antidote to the royal uses of writing which are so ominous]. David writes a letter (II Sam. 11:14). Nathan says, “Thus says YHWH” (12:7). …We may usefully reflect on the dynamics of writing and speaking\(^{19}\). Israel is characteristically inclined to speak, not to write. To speak is to address and evoke response. It is the medium of direct address which allows for alternative responses and maintains space for free interaction between parties. Speech is the appropriate medium for covenantal promises and demands. But writing tends to be, by contrast, one-way communication. It is exact and precisely delivered, carefully measured. Above all it is communication that neither invites nor permits response. There is no give and take but only a directive. It is not a letter which engages another and invites a free response, but it is a decree presuming not exchange but obedience. It is the form of communication which in a detached managerial way sends Uriah to his death and covers for the king.

David had become a practitioner of one-way bureaucratic communication\(^{20}\) intended to cover the open, unresolved space between king and Torah. Surely something happened to this man who had gone so willingly into extremities with his fellows. What had happened to him was land. Land required and made possible a new form of communication which no longer communicated but only dispatched and commanded. The ones receiving the directives were not covenant members but functionaries in the ordering and retention of land. The directive has no interest in either Joab or Uriah but only in David and preservation of his turf. The situation of land transforms modes of communication and with it the modes of all relations.

The counter-theme to the managing memo of the king which controls is the word of God, borne by Nathan, which cuts through the closed situation of royal control\(^{21}\) and calls to accountability. The word is expressed subtly in the parable but unmistakably in the words following the parable. In the very world the landed king thought he controlled, this other Sovereign says: “I delivered you … I gave you … I gave you … I would add to you …” (II Sam. 12:7-8). The language echoes and parallels the same emphasis in the legitimating oracle of II Sam. 7:8-11: “I took you … I have been with you … I will make for you … I will appoint … I will give you …”. There is no doubt who is subject and who is object, who is giver and who is receiver of all he is and has. The structure of the two speeches calls into harsh question the world-view of the king who thought he could order his own world and therefore constructed a mode of communication in which king is always subject of every active verb and acts on every object. The word of YHWH, twice pronounced by Nathan, suggests an alternative grammar in which YHWH as land-giver, and not king as landholder, retains initiative.

\(^{18}\) Walter Brueggeman, _The Land_, p. 82-83
\(^{19}\) See Marshall McLuhan’s _The Gutenberg Galaxy_ and in _Understanding Media_ on modes of communication and modes of relationships in society. The emergence of coercive language serves to alienate and to define relations in terms of production and consumption.
\(^{20}\) John Steinbeck, _Grapes of Wrath_, p. 317, has shrewdly presented the power of writing as a means of confiscation when it is controlled by the bureaucracy in the service of established interests: “Owners no longer worked their farms. They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land.” The Oakies learned to avoid anyone with writing equipment for writing meant land-loss.
\(^{21}\) I have been able to locate only three other biblical narratives in which kings write in the sense that David did here. One is in 1 Kgs. 21:8-14 in which Jezebel writes documents to frame Navot and secure land for the king by illegal confiscation. The second is in 2 Kgs. 5:5-7, in which the king of Syria sends a letter commanding the king of Israel to heal, i.e., healing on demand, by royal memo. The third incident of writing is in 2 Kgs. 10:1-11 when Jehu executes a coup by writing directives. These three uses of royal directives in writing stand as a sign for the way in which royal management tries to secure turf at the expense of the others. Interestingly, in each of the three, the royal letter is confronted by prophetic word: by Elijah (1 Kgs. 21:17), by Elisha (2 Kgs. 5:14) and again by Elisha (II Kgs. 10:10). The land-giving, land-taking word will not be circumscribed by a royal form of controlling communication.
Biblical Analogies to David and Batsheva: 
Compare, Contrast and Judge

Yair Zakovitz shows us how parallel stories establish not only literary parallels but a moral standard from which to evaluate our characters.

Tamar and Yehuda – Gen. 38 – Parallels and Contrasts

David of course descends from Yehuda and he is the first king from the tribe of Judah.

- Both have a wife with a similar name: Bat Shua / renamed Bat-Sheva in I Chronicles 2:3 and 3:5.
- Both cases say the husband “took her and came into her” (Gen 38:2 and II Sam. 11:4).
- Both wives give birth to children who are killed by God for sin – Er and Onan to Batshua and the first son to Bathsheba, though in fact the son dies from David’s sin, not his own.
- Er and Onan sinned by trying to avoid pregnancy, while David’s son dies because he made Batsheba pregnant. It is God who judged them “bad in God’s eyes,” just as God judged David as “vayeira b’einei Adonai” (Gen 38:7 and 10 and II Sam. 11:27).

- Both women sleep with leader of the tribe of Judah while in a legal relationship to another man – Tamar as yivama for Shelah and Batsheba still married to Uriah.
- Both men made inquiries about the identity of the woman they would sleep with – David before and Judah after. David knew that Bathsheba was married before sleeping with her, while Judah did not know who Tamar was. (Gen 38:21 and II Sam. 11:3).
- Both men were interested in looking reputable. Judah by trying to pay off his debt to the prostitute and getting his identity symbols back and David by making Uriah take the rap for the pregnancy.
- Both women return to their homes – Batsheba of her own initiative and Tamar sent by Judah after the death of the first two sons.
- Both women were exposed and naked before the man was attracted. However Batsheba may have been just bathing innocently, while Tamar was not innocent at all but interested in seducing Judah knowing it was illicit.
- Both become pregnant from a one-night stand that is motivated purely by a passing unpremeditated sexual need, though Tamar wanted to be pregnant and it does not appear that Batsheba did.
- In both cases someone sends to the illicit partner an announcement that the woman is pregnant (Gen 38:25 and II Sam. 11:5), though Tamar did not send the initial message and Batsheba did. Bathsheba expected David’s help, and Tamar expected Judah’s punishment. Tamar did send a message with the identity symbols she had from Judah saying: “to whomever these belong I am pregnant.” The terse announcement “anochi hara”/”hara anochi” appears in the whole Tanakh only in these two stories.
- Both David and Judah had good reasons which were hidden from the public to get rid of Uriah and Tamar respectively. David abused the army to eliminate Uriah for personal reasons and Judah wanted to use the justice system to rid himself of Tamar under the guise of her being a prostitute. But Judah made his use of the legal system public, while David sent secret messages to Yoav.
- David knew he was breaking the law, while Judah both in going to a prostitute and in executing Tamar thought he was well within the guidelines of the law. Judah felt self-righteous in condemning Tamar, as David felt self-righteous in condemning the richman.
- David sought to get rid of her innocent and righteous husband, while Judah hoped to get rid of the woman who committed adultery.
- Both Batsheba and Tamar produce two sons – the second of which belongs to the Davidic dynastic line – Peretz (Ruth 4:18-22; I Chronicles 2:3-15) and Solomon.
- David and Judah ultimately admitted their guilt – David for the adultery and Judah for leaving Tamar with no choice and getting her pregnant. But Tamar felt she was justified all along in her intentionally illicit act because of a greater injustice. David had no such justification for his crimes (Gen 38:26 and II Sam. 12:13).
After the first illicit sexual contact, Judah never has relations with Tamar, but David does have sex again and produces Solomon (Gen 38:26 and II Sam.12:24).

In conclusion, David and Judah share the greatness of doing teshuvah, of making a confession, though there sins were very different. Tamar is a heroic rebel against an unjust patriarchal system and she risks her life for her child. However Batsheba does not seek to right any wrongs or lead her consort to a higher consciousness.

Abraham/Isaac, Sarah/Rivka and Avimelech/Pharaoh – Gen 12 and 20

- Both Batsheva and Sarai are swooped up by kings because of their beauty (Gen 12:11,14 or 26:7 and II Sam. 11:2) is “seen” (Gen 12:14-15 or 26:8 and II Sam. 11:2).
- The kings “sent” and/or “took” her to his palace (Gen 12:11,14 or 20:2 and II Sam. 11:4).
- In both cases the woman or at least her husband is a foreigner without defenses – Uriah the Hittite and Abraham the foreigner. Both ought to be afraid of the king’s ability to kill the husband and take the wife but Uriah cannot conceive of that threat from his king, while Abraham may have sinned against these foreign kings by suspecting them unjustifiably of such a travesty of hospitality to the stranger – to kill her husband and take the beautiful wife (Gen 12:18 or 20:9-13 or 26:9 and II Sam. 11:2).
- Both foreigners – Uriah and foreign kings - turn out to be much more pious and moral than the Jew whom they lecture harshly and self-righteously.
- In both cases the king to appease the husband from whom he stole the wife, offers gifts – for Uriah and for Abraham (Gen 12:16 or 20:14 and II Sam. 11:8).

Yet the greatest difference is of course that David, chosen by God, does act out what Abraham most feared – from foreign kings who have “no fear of the Lord.” That means David has no yirat elohim though he knows God and was anointed by God to his task as king. How ironic! How shameful by comparison. The foreign kings acted innocently not knowing Sarah/Rebecca was married, but they are apologetic even for an unintentional sin. In fact it appears they never actually slept with either matriarch (Gen 20:4 or 26:10). David however knew who and what he was doing and he knew Batsheba and felt no guilt but only a concern to avoid complications.

Abraham is no paragon of virtue in this story, but his acquiescence in his own wife’s adultery with a king is justified by his fear for his own life. David on the other hand takes another man’s wife and then his life, a foreigner for whom he should have been particularly sensitive and his own loyal soldier.

God protected the foreign kings from sin, the kings rewarded Abraham who did not deserve it, but God did not save Uriah who believed in him. It is Uriah like Avimelech/Pharaoh who models and articulates in religious words the moral and sexual restraint which David lacked, even though it is the Canaanites, Egyptians and Hittites to whom Genesis 19 and 38, Leviticus 18, and Deuteronomy 7 attribute lewdness and sexual immortality, not the Jews! How ironic! How shameful for Jews, so convinced of their moral superiority! (Recall that the Book of Judges also mocks Jewish self-righteousness by describing the sin of Benjamin in the story of the concubine in Givah in the same language as Sodom. There is no moral immunity for Jews or Jewish monarchs.)
The David – from Shepherd to Hunter Taking Spoils:

The Motif of Animals by Erin Beser

The animal imagery in relationship to David is so prevalent throughout his narrative, that I thought it would be an interesting element to trace. Especially with the way that the metaphor figures so strongly at the pinnacle of David’s narrative, the rebuke of Nathan, I think that perhaps following this element might reveal a unique piece of identity and insight into David’s character that I otherwise would have missed.

I decided to back up from this moment of Nathan’s rebuke to the beginning of David’s narrative, to see what role animals play in the David narrative, if any. I found a striking trail of images, marking David’s transformation from shepherd to warrior and to the King who must accept the rebuke of the prophet. It was interesting to trace the appearance of animals in the text: goats, sheep, camels, etc. and to try and discern their meaning. I found that the image of animals came to indicate a change in David, from shepherd to warrior to King, and also marked moments of troublemaking. I will elaborate further.

Animals and Deception

Before we even meet David, Samuel introduces the animal element by taking a heifer to sacrifice so that Saul does not get angry that Samuel might anoint a new king. Alternatively, Samuel uses the heifer as an excuse to invite Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice. At this moment, the heifer symbolizes the secret that David must keep in order to safely put himself on the throne in place of Saul. Without his intention or ownership, this begins the thread of David’s flirtation with lies and skewed truth.

In the episode where David sneaks out of the house and Michal pretends he is sick, goat hair makes a strange appearance. The specifics of the goat hair blanket that Michal uses to pretend that David is sleeping under appear twice. The text specifically mentions that the quilt is made of
goat’s hair. It is interesting that this detail is asserted twice at the moment of David’s deception and avoidance of Saul. The theme of deception surely hearkens back to the moment when Samuel takes a heifer to sacrifice in order to conceal his search of the future king of Saul. [Further back the tale of Michal fooling her father with a goat, echoes Rebecca dressing Jacob in a goat skin to fool his father and Joseph's brothers using blood of goat on Joseph's coat to fool their father].

Coincidentally or not, this theme is echoed in the scene in Chapter 24 where David is hiding from Saul in the wilderness of En-gedi. Here, David’s evasion of Saul takes place upon the rocks of the wild goats. At this moment, David has the opportunity to kill Saul, but instead evades him and shows mercy (or fear of God, depending on the reading of the text). The mention of goats twice could appear here as an echo to David’s shepherding past, hearkening him to act peacefully and show mercy as the association with these animals first meant to David in his early years. But also, the appearance of goats at this stage in David’s life has come to mean trickery, such as the blanket trick that Michal uses to help David escape.

**Shepherd and Nurturer/Tender**

Before we even learn David’s name, another animal appears in the story in association with David’s character. Jesse tells Samuel that David tends sheep. David is again mentioned as the tender of sheep when he is introduced to Saul as well. However, the description of David being with the sheep is more of an add on to a lengthy list of titles that we are beginning to associate with the character of David: a harp player, mighty man of valor, a man of war, good-looking, etc. His connection to the sheep is more of a location than a description of his character. He also brings gifts of a donkey to Saul.
Leading up to the confrontation with Goliath, David is described as going back and forth from Saul to feed his father’s sheep. The tenderness of this image is contrasted with the battlefield imagery. David is also charged with the task of transporting food to the battlefield. These two tasks combined portray David in a very nurturing, yet helpless and significantly less masculine and combative role as compared to the soldiers.

The *mashal* that David tells to Saul explicitly employs animal imagery. When David tells Saul that he will confront Goliath, Saul tells him that he is too young. Even though in the previous chapter, David is described already as a man of war. Here David tells Saul a story about a shepherd who must protect his flock from an encroaching lion or bear. Obviously in this case, Goliath is the bear and even though the shepherd is associated with the peaceful grazing of his sheep, he must defend his flock, with force if necessary.

This is a pure and rich image of David, as a young man, the mighty shepherd, not afraid to defend his sheep from a predator, a noble cause. He exhibits a certain amount of determination in the justness of his cause and his ability to prevail because of the purity of his intention. In this case, the people of Israel are as defenseless as a flock of sheep in the face of a huge beast and they need a man like David to protect them. However, it is David’s faith in God that God will deliver him out of the paw of great animals that gives him the courage to take on the challenge.

Even the tools that he uses are specifically denoted as being his usual shepherd utensils; he puts the stones into his shepherd’s bag. David himself may have great faith in God and even from his stature as a shepherd, even with the tools of a shepherd, he has faith and assurance in his task.

After his victory with Goliath, David is no longer associated with his flock or any animal in that case. It seems that his role as shepherd has almost been forgotten. Perhaps this symbolizes a loss of innocence or the beginning of his transformation into a man of war. He is no longer
associated with the peaceful symbol of his flock, but instead known for his violent actions against Goliath. There is a long gap in the text of mentioning any animals or animal products specifically.

At the beginning of Chapter 25, we learn about a very great man who has three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. We should, at this point, automatically understand that somehow, this man will come in contact with David. We have come to expect this connection, that sheep and livestock and other animals will come to indicate something specific about David. We learn that this man’s name is Nabal and his wife’s name is Abigail, that she was of good understanding and beautiful form and the man evil. David appeals to Nabal, but to no avail. Nabal does not want to share with David. David then prepares for war, but Abigail attempts to appease him with some of her livestock and food. She falls on her face in front of David and invokes the name of God. David in return blesses her and she returns with David to her home and they have a great feast. However, God seems displeased with Nabal and kills him.

Here the parallels begin to emerge very clearly. Nabal did not want to part with any of his livestock and in the end, he lost his most precious possession: his life, followed by his wife. David was also willing to go to war for the livestock and instead received them with blessing after Nabal’s death. He not only received Abigail’s gifts of livestock and food, but also herself as his wife. This episode seems to link Abigail, a woman and a wife, to the spoils of war and to livestock in particular. Abigail is nothing more than a precious goat that David had originally wanted from Nabal and Nabal would not part with. Now that Nabal is dead, David can have as many goats or animals or women as he desires. This could be a foreshadowing of Nathan’s rebuke, in its deliberate linking of women, animals, and their belonging to male owners. On the other hand, Abigail convinces David not to use violence to take Nabal’s life, his livestock and his wife as spoils, but to wait for God to kill Nabal and give him everything including her as a gift. Abigail by
feeding David’s men plays the role of the shepherd David did bringing food to his brothers who were soldiers fighting the Philistines.

As David’s warrior character develops, livestock periodically appears as the spoils of war, particularly in Chapter 27 and Chapter 30 when David raids the lands of the Geshurites, the Gizrites and the Amalekites, leaving not a man or a woman alive, but taking away the sheep, oxen, asses, camels and things. This image of David as a violent warrior inverts the initial picture of the peaceful shepherd. In the first moments of David’s appearance in the narrative, he is associated with the careful tending of flock and his marginalization from war. Now when these animals appear, David is not peacefully tending to them at all, rather they are the spoils of war and sole survivors of David’s raid. The way these animals are treated help us trace David’s development as a warrior and future leader.

Finally we arrive at Nathan’s mashal that he tells David. This is the ultimate moment of David’s misbehavior. Nathan rebukes him using the metaphor of livestock, giving further strength to our observations thus far of the role of animals in the narrative. Nathan tells David a story about two men, one rich and one poor. The rich man has many flocks and herds, and the poor only has one little lamb. When a traveler comes, the rich man spares his own flock, but instead takes the single lamb of the poor man.

Ironically, David is incensed. He vows, “As the Lord lives, the man that has done this deserves to die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold because he did this thing and because he had no pity.” At this moment, Nathan reveals that he is not talking about a lamb and a rich man, rather Batsheva and David. This story is the culmination of David’s journey – from peaceful shepherd to conqueror of war to the rich man who stole the poor man’s single lamb. We can trace David’s development of character through his interaction with livestock, particularly sheep and goats. Whereas David begins as caretaker, he transforms into warrior who treats these animals as spoils.
Throughout his story, his interaction with animals indicates his mischief, whether a direct deception or misbehavior in the eyes of his wife. All of his wives are connected to the animals, they signal the arrival of something important. Finally, the rebuke of David concerning Batsheva employs a powerful metaphor of livestock that signifies just how far David has come from the shepherd.
EXERCISE: Tocheicha Workshop
led by Nathan the Prophet – The Art of Moral Criticism

Tocheicha is the mitzvah of confronting one’s neighbors in the community of Israel with their misdeeds and their character faults in such way as to catalyze a process of inner heshbon hanefesh leading to Teshuvah.

Note the confrontation is direct but not physical but rather always verbal. The words are not meant to be browbeating verbal abuse and certainly they may not openly shame the one being criticized. But they are persistent – “hokheiakh tochiakh.” The primary goal is not to show the critic is right, to be able to say “I told you so,” but to move the critic done to accept responsibility and to begin to change behavior. In short this is a mitzvah of communication. If the mitzvah is not done in the right conditions then it is dangerous for three reasons. First the one criticized may just be hardened into stubborn opposition. Second the softhearted one criticized may be shamed. Third the one criticized may strike physically the one who is verbally attacking him with words of criticism. Here is mitzvah than can easily backfire producing greater risks than it averts.

That is how Maimonides defines the mitzvah summarized in Leviticus 19:17-18 in Hilchot Deot, the laws of Character Traits.

Maimonides, Laws of Character Traits, Book of Knowledge, Mishne Torah Chapter 6:7-8

7- If one observes that a person committed a sin or walks in a way that is not good, it is a duty to bring the erring man back to the right path and point out to him that he is wronging himself by doing evil, as it is said, “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:17).

He who rebukes another, whether for offenses against the rebuker himself or for sins against God, should administer the rebuke:

- in private,
- speak to the offender gently and tenderly, and
- point out that he is only speaking for the wrongdoer’s own good, to secure for him life in the world to come

If the latter accepts the rebuke, well and good. If not, he should be rebuked a second, and a third time. And so one is bound to continue the admonitions, until the sinner assaults the admonisher and says to him "I refuse to listen."

Whoever is in a position to prevent wrongdoing and does not do so is responsible for the iniquity of all the wrong doers whom he might have restrained.

8- He who rebukes another must not at first speak to the offender harshly so as to put him to shame, as it is said, “And you shall not incur a sin because of him” (Lev. 19:17). Our rabbis explained this text as follows: “Since it might have been supposed that you are to rebuke the sinner till he changes color, therefore it is said ‘And you shall not incur sin because of him.’

Hence the inference that it is forbidden to cause an Israelite shame, especially in public. ...The rabbis said, “He who shames another in public has no portion in the world to come.” One ought, therefore, to beware of publicly shaming anyone, whether he be young or old. One should not call a person by a name of which he feels ashamed nor relate anything in his presence which humiliates him. This applies to matters between man and man.

But in regard to duties to God, if an individual, after having been privately rebuked, does not repent, he should be shamed in public; his sin should be openly declared; he is to be reviled, affronted, and cursed till he returns to the right course. This was the method followed by all the prophets of Israel.
The Prophetic Critique

Generally Biblical prophets have been eloquent in their criticism and creative in their use of visual symbols but their memorable words preserved in the Tanakh have not usually been effective. Nathan and Isaiah with their kings have been more successful than others. Nathan in particular managed to evoke in David self-reflection followed by admission of guilt and perhaps by teshuvah. David did this without evoking David’s anger and thereby endangering Nathan whom David could have had eliminated as he eliminated Uriah. Nathan was “managing up” toward his political superior King David, on one hand, and on the other, he was delivering David’s superior’s – God’s – harsh verdict of death and internal and external chaos.

Nathan is a great messenger for God. Yet imagine what David would have said had Nathan simply begun with II Sam. 12: 7-12. Try reading it out loud with passion toward someone playing David. Even if David had responded in fear of the punishments, would he have done sincere inner Teshuvah or simply been threatened into a tactical retreat.

But Nathan added - probably on his own initiative a parable.

Exercise: Please LIST all the conditions for the METHOD of giving the ideal form of criticism based on the Rambam.

Then reread II Samuel 12: 1-7 and mark which of these techniques David has followed and what else has been added.

Here is our list of most effective techniques demonstrated by Nathan the prophet and God for the first part of Tocheicha. The second part is very different. :

1- Approaching David in private.
2- Speaking to him gently in a nonaccusatory manner – at least to begin with.
3- Not calling him names.
4- God chose to send a messenger rather speak directly since God was very insulted and hurt by what David had done – seeing it as betrayal and a desecration of God’s good name and as an act of ingratitude despite all God had given him
5- God chose an expert in the art of communication – a prophet to use artistic means and diplomatic speech to make his point
6- Nathan posed himself as asking for David to sit in judgment of others thus avoiding David’s defensive reaction to criticism
7- Nathan told him a story rather than giving the message, straight away. That caught David’s ear as do all stories and put him in a frame of mind of sympathetic listening
8- The story led David to use his imagination to identify with the characters. This was a “tear jerker” story onesidely presenting the callousness of the rich man and tenderheartedness of the poorman
Thus David could be both objective and neutral in his judgment since the story did not seem to be about David himself and at the same time to be subjectively and emotionally moved to empathize with the victim and his lamb.
9- God choose a prophet with a long and positive relationship with the one being criticized. Nathan in II Sam 7 informed David that God had chosen Israel, Jerusalem and David’s dynasty forever
10- David is placed in the role of judge and king, so he is officially called upon to judge objectively but also as the king to guarantee that justice be executed through out his kingdom. The passion for justice complements the cool analytic approach to what happened.
11- David was invited to judge someone else and then he was asked to be consistent and not to be hypocritical and to judge himself by the standards. Thus David was forced to pass sentence on himself rather than being confronted with an accusation and a punishment which might have evoked from him a plea for mercy or rationalizations. In short David was not at first confronted with God’s judgment from the outside but with his own words of condemnation for a crime that is revealed as identical with his own. It is easier to condemn oneself than to accept other people’s finger pointing
12- Nathan at the end revealed that the story was not a report of a literal incident but a parable for David’s own crimes. Then David had to reflect on the story and apply it by interpretation to himself. The intellectual effort to decipher the parable from one hint – “you are the man!” – contributes to David’s own self-reflection as he sees himself through his own eyes as a judge.
13- Nathan managed to “manage –up” the ladder from a public servant to king, from prophet to royalty, so the king would listen to a subordinate who has caught him red-handed
14- Nathan applied the technique of psychodrama i.e. reenacting a real life trauma (which one tends to deny or repress) before the original participant.

**Psychodrama as a therapeutic tocheicha** is an artistic indirect way to raise painful truths from one’s past. It was first used in the Tanakh by Joseph. Joseph forced the brothers to relive his own trauma and their own guilt in order to evoke from his brothers recognition and guilt and then remorse and teshuvah. Joseph recapitulates his own history of being kidnapped and sold as a slave in Egypt with his stand-in Benjamin, his younger full brother from Rachel and his father’s second favorite.

That was also Shakespeare’s ploy in Hamlet where the son accuses his mother of collusion with his father’s murderer – her brother-in-law and now her second husband who had been poisoned to death. Hamlet writes and stages a play for the court that reenacts the original crime as a piece of cathartic art. The mother sought to turn away from the play and deny her identification with murderer in the play. But Hamlet said:
“**You go not until I set up a glass [a mirror] where you may see the inmost part of you.”**
His mother Gertrud replied: “**Thou turnst my eyes into my very soul!”**
Love Making as a Model of Criticism by Rebbe Aharon Leib of Primishlan

It is related that when Reb Aharon Leib of Primishlan saw from the face of a person that the latter had committed a wrong, then he would ask the person to meet with him privately. Then, after kind and reassuring words to the person, Reb Aharon would begin his loving rebuke. When asked why he proceeded in such a manner, he replied:
In Psalm 51 it is written:

A Psalm, a Song of David, composed after Nathan the prophet came into him just as he had come from Bathsheva

What do the words mean? Note them well, for they convey an important teaching. Had Nathan come to David in a judgmental spirit, rebuking him angrily in public, it is possible that he would have failed to achieve his end. Perhaps David would have hardened his heart and closed his ears to the prophet's plea for repentance.
Nathan came to David lovingly and privately, just as David had come into Bathsheva.
Thus the prophet's words entered David's heart and he immediately recited this Psalm of Repentance.

The Psalm-Singer

Not far from the home of the Baal Shem, there lived a wealthy Hassid who was renowned for his generosity. He had commissioned a famous Torah-scribe to write a Torah for the glory of God, and when the job was completed he threw open his mansion doors to the public to join him on this festive occasion. The festivities had gone on for a few days and his servants had to fight off sleep for three days and nights. Among them was a psalm-singer who was known for always reciting the words of David's songs as he worked. The psalm-singer, however, had fallen asleep through sheer exhaustion in his attic chamber. His master was outraged and shouted at him: "May the black year descend upon you". The house withered away around him and he suddenly found himself in a strange chamber with an enormous shimmering green oven in a corner. The Patriarchs sat around the oven together with King David, who demanded a just punishment for the rich man who had cursed the psalm-singer. But he recognised another person in the room, the Baal Shem, who courteously and respectfully reminded his Majesty of the story of Batsheba and Uriah. Nobody is faultless. King David realised the truth of the Master's words and the nocturnal trial ended with reconciliation: the Hassid was allowed to wake up in his own home.

"A Psalm by David, when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone to Bath-sheva. Be gracious to me, 0 God, in keeping with Your kindness: in accordance with Your abounding compassion, erase my transgressions. Cleanse me thoroughly of my wrongdoing, and purify me of my sin...

Managing Up: Avraham's Style and Strategy and Nathan’s

We might compare Nathan’s challenge in managing up an all powerful King David and Abraham’s in managing up to God, Judge of the whole earth.

The power of Avraham’s bargaining style is expressed through a broad repertoire of approaches including the ability to move rapidly from one emotional state to another. Avraham moves from the hutzpah of assailing God’s malfeasance as a judge to a statement of extreme humility “...I am but earth and ashes” he admits in Gen. 18: 27. Rashi captures Avraham’s multifaceted initiative in his interpretation of vayigash = “he approached God” (Gen 18: 23):

Avraham approached to do war with harsh words (like Yoav), to appease anger (like Yehuda to Yoseph), and to offer prayer for mercy (like a prophet). - Rashi

How are these three approaches evident in Avraham’s speech to God?
To accuse God killing the innocent is warlike (the best defense is an offence).
To appease God’s anger (af), Avraham says “do not, please, God, get angry"
To pray for mercy to forgive the whole city for the sake for the tzaddikim.

Avraham also knows how to begin the conversation – aggressively raising the unthinkable – yet he also knows when to cease making demands and never descends below ten tzaddikim in his bargaining.

Avraham is “managing up.” He is trying to affect his boss’s decisions even though his boss has absolute power and his own status (as well as the fulfillment of all promises) depends on the whim of that God who chose him. There are no precedents for this initiative and yet Avraham begins with incredible assertiveness: without any prior invocation of God, without compliments (“buttering up”) as is typical in prayer (Moshe to God in Deuteronomy 3: 23-25) and without any self-deprecation (“I am dirt and ashes” – Genesis 18: 27. (Only latter in the bargaining does Abraham call himself dirt and ashes). It is not even clear that Avraham has “legal standing” – it seems to be none of his business! Only if we assume that God said out loud to Avram - what is reported as an inner monologue in Genesis 18: 20-21 – could Avraham have then heard an implicit invitation to put in his two cents worth on this matter under judicial investigation.

Nevertheless Avraham opens with a rhetorical question that puts God into a defensive corner – “Will you even destroy the righteous with the wicked? (the innocent with the guilty)?” (Gen. 18: 23). Here in Sodom, Avraham is even more daring than the snake[1] in the garden, for he takes on God directly, imputing God with scandalous intentions. Even if God were to agree with the request being made, there are grounds for punishing the petitioner for contempt of court. Beyond the particular issue at hand, Avraham’s challenge of Divine justice, seeks to overthrow God. Who is Avraham to judge God and how does this affect God’s standing as a judge?[2]

Yet Avraham pulls off this hutzpadic opener which is actually a complex and lengthy argument in order to establish the opening bargaining position. Here there are two contradictory yet complementary themes in Avraham’s challenge to God. Gen. 18: 23-25 revolves around justice and mercy. Avraham demands that no innocent be killed, but he also asks that God forgive and give up on destroying the entire city.

**Now let us compare Nathan before David.** In one sense Nathan is standing above David, for David is appointed king conditionally by God who can remove him and punish him at will. Nathan has a terrifying punishment and prophecy to deliver to David as he lets loose right after the parable. Yet as Josephus writes, Nathan has a reason to fear the king, just as Samuel feared lest Saul hear that Samuel is on his way to anoint David. But even more important, Nathan has a task to bring David to repentance, to accept not the punishment but the guilt and to try to change actions?

**Now Nathan was a fair and prudent man; and considering that kings, when they fall into a passion, are guided more by that passion than they are by justice, he resolved to conceal the threatenings that proceeded from God, and made a good-natured discourse to him.** (Josephus, Antiquities 7:7)

Nathan has a reason to fear the king, just as Samuel feared lest Saul hear that Samuel is on his way to anoint David. But even more important, Nathan has a task to bring David to repentance, not just write him off and start a new dynasty. In Samuel 7:14 God told Nathan to tell David: “I will be a father to you and you will be my son when he sins, I will rebuke him (hokhakhtiv) …but my love for him I will not remove, though I did remove it from Saul.”

**So how does Nathan get David to do teshuvah, to accept not the punishment but the guilt and to try to change himself as well as his actions?**

This too is a situation of managing up. Like Abraham, Nathan builds his argument with David on the premise that David is the judge of all Israel, even if not “the judge of the whole earth” (shofet kol haarezet). He approaches David as if bringing before him a case of injustice that must be redressed. Abraham suggested that God would sweep away the innocent, which is travesty of justice and violation of God’s own self-

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[1] The word *af* (even, but) is the opening word in the snake’s seductive interrogation of the woman in the Garden of Eden, that begins by misquoting God to put the Divine governor into a negative, selfish light – “Af = even though God said: ‘you are not allowed to eat from all of the trees in the garden’” (Gen. 3:1).

[2] Though not fully analogous, recall Avshalom, son of King David, who spread false rumors of God’s governance in preparation for a rebellion. Avshalom corrals every man (II Samuel 15:2 – “ish”) on the way to the king’s court to assure him ““The king will not give you a hearing” but “who would like to make me the shofet = the judge of the land, and everyone would come to me with a legal suit and I would acquit them [from root zedek]” (II Samuel 15:1-4)
pronounced role and identity. Nathan assumes that implicitly that David is a just judge. But Nathan's accusation is much harsher than Abraham's. For Abraham and Nathan, God and David are violating their oaths of office so to speak, but God in the case of Sodom is guilty only of collateral damage killing the innocent along with the guilty. But David himself in his private role is the thief and murderer. He ought to be judging himself, not others.

Abraham's rhetoric is rational and persuasive in the style of wisdom literature, in the style of Avigail's speech, but Nathan is a storyteller seeking to affect emotions directly through the empathetic, even cathartic power of a play. Nathan is more like Joseph putting his brothers through the paces of psychodrama in which they only come to see themselves gradually. The power of the parable is not of reason but of revelation – "You are the man!"
Exercise: What Tocheicha may we direct to Yoav who followed David’s orders without protest?

As we saw above, just as Nathan “managed up” toward David, so Yoav could have sought to dissuade David. The halacha makes clear that Yoav is held responsible for following his king’s immoral orders, just as today an Israeli soldier following an obviously immoral order to shoot unarmed Arabs would be held liable along with his commanding officer for executing such an order.

Can you write a letter of protest in which Yoav refuses to kill Uriah? In the letter use the case of Saul’s officers who refused to kill Ahimelech the priest accused of helping David escape.
The Jewish Attitude Towards Non-Violent Protest and Civil Disobedience
by David Golinkin (abbreviated)

In general, Jewish law and tradition have a positive attitude towards protest. Genesis 18 contains Abraham’s classic protest against what he perceived as Divine injustice. Would God wipe out Sodom if it contained fifty or forty or thirty or twenty or ten tzaddikim among the guilty? “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” (Gen.18: 25).

A similar protest is uttered by Moses and Aaron in the portion of Korach (Numbers 16: 20-22). God says: “Stand back from this community that I may annihilate them in an instant!” Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, saying: “O God… when one man sins, will you be wrathful with the whole community?!”

The importance of protesting an injustice or a transgression is emphasized numerous times in rabbinic literature:

Rav, R. Hanina, and R. Yohanan taught… Whoever can protest to his household and does not, is accountable [for the sins] of his household; if he could protest to his townspeople, he is accountable for their sins; if he could protest to the whole world, he is accountable for the whole world (Shabbat 54b).

The Exilarch was the supreme civil authority of the Jews of Babylonia:
R. Zera said to R. Simon: Did you rebuke those of the Exilarch’s house? He replied: they will not take it from me. R. Zera said: Even so, you should rebuke them. (Shabbat 55a and cf. Tanhuma Tazria parag. 9).

Another famous Talmudic passage (Gittin 55b-56a) explains why Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. It tells the story of a man in Jerusalem who loved Kamtza and hated Bar-Kamtza. He made a feast and, by mistake, his servant invited Bar-Kamtza. Bar-Kamtza offered to pay for the entire feast if he would let him stay. The man refused and threw him out. Bar-Kamtza said: “Since the Sages sat here and did not protest… I will go slander the Jews to [Caesar]…”. In other words, according to this story, Jerusalem was destroyed because the Sages witnessed an injustice and did not protest.

Silence and lack of protest in the face of evil are also condemned by medieval moralists and philosophers. The Maharal of Prague (ca. 1525-1609) explained (Netivot Olam, Netiv Hatochecha, end of Chapter 2, p. 194, translated by Kimelman, p. 41):

While a person may be individually pious, such good will pale in the face of the sin of not protesting against an emerging communal evil…such a pious person will be accountable for having been able to prevent it and did not…

A tzadik who remains quiet and passive is ultimately responsible for the communal evil which he could have and should have prevented.

This idea is stated even more forcefully by Orhot Zaddikim (Chapter 24, ed. Seymour Cohen, New York, 1969, p. 404), which was apparently written in fifteenth-century Germany:

If one could protest, but neither protests nor pays attention to the sinful acts, then it is akin to flattery, because the sinners think [to themselves]: since they are neither protesting nor reproaching us, all our deeds are good…

We also have a Talmudic story (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 2:1 = Yerushalmi Horayot 3:1) which shows that one rabbi felt duty bound to rebuke a Jewish leader, even if it meant going to prison. Resh Lakish said that if a Nasi (Patriarch) sinned, he is flogged by a court of three. Rabi Yudan Nesiah - the Patriarch - issued a warrant for his arrest. Resh Lakish fled. In the end, they were reconciled through the intercession of R. Yohanan, but Resh Lakish said to R. Yudan: “Did you think that for fear of you I would stop [proclaiming] the teaching of God!”
Finally, there was a medieval Jewish custom mentioned in many sources which shows that medieval Jews used to protest an injustice in practice. This custom was called *ikuv hatefilah* or *ikuv hakeriah* or *bitul hatamid* (delaying the prayer, delaying the Torah reading or abolition of the daily offering). If a person felt that an injustice was perpetrated upon him by wealthy or violent people or by the community, he or she could interrupt the service before *Barekhu* or before the Torah service “until justice is done them”. This custom is mentioned frequently in the Cairo Genizah, in the *Takkanot* of Medieval Germany and even in the *Shulhan Arukh*.

### II) Civil Disobedience

Civil disobedience was defined by Ghandi as follows:

> He who resorts to civil disobedience obeys the laws of the state to which he belongs, not out of fear of sanctions, but because he considers them to be good for the welfare of society. But there come occasions, generally rare, when he considers certain laws to be so unjust as to render obedience to them a dishonor. He then openly and civilly breaks them and quietly suffers the penalty for their breach.\(^5\)

We have many examples of Civil Disobedience in the Bible, Apocrypha and rabbinic literature.

If Joshua Chapter 2, we have an example of a non-Jew disobeying a non-Jewish king in order to help the Jewish people. The King of Jericho explicitly ordered Rahab the harlot to surrender the two Jewish spies whom she was harboring. She lied, saying that they had already left town. She helped them because she believed that God would give the country to the Israelites and she asked the spies to save her and her family. Rahab knew that she was breaking the law and was no doubt willing to risk the dire consequences.

Many of the stories in our classic sources involve Jews disobeying the anti-Jewish laws and decrees of non-Jewish rulers:

According to Exodus Chapter 1, the Hebrew midwives Shifra and Puah, fearing God, did not murder the newborn Jewish boys as commanded by the King of Egypt. Verse 21 states ambiguously “and he made them houses”. Rashbam (France, 12\(^{th}\) century) explained that Pharaoh made them houses “to guard them lest they go to [assist] the Israelite women giving birth”. In other words, Shifra and Puah were put under house arrest for refusing to murder the Jewish boys. They disobeyed the King and were willing to face the consequences.

In Esther Chapter 3, Mordechai refused to bow down to Haman; he apparently considered it a form of idol worship. He did this for many days and was clearly willing to face the consequences, which as we know, were dire.

In Esther Chapters 4-5, Esther was willing to risk death by going to see King Ahashverosh without being invited, in order to save her people.

In Daniel Chapter 3, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered everyone to bow down to his statue. Hanania, Mishael and Azaria refused to bow down, despite being threatened with death in a fiery furnace. They replied that God could save them from the fiery furnace and even if He does not, they will not worship the statue of gold. In other words, they too engaged in civil disobedience under pain of death.

In Daniel Chapter 6, Daniel's fellow ministers in Persia were jealous of him and sought his downfall. They convinced King Darius to issue a ban that whoever shall address a petition to any God or man besides Darius for the next thirty days shall be thrown into the lions’ den. When Daniel learned that it had been put in writing, he went to his house to pray. The King made every effort not to arrest him, but Daniel continued to pray. In other words, Daniel engaged in civil disobedience even though he knew that the penalty was death.
We want precedents for civil disobedience by Jews in a Jewish State, we need to find examples of Jews disobeying the laws or decrees of Jewish kings since a Jewish State, according to a number of important rabbis, has the same status as a Jewish king. Indeed there are at least four sources relevant to civil disobedience in Israel today:

1) I Kings 18: 3-4: King Ahab was considered by the bible to be a wicked king of Israel who worshipped idols and opposed Elijah the Prophet.

   Ahab had summoned Obadiah, the steward of the palace. (Obadiah revered the Lord greatly. When Jezebel was killing off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and provided them with food and drink.) And Ahab said to Obadiah...

   In other words, Obadiah feared the Lord more than he feared King Ahab and Queen Jezebel who were Jewish. He saved 100 prophets at the risk of his own life.

2) I Samuel Chapters 21-22: David was on the run from King Saul and he and his men received provisions from Ahimelekh son of Ahitub and the men of Nov, the priestly city. Doeg the Edomite learns of this and informs King Saul, who summons Ahimelekh and the men of Nov. King Saul berates them (22:17):

   And the king commanded the guards standing by: “Turn around and kill the priests of the Lord, for they are in league with David!”... But the king’s servants would not raise a hand to strike down the priests of the Lord.

   The Palestinian Talmud (Sanhedrin, Chapter 10, ed. Venice, fol. 29a) asks:

   Who were those servants? R. Samuel son of R. Isaac said: they were Avner and Amasa. They said [to Saul]: “Do we owe you anything beyond this belt and mantle [= insignia of office]? Here, take them back!”

   According to this Midrash, the “servants” who refused King Saul’s direct orders were not simply soldiers; they were Avner his Chief of Staff and Amasa, one of his generals. They refused to kill Ahimelekh and the Priests of Nov, either because they thought that the punishment was too severe or because they were afraid to kill Priests. They “resigned their commission” even though the penalty could have been death. They did not take up arms against King Saul; they simply refused to participate. In other words, they acknowledged that the king had the legal right to execute people, but they would not participate in that unjust or excessive punishment.

3) In addition to these two biblical stories, Maimonides discusses our issue in his Mishneh Torah (Laws of Kings 3:9):

   A person who annuls the decree of a [Jewish] king because he was engaged in performing a mitzvah, even a minor mitzvah, he is not liable: the words of the master [= God] and the words of the servant [=the king] – the words of the master take precedence. And there is no need to say that if the king decreed to annul a mitzvah, one does not listen to him.

   In other words, if a Jewish king decrees to annul a mitzvah, one should engage in civil disobedience and not listen to that decree. Maimonides, as usual, cites no source for his ruling. R. Yosef Karo in his Kesef Mishneh ad loc. refers to Sanhedrin 49a. In that Midrash, Avner says that he killed Amasa because the latter took more than three days to gather the men of Judah to go to war (II Samuel 20:4 ff.). King Solomon replies that Amasa delayed because he found the Israelites engaged in studying a tractate. In other words, God’s command to the Jewish people to study Torah takes precedence over the King’s command to gather the troops.

4) A similar opinion is found in Numbers Rabbah (Naso, 14:6), which was edited in the 12th century, apparently in Provence:
“I obey the king’s orders” (Kohelet 8:2)… that you should not rebel against his command. Does this mean even if he tells you to transgress the words of God? Therefore it says “and uttering an oath by God” - the verse comes to inform you that the [utterance of God] takes precedence over the command of flesh and blood [=the King]…

In other words, according to Maimonides and Sanhedrin and Numbers Rabbah, if a Jewish king – or a Jewish State which has the halakhic status of a Jewish king – orders a Jew to desecrate the Sabbath or to eat pig or to transgress a commandment – the Jew should refuse, since the words of God take precedence over the words of the Jewish king or the Jewish State.


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Rabbis Make Speeches to American Presidents by Jack Riemer

David and Batsheba’s Echoes in America

I think it would be fair to say that Richard Nixon was not one of America’s most pious presidents, and yet, he introduced a custom of worship that no previous president had ever done. By the end of his administration he could hardly appear in public without being jeered because of Vietnam and Watergate. So, since he could not leave the White House to go to church, he had services each week in the White House. He invited a different minister, representing a different denomination, to conduct the services each week.

One of the people invited was a rabbi. He is a very great rabbi and I do not mean to be disrespectful of him, but he gave a dreadful sermon. It contained one paragraph that was so obsequious, so ingratiating, that it offended everyone. He was speaking of how we never fully grasp the significance of events while they are going on. The Egyptians did not realize the full meaning of the Exodus of the Israelites. The people at the time of Cyrus did not comprehend the full significance of his declaration permitting the Jews to return to their land. And then he said:

I hope that it is not presumptuous of me, a guest of the President of the United States, to pray that the future historian looking back on our generation, may say, as I have said of Lincoln, that in a period of great trial and great tribulations, the finger of God pointed to Richard Milhous Nixon, giving him the vision and the wisdom to save the world and civilization, and also to open the way for our country to realize the good that the twentieth century offers mankind.

Ugh! What an embarrassing sentence that is! How could he possibly have said that? I think I know how. When he got up to speak, the image of his father, who was born in Czarist Russia, must have been before him.

His father never dreamed that he could ever see the Czar, much less speak in his presence, much less chastise and criticize him. And so the rabbi chose not to rock the boat or spoil the party. It was enough, his father would have said, that his son was invited to speak at the White House. He should not spoil the celebration by being rude.

Eartha Kitt [the singer] chose to do differently. When she was invited to sing at the White House, she spoiled the party. She said to the President, “Mr. President, stop the bombing!” As a result, her career was ruined, and the FBI harassed her for years. The [older] rabbi, rightly or wrongly, had chosen to do differently. He chose to speak words of over-generous praise, so as not to offend.

The sermons given at the White House by those ministers, were published in book form. Then a counter book was published by Stephen Rose, with the engaging title *Sermons NOT Preached at the White House*. The two books were reviewed together in the New York Times. The reviewer compared them this way: "The first book has elegance and grace. The sermons in them show erudition and manners. There is only one thing missing, in them. **The Voice of Nathan is not there.**"

Here is another story about Nathan and American politics: Some years ago, Congress established a new medal, one of the most prestigious that anyone in this country can be given, and one of the provisions of the law is that the medal must be presented by the President of the United States. The first recipient of the medal was Elie Wiesel and the event was scheduled many weeks in advance.

Then came one of those incredible coincidences that no novelist could have ever dreamed up. Three days before the presentation was scheduled to take place, the Bitburg controversy broke out in the press! The President was going to visit Germany and the German government had arranged his itinerary. One of the stops was going to be a military cemetery in which S.S. men were buried.

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22 The article from "David, Batsheba, Nathan and Woody Allen” probably appears in a Festschrift for Zalman Schachter-Shlomi.
What to do? Reagan could not graciously withdraw without offending his German hosts. The Germans held firm and insisted that the itinerary could not be changed. There was an uproar of protest from Jews and other people who were deeply offended at the idea of the President of the United States paying tribute to Nazis. Frantic negotiations went back and forth between the camp of Elie Wiesel and officials at the White House. At one point Mr. Wiesel threatened to withdraw from the ceremonies. At another point the president did too. No compromise could be worked out in time, and the ceremony went through. The President came and presented the medal. Elie Wiesel thanked him graciously, and then, on world television, in front of hundreds of reporters and broadcasters, he turned to the president and said, "Mr. President, that is not your place! You belong with the victims, not with the killers!"

It was a dramatic scene and the papers were full of editorials the next day praising Elie Wiesel for his courage. One newspaper writer put it best, "The voice of Nathan, bottled up for centuries in books that were studied for centuries in villages like Sighet [the shtetl where Elie Wiesel grew up and from which he was deported to Auschwitz with his whole family] exploded in Washington today."

It is a memorable line, for it expresses the great wonder of this ancient story that still has power to speak, that centuries later it can still serve as a model for the prophetic task to speak truth to power.

But there is one more nuance of the story that has been generally overlooked. Why did President Reagan come to the ceremony, knowing full well that he would be rebuked on world television? Why did he not excuse himself, citing the pressures of presidential responsibilities, and send someone else in his place, or why did he not present the medal and then leave; instead of staying and being publicly photographed by the cameras while being publicly rebuked?

I can't prove it, but I have a hunch that this willingness to stay and be chastised was an act of morality that should not be underestimated. And if that is so, then it opens up yet another perspective on the biblical story and the identity of the real hero.

No one knows the name of the author of this Biblical tale and can say for sure when it was edited or when it entered the Book of Samuel. But this much we can say for sure: Whenever it was written and whenever it was redacted, it was done in the time when a descendant of the House of David was on the throne. There was never any other kind of king in Judah, for Judah lived by the tradition that only a descendant of the House of David was eligible to be king. Whoever that king from the House of David was, he allowed this story about the great sin of his ancestor to be told, to be recorded, and to be included in the book of Samuel! He chose not to censor it and not to execute its author, just as Ronald Reagan chose to stay and endure public rebuke. For this, he deserves our respect.

Who are the heroes of the biblical tale? The one who had the courage to tell it and the king who had the graciousness to allow it to be told.
Strategies for Character Education that may Counteract the Temptations of Power

adapted and expanded from a lecture by Micah Goodman and Noam Zion to TICHON

What strategies might we use for educating people to self-control, to not exercising what their power makes possible? How does the character education proposed by Deuteronomy 17 for the monarch with an unprecedented concentration of power and honor translate into an educational program? Here are some broad stroke philosophies of moral education that might be used to address the issue of temptations and power.

A. The Ethics of Reason and Passion

Generally, Greek, Rabbinic and Christian ethics has often phrased the issue of temptations as a conflict of reason and passion and identified that with a choice between free will and enslavement. Passions are portrayed as a dehumanization reducing us to the indignity of being an animal, while reason marks the human being’s uniqueness. Passions are also enslaving denying our freedom of will, our self-control, making us slaves. Self-discipline even self-denial becomes a way to both rational dignity and to autonomy as freedom. The rabbinic midrash - - al tikri harut al haluhot elah herut al haluhot – insists that freedom derives from law, from controlled limited satisfaction of desires. The religious argument in these three traditions also argue that humans must know their place before the God or the gods (moria = fate) or within the natural, hierarchical order. Hubris is foolish and unnatural as well as rebellious and sinful.

A Kantian approach would identify autonomy and freedom with rational self-control, but we will not unpack that approach here. We will note that Yeshaya Leibovitz created a Kantian- inspired philosophy of halacha that makes the Akedah into the model of self-control and of service to God. Self-interest is always seen as self-idolatrous, and one pays the price of self-enslavement by giving in to self-serving passions. However one who obeys the law of God without regard to self-interest or natural inclination is truly dignified and heroic. So an education to moral heroism through self-denial and self-discipline may be a way to counteract the temptations of power. Leibovitz would certainly have felt that this approach has relevance to the temptations that Israeli political power and independence created. This was for him not only morally wrong and demeaning to the true meaning of being human but it was theological crime of self-idolizing power typical of Ben Gurion’s state and its military power.

Nevertheless the serpent would respond in anti-rationalist Nietzschean mode that our freedom is not in self-limitation but in transcending boundaries, knowledge is penetrating mysteries not accepting immutable laws and sensual pleasures are not animal aspects to be repressed but expressions of the plenitude of our self. The will to power will not accept the slavish reversal of values that identifies freedom with law and makes us feel guilty for self-assertion.

Alternative approaches to character education derives from the classic debate is between Plato and Aristotle:

B. Plato: Knowledge as an Antidote to Temptation

Plato’s Socrates says no one commits evil knowingly since then they would see that a bad act will have negative consequences for themselves. If David had realized the full implications of his individual act, if he had foreseen the unintended consequences, the chain of complications, then a simple calculation of long and short term pleasures would have shown him that what is wrong is also bad for all. If David had understood the limitations of his power even as king to shape events, he would never have acted so highhandedly. More generally if David had become a philosopher seeing what is truly important and long lasting in life and beyond, then it would have seen no great temptation if a passing sexual hookup with a female body. Rambam suggests in the Guide that the philosopher king is immune from temptations of power and fame and sexual satisfaction, as long as he keeps his mind’s eye on the higher things.
Hassidism especially the book of *Tanya* suggests that when one knows we are all part of God and there is no reality to individual ego, then crimes lose their lure for they are based an illusory understanding of reality.

However there are many times when we know what is right, but we still sin against our own good. Plato suggests the problem then is weakness of will.

Imagine this awful scenario during the Nazi era. The Nazis wish to train SS officers to overcome a natural sense of mercy for fellow human beings, so they can effectively kill. Initially when regular Nazi soldiers were employed in Einsatzgruppen shooting Jews in rows, they were sickened and could not continue to function. According to Platonics view knowledge is the solution. Teach them to see the Jews as vermin biologically, racially and to see them as inhuman enemies exploiting women and children. However the behavioral approach reported anecdotally is that Nazis asked SS officers to adopt a puppy, feed it, sleep with it, train it and then kill it with their bare hands. Initially the cruel act was revolting but when repeated the soldiers learned to curb their natural empathy. This leads us to Aristotle’s approach.

### C. Aristotle and Rambam: Guided Practice as an Antidote to Temptation

Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and his great student Rambam in *Shemoneh Perakin* and *Hilchot Deot* argue that knowledge does not have the power by itself to change behavior, but character traits can develop the will power and the habitual momentum to overcome temptation. The ideal is a golden mean of balanced traits hence they are called in Hebrew *midot* = measures, measured existence which would not allow for going to an extreme as when someone is tempted. We might derive from this school of thought a whole series of micro-strategies for behaviorally engineered character education.

1. The first response to temptation is to act reasonably **weighing your behavior** before acting and calculating the results. The passion cannot carry you away if you weigh things properly. But in the heat of the moment will we weigh things rationally.

2. So the second strategy is to build up **habitual responses** that carry you along without reconsidering each situation. People may be stingy by natural inclination but that doesn’t mean they will not give tzedakah. But it will be hard for them psychologically. It will require great will power. Rambam describes Abel – unlike Cain – as one who overcame his yetzer to give generously to God from his best flocks. Rambam explains that practice through halacha shapes a constant character that is predictable and dependable. Initially it is hard for one to do what is right such as sharing one’s wealth, however by giving $10 of Tzedakah one dollar at a time one develops as second nature the habit of giving. Ethics need not be a heroic act of kibush hayetzer against one’s nature but a natural flow of doing what is right and good. The Hassid is preferable to being Gibor Kovesh et Yitzro. Ethics should not remain matter of self-denial and a heroic challenge but it should become an easy flow. Cases shape habitual traits that then in turn shape actions without a need for rational weighing. This is a circle of reinforcement that produces behavioral results in particular realm. While the goal is balanced behavior, neither to either extreme of being overly generous or stingy, there is a technique of teshuvat hamiskal where you go to one extreme to counterbalance previous onesided habits until the one reaches a comfortable place in the middle.

3. The third strategy is to build **will power** as a capacity that is transferable to any difficult struggle of reason and libido. So Rambam sees in the laws of kashrut an area not merely for ritual or spirituality but for character development. Following arbitrary *hukim* that force us on a daily basis to curb desires trains will power and adds to its strength,, just as an athlete builds capacity. That is Ibn Kaspi’s explication of Rambam. Think of a Jew wanting to eat a steak but his desire is reigned first as he realizes he ate milk products less than a hour before, then by the concern for the slaughtering procedure, then by salting, then by utensils, then concern that it might be a fast day and then by concern that his pets and farm animals have been fed first and then by the need to say a bracha first.

4. The fourth strategy is **channeling** - to say yes to some areas of gratification and no to others. One channels rather than merely denying desire. Thus Rambam views the nazir who adds to realms of the forbidden a simmer and fool who does not accept God’s guidelines to the forbidden and the permitted which are perfectly balanced. Initially one is drawn to immediate gratification of desires but by practice one develops self-control and moves to the golden mean in enjoying legal pleasures.
as with one’s spouse and refraining from illegal ones. David had many wives, so God cannot understand why he takes another man’s wife? Channel desire into what is permitted.

(5) The fifth strategy is to make character self-transformation into a heroic creative act. Soloveitchik understands Rambam as celebrating human creativity where our greatest creation is ourselves. We can all be like Moshe. No natural limitations. Rambam rejects the view made famous in the saying of Zusya that in the world to come I will not be asked why I was not Moshe Rabbenu, but why I did not live up to being Zusya? The true test of successful re-creation of one’s character is to return to the same situation with the same attractive woman and the same desire – not when you are old and beyond sexual arousal – and yet this time to refrain for sinning and even do so without too much painful self-denial and inner struggle.

(6) The sixth strategy is to acknowledge the limits. It is foolish hubris to dream of being totally autonomous. Theologically that might be reflected in acknowledging that one is a creature before the almighty Creator, however beliefs will not change character. But practicing Shabbat is a counterbalance to our weekly experience of being rulers of nature as God mandated us – vyirdu. On Shabbat as Shimshom Refael Hirsch says we restrict our freedom to act, we accept our limitations by God’s superior authority. This weekly act so at odds with our weekly habits of command and control of nature is a behavioral analogue to the faith structure of humility, of knowing our place. Shabbat is not rest from physical effort but refraining from technology that makes the manipulation of nature so simple and easy and natural. Technology habituates us to our absolute power over a world of objects designed to satisfy our egocentric needs. But our ability to desist from technology shows us our humility before Creation and the Creator and moves us from self-centered to theocentric, to another creature-consciousness with fellow feeling for nature as in the Shmitah year. As A.J.Heschel argues, Shabbat was once designed to liberate slaves from their masters for one day but in the modern world it is also designed to liberate the masters from the technology and the hubris or power that enslaves the master. Shabbat helps us overcome the temptation to power that when carried to an extreme leads to corrupt nature, to corrupt others turned into I-it instruments of our needs and to corrupt our personality. Shabbat is about balance as is Rambam’s whole golden mean psychology and ethics of character traits.

D.Divine Providence as an Antidote to Temptation to Self-Deification

Turning back from Aristotle to Plato we return to two knowledge-based therapies for hubris, for temptations of power. One is derived from the story of Joseph and David and one from the wisdom of Nathan and Avigail.

Let us begin with Joseph.

Many a seventeen year old may dream of greatness and of recognition as did Joseph. Many see themselves at the center of the world. In the song by the group called U-2 the sinner says: “I thought when I

23 David’s sin may be compared to the most mythological texts in the book of Genesis.

“The sons of gods saw that the daughters of Adam were good and took them as wives from whomever they desired...The sons of gods had intercourse with the daughters of Adam and gave birth and those are called the heroes.”(Genesis 6:1-4)

It also recalls the woman in the Garden who disregards God’s warning command and takes from the Tree of Knowledge because

“The woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes and the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, so took from its fruit and ate” (Genesis 3:6)

In so far as David was God’s messiah, the all-powerful king of a new empire blessed by a personal covenant with God, he may have been tempted to see himself as semi-divine, as one of the heroes half-human and half-divine mentioned in Greek mythology. He after all killed one of the last of the mythic heroes or giants, Goliath of Gat, leftover from that era (Joshua 11:21-22). David’s success could produce a hubris reflected in his sense of entitlement to take any beautiful woman he sees without regard to Divine limitations that separate humans and gods
was three that I was the center of the world but I was wrong." The symbolic significance of all the brothers bowing down to Joseph reversed the natural hierarchy within the family, and the sun and moon and stars bowing down to Joseph suggests a godlike rule of all of nature typical of Egyptian religion where the Pharaoh becomes deified as the one uniting heaven and earth. In the Psalms nature bows down only to God, not to human beings. Some of the Psalms describe David as God's son and royal ideology may have borrowed pagan motifs to deify the Davidic dynasty. (though that self-deification does not appear at all in the narrative story of David).

Joseph overcomes his hubris when he realizes that he is not in control but God is. The ups and downs—literally being thrown into the pit and brought out to Potiphar's house and thrown in again to the pit of jail on false charges of adultery and again emerging to become Pharaoh's second in command and then finding himself ruling over his prostrate brothers—forced Joseph to reconsider how he got to where he was in the narrative arc of his life. Then Joseph the interpreter of dreams became the interpreter of his life course. His life of coincidences became an oracle like the dreams. The predestination of his life disabused Joseph of the dreams of being worshipped as a god. He realized he was not in charge but merely sent by God as a shaliach to serve Divine options that will come true willy nilly with human efforts to thwart it. At that point Joseph accepted his role and exercised his intellectual power to serve God's purposes. Using human intelligence, he saved Egypt and saved his brothers. Then he played God to re-educate his brothers to recognize their responsibility for selling him into slavery. But he does not wish them to feel guilty but to realize that their efforts were futile, that their little brother's dream was not his own invention but a divine plan like Brit Bein Habetairm (Genesis 15). He and they were merely fulfilling a divine destiny which neither he nor they could thwart. To acknowledge God's providence was both to remove moral guilt from their shoulders, to remove anger and vengeance form his heart, and to remove the offending hubris and arrogance. One does not credit for his position in the Divine play and that position is not permanent but turns as the plan rises and falls through one's career.

Micah Goodman offers a reading of Joseph's story as a Greek myth like Oedipus where human beings seek to thwart their predestined fate but fail. In the fact their attempts to deflect Divine plans serves to make those plans come true. Oedipus' father sought to kill him but that way Oedipus ended up not knowing who his father was and therefore having no compunction about killing him or marrying his mother as fate had predicted and required. Similarly the brothers hated not Joseph but his dreams and they threw him into the pit saying: Now we will see what will be with his dreams? Yet that is the very way Joseph ended up going down to Egypt, becoming viceroy, saving the family and being bowed down to by his brothers. In fact this is how God's Berit Bein Habetarim is fulfilled. The brothers come to realize God's fate has found them out and come to punish them. Unlike Oedipus here there is moral guilt for the brothers and recompense. But Joseph does not see his success as sachar vaonesh. That would only have reinforced his hubris as to his own talent and his own entitlement from birth. It is providence as mysterious and transcending any moral calculation that Joseph acknowledges leading to his renewed humility foreswearing self-deification, to his forgiveness of injustice done to him by his brother and now seen as a necessary twist in his road to becoming a redeemer. "You did not sell him but God sent me before you to provide livelihood" (Genesis 45:5).

How then do we speak to a 17 year old dreamer? Do we seek to quash dreams in the name of realism (reality testing)? In the name of humility and democratic egalitarianism? In the name of religious sense of being a creature with limitations? Or do we tell them to believe in themselves and their dream? How then do we help them resist the temptations of megalomania?

Joseph himself learns from his interpretation of the trajectory of his own life. Similarly he tries to teach his brothers by artificially manipulated their lives to teach a lesson and then helping them realize it themselves just as Joseph did—without Divine revelation. The dramatic cathartic seeing of their own lives as in a play where they had lost all control taught them to see the Divine hand in Joseph's hand. This is a form of Platonic self-knowledge but comes not by looking inward to one's soul nor by achieving universal knowledge of the forms nor by philosophic activity. Rather feelings as much as thoughts are involved. Unlike Plato we know ourselves in relationships within time, particular ones. Seeing one's biography, one's actions and life events as one's self-identity is the raw material of self-knowledge. The means is dramatic, narrative, not philosophic abstraction. Joseph puts the brothers through a play, Nathan creates a parable
about David that David enters into empathetically before realizing “you are the man.” Aristotle’s theory of drama and catharsis is more relevant than Plato. In sense the whole narrative Tanakh, and especially the whole story of David and Batsheva leading to self-knowledge and teshuvah and confession, is itself an exercise in character education through empathy and story telling. It is rich dramatic story of temptation and power whose aesthetic power is its educational strategy.

E. Critical Advice from your Courageous Friends: The Wisdom Tradition, Literary Prophetic Tradition and Mesilla Yesharim as an Antidote to Temptations

Yehudit Ravitz sings in a popular Israeli song: Dvarim she roim misham lo roim mikan. If temptations involve excessive egocentricism and insensitivity to the other who becomes an instrument for self-pleasuring, then the actor loses ability to see him/herself in broader perspective, in web of relationships, in long-term perspective. So one's friends as advisors concerned with one's goodness owe their friend the courage and goodwill to let the subject know how he/she appear and where they are headed perhaps unbeknownst to themselves. Mesillat Yesharim, Moshe Hayim Luzzato in his mussar book, says that is the benefit of friends and the subject must know the value of not only listening to criticism but seeking advice from those he can trust to tell the truth or truths.

David is blessed by two such advisors - God through the good offices of Nathan and Avigail, Naval's wife, out of self-interest and but expressed with the great, persuasive rhetoric of a wise woman. Prophetic and wisdom models use literature to lead David to see himself in new and unflattering light. In short the temptation is countered by an appeal to identity, to the higher identity, to the more positive self-image of the leader whose tempted behavior is more typical of a vile or selfish or arrogant ruler. Nathan's mashal draws David in to story where empathy for the poor victim is taught. David himself ahs always seen himself as the poorman, as the David opposite Goliath, as the little brother ignored, so he sees himself as a good man. Further Nathan appeals to David as the king, as the judge of the land. Then David is revealed as the underminer of justice, as the hypocrite, as the rich insensitive man who deserves to die by David's own standards. Similarly Avigail portrays David to himself not as an outlaw seeking to defend his male dignity but as king-to-be who will be a great statesman representing God's messiah and helping heal the civil war in Israel. He is called upon to defend civilization, but also to accept the active role of providence and to let things work out without bloodshed by human hands if possible.

Generally the power of Biblical literature, Biblical history, is to teach us about hubris and temptation through the lives of our ancestors in a literary genre that emphasizes measure for measure outcomes and the folly of human hubris, especially self-deification or the folly of covering up the ugly truth rather than confessing it to the all knowing God. These stories and their heroic advisors and prophets speak truth to power in ways that it can really be heard.

The greatness of David is to allow himself to hear, to be persuaded where power might allow him to ignore the message that is so unflattering. It is also to the credit of the style of history writing in Samuel that this artful self-criticism is celebrated and not suppressed and institutionally preserved by the descendants of King David as opposed to The King David Report of Stefan Heym (See Jack Riemer essay in this volume on Reagan and Elie Wiesel at Bitburg).
VI. Writing David and Batsheva's History: 
The Trajectory of David’s Life

Walter Brueggemann – David’s Truth and In Man We Trust 
Avishag: An Ironic Reflection of the End of King David’s Trajectory

History Writing as the Context for II Samuel 11-12

Samuel I and II is considered by many the first example of a genre of prose realistic history in human history. Yet already in the Tanakh we have several models of history writing relative to David that offer very different alternatives for reading this problematic story about David our messiah's temptations and crimes. How do we handle writing and teaching our ancestor-founder's foundational story when we want to generate loyalty to David and the Jewish political religious dream?

1- Mythic history typical is typically found in Chronicles (as well as in the enthronement Psalms of Davidic dynasty). Here the historians pursue a strict censorship of scandalous materials about David's weaknesses as in David and Batsheva affair. Philo too refuses to retell stories like Moses hitting the striking of the rock.

What Bible stories, we may ask ourselves, do we skip over in choosing a curriculum for Jewish students in whom we wish to develop loyalty to our nation and its history? Do we censor the curriculum to avoid studying the commandment to exterminate all the Canaanites?

The novelist Stefan Heym, quoted elsewhere in this book extensively, presents his version of the King David Report as a work written at the behest of King Solomon after David's death to prepare what have called a mythic history:

"This is the Royal Commission on the Preparation of The One and Only True and Authoritative, Historically Correct and Officially Approved Report on the Amazing Rise, God-fearing Life, Heroic Deeds, and Wonderful Achievements of David the Son of Jesse, King of Judah for Seven Years and of Both Judah and Israel for Thirty-three, Chosen of God, and Father of King Solomon....

The King David Report is to be composed by careful selection from and judicious use of all materials extant on the Amazing Rise and so forth of the late King David, such as royal records, correspondence, and annals, as well as available testimony, further legends and lore, songs, psalms, proverbs and prophecies, especially those referring to the great love and preference shown by King David to his beloved son and successor, King Solomon.

The said Report is to establish for this and all time to come One Truth, thus ending All Contradiction and Controversy, eliminating All Disbelief of the Choice by our Lord Yahveh of David ben Jesse, and allaying All Doubt of the Glorious Promises made to him by our Lord Yahveh in regard to his Seed and Progeny."

2- Apologetic history is a genre unable or unwilling to remove David's crimes from the record but that calls out for the editing and writing of spin doctors. The Israeli debate among religious Zionist educators is between teaching the characters after extensive apologetic reconstruction and o the other side, presenting them b'govah einayim as realistic characters facing real moral struggles and sometimes failing. Here the "apologetics" are that the Biblical figure do teshuvah like King David. But the hero worth emulating is
different notion of a monumental hero - one who faces real challenges, full bodied and not perfect. This they argue makes him a better hero for emulation and identification.

See the efforts of Rabbinic Midrash in one of the appendices of this volume.

3. **Realpolitik History** is a genre typical of contemporary historians like Baruch Halperin or Stephen MacKenzie and Bible scholars like Yair Zakowitz or writers like Meir Shalev in Tanakh Achshav. They read the text against the grain to recover what really happened by removing every apologetic ideological cover to reveal the **cynical political operator**. Actually **I Kings 2** is an outstanding example of that kind of realpolitik Machiavellianism revealed in the Tankah's own genres.

4. **Primary documents archivist** is another genre typical of Ezra and Nehemiah that includes official royal letters. In **II Samuel 7** quotes David and Nathan's official speeches (at what amounts to the coronation or better the consecration of the dynasty in its new capital).

5. **Literary political biography** is however the dominant genre of I and II Samuel. It involves a literary style concentrating on character development – comic or tragic – as seen in the trajectory of a life’s career. Walter Brueggemann identifies two distinct kinds of such biography in David's story, though his categories do not fit perfectly. One is about **David on the rise**, the "Making of the President" - rags to riches from **I Samuel 16** to **I Samuel 5** that hardly shows us an internal view of David - except in his relationship to Yonatan at his death and to Michal when she curses out David. Here everyone loves David but what does David feel and think?

The second political biography - **II Samuel 9-20** shows us **David's inner truth**, his jadedness, his corruption yet also his partial regeneration and confession. Here we have the enlightenment revelation of **David's self-knowledge** after eating from the tree of knowledge of political power, which tends to corrupt. David is not as loveable but he is pained and we have an inside view of his feelings, his remorse, his fear. Neither is David all powerful nor living a charmed life and certain if near escapes.
David’s Truth by Walter Brueggemann (summarized by the editor)

Walter Brueggemann catalogues four styles of historiography in presenting David in the Tanakh.

1- In Chronicles David is a **mythic founder of the Jewish state** appointed by God and the planner of the Temple. He can do no wrong and the David-Batsheva affair does not appear. The whole genealogy from Adam leads up to David. He is portrayed in the spirit of the rabbinic figure who said: anyone who says David sins has no place in the world to come. David’s role in the messianic hope for restoration of the Jewish kingdom does not allow his faults to be memorialized.

2- In II Samuel 7 when Nathan proclaims in God’s name that David is chosen and his dynasty will last forever it sounds like the **official press release** of a presidential press secretary at the signing of a historic document. High language and official speeches solemnize the occasion and celebrate the office held by the king. This selection might have been taken from the Sefer Divrei Hayamim, the official chronicle of each king written by his court historians. Though mentioned in the Tanakh none were preserved.

3- In I Samuel 16- II Samuel 5 we have the **campaign trail rags to riches biography of the young David, the outsider on his way to power and to the redemption of the Jewish people.** Not the court historians but the outsider supporters of David wrote this biography. David is described as beloved by all; as the underdog declining to use Saul’s armor to confront Goliath who is insulting God and Israel; as the gallant but persecuted young hero who always avoids using violence in intra Israelite political rivalries. On the run David never or almost never loses his statesman image and his professed loyalty to Saul and to the Israel even when taking refuge with the national enemy – the Philistines. He is religiously observant, consulting the priestly oracles about going to battle and dancing with abandon before the ark without regard for the royal appearances important to his wife Michal daughter of King Saul. His behavior always contrasts favorably with the corrupt court of Saul. Avigail saves him when he is about to slip into avoidable, but not unprovoked, bloodshed.

However we almost never have an inside view of David’s psyche. Everyone loves him but we hear nothing of his feelings for others – except in the poetry of his eulogy for Yonatan.

4- Only in II Samuel 9-20 and I Kings 1-2 do we discover **“the painful truth of the man.”** After David is officially crowned by God and by all the people, then we discover what Gerhard Von Rad called the self-critical enlightenment view of political leadership and human life. When David turns from the young man to the mature leader he is revealed in his inner temptations, in his corruptibility, in his guilt and his repentance. No longer on the margins of power, at the center of power, absolute power corrupts absolutely. The shepherd in the desert fighting lions with his bare hands with God’s help becomes the head of a hierarchal bureaucracy in the capital city with many messengers to carry out his every order or whim. No longer careful to shed no Jewish blood, he now feels free to shed his own loyal soldier’s blood with the help of his chief of staff. David is plagued by scandal rather than being everyone’s hero. He is jaded, suffering from the boredom of the prince sleeping late and restless for sexual exploits.

Yet the moral and political corruption accompany a deep growth in **introspective consciousness**, of religious feeling and guilt, of humility and the recognition of the limits of hubris and of control. David once again becomes the fugitive from his son Avshalom who wishes to kill him, but David believes that is a just punishment for his failures as father. In escaping Saul, young David is buoyant and his adventures are about narrow escapes and gradual growth in recognition by others of his divine destiny to rule. In escaping Avshalom, David is guilt-ridden and ambivalent and his triumph is experienced as his deepest mourning for his lost son. The David to whom Psalms are attributed describing his personal anguish, fear, guilt and longing for God is an introspective David which the narrative of the books of Samuel do not reveal until after the Batsheva affair.

David’s impotence is ironic during his reign after the Batsheva affair. He is unable to criticize his sons’ moral improprieties and he cannot make the harsh choices to win the civil war with his son. Yet at the end of his life when he revives for a last political move to enthrone his successor, he becomes in his last will and political testament a ruthless power broker encouraging his son Solomon to murder all those against whom
he had vendettas. The old David displays none of Abraham Lincoln’s with malice to none and charity for all” magnanimity in victory.

Brueggemann believes the combination of the rags to riches tale of young David and the corrupt and yet conscience ridden mature David forces David’s fans – the whole people in love with their mythic hero – to face their own naïveté. They were taken in by the romance of his rise to power. They thought he was the messiah, not just another anointed king. They wanted to believe that David and the Jewish body politic could traverse the path from powerlessness to power without serious moral or political consequences. They disregarded Shmuel’s warnings. But now they and David have eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and discovered they are naked and guilty. The loss of innocence is deep. The people who asked for a king are implicated in the results of the centralized power they created and the way it corrupted them and their leader.

Happy endings? The story of Batsheva is the fulcrum in David’s downfall. True the ending of II Samuel 12 is hopeful, a tribute to David’s ability – unlike Saul’s – to repent. It ends on the hopeful note of God’s forgiveness for David who will live and the divine blessing of the marriage when Solomon is born. Yet the curse of the sword unleashed against Uriah and now turning inward against David’s own house is only beginning. David’s own sexual crimes make it impossible for him to educate his sons – not Amnon and not Adoniyahu. The Tamar affair turns his family into a sibling rivalry between Amnon and Avshalom that ends in rebellion against David himself. Again David does teshuvah and accepts his own part in bringing on the rebellion. Yet the revolts continue and battles between David’s sons continue after him. After Solomon, the dynastic struggles remove all the halo from what God called in II Sam. 7 the eternal covenant with David’s house.

What the David and Batsheva affair does is to frame the whole road to the destruction and exile of Judah and Israel as morality tale of character. It is not merely an issue of pragmatic politics or of a failed form of government – the monarchy – but of the moral failings of leader tempted to corruption by power. Deuteronomy 17 warned us about the accumulation of women, wealth and military power without adequate Torah education as a brake on human hubris. Solomon will fail precisely in these three areas plus the temptation generated by the accumulation of too much wisdom which is also a stumbling block. The message transcends politics and need for checks and balances. This is a Shakespearean tragedy of character flaws but if we listen to Nathan we can still do teshuvah and perhaps save ourselves and our people, though the consequences of our actions will always come home to roost. It all begins with the knowledge that David was not immune to corruption nor are we.

THE PAINFUL TRUTH OF THE MAN by Walter Brueggemann (David’s Truth, p. 41)

I will follow the conventional assumption that there are two great narratives about David:

1) "The Rise of David" (1 Sam. 16:1-2 Sam. 5:5) is the account of David moving from the margin to the center of power.

2) The other is called the "Succession Narrative," so named because it is asked in 1 Kings 1:20, "Who shall sit on the throne after David?"

...Aage Carlson has suggested that the two conventional narratives are juxtaposed so that the first portrays David “under blessing” and the second, David “under curse."

(1) In the "Rise of David," the narrative focuses exclusively and with severe discipline only upon the public David, screening out any probe of David's person, attitude, or motive. My suggestion is that the first narrative is the trustful truth of the tribe - truth that is uncritical of David and is unwilling to engage in any speculation or to probe any ambiguity or mixed motive that David may have entertained. The narrative does not want to assess David’s interiority, because that may lead to a lessening of nerve.

(2) In the episode of David-Uriah-Bathsheba and the death of the resultant child, however, the narrative turns increasingly to reflect on the interiority of David, and all the delicacy, ambiguity, and freedom that David in fact exercises. Robert Alter suggests, that in a rather elusive way, it is the shattering effect of a
child's death (2 Sam. 12:15-23) that breaks things open and perhaps moves to a disclosure of enormous depth. Death does indeed do that on occasion. In Carlson's terms, the agenda of David "under curse" necessarily requires a disclosure of the agony and anguish of this failed man.

The upshot of Alter's suggestion is that the David- Uriah-Bathsheba episode is lifted up as the key to the entire story. That is, it is the break point for David...It is David's awful moment of self-knowledge when he no longer believes his press notices, and is no longer either able or compelled to be the uncritical public David. The incredible miscalculation (sin?) with Uriah and Bathsheba opens David, according to the narrator, to the awareness of ambiguity of a moral kind. It is the kind of moral ambiguity that the David of the "Rise of David" story could never entertain. And from that shattering moment, the narrator, the community around the story, and perhaps David, are permitted to enter a new world of personal interiority with all its problematic of anguish, ambiguity, ambition, and ambivalence. The public David continues to function, but the public David is no longer able or permitted to override, censor, and ignore the personal David. Now the two are placed in a deep and unresolvable tension."

THE MAN DAVID

I presume that in the Succession Narrative we have a different storyteller. ...It is no longer tribal truth, for this truth is too daring and ambiguous to serve the tribe. David is now ensconced within the palace. He has an army, a bureaucracy, a harem. If anything, he contradicts the hopes and needs of the tribe. A very long time, sociologically if not chronologically, has passed since the tribal truth. This literature is neither tribal nor trustful. I suggest that it is a different narrative with a different agenda, an agenda that had to present a very different David...- "the painful truth of the man."

The narrator cuts through all the royal business to see the man, to see him as an ambiguous, contradictory, enmeshed man, driven and inept, with a range of emotional possibilities. It is the earliest portrayal in Israel of the human creature with such depth and discernment, and it is surely the most imaginative picture we have of David, or of anyone in the Bible...an intimate portrayal of a public man. ...a great deal of pain and anguish...and trouble of a man whose personal agenda and public role keep him embroiled in painful ways... Human life has freedom and anguish, power and pain, and neither is avoidable for those mirrored in this astonishing man.

Lodged for just a moment between the ebullience of the tribe and the jadedness of the state, this narrative notices that human life is marked by pathos, by a sense of incongruity, a wistfulness, a lingering regret about all that cannot be recalled. ...This narrative lets David become a model or a paradigm for humanness. It is precisely the concreteness, when it rings true, that permits generalization and identification. ...The continuing power of the narrative is that we continue to find ourselves portrayed in this narrative about this pained man. We know it is the truth about him, and about us. ...The narrative wants us to remember the beginning as we observe the shameful, shabby conclusion....The public facade is broken by the depth of human reality....It is a narrative poised just at the balance point where the pain is most immediate and acute. The narrator wants us to attend to the deception and the relentless, resilient quality of chagrin and shame and wistfulness that public form never fully nullifies. Gerhard von Rad has related this to the "Solomonic enlightenment." By that he means it lives at a moment of marvelous exaltation of human capacity and human power.
In Man We Trust by Walter Brueggemann

David's Israel (p.64)

In the brief period from Saul to Solomon, Israel's history ran a gamut of emotional states and experienced most of the options open to a historical community. Changes were rapid and radical. In the brief span of three generations the dominant strand in Israel's faith moved from a man in touch with the soil and the people to a tyrant, alienated from land and people as well as from the God of whom Israel's tradition speaks....

In the categories we are using, Saul stands before the revolution. The vast cultural changes of David and Solomon which required accompanying theological changes had not yet hit Israel in the time of Saul. Thus he shares none of the sense of power, freedom, and responsibility so characteristic of David and Solomon. At the same time and for the same reasons, he is a pitiful figure unable to cope with his historical moment.

In the world of Saul; a world of vows to death and appeals to the dead, David appears to be a radical innovator. ...The whole tenor of his career is that he is not impressed with the old tabus. He is not controlled by old conventions and old opinions. It is not clear if his new way of operating is to be understood as simply the action of a bold person who exercised his genius without regard to his religious context, or if it is to be read as a conscious effort to make a point. In either case, the tradition clearly shows that David felt himself so trusted by God, so committed to a fresh notion of power, so confident of his own capacities to cope with the situations confronting him, that he acted and lived out of a tremendous sense of his own freedom.

David's freedom is manifested in many ways: his decision to shape his government in the non-Israelite city of Jerusalem; the transfer of military operations from a people's militia to state army; his self-assertion which set a tone for government by royal decision rather than by traditional laws. Indeed, the whole flavor of his person and career was a movement from the amphictyony (the tribal covenant made in Joshua 23 in Shechem) of the hill country with its parochial, isolated mentality, to the world of commerce and trade. David's reading of the historical moment required a sharp though ambiguous break with the past which had still figured so large in the thinking of Saul.

Indeed, David's times and circumstances called for that kind of radical change in the mood and direction of Israelite leadership. His movement of the ark into his own Canaanite city-state and the liturgical moment in which he receives theological legitimacy (II Sam. 7) give expression to David's decision to go a new way. The new way was the way of learning, the introduction of wise men into the councils of government (cf. II Sam. 16-17). The new way was therefore the way of reflection and asking bold questions which the older generation had never dared to ask nor felt compelled to answer. The new way was one of power -- both military and economic-- of taking history into one's own hands and giving it shape and direction. There was no need to ask the witches or the medicine men, for now human ends and human policies are taken with great seriousness.

The new way was the way of pluralism: this conglomerate included all kinds of people like ethnic foreigners [Uriah the Hittite and the foreign wives who produced heirs like Avshalom] who gave allegiance to David and his government.

David as Problematic Innovator (p. 29)

It is the understatement of Israel's history to say that David is an innovation in the self-understanding of the community of faith. Israel had never known anything like him before and was not to see such again...Indeed, David is historically and theologically something of a misfit in terms of his antecedents. He cannot be easily assimilated into any of the already existing forms of structures...

David represents a crucial turn in biblical history. The old categories cannot contain him.
There is a new form of historiography. Gerhardt Von Rad has shown clearly that the style and presuppositions of the Succession Narrative (II Sam. 9-20; I Kings 1-2) are quite in contrast to the pre-Davidic materials. In the earlier ones the center of the material is the cultic experience and the central actor is God. In the David materials, especially the Succession Narrative, the materials have moved from sacral matters and cult to the affairs of politics and history. Now men make the major decisions and live with the consequences of their choices. This is not writing without faith, for God is still present and decisive, but the style and assumptions are now radically secularized. Israel's history since David has become more properly human history in the modern sense of the word.

The ordering of Israel's life before David is amphictyonic, or federational. This indeed is what the tensions of First Samuel are all about, with Samuel holding to that order and Saul trying to find room in that context to be king.

But with David, the center of power and authority, of responsibility and prerogative is shifted. To be sure, the tradition has now been formulated to suggest continuity between David and the old order. David himself is at pains to claim continuity, as in the movement of the ark and perhaps in the marriage to Saul's daughter. But clearly one becomes immediately aware that the discontinuity is much greater than the tradition means to suggest. The monarchy embodied in David represents a radical innovation which will not be subsumed under the already existing structures. The conservatives in Samuel and First Kings were right in discerning that the foundations of corporate life were being radically changed.

In the tenth century, under the leadership of David, Israel ceased to be a minority community in the hill country and emerged into the larger world of ancient Near Eastern power and prosperity. With the new material blessings of such a transition there were also new ideological and theological resources at hand, either to reformulate the faith or compromise it, depending on one's perspective. It is clear that royal theology to the older Israelite community became a live option for Israel under David.

Royal ideology was appropriated which gave important support to the new ambitious regime. [The Wisdom literature of Proverbs with its utilitarian wisdom tradition becomes relevant even if its literary formulation comes later.]

[Yet Nathan’s prophecy in the Batsheva affair is an important counterweight to the new Davidic worldview. David does not consult the law book as Deuteronomy 17 would have recommended nor does he subject every decision to a prophet as Samuel wished unrealistically of King Saul. However he subject to the Ten Commandments and God will put him in his place “under the law.”]

**Avishag: An Ironic Reflection of the End of King David’s Trajectory**

Let us recall the Biblical Avishag (I Kings 1) to see David measured in the light of another woman but at different stage in his life – the end stage. Yair Zakovitz uncovers a deep connection between David and Avishag that closes the circle on David’s life. We first meet David as young musician from a family of simple shepherds who is brought to minister to a sick king’s paranoia, just as Avishag is drafted by the king’s court to minister to aging David’s infirmities. (I Samuel 16:14-23). David is described as young and beautiful (I Sam. 16:18) just as Avishag is praised for her youth and beauty (I Kings 1:4) and both are brought to “stand before” and serve “the king” ((I Sam. 16:21 and I Kings 1:2). However David has the power to soothe Saul temporarily, while Avishag does not seem to warm him adequately and she certainly does not succeed in arousing him from his impotence. Tragically David the great lover cannot even know her sexually, and tragically Saul cannot be cured by David but David actually cause his jealousy and his paranoia to grow. David will ultimately replace king Saul, but Avishag will never be the next wife of king – neither for David or for Adoniyahu. Avishag is chosen and drafted to the king’s bed like Esther to Ahashverosh’s bed but she will never fill those shoes. Batsheva also began as a beautiful body but she turns into a powerful mother of the king. Avishag is a foil to point up David’s decrepit old age. She shows us that our hopes for the eternally young David and his messianic kingdom are not to be achieved.

See the poems below about Avishag from Shirley Kaufman, Walter Kaufmann, Yehuda Amichai and Maria Rilke for another take on David and Avishag
VII. Women and Politics: Comparing Avigail/David with Batsheva/David/ Nathan and with Jezebel/Ahab/ Elijah

A. Avigail/David - I Samuel 25:1-44
   David’s Temptation to Violence and his “Therapist” Avigail
   Win Some, Lose Some – Marriage Politics
   You be the Judge: Bad-Mouthing David and Avigail?
   Techniques: The Literary Toolbox
   Analogies: Literary Parallel Stories
   The Case for Restraints on the Use of Political Violence, Collective Punishment
   Woman Ventures Out: Abigail Takes to the Road by Nehama Aschkenasy
   David becomes Nabal! by Regina Schwartz

B. Jezebel/ Ahab/ Elijah – I Kings 21

Juan Antonio (Spain, 1630 -1670)
יַיִן, וְחָּׁמֵשׁ צֹאן עשוּיִת וְחָּמֵשׁ סְאִים קָלִי, 

הִנֵה שָׁׁלַח דָּוִד מַלְאָכִים 

הַדְבָּרִים הָּאֵלֶּה בְּשֵׁם אֲשֶׁר עַל וְצִוְּךָ לְנָּגִיד, עַל כִּי נִפְקַד מִכָּל נְעָרֶיךָ וְיַגִידוּ לָּךְ, וְיִמְצְאוּ הַנְעָרִים חֵן בְעֵינֶיךָ וְתִשְׁתַחוּ, וַתִפְגֹשׁ אֹתָּם. 

שֶכֶל וִּב וְאִישׁ בְמָּעוֹן וּמַעֲשֵהוּ בַכַרְמֶל, וְהָּאִישׁ גָּדוֹל מְאֹד, וְלוֹ צֹאן שְׁלֹשֶׁת.

אֲשֶׁר לָּזֶה בַמִדְבָּר לְנָּבָּל עַד אֶחָּׁד מֵנָּבָּל, וַיָּמֹת.

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I SAMUEL 25

Prologue

Act One: David and Naval – Request, Rejection and Revenge
   Scene 1 – The Request – David's Wise Speech and his servants
   Scene 2 - Request and Rejection – Naval’s Stupid Speech
   Scene 3 – Report and Revenge – David and his Servants

Act Two – A Wise Woman and an Angry Man
   Scene 1 - Bad News – Avigail and her servant
   Scene 2 - The Request Filled
   Scene 3- The Meeting
      Flashback – The Angry Man’s Speech – David
      The Wise Woman’s Speech – Avigal
      The Angry Man Appeased – David

Act Three – Back at Naval’s House
   Scene 1- Back at the Party – Naval’s Wine
   Scene 2- Sober at Daybreak – Bad News
   Scene 3- Stone Dead – Good News

Act Four – Happy Endings
   Scene 1– Blessing God – David
   Scene 2- Proposing Marriage – Avigail

Epilogue – Win Some, Lose Some

24 Adapted from Everett Fox and Robert Alter combining their two versions and after examining the Hebrew original.
Prologue
2 Now (there was) a man in Ma'on, with his stock in Carmel, and the man was very great (in wealth): he had sheep, three thousand, and a thousand goats, and he was (occupied in) shearing his sheep in Carmel.
3 The man's name was Naval/Vile-One, and his wife's name was Avigayil.
Now the woman had a good mind and lovely looks, but the man was hard and evil in deeds, and he was a Calevite.

Act One: David and Naval – Request, Rejection and Revenge

Scene 1 – The Request – David and his servants
4 And David heard in the wilderness, that Naval was shearing his sheep.
5 So David sent ten lads, and David said to the lads:
“Go-up to Carmel and come and when you come to Naval, ask him in my name about his well-being/peace/shalom.
6 And you are to say thus: “To Life!” [So may it be next year at this time] May you be (in) peace, your house be (in) peace, and all that is yours be (in) peace!
7 So-now, I have heard that they are doing your shearing, Now - the shepherds that you have were with us, we did not humiliate them, and nothing of theirs has gone unaccounted-for all the days they were in Carmel.
8 Ask your lads and they will tell you. So may (my) lads find favor in your eyes, for upon a good day/ yom tov we have come. Please give, whatever your hand finds, to your servants and to your son, to David!”

Scene 2- Request and Rejection – Naval’s Stupid Speech
9 So David's lads came and spoke to Naval according to all these words, in David's name, and then they paused/rested.

10 And Naval answered David's servants, he said:
“Who is David? Who is the son of Yishai? Nowadays (there are) many servants who break away, each one from his lord!
11 So should I take-away my bread, and my water and my butchered meat - that I butchered for my shearers - and give (it) to men who come from I don't know where?”
12 David's lads whirled around and (set out) on to their way.

25 Adapted from Everett Fox and Robert Alter combining their two versions and after examining the Hebrew original.
Scene 3 – Report and Revenge – David and his Servants
They returned, they came and they told him all of these things/words.
13 Then David said to his men: “Every man, gird his sword!”
Every man girded his sword, and also David girded his sword.
Then they went-up after David, about four hundred men,
while two hundred stayed with the gear.

Act Two – A Wise Woman and an Angry Man
Scene 1- Bad News – Avigail and her servant
14 Now Avigayil the wife of Naval was told (by) one lad
from among the serving-lads, saying:
“Here, David sent messengers from the wilderness to bless/greet our lord,
but he pounced on them.
15 Now the men have been very good to us,
we were not humiliated (by them), nothing of ours went missing
for all the days that we went about with them in the field.
16 They were a barrier around us, both by day and by night,
all the days we were with them shepherding the sheep.
17 So-now, know and see what you should do,
for evil is concluded against our lord and against all of his house!
But he is (too much of a) scoundrel/son of worthlessness to speak to!”

Scene 2- The Request Filled
18 Avigayil hurried and took two hundred loaves-of-bread and two skins/navalei of
wine and five sheep made-ready and five seahs of parched-grain and
a hundred raisin-cakes and two hundred pressed figs,
and she put them on the donkeys.
19 Then she said to her lads:
Cross-on ahead of me, here, I'll be coming behind you.
But her husband Naval she did not tell.

Scene 3- The Meeting
20 Now just as she was riding on the donkey,
going down in the cover of the hill;
here David and his men were going down towards her,
and she met them.

Flashback – The Angry Man’s Speech – David
21 Now David had said (to himself):
“For sure it was in vain that I guarded all that belongs
- to that one - in the wilderness,
so that nothing was missing from all that belongs to him.
Now he paid back to me evil in place of good!
22 Thus may God do to “the enemies of” David, and thus may he add,
if I leave from all that belongs to him, by the light of daybreak,
a single pisser against the wall!
The Wise Woman's Speech – Avigail
23 Avigail saw David, and she hurried and got-down from the donkey and threw herself down before David, on her face, and bowed to the ground.
24 She threw herself down at his feet and she said: “On me, my lord, is the blame! Please let your maidservant speak in your ears. Hear the words of your maidservant.
25 Please let my lord pay no mind to this worthless man, to Naval, for as his name is, so is he:
Naval/ Vile-One is his name, and vileness is with him!
But as for me, your maidservant,
I did never saw my lord's lads whom you sent.

26 So-now, my lord, as YHWH lives and as you yourself live, YHWH has prevented you from coming into bloodguilt by saving yourself by your own hand.
So-now, may your enemies be like Naval, And those who seek evil against my lord!
27 And so-now, this bracha/ blessing that your handmaid has brought to my lord, let it be given to the lads who go-about in my lord's footsteps.

28 Please forgive the crime of your maidservant, for YHWH will make for my lord a faithful/ne’eman house, for these are the battles of YHWH that my lord is fighting, and no evil be found in you (all) your days.
29 Should anyone arise to pursue you, to seek your life, may my lord's life be bound up in the bond of life with YHWH your God, but may the life of your enemies be slung-away in the palm of a sling!
30 And when YHWH does for my lord all that he has promised, the good-things for you, and he commissions you as Prince over Israel:
31 then let this not be for you an obstacle or a stumbling-block of the heart for my lord, to shed blood for nothing and to save yourself, my lord. And when YHWH does good to my lord, then remember your maidservant!

The Angry Man Appeased – David
32 David said to Avigail:
“Blessed/baruch is YHWH, the God of Israel, who has sent you this day to meet me!
33 And blessed/baruch is your discernment, and blessed/ baruch are you, who has restrained me this day from coming into blood-guilt and saving myself by my own hand (alone).
34 But as YHWH, God of Israel, lives, (God) has prevented me from doing evil to you. If you had not hurried and come to meet me, there wouldn't have been left to Naval - by the light of daybreak – one single pisser against the wall!”
35 David took from her hand what she had brought him, and to her he said: “Go-up in peace to your house. See, I have listened to your voice, and I have forgiven you [and lifted up] your face!”

Act Three – Back at Naval’s House

Scene 1- Back at the Party – Naval’s Wine
36 So Avigayil went back to Naval, and here he was having a drinking party in his house, like a king's drinking party. Now Naval's heart was in good-humor and he was intoxicated to excess - so she did not tell him a thing, small or great - until the light of daybreak.

Scene 2- Sober at Daybreak – Bad News
37 Then it was at daybreak, when the wine was going out of Naval, that his wife told him those things, and his heart died within him, and he himself became (like a) stone.

Scene 3- Stone Dead – Good News
38 And it was about ten days (later) that YHWH struck Naval, and he died.

Act Four – Happy Endings

Scene 1– Blessing God – David
39 When David heard that Naval was dead, he said: “Blessed/Baruch is YHWH, who fought my cause at having-been-mocked at the hand of Naval. So his [God’s] servant [David] has been spared from (doing) evil! And as for the evildoing of Naval, YHWH has paid it back on his head.”

Scene 2- Proposing Marriage –Avigail
David sent and spoke for Avigayil, to take her as a wife for him.
40 David's servants came to Avigayil, to Carmel, and they spoke to her, saying: “David sent us to you, to take you as a wife for him.”
41 She arose and bowed, brow to the ground, and said: “Here, your maidservant is a handmaid to wash the feet of my lord's servants!”

42 Avigayil hurried and arose, mounting the donkey, with five of her girls who went in her footsteps, and she went after David's messengers, and she became his wife.

Epilogue – Win Some, Lose Some
43 Now Ahino'am (too) David had taken (as a wife), from Yizre'el, and the two of them both became his wives.
44 But Sha'ul had given Mikhal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti son of Layish, who was from Gallim.
I Samuel 25:1-44 - David's Temptation to Violence and his "Therapist" Avigail

Commentary by Walter Brueggemann, Interpretation: First and Second Samuel

Here in I Samuel 25 David lives close to the practice of violence. Indeed, David's potential violence seems to evoke and require the shrewd intervention of Abigail. The outcome of this narrative is reassuring for David, but the route to that outcome shows his dangerous potential and "near the surface" his destructiveness. It is Abigail who redeems David from his destructiveness and redeems the narrative from its powerful, potential ugliness.

Prologue

2           Now (there was) a man in Ma'on, with his stock in Carmel, and the man was very great (in wealth):
he had sheep, three thousand, and a thousand goats,
and he was (occupied in) shearing his sheep in Carmel.
3           The man's name was Naval/Vile-One, and his wife's name was Avigail.
Now the woman had a good mind and lovely looks, but the man was hard and evil in deeds, and he was a Calevite.

25:2-3 Walter Brueggemann: This opening of the narrative skilfully accomplishes two things. First, it characterizes the lead roles played in the drama by Nabal and Abigail. Nabal is first encountered in terms of his possession (v. 2). He is very rich. This way of introducing Nabal is precisely on target, because Nabal's possessions precede his own person. His life is determined by his property. Nabal lives to defend his property, and dies in an orgy, enjoying his property. [Yet not all wealthy men are so materialistic. Barzilai in II Sam 19:33 is described with the same words and yet he is King David's greatest and most loyal supporter even when the king is again on the run. Job in Job 1:3 is also very rich in flocks but he is kind to the poor and man of justice.]

Only after being told of his riches are we told his name (v. 3a). Naval's personality is characterized as "churlish and ill-behaved" (v. 3b). His name says it all. He is a fool (nabal). He is ...stupid. He has come to think of himself as an autonomous man, believing that "there is no God" (cf. Ps. 14:1), no neighbor, and no social reality, He would indeed do as he pleases. He neither fears nor respects any other, nor does he care for any other.

The character of Abigail, his wife, is a complete contrast. She is of "good understanding (sekel) and beautiful" (v. 3). Her beauty may have attracted David. It is, however, her "good understanding," her shrewd common sense, and her cunning way, with words that make a crucial difference in the narrative. The combination of "good understanding and beautiful" makes Abigail an obvious counterpart to David himself. They are two of a kind. The word "beautiful" (yph) is used of David (16:12) as of Abigail. But in both cases it is the "heart" (leb) and the "understanding" (sekel) that matter in the narrative. Nabal and Abigail exemplify respectively what the wisdom tradition means by "foolish" and "wise."
A “Western” Type Scene

Getting to know the players is not only a matter of listing characters but setting them up into teams for the dramatic showdown. Here the genre is like a Western with a showdown – a gunfight – between the black-hatted villain – the rich, boorish, arrogant Nabal and the heroic, fugitive Robin-Hood-like David and his merry band. However the two protagonists never meet, though they do make bellicose speeches. The “middleman” is a woman – Avigail, first Nabal’s and later David’s wife. Like any good Western there is a struggle of male egos and a beautiful and very feminine woman is involved, usually as the prize. The good woman – as opposed to the femme fatal – is expected to be loyal to her husband and represent the values of civilization off on the frontier.

Avigail plays her role admirably but the surprise in this Western is that there is no gunfight, even though the villain does die and the woman is awarded to the hero. Here the woman is the heroine stopping the men from killing one another and preserving the integrity of Robin Hood who almost became himself a villain or at least was in danger of losing his reputation tarnished. Avigail contributes to the larger narrative where Robin Hood will have to turn from outlaw to king and for that he needs to learn the civilized arts of statesmanship – to move from a country hero into a urban leader. Avigail will teach David these skills and these values because this genre is more than a Grade B Western, it is about the coming of civilization to the wild West and the ending of bloodshed, of blood feuds and of the taking of the law into one’s own hands.

Midrash Shem and Name Puns and Associations

The key to many Biblical stories lies in the name which may reveal not only the parental circumstances of the naming, but also the character or the plot destiny. Here the name of Naval is a character trait with which he is tagged even before the reader meets him in action. There is no moral choice nor character growth for Naval. He is a foil for Avigail and for David. Exploring the midrash shem for Naval and Avigail is the way the narrator suggests we enter into the story.

Naval’s name is the richest mine for punning and for characterization. Avigail uses his name to condemn Naval by saying his name is his essence – “ki kishmo ken hu, Naval shemo v naval imo” (I Sam 25:25). Yet paradoxically this insult by his wife is what saves his life, for David has no reason to take offence at such a low-class person who cannot help but be a boor. It is beneath David to respond to such low trash. Naval is also contrasted with David because he is ish kashel = a hard, harsh man, while David sees himself as soft, rach opposed to Yoav who is kashel and ready to spill blood easily (II Sam:3:39).

Exercise with the Concordance: Divide up the students to explore not only the etymology of Naval but its semantic associations by looking up the following verses:
- Isaiah 32:5; II Sam. 3:33; Deut. 32:6; I Sam. 25:8; Exodus 18:18; Leviticus 22:8; Psalms 14:1: Gen. 34:7 where the origin of many of the definitions found above can be found.

The etymology of Naval’s name and its role in the plot as well as its more distinct associations are explained by various commentators.
- niveli yayin – vessels of wine (I Sam. 25:8,37) which he refuses to give to David and which he consumes until drunk at a party “like the drinking party of king” even though he has just insulted a real king-to-be. Note that Naval lives in Carmel = kerem el = God’s vineyard.
- nevel – musical instrument, perhaps with hollow inner space like lute
- nabol tibol – withering, lacking in strength and stamina - Exodus 18:18
- naval – fool, stupid, especially religiously denying arrogantly that there is a God, that there is anyone above you – am hacham, vlo navon - Deut. 32:6, Psalms 14:1
- naval – characterized by Ramban on Deut. 32:6 as someone who repays good with evil, which is exactly what David accuses Naval of doing
- naval – cheapskate, selfish - Isaiah 32:5 – which fits Naval’s characterization by all his property and his speech to David’s servants in which he uses the possessive “my” over and over again to describe his property and why he would never give it away. Maybe Naval’s heart turned to stone after Avigail told him how much of his property she had given away without his permission to appease David
navala – confusion, disordered as in Genesis 11:7 where God confuses the languages in Babel
nevele – doing outrageous, scandalous things that may not be done in Israel, hence worthy of being cast out - Gen. 34:7
nibil peh = vulgar language that pollutes one’s mouth
nevele – dead carcass literally, something thrown out and discarded, a sign of lack of honor for the body to be left in the field - II Sam. 3:33, Leviticus 22:8 (Akkadian for a stone cast out)
nevele – “dead meat” to use American slang for one who is about to fall, a dead carcass which is how he ends up
Naval is called hakalbi from the Judaite tribe of Kalev the spy and conqueror of Hevron but he acts like a dog = kelev. Rashi understands “mashtin bakeer” = pissing on the wall as a reference to dogs, meaning not even a dog will be left alive in Naval’s camp.
Naval = lavan spelled backwards (Yalkut Shimoni); (ben belial =mixing of the letters in Nabal)

Avigail’s name may mean father of joy = gil or father of redemption = ga’al.
The first suggests her ultimate joy in marrying David but more appropriate literally is the second suggesting her role in redeeming David and in predicting his redemption by God. Proverbs 3:4 is quoted in Birkat HaMazon in praising “one whose sekhel tov is recognized by God and human beings.”

Uriel Simon raises an interesting question: How can anyone bear the name Naval – fool, scoundrel, miser etc? What parent would name their child that name? He offers three responses:

1- This is a literary name because this is a parable, not a realistic historical chronicle. This is a didactic wisdom tale written into a historical-novel style. Hence the unusual identification of the characters as good and as bad from the beginning.

2- Radak quotes his father as saying: “Naval was not his real name given him by his father but his derogative nickname given him by the people who saw his evil traits.”

3- Naval has an honorable meaning –“generous noble” (based on the Arabic cognate Nabula). However his detractors punned on its negative associations. Thus Esav interprets Jacob’s name not as “heel” but as “cheat” after Jacob steals his blessing – “Truly he was named Yaacov (trickster), for he tricked me twice - achi kara shemo Yaacov, vayakveini paamaim” (Gen. 27: 36). (Recall the puns made on the names of hated political leaders).

So Avigail reinterprets his name ironically from “generous noble” to selfish miser (in ways similar to Isaiah 32:5 – “You shall not call a naval “nadiv” = generous, and you shall not call a miser a spendthrift”). She also identifies it with scoundrel (as in the nevele done to Dinah and Tamar when raped). The narrator may also be joining in this ironic punning in identifying Naval’s family lineage to Calvi as if it is like a “dog.” The Septuagint translates Calevi as “dog-like.”
Act One: David and Naval – Request, Rejection and Revenge
Scene 1 – The Request – David and his servants

4 And David heard in the wilderness, that Naval was shearing his sheep.
5 So David sent ten lads, and David said to the lads:
   “Go-up to Carmel and come and when you come to Naval,
ask him in my name about his well-being/peace/shalom.
6 And you are to say thus: “To Life!” [So may it be next year at this time]
May you be (in) peace, your house be (in) peace, and all that is yours be (in) peace!
7 So-now, I have heard that they are doing your shearing,
Now - the shepherds that you have were with us,
we did not humiliate them, and nothing of theirs has gone unaccounted-for all the days they were in Carmel.
8 Ask your lads and they will tell you.
So may (my) lads find favor in your eyes,
for upon a good day/ yom tov we have come.
Please give, whatever you have at hand, to your servant and to your son, to David!

25:5-8. Walter Brueggemann: David's initial action begins the story by creating a dangerous crisis with Nabal. The provocation of Nabal seems almost deliberate on David's part. David's initial instruction to his men is an act of masterful intimidation (vv. 5-8). David sends word to Nabal during the festival at the time of sheep-shearing. David approaches Nabal when his wealth is especially available, visible, and hence vulnerable. David's message begins with conventional words of greeting: "Peace ... peace ... peace.". David's message, however, is not of peace. He sends a message of intimidation and confiscation. The repeated words of peace function ironically to inform Nabal that his peace may be in jeopardy. The greeting is in fact a warning. David reminds Nabal that, thus far, David has done no harm to Nabal's flocks (v. 7). The very reminder is an implicit threat that he might do harm now. David wants from Nabal "whatever you have at hand" (v. 8). Since Nabal has much goods "at hand," David implicitly asks for an ample amount. David appears to be making a subtle but unmistakable request for protection money. We have been told in I Sam. 22:2 that David's company consisted of malcontents. Now it is clear that David and his unsettled, greedy malcontents are in fact a threat to those who benefit from, value, and maintain a settled pastoral economy.

[Is David just a racketeer? How we evaluate David’s request depends on what was expected of “great” men on Yom Tov, on a festive harvest celebration:

First, as in the case of Avshalom’s sheepshearing festival (II Sam.13:23) one expects to invite lots of guests and to drink to one’s heart’s satisfaction. All King David’s children were invited and Amnon got good and drunk – tov lev (II Sam. 13:28). This literary echo to Avshalom’s party is ominous since Avshalom then killed Amnon his brother and David will soon be tempted to wipe out Naval’s household.

Second, this is harvest festival where the rich are expected according to the Torah to share with the poor and landless migrants – gerim. Deuteronomy 16: 13-15 states:
You shall make a Festival of Booths seven days, when you gather from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice on your festival - you and your son and your daughter and your servant and your maid and the Levite and the alien and the orphan and the widow who are within your gates. Seven days you shall celebrate for YHWH, your God, in the place that YHWH will choose, because YHWH, your God, will bless you in all your produce and all your hands’ work, and you shall just be happy.] Third, do we understand his triple reference to shalom as an ironic implied threat?
Curiously 1 Chronicles 12:17-19 tells of Benjamites from Saul's tribe who come to join David's fugitive band. Initially David suspects their motives. But their leader convinces David of his sincerity with his own threefold repetition of shalom: "We are yours, David, on your side, son of Yishai. At shalom, at shalom with you, and at shalom with those who support you, for God supports you." That triple shalom is the test of sincerity! "David accepted them and put them at the head of his band." But not Naval who does not trust or value David's offer of peace, of alliance.

Scene 2- Request and Rejection – Naval’s Stupid Speech

9 So David's lads came and spoke to Naval according to all these words, in David's name, and then they paused/rested.

10 And Naval answered David's servants, he said: "Who is David? Who is the son of Yishai? Nowadays (there are) many servants who break away, each one from his lord! So should I take away my bread, and my water and my butchered meat - that I butchered for my shearers - and give (it) to men who come from I don't know where?" 11 David's lads whirled around and (set out) on to their way.

25:9-13. Walter Brueggemann: Nabal no doubt thought David's men were troublemakers, and Nabal will not deal with terrorists. David's men sent the message and "they waited" (v. 9). Nabal responds in indignation (vv. 10-11). Indeed, Nabal responds as any propertyed person might who resents the loss of property to those who are not entitled to it. Who does David think he is? Nabal's rhetorical question does not mean he does not know who David is. He might or he might not. He surely knows David's kind. In Nabal's eyes, David is a nobody. Nabal is engaged in big business. He does not deal with beggars, marauders, gypsies, or tramps. He refuses to pay protection money, either believing the threat is not real or believing he can handle the threat on his own.

David's men are a motley crew: "every person who was hard-pressed, everyone with a creditor [who in those days would demand enslavement of the debtor or his children] and everyone who was embittered" (I Sam.22:2). Yes these are the men Naval calls runaway slaves, just as David is a rebellious subject of Saul since slave and subject are the same word. But why should we take the side of the exploitative class society of Saul's regime? Why are these desperate men a Mafia? Why does their lack of aristocratic genealogy or class possessions disqualify them to be invited to the table to celebrate when the great men have so much? Haven't the Jews in Egypt and throughout history been an underclass? We love David because he is the underdog, the little guy, the commoner and the last child in his big but not well-born family? They are not shown as committing any violence to other Israelites.
On the other hand, Naval characterizes and caricatures himself by his selfishness. He uses first person possessive six times in I Sam 25:11 to describe in detail each of his rich menu of items that he would never think of offering to the ten hungry and polite lads before him! The Septuagint changes his remark about “my water” to “my wine” which he will not share. That connects to his name which means both wine flask and stingy one. It foreshadows his drinking party where he will drink, while David almost kills him.

What is wrong with Naval's Refusal to Share with David?

Naval's behavior is first an act of economic-moral insensitivity; a violation of the rules of hospitality to the fugitive and needy, a sign of unnecessary selfishness when he has so much for himself. It is a travesty of the ethos of Yom Tov when one celebrates God's gift of prosperity by sharing it with God's people – the needy.

But it is also an act of political rebellion. The phrases “Who is David? Who is the son of Yishai?” (I Sam 25:10) echo the later words of rebellion of Sheva ben Bichri against King David (II Sam. 20:1) and Yerovam against David’s grandson Rehavam (I Kings 12:16).

At the same time Naval is making a rational political decision to identify with King Saul who is determined to get David even sending 3,000 soldiers to catch him in Ein Gedi. He is siding with the tribal brothers from Keilah and Zif who spy on David and try to turn him in as a rebel to King Saul (I Sam. 23:10-12, 19-24;26:1-2). Naval is aware of the danger as well as the benefit to supporting David even indirectly with material support like bread as did the priests at Nov who were wiped out by Saul for giving David bread. Yet Naval is no reluctant supporter of Saul out of fear but an enthusiastic and arrogant one who seeks to brand David as the rebel, not himself – “Nowadays (there are) many servants who break away, each one from his lord!” (I Sam 25:11). Maybe Naval thought that Saul would protect him and maybe he had heard of David’s backing down from killing Saul in the cave at Ein Gedi and he misinterpreted it as a sign of weakness in David. In any case the political significance of the aid, the refusal to give aid and the lack of a strong response by David is as important as the lack of generosity of the Naval whose name also means the miser.

Scene 3 – Report and Revenge – David and his Servants

They returned, they came and they told him all of these things/words.

13 Then David said to his men: “Every man, gird his sword!”

Every man girded his sword, and also David girded his sword. Then they went-up after David, about four hundred men, while two hundred stayed with the gear.

Walter Brueggemann: David's response to this rebuff is quick and harsh (v. 13). We learn that David has an enormous band, six hundred men, and he dispatches four hundred against Nabal. Indeed, such a subtle threat as was initially delivered has no credibility unless there is enforcement. David is prepared to act forcibly and, if necessary, violently. If the issue is left between Nabal and David, there will be blood - surely Nabal's. David does not flinch from the prospect of shedding blood. The narrator, however, holds that matter in abeyance.

War and Peace. David's first speech repeated "peace" three times in a row and now three times the text describes David's order "to belt on a sword."

- I Sam. 25:5 -6 and 35 - 4 times x shalom which Naval rejects and leads to David's decision to go to war, but Avigail returns David to his peaceful intent. Perhaps the shalom 3x is ironic as in II Sam. 11:7 where David asks about Uriah's and the army's shalom 3x when he does not give a damn and he ultimately sends him off to his death and to a battle which goes badly, not well.
- I Sam. 25:13 – David and his men belt up with their swords 3 x - vayachgor harbo - the time for peace and for talk is over.
- In the happy ending of this encounter David will send Avigail back to her home in “peace” (I Sam. 25: 35)
Act Two – A Wise Woman and an Angry Man
Scene 1- Bad News – Avigail and her servant

14 Now Avigayil the wife of Naval was told (by) one lad from among the serving-lads, saying:
   “Here, David sent messengers from the wilderness to bless/greet our lord, but he pounced on them.
15 Now the men have been very good to us, we were not humiliated (by them), nothing of ours went missing for all the days that we went about with them in the field.
16 They were a barrier around us, both by day and by night, all the days we were with them shepherding the sheep.
17 So-now, know and see what you should do, for evil is concluded against our lord and against all of his house! But he is (too much of a) scoundrel/son of worthlessness to speak to!”

25:14-17. Walter Brueggemann: Happily, the simple game of intimidation between Nabal and David is interrupted by a servant who asks Abigail to intervene. The speech of the servant is remarkably one-sided, asserting that David is good and Nabal is bad. In verse 15 the servant’s report reiterates exactly David’s points from verse 7: There was “no harm” and “nothing was missed.” Indeed, David’s men were “very good to us” (v. 15). The narrator has deliberately repeated David’s words from the mouth of Nabal’s own servant. The speaker who reports to Abigail is one of Nabal’s own people, but his comments are sympathetic to David. By this device, the narrator adds intentionally to the impression that David is in the right and that David’s perspective is legitimate. The narrator stacks the cards against Nabal in David’s favor. The verdict that David is “very good to us” contrasts nicely with the judgment that Nabal is’ good for nothing” (v. 17). These are remarkable words for the servant to speak to the wife of Nabal. Presumably the words were not a new insight to her.

[David’s servants had suggested Naval consult with his own shepherds to corroborate their version of the story but he was too arrogant to do so. The servant won’t even share his words of wisdom/warning with Naval because he expects him to “pounce” on him as he did on David’s men. The term “pounce = va’yat” is unique and it may refer to the way a vulture pounces on meat and chases away all the other birds. Both the vulture and the freshly slaughtered meat have ominous implications since David is ready with his swords to slaughter every male in Naval’s household. Naval had trumpeted his concern for saving his freshly slaughtered meat for his own servants who did the sheepshearing, but his servants seem none too enamored of their master. They preferred the company of the David’s men far from the main house.]
Scene 2- The Request Filled

18 Avigayil hurried and took two hundred loaves-of-bread and two skins/navalei of wine and five sheep made-ready and five seahs of parched-grain and a hundred raisin-cakes and two hundred pressed-figs, and she put them on the donkeys.
19 Then she said to her lads: “Cross-on ahead of me, here, I'll be coming behind you.” But her husband Naval she did not tell.

Scene 3- The Meeting

20 Now just as she was riding on the donkey, going down in the cover of the hill; here David and his men were going down towards her, and she met them.

25: 18-20 Walter Brueggemann: Abigail hurries to intervene in the middle of the night! The list of her "gifts" to David (protection money?) is extensive and extravagant (v. 18). [Three gifts – bread, wine and sheep were what David had asked for in the first place as part of the sheep shearing celebration and Naval had pointedly refused. But the dates, parched grain, and raisins are more high energy, more expensive, more long lasting and easily stored. Avigail has more than made up in quality for what had been denied].

Abigail is a realist and stands on no principle but acts shrewdly to save her husband and her wealth. [But she can only save Naval’s life and wealth by taking his wealth without his knowledge because no one can talk to him. Because his wealth blinds him]

Abigail hurries to meet David; she pointedly does "not tell her husband Nabal of her meeting with David” (v. 19). [We will see that one cannot talk sense to Nabal, nor did Yonatan succeeded in talking sense to Saul who wanted to kill David nor did Saul’s men succeed in talking sense to him when he killed the priests of Nov. But Avigail will prove that one cannot talk sense to David. She has good sense and she helps David not only listen but admit his error and praise her for her timely rational intervention.]

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<th>Avigail and Jacob – A Sulcha: From Vengeance to Forgiveness:</th>
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Preparation Avgail’s gift for David is the first of a series of linguistic and plot parallels between Genesis 32-33 and I Sam. 25. Both figures are bearing “blessings” = gifts to an insulted angry war lord about to massacre their whole household. Neither Avigail nor Jacob are fighters, but rather people of words, of diplomacy. The phrase “cross over = avru” and I will be coming “after” = achareichem connect the two figures.

- Both Jacob and Avigail face a determined enemy with 400 soldiers (Gen. 32:6, I Sam 25:13).
- Both enemies are seeking vengeance for an insult and the denial of blessing they think they had coming.
- Both Jacob and Avigail prepare in advance a grand gift of conciliation elaborately described as extensive and called by each a bracha = gifts (Gen. 32:13-15 and Gen. 33:11 after Gen.27; I Sam 25:6,14).
- Both accept responsibility for the sins of the past and ask for forgiveness (Gen.32:21; I Sam 25:24,28)
- Both bow profusely and use the submissive language of servants to make up for the way Jacob and Naval lorded over Esav and David in the past (Jacob took the blessing which included the blessing that one’s brothers would bow to the one with the blessing).
- Both ask for forgiveness with the phrase “sa na” (Gen.32:20; I Sam 25:28).
- Both fear for all their children (Gen.32:11; I Sam 25:22).
- Both potential enemies finally accept the peace offering after a long plea (Gen.33:11; I Sam 25:35).

However the relationships are wholly different.

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Jacob is himself the brother who betrayed Esav. His plea for forgiveness is accepted. Yet the brothers do not get back together after this reconciliation but rather they go their separate ways, their destinies diverge.

Avigail, by contrast, accepts responsibility for her husband but in fact she is innocent and David has nothing against her. Here the reconciliation leads to marriage as their destinies merge.

Jacob protected his wives and children from the danger Jacob had created, while Avigail the wife protected her husband and children who had no notion of the danger the foolish husband had aroused.

The analogy portrays David who is described as ruddy (admon) as a potential Esav, Edom, who may become a spiller of blood. That possibility is real even though David is a descendant of Jacob and a king of Israel. Avigail helps him control his own bloodthirsty tendencies.

Flashback – The Angry Man’s Speech – David
21 Now David had said (to himself):
“For sure it was in vain that I guarded all that belongs
- to that one - in the wilderness,
so that nothing was missing from all that belongs to him.
Now he paid me back evil in place of good!”
22 Thus may God do to “the enemies of” David, and thus may he add,
if I leave from all that belongs to him, by the light of daybreak,
a single pisser against the wall!

Walter Brueggemann: David’s phrase contrasts precisely with Saul’s verdict on David in 24:17. The use of both formulas so close together suggests that in both narratives the intent is to suggest that David peculiarly returns good for evil in contrast to those around him, who do not.

David is, to be sure, quite selective about when to return good for evil. In this case he is prepared promptly to kill Nabal and all his male servants (v. 22). The term rendered “male” in the Hebrew has the crude, explicit reference, “those who piss against the wall.” Thus the male members of Nabal’s company are categorized by their method of urination. The phrase is regularly used for those who are despised.

This flashback lets us know what Avigail is up against:

1- David is giving no more benefit of the doubt. Naval has violated the basic norm of male relationships – tit for tat, reciprocity. The issue is not racketeering, not maintaining his reputation as a tough guy, and not getting the supplies he needs. The issue is justice as reciprocity.

2- David has taken a public oath before God and his men to dispatch all the men in Naval’s household before this night is over. Time is running out. “Pissers against the wall” sounds like harsh frontier military talk, but in fact Uriel Simon points out that it is typical of prophetic language when prophesying the displacement of a dynasty by wiping out all the male descendants – all Avigail’s children (I Kings 14:10; I Kings 21:21; II Kings 9:8; I Kings 14:10).

3- David sees this as a male-male confrontation and refers to his enemies with derision punning on bakeer = against the wall and boker = morning. His masculinity and theirs is on the line. What can a woman do to stop this massacre? What weapons does she have?)
The Wise Woman’s Speech – Avigail

23 Avigail saw David, and she hurried and got-down from the donkey and threw herself down before David, on her face, and bowed to the ground.

24 She threw herself down at his feet and she said:

"On me, my lord, is the blame!
Please let your maidservant speak in your ears.
Hear the words of your maidservant.

25 Please let my lord pay no mind to this worthless man, to Naval, for as his name is, so is he:
Naval/ Vile-One is his name, and vileness is with him!
But as for me, your maidservant,
I never saw my lord's lads whom you sent.

26 So-now, my lord, as YHWH lives and as you yourself live, YHWH who has prevented you from coming into bloodguilt by saving yourself by your own hand.

So-now, may your enemies be like Naval,
And those who seek evil against my lord!

27 And so-now, this bracha/ blessing that your handmaid has brought to my lord, let it be given to the lads who go-about in my lord's footsteps.

28 Please forgive the crime of your maidservant, for YHWH will make for my lord a faithful/ne’eman house, for these are the battles of YHWH that my lord is fighting, and may no evil be found in you (all) your days.

29 Should anyone arise to pursue you, to seek your life, may my lord's life be bound up in the bond of life with YHWH your God, but may the life of your enemies be slung-away in the palm of a sling!

30 And when YHWH does for my lord all that he has promised, the good-things for you, and he commissions you as Prince over Israel:

31 then let this not be for you an obstacle or a stumbling-block of the heart for my lord, to shed blood for nothing and to save yourself, my lord. And when YHWH does good to my lord, then remember your maidservant!

25:22-31. Walter Brueggemann: Abigail engages in a long, winsome speech in which she shows her extraordinary boldness, common sense, and capacity for effective language. Her speech reverses the flow of the narrative.

[But before the fine points of her rhetoric she must STOP David in his tracks with a surprising angle of attack. First she throws herself down at his feet – twice – grabbing his feet (II Kings 4:27; Esther 8:3). David had not seen her coming in the dark because she was in the covered side of the mountain. Suddenly he is physically attacked, his progress stopped in its tracks. Initially David could have taken her for an enemy as Jacob in struggling with the angel all night. She was taking a chance but the momentum is now on her side.]
Then Avigail has no time to wait to see how David will respond. She just opens up with a long talk which she may be afraid to halt lest he dismiss her and restart his momentum toward her family. Its opener is very unusual – “On me, my lord, is the blame! – bi ani adoni heavon. Like Judah (Gen. 44:18) before the viceroy Joseph when Benjamin has just been arrested, she begins with bi adoni which is the language of supplication for mercy. However she inserts "I" and she claims all the guilt rather than blaming it on her husband or making excuses for him. David has been musing about Naval's injustice – evil for good – and she agrees that David was not only insulted but treated unjustly and she takes all the guilt upon her. Now David will have to ask himself whether killing this supplicating woman who claims to be responsible will assuage his male hormones. He cannot get around her so easily as long as she grabs his attention and his feet.

Naomi Harris Rosenblatt, Abigail's Gift of Language, After the Apple, pp. 157-161

Abigail's plea to David is the Hebrew Bible's longest single quotation attributed to a woman. A masterpiece of meticulously crafted phrases, her argument relies on the art of flattery, one of the oldest tools of civilized discourse. Her speech offers David time to reconsider his wish for revenge horn of a flash of fury. He also may fear that ignoring Naval's refusal to feed his men would be viewed as cowardly. With subtlety tact and confidence she uses every tool in her arsenal: persuasion political advice, religious ethics, and flattery.

Abigail takes her life and the lives of those in her household in her hands. She is a defenseless woman whose world is on the verge of collapse, she challenges a warlord to refrain from violence. She threads her way between two stubborn, hardheaded men locking horns - her husband and David. Her main tool for survival is the gift of language that God first gave to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and she wields it brilliantly as she pleads, flatters, reasons, and persuades.

Her flattery of David, while a successful tactic of self-preservation, also averts actions that would be both morally objectionable and impolitic for David. What alternatives are available to Abigail other than this high-risk course? Unlike contemporary women, she cannot separate herself from her husband or move to another town. If she does not deal directly with David, her husband will perish with his men, leaving her in a perilous position and, as her husband's wife and thus a leader in society, morally complicit in the death of their followers. She defuses the conflict with feminine tact and demonstrates that brute masculine force is not the only solution to hostile confrontation between individuals or groups. ... By the end of his encounter with Abigail, David has come one step closer to behaving like a true and worthy king. He controls his murderous impulses and thereby- passes a test of leadership.

She begins with ostensive obeisance and properly shapes the relation as one between "my lord" (14 times) and "your handmaid" (6 times). The contrast to Naval's surly talk is unmistakable. Abigail first disposes of Naval as a factor in the negotiations. He is a fool and is not to be taken seriously. Notice again, in verse 25, it is "my lord" and "your handmaid."... Her presence has already kept David from killing. Her presence has in fact effectively eliminated Naval. He has ceased to exist as a serious character in the narrative.

In verse 28 we arrive at one of the pivotal statements in the entire narrative of David's rise. We have seen how David's coming rule is acknowledged by character after character, until finally in 24:20 even Saul has conceded. Now, in 25:28, even the acknowledgment of Saul is topped by this shrewd and discerning woman, who seems to understand everything. Her acknowledgment of David's future goes beyond that of Saul in using the formula "sure house / bayit neeman," which parallels the dynastic formula of II Samuel 7:16. Here the royal formula is almost like an official declaration in the mouth of this wise one. Moreover, either in shrewdness or in theological extravagance, Abigail confirms that David is "fighting the battle of YHWH" and will do no evil.

This remarkable claim seems remote from the actual David of this chapter, who is engaged in racketeering. But Abigail, as the narrator renders her, is playing for high stakes: namely, her own well-being and future. High stakes call for the playing of high cards.

The remainder of Abigail's speech reads almost like a benediction for this future king (vv. 29-31). The life of "my lord" will be preserved in the care of YHWH, whereas the lives of his enemies will be rejected (v. 29).
"My lord" will have no cause for regret, because he has not taken vengeance. David's resolve in verse 22 was to take harsh vengeance on Nabal. Abigail of course knows of David's resolve against Nabal and seeks to overcome that ominous threat. The narrator has Abigail know much more than the specifics of this narrative. She also knows, according to the narrative, that David is destined for the throne in Israel.

Abigail's artful response must deal at the same time with the immediate matter of Nabal and the long-term interest of the throne. **Abigail does not want David's immediate temptation to vengeance to intrude on David's legitimacy for the throne.** Abigail's promise to David, which dares to echo the promise of YHWH, is that the throne will surely come, the divine promise will be kept (vv. 28-30). The future is so certain for David that vengeance on Nabal is rendered both unnecessary and unwise. By indirection, **Abigail asserts that a great king like David does not need to bear the mark of this little vengeance.**

Abigail concludes, "**Remember your handmaid**" (v. 31). How remember?

- Remember me when you come to your throne, when you come to your paradise (cf. Luke 23:42-43).
- Remember me in gratitude.
- Remember me as the one who talked sense to you.
- Remember me as the one who protected your coming regime from the blood of Nabal.
- Remember me for my own well-being, for unless you remember me, I am left only with this hopeless Nabal.

### The Wise Woman of the Carmel – Avigail

Just as Naval proved in his first words and actions that he was well-named Naval, so Avigail has now proven in her first actions and words that she is well described as *tovat sekhel*. (See below in the Literary Toolbox for a partial list of the rhetorical devices Avigail uses it). She represents the **Wisdom Literature** of the **Book of Proverbs** which is a part of the educational literature of the Ancient Near East for training up-and-coming young aristocrats to rule their empires with sagacity, with self-restraint avoiding not only the youthful passions of sex, impatience and anger, but also the temptations of the courtly life – excess (like Naval's parties) and arrogance (Naval's loudmouth). The arts of rhetoric are essential for the development of rationality and the solution of problems by persuasion, rather than brute force. This will lead to economic success brought through negotiations as well as the longevity of rule brought through slow but sure rational decision-making after consultation with one's wise advisors. This ethic of practical this-worldly success has a moral significance but it is different than the moral pathos of a prophet like Nathan.

The ending of the Book of Proverbs is the ode to Eishet Hayil, the woman of valor, whose valor is not military but economic and moral. This is the crown which Avigail wears in our story and therefore she deserves to sit at the right side of David turned into the king - and advise him in all areas – political as well as domestic. **The ideal woman and wife is a political advisor and voice of practical reason as well as moral self-restraint and patience.** She is uniquely endowed with a phrase never used elsewhere in the Tanakh – *tovat sekhel* (see “sekhel tov” in Psalms 111:10; Proverbs 3:3,13:15; II Chronicles 30:22).

What are the lessons (repeated here didactically *ad naseum*)?

1. **do not take the law into your own hands but trust God** (I Sam 25: 26,31,33)
2. **do not take vengeance and spill blood unnecessarily, even if the villain deserves to die**
3. **do not act spontaneously in anger on the basis of hurt male pride**
4. **reconsider and reverse bad decisions even in the middle of their execution**
5. **beware of hot-blooded statements, impetuous oaths to God and bellicose public declarations that tie one’s hands, for public policy requires greater nuance and flexibility**
6. **seek and accept advice even from women and subordinates** (Note that Avigail took the advice her servant)
Tzror HaHaim – An Evocative Simile

In this speech one of the finest similes invented is Avigail’s blessing for David that his life will be protected as in “tzror hahaim” like coins or fruits bundled together and the lives of his enemies will be dispatched “like stones in the pocket of slingshot.” The slingshot is also an allusion to David felling Goliath (I Sam. 17:49) another big man like Naval and Saul. Later Naval’s heart will “turn to stone” perhaps related to that slingshot of enemy lives to be dispatched. (I Sam. 25:37). Based on an archeological find in Nuzi of a pottery container with little stones and a list of heads of sheep, some commentators have suggested that this is tzror = a protective counting device where each stone stands for a sheep. When sheep is killed, then his stone is thrown away. Metaphorically God has a tzror or pocket pouch or chain of protected lives where David’s life is guarded as David had guarded the sheep of Naval. Later that phrase is used in every Jewish cemetery and the prayers for the dead with the motto – T’hi Nafsho Tzrura Btzror HaHaim = “May his soul be protected in the Tzror of life” = T.N.Tz.B.H. Now it refers to life after death but here it refers to keeping one alive in this world.

The Angry Man Appeased – David

32 David said to Avigayil:
“Blessed/baruch is YHWH, the God of Israel, who has sent you this day to meet me!
33 And blessed/baruch is your discernment, and blessed/ baruch are you, who has restrained me this day from coming into blood-guilt and saving myself by my own hand (alone).
34 But as YHWH, God of Israel, lives, (God) has prevented me from doing evil to you. If you had not hurried and come to meet me, there wouldn’t have been left to Naval - by the light of daybreak - one single pisser against the wall!”

35 David took from her hand what she had brought him, and to her he said: “Go-up in peace to your house. See, I have listened to your voice, and I have forgiven you [and lifted up] your face!”

25:32-35. Walter Brueggemann: David’s speech in response is a worthy match for Abigail’s eloquence. It is as though through Abigail’s words of warning, David recognizes for the first time how his vengefulness would have put his own future at risk. Notice the parallel situation and the different resolution with Uriah and Bathsheba (II Sam. 11-12). In that later narrative there is no Abigail to intervene. David acts by what is “right in his own eyes” (11:25) and brings an abiding sword into his house (12:10). But not here. Abigail has made the difference.

The startling discovery - indeed, startling self-discovery - causes David to begin his response to Abigail with a threefold formula of blessing:
Blessed be YHWH ... who sent you,
Blessed be your discretion,
Blessed be you (vv. 32-33).

The blessings begin with YHWH. YHWH has dispatched Abigail, who has saved David from the guilt of murder. David expresses what it would have been like without these blessings (v. 34). Had it not been for Abigail, David would have “done in” both Nabal and himself. David is persuaded by Abigail and accepts her gifts (v. 35; cf. v. 18). David has taken Abigail seriously and accepted her entreaty. David is a free man, free of vengeance- thanks to Abigail. She has saved his life and his future.
Act Three – Back at Naval’s House
Scene 1- Back at the Party – Naval’s Wine
36  So Avigayil went back to Naval, and here he was having a drinking party in his house, like a king’s drinking party. Now Naval’s heart was in good-humor and he was intoxicated to excess - so she did not tell him a thing, small or great - until the light of daybreak.

Scene 2- Sober at Daybreak – Bad News
37  Then it was at daybreak, when the wine was going out of Naval, that his wife told him those things, and his heart died within him, and he himself became (like a) stone.

Scene 3- Stone Dead – Good News
38  And it was about ten days (later) that YHWH struck Naval, and he died.

25:36-38. Walter Brueggemann: Finally the narrator returns to Nabal. His last appearance was his speech of reckless defiance (vv. 10-11). Now he is engaged in a reckless, self-indulgent feast, "very drunk" (v. 36). Abigail had told him nothing before her meeting with David (v. 19). She still does not tell him in the midst of his party (v. 36). Only when he is sobered up does she tell him. When he heard his wife's words "his heart died"; he became like a stone, and spent ten days dying (v. 37).

- Was it a stroke that caused him to linger ten days?
- Did he die because his wife had deceived him?
- Because David had intimidated him?
- Because he had lost control of his life?
- [Because Avigail had given away so many of his precious possessions?]

These may be possible explanations, but the narrator is quite explicit about the cause of death. YHWH smote him (v. 38). What David refrained from doing, YHWH did. YHWH took vengeance, which David did not, …for Naval (unwittingly) had affronted the coming king. And he paid.

Stone Dead – Literary Associations

Uriel Simon explains that “his heart died within him, and he himself became (like a) stone” means, literally and figuratively, that Naval was paralyzed. The same phrase is used in the splitting of the Red Sea when the walls of the sea stood firm like stone before God’s powerful arm (Exodus 15:16). What is the significance of this image?

1- It could mean stone-like emotionally. Naval was sacred too death, frozen in fright.
2- Naval is described at the inception of the narrative as a “hard man = ish kashe” (I Sam. 25: 3), so it is poetic justice that this anticipatory character trait is actualized when he becomes literally hard in the course of events. His hardness means he was inflexible and could not be reasoned with and softened in his stance. Hence he replied to David’s messengers so brutally, so his own servant never bothered to try to talk to him about David’s threat (I Sam. 25:17). Hence his own wife did not bother to tell him things – twice (I Sam. 25:19 and 36). Unlike David who is a “soft man – rakh” (I Sam. 3: 39 when contrasted with Yoav and his brothers who are hard men who cannot be talked out of vengeance).

3- Naval may have been shocked and hence paralyzed by the thought that at that very moment on the morning Avigail was speaking to him after he had sobered up, he would have been dead, had David done what he swore, to kill all the males "before the morning."

4- Naval, the property owner par excellence, could also have been beside himself to hear what a giant gift offering Avigail had given to David without his permission.
5- Now that David has spared his life when he was such an easy target being drunk all night, Naval could have thanked his wife and asked for David’s forgiveness. But Naval’s stone-like rigidity meant he lacked the flexibility to admit his error as had King Saul.

Saul versus Naval: Both Naval and Saul – big men associated with royalty ("like a royal drinking party!") – let their guard down – Saul by sleeping and Naval by being drunk, so that David could have killed them at night as they slept without any resistance. Yet the next morning they react to this fact differently. When seeing that David could have cut off not only his coat in the cave but his life, King Saul admits to David:

“You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me with good, while I repaid you with evil. God had handed me over to your hands – but you did not kill me. Does a man ever catch his enemy and send him on his good way? May God pay you good for today as you did for me. Now I know you will certainly come to rule, in your hand will the kingdom of Israel rise. So swear to me that you will not wipe out my seed after me and you will not destroy my name from my father’s house.” (I Sam. 24:16-22)

Saul, like Judah to Tamar, was flexible enough not only to realize his error but to admit it. He made amends rather than freezing up. He acknowledged almost word for word exactly what Abigail had done to save Naval’s life. Avigail acknowledged David’s right to be repaid good for good as a basic principle of justice. She recognized that he should and would become king after Saul. Thus she managed to save her household and to avoid being wiped out. However Naval was constitutionally incapable of that transformation, therefore his “hardened heart” (kashe) like Pharaoh’s, prevented him from swallowing his pride and surviving. So with poetic justice his paralyzed heart led to his death ten days later. As we might say colloquially today, “he died of shock!” or perhaps of hardened arteries.

Exercise: Ten Days

The rabbis suggested those ten days were like the Ten Days of Teshuvah between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, but clearly Naval did manage to do Teshuvah. One wonders what Naval would have said in his prayers to God or what he would inserted into his confessional Vidui. Write your own version using the model of the Mahsor’s Vidui.
Act Four – Happy Endings
Scene 1– Blessing God – David

39 When David heard that Naval was dead, he said:

“Blessed/Baruch is YHWH, who fought my cause /rav et riv
at having-been-mocked at the hand of Naval.
So his [God’s] servant [David] he has been spared from (doing) evil!
And as for the evildoing of Naval, YHWH has paid it back on his head.”

[David gives credit where credit is due. He blesses Avigail in a three fold blessing like the three fold shalom
sent to Naval initially and the three fold girding of the sword. But here he swears a new oath to cancel and
replace his initial oath about killing off Naval and his household by the following morning (I Sam. 25:22.

David has been saved from a sin mentioned by Gideon – “Lest Israel boast about me that my own hands
saved me” (Judges 7:2; I Sam. 25: 26,31). He has let God defend him. David uses the same phrases as
Psalms 74:22 – “Arise Adonai and fight my battles (riva rivi), recall my shame from naval = fools, vile
people, scoundrels.”]

Walter Brueggemann: Saul and David – Men of Self-Restraints

David has now proven himself worthy of kingship by recapitulating the path of King Saul in response to
his earliest detractors. In I Sam 10:27 when Saul has just been selected by Samuel and God in public lot
casting ceremony, then people brought the new king gifts.

I Sam. 10: 26 – 27
Sha’ul too went to his house at Giv’a;
and there went with him the valiant-ones whose heart God had touched.
But some sons of worthlessness/ bnei belial/ said:
How can this-one deliver us?
And they despised him, they did not bring him a gift. But he was like a silent-one.

[David had demanded gifts from Naval who spoke of him contemptuously for he too was as Avigail says –
ben belial (I Sam. 25:15,17). But David learned as did Saul to ignore such insults as being beneath him as a
statesman chosen by God. Saul was “above” that pettiness and he established his authority through his
deeds not his words, as David would do.]
Scene 2 - Proposing Marriage – Avigail
David sent and spoke for Avigail, to take her as a wife for him.
40 David's servants came to Avigail, to Carmel, and they spoke to her [about marriage], saying:
“David sent us to you, to take you as a wife for him.”
41 She arose and bowed, brow to the ground, and said:
“Here, your maidservant is a handmaid to wash the feet of my lord's servants!”
42 Avigail hurried and arose, mounting the donkey, with five of her girls who went in her footsteps, and she went after David's messengers, and she became his wife.

Epilogue – Win Some, Lose Some
43 Now Ahino'am (too) David had taken (as a wife), from Yizre'el, and the two of them both became his wives.
44 But Sha'ul had given Mikhal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti son of Layish, who was from Gallim.

25:39-44. Walter Brueggemann: David regards the death of Nabal as vindication for his own faith and his own restraint. It causes him to sound a fourth “blessed” to match the first one in verse 32. YHWH is blessed because YHWH has avenged (v. 39). David was not to avenge, and need not, precisely because YHWH will act on his behalf. David is convinced not only of his own innocence (righteousness) but of YHWH's righteousness. In verse 21 Nabal has "returned evil for good." Now, as a resolution of that perfidy, YHWH has "returned evil" on Nabal (v. 39). Things are squared away and David is thankful. The conclusion of the story is almost anticlimactic but not unexpected. David wooed Abigail. And he took her. Samuel had warned that kings would “take” (I Sam. 8:11-20). Later David will more rashly "take" Bathsheba (II Sam. 11:4). Here he takes Abigail, who must be regarded as a willing partner. She is not forcibly seized. Indeed she is, by her speech, an active party in forming the new connection with David. **Abigail is the perfect partner for this headstrong man, knowing how to be shrewdly discerning, politically efficient, and theologically astute.**

[Uriel Simon adds: As we reach our happy ending, the story comes round full circle. Again David’s messengers are sent to Carmel to Naval’s home, but this time they are greeted by Avigail warmly and she immediately agrees to their suggestion that she be married. Again she bows and again she sets off quickly with her servants on donkeys to David’s camp, but this time it is for marriage not to stop him from wiping out her household. Now the dissymmetry of the opening lines where a beautiful wise woman was married to a stupid, vile, bad one is corrected. David is described as “good looking” (I Sam. 16:12) and so is Avigail (I Sam 25:3) so a midrash understood the narrative logic of this resolution when it wrote:

“The Holy One said: Let the good one (female - Avigail) be assigned to the good one (male - David) and let the bad one (Naval) go with his badness” (Yalkut Shimoni).

Sadly, when the next good looking wife comes along – Batsheva (II Sam 11: 2) – she will lack the good sense, the power of rhetoric, the political foresight, and the moral loyalty to save her own husband and the courage to rein in King David from executing his own justice. David will take the law into his own hands - taking his own women illicitly rather than letting God give him wives legally (II Sam 12: 8). David will follow his instincts and a short-term sense of his political interests and the result will be a return of political violence from within his own family. Avigail warned him that spilling innocent blood will be a stumbling block to his kingdom and she was right.
David out of power used self-restraint, David once in power was corrupted by power. There was no one to save him from himself, from bringing bloodguilt into the cycle of violence that ate up his sons. When Batsheva was nothing but a good-looking body without wisdom, nothing but a sexual object, then David treated everyone merely as an instrument for his self-aggrandizement. However when Avigail was both good-looking and wise, then she taught David to relate to women and men with psychological wisdom (seeing how each one is different – whether vile or wise), with long-term political thinking and self-restraint, and with a moral – religious sense of the sacredness of blood, that is of human life. Gender relationships are indicative of wide political and religious messages.

Win Some, Lose Some – Marriage Politics by Noam Zion

I Sam. 25: 43-44

"Now Ahino'am (too) David had taken (as a wife), from Yizre'el, and the two of them both became his wives. But Sha'ul had given Mikhal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti son of Layish, who was from Gallim."

Goodbye romance, hello politics – male politics. For romantics and feminists like myself the body of this chapter offered me much hope. A woman could step out of her domestic role and her coveted beautiful trophy role and teach political, religious, moral wisdom to a young aspiring statesman. Then the woman could be recognized for her worth as partner in life not only in the bed – a wise woman to counsel an ambitious but still idealistic messiah already anointed by God. This was a good marriage where both sides were happy with the relationship.

Then the epilogue joins David’s marriage to Avigail to a previous one with Achinoam. The king-to-be is accumulating a harem which as Solomon will teach us is less about love than about intertribal and international relations. Here the happy ending of the marriage to a remarkable individual has been placed into a political context of transferring wives and transacting political alliances. Similarly American Presidents choose a vice president for an American election, not on the ability to replace the president in time of crisis, but for the electoral appeal from another part of the country that the presidential candidate himself cannot deliver.

David's triumph in provincial Judah near Carmel over one “great man” – Naval who gives parties “like a king” (I Sam. 25:36) can be seen, as Avigail suggested, as a stepping stone to a national victory by eliminating the other enemy, the one who seeks to kill David – King Saul. But here we have a surprise coming that puts a bone in the throat of this euphoric expectation.

A flashback reveals to the reader suddenly the ominous news that David has lost his first wife Michal because King Saul has taken her from David and given her to another man. Michal was a political military prize for David's conquests of the Philistines – 100 foreskins that turned into 200 foreskins, like Indians scalping white soldiers. It established David's masculinity by emasculating the enemy known as the arelim = the uncircumcised. It raised a commoner to a relative of the king but also a potential rival heir threatening Saul’s own sons. It was also a trap set by Saul to get David killed in battle, as Uriah’s being sent to the hardest part of the front was a convenient way for the King David to dispose of him.

David’s triumph over Naval has been punctured by a defeat by another great man – a tall and true king who has stolen his wife. We wonder whether David will respond with self-restraint to Saul’s unspeakable affront as he did to Naval’s lesser one and whether God will kill off Saul as he did Naval as promised by Avigail our prophet (I Sam. 25:26). This flashback piques our interest in seeing the next episode of our narrative. It also shows us that political fortunes are fickle and may have reversals. Women are not only a test of character as in the body of I Sam. 25, but also a thermometer to rising and falling male egos.

David’s political wisdom teaches something different than Avigail’s diplomatic, moral and religious wisdom. A man who would be king cannot allow himself to lose a royal bride. Avner will
come to David when denied access to Saul’s concubine and David will insist on taking back Michal from Paltiel to reestablish his authority over his property, hence his sovereignty, as well as perhaps producing an heir to the joint throne of David and Saul. The emotional pain of the sensitive second husband of Michal, which is portrayed with great pathos by the Tanakh, contrasts negatively with David’s cold calculated claim to the return of his stolen “property” – the woman he paid for with 100 foreskins.

II Sam. 3:13-16

[David concludes a deal with Avner, general of Saul’s son’s army to end the civil war. But first he has one condition to fulfill:] “one thing I will require of you, namely: you are not to see my face unless you first bring Mikhal daughter of Sha’ul, when you come to see my face.

14 So David sent messengers to Ish-Boshet son of Sha’ul, saying: Give over my wife, Mikhal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred Philistine foreskins.

15 Ish-Boshet sent and took her from (her) husband, from Paltiel son of Layish.

16 And her husband went with her, going-along and weeping after her, as far as Bahurim. Avner said to him: Go, turn-back! And he turned-back.”

Most shocking to me is that the Tanakh portrays God acknowledging this form of political succession as legitimate even in his speech through Nathan in II Sam 12:8

“I gave you the house of your lord, and the women of your lord into your bosom, I gave you the House of Israel and Judah and as if (that were) too little, I would have added yet this and that to you.”

Which wives of Saul is God referring to? How can God descend to such a low notion of politics and treat women as political commodities? It seems that God separates between the exchange of women as national politics and the commodization of women in the theft and exploitation of one’s subjects. One is immoral and the other is the way of the political world in which God too is a player.
You be the Judge: Bad-Mouthing David and Avigail? 
Midrash and Contemporary Commentators

David the Mafioso versus David as Robin Hood

Many commentators and readers read David’s overly polite request to share in Naval’s sheep shearing festval as a thinly disguised pseudo-politeness of a protection racketeer. (Recall similar scenes from Godfather movies). These readers seek to unmask David and to puncture his image. They view the narrator as a propagandist of the Davidic dynasty. (See Baruch Halperin and Stephen McKenzie and many other historians of the Biblical era). Their goal is to look “through” the text as a distorted window onto historical reality. They assume a world of dirty power politics - both now and then – and a sophisticated propaganda machine using history writers paid by the court who are fully aware of the political sins they are covering up. Then they adjust for this distortion and read the text in a reverse distortion from the idyllic to the muckraking.

One may make two crucial points to this historical reconstruction approach:

1- While the historical reality of David may have been more like a Mafia don, the literary rhetoric is one of a force for law and order in a dangerous frontier land where brigands would otherwise be committing violent crimes. David has gathered 600 such bitter men who he rules and whom he uses to prevent others from random violence. 
To this day Bedouins typically provide a rough and ready law and order as a private police force in a desert pasture area beyond the control of the central government, in exchange for goods like oil, butter and sheep from the sheep owners in the nearby agricultural areas (Neshot David, Haya Shraga Ben Ayun , p. 90).
In short, the Biblical reader concerned for the literary and religious meaning of the text should take the editor at face value unless the writer shows that he is trying to be tongue-in-cheek.

2- The Bible is not always interested in whitewashing its political and ancestral leaders as the critical historians mentioned above assume. In fact the Tanakh often makes the sins of the ancestors painfully apparent as in the story of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt and in the land of Philistines. David himself is clearly held accountable for the Batsheba affair by God, Nathan and the editor. After all the editors need to explain why David’s later kingdom suffered from rebellions and ultimately why the whole dynasty split and finally while Judah was exiled. Why not assume a Biblical historian quite willing to find fault and to teach his readers to avoid the same kinds of errors.

In any case our students should be aware of both perspectives and should learn to make the best case for both sides.

A. The CRITICS argue:

Meir Shalev (“Protection in the Carmel”, Tanakh Achshav, p. 19ff), the novelist and Bible commentator, imagines that David could not have supported himself any other way than by protection. He was pursued by Saul and not supported by the locals from his own tribe. He would soon be forced to go over to the Philistines to survive. So it is no surprise he would do what any of his own band of men whom he gathered – the debtors, hard-luck men and brigands who had all left civilization as fugitives from justice. Of course David did what he could to survive and protection is an age old profession for political rebels and criminal fugitives in all frontier areas. Today political terrorists in the middle east finance themselves by selling drugs to the West. David’s men speak of shalom – four times in two lines but “me thinks the lady dost protest too much.” The point is: Either help voluntarily or we will take what we want, not what we need. “This is a deal you cannot refuse” in Mafia parlance. When Naval is too “thick” to understand and shames David before his men, then David must act to restore their faith in him or he will be deposed. His supporters are looking for spoils, not morality and religion..
Avraham Melamet compares David not to mobsters but to any transient army that takes its supplies off the land. Quartering soldiers with citizens and taking a provisions tax in kind was always well accepted practice. In 13th BCE the Egyptian army, while stationed in Canaan, took a “peace offering” to feed the soldiers.

B. The DEFENDERS of David argue:

Uriel Simon (in Bakesh Shalom v Rodfeihu, pp. 196) argues vigorously:

a. The Tanakh is not interested in feeling sorry for Naval as the victim of a protection racket. This is not a small shopkeeper threatened by the mob. Naval is not like the poor man in Nathan’s parable of the rich man who has so many flocks but takes the one lamb from the poor man (II Sam. 12:1-4). There is no Biblical sympathy for law and order for its own sake. True, theft is forbidden but narratively it is hard to empathize with a man so utterly rich. Naval is extraordinarily rich. His property is described extensively even before his personality. He has at least 4000 heads; he has servants to take care of all his stock, so he is no longer a shepherd himself and he has plenty of time to enjoy his luxuries.

b. Protection racketeers only “protect” their clients from themselves, but David is protecting these frontier areas from foreign enemies like Amalek and Philistines. In I Sam. 23:1-13 David’s band saves his tribesman from the Philistines and in I Sam. 30 his men are attacked and plundered by Amalek and only with difficulty does he retrieve is own women and children but also much spoils that had been taken in many raids on Judea by Amalek. David even sends an offering of recovered spoils to the leaders of Judah to show his good will in protecting their interests (I Sam. 30: 26).

Yigal Ariel in Oz Melech defends David by suggesting David was sincerely looking for a paternal sponsor. As a young man he wanted someone older to be his political father. David calls himself “son” to Shaul who calls him “son” in return (I Sam. 24:11,16), so David’s use of “son” in I Sam 25: 8 is also a search for recognition and support. Another “great man” ultimately did become David’s financial sponsor and David never forgot him – Barzilai HaGiladi who is called “ish gadol meod” and who supports the king all his life (II Sam. 19:34). Naval could have chosen to be a patron for a fellow Judaite on his way up. This was not just a protection racket but David was looking for protection, for sponsorship, for a patron, not just patronage.

The same debate offers two opposed views of Avigail:

Avigail the Seductress

Many midrashim attribute impure thoughts and actions to Avigail turning her into a sex goddess, an ancient version of the singer Madonna, as well as reducing all David’s men to panting sex maniacs. One midrash says when they saw her – men without women for months in the desert - they all had seminal emissions (Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 2:3).

Avigail revealed her bare thigh and it gave off light to light up the night for David for three parsangs. David said to her: “Obey me (meaning agree to have sex with me).” But she warned him: “Don’t let this be a stumbling block to you” (TB Megillah 14).

Rabbi David Kimchi concluded in his commentary that when Avigail told David “Please remember your servant” (I Sam 25:31), she made herself sexually available to him (like a sex slave), so the Tanakh lowers her status by writing her name without an extra yod – as “Avigal” (I Sam 25: 32) (based on Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 2:3).

Many moderns argue that Avigail used her beauty to convince David and that she is no modest wife for she calls her husband a “good for nothing.” She is an opportunist who plotted to win David as her husband from the very beginning of her speech because she saw no future in Naval. Meir Shalev suggests she must have poisoned Naval to help along Divine destiny and that was her coded offer to David when she prayed to God that all his enemies die. The deal was: you remember me and marry me after I take care of him...
silently without your being blamed. Thus the David who asked Yoav to eliminate Uriah on the sly is the same one who would respond to such an offer from Avigail. This is not against David’s character at all, as long the cover up is successful. Meir Shalev also suspects David of having Yoav kill off Avner. Chronicles must have known of the rumors about Avigail and David so they suppressed both the Naval story and the Uriah story totally. Why should we be naive, he argues.

Avigail the Eishet Hayil

Haya Sharga Ben Ayun in Neshot David (p. 138 ff) argues strenuously that portraying Abigail as a Seductress is a misreading of the text.

- Avigail acts on the spot to stop David from killing her whole household. This is no time to think about marital politics.
- Avigail seeks to save Naval’s life, not separate herself from him and save only herself
- Avigail asks David to remember her for political favors but she cannot know that Naval will be killed by God in such short order and so she cannot be angling at this point for new marriage.
- David never hints that he is attracted to her beauty nor does she do anything explicit to arouse him sexually.
- Avigail calls herself a servant, not to make herself available sexually, but as a traditional rhetoric of one asking for mercy. David does the same with Saul.
- Avigail’s whole line of argument is to maintain David’s moral stance — *lfnim mi shurat hadin* — so why would she seduce him to adultery, which is David’s almost fatal sin with Batsheva much later.
- Avigail is of course glad to marry David, but that does not mean she won him illicitly.

Avigail – The Hero of Emotional Intelligence

Avigail is a gibor, a hero even though that word originally means physical triumph over, an overcoming of an enemy, which is typical of an ideal masculinity (*gibor* from *gever* = male).

Avigail’s wisdom ethics involves teaching David the rabbinic wisdom tradition that says: “Who is a gibor = a hero? One who conquers one’s yetzer, one’s instinct” — in this case David’s pride and desire vengeance.

In addition she is herself a gibor, not for her inner struggle, but for her role as a diplomat negotiating with her sworn enemy. “Who is a gibor? One who turns one’s enemy into one’s ally or [literally] one’s hater into one’s lover” (Avot D’Rabbi Nathan Chapter 23, version A).

Uriel Simon says Avigail scores off the charts in *Emotional Intelligence* which is part of her being “tovat sekhel” — good in common sense.
Learning to analyze the Avigail story, we can add some literary devices to our student’s toolbox as well as delve into the message of the narrative:

1- The lineup of the protagonists and the genre – A “Western” type scene.
Getting to know the players is not only a matter of listing characters but setting them up into teams for the dramatic showdown. Here the genre is like a Western with a showdown – a gunfight – between the black-hatted villain – the rich, boorish, arrogant Nabal and the heroic, fugitive Robin-Hood-like David and his merry band. However the two protagonists never meet, though they do make bellicose speeches. The “middleman” is a woman – Avigail, first Nabal’s and later David’s wife. Like any good Western there is a struggle of male egos and a beautiful and very feminine woman is involved, usually as the prize. The good woman – as opposed to the femme fatal – is expected to be loyal to her husband and represent the values of civilization off on the frontier. Avigail plays her role admirably but the surprise in this Western is that there is no gunfight, even though the villain does die and the woman is awarded to the hero. Here the woman is the heroine stopping the men from killing one another and preserving the integrity of Robin Hood who almost became himself a villain or at least was in danger of having his reputation tarnished.

Avigail contributes to the larger narrative where Robin Hood will have to turn from outlaw to king and for that he needs to learn the civilized arts of statesmanship – to move from a country hero into a urban leader. Avigail will teach David these skills and these values because this genre is more than a Western, it is about the coming of civilization to the wild West and ending bloodshed, ending blood feuds and ending the taking of the law into one’s own hands.

In the process the reader who is struck from the beginning by the absurdity of Avigail and the beautiful, the good and the wise married to Naval, the hard, the stupid, the evil and the arrogant has been waiting for things to be set straight. Finally David and Avigail get together – both described as beautiful. The lover of Westerns is also happy to see the underdog triumph over the rich but miserly man as well as ending up rich when he marries Avigail and inherits his wealth. He loves the touch of the good outlaw, a man on the way to murder the beautiful woman who ends up falling in love with her and letting her turn him into a man of law and order and self-restraint. In short David becomes respectable because of his good woman.

2- The lessons learned and the Wisdom literature genre.

Not all stories are about learning a moral lesson as are Aesop’s fables. In fact great literature is usually about character development that shows ambiguity, mixed motives, inner growth in a world of grays and values conflicts. However this story has a Wisdom literature core and it has lessons to teach and the characters do tend to become cardboard cutouts for values that they embody. The exposition presents us clearly labeled value opposites: Avigail – “a wise woman and beautiful one” and Naval – “a harsh, nasty man with a bad record” (1 Sam. 25:3). David’s moral choice is to become like Naval or like Avigail. His character is being tested, not his success. David will win in any case – his life is never in doubt for he has all the military might. But his character is being tested. In killing the villain David will paradoxically become the villain – a man of anger, of vengeance, of male ego, of great power but with bad record of bloodshed. In refraining from killing him, David becomes the wise-man and will then marry the wise-woman.

These values represent the Wisdom literature ideal of the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs is part of educational literature of the Ancient Near East for training up-and-coming young aristocrats to rule their empires with sagacity, with self-restraint avoiding not only the youthful passions of sex, impatience and anger, but also the temptations of the courtly life – excess (like Naval’s parties) and arrogance (Naval’s loudmouth). The arts of rhetoric are essential for the development of rationality and the solution of problems by persuasion, rather than brute force. This will lead to economic success brought through negotiations as well as the longevity of rule brought through slow but sure rational decision-making after consultation with one’s wise advisors. This ethic of practical this-worldly success has a moral significance but it is different than the moral pathos of a prophet like Nathan.
The ending of the Book of Proverbs is the ode to Eishet Hayil, the woman of valor, whose valor is not military but economic and moral. This is the crown which Avigail wears in our story and therefore she deserves to sit at the right side of David turned into the king - and advise him in all areas – political as well as domestic. The ideal woman and wife is a political advisor and voice of practical reason as well as moral self-restraint and patience. Her unique endowment is epitomized in a phrase never used elsewhere in the Tanakh for a woman – tovat sekhel (see “sekhel tov” in Psalms 111:10; Proverbs 3:3;13:15; II Chronicles 30:22).

What are the lessons (repeated here didactically ad naseum)?
(1) do not take the law into your own hands but trust God (I Sam 25: 26,31,33)
(2) do not take vengeance and spill blood unnecessarily, even if the villain deserves to die
(3) do not act spontaneously in anger on the basis of hurt male pride
(4) reconsider and reverse bad decisions even in the middle of their execution
(5) beware of hot-blooded statements, impetuous oaths to God and bellicose public declarations that tie one’s hands, for public policy requires greater nuance and flexibility
(6) seek and accept advice even from women and subordinates (Note that Avigail took the advice her servant)

Avigail – The Heroine of Emotional Intelligence

Avigail is a gibor, a hero even though that word originally means physical triumph over, an overcoming, of an enemy, which is typical of an ideal masculinity (gibor from gever = male). Avigail’s wisdom ethics involves teaching David the rabinic wisdom tradition that says: “Who is a gibor = a hero? One who conquers one’s yetzer, one’s instinct” – in this case David’s pride and desire vengeance. In addition she is herself a gibor, not for her inner struggle, but for her role as a diplomat negotiating with her sworn enemy. “Who is a gibor? One who turns one’s enemy into one’s ally or [literally] one’s hater into one’s lover” (Avot D’Rabb Hannah Chapter 23, version A). Uriel Simon says Avigail scores off the charts in Emotional Intelligence which is part of her being “tovat sekhel” – good in common sense. This language of emotional intelligence is part of the modern tradition of Wisdom Literature.

3- Changing points of view.

Wisdom involves empathy to understand the point of view of the other, and then rhetoric to appeal to others in language they understand and “change their point of view.” The narrative art of I Sam 25 constantly moves the reader from one point of view to the next displaying these through pointed dialogues. After the exposition (I Sam. 25:1-3), the narrative takes serially:

- David’s point of view in speaking to his servants (I Sam. 25:4-8)
- Naval’s point of view in speaking to David’s servants (I Sam. 25:9-11).
- Back to David’s point of view in speaking to his servants (I Sam. 25:12-13).
- Then we see the whole story retold from Avigail’s perspective as she wisely listens to her servant (I Sam. 25:14-20)
- Then Avigail’s presentation of her point of view to David, she convinces David to take the point of view of a king-to-be (I Sam. 25:20-35)
- Back to Naval who finally sees things through Avigail’s point of view (I Sam. 25:36-38)
- Finally the happy ending as David accepts Avigail’s point of view acknowledging that it is God’s point of view. So David and Avigail marry as their points of view merge (I Sam. 25:39-42)

The happy ending is when God’s point of view comes to define the protagonists’ point of view. Avigail is the “prophet” not only in foretelling David’s rise to royalty, but in getting David to see God’s implicit moral perspective in relation to bloodshed and to get Naval to realize how stupid he has been, even though both David and Naval are caught up in the heat of their male interaction - action and reaction – and both have their judgment clouded by their respective passions – anger, arrogance and drink.
4- Flashbacks

While this action-packed narrative rushes toward the showdown, there are several flashbacks to give the reader essential information and sometimes to intensify the reader's sense of the drama. The grammar identifies the flashback: For example, I Sam 25:21 “And David said” reverses the usual order of verb and subject and uses simple past.

- I Sam. 25: 14 – In the midst of David’s headlong march to wipe out Naval’s whole household, the reader learns that Avigail had found out about Naval’s insulting speech to David’s servants from her servant. The servant corroborates that David’s perspective is the correct one, David has been insulted for no good reason and the reader now understands who is the villain – Naval - and how hard Avigail’s task of mollifying the innocent victim will be.

- I Sam. 25: 21-22 – Just before Avigail runs into David, the reader learns that David has sworn publicly to God before his men to wipe out every “little pisser” – every male of Naval’s house – all of Avigail’s children and all the servants by next morning. Now the reader understands how difficult and how time sensitive Avigail’s last minute mission is, just before her opening speech – her last chance, life-and-death speech.

- I Sam. 25: 43-44 – In the epilogue when David marries Avigail and Achinoam, the reader suddenly hears a flashback - the ominous news that David has lost his wife Michal because King Saul has taken her from David and given her to another man.

5- leitworte – repeating lead words and punning word roots (milah manha)

Martin Buber taught us to identify themes and literary units in the Tanakh by counting words and following root words or their like.

- In I Sam. 25:3,17,21,39 we have polar opposites – ra/tov – no surprise considering the Wisdom literature moral lesson genre and the contrast between Naval and Avigail in the exposition – a” good” thinking woman and a “bad” doing man (I Sam. 25:3). However this also points at the deep moral structure of I Sam. 24:11, 17, and 25:21,28 where the roots repeat 8 times in chapter 24 and 14 times in chapter 25. Political and personal alliances are meant to be built on the self-evident principle of returning good for good and on punishing those who return evil for good.

- Lakach – natan repeats (I Sam 25:11,18, 39-40,43 in the contrast between Naval not wanting to “take” from his riches to give to David, Avigail taking them without her husband’s permission, and David in the end taking Naval’s wife. David is never described as taking – perhaps ironically – but he constantly reiterates that nothing was missing = lo nifkad from Naval’s flocks (I Sam. 7,15,21).

- Lo higida = she did not tell (I Sam 25:19, 36,37) forms a threesome. Twice Avigail (who is so wise in words as to change David’s mind in a great speech, the longest of any woman in the Tanakh), refrains explicitly from telling her husband she is taking a gift to David and that she just stopped David from killing Naval. Naval is either too arrogant, too stupid or too drunk to understand. But after he sobers up, finally Avigail tells him straight out what almost happened to him and his heart dies in him like a rock and God strikes him dead thereafter. It is a trait of Wisdom literature to know when and whom not to talk to.

- Also see shalom, bracha and harbo = sword and lo hechlamnu = not having insulted which are words repeated often in I Sam. 25. (See below for explanations of their significance).

6- Rhetorical devices.

Given the Wisdom literature genre the prevalence of greater rhetoric is an obvious literary choice where the medium is the message (Marshall McLuhan). The power of Avigail's rhetoric is all she has and thankfully all she needs to win David over. She is chosen as his new wife not for her hospitality to strangers as in the well story of Rivka nor her beauty as in the well known story of Rachel, but for her wise words. (The engagement marital well scene contest may be an implicit background, though not an explicit type scene in I Sam. 25). Let us remark on a few key rhetorical devices:
a. imagery—similes
   - I Sam. 25:16—David’s band was “like a wall” in protecting Naval’s sheep and men. Here the servant dispels the image which many commentators and readers have of David as protection racketeer.
   - I Sam. 25:29—Avigail blesses David that his life will be protected as in “tzor hahaim” like coins or fruits bundled together and the lives of his enemies will be dispatched “like stones in the pocket of slingshot.” The slingshot is also an allusion to David felling Goliath another big man like Naval and Saul. Later Naval’s heart will “turn to stone” perhaps related to that slingshot of enemy lives to be dispatched. (I Sam. 25:37).
   - I Sam. 25:36—Naval is likened to Saul with the simile of throwing a party “like a king.”

b. chiasm—reversals of order: abba.
   - I Sam. 25:3—first Naval is introduced and then Avigail, but Avigail is characterized before Naval.

c. a duel of oaths to God to reinforce one’s truthfulness, one’s sincerity, one’s taking of responsibility, one’s finality
   - I Sam. 25:22—David’s oath to wipe out Naval
   - I Sam. 25:26—Avigail’s oath to stop David from shedding blood
   - I Sam. 25:28–30 Avigail’s oath to reward David with a secure dynasty
   - I Sam. 25:34—David’s oath not to spill blood

d. gestures
   - I Sam. 25:23-24—Avigail falling at David’s feet in begging for mercy. The foot of the ruler on the head of his enemy is a sign of victory and falling before the ruler is a sign of absolute surrender, throwing oneself on the mercy of the ruler.
   - I Sam. 25:27—Avigail giving the gift to David’s servants at his feet (not directly to David as if he needs it) makes up for Naval refusing to give a gift to David’s servants

e. titles of rhetorical humility that express voluntary obeisance rather than demands, so that one granting the request will be seen as magnanimous rather than as subject to the other’s superiority
   - I Sam. 25:8—Even though David is a powerful man, David’s servants present him as a “son” before the patriarch Naval (similar usage of David to Saul in I Sam 24).
   - I Sam. 25:24,28,31—Avigail presents herself as “your servant” amatcha many times, even though she is a powerful, aristocratic lady of the house. In the end David is asked to remember this servant woman and he turns her into his lady, his wife.
   - 13 times the term adoni = my master is invoked

f. ringing poetic repetitions of words and puns—lashon nofel al lashon
   - I Sam. 25:5-6 and 35 - 4 times x shalom which Naval rejects and leads to David’s decision to go to war, but Avigail returns David to his peaceful intent. Perhaps the shalom 3x is ironic as in II Sam. 11:7 where David asks about Uriah’s and the army’s shalom 3x when he does not give a damn and he ultimately sends him off to his death and to a battle which goes badly, not well.
   - I Sam. 25:13—David and his men belt up with their swords three times- vachgor harbo indicating the time for peace and for talk is over.
   - I Sam. 25:32-33-39 – 3x baruch. David opens three parallel statements blessing God and blessing Avigail. Thus he finally accepts her gift = bracha offered in I Sam 25:27 but accepted only in I Sam. 25:35. Acceptance of the gift is a gesture of reconciliation, just as Naval's refusal of David's verbal bracha was a declaration of enmity— I Sam 25:14.
   - I Sam. 25:7,15,17,33 - lo hechlamnu = “not having insulted” which describes David’s treatment of Naval who then insulted David. This leads to David’s resolve to bring down evil on Naval – ki halta haraa. However in the end David acknowledges that Avigail hilitini = prevented him from bring destruction.
g. rhetorical questions as putdowns
- I Sam. 25:9-10-11 After the servants speak in the “name of David,” Naval insults them by asking: who the hell David and son of Yishai and his unheard of men are?

h. envelope structure'
The whole speech and the whole chapter has an envelope structure that returns in circular fashion to resolve earlier issue. For example, the circle includes: the blessings and gifts refused and the blessings given, and Avigail taken from one husband and given to the next. Avigail takes upon herself the guilt and then asks for it to be forgiven (I Sam. 25:24 and 28) and many more examples.

7- plot structure:
- pre-script - I Sam. 25:1
- a. exposition - I Sam. 25:2-3
- b. complication - I Sam. 25:4-13
- c. turning point - I Sam. 25:14-31
- d. denouement – winding down –
  resolution of complications and tensions - I Sam. 25:32-41
- e. epilogue - I Sam. 25:42
- f. postscript - I Sam. 25:43-44

8- midrash shem and puns

Naval’s name is the richest mine for punning names that express his character. Avigail uses his name to condemn Naval by saying his name is his essence – “ki kishmo ken hu, Naval shemo v naval imo” (I Sam 25:25). Yet paradoxically this insult by his wife is what saves his life, for David has no reason to take offence at such a low-class person who cannot help but be a boor. It is beneath David to respond to such low trash.

The etymology of Naval’s name and its role in the plot is explained by various commentators.

- nivlei yayin – vessels of wine (I Sam. 25:8,37) which he refuses to give to David and which he consumes until drunk at a party “like the drinking party of king” even though he has just insulted a real king-to-be. Note that Naval lives in Carmel = kerem el = God’s vineyard.
- nevel – musical instrument, perhaps with hollow inner space like lute
- nabol tibol – withering, lacking in strength and stamina - Exodus 18:18
- naval – fool, stupid, especially religiously denying arrogantly that there is a God, that there is anyone above you – am hacham, vlo navon - Deut. 32:6, Psalms 14:1
- naval – characterized by Ramban on Deut. 32:6 as someone who repays good with evil, which is exactly what David accuses Naval of doing
- naval – cheapskate, selfish - Isaiah 32:5 – which fits Naval’s characterization by all his property and his speech to David’s servants in which he uses the possessive “my” over and over again to describe his property and why he would never give it away. Maybe Naval’s heart turned to stone after Avigail told him how much of his property she had given away without his permission to appease David
- navaal – confusion, disordered as in Genesis 11:7 where God confuses the languages in Babel
- nevela – doing outrageous, scandalous things that may not be done in Israel - Gen. 34:7
- nevela – dead carcass literally, a sign of lack of honor for the body to be left in the field - II Sam. 3:33, Leviticus 22:8
- nevela – “dead meat” to use American slang for one who is about to fall, a dead carcass which is how he ends up
- Naval is called hakalbi from the Judaite tribe of Kalev the spy and conqueror of Hevron but he acts like a dog = kelev. Rashi understands “mashtin bakeer” = pissing on the wall as a reference to dogs, meaning not even a dog will be left alive in Naval’s camp.
Exercise with the Concordance:  Divide up the students to explore not only the etymology of Naval but its semantic associations by looking up the following verses: Isaiah 32:5; II Sam. 3:33; Deut. 32:6; I Sam. 25:8; Exodus 18:18; Leviticus 22:8; Psalms 14:1; Gen. 34:7 where the origin of many of the definitions found above can be found.

Avigail’s name may mean father of joy = gill or father of redemption = goal. The first suggest her ultimate joy in marrying David but more appropriate literally is the second which suggests her role in redeeming David and in predicting his redemption by God.

David’s name is not interpreted but his genealogy is invoked. In I Sam. 25:9-10-11 David’s servants speak in the “name of David,” Naval insults them by asking: who the hell David, son of Yishai of who knows what origin, is? All of the terms used refer unbeknownst to him, to family members in David’s illustrious lineage back to Judah’s son Peretz = hamitpartzim and Ruth’s son Oveid = eved from Beit Lehem = lachmi.
Analogies: Literary Parallel Stories

Biblical stories refer, as Yair Zakovitz likes to point out, to one another as intertextual commentaries. They are both similar and different and thus they make their point by juxtaposition. Sometimes the stories form a type scene where the genre is structurally very similar as Robert Alter pointed out with the three well – engagement scenes – Rivka, Rachel and Tzipora. Sometimes the comparison is much less explicit but still very significant for interpretation. Yair Zakovitz’s insight that David’s most famous wives – Batsheva, Avigail and Michal were all wives taken away from other husbands (“David’s Wives in Mirror Image,” David: MeiRoeh lMashaiach, pp. 75) catalyzed this curricular unit built on comparing Avigail and Batsheva. Let us compare and contrast Avigail and other related Biblical figures and see what the interpretative lessons are.

Exercise: An interesting extra credit activity for curious students is to research these analogies, compare them and report back to the class on how each may throw light on the core story.

1- Avigail and Batsheva – II Sam 11

In both cases:
- David marries a beautiful woman who is widowed from a man David wanted dead.
- In both cases David sends messengers to take the women in question (I Sam. 25:39 and II Sam. 11:27).
- Neither woman objects to being sent for or ultimately to the marriage and both benefit from it.
- Both stories show God condemns unnecessary violence and that a violation of this moral demand will be a stumbling block to rule.

However the differences are even more significant.
- Uriah is innocent and even righteous, while Naval is guilty.
- Uriah is a loyal and ultimately betrayed servant of David, while Naval is like a king to whom David appeals in the language of “your servant David.
- Naval refuses David’s request to share food and drink out of selfish arrogance and stupidity, while Uriah refuses the final part of David’s request that Uriah eat, drink and go home to sleep with his wife, out of idealistic loyalty to God and his fellow soldiers.
- Naval gets drunk out of self-indulgence not knowing that David almost killed him, while Uriah gets drunk at David’s insistence but he still maintains his principles. In both cases the drunkenness precedes their demise though for different reasons.
- David and Avigail maintain a chaste relationship in spite of her beauty until married, while David and Batsheva have sex in total disregard of their knowledge that Batsheva is married.
- Avigail predicts and wishes for the death of Naval, while Batsheva mourns the death of Uriah.
- David is calculating and self-serving in having Uriah killed by the sword of Amon, while he is angry and self-righteous in wanting to kill Naval with his own sword.
- The story begins with David’s merely sexual attraction to Uriah’s wife, while it ends with David’s marital interest in Avigail. Avigail’s story goes from murderous rage to love, while Batsheva’s goes from sexual gaze to murder without any feelings at all.
- Batsheva becomes the unwitting cause or occasion for her husband’s death, while Avigail consciously and strenuously seeks to and succeeds in having her husband’s life.
- Avigail saves her children’s lives from David’s anger, but neither David nor Batsheva can save their first son’s life from God’s anger.
- Batsheva uses no rhetorical arts (though in I Kings 1 she demonstrates them) so she is not seen as a woman of wisdom but only a woman of beauty, while Avigail is first a woman of wisdom and secondarily a woman of beauty.
- David’s sexual passion gets him caught in a web of complications, while Avigail saves David from such complications by making him control his passion for vengeance.
- David initiates the Batsheva affair with a military expedition to make war on Rabat Amon, while David initiates his relationship with Avigail by sending a diplomatic expedition to send verbal brachot and to receive material brachot from a potential ally – Naval.
God kills (vayigot) David’s and Batsheva’s son because of David’s sin, while God kills Naval for his own sin (I Sam. 25:38 and II Sam. 12:15).

In conclusion, David could have controlled his passions with Batsheva as he did control them with Avigail’s help. Batsheva could have found a way to object to David despite his power, just as Avigail did. Both Avigail and Uriah call David to live up to a higher calling by swearing an oath to David’s life (I Sam. 25:26 and II Sam. 11:11). Unfortunately, Uriah was unsuccessful with a jaded king, while Avigail was successful with a young David aspiring to royalty. Neither David nor Batsheva benefit from the comparison to the story of Avigail and David.

2 - Avigail and Nathan – II Sam. 7 – Two Prophets of the Davidic Dynasty

Many linguistic echoes unite these two figures:

- God promises a faithful bayit ne’eman – a steadfast dynasty - II Sam. 7:11,16 and I Sam 25:28. That phrase is planted in our collective expectation by the prophet who appeared to Eli to remove his dynasty and to replace it with bayt neeman (I Samuel 2:30,35) though here it is kohen neeman, not melech neeman.
- God will wipe out your enemy and make you nagid = ruler and the tov = the good word will come true (I Sam 25:29,30 and II Sam. 7:8,9,28)

Avigail predicts David’s rise and asks him to act like a statesman as if he already were king even though he is tempted to act like an outlaw. Nathan announces the official declaration of the eternal dynasty. However he fails to warn David before spilling innocent blood and he comes only afterwards to bring David to confess and repent. David fails to live to the moral teaching of Avigail which succeeded in I Sam 25 with the outlaw but in not II Sam. 11 with the king.

Both Avigail and Nathan play the delicate double role of prophets as predictors of God’s word in history and of moral educators for royalty. Both seek to decrease the spilling of blood. Both must use rhetorical skill to arouse David’s conscience without becoming victims of David’s own violence.

Both Avigail and Nathan use the power of rhetoric to bring David to a reversal of policy at a crucial moment in his career. But Nathan uses the ruse of a parable posing as a real case not related to David’s predicament, while Avigail speaks to David’s higher calling and his long-term self-interest and to alternative ways to achieve his goal of just revenge. Fiction versus logic, moral passion versus cool rational calculation, shame versus caution are the different poles of their approaches. Yet both argue against unnecessary bloodshed.

In an inventive midrash from Yalkut Shimoni the rhetorical gap between Avigail and Nathan are closed when a parable is invented for Avigail to use as well.

Avigail said to David: My master David! Wait until morning when the wine goes out of Naval, and then put him on trial.

David replied: Every rebel against his royal authority deserves to die without court proceedings.

Avigail responded: Saul the king of Israel is still alive and no one crowned you yet over Israel? David replied: But Naval said there was no God and despised Shmuel, God’s prophet!

Avigail went on:
Imagine when you become king and a poor man comes to you and says:
“I came to a rich man to request a slice of bread. He refused me so I killed him and now his sons have risen to kill me out of blood vengeance. So I have come before to you the king to say: Protect me from those seeking my life for I have done no evil!”

Now you say to the poor man who is a murderer: “How can you say you are innocent? Your hands spilled blood!”

Then the poor man will answer back: “My lord the king also asked Naval for bread and he refused to give it and the king arose and killed him!”...
David heard Avigail's words and said: "Blessed are you Adonai God of Israel who sent you to me today! Blessed is your discernment and blessed are you, for preventing me today from spilling blood.

In an alternative version of this midrash, Avigail speaks explicitly of Tocheicha, the rules for giving moral criticism:

Avigail said: My lord David, if someone comes seeking justice before you, what will you do?

Let's say a poor man goes to propertied owner and says: 'Do tzedakah with me, and give me a little bread.' But the property owner does not meet his needs. So the poorman attacks and kills him.

If they come before you for justice, what will you say to them? You will be hesitant, in doubt = mfakpeik and you will not be able to get a word out of your mouth.

The [the poorman] will say: "Didn't you do the same thing to Naval when he did not give you anything?"

You will still be in doubt = mfakpeik as I said: "Let this not be an obstacle = pukah to you" (I Sam. 25:31) – do not be doubtful, be not hesitant in your mouth, in your speech. Nor think: "Since I am the king, no one will dare rebuke me!"

Rat her hocheiach atzmcha = rebuke yourself as it says (in Zephania 2:1):

"Dress up (hitkoshu) first, and then dress up others. If you desire to dress up (lkashet) others, dress yourself up first and then afterwards dress up others. (Midrash Shoc her Tov on Psalm 53)."
3 - Avigail and Joseph (Gen. 40:14):
Recall Your Servant ‘s Favor and “Get Me out of Here”

One simple parallel between Avigail and Joseph is revealed in the phrase they use when delivering good advice to a person down and out and yet now predicted by them to be on the way up and out:

- Joseph says to the cup bearer “Remember me when things are good for you and take me out of this house = prison” (Gen. 40:14) for I predicted your dream meant that you would be elevated out of prison.
- Similarly and yet differently Avigail predicted David would rise from an outlaw to a king and she asks that “When God does good for you my master, remember your servant” ( I Sam. 25:31)

The differences are of course significant so by comparison meaning is generated out of the differences within the linguistic or structural parallel.

- Joseph wants to get out of his prison where he was sent unjustly. Avigail wants some vague favor from this future ruler, but when David remembers her he makes her his wife right after Naval’s death. Thus one might say she is “taken out of the house of bondage” to her stupid arrogant husband.
- Joseph only interpreted a dream that would have come true anyway, while Avigail prevented David from spilling blood which might have been a stumbling block to God making him king.
- Joseph’s wisdom was the art of dream interpretation but Avigail’s was the art of intuiting political directions and being a moral teacher to a ruler through the art of rhetoric.

4- Avigail and the Shunamite (II Kings 4:18-37): Two Women defending their Home.

Here are two strong women in desperate situations – Avigail’s house is about to be destroyed and the Shunamite’s son has just died. Both swear oaths and fall at their protector’s feet when they leave their homes to meet their potential protector on the road. Both are well-off women riding on mules who live in Carmel – though those are identical names for different geographic areas. The Shunamite is more direct and Avigail much more round about in the diplomatic tradition of wise women. But both succeeded in convincing a powerful man – David and Elisha respectively - to save their families.

5- Avigail and Jacob – A Sulcha: From Vengeance to Forgiveness:
Bearing Blessings to an Insulted, Angry War Lord about to Massacre a Whole Household – Genesis 32-33 and I Sam. 25

Neither Avigail nor Jacob are fighters, but rather people of words, of diplomacy and (in Jacob’s case alone) of the power of deception.

- Both Jacob and Avigail face a determined enemy with 400 soldiers (Gen. 32:6, I Sam 25:13).
- Both enemies are expected to wipe the whole family out (“mothers and children” –Gen. 32:12 ; “every last male pisser on the wall” – I Sam. 25:22)
- Both enemies are seeking vengeance for an insult and the denial of blessing they think they had coming.
- Both Jacob and Avigail prepare in advance a grand gift of conciliation elaborately described as extensive and called by each a bracha = gifts (Gen. 32:13-15 and Gen. 33:11 after Gen.27; I Sam 25:6,14).
- Both accept responsibility for the sins of the past and ask for forgiveness (Gen.32:21; I Sam 25:24,28)
- Both bow profusely and use the submissive language of servants to make up for the way Jacob and Naval lorded over Esav and David in the past (Jacob took the blessing which included the blessing that one’s brothers would bow to the one with the blessing).
- Both ask for forgiveness with the phrase “sa na” (Gen.32:20; I Sam 25:28).
- Both fear for all their children (Gen.32:11; I Sam 25:22).
- Both potential enemies finally accept the peace offering after a long plea (Gen.33:11; I Sam 25:35).

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Both are met unexpectedly by a sworn enemy (David’s oath – I Sam 25: 22 and Esav’s oath – Gen. 27:41) who despite the 400 men indicating military intent turn into magnanimous forgiver of their past insults. They both accept the blessing = gifts and reply with words of blessing (Gen 33 – “My brother, what is yours is yours, I have enough” and David’s triple blessing – I Sam 25: 32)

However the relationships are wholly different.

- Jacob is himself the brother who betrayed Esav
- His plea for forgiveness is accepted and yet they do not get back together after this temporary reconciliation but rather they go their separate ways, their destinies diverge.
- Avigail, by contrast, accepts responsibility for her husband but in fact she is innocent and David has nothing against her, yet here the reconciliation leads to marriage as their destinies merge. Jacob protected his wives and children from the danger Jacob had created, while Avigail the wife protected her husband and children who had no notion of the danger the foolish husband had aroused. David still prays for Naval's death and has only changed his means for getting revenge, but Esav foregoes all desire for revenge.

The analogy portrays David who is described as ruddy (admoni) as a potential Esav, Edom, who may become a spiller of blood. That possibility is real even though David is a descendant of Jacob and a king of Israel. Avigail helps him control his own bloodthirsty tendencies but no one succeeds in stopping David when he seeks to spill Uriah’s blood. For with Uriah David is not driven by vengeance, by hurt feelings or any feelings at all, but by cold calculation of self-interest and the corruption of absolute power.

6 - Avigail and the Wise Woman of Tekoa sent by Yoav to David - II Sam. 14

Both Avigail and the woman of Tekoa face off against David and both use rhetorical skills to convince him to forgive an insult and to prevent further bloodshed even if the initial crime – Naval and Avshalom – deserves punishment. Both accept the guilt on themselves personally – “bi ani adoni ha-avon” (I Sam 25:24) and “Alai adoni hamelech ha-avon” (II Sam 14:9). Both speak of good and evil, redemption from blood, being remembered, and asking forgiveness. Yet Avigail goes to represent her own children on her own initiative and evokes David’s blessing. The woman of Tekoa is acting, she is sent by Yoav, and she arouses the king’s suspicion. Avigail must deal with David’s anger at Naval, but the woman of Tekoa has a more delicate task since it is David’s ambivalence about his son Avshalom which must be straightened out. There is no truly happy ending to her intervention although it creates some modicum of reconciliation.

7- Naval and Uriah – Judith May, Bible teacher:

Naval and Uriah each have a fatal flaw. Naval's is his selfishness. He dies of a stroke he suffers when, after an evening of self-indulgence, he hears that his wife has given away his stuff. Uriah’s is his faithfulness. If he had not been such a faithful soldier, he wouldn’t have had to die.
The Case for Restraints on the Use of Political Violence and Collective Punishment
(based on Robert Polzin, Samuel and the Deuteronomist, pp. 205 and on Uriel Simon, Bakesh Shalom v Radfeihu, pp.208ff)

The message of the Avigail story together with the chapter before and after it (I Sam. 24:26) is a sustained literary and rhetorical argument for political and religious restraint on the use of violence even where otherwise justified. In Chapters 24 and 26 David has a golden opportunity to kill Shaul who is actively pursuing him to kill him for no good reason. His men – a motley band of rebels and criminals - encourage David to kill Shaul their mortal enemy, yet David refuses and restrains them. Clearly says the editor of these chapters one has the right to return “raah takhat raah” (evil for evil) especially when Shaul and Nabal have returned “raah takhat tova” (evil for good). David has been generous and restrained when he could have been violent, yet the aristocratic Nabal and Shaul have treated him as an enemy and even worse as a nobody. David lives in a world of tit for tat political alliances and personal blood feuds (such as Yoav killing Avner for killing Yoav's brother Asael). This is understood not only as a pragmatic logic but as a moral one.

In Favor of a More Genteel, More Statesmanlike, Ethics of Forbearance and Trust in Providence

Nevertheless David rises above that world of endless blood feuds leading to civil war among tribes and families. David represents ifnim mishurat hadin (gracious foregoing of one's right to retribution). In the stories with Shaul, David reveals no inner struggle to achieve that moral elevation above the world in which he is acting. He has a sense that no one may touch the messiah of God (II Sam 24:7,11 and 26:9,11,16,23) – not even if Shaul is threatening David’s life. In contrast our story with Nabal reveals David’s inner struggle morally and politically. David wants to kill Nabal out of deeply felt vengeance for an insult worse than anything Shaul has said (Nabal said: “who is the son of Yishai anyway?”). Emotion speaks louder than reason. David has taken an oath before his men to kill Nabal to establish his political position among his men and letting others know he means business. In this macho world, your word is your bond and one cannot be seen to back down.

Yet David is convinced by Avigail to choose both a gentler ethic – forgiving retribution against a fool, showing mercy to his wife and children –and a more long-term political interest – to be seen as a guiltless leader with no blood on his hands for killing fellow Jews even when provoked. David will be the only leader who can end the civil wars among Jewish tribes only if he can show he is above party interests and ego. He will be the man of peace among the tribes even if he is the man of war against the Philistines. Thus David models a centralized state which forbids private violence to execute private justice, that is, revenge (goel hadam). (A related argument is made by the wise woman of Tekoa pretending to present to David the blood feud of her two sons that led one to kill the other and now her relatives want to kill the surviving brother. David is persuaded to stop the cycle of violence even though it has its own moral justice).

Thus David is convinced to assert rational control on his anger, to dismiss the insult to his ego by a fool, and to postpone proving his political prowess because God will in the long-run bring him victory. David need not show anxiety about proving his manhood and his authority at every confrontation, at every innuendo about his illegitimacy. David gets his recognition at a deep religious level as the undeniable man of Divine destiny so he need not force himself down people's throats with superior violence. Avigail says what Shaul himself acknowledged - “For the Lord will certainly make my lord an abiding dynastic house (bayit neeman) " (I Sam. 25:28). Similarly Shaul admits – "I know that you shall certainly be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established ion your name” (I Sam 24:21). So David is a man of faith – not in his superior ethics but in he trust in a Divine promise that will bring him to power even without him shedding blood. David can leave this battle up to the elections – God’s election where he will surely be vindicated. “May the Lord be the judge between you and me” (II Sam 24:13,16).

It is precisely in not killing Nabal and his household that David proves his superiority over Shaul as a more worthy candidate for kingship. Shaul had killed the whole clan of Ahimelech the priest for inadvertently helping David by giving him food and helping his escape from Shaul. Despite the protests of his own soldiers and the innocence of Ahimelech, Shaul in jealous and paranoid rage kills them all. Yet David prevents his men from killing Shaul and David has the wisdom to listen to Avigail and NOT to kill Nabal who had refused to give David food and support his rebellion from Shaul. In the end, David will trust to Providence and God will kill off Shaul (II Sam. 26:10) and Nabal (25:38) and clear the field for David to get
what he is destined to without engaging in internecine warfare. Thus David can become the peacemaker leader for after the Jewish tribal civil war.

In Opposition to the Injustice of Collective Punishment and the Spilling of Innocent Blood

Avigail is not only arguing to save her own life and her family but she uses her own case to breakdown an accepted notion of collective punishment that held that if Naval, the head of her family sinned by rebelling against David and insulting him, then his whole family should be killed. When David sends his messengers to wish Naval — “May you be (in) peace, your house be (in) peace, and all that is yours be (in) peace!” (I Sam. 25:6), he is assuming an organic unity between the man, his family and his property.

Collective punishment within a family, fathers and sons, was an accepted religious principle of justice executed directly by God for crimes of treason, idolatry, against God (“I am a jealous God punishing sin of father son their sons up to the third and fourth generation” - Exodus 20: 5). But the legal principle applicable to human justice system for all usual criminal and religious crimes had begun to change as is clear from Deuteronomy 24:16 “You shall not put fathers to death for the sins of their sons, and sons to death for the sins of their fathers, rather each individual will be put to death only for their own sin.”

Still the typical political principle of justice was that all the family of your rival should be eliminated as a matter not only of expediency but of justice, as well as anyone suspected of helping the traitor/rebel. David is well-aware that King Saul has just executed Ahimelech the priest who unwittingly helped David by giving him Goliath's sword and bread while under the false impression that David was sent by Saul for secret mission. Nevertheless the king had Ahimelech and all 85 fellow priests from Nov “from man to woman, from suckling baby to toddler, from ox to donkey and sheep put to t...” (I Sam. 22:18-19). David wisely spirits away his own parents to King of Moav's court to protect them from King Saul's long reach (I Sam. 22:1-4).

Now the question of Avigail to David the next king is whether he will use the same bloody justice as his own persecutor? It is not merely the factual question of whether Saul was paranoid and mistaken about the facts, but whether the collective nature of the punishment is considered murderous even if Avigail admits the heinous crime that Naval committed that make him deserve death. In addition she will challenge David to refrain from taking the law into his own hands against Naval even if he deserves it and thereby creating blood guilt and a cycle of vengeance that is destructive to civil society, to political stability and to the religious purity of a king wishing for universal acceptance.

We might say that Avigail is trying to teach David to extend the Deuteronomic principle of legal punishment for individuals only, even to the political realm, as King Amaziah of Judah his descendant will.

“When [Amaziah] strengthened his hold on the kingdom, he struck down his servants [cabinet members] who had killed his father [Yoash] the king, but their sons he did not put to death for it says in the Torah of Moshe (Deuteronomy 24:16) God has commanded: ‘You shall not put fathers to death for the sins of their sons, and sons to death for the sins of their fathers, rather each individual will be put to death only for their own sin.’”(I Kings 14:5-6).

Later Avigail’s implicit principled opposition to collective punishment is expressed by the Rabbis’ Avigail in the midrash:

“Avgail said to David: My lord, David, what did I do? My sons, what did they do? My livestock, what did they do?

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27 See also Exodus 34:7; death of Korach’s family and property in Numbers 16:20-34; death of Achan stealing from the herem in Jericho in Joshua 7:11-25; in II Sam. 21:1-10 when King Saul killed the Givonim, thereby violating Joshua’s religious oath to defend them, then a generation later David must hand over Saul’s sons to be killed for that.
28 Basha kills all of the house of Yerovam (I Kings 15:29 based on the prophetic justice of Ahiyah HaShiloni in I Kings 14:10-11). Then Basha’s family is destroyed by Zimri based on Yehu’s prophecy (I Kings 16:2-4,12). Elisha issued the same punishment for Ahab’s family (II Kings 9:7-8) using the same terms for all male descendants as does David himself in our chapter about Naval – “I will wipe out every pisser against the wall belonging to Ahab.”
David replied: because Naval cursed the royal house of David [making him a traitor deserving death]...
Avigail: Are you already a king?......But when you do become king over Israel and they say to you: ‘Spiller of Blood!’ [what will you say?]"

But how does Uriel Simon (in his chapter in Avigail in Bakesh Shalom v Rodfeihu, pp.208ff) prove that this principle of justice is at the heart of the rhetoric of the Biblical Avigail?

1- She begins by admitting that (by the old logic) she too is fully responsible for the crime of her husband: “On me, my lord, is the blame!” (I Sam 25:24). Therefore she has returned with the blessing = the gift that David had requested and more and she bows down to him to make up for Naval’s insult. She declares him to be the legitimate king to be to make up for Naval implying he was just another rebellious slave.

2- Then she chips away at that admission of guilt because she did not even know that David’s messengers had arrived. “I never saw my lord's lads whom you sent” (I Sam. 25:25). If crimes especially of treason combined with disrespect require intentionality, then she could not be held responsible.

3- Avigal shows in all her words that she is not David’s ally but she is Naval’s opposite. “Please let my lord pay no mind to this worthless man, to Naval, for as his name is, so is he: Naval/ Vile-One is his name, and vileness is with him!” (I Sam. 25:25).
But as the reader and now David knows:
“The man's name was Naval/Vile-One, and his wife's name was Avigayil. Now the woman had a good mind and lovely looks, but the man was hard and evil in deeds” ( I Sam. 25:3).

So what logic is there to punish a man’s wife and her children when she is so different from him in precisely what causes his sin of foolishness, stinginess and arrogance? Sin derives from character and Avigails’ character is different, so one must punish people “according to their sin,” not assuming some organic unity of the whole household because of the man’s behavior.

4- Now Avigail is asking for forgiveness and asking for self-restraint which do not in themselves imply that David would be wrong to execute her and her sons for Naval’s sin. But she bases her main and oft repeated claim on preventing David from sinning! Avigail warns:
“So-now, my lord, as YHWH lives and as you yourself live, YHWH who has prevented you from coming into bloodguilt” (I Sam. 25:26) and “let this not be for you an obstacle or a stumbling-block of the heart of my lord, to shed blood for nothing (I Sam. 25:31).
Then that claim, not one based on mercy for a mother and her children, is word for word accepted by David himself:

“Blessed/ baruch are you, who has restrained me this day from coming into blood-guilt and saving myself by my own hand (alone). But as YHWH, God of Israel, lives, for (God) has prevented me from doing evil to you. If you had not hurried and come to meet me, there wouldn't have been left to Naval - by the light of daybreak one single pisser against the wall!” (I Sam. 25: 33-34).

5- Uriel Simon notes that David is very happy to have been saved “from doing evil to you” – to hurt her or her children would have been to hurt her. Thus Avigail made herself and David’s appreciation of her character and her rhetoric into a principled argument against collective punishment even in political cases of treason which is now defined as spilling innocent blood. She also makes the further argument against David taking the law into his own hands even to kill Naval whom she admits deserves punishment and prays will be punished – but by God.

Tragically Batsheva does not even try to have the same effect on David. In fact her beauty evokes his desire that leads ultimately to killing her otherwise exemplary, loyal husband. Batsheva in II Sam. 11 never opens her mouth except to say she is pregnant. She is only a pretty face, but Avigail is also a woman of uncommon common sense, a wise woman. She is both good looking and of good mind. David is, unlike
Naval, open to hear from her, he is not a hard man but a soft, flexible and therefore moral and rational one. David praises her good sense, not her good looks in his blessing for her—

“Blessed/baruch is your discernment, and blessed/baruch are you, who has restrained me this day from coming into blood-guilt” (I Sam. 25:33).

After the Bathsheva affair with its unopposed “spilling of innocent blood” and its use of the King’s private vigilante “justice” now under the guise of royal orders, David is cursed with the sword. David has returned to the arbitrary use of political violence even without the principle of justice of vengeance or of collective punishment. So he elicits a cycle of political violence within his own household. It begins with Amnon’s illicit taking of a woman (like his father had done), then proceeds with David’s unwillingness to do justice to his son for a sin like his own, and leads to Avshalom’s taking the law into his own hands and finally to a rebellion which almost brings David’s dynasty down. On his deathbed David commends—in fact commands political violence to Bathsheva’s son. It sets a norm for internal political violence among potential heirs that will haunt David’s dynasty for generations. If only for another wise woman and for a wiser man to listen to her! Good advice, good morality, good common sense, good emotional intelligence and another way might have dominated.
From Wife Of to Wife Of

The tale of Abigail is framed by information about the woman's marital status; she is introduced to us as Nabal's wife, and she exits the tale as David's wife. As Nabal's wife Abigail is mistress of a wealthy estate. As David's wife she is one of several wives of a man who leads a nomadic life as a fugitive sought by King Saul. Nabal provides her with a regal home where lavish parties are given into the early hours of the morning (25:36), while David and his group of outlaws hide "by the covert of the hill" (25:20). Although the Abigail episode may be regarded as a comic relief in the saga of David's tribulations before he ascends the throne, as the tale takes shape the charismatic David recedes to a supporting role and gives way to an even more fascinating person, the wise woman Abigail.

Comic Poles and Golden Mean

Nabal and Abigail are introduced to us as a study in opposites: he is coarse and ill-behaved, she is intelligent and beautiful. These stereotypical characterizations are soon animated in a dramatic example: Nabal acts in a mean-spirited way that is also foolish and Abigail is called on to correct her boorish husband's mistake...

Nabal and Abigail exemplify a variation on the "detestable father/admirable daughter" pattern with the forbidding patriarchal figure of the husband taking the traditional place of the father." David is the "other," the young man of an outside group, who will ultimately save the beautiful young woman from the ugly patriarch. The typology transcends the love theme and as well as gender.

The two men - Nabal, older, affluent, and self-confident and David, young, ambitious, and hotheaded- serve as foils to each other. Both are too extreme and irrational in their reaction, and their conduct could lead to disaster. These two figures exemplify Northrop Frye's formula of the polarized comic pair consisting of eiron, the self-deprecator, and alazon, the boaster or impostor. David is less than he really is, or will become, and therefore plays the eiron, using, fawning language in his first message to Nabal and calling himself Nabal's "son" (25:8). The arrogant Nabal, in his social status and wealth, is more than his character warrants, and therefore is the alazon. The moderate type between these two extremes is the truthful person, a role assumed by Abigail, who offers balance.

Furthermore, if the eiron and alazon are two extreme types with regard to truth, another pair of comic figures consists of two extreme types: the buffoon-chur (or the clown-boor), with the eutrapelos the wily person, representing the middle way. Frye's comic formula applies to the three actors in this small drama. The two men assume the roles of the comic extremes: David is as ludicrous in his audacity and saber-rattling impetuosity as is Nabal in his crude, drunken boorishness. David shuttles between one comic extreme and the other, since he is both the eiron, the self-deprecator and the alazon, the boaster, especially when he becomes intent on revenge. The woman represent the golden mean between these two antithetical forms of distortion of reality and comic conduct.

Abigail is a variation on the "wise woman" figure; she is presented as possessing "good intelligence" and she has a moderating, calming effect on the reckless David. She may, indeed, be a particular example of the abstract, disembodied "Woman Wisdom" of Proverbs. Abigail is thus an auxiliary character, an educational tool assisting David his journey toward maturity and self-knowledge.

Nevertheless, Abigail, not David, is the center of this episode, with the two men not only the opposites of each other but of her as well. Whatever position they take, she is the opposite, not as an extreme, but as the middle way, the golden mean.

- If Nabal is ugly, she is good-looking; if he is boorish, she is delicate and smart.
- If David is homeless, with no connection or roots, Abigail is mistress of a large and rich home, member of the Israelite elite.
- If David is too quickly offended and too ready to wave his sword, Abigail illuminates to him the virtue of patience and self-control.
• If David's view is limited only to the moment and the healing of the present injury, Abigail opens up to him the vision of the future and redemption in time.

On the temporal axis, Nabal represents blindness to the march of fate by clinging to a failed king and not recognizing David's inevitable rise. David represents the young man's sense of urgency and impatience with the normal of time, his unreasonable attempts to speed up the pace of history. Abigail possesses the correct vision of the future, but also understands that destiny cannot be hastened.

Gender and Appeasement

Abigail steps out of her feminine role and, at the heart of the narrative, becomes an ungendered, cerebral presence with the power to reason and persuade. Yet her logically-structured argument, which employs the right words that exhort without offending, is again framed by strong gender-based connotations.

Abigail's strategy is a combination of sexual daring and sexual appeasement. By taking to the road, and apparently having to depart from the main road in order to meet David in his hiding place, Abigail acts in a way more typical of a man than of a woman. We remember that Jonathan, Saul's son, met with David under such circumstances, but the spunky Michal never did. By sending food as well as wine ahead of her, Abigail resorts to the feminine role of a nurturer, with the wine promising more than just the basic nourishment. Between the moment Abigail sights David, and when she meets him, the text inserts David's additional bragging that he is going to decimate Nabal's entire household. Whether or not Abigail overhears these words, she acts as if the matter is urgent. When she sees David she recognizes him immediately even though it is hard to imagine she saw David before. Most probably, she catches David in the midst of delivering the long tirade of boasts and threats (25:21-22), and thus she guesses that this is David. Although they have not been formally introduced, Abigail's intuition leads her directly to David. She quickly descends from her higher position on the animal, not to David's level, but to his feet, pleading with him to listen to her, and flattering him by calling herself 'his "handmaid" (25:24).

Before David has a chance to give her permission to talk, Abigail embarks on a lengthy, thoughtful monologue. First she denigrates her husband, referring to him several times as "ignoble" or "uncouth," thus dissociating herself from him. She also claims not to have met David's messengers when they came to see her husband, implying that she usually participates in making decisions, giving credibility to the role of mediator she has taken. She then blesses David in God's name for having restrained himself from bloodshed. I see this as Abigail's tactic. She acts as if David has already had a chance to wreak revenge and has chosen not to. She calls the gifts that she has brought a "blessing, repeating David's euphemistic request for material reward.

Appearing to assume that an amiable rapport now exists between herself and David, Abigail boldly continues to tie her faith in David's glorious future with the warning to him not to engage in an impetuous act that would tarnish his image later. She does not remain within the exigency of the moment, but lays out her vision of David's future. Nabal called David a "servant" who broke away from his "master," thus alluding to David's homelessness. Abigail, on the other hand, talks about the "house" that God will build for David, implying more than a residence. but a continuous dynasty. She reiterates her vision of David's future as the "prince" or "master" of Israel, trying to lift him out of his present misery and fury to see the coming years stretching before him and expand his responsibility to the time God fulfills his promise.

Abigail takes a view of David opposite that of her husband. She seems acquainted with David's ambition and his special bond with God. Her lexicon of piety resembles many of David's speeches. She points out the moral reason why David should avoid bloodshed (the people who would be harmed, including her, are innocent), but also adds a pragmatic reason - the shedding of innocent blood will sully David's name. Abigail uses the tactic of flattery and appeasement, then appeals to his morality and, finally, to his good sense and ambition. She is mediator. teacher. and advisor combined.
Yet other dynamics develop while Abigail speaks passionately and David listens, culminating in Abigail offering herself to David under the veiled language of "you shall remember your handmaid" (25:31). In the last phrase Abigail retreats to her femininity, thus softening the audacity of her warning to David not to create an unnecessary obstacle to his rise and ultimate victory. Abigail has thus averted potential carnage, steered David in the direction of self-control, and, in the process, and has probably fallen in love with David. She springs out of her wifely anonymity and occupies the limelight momentarily, only to recede to the background when she becomes one of David’s several wives (25:22-23).

David’s reasons for marrying Abigail are seen as politically motivated. Abigail’s are not easily deciphered, and may be a combination of the political - tying her life to the future king’s-and the personal - the exciting David is the very opposite of her uncouth first husband.

By taking to the open road Abigail has proven the breadth of her vision, her ability to look into the future clearly and correctly. At the end she is taken off the road and cut down to size by a narrator who has gone too far in his admiration of the woman, and now has to re-focus his narrative on David, the maker and carrier of the covenental history. Abigail’s reward is the conventional feminine good fortune: she has children with David. Nevertheless, for one brief moment she has occupied center stage, taking the limelight, as well as the narrative space, from the charismatic David.

Uriel Simon – The Hit-Parade of Biblical Women who Save Lives!– Eve: “Mother of all life” (based on Bakesh Shalom v Rodfeihu, pp. 185 ff)

Avigail represents an exceptional woman but not a unique one.
I. She continues the universal Biblical role of women of bringing life into the world (motherhood) which also means defending their children anyway they can - using verbal deception, rhetoric, trickery as do all Biblical underdogs of whom women are a paradigm. She plays a role analogous to the little “people of Israel” doing anything to survive.

2. Beyond defending their own children as well as husbands, these heroines also sometimes defend human life as such, the life of strangers.

3- Now in Avigail we have an even more expansive role for she is arguing public policy – do not shed blood in vigilante activity, in blood vengeance or even preemptively to wipe out all the family of a potential or actual political rival. Swear off collective punishment like Saul killing al the people of Nov. David has suffered from that ethos of collective punishment and preemptive political murder at the hands of Saul. He has had to hide his family across the Jordan with the king of Moav. So he must choose a path without unnecessary political violence. He must leave it to God to defend his case and keep his own hands clean.

Abigail said: My master David, what have I done? What have my sons’ done?

David answered her: But Naval cursed the kingdom of David!

She said: If you kill us, when you become king over Israel they will call you the spiller of blood! [as in fact, Shimi ben Gera actually does] (Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 2:3)

In Chronicles I 22:7-10 David explains to his son Solomon, whose name means “peace,” that God has prevented me from building the Temple because I spilled much blood and fought many wars, but Solomon will be a man of peace, of menucha, of quiet.

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29 I Kings 3:26-27 – prostitutes judged by Solomon; Gen. 27:45 – Rivka getting Jacob sent away to save him from Esav; Exodus 2-Moshe’s mother; I Kings 1:1 -Batsheva saving Solomon from Adoniyahu; II Kings 4:8-37 – woman of Shunem saving her son using Elisha; II Sam. 21:1-14 – Rizpah saving the dignity of her executed sons; II Kings 8:26, 9:27-28,11:1-20, II Chronicles 22:11 - Yhosheva saving Yoash heir from Ataliaya the murderous queen; Exodus 4:24 – Tzipora saves Moshe; I Sam. 19:11-16 – Michal saves her husband David; Joshua 2 - Rachav saves her children and saves the spies of Joshua; II Sam 20:21 – wise woman of Abel saves whole city from Yoav; Esther 4 - Esther saves her whole people; Sarah saves Abram who is afraid he will be killed in Egypt because of his beautiful wife – Gen. 12 and 20.

30 Exodus 1:15 – the midwives; Exodus 2:6-10 - Pharaoh’s daughter; I Sam. 28:19 – the medium, the witch of Ein Dor, the Balaat Ov supports King Saul her persecutor when he is her guest; II Sam. 17:15-21– the Benjamite women of Bahurim who save David’s spies during the Absalom Revolt; I Kings 17:8-24 – starving woman of Tzorfat who helps Elijah.
These stories call to mind the rather appalling formulation reached by Claude Levi-Strauss that the "exchange of brides is merely the conclusion to an uninterrupted process of reciprocal gifts [from, say, wine to animals to women], which effects the transition from hostility to alliance, from anxiety to confidence, and from fear to friendship [between tribes]." But when women are stolen, rather than peaceably exchanged, all of the relational directions reverse, toward fear, anxiety, and hostility.

In the Bathsheba story, the consequence of stealing another's wife is the murder of a loyal servant of the king. As we have seen, chaos ensues - "you have killed with the sword so the sword will never be far from your House" - and the death of a child born of such an infraction is overdetermined.

When Nathan the prophet tells David a didactic parable about the rich man taking the poor man's only ewe lamb, he drives home the point that the king's adultery is also a violation of a property right: Bathsheba is compared to an animal, a favored animal, to be sure, one that is like a daughter (alluding to the Hebrew wordplay on Bathsheba's name, bat = daughter), and the only one the poor man has; but the polluting of his woman is analogous to the slaughter of his animal.

When David takes another man's with Bathsheba, he does not need her. He is no fugitive. Rather, he is at the height of his power, king of all he surveys, including Bathsheba. She is still the property of another man, in fact, two other men have rights to her before David, as the careful inclusion of her patronym (so rare for women in the Bible) "daughter of Eliam" reminds us. Her husband, Uriah the Hittite, is a loyal servant of the king, and moreover, a loyal servant of God. His name, 'Uriahhu, probably means "YHWH is my light," and we might well wonder what a Hittite, one of Israel's Others, is doing with such a name; moreover, he is fighting Israel's holy war while David lolls about at home during "the time when kings go to war." The way King David takes Bathsheba contrasts with the way David garnered power and women as a fugitive. In fact, the roles of Nabal and David have reversed. The king is greedy as Nabal had been, and he denies his neighbor what is rightfully his, as Nabal had denied David hospitality. Now David is the fool.

The biblical division of the universe into pure and impure further suggests that we understand adultery as adulteration. A recent study makes the etymological connection explicit: "Adulteration implies pollution, contamination, a 'base admixture,' a wrong combination. . . . If society depends for its existence on certain rules governing what may be combined and what should be kept separate, then adultery by bringing the wrong things together in the wrong places, (or the wrong people in the wrong beds) offers an attack on those rules, revealing them to be arbitrary rather than absolute." Adultery not only challenges the rules as arbitrary, it also challenges the precarious identity of a society that depends upon them for definition. Hence, we should not be surprised that vigorous laws on adultery are invoked to police Israel's borders. According to Deuteronomy, the child of the adulterer cannot be admitted into "the Congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation" (Deut 23:3), that is, such a child is banned forever from the people of Israel. The rabbis even relate the Hebrew term for illegitimate child, mamzer, to the adjective zar, "a stranger," an "alien."

All of this anxiety about identity, political and sexual definition, has been succinctly summarized in that one biblical word: nabal. It not only means fool, but also outcast, someone who has severed himself from society through a moral transgression, someone who has forfeited his place in society by violating taboos that define the social order. As a verb, it means "to violate," and it is used especially to indicate sexual violations: the rape of Tamar, the rape of Dinah, the rape of the Levite's woman in Judges 19, adultery in Jeremiah 23. It is also used, significantly, to indicate uttering false words, thereby disrupting the order of language. Its Akkadian stem was used to indicate breaking away (as a stone) or tearing away, and that ancient Akkadian sense of rupture is still attached to the Hebrew word used for an adulterer in ancient Israel where sexual violation signals rupturing or breaking away from the norm. A variant of nabal means corpse, and in ancient Israel, a
corpse represents another rupture, not only from the social order, but from the order of life itself. Death represents the strongest degree of uncleanness, an "irreparable separation from God's life-giving power and from the centre of life.

What Tamar says of her rapist becomes an indirect indictment of David: "This is not a thing (nevela) men do in Israel." At his height, when the House of David is synonymous with the nation, David behaves like an outcast. ..The Israelite also defends himself with such ferocity against the outcast from fear of the violator within. Nebalim is used for Israel's enemies, the generic "other," but it is also used for an Israelite tribe, the Benjaminites, when they make themselves the enemies of Israel's other tribes, and the term outcast is applied to all of Israel itself (Deut 32:6).

The meaning of nabal deepens when we view David's act of adultery with Bathsheba not only in the light of the exchanges that characterize his other marriages or the violence set in motion by his rapist son, but in the light of the much larger issue of faithlessness that pervades biblical thought. "I am a jealous God, you will have none but me." When sexual practices are called upon to describe national politics, ... they subsume sex and politics to divinity, Monotheistic theology is obsessed with the possibility and actuality of betrayal, with "going astray" as the term for both faithlessness to God and sexual transgression, and it is in that context that the king of Israel goes astray.

Even within the Bathsheba story itself, desire for God and human desire are made analogues of one another, with David's adultery set in stark relief - not, as we would expect, to the fidelity of Bathsheba's husband to her - but as a foil to Uriah's faithfulness to God. Under the injunctions of holy war, to sleep with his own wife would be to be faithless to God; it is that fidelity to God - that Uriah maintains through his sexual abstinence during holy war, despite the apparent attractiveness of his wife, despite being plied with wine by the king, and it is that fidelity to God that he finally dies for. Meanwhile David, so very careful about idolatry has "gone astray" from God after all.

In his act of adultery, David has violated a whole string of commandments: "You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." And just before the commandments about not killing, not having adultery, not taking what is your neighbor's, that is, laws regulating the social order, are the commandments that insist upon the exclusive desire for God. "You shall have no gods except me." An intimate relation between the final social commands that honor the neighbor and the earlier theological ones that specify love and loyalty toward God is thereby established. When the logic of "you shall love only me, you shall not love your neighbor's God" is translated into the social sphere, it becomes "you shall love only your wife, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife," and the two spheres become inseparable.

Hence, in YHWH's response to David's adultery with Bathsheba, it is not at all clear from his rhetoric whether David's chief guilt is betrayal of her husband or betrayal of God: "A sword will never be lacking in your house, because you treated me with contempt and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own wife." These infidelities, to God and to a husband, are one and the same. Furthermore, the violations of adultery, rape, and the people going astray are not just violations of commandments. They are also violations of various identity constructs of "Israel," and they become tests of definition in a text that is anxious about who this story is about, and whose story it is anyway.

Sexual fidelity and divine fidelity, monogamy and monotheism, are preoccupations of a narrative that tends to construct identity as someone or some people set apart, with boundaries that could be mapped, ownership that could be titled. But if the parameters of Israel's identity are always very much at issue, of which God is allowed and which is not, and which woman is allowed and which is not is forever being contested, then the identity of the nation and the people is not already mapped, but in the process of being anxiously drawn and redrawn.
B. Izevel/Ahab / Elijah – I Kings 21

The Poorman's Lamb - The Kerem/Vineyard of Navot, Uriah's Bathsheva and Naval's Lambs in Karm-el

Queen Jezebel or Deuteronomy’s Worst Nightmare by Tikva Frymer-Kensky

Navot's Inheritance by Walter Brueggemann

Mike Bennett, The Treachery of Jezebel
The Poorman's Lamb - The Kerem/Vineyard of Navot, Uriah's Bathsheva and Naval's Lambs in Karm-el

A creative way to sum up the David-Batsheva-Uriah-Nathan story is to invite the students to compare it to either or both stories of Avigail-Naval-David and Ahab-Jezebel-Navot-Elijah. The surprising parallels and reverses make this a rich and imaginative assignment that enables one to review, to see the well-known story in a new light and to generalize about the big ethical themes being explored narratively. Below are my reflections on these comparisons but many more can be drawn. We have also included two essays on Ahab and Jezebel – one by Tikva Frymer Kensky who also translates the story in an accessible way and Walter Brueggemann who brings out the prophetic message of the Navot story.

Plot and Characters – Similarities and Differences

(1) David is a powerful king making his own decisions in relationship to Batsheva who is only a sexual pawn, in relationship to Nathan before whom he takes the initiative to confess and repent, and even in relationship to Avigail who offers rational arguments which David chooses to accept.

But Ahab is a spoiled child taken care of by his powerful wife, Jezebel. She gets him what he wants, she foists on him her idea of the royal role of arrogant privilege, and she invents and executes the cover-up. She never really needs to reason with Ahab but only to maneuver him in the way he wishes to be led. She never faces inner dilemmas nor needs the courage to confront others.

Like David, Ahab too is repentant when he hears the prophet's curses and he too refrains from eating, he lies on the ground in mourning and here too God forgives or at least postpones the punishment and places it on Ahab's son, as he did on David's son.

(2) Uriah, the idealistic victim of royal desires and royal expropriation is matched by Navot.

- Both stand on principle refusing to follow royal requests in the name of higher values by which the king too ought to be judged.
- Both are fooled and both are executed through the miss use of royal power – the army and the judicial system.
- Both fall victim not only to the king but to the willingness of officials to play the king's political games for his private purposes.
- Both are removed not because the king wishes them dead but because they stood up to the king and refused him what he desired.
- Both murders are the product of a cover-up, of a perceived gap by the king himself between how an Israelite king is meant to behave and how they actually behave. The king's concerns for the appearances of moral and legal order that prohibit theft even one’s subjects lead to the even more dastardly crime of murder and the corruption of the governmental system.
- Both Uriah and Navot is killed by their comrades. For Uriah, high officer and well-respected fighter, it was his fellow soldiers who were asked to retreat without him and it was his general who betrayed him. For Navot who sat on the court of Jezeriel, it was his fellow judges who had him tried and executed in his own “field of battle” under orders from Jezebel.

Uriah's relationship to Batsheva appears in Nathan's parable as the poorman's intimate ties to his daughter-like lamb. This may parallel Navot’s highly personal relationship to his ancestral vineyard. (In Deuteronomy 20:19-20 vineyard and wife are compared since one may get an exemption from army service to enjoy the first fruits of a new wife or a newly available vineyard). Both swore an oath to God that they would never do what the king suggested.

Naval also had a deeply personal relationship, a deep but negative possessiveness, regarding his property in Carmel = Kerem –El = God's vineyard.
None of these men will easily relinquish what is theirs even to a powerful, threatening or cajoling royal figure. Shmuel warned that monarchs would take both "your daughters" (Bat-Sheva/the daughter-like lamb) and "your vineyards" (karmeichem) and your sheep (the poorman's lamb and Naval's sheep (I Sam. 8:13-14,17). But thanks to Avigail, king-to-be David refrained from taking his lambs in Carmel by force and also his life, just because Naval refused to give the sheep to David willingly. In each case the royal figure makes an inappropriate or problematic request that the principled victim-to-be refuses with high flying provocative rhetoric.

Naval is also an "idealist" whose inflexibility is his absolute commitment to Saul's rule and his dismissive attitude to David as a slave rebelling. He defends the right to keep his own property from the hands of a false king who really just a worthless criminal. Ironically both Uriah and Naval are also defying a king (whose legitimacy they do accept, unlike Naval to David) because in principle they do not believe he has the power to command them to hand over their most precious possession, to violate their deepest loyalties. Uriah may not even realize that is what is being demanded, to give legal cover to the theft that has already been committed.

(3) Batheva plays the role of the poorman's lamb, like Navot's vineyard, but she never rises out of her victim's role. By contrast, Avigail saves David from crime or Jezebel urges and executes the crime for Ahab. Both Jezebel and Avigail call upon the king to think/act royally -- to rise above childish emotions of disappointment and vengeance, respectively, by thinking of their image. However Avigail paints a picture of a leader forgoing unnecessary violence and letting God achieve his goals bringing him what he wants, while Jezebel wants her husband to live up to the pagan image of a king who rules summarily without concern for legal limits on his will. Note that Samuel the prophet also rebuked King Saul for being too reticent, too afraid of his own people, when he is "head of all the tribes of Israel" (I Sam. 15:17).

Jezebel is never called the queen but often Ahab's wife for she functions as an " ideal wife" -- pushing her husband ahead, protecting his interests, comforting him, counseling him -- but her ends clash with God's ends, God's royal mandate. (Curiously Jezebel also recalls David who pushes Uriah to eat and drink and enjoy himself, just as she pushes Ahab to get up, eat and be cheerful).

(4) Nathan's prophetic role is similar to Avigail's in so far as they both persuade David to forego his power prerogatives and admit (or in the case of Avigail, avoid sin). Nathan is like Elijah who reveals God's knowledge of the hidden crimes. Jezebel's and David's perfect cover-up fail only because of God's/the prophet's belated intervention. Both prophets put their lives on the line courageously confronting their ruler. Both pronounce very harsh Divine curses, but only Nathan (like Avigail before him) has the pedagogic artistry to elicit an inner change in the king being criticized.

Elijah pronounces a verdict of wiping out all Ahab's male descendants -- "all the pissers against the wall" just as David pronounced that curse against Naval. However Avigail showed him that David may not play God but let God act. In the end that curse is cancelled by Avigail's taking responsibility for her husband's sin and by Ahab accepting responsibility for his wife's sin.

Common Political Theme: The Constitutional Limits on the Monarchy Imposed by God

The most important constitutional similarity of the Batsheva and the Navot story is that an Israelite king is not above the law and the Israelite king does not have arbitrary power over the private possessions of his subjects, his servants. So David cannot take Uriah's wife and Ahab cannot take Navot's vineyard. (Recall that in God's punishment of David he complains that David took the wives analogously to taking property that belongs to another. Not adultery but theft was at stake. "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Exodus 20). Yes, there is a right of eminent domain both in the Mishna and in the American law and presumably in the Tanakh. A king may take property or draft soldiers for a national purpose, but not for his private whims. Ahab and David have no such national purpose in mind.

Interestingly one etymology of m-l-k based on the Arabic suggests that melech means to own completely. Historically the monarchy is typical of agricultural societies where the king may be seen as
owning all the land and deriving tribute or tax as rent and fealty as from serfs on his feudal land. Often monarchs also had first night privileges to have intercourse with every new bride. David could pick any young woman to be his bedwarmer as in the case of Avishag, though she may have come voluntarily and she was certainly not married. But Nathan and Elijah and basic Israelite tradition denies the right to take even your own servant's wife or land. That is precisely why both kings need a legal ruse to cover their crimes because the society would not allow such a king to stand above the law.

Often ancient near eastern rulers rise above their subjects and above the law by virtue of being children of the gods or chosen by Divine right. The later is true for David whom Natan and Shmuel elevated. However in the Biblical tradition precisely because these kings were chosen by God they were subject to God's demand for moral-legal-religious behavior as condition of staying in power with a Divine mandate.

God's word and God's evaluation, not the king's is what counts. David said to Yoav, "Don't let it appear bad in your eyes that the sword has consumed" your soldiers – including Uriah. But it is bad in God's eyes so God sends his messengers instead of David's many messengers. Similarly Jezebel's words command Ahab as to what he should do. Jezebel like David sends secret letters that conspire to kill loyal subjects, loyal to God's values, and they both receive notice from their henchman that the targeted killing is done. Then David marries Uriah's wife and Jezebel gives Ahab Navot's vineyard. But God sends the Divine word with Elijah who will not allow this theft and murder to go unpunished. Ironically Navot is accused of cursing God\footnote{Navot must be convicted of blasphemy and treason because only that kind of crime entails confiscation of the land which would otherwise be inherited by Navot's children. That punishment is valid throughout medieval law until the American Constitution abolishes the punishment for treason called "corruption of blood" which denies the heirs inheritance (Article III second two).} and the king, but in fact both Ahab and David are responsible for blaspheming God and bringing down their own dynasties.
א תִּהְיֶה שָּׁמֶרֶת לְאַחֲאָב בָּעִיר, יֹאכְלוּ וְהוֹשִּׁיבוּ שְנַיִם וּאֵּקָדְם אֶל בֵיתִי, וְאֶתְנָה לְךָ תַחְתָיו לֶּיךָ רָעָה, וּבַעֲרְתִי אַחֲרֶּךָ; וְהִכְרַתִי לְאַחֲאָב—

וַיְסֹקְלֻהוּ לָעִיר, וַיִּמְלֹק בָּאֲבָנִים וַיָּמֹת.

אֲכִיָּה: בְּשָרוֹ, וַיָּצוֹם; וַיַּשְׁכִּב בַּשָּׁק, וַיְהַלְךָ אַט נִכְנַע מִפָּנַי, לֹא מִחוּץ לָעִיר, וַיְהִי, דַם נָבוֹת, יָלֹקוּ הַכְלָבִים אֶת לעַד, וַיִּטַּב לִבֶּךָ—

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְנֵי הָאֲנָשִֵׁים בְּנֵי כֶּרֶּם נָבוֹת הַיִּזְרְעֵאלִי—

וַיַּעַן הִתְמַכֶּרְךָ, לַעֲשוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה. זֶה רוּחֲךָ סָרָה, וְאֵינְךָ, אֹכֵל לָחֶּם.

וַיְהִי, אַחַר הַדְבָּרִים הָאֵלֶּה, כֶּרֶּם הָיָה לְנָבוֹת הַיִּזְרְעֵאלִי, אֲשֶּּר בְיִזְרְעֶּךָ שַק עַל מַכֵּר, לַעֲשוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה—

וְנָתַתִי אֶת כֶּרֶּם טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ; אִם טוֹב בְּעֵינֶּיךָ, אֶתְנָה כַרְמִי.

וַיַּתְעֵב מְאֹד, לָלֶּכֶּת אַחֲרֵי הַגִּלְולים הָיָה כְאַחֲאָב, אֲשֶּּר הִתְכַּבֵּר אִיזֶּבֶּל אִשְתוֹ, אֵלִיָּהוּ הַתִּשְׁבִי, לֵאמֹר:

מַה סֻקַל נָבוֹת, וַיָּמֹת.

אֵלִיָּהוּ, הַמְצָאתַנִי אוֹיְבִי; וַתָּבֹא אֵלָיו, אִיזֶּבֶּל אִשְתוֹ; וַתְּדַבֵּר אֵלָיו, אַחֲאָב, קוּם אֶת בְּרֵשָּׁה בְּכֶרֶם טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ; אִם טוֹב בְּעֵינֶּיךָ, אֶתְנָה כַרְמִי.

דִּבֶּר יְהוָה, לֵאמֹר:

הַכַעַס אֲשֶּּר הִכְעַסְתָ, וַתַּחֲטִא אֶת אֲדַבֵר אֶל

אַחֲאָב:

וַתֹּאמֶּר אֵלָיו, אִיזֶּבֶּל אִשְתוֹ, אַתָה, עַתָּה תַעֲשֶּה מְלוּכָה עַל נָבוֹת הַיִּזְרְעֵאלִי וָאֹמַר לוֹ תְנָה יַעַן הִתְמַכֶּרְךָ, לַעֲּשֶׂה הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה.

וַיְהִי, דְבַר יְהוָה, אֶל בֵי יִשְרָאֵל, אֶּת יָרָק, כִּי הֵן תַּחְתִי אֶת הַכַּעַס אֲשֶּּר הִכְעַסְתָ, וַתַּחֲטִא אֶת אֲדַבֵּר אֶל

אַחֲאָב:

וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו, אִיזֶּבֶּל אִשְתוֹ; וַתְּדַבֵּר אֵלָיו, אַחֲאָב, קוּם אֶת בְּרֵשָּׁה בְּכֶרֶם טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ; אִם טוֹב בְּעֵינֶּיךָ, אֶתְנָה כַרְמִי.

וַיְהִי, דְבַר יְהוָה, אֶל בֵי יִשְרָאֵל, אֶּת יָרָק, כִּי הֵן תַּחְתִי אֶת הַכַּעַס אֲשֶּּר הִכְעַסְתָ, וַתַּחֲטִא אֶת אֲדַבֵּר אֶל

אַחֲאָב:

וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו, אִיזֶּבֶּל אִשְתוֹ; וַתְּדַבֵּר אֵלָיו, אַחֲאָב, קוּם אֶת בְּרֵשָּׁה בְּכֶרֶם טוֹب
Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Queen Jezebel or Deuteronomy’s Worst Nightmare
“Reading The Women of the Bible (pp. 209-213)

Wealth and power magnify the effects of the quintessential foreign wife, Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, the northernmost of the Phoenician cities included as “Canaan” in Genesis 10 and Judges 3. As the wife of King Ahab of Northern Israel, she brought her foreign gods and ideas into the heart of Israel. The book of Kings remembers Ahab primarily for his establishment of the cult of Ba’al in Samaria.

[The constitutional sin of the Israelite monarch is "to multiply wives who will lead his heart astray" (Deuteronomy 17). "King Solomon who loved many foreign women" (I Kings 11:1-3) married them for diplomatic purposes to expand his empire and its relations with foreign powers, but the result was to lead his heart to follow foreign cultures and religions whose influence was imported into Eretz Yisrael, just as imperial superpower bring their global cultures into small nations today. That is understood in the metaphor of the Tanakh as corrupting the king’s “heart.”

מלכיים א פרק יא

Ahab son of Omri did evil in the eyes of YHWH more than all who were before him.
It happened that it was not enough for him to go in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, so he took as wife Jezebel daughter of Ethba’al the king of the Sidonians, and he went and worshiped Ba’al and bowed down to him.
He erected an altar to Ba’al in the temple of Ba’al which he built in Samaria.
Ahab made the asherah and Ahab continued to behave thus and to anger YHWH the God of Israel more than all the kings that came before him.

The Book of Kings tells us nothing about Ahab’s leadership of a coalition of South Syrian states to victory over the Assyrians. It remembers instead his worship of Ba’al and attributes the states to his marriage to a Sidonian princess. Jezebel herself tried to spread the worship of her gods Ba’al and Asherah, killing the prophets of YHWH and subsidizing Canaanite priests so that the prophet Elijah confronted “four hundred prophets of Ba’al and four hundred and fifty prophets of Asherah who ate at Jezebel’s table” (II Kings 18:19).

Even after Elijah defeated them decisively in a dramatic contest on Mount Carmel and roused the people to kill the prophets of Ba’al, Jezebel did not give up. Instead, she sent word to Elijah, "Thus may the gods do to me and continue to do if it is not that by tomorrow I will make your life like one of their lives" (I Kings 19:2) The contest was not yet over. Her otherwise estimable piety was a prime danger, for it magnified the intrusion of a foreign cult into Israel.

The next appearance of Jezebel is in the story of Navot's vineyard. Here too she appears as a well-meaning woman who does everything wrong, this time by trampling on Israelite law.

Act One – Navot, Ahab and Jezebel:
Land Transfers and The Monarch’s Power – Navot’s Word versus The Royal Word

Scene 1 at Navot’s Vineyard: A Question of Patrimony (I Kings 21:1-3)

Navot the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.
Ahab spoke to Navot thus, "Give me your vineyard and let it be my vegetable garden, for it is near my house. I will give you a better vineyard in its stead. If you wish, I will give you money at full price."

Navot said to Ahab, "God forbid, YHWH himself forbids that I should give my fathers' patrimony to you."

Here we have a classic economic issue; the enlargement of estates where there is no empty land. Many people sold land during Israel's history. The Elijah and Elisha stories interspersed with the tales of this dynasty show that, at the time of Ahab and his sons, people were incurring debts that they were not able to repay and thus were forced to sell land to pay off what they owed. Significant rural poverty was accompanied by the growth of large landholdings, a process (called "latifundization") that continued in the next (eighth) century, when Amos and Isaiah bitterly attacked those who obtained land in this way. The sale of one's patrimony was all too common in the time of Ahab, but Navot was not a debt-ridden poor man. He turned back the encroaching king with a flat "no," a refusal that he softened by referring to Israel's basic belief that people should preserve their ancestors' land and the memory that is attached to it.

Scene 2 in Ahab's Bedroom: Jezebel to the Rescue (I Kings 21:4-7)

[4 And Ahab came into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Navot the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said: 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.' And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.]

5 But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him: 'Why is your spirit so sullen, and aren't eating bread?'
6 And he said to her: 'Because I spoke to Navot the Jezreelite, and said to him: 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if you please, I will give you another vineyard for it.' But he answered: 'I will not give you my vineyard.'
7 And Jezebel his wife said to him: 'Now are you going to act royally over Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let your heart feel good. I will give you the vineyard of Navot the Jezreelite.']

[Yair Zakovitz in "Kerem Haya L'Navot", HaMikra Kifshuto edited by Meir Weiss commentary may be summarized:

Ahab recounts the exchange with Navot with subtle differences. First he leaves out his soft diplomatic tone when he tried to sweet talk Navot, so as not to appear weak before his imperious wife Jezebel. Second, he leaves out Navot's rationale – his commitment to his familial inheritance and his oath to God. The confrontation is described merely as my will against his will for a piece of property for which I offered him a generous price. Lost is what Nabot said to Ahab: "God forbid, YHWH himself forbids that I should give my fathers' patrimony to you." Ahab's egocentric and royal perspective transforms the nuanced facts of the exchange into an image of two men facing off over power and honor.

Ahab's restraint in not forcing his desire on Navot can be seen as mercy for his subject's deep ties to the patrimony (inheritance) or his respect for traditional law in Israel or his weakness of will. Jezebel is certain that it is the later because Ahab continues to brood over the loss of the garden and he only reports to her the power struggle without the value context.

Jezebel is described here as "Ahab's wife," not his queen, not the daughter of the king, because her initial concern is for her husband's health and for his mood. Later she reveals in sarcastic statement her concern for his political status (as Michal daughter of Saul was disgusted at David's unseemly behavior dancing before the people which she saw as an insult to the royal house, rather than a submission to God's authority). But here Jezebel reassures her husband like a spoiled child. Just eat and feel good and I will give you what you want. She will act in his name with his royal seal on her letters to get what Ahab wants. But

32 In contrast to Yair Zakovitz's reading, Josephus retells the story with Ahab emphasizing to Jezebel "how the king spoke in gentle tone to Navot even though that is not appropriate for the honor of the monarch" (Antiquities 8:13)
she does not bother the king with the gruesome or technical details. He will get what he wants but never mind how. He is too squeamish to get what he wants or deserves himself without Jezebel.]

Ahab has no tradition of "eminent domain" that allows a government to take any land it wants, but Jezebel sees that a subject stands in the way of the king's desires, and she will "perform kingship", acting as she believes kings should act.

**Scene 3 in the Palace: A Show Trial for Treason (I Kings 21: 8-15)**

She wrote scrolls in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the scrolls to the elders and the nobles in his city who sat with Navot. She wrote in the letters thus, "Proclaim a fast and seat Navot at the head of the people. Seat two worthless people opposite him and let them testify thus, 'you "blessed" God and the king,' and take him out and stone him till he dies."

[Yair Zakovitz notes how ironic that Ahab is fasting out of self-indulgent moodiness and Jezebel has a solemn fast declared for all his subjects because Navot has rebelled against God and the king's authority. Navot's real sin in Jezebel's eyes is his loyalty to his parents, to his God, to a national local legal tradition that limits internationally recognized royal prerogatives that uproot local ones. Yet she cynically reverses the crime attributing to Navot the least likely sin – betraying his God. She finds in Navot's fellow judges who "sit with Navot" in the city council/court pliant allies to subvert local justice and betray their comrade, just as King David had Yoav and his soldiers subvert justice and the military tradition to betray their comrade-in-arms Uriah who in fact had been very loyal to God's ark and his men and his commander. Jezebel like David plots out every detail of this *farce of a court trial* (like the farce of a battle against the city of Rabbah). Suddenly Navot finds himself sitting at the head of his court before his people and having them all turn on him and accuse him and execute him].

**Scene 4 in the Jezeriel Courtroom**

The men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, just as was written in the scrolls that she sent to them. They called a fast and sat Navot at the head of the people. Two worthless men came and sat opposite him. The worthless men accused Navot thus before the people, "Navot `blessed' God and the king" and they took him out of the city and stoned him and he died.

[Yair Zakovitz notes that the trial and execution are retold in even greater detail though the Bible often simply reports that an order was carried out without repeating its details. However the repetition like a slow-motion replay in a movie adds emotional power for the reader. The reader cannot believe this travesty is really taking place. He cannot believe these cowardly judges are so corrupt and cynical. This is the corruption of the whole judicial system which is the effect of a corrupt king overcome with desire to take what does not belong to him and a corrupting wife giving bad advice – unlike Avigail to David – and a cowardly officialdom unwilling to risk their political skins to do what is right by their own comrades. No one but Navot is concerned about God's point of view].

**Scene 5 in the Palace: Jezebel's Success**

They sent to Jezebel thus, "Navot was stoned and he died."

As soon as Jezebel heard that Navot had been stoned and had died, Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, inherit the vineyard of Navot the Jezreelite who refused to sell it to you, for Navot is not alive, he is dead."

Ahab's predicament, which Jezebel has made her own, is like David's when he was faced with an inconvenient Uriah; like David, she will not simply kill a subject without a cover story. David used the
cover of warfare. Placing Navot in a situation in which he will be convicted for "blessing" the king, a euphemism for cursing the king, is an act of treason. Her plan rests on the widely held convention that the king can confiscate the lands of those executed for treason. [Like David, Jezebel sends detailed instruction to her loyal and unscrupulous subordinates to serve the king's private desires discreetly without asking why and to report back in detail].

**Act Two in Navot's Vineyard:**
**Elijah/ God Word against Ahab's and Jezebel's Word: (I Kings 21:16-19)**

As soon as Ahab heard that Navot was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Navot the Jezreelite to inherit it.
The word of YHWH came to Elijah the Tishbite thus,
"Arise and go down to meet Ahab king of Israel in Samaria.
Look! He is in Navot's vineyard to which he has gone down to inherit.
You shall speak to him and say, "Have you murdered and also inherited?"
And say to him thus, "This is what YHWH says,
"In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Navot, the dogs will also lick your blood.""

**[Yair Zakovitz adds: Rising and going down are central spatial metaphors in the narrative. Ahab cannot stand up to his idealistic subject Navot, so he lies down and stops eating and broods. Jezebel tells him "arise" – go and eat, for I will give you Navot's vineyard. After Navot is "taken care of", she immediately tells Ahab: "Arise" and "Ahab does arise and goes down to the vineyard."
Ironically he thinks he is going "to inherit" the vineyard as if this were a legal inheritance after the death of a parent when in fact Navot has opposed this transfer because it violates God-given inheritances of land divided by each family. So God tells Elijah: "Arise and go down" and tell him one cannot both murder and commit judicial murder yet– an act of illegality flaunting tradition – and then also "inherit", an act of legal traditional succession.**

**The chiastic envelope structure of the chapter is coming to closure:**
- First Ahab-Navot in the vineyard in Jezeriel,
- then Ahab-Jezebel in their palace in Samaria,
- then in the center of the chiasm – the show trial, and
- then subsequently Ahab-Jezebel in the palace and
- finally coming back first circle to Ahab and Navot's stand-in, Elijah, in the vineyard. Again the Divinely mandated refusal to transfer the vineyard declared by Navot is reiterated by Elijah against the words of Jezebel that she will give the land to her husband.]

**[Yair Zakovitz adds: Ahab is so weak throughout the narrative. His wife – like Avigail to Naval – never bothers to tell him how she will get him what he wants and what it will cost. Ahab hears from her only the euphemistic result:
Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, inherit the vineyard of Navot the Jezreelite who refused to sell it to you, for Navot is not alive, he is dead."
Ahab does not ask how Navot died so conveniently or how Jezebel made good on her promise to deliver the vineyard from a man who was so adamant not to give it up. Yet he is responsible as a king, as a husband, because Adam's excuse that "the woman told him to do it" is no excuse. More important even if ignorant of what happened – of the murder – he as the king is responsible for all injustice in his realm. David assumed, as a matter of course, that Nathan would bring him every case of exploitation of the weak for a redress of justice. To "perform kingship" is not merely to lord over one's subjects or fight their battles but also to guarantee justice.]

**Yair Zakovitz argues the following verses are a digression misplaced here that deal with Ahab's running feud with Elijah and his sin of paganism, not with Navot. So let's skip these verses and complete the narrative with its happy ending I Kings 21:27-29.**
Digression – Kings 21:20-26

20 And Ahab said to Elijah: Have you found me, my enemy!

Elijah answered: I have found you! For you have sold yourself to do that which is evil in the sight of the YHWH. 21 Now I will bring evil upon you and will utterly wipe you away, and I will cut off from Ahab every man-child/ every pisser against the wall, everyone shut up and left at large in Israel. 22 And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasa the son of Ahijah, for the anger/ provocation you provoked Me, and the sin you brought upon Israel.

23 And of Jezebel, YHWH has spoken: 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the moat of Jezreel. 24 Those that who belong to Ahab who die in the city - the dogs shall eat; and those who die in the field - the birds of the sky will eat.'

25 But there was none like Ahab, who did give himself over to do that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. 26 And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites did, whom the YHWH disinherited before the children of Israel.

Act Two Concluded: Ahab Repents – I Kings 21:27-29

27 When Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay down in sackcloth, and walked softly.

28 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying:

29 'See that Ahab has submitted before Me? Therefore as a result of his submission before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.'

[Yair Zakovitz understands the conclusion as a catastrophic defeat for Jezebel as her husband chooses to listen to God's word, not hers! Recall that Ahab lay down and stopped eating after hearing Navot invoke God's name in his refusal to give the king what he desired. Then Jezebel told Ahab to get up and eat because she was going to deliver Navot's land. When Navot was reported dead she told her husband to listen to her and go down to claim the vineyard as his own inheritance.

Jezebel said to Ahab, `Arise, inherit the vineyard of Navot the Jezreelite who refused to sell it to you, for Navot is not alive, he is dead.'

As soon as Ahab heard that Navot was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Navot the Jezreelite to inherit it. But God sent Elijah to "arise" and to stop Ahab from claiming the vineyard. Ahab did hear and listen to God, not to Jezebel, and he went back to lie down as he had when he heard Navot's first refusal and again he refused to eat bread.

When Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay down in sackcloth.

Here unlike Adam, Ahab does not listen to his wife's voice overruling God's voice of prohibition. Ahab and Adam may not take from the garden. Recall that Ahab had wanted to make the vineyard into a garden = gan echoing Gan Eden:

Ahab spoke to Navot thus, "Give me your vineyard and let it be my vegetable garden (I Kings 21:3) Ahab whose unhealthy appetite led him to want to eat Navot's garden (as in Nathan's parable the richman wants to eat the poorman's one and only lamb) had gone on a "hunger strike" in his sullen disappointment. But now after being disappointed again by Elijah denying him the inheritance of the garden/vineyard, Ahab goes on a penitential fast like the king of Nineveh who came down form his throne, removed his royal
robe, put on sackcloth, sat on the ground and fasted in penance because he had heard the prophet Jonah's word of doom from God (Jonah 3:5-8).

Like David, Ahab descends to do teshuvah. Like David, his potential excuses for his indirect murder of Navot, which in this case Ahab may not even have known about, drop away. **Ahab takes responsibility without any apologetics**, without even Adam's putting off the blame on the woman, without blaming Jezebel who was responsible. Ahab, like Avigail, takes responsibility even for the sin of the spouse when neither Ahab nor Avigail knew what had happened. Like David, God immediately rescinds the punishment – but only partially and temporarily. This kind of systemic corruption of the monarchy by David and by Ahab necessarily produces more shedding of blood.]

In conclusion, says Tikva Frimer Kensky: The house of Ahab began to unravel. Ahab himself died of wounds incurred fighting at Ramoth-Gilead. His son Jehoram had good intentions. He dismantled Ba'al worship, and seemed to listen more to Elisha than his predecessors had listened to prophets. But he ruled only twelve years before Jehu, anointed by a disciple of Elisha, brought the final doom of the house of Omri in a bloody coup.

Jezebel wished to gratify her husband's desire, but the prophet tells Ahab that he has been doomed to a terrible death. Foreign wives bring their own ideas about social institutions, and Jezebel has run roughshod over Israel's cherished traditions. **Her vision of kingship is imperial and imperious, not so different from David's before he learned better.**
Navot’s Inheritance by Walter Brueggemann
from The Land, The Prophet and the King (pp. 90 f)

Kings are not free to manage the land as they wish in Israel. The land is not to be perceived in Israel as it is among the nations. That is a perennial lesson Israel had to learn and to perceive otherwise is a perennial temptation. Israel kept thinking it could be like the other nations (1 Sam. 8:5, 20) and only discovered painfully that it was not possible. The land of Israel must be understood peculiarly because Israel itself was a peculiar people.

1 KINGS 21: THE LAND, THE TORAH, AND COVETING

One such model of king/prophet confrontation over land management is that of Ahab and Elijah in 1 Kings 21. The narrative begins (I Kings 21: 1-4) with an encounter of Ahab and Navot, each expressing a view of the land. Ahab regards the land as a tradable commodity:

“Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money” (I Kings 21: 2).

[Yair Zakovitz in "Kerem Haya L'Navot", HaMikra Kifshuto edited by Meir Weiss adds:

The opening sentence is not about Navot but about his vineyard. It is literarily translated: "A vineyard belonged to Navot the Jezreelite." It begins just as does the prophecy of Isaiah 5:1 ‘A vineyard belonged to my friend' which refers to God's love for Israel and as does the song of Shir HaShirim 8:11-12 referring to King Solomon's beloved vineyard. The relationship is personal to this land. It is not a commodity.]

In contrast, for Nabot land is not a tradable commodity, but an inalienable inheritance:

"The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers . . . I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers" (v. 3).

The exchange sharply expresses two views of land. That of Navot represents traditional covenantal language in which the land is not owned in a way that permits its disposal. It is "inheritance," which means it is held in trust from generation to generation, beginning in gift and continuing so, and land management is concerned with preservation and enhancement of the gift for the coming generations. Navot is responsible for the land, but is not in control over it. It is the case not that the land belongs to him but that he belongs to the land. Navot perceives himself and the land in a covenantal relation, with the relation between the two having a history of fidelity which did not begin with him and will not end with him. Thus the term "inheritance" insists that the land be understood as a dimension of family history.

Of course Ahab and surely Jezebel had no notion of that, because kings characteristically think everything is to be bought and sold and traded and conquered. The statements imply two views of royal management. Ahab intends to deal equitably but believes royal prerogatives have weight. By contrast Navot gives no credibility to royal claims. He regards the king as also subject to more historical, covenantal views of land management. The exchange embodies the alternatives expressed in Deut. 18:9ff., the one providing means of self-security, the other the risks and openness of covenantal history.

The response of Jezebel (I Kings 21: 4-7) introduces a new element presenting:

(a) Canaanite kingship as an institution which can rule and manipulate,
(b) a mercantile view of land in which land is a commodity to be secured by what ever means, and
(c) an alien view of Torah which makes the king immune from its demands.

Thus in the speech and action of Jezebel covenantal views of kingship, land, and Torah are all called into question. The narrative hints that Ahab, in contrast to his wife, is at least cognizant of peculiarly Israelite perceptions, for he is prepared to honor the resistance of Navot even if he does not like it. The distortion comes from Jezebel, clearly not "one from among the covenant partners." Her presence embodies an alien view of kingship, land, and Torah. She has no appreciation at all for the inalienable quality of a family inheritance.
"Inheritance" as a land notion directly contradicts royal notions of land management which know no limitation and which sanction confiscation and royal prerogatives generally. The idea of inheritance affirms that there are enduring and resilient networks of meaning and relationship into which one is placed, and these are fundamental to the shape of society. The queen believes, as Peter Berger has observed, that persons and property are replaceable parts, each a component in a grand royal design which can be shuffled and rearranged at the whim of the managers. The queen believes societal arrangements are a human artifact. Therefore they can be handled with freedom and inventiveness, thus denying the shape of societal relations ordained in covenant and not subject to such administration.

Jezebel's complete misunderstanding of Israelite notions of king, land, and Torah is evident in her rebuke and assurance to Ahab:

"Do you now govern Israel? I will give you the vineyard" (v. 7).

The first comment shows that "govern" (literally "do kingship") means total control with capacity to dispose of land as one prefers. The second comment misunderstands "inheritance" because she proposes to give what cannot be given and in any case is not in her power to give. Inheritances are not given in Israel, surely not by a royal officer. In the queen's view, quite in contrast to that of Navot, land is negotiable, that is, it is a piece of property handled objectively and with detachment and rationality. How modern she is!

The conspiracy of I Kings 21:8-14 presents a view of monarch not inconsistent with that of 1 Sam. 8:10-18. The main function of the king is to take, and there are no higher norms or principles which govern the king or protect his subjects according to that notion. The will of the monarch, as capricious as it may be, is all that matters.

The narrative contains two noteworthy features. First, the queen writes, that is, issues a directive, not unlike David's action against Uriah. Monarchy represents in Israel the emergence of written communication which is bureaucratic and impersonal. It is consistent with a notion of kingship outside the context of covenant.

Second, the queen uses the Torah for her own ends. Thus in her false charge she appeals to the norm of Torah: "You shall not revile God nor curse a ruler of your people" (Ex. 22:28). But for her the teaching is not a norm. It is a tool like everything else to serve royal interests. It is not a principle for the queen but only an instrument for manipulation. Here is a ruler who no longer submits herself to Torah, but now controls Torah, just as she intends to control land and to control citizens.

But the issue is not yet joined. The action really only begins in I Kings 21:17 with the appearance of Elijah, spokesman for YHWH champion of Navot, enemy of this kind of royalty. Until now the narrative is preliminary to the essential confrontation. The narrative discloses in its movement a factor about land which Jezebel completely missed. She presumed that in securing land she had only to cope with public opinion and conventional legal practice. And she managed to circumvent both of these. By I Kings 21:16 the narrative appears to reach a conclusion as the land issue is resolved.

"And as soon as Ahab heard that Navot was dead,
Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Navot the Jezreelite,
to take possession of it."

But now it is clear that the hedge against royal confiscation is not only a social usage which might be overcome, but the intentionality of YHWH himself. And that changes everything in ways that this Phoenician princess could not comprehend. It is YHWH who has assigned land. When YHWH gives it, it is gift-land. One is not free to pervert that peculiar character of land. The relation of Navot and land is not owner/property but heir/gift, and that is true even in the face of the king, not to say the queen.

The speech of Elijah is crisp and unmistakable. There is first a question of indictment:

"Thus says the Lord: 'Have you killed, and also taken possession?' " (v. 19).

Two offenses, guilty of both - killing and taking, both in the repertoire of Canaan but not of Israel.
And then an answer of **verdict**:

"Thus says the Lord: `In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Navot shall dogs lick your own blood.'"

The land will be avenged precisely because land is not given over to any human agent, but is a sign and function in covenant. Thus arrayed against the monarchy are both the traditionalism of Navot and the purpose of YHWH.

This plus factor of **YHWH’s purpose for land** had been affirmed both in the legal and sapiential traditions of Israel:

In the inheritance which you will hold in the land that the Lord your God gives you to possess, you shall not remove your neighbor's landmark, which the men of old have set. (Deut. 19:14)

Remove not the ancient landmark which your fathers have set. (Prov. 22:28)

Do not remove an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you. (Prov. 23:10-11)

More vigorously YHWH is presented as an active intervenor:

The Lord tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries. (Prov. 15:25)

YHWH is the lord of tearing down and building up. In our narrative he tears down the proud, that is, those of elevated heart (cf. Deut. 17:20) and builds up the "widow," that is, those who have lost power and standing in the community. Most remarkable and most radical is the alliance of YHWH with the poor against those who would seek to take the land from them.

Prophets characteristically condemn avarice in land seizure:

Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. (Isaiah 5:8)

Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil upon their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. (Micha 2:1-3)

This last could well be a commentary on the Navot episode. The ones who take the land are characterized by a sequence of harsh verbs: they covet, they seize, they take, they oppress. And the offense is against the man, but also against the inheritance, and if so, then against the God who arranged it so. Such a proprietary attitude toward land is oppression of the land as well. It takes the land out of covenant and reduces it to control. The character of the land itself as covenanted, gifted land is disregarded and can now bring only trouble. The prophet announces the end, the end of haughtiness in which one takes priority over another, the one who has forgotten about covenant partners. It is clear that this is not simply gentle concern for poor folks, but it has to do with YHWH, with his character and his commitments. He is allied with the poor against the rapacious wealthy. That is who he is and no royal wishing will have it otherwise.

The speech of Elijah announces a surprising thing, one not heard often by kings. When one in power forgets brothers and sisters, it is not only the brother and sister who suffer but the one who "lifted his heart over them." The king is subject to the Torah and may not manage the land in any other way. The verdict of Elijah contains a word from YHWH which always surprised the self-serving landed:

Behold, I will bring evil upon you; I will utterly sweep you away and
[I] will cut off from Ahab every male....
I will make your house like the house of Jereboam... (I Kings 21: 21-22)

The first formula is like that against David (2 Sam. 12:11) which in itself is radical enough - God against the landed.

The second formula is more radical and echoes the threat of Samuel against landed monarchy (1 Sam. 12:15) although the language is different.

The third and fourth statements, by appeal to historical example, announce the end of monarchy, the end of promise, the end of landedness, the end of royal history. Royal history is terminated by the Lord of the land who is the Lord of the Torah. The grammar of the narrative is instructive:

- **Jezebel had asserted, "I will give."**
- **But when the resolution comes, it is YHWH who says, "I, I":**
  - I will bring, I will sweep away, I will cut off, I will make.

The initiative has passed from the royal family back to the land-giving God. He finally presides.
VIII. Movies as Midrash

A. Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward in *David and Bathsheba* (1951)
   "Bathsheba Goes bathing in Hollywood" by David Gunn

   Screenplay Exercise on David and Bathsheva
   Lesson Plan for the Movie,
   *Crimes and Misdemeanors* Reviewed by Maurice Yacowar

Midrash has always filled in gaps with analogies from the everyday sayings and anecdotes (*mashal l’ma hadavar domeh*) and with dramatic dialogue where the Biblical text was reticent about the inner feelings or even contradictory. The emotional power of visual imagery in the midrash makes up for the paucity of detail – especially physical detail - in the Tanakh.

Movies, art and sculpture have sought to give “rounded” portrayals of the shadow characters of the Tanakh. But beyond the aesthetic effect, each midrash – classical and contemporary – puts an interpretive, value spin on its rewritten story. Let us examine those interpolations, extrapolations and rewritings and pay attention to their role as sophisticated commentaries on the Biblical text as well as on the perennial issues raised by the Tanakh.

**David and Bathsheva (1951) – Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward**

In the 1985 film King David, drastic changes are made to make David look better. Paramount Pictures; produced by Martin Elfand; directed by Bruce Beresford; and starring Richard Gere. Alice Krige has a minor role as Bathsheba.
The Movie Midrash written for Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward (1951)

The 1951 movie script is a rewriting of the David and Bathsheba story with many liberties taken for dramatic effect, for condensation of the plot but also to reflect a deeply Christian and romantic ethos. Let us review the script’s story to highlight these interesting and legitimate but not at all innocent movie midrashim.

Opening Scene – David the aging king at the front in TransJordan besieging Rabbah capital of Ammon.

The Tanakh has King David sitting at home restlessly, while his men are off at the front, even though it is the king’s role to lead his armies. Is this cowardice? Doe she prefer to fight by proxy? Not according to the movie which has King David on the front sneaking off to join a small patrol led by Captain Uriah. Chief of Staff Yoav is appalled by the risk, but David loves the exhilaration. Ultimately David needs to go back to Jerusalem to rule.

In discussion with Captain Uriah, the older wiser more mellow David contrasts with the war-eager young soldier that reminds David of himself as a young soldier.

David – In war time it is always the best soldiers who die. But you Uriah will serve me best by staying alive.

Uriah – We will gladly die for our king.

David – But what then will I say to your wife who comes wailing to my doorstep?

Uriah – If I am unlucky and fall in battle, she will weep with tears of pride.

Scene – David with Michal and then David with Batsheva

There is a bitter exchange between David the shepherd’s son and Queen Michal daughter of the aristocratic Saul. The exchange in I Samuel 6 is reflected here. Here the dialogue shows that David has lost his passion for life and love and found no satisfaction in his official wives.

David – We are past the age of our passion, hate or love or anguish... but we have to go on living.

Yet David’s emotional acquiescence is immediately reversed by sighting from his roof porch the beautiful Bathsheba bathing. He invites her to come to receive a medal on behalf of her husband’s bravery and to dine with him that evening.

David – As a soldier’s wife you must hate me for sending your husband away?

Batsheva – Not really. That is your duty.

David – But we Hebrews are a passionate people. Like the hot desert winds fro which we come, we are fight fiercely, we love fiercely and we worship fiercely. So we feel sorrow fiercely even in the absence of a loved one.

Batsheva – But I only met Uriah when my father brought him home and we were married onlly six days when he went off to war.

David - Uriah is a fool. When I looked on you from my terrace tonight, I knew that every future moment spent away from you would be a moment lost. Yet he has found only six days for you in seven months. The perfume of his beloved is the stink of war. Does he think that a man was made only to know the agony of battle? Does he call that manhood? Has he no blood, no heart?

Batsheva - You are the king. You have sent for me and made known to me your will. What else is there for me to say?

David – In Egypt Pharaoh has that right but be thankful that I'm not Pharaoh. I have never used my power to take anything by force. All I have ever had was given to me as a gift. Freely and without restraint! Even the kingship I refused to take until every elder begged me to be their

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king. It is a matter of pride never to force myself on anyone. I did not ask for you until you and Uriah told me there was no love in your marriage. Uriah’s dream of glory is his wife in tears.

Then David tries to send Bathsheba home without having intercourse saying: At least I can console myself with the thought that your modesty matches your beauty.

Bathsheba - Perhaps you would prefer truth to modesty, sire. Before you went away, I used to watch you every evening as you walked on your terrace. Always at the same hour, always alone. Today I heard you had returned.
D: And you knew that I ...
B: You’d be on your terrace tonight? Yes. I had heard that never had the king found a woman to please him. I dared to hope I might be that woman.
D: Why are you telling me this now? Why not before?
B: Because, first I had to know what was in your heart. If the law of Moses is to be broken, David, let us break it in full understanding of what we want from each other.

David tries to kiss Bathsheba, but she holds back until she can explain: Wait. There are women you can send for and send away again, but I am not one of them.

D – I will never send you away!
B – Think not of one night but of all nights and days. Can I give you what you need as your wife?
D: But you are not free....

D – What I need is a friend, not like those who call themselves the friends of the king. I see only the top of their heads as they bow to me and their palms stretched out to make requests. I am only a man. I need someone to understand that. I need someone to share my heart.
B – The man I saw on the roof was not a king but a man whose heart is well worth sharing...

Scene – David and Bathsheba pass by an attractive woman pleading for mercy against the city gate. Then the crowd invites the wife of the man who committed adultery with the accused woman to cast the first stone. She does and the adulteress is stoned to death horribly.

Scene – Bathsheba tells David she is pregnant, after the couple have spent many nights and outings together. They discuss their options as David realizes that Bathsheba – but not David – will be stoned to death for the adultery which cannot be denied due to the pregnancy.

D – What if I sent for Uriah and told him everything?
B – We both know what he would say.
D – Honor is everything, charity is nothing. For the sake of honor, blood must flow, lives must be ruined, and humanity denied. I can see Uriah hurrying to the gate to be the first to cast a stone.

D: Then I will just invite him back for one night...
B: David, it is not worthy of you.
D – I know, but it is your life, Bathsheba, that is in danger. There is no act so vile I would not do it to save my love.

Scene – Uriah has been summoned back to the palace and David plies him with wine and entertains him with a sexually arousing belly dancer before sending him home to Bathsheba.

Uriah: My only desire is to serve my king!
David: I might believe that, but you have a wife.
U: My wife is nothing sire, beside my duty....
D: A woman does not always share her husband’s devotion to duty. Have you ever tried to think of things from her point of view?
U: No sire.
D: Well supposing her wishes and yours come into conflict?
U: A woman’s wishes cannot conflict with her husband’s, sire. That is the law.
D: The law. The law can only control what we do, not what we think. What does your wife think, Uriah?
U: I do not know, sire.
D: Is it possible that you believe she does not think or feel? A woman is flesh and blood, Uriah, like us. Perhaps even more so because we give her so little to think of but matters of the flesh. In all our history, only a handful of women have been permitted to write their names beside the men. Miriam, Deborah, Jael, one or two more. A woman’s occupation is her husband and her life is her love. But if her husband rejects her love, if he puts another love before it, if he denies her the only meaning her life can have, is it not understandable that she seeks a meaning for it elsewhere?
U: With another man? It is against the law!
D: Yet if her husband feels pity for her, he may forgive her under the law.
U: No, then it is doubly his duty to make sure the law is obeyed.
D: Could you condemn your own wife?
U: Yes if she had broken the law, I would not hesitate to do my duty, sire.
U: Sire, please do me a boon [a favor]. Dispatch to Yoav to set me in the forefront in the hottest battle so I may serve my king to the utmost.

Later that night David discovers that Uriah has not returned to his wife but sleeps with the king’s guards.

D: Why did you not go home to sleep with your wife?
U: I ask your pardon, sire, perhaps you will consider this foolish thing. I swore on my sword that as long as Yoav and the armies sleep in the field, I would deny myself the comfort of my wife’s bed. I would keep myself clean for battle as if entering the tabernacle of the ark.
D: You stupid fool!

Later David adds a dispatch to Yoav: Set me in the forefront in the hottest battle.
Avihai his military attache questions David who defends himself: It is his own wish, even his own words! Yet I will not add hypocrisy to my other sins. I cannot ask Yoav to share the burden of guilt. Place him at the hottest point of the battle – then retire from him that he may be smitten!

Scene – David married Batsheba immediately to save her from suspicion of adultery that could have be fateful to her and her alone.
Then Nathan echoing Elijah prophesies a drought and famine for Israel’s unspecified sins. Then Nathan reports on Avshalom who is stirring up a coup by saying to the people that his father the king will not give them justice [The move telescopes and deletes completely the rape of Tamar but moves Avshalom’s complaints about David’s injustice up front.]

Scene – After the marriage to Batsheba the child dies in the palace and a severe drought rages outside. The Nathan approaches the king with the parable.

David concludes: Pay the lamb sevenfold or let him be killed of showing no pity.
Nathan: You are the man!
David: You have made me pronounce judgment on myself and I accept it. It is the will of God and I accept it.
Nathan: Bathsheba has sinned also and she must be punished according to the law.
David: She is innocent. I was the king. She could not have refused! I alone am responsible. She came with love and tenderness, not evil.
Nathan: She has brought evil, the wrath of God on Israel!
David: No!

Scene – David flees Nathan and goes to meet and to defend Bathsheba from the mob.
David to Bathsheba: I killed him.
B: NO, I too bear the guilt. God sees into our hearts, David.

Bathsheba: David, take this harp. I have never heard you play. Play something from your childhood as a shepherd.

David plays and sings Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want... surely goodness and mercy..."

David who had become an agnostic recalls: I believed in that God of my youth, but I lost that faith. Now Nathan has found God for me – but not a God of mercy! Only a God who thinks only of his justice. So you Bathsheba must die. But I will not let you die!"

Scene – David confronts Nathan and the crowd and then goes into the Ohel Moed to pray.

David: I will not believe in a God who will condemn a woman for another’s sin. I will go to the Tabernacle of the Ark to pray.
Nathan: If the young David of faith prays to God, God will not deny him mercy.

David kneels by the Ark in the Holy of Holies:
God, God of my early youth. Let thine eyes which alone see clearly fall upon your unworthy servant. In all things I have failed Thee.... I have abused Thee with ingratitude. I have been a faithless shepherd.
Yet, Oh God, I am your creation. Your holy spirit abides in me... By my sin I have put myself beyond the compass of your forgiveness. But forgive the people for the sin I did. And let Bathsheba live to praise thy name and testify to thy mercy. Show her your loving kindness and let their punishment fall on your servant who earned it. Look on the boy I was who loved Thee and would have died for Thee. Let the boy live again in innocence!

David then touches the Ark in suicidal act which he knows will cause him to be struck down by Divine thunderbolts like Uzziah the servant who touched the Ark when it was brought to Jerusalem.

David enters a reverie of flashbacks to his faithful youth. When he opens his eyes the thunderbolts have not killed him but they have brought long desired rain as a sign of Divine mercy and forgiveness.

The choir sings Psalm 23 and Bathsheba and David are reunited.

[Note that the Psalm 23 replaces the Tanakh’s Psalm 51 attributed by the editors of Psalms as David’s penitential prayer after sinning with Bathsheba. The script also conflates the drought brought on Israel for David’s census in II Sam 23-24 with God’s punishment for the sin of Bathsheba.

To Summarize:
The movie script turns Uriah into the adulterer betraying his wife for the perfume of war. He thus betrays true manhood which must learn from womanhood about love and emotions. In effect the marriage is a mere legal sham, but truthfully marriage without love has no standing. The romantic critique of institutions like the Christian critique of Pharisaic Judaism raises love above law. In same sense David the artist is above David the warrior and the ruler, for the private life is true life. The sacredness of matrimony has been voided by Uriah’s betrayal of love. So David is permitted to take Bathsheba who is not coerced but herself a lover who took the initiative to attract David. However Bathsheba is not a seducer or even a collaborator in her husband’s death. Bathsheba opposes David’s plan to kill Uriah so she is not passive as is her Biblical character. She does not seek to manipulate David but to offer him love and liberation only after she knows he wants that. Bathsheba is a woman as enabler of men’s self-fulfillment reviving David’s artistry as well as his love life which have been corrupted through institutionalization of his roles.
However reading the Tanakh simultaneously we as readers may feel deep ironies about the movie. How can David insist that he has never taken anything by force. Samuel in I Samuel 8 has warned us that kings are takers and David surely does take Batsheva from Uriah. The betrayal of a soldier at the front recalls the Japanese radio propagandain which Tokyo Rose wearnd American soldiers that while they fought Japan abroad, their wives and sweethearts were betraying them at home. David says Be thankful that I'm not Pharaoh yet David is worse than the Pharaoh who took Sarah from Avraham not knowing they were married. Abraham worried that they might kill him if Pharaoh knew Abrham was beautiful Sarah;s wife, but it David, God's messiah who lacks "fear of the Lord" – conscience. He takes batsheva nd then has Uirah her husband killed.

Gregory Peck, Susan Hayward, Raymond Massey produced by Darryl Zanuck and written by Phillip Dunne.

"For this woman – David the Lion of Judah, conqueror of Goliath, broke God’s own commandment!"

“Bathsheba Goes Bathing in Hollywood” 34 by David Gunn

Not a Biblical Epic but a Chic Flick?

In terms of genre, biblical movies are generally considered in the category of epic. Action, spectacle, and great public events are their stock in trade. This movie, however, has at its center David's world weariness, his isolation from his family, cynicism about religion, and his search for meaning. It is a movie, in other words, about a man's mid-life crisis. This context helps delineate a role for Bathsheba: she is the Other Woman who enables his recovery of both love and faith. Here, then, is a domestic love story centering around a searching man and a strong woman.

In 1951 that places it in an interesting relationship with a family of movies that critics call "the woman's film." In such movies Susan Hayward had made her reputation. Throughout the '40s, during World War II and its aftermath, and into the early '50s until the advent of television soap operas, a large number of movies were made expressly to meet what producers understood to be primarily a market of women [more prosaically, a chic flick].

The narrative structure [of the Woman's Film] revolves around the female protagonist's quest for happiness, a quest played out thematically around issues of sexuality, marriage, the family, and independence. What the majority of these female protagonists quickly discover, however, is that in the patriarchal society of their diegetic [film] world, there is no place for an active, independent woman.... Only through renunciation and sacrifice [do] they achieve their ultimate goal; indeed, have any hope of achieving it.... Directed to women, but rarely by them, these films entertained, superficially, while beneath the surface they laid out rigid guidelines which informed woman as to the correct path to take, the right choice to make. (Morrison: 49)

34 First published in Semeia, pp. 92ff, and reprinted in Goliath’s Head: Sex, Politics, and the Authority of the Bible
Now although Bathsheba, is not strictly the protagonist, she plays a pivotal role without which the script would collapse. While her search for happiness is subordinated, structurally, to David's, it is not eclipsed as a source of interest or motivation in the plot. She is depicted as desiring and being in love with him. Yet her refusal to countenance the murder of Uriah, her rebuke to David when he insists on proceeding with the marriage (why had he left her alone for so long if he truly loved her?), and her stony faced acquiescence, all speak of struggle within her. Sexuality, marriage, the family, and independence are all thematic issues.

Conventional, too, in this movie is the "woman's film" theme of waiting. But even more striking is the film's use of another characteristic of the genre, namely the identity of the male protagonist as an artist.

The love story has a way of feminizing the male, argues Mary Ann Doane, and art is "the only culturally sanctioned and simultaneously 'feminized' activity" (97). David's rediscovery of his harp, and through it his identity, marks the final turning point of the movie. David is not only king but God's musician. Of signal importance for the resolution of the plot, the discovery is engineered by Bathsheba. So we end with...Bathsheba as the wife (as she is now) that every man of creative genius in a mid-life crisis needs.

But there is something odd about this movie which has to do with the biblical text which parents it. Normally in the Woman's Film, the woman's desire cannot be sustained - she must renounce it or be subject to filmic sanctions: separation from her lover (often by her self-sacrifice) or even death. Indeed, in the movie, Nathan, Michal and David's neglected sons demand just that-death for her for adultery. This does not happen, however, because in this particular film the biblical text which parents it insists on the marriage both happening and continuing....to the typological scenes of Bathsheba's enthronement. So the movie ends not only with the miracle of the rain that relieves the drought, but with the miracle of David rededicated to his lover-wife. Thus they walk hand-in-hand, happily into the rain-drenched sunrise. So she gets away with it!

Not another Femme Fatale, but a Liberated Women?

The movie presents some words about women's subjectivity that must have been disturbing to some men in 1951. The scene is between David and Uriah whom the king has summoned from the battlefield upon learning that Bathsheba is pregnant. David invites the soldier to speak with him alone. After assuring David that Joab, the general, is confident of success, Uriah seeks permission to return to the field. David replies that there will be dispatches for him to take back and suggests that he might desire to stay in Jerusalem longer.

Uriah: My only desire is to serve my king!
David: I might believe that, but you have a wife.
U: My wife is nothing sire, beside my duty....
D: A woman does not always share her husband's devotion to duty. Have you ever tried to think of things from her point of view?
U: No sire.
D: Well supposing her wishes and yours come into conflict?
U: A woman's wishes cannot conflict with her husband's, sire. That is the law.
D: The law. The law can only control what we do, not what we think. What does your wife think, Uriah?
U: I do not know, sire.
D: Is it possible that you believe she does not think or feel? A woman is flesh and blood, Uriah, like us. Perhaps even more so because we give her so little to think of but matters of the flesh. In all our history, only a handful of women have been permitted to write their names beside the men. Miriam, Deborah, Jael, one or two more. A woman's occupation is her husband and her life is her love. But if her husband rejects her love, if he puts another love before it, if he denies her the only meaning her life can have, is it not understandable that she seeks a meaning for it elsewhere?

Something is happening in this movie that is exploiting the fundamental ambiguities of the social and ideological forces that created the genre in the first place. As women during the war moved rapidly into the workforce outside the home, their economic power grew, as did their perceptions of their capabilities as independent agents in many other areas of public and private life. This was a critical growth point in the history of women's subjectivity in this country and in the West. The Woman's Film encoded the tension between the emerging desire of women as subjects - and women were willing to pay to see themselves as such - and the latent anxiety of men as subjects over the impending collapse of their privileged status.

Bathing in Hollywood

I wonder, then, if the bathing scene may not be viewed as an emblem of the ambiguities of the film, the genre, and the social order of the early fifties as it related to women. Does Bathsheba beckon David or her women viewers? Does she beckon at all? As she turns, her eyes seem fleetingly to meet the camera. Is her gaze towards David, or the viewer? Or nowhere in particular - her own space? What about that solid screen? Does it invite the male gaze behind it to contemplate her nakedness? Or does it mark off her body as her own to give? Her boundary-to be crossed at her choice? Does the screen signal that her body is a source of vulnerability, needing protection? Or does it constitute a shield for battle, signaling that the body behind it has a power over the man? If so, what (given the movie's outcome) is the moral nature of that power? Is she a victim? A survivor? A schemer? A femme fatale? A femme forte? All or none of the above? Can she slip out from behind the viewer's labels as easily as she can slip out from behind the screen?

A Speech for Women's Liberation by a Man

In the last analysis I would not argue that these ambiguities are finely balanced. The patriarchal rules are still in place at the end. Certainly the messages are mixed. Even the speech for women's liberation has to be spoken by the man. Yet it is spoken, self-serving as it may sound on David's lips. And Susan Hayward plays no stereotyped steamy "seductress" as many male critics desired but instead she brings dignity to a character of multiple dimensions.
David: Uriah is a fool. When I looked on you from my terrace tonight, I knew that every future moment spent away from you would be a moment lost. Yet he has found only six days for you in seven months. The perfume of his beloved is the stink of war. Does he think that a man was made only to know the agony of battle? Does he call that manhood? Has he no blood, no heart?... Be thankful that I’m not Pharaoh. At least I can console myself with the thought that your modesty matches your beauty.

Bathsheba: Perhaps you would prefer truth to modesty, sire. Before you went away, I used to watch you every evening as you walked on your terrace. Always at the same hour, always alone. Today I heard you had returned.

D: And you knew that I ...

B: You’d be on your terrace tonight? Yes. I had heard that never had the king found a woman to please him. I dared to hope I might be that woman.

D: Why are you telling me this now? Why not before?

B: Because, first I had to know what was in your heart. If the law of Moses is to be broken, David, let us break it in full understanding of what we want from each other.

Bathsheva - a character of multiple dimensions:
A woman who desires, perhaps initiates and certainly collaborates in an affair, makes love, refuses to harm her husband, calls the king on his failings, entertains fear, despair, hope, and happiness. ...A Woman's Film...
To Summarize:

The movie script turns Uriah into the adulterer betraying his wife for the perfume of war. He thus betrays true manhood which must learn from womanhood about love and emotions. In effect the marriage is a mere legal sham, but truthfully marriage without love has no standing. The romantic critique of institutions like the Christian critique of Pharisaic Judaism raises love above law. In same sense David the artist is above David the warrior and the ruler, for the private life is true life. The sacredness of matrimony has been voided by Uriah’s betrayal of love. So David is permitted to take Batsheva who is not coerced but herself a lover who took the initiative to attract David. However Batsheva is not a seducer or even a collaborator in her husband’s death. Batsheva opposes David’s plan to kill Uriah so she is not passive as is her Biblical character. She does not seek to manipulate David but to offer him love and liberation only after she knows he wants that. Batsheva is a woman as enabler of men’s self-fulfillment reviving David’s artistry as well as his love life which have been corrupted through institutionalization of his roles.

However reading the Tanakh simultaneously we as readers may feel deep ironies about the movie. How can David insists that he has never taken anything by force. Samuel in I Samuel 8 has warned us that kings are takers and David surely does take Batsheva from Uriah. The betrayal of a soldier at the front recalls the Japanese radio propaganda which Tokyo Rose wared American soldiers that while they fought Japan abroad, their wives and sweethearts were betraying them at home. David says Be thankful that I’m not Pharaoh yet David is worse than the Pharaoh who took Sarah from Avraham not knowing they were married. Abraham worried that they might kill him if Pharaoh knew Abrham was beautiful Sarah’s wife, but it David, God’s messiah who lacks “fear of the Lord” – conscience. He takes batsheva nd then has Uriah her husband killed.

Cheryl Exum: Is Bathsheba Free to say No?

The movie David and Bathsheva is sensitive to the possibility of coercion: is Bathsheba free to say no? “You are the king’, says’ Bathsheba. ‘What other answer can I give, sire You have sent for me and made known to me your will, what, else is there for me to say’? This response represents Bathsheba as a subject who feels she cannot refuse her king, one who yields to his authority, and at this point we may think that the film is out to restore Bathsheba’s honor. But pursuing this characterization of Bathsheba would cast King David in too negative a light. David therefore responds to Bathsheba’s submission to his will with a long speech in which he prides himself for refusing ever to take anything by force, not even the kingdom:

’So I said nothing to you until you told me that there is no love in your marriage. Yes, you told me that, and so did Uriah…’

Only when he tells Bathsheba that she may leave, proving his respect for her right to refute, does Bathsheva confess to having planned the whole thing! She watched him walking on his balcony every evening and knew she could count on his being there to see her. She had heard he had found no woman to please him. She wants to be the woman who will make him happy. She wants to be his wife.

(J. Cheryl Exum, Plotted, Shot, and Painted, p 23)
PART ONE – THE TANAKH TEXT

Enduring Understandings of the Study Unit:

1) CHARACTER. Reading and interpretation of a narrative requires gapfilling to imagine and extrapolate psychologically coherent characters. A screenwriter is a kind of interpreter of text that turns words into visual images.

2) DIALOGUE, CASTING, STAGING. To simulate what a movie producer does in turning the Tanakh into a movie may be a very serious form of textual interpretation and a form of midrash that updates ancient perennial stories.

3) PLOT. “One sin leads to another sin.” Transgressions may produce unforeseen circumstances that complicate one’s attempt to control life. Where one hides the truth and refuses to confess guilt, the indiscretions may escalate to cover-up the original misdemeanor and become heinous crimes.

4) PLOT. Choosing an ending for a narrative about sin depends on a philosophical perspective about the moral structure of the world.

5) MOVIE REVIEWER. Write your own review of the movie evaluating it both for its popular appeal and for its treatment of Biblical materials. A close text study of a great movie has many parallels to Torah study.

CAVEAT for the educator: The length of the text and the movie require using excerpts or reading at home or seeing the movie at home. We must balance the need to cover the long story with a close reading of selected passages.

I. Introduction. SIMULATION.

Imagine that you are screenwriters for a movie to be made of the story of David and Batsheva. Your job, as screenwriters, is to present to your producers an outline of the story, sketches of the main characters, and the dramatic issues which you want developed.

Our problem, as the screenwriters, is complicated by the peculiar nature of the Biblical text. The Bible is not at all like the typical story or novel which we are used to. It is extremely spare on physical details. The description, if any, is brief. Dialogue, especially between David and Batsheva, is nearly non-existent. Whatever details we are given at first glance seem more confusing than enlightening. Yet, it is my belief, that if we read very closely and carefully, we will find a richness of character, plot, and setting. Just remember. Every detail, every nuance is important. It's put there for a reason. No plot fillers in this text, folks.

So let's take about ten minutes to read to ourselves Chapter 11. As you read, picture in your mind the main characters (their feelings, their thoughts, their motivations, their fears) and make notes as would a producer who will be turning this plot into a popular movie. Who are the good guys and who the villains? What is the dramatic interest? What visual aspects can be added? (weather, place, time, props, clothing etc)
II. Main Characters. Read II Sam 11.

Role-playing: The research team of the screenwriter and the producer are sent to gather background.
Who are the main characters of the story? Who is in our cast’?
Expected answers: David, Bat Sheva, Uriah, Yoav, messenger, servants, soldiers.
(Students might not think to mention servants and soldiers, but want to add them at least to fill out the picture, and perhaps, time permitting, to focus on the question of the secret nature of the love affair.)

A. Focus on DAVID:

Introduction. The David-Batsheva affair is the fulcrum of David’s life, of David’s kingdom and of the Book of Samuel. His road has been up from rags to riches until he reaches the height of his power and legitimacy in his new capital housing the Ark of the Ten Commandments. The civil war between northern and southern tribes is ended, all acclaim David the king and God’s prophet Nathan proclaims David God’s chosen one and his dynasty an eternal one. “Pride before the fall” will now bring David down. However the great fall will only be understood on the background of the dreams and expectations that David represented as the ideal leader. His name still evokes great hopes.

Collect contemporary images of David (visual symbols where possible):
1- Cartoons often illustrate the commonplace phrase of English language – “like David and Goliath” used in sports setting for an underdog facing an established giant;
2- Michelangelo’s sculpture of David as the youthful representative of the Republic of Florence.
3- David’s harp
4- David as the messiah and Jesus his descendant born in Bethlehem
5- compare children’s books portrayal of David
6- compare songs using David’s name

Gather some background on David using memory, brief informational sources to summarize his life up until now and organize research into the previous stories in the Tanakh leading up to II Sam. 11. A brief characterization might include:

1. David as a fierce, young and brave warrior, standing up to giants;
2. David as the author of Psalm 23 - a sensitive poet
3. God’s favorite chosen to be king = messiah. David brings up to Jerusalem the Ark of the Covenant symbolizing the three main covenants of Bible: Abraham–God for the Jewish people; Moses–Ten Commandments, stipulations of the ongoing relationship; David-God for the kingship – I Sam 7)
4. Great lover and friend (Jonathan)
5. David’s past as refugee hiding in Ein Gedi from King Saul’s paranoid persecution
6. David as a musician with a harp, in fact as a musical therapist treating King Saul’s depression, but also a target of his spear and his jealousy....etc

Gleanings from first reading of II Sam. 11: First Impressions of David

The hero David shockingly appears as a murderer, adulterer, engaged in cover-up, callous towards his soldiers, an abuser of power, lacking all religious or moral consciousness. .

a. wife stealer - Why does David do it? Lust or love?
   - Note David gets up from his lying place after afternoon nap and then he lies with Batsheva("Idle hands are the devil’s playground”).
   - How does David react to the information that she is married?
   Answer: he doesn't.
   - What can we learn from his non-reaction?
   Answer: Batsheva is treated as a nameless woman, just a woman, just a person as an object. Lust and power – not love - is implied
b. arrogant power
- David's physical position compared to both Batsheva (he's on the roof, she is down below), and Uriah (“go down to your house”).
- Why is the word “sent” repeated 12 times and how can that be represented on screen?
Answer: People are following David's orders. Note the opening sentence where army efficiently executes David commands, while he just sits in Jerusalem. David summons Uriah and Uriah is sent. Others do David's dirty work for him.

c. commander in chief – What has happened to the David of David versus Goliath?
Answer: He became callous in becoming secure - willing to sacrifice a battle for a cover-up.
- David asks Uriah how the troops are doing? What does Uriah say? Why do you think we are given no answer?
Answer: Text speaking from David's perspective. He doesn't care about the war, or his men; he is obsessed with the cover-up. Remember, he's sitting idly in Jerusalem, taking afternoon naps, strolling aimlessly on his roof while his men are dying in battle.

Evaluative Questions:
o What are the tensions between the viewers’ background expectations (What kind of king/man is David supposed to be) and actual behavior (adulterer, murderer, power -hungry, selfish)
o Where is David's famed relationship to God in the entire chapter?
o How do you want your viewers to feel about David?

Staging a scene:
Imagine the first scene as David gets out of bed in the later afternoon. What is the weather? What kind of pajamas is he wearing if at all? Was he in bed or on a couch or swinging in a hammock? Does he walk the roof like a stalker, a jogger, a stroller, a drunk? Is he looking for anything special or does Bathsheba just catch his eye? What mood dominates him? Bored, restless, sleepy, filled with desire, lonely and in search of love?

Type casting:
Now cast David – which contemporary actors would you consider? What criteria for the choice?

B. Batsheva

Questions:
What is the nature of her beauty? She is characterized totally by being beautiful to men's eyes. But what kind of beauty? Seductive, naïve and pristine, smiling and welcoming etc?

Why did she do it? Do you think she had a choice? If she refused, would David have raped her?
Does she love her husband? David? Batsheva seemingly innocent, uninvolved.
What does "Taking" a woman in Bible mean? rape, physically transfer or permanent acquisition (the Rabbis will derive a notion of formal contractual marriage from this word – taking).

Character: victim or seducer: In one sense she is an innocent victim of the power of the king, yet she is also a somewhat active personality: "she came," she sends a report to David of her pregnancy.
What kind of response does she hope to get from David? What is her problem? How do we know that David must be the father?
Consider the touch of irony in the word, mitkadeshet = becoming holy or purified, yet this is reported only belatedly right after she has engaged in a manifestly unholy, tameh act.
Evaluative Questions:
- What are the tensions between the viewers’ background expectations of Batsheva and what you found in the text?
- How do you want your viewers to feel about Batsheva?

Staging a scene:
Imagine the bedroom scene. What is the lighting? What kind of pajamas are they wearing if at all? What kind of bed? Bed covers? Is there liquor? A cigarette? Is their any dialogue? Does David make any promises? What mood dominates him? Bored, restless, sleepy, filled with desire, lonely and in search of love?

Type casting:

Screenwriting exercise: Write a dialogue between David and Batsheva. What do you think might have been said between them as she first enters his room? after their passionate encounter? Did she tell David that if she gets pregnant, he must be the biological father since she was just purified? Did David assure her he would take care of everything? NOTE that Batsheva also means Bat Shevuah = daughter of the oath and at the end of David’s life she asks him to keep his oath to crown their son Shlomo.

C. Uriah.

Questions:
- a. What is Uriah’s relationship to David, to Bathsheba and to Yoav, to God? The faithful, patriotic, deeply religious and trustworthy Uriah or the cynical husband who knows he is being exploited and takes the moral high ground against the man with all the power. Examine the irony of Uriah’s speech: eating, drinking and having sex, while the men are at the front.

- b. What does it mean that Uriah is always called the “Hittite”? , a minority culture, a vulnerable foreigner, a convert more idealistic than born Jews.

- c. Does Uriah know what the letter he is carrying says? If he did, why did he deliver it anyway? a desire to commit suicide?

Casting. Now cast Uriah – which contemporary actors would you consider? What criteria for the choice?

Costume. How would you dress Uriah as he arrives for the field? How would you dress him when he is carousing with the king?

Write a letter from Uriah on the front to his wife? Write a last will and testament before he is sent on this dangerous mission that Yoav has asked him to undertake.

D. Yoav, the Professional soldier.

Questions:
- a). What did Yoav think about the message from David? Imagine. If you were a general at the front, and received such a message from your commander in chief, what would you think?
Here must be something of personal import to the king. Why doesn't king could have him killed in Jerusalem. Political intrigue? Personal vendetta? Maybe Yoav knows - after all, maybe even all Jerusalem knows. All these servants, messengers, etc.

b). Yoav's long speech. Central element in lengthy speech is "Who struck Avimelech?"
Prepare chart of the speech indicating its pyramid structure emphasizing following point:
If you go too near a fortress wall, you not only expose yourself to a shower of arrows, but also give a woman the chance to put you out of commission in a very stupid manner.

c) Consider Yoav's history with David. Yoav has been a ruthless general, who oversteps his bounds by murdering Avner for revenge, against the implicit orders of the king. David has something on Yoav. Now, Yoav has something on David. (II Samuel 4).

Casting. Now cast Yoav – which contemporary actors would you consider? What criteria for the choice?

Write a diary. What does Yoav think of David and the letter he sent?

Staging. Notice there are two venues, two scenes of action for this story: Jerusalem and battlefront. Uriah is the tragic link between them. The battlefront is harsh, a cruel world of death. Jerusalem and the palace world is a place for idleness, sleeping, partying, drinking. The power of Jerusalem is maintained at the expense of harshness on the battlefront.

III. Plot. Summing up Chapter 11:
11:2-4: David Batsheva: adultery
11:5-13 David –Uriah failed cover-up attempt
14-25 David - Uriah –Yoav collaborate to execute the murder as successful cover-up?
26-27: David-Batsheva; marriage. Marriage as crown for adultery

What is motive force which moves the plot:
David's guilt and desire to cover-up versus Uriah's surprising stubborn self-righteousness.

Moral Summary: What are David's sins?

What moral message do you want the movie to advance if any?

What is the opening scene for the movie? Describe in detail how the camera is to be used to introduce the viewers to the characters.

Writing letters. Some old fashion movies integrate the scene with written messages like letters or diary excerpts. What would you write in letter of David to Batsheva before making love, Batsheva to David after discovering she is pregnant, David to Yoav after Yoav's death

IV. Research alternative versions of the story.

For example, Cecil B DeMill studied Josephus before doing the Ten Commandments. Look at the dialogue and characterization in Stefan Heym's King David Report, in Moshe Shamir's Kivsat haRash, in Susan Hayward in the movie of 1951 (see above).
V. David exposed and judged. Read II Samuel Chapter 12.

A. Nathan the Prophet - messenger of God. David tells Yoav: don’t let this thing (death of Uriah) be bad in your eyes at the close of Chapter 11. But the thing was bad in the eyes of God. David thought he had concealed everything, but God sees all.

What is Natan's mission to David? not only expose, impeach, but also evoke tshuvah!

B. Parable: How does the prophet get David to repent, to change, to recognize his sin? Through a parable, a story.

1. How close is the parable parallel to the real story of David's crime? Why the gap?
   Answer: distant and yet close to original story of crime - distant enough that David can condemn the criminal but close enough that David can eventually recognize himself and condemn himself

2. How does David react to parable?
   a. outrage, nearly overreaction. Since when does a thief deserve death? Or even quadruple compensation - double yes, but quadruple? (see Exodus 21:37 for the punishment for stealing and killing another’s lamb). David is not a dispassionate judge.
   b. guilt. David tormented by the murder of Uriah and the marriage with Batsheva. His murderous rage at himself might come out here to demand death for the rich man. David tries to occupy himself with outrageous events outside himself - death to the rich man - in order not to have to deal with his own guilt. Nathan provides him with the "projection screen" for his feeble attempt to restore his equilibrium.

C. Why does David react with two punishments? Certainly either would have been sufficient.
   (1) each corresponds to his two crimes: death sentence for his murder, and quadruple penalty for his wife-stealing.
   (2) David condemns himself to death. He is literally scared to death. He has sworn with the seal of his monarchy. Nathan throws the mirror up to David - You are the man - you deserve death. And there is literally no where for David to go. Only God will remit the death sentence which David intuitively has placed upon himself. He suffers his own death and he is reborn through his repentance.

D. Nimshal: Rich man vs. poor man on two levels.
   a. rich=David, poor=Uriah, lamb=Batsheva, herds=harem
   b. rich vs. poor as two aspects of David's self (and all our own selves). We all have choice whether to live as a rich or as a poor man. Guests always come into our lives to give us the opportunity to choose how to live. Guests also may be the true self who knocks on our greedy doors, giving us a chance to share what is ours.

V. David's punishment.

Does he live happily ever after? Is it fair to forgive him?
A. death of child of adultery

B. violence and sexual impropriety in his house. Note the outcomes in David's family: violent rape of Tamar by her brother Amnon. Rebellion of Avshalom against David, where Avshalom will sleep with David's harem atop the same roof. On his death bed, as an old, enfeebled king, his son Adoniyah will try to usurp his throne. Violence and sexual intrigue will plague David's house for the rest of his life. He does. tshuvah, but he pays a price. He is not sentenced to death, but his family life is so full of violence, death, sexual immorality - chaos.

C. Two kinds of punishment.
   1. Extrinsic: penal or miraculous
   2. intrinsic: natural outcome, “crime doesn't pay”.

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VI. Summary questions

A. Is the story believable, relevant to our reality?

In many ways we experience this story as very real because:

1. The characters are not papier-mâché. They are lustful, power-hungry, lying, yet also guilt-ridden, concerned about their image, their moral standing.
2. The style of the story: much is revealed, but much hidden as well. Much like what happens to us in our lives.
3. Even the moral voice of prophet – the most unrealistic element in story - echoes as authentic. He does not speak as just a mouthpiece. He is creative. He makes up the parable, not God. He knows David's heart. He is a good friend, counselor, advisor, almost rabbinic-like.

B. Is there a moral structure to our world as there is in the world of the Bible?

Most of us are left with nagging question as to whether our world is moral. Is all morality relative? Do we create our own morals and values or are there some basic things that are wrong no matter what? Is there a moral structure which underlies our reality, or do we merely impose a moral order and our essentially chaotic existence and therefore discard at times? Many would say that our world is amoral and any notions of morality are unreal, fantasy, wishful thinking. That is the message of II Sam. 11.

But II Sam 12 declares that crime does not pay. How do you feel? How should movies portray this issue? How should we educate our children and their expectations of justice?
Lesson Plan for the Movie, *Crimes and Misdemeanors.*
By Robert Toren and Noam Zion

Educator's Opener

After studying the Biblical text and after an exercise in asking students to play the role of screenwriters or producers casting the characters, imagining the staging, and maybe rewriting the dialogue (see above), then it is time to view the movie. Our suggestion is that the movie be seen in sections – after each conduct a guided analytic discussion. Below are some notes to the teacher for themes and questions to raise and features of the movie to point out. After this "lesson plan" we have brought a fine review of the movie by Maurice Yacowar that touches its core meanings.

I. Introduction to the Movie - Major Themes of Woody Allen as movie producer, writer and actor.

A. As a Bible interpreter:
   See his humorous book *Without Feather* on Bible stories. Parodies of Noah and Binding of Isaac.
   His style reflects the repeating Biblical motif words. Pay attention in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* to themes/words of sight, light, dark, ophthalmology, eyes of God, how movie plays with visual images of light and dark.

B. As a Religious/existentialist philosopher:
   Religious belief vs. secular existentialism which posits an orderless, meaningless world which receives its meaning only from man, from what he imposes upon it. Woody Allen builds this movie and his movie Matchpoint explicitly on Fyodor Doestoevsky's existentialist novel *Crime and Punishment* which has a happy Christian ending where the murderer who was not caught by the police turns himself in out of a sense of guilt after sleepless nights of nightmares and finds human love and Christian love. Suffering is for him redemptive and he feels that he will be resurrected like the New Testament figure Lazarus. However Woody Allen is exploring a Jewish version of this story as well as secular humanist existentialism identified with Primo Levi, the Italian Holocaust survivor and philospher who is represented in his movie by Louis Levy, who commits suicide as did Primo Levi. Woody puts in the mouth of his successful comic movie producer, Allen Alda, the revealing comment: I never graduated that college but now the college is teaching a course on existentialist themes in my movies.

C. As a Social Commentator on American Jews:
   Assimilation of Jews into modern culture; American materialistic values. See his movie *Annie Hall* and *Play It Again Sam*

D. As a postmodern filmmaker interested in the history of movie making:
   Interest in intertextuality where texts/stories/movies/songs are constantly played off one against the other as Yair Zakovitz describes biblical stories as well. The juxtaposition is designed to help the viewer evaluate phenomena. For Woody Allen – "life imitates art and art imitates life."

   1. In this movie there is a parable style of comparison of two stories: Cliff's story and Judah's story.
   2. Old movie snips woven into the plot line
   3. Memory flashbacks versus the present. (After the murder Judah has a vision of his father at the family seder. This is similar to the midrashic technique that has Joseph envision his father Jacob just as Joseph is being tempted into adultery by Potiphar's wife. The paternal moral image saves Joseph but not Judah from the crime)
   4. Cliff interpreting the world to his niece through movies as moral tales. (One movie dialogue discusses humorously the killing of a spouse right after Judah has decided to have Dolores "taken care of".)
5. music is used as commentary. (As Judah gives his opening speech at the award dinner and as recalls his affair, the music is “Taking a chance on love.” As Dolores the sad one is being murdered her favorite sad song from Shubert is being played. It might have been even more ironic if Allen had chosen the Shubert work entitled Death of the maiden. The movie ends with the blind rabbi dancing with his daughter to “I'll be seeing you.”

II. Cut before Judah meets with Jack

A. Who is Judah?
1. successful, eye doctor, philanthropist, family man, refined cultured (knows classical music, best restaurants), well-respected
2. grew up in religious home - “eyes of God are upon me” his father used to teach him (Deuteronomy 11:12 Eretz Yisrael is “a land which God is inspecting, a land where God’s eyes are constantly upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.”)
3. Judah is an archetypal modern Jew both in his financial success, his scientific and skeptical outlook, his moral contribution to society, his concern for social standing in the non-Jewish world. Yet Judah's language is till peppered with religious terms. (Judah says of the letter he discovered from Dolores to Miriam, that is “a miracle” that Miriam did not open it. He constantly says: “Oh God.”
4. Judah likes a good wine and traveling and culture but also self-indulgently he begins an affair with a non-Jew to spice up his life, which is boring and without passion, but he has no intention of making a new life. He is too practical to follow love and give up his whole professional and family life.

B. Picture of Dolores
1. Her name means sad or suffering as in the Christian motif of Jesus’ suffering, his passion – the Via Dolorosa. (Dolores says she wishes to cause Miriam, Judah's wife, no suffering, but she suffers terribly)
2. She loves Schubert’s sad music
3. She is a younger woman viewing Judah as Prince Charming, as her messiah, to save her.
4. She recalls Judah’s supposed promises to her of marriage (the way Batsheva will remind David of his so-called promises to enthrone her son Solomon. Batsheva comes to mean daughter of the shevuah = oaths or promises)

C. Ben, the Rabbi
1. brother-in-law to Cliff
2. moral structure of world based on man's need for order (“without order, we couldn’t go on living”).
3. going blind (Does this recall Oedipus going blind because he cannot face the truth of an immoral fate or is Ben by contrast living like Judah's father in a chosen illusion of morality and God?)
4. rabbi from non-traditional family who became religious out of a search for meaning
5. a "saint" - liked by everybody, loyal, moral, forgiving, wise.
6. Ben's brother Lester seems to be totally opposite of the rabbi – materialistic, sexual exploiter of women, externality and fame without ethics or intellect or identity

D. The Dilemma:
1. With whom of the key figures do you sympathize and why”?
2. define the practical problem, the emotional dilemma and the ethical dilemma Judah faces
3. what are his options and their cost and risk factor
4. What would you do, if you were Judah?
III. Cut before the final wedding scene.

A. Who is Jack?
   1. gangster, cool, but somehow committed to a code of loyalty to his brother Judah who helped him in the past, but not enough to go to jail for him.
   2. who is wiser, Jack or Judah or the rabbi Ben?
   3. who is more realistic?
      Jack claims to know the real world, while Judah is the idealist.
      Yet Judah, compared to Rabbi Ben or Cliff the documentary filmmaker, is the atheist skeptic. He tells Cliff: “You live in the Kingdom of Heaven, not the real world” “You want a Hollywood ending, not to portray the real world.”

B. Role of memories (Pesach seder)
   1. atheism vs. morality
   2. the eyes of God as central metaphor that shapes all the sight/light metaphors
   3. how do two such different brothers come from same family? How do does Aunt May the Trotskyite and her brother Judah's father come for the same family? (like Jacob and Esau)

C. How does story remind you of David and Batsheva?
   1. Yoav parallels Jack – the loyal hit man
   2. Batsheva/Uriah parallel to Dolores
   3. Natan and Ben
   4. David and Judah (Judah as a progenitor of a line of kings)

D. What should happen in this movie if it were to end like David and Batsheva?
   Confession, guilt, forgiveness.

IV. The Ending of the Movie

A. Was this a happy ending? believable?

B. Was it satisfying? Do you sympathize with Cliff (“a victim of a sellout, of materialism, an unyielding but immature idealist“)? With Judah (accommodates with reality, gets away with murder, has his cake and eats it, too.)

C. At the end of the movie, Judah suggest to Cliff the filmmaker a great movie based on Judah's murder of Dolores without admitting this is real event rather than a mere screenplay. It seems like Woody Allen the movie maker is sharing his own dilemmas about how to the end the movie with his characters.
   What is the debate between Woody and Judah?

   Woody: This fellow has to suffer, confess,
   then you have the makings of a real tragedy
   Judah: You deal in the world of movies. This is the real world.
   Woody: How can a man live with that?
   Judah: You get used to it.

   1. Who is correct? Is there a moral structure?
   2. Must the rabbi go blind (as the representative of the eyes of God), must the humanist existential philosopher commit suicide (Primo Levi?) , and must the honest film maker be abandoned by love, his wife, and by Lester and be broke, impotent, alone?
   3. the philosopher, Levi's final speech: This is a cold world with no moral structure, therefore all we have are relationships, yet Cliff, Judah, and Halley all betray relationships, as does the guy who defecates on Woody's sister.

D. Why does Woody use the technique of montage, of film clips, of flashback
1. Life is a constant tension between moral paradigms (David and Goliath, but David and Batsheva), of success vs. reality.
2. Woody Allen is reaching out to us to call into question our sense of reality as being separate from movie. Movie vs. reality distinction is artificial. Life and movies and texts need to be interpreted, have no meaning without our active involvement as interpreters.

3. Both Allen’s use of movies with clips inside clips and the Bible’s intertextual references with one story referring back to and reinterpreting another embody Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic method: “one text argues with another, agrees with it (with conditions), interrogates it, eavesdrops on it, but also ridicules it, paradoxically exaggerates it.”
CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS (1989)
directed by Woody Allen (Allen Konigsberg)
reviewed by Maurice Yacowar in "Loser Take All", The Comic Art of Woody Allen

Cast of characters:
Judah as King David
Dolores as Batsheva and Uriah
Jack, Judah's Mafia brother, as Yoav, David's cousin and Chief of Staff
Rabbi Ben and Cliff (Woody) as Nathan the Prophet

In Crimes and Misdemeanors a murderer and a corrupt hack are rewarded while a virtuous artist loses his job, marriage and love, and a life-affirming philosopher kills himself. **It's a comedy of tragedies.**

**In the comic story**, Clifford Stern (Woody Allen) hopes to improve the world through his recherché documentary films. Cliff is frustrated in his marriage and hates his wife's brother Lester (Alan Alda), successful TV producer. Commissioned to film a PBS homage to Lester, Cliff falls in love with a bright PBS producer, Halley Reed (Mia Farrow). When he cuts the material into an expose of Lester's corruption, Cliff is fired. Meanwhile he works on his documentary about a life-affirming philosopher, Professor Louis Levy (Martin Bergmann), whose idealism survived the concentration camps. Cliff is shocked when Levy commits suicide, then again when the Reed he has been clinging to agrees to marry Lester.

The somber story centers on an esteemed eye surgeon, Dr. Judah Rosenthal (Martin Landau). When his mistress Dolores Paley (Angelica Huston), threatens to expose the affair and his use of charity funds, he has his shady brother Jack (Jerry Orbach) hire a hit man to kill Dolores. Initially shaken with guilt, Judah recovers his composure and resumes his normal life.

**DOLORES (BATSHEVA)**

Dolores "the sad one", a beautiful, nurturing stewardess, served Judah's vanity in return for stability and hope. But when Judah withholds the commitment that he implied, she loses her "faith" in him. Dolores despair to the point that she would destroy his reputation in order to win him. In her ardor and need, she is a sympathetic variation on the theme of self-serving rationalization. Like Judah, she grasps for peace of mind at whatever cost to others. But only he can afford to buy it.

[Dolores threatens to reveal his financial indiscretion borrowing hospital money to cover private debts. She accuses him of being a liar, an embezzler.]

Judah justifies the murder by putting his own rights and interests ahead of others: "What good is the law if it prevents me from receiving justice?"

"Once the sex goes, it all goes," Cliff (Allen) replies with a telling metaphor: "The last time I was inside a woman is when I visited the Statue of Liberty." Yet the film condemns the ethos of Judah's sexual liberty as the misdemeanor that led to his crime.

**BEN (NATHAN ) versus JUDAH (DAVID)**

In the comic story, Cliff's wife Wendy (Joanna Gleason) has two successful brothers, the shallow Lester and a wise rabbi Ben (Sam Waterson), who goes blind during the course of the film. Ben links the stories, as he is treated by Dr. Rosenthal and advises him on his dilemma. Each treats the other's (real or metaphoric) blindness. According to Ben, Judah sees the world "as harsh and empty of values and pitiless," but Ben believes in "a moral structure with real meaning and forgiveness and some kind of higher power. Otherwise there's no basis to know how to live."

In Judah, Allen amplifies into a villain the casual infidelities of the characters. A misdemeanor swells into a crime. As Ben puts it, **"We went from a small infidelity to the meaning of existence."**

To Ben, wisdom is finally realizing "the difference between what's real and deep and lasting versus the superficial payoff of the moment."
Judah confesses: I did a foolish thing, dumb, vain, another woman, but now my life is going down the toilet. She is vindictive, hysterical. I don’t even know if I promised anything.

Ben responds: Wisdom is to know the difference between pleasure, adventure and lust which are short term and love. Confess the truth and hope for forgiveness. Maybe the love with Miriam will not be the same but it can be more mature with understanding.

Ben believes Judah has a spark of belief in the moral structure of the universe. However Judah’s lack of faith in God’s justice is also his lack of faith in Miriam’s forgiveness. This double cynicism leads him to a cover-up involving murder. If he were totally cynical perhaps he would not care what Miriam or society thought about him but he wants to keep his good name and his family as well.]

[JUDAH (David) versus JACK (Yoav) (Jerry Orbach from the Law and Order TV series)

Judah represent the successful and moral son, while Jack is the unsuccessful underworld type. (This recalls David who describes himself as rach = gentle and his cousin Yoav the chief of staff as kasha - ruthless, but totally loyal. Judah is morally struggling: “I cannot believe I am talking about a human being – like squashing an insect.” But Jack speaks straight in favor being realistic. “You never liked playing hardball. You called me because you had some dirty work to do? Shall I threaten her? Money can buy whatever is necessary. You are not aware of what goes on in the real world. I am not so high class to be unrealistic.” Later Jack will not allow Judah to confess after the fact.

JUDAH’S CHILDHOOD SEDER: FATHER SOL versus AUNT MAY

Allen’s “gag” (since the movie Annie Hall) of an adult revisiting a childhood scene here becomes an act of conscience. At a Seder young Judah’s family debate God’s function as a moral source and the murder for which Judah is responsible.

[When Judah asks his father what about murder, Judah’s father insists that whether it is Shakespeare or the Bible – ”Murder will out!” But May insists: If he choose not to feel guilty and does not get caught, then he is home free.]

For Aunt May (Anna Berger) the Holocaust proves that there is no absolute moral structure in the universe: ”Might makes right....... For those who want morality there’s morality. Nothing’s handed down in stone.” She anticipates Judah’s salved conscience: ”If he can do it and get away with it and he chooses not to be bothered by the ethics, then he’s home free. Remember. History is written by the winners.”

In contrast, Judah’s Orthodox father, Sol (David Howard) is confident that even if his faith were to prove unfounded, ”Then I still have a better life than all of those who doubt..... If necessary I will always choose God over truth.”

[May and the religious Hebrew teacher at the seder table face off over the educational question of teaching the children there is a moral structure to the world. What we may ask as educators do we teach our children and why?]}

THE EYES

The film’s main metaphor is eyes. In an archetypal paradox spiritual vision is vested in the sightless Rabbi Ben, while the eye specialist is morally blind. Though Jack speaks of himself as a man of science, a religious skeptic, he remembers his father’s teaching ”that the eyes of God are always on us” and thinking God’s eyes are “unimaginably penetrating.” Significantly, Judah’s father is named Sol, not spelled Saul but as an abbreviation of the wise Solomon or as the pagan sun, the revealing force of light. In becoming an ophthalmologist Judah chose the order of nature over the order of grace, affirming the physical vision over the spiritual.

In one flashback, Dolores asks if Judah agrees that the eyes are the windows of the soul. ”I believe they’re windows,” he replies, ”but I’m not sure it’s the soul I see” as he kisses her. Dolores later wears sunglasses.
(even in a car at night in the rain). When Judah visits the murdered Dolores' apartment to recover his mementos, his part in the murder is imaged when he snuffs his headlight. A continuous line of perfection and responsibility is suggested in the camera's pan from Judah's eyes down his natty suit along the empty, pale floor to his dead lover's wide open eyes. "There is nothing behind her eyes," he recalls, "All you saw was a black void."

But Ben holds out for "The Law." "Judah, without the law it's all darkness."

[Initially Judah feels remorse after the murder and agrees with Ben retroactively: "I believe in God now. Without God the world is a cesspool."]

FINAL SCENE: WOODY versus JUDAH

In the last scene, Allen gives his familiar play on the tensions between film and life, a moral bite. As the two men in tuxedos sit apart from the party, Judah claims they are the same: "Off by yourself, huh? Just like me." But there is a difference: one personifies evil rewarded, the other virtue punished. Where Cliff was playfully plotting to murder the successful Lester ["I was planning the perfect murder"], Judah has lived out his "great murder story" ["with a strange twist."]

[Judah has a chance to confess his crime portrayed as a movie script. "It is a chilling story." He describes a murderer one inch from confessing the whole thing." But then] Judah describes his character's triumph over guilt: "Mysteriously the crisis is lifted..... His life is completely back to normal, back to his protected world of wealth and privilege...... Once in a while he has a bad moment. But it passes."

Cliff sees through the happy ending in his supposed fiction: the character's peace rests on the fact that "His worst beliefs are realized, the universe is morally neutral."

For Judah, "People carry awful deeds around with them. What do you expect him to do, turn himself in? I mean, this is reality. In reality we rationalize, we deny, or we couldn't go on living."

Indeed, the stern Cliff proposes that to give the story tragic proportions the hero should turn himself in, in the absence of God assuming responsibility himself [borrowed directly from Crime and Punishment]. "But that's fiction," Judah replies, "That's movies..... If you want a happy ending you should go see a Hollywood movie." This is history written by the winner. [May would add that Judah's script is more believable. Her niece at the party quotes Aunt Mat as saying: "I reject the Bible. It has a completely unbelievable theory of character."]

By converting his history into a story, Judah manages an easy "confession," without the costs of confessing the adultery to his wife or (later) the murder to the police. Allen shows how much easier it is to make moral stories than to live a moral life. Yet Judah has a compulsion - like the Ancient Mariner - to unburden himself of his story.

HAPPY ENDING?

In Crimes and Misdemeanors Allen has made a Happy Ending film that denies the happy ending. In the ambivalent last scene, the blind rabbi dances with his just married daughter. The wedding signifies a comedic resolution for the Ben-Lester story, but it excludes from its grace both the comic loser Cliff and the false "winner" Judah. The officiating rabbi's confidence of being "in the presence of God, the guardian of our homes," is overridden by Levy's last statement.

Over a montage of scenes from the film we hear Levy [Primo Levy] say we define ourselves by the "agonizing decisions, moral choices" we make, mostly on small matters of daily life. "Events unfold so unpredictably, so unfairly, human happiness does not seem to have been included in the design of creation." [The universe is a cold place, as the existentialists argue, but we need love. We invest life with love by the choices we make. Many people find love and meaning in the family circle. "Only with our capacity to love can we give meaning to life."]

The music to which the proud, blind father waltzes is "I'll Be Seeing You," as recorded by the icon of glitz, Liberace. The film concludes with an uneasy tension between hope and self-deception, faith and skepticism, evasion and confrontation. The social pillar gets away with murder, because he has status and a self-rationalizing conscience. That civilized monster is us.
X. Political Midrash: Rewriting David’s Life in Rabbinic Midrash, Modern Poetry and Historical Novels

Rabbinic Midrashic Strategies for Redeeming David of the Batsheva Affair

*David Melech Yisrael Chai v Kayam....Ata Halsh* by Yehuda Amichai

*David Laments His Fate to God by Yaacov Fichman*

Retelling David’s Story for a Greco-Roman Audience, 100 CE

*By Josephus, Antiquities Book 7:7*

*Kivsat Harash – The Poorman’s Ewe Lamb* by Moshe Shamir

*The King David Report* by Stefan Heym

Avishag and David in Contemporary Poetry

Rabbinic Midrashic Strategies for Redeeming David from the Batsheva Affair

by Steve Israel and Noam Zion

Steve Israel offers three rabbinic strategies for dealing with the difficulties of having our greatest national hero, the writer of our religious poetry and our model of the messiah and the progenitor of the messianic line involved in such a terrible scandal as the Batsheva affair.

Then we add more strategies brought by Avigdor Shan, from “Al Demuot shel Hamelech David bSifrut Hazal” in Yair Zakovitz’s David – MeiRoeh L’Melech.

1. THE PREDESTINATION STRATEGY: A MODEL FOR BAALEI TESHUVAH

David was not the sort of man to do the act with Bathsheba...Why then did he act in this way? **God predestined** it so in order to teach that if an individual has sinned and hesitates about the effects of repentance, he could be referred to the example of David. (Talmud; Avodah Zarah)

Neither David nor Israel were deserving of such an event...So why did they do it [Israel did the Golden Calf and David did the Batsheva affair]? To teach that teshuvah is possible. So if an individual sins, we tell him to go learn for an individual [from David that one can repent and be accepted] and if a whole community sins, we tell them go learn from a community [Israel who sinned at the Golden Calf and then repented and were accepted]. (TB Avodah Zara 4b-5a)

In this approach, David is chosen for this act by God because of his saintliness. David is chosen as an example to future generations and in order that the example be effective, it was necessary for God to choose the LEAST LIKELY person to be caught in sin. This is an effective line of defense which clears David of all responsibility.

2. THE HUBRIS STRATEGY

Rav said: Never put yourself into a trial [of virtue] for David the king put himself to the test and failed. David the king of Israel went to God and said: King of the world, why do we say...
in prayer "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob," but not the God of David?

God replied; They were tested by me, but you were not.
To this David replied; King of the world, examine me and try me.

God answered him: I will test you, but I will grant you a great privilege, for I did not inform them of the nature of their trial beforehand but I inform you that I will try you in a matter of adultery.

[David prepared himself for his trial] as it is said; "and it came to pass one evening that David arose from his bed".

Rabbi Yochanan explained this to mean that he changed his night couch to a day couch [and made love to his wives during the day, so that he might be free of desire during the night] but he forgot the rule that a man's small organ [his phallus] satisfies him in hunger, but makes him hungry again when satisfied!

(Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 107a)

This extraordinary piece is a classic example of the apologetic approach, which is prepared to go to quite extraordinary lengths to take away any blame from David. In this piece, it is David's determination to be included among the patriarchal figures in the prayer formula that makes him vulnerable to the sin, which once again, is sent from God. And then, as he tries to prepare himself for his test, it is his enthusiasm to pass the test that proves his undoing, since he underestimates the power of biological drives!

There is an interesting continuation to this story from the same place in the Talmud:

After he had committed adultery, David pleaded before God, and said; You know very well that had I wished to suppress my lust I could have done so, but I thought that it would be wrong to show that the judgment of the Lord was faulty so that people would say; "The servant triumphs against his master". (Talmud; Sanhedrin)

Once again an extraordinary piece, but one that has perhaps an implied criticism of David for his conceit, a motif that appears a number of times in the rabbinic literature concerning David. Nevertheless, it has to be accepted that criticizing David for pride is not as harsh as criticizing him for murder and adultery.

3. THE REPENTANCE AND REMORSE STRATEGY

These are the last words of David. It was said of him that for twenty-two years prior to his death, the joy of life was taken from him. Every single day, he would cry rivers of tears and eat his bread of ashes. As it is written in Psalm 102:2 - "I have eaten ashes like bread," and these are David's last words. (Seder Eliyahu Rabba 1)

[Here, the question of David's guilt is accepted and no excuses are used to downgrade his responsibility. David wants to take responsibility and he is not looking to exempt himself from guilt.

David is judged not for his initial sin, for his lack of purity, but for the greatness of his desire to atone. Repentance is David's virtue but that is reserved only for sinners. In the place that Baalei Teshuvah stand even a pure Tzaddik cannot stand.

[This is also the strategy of the editor of Psalms who entitled Psalm 51 "Lamnatzeiach Mizmor l'David when Nathan came to him after He came into Batsheva." Here David confesses and asks for forgiveness].

Shame in the Beit Midrash of King David

David said before the Holy One: "Master of the Universe. It is revealed and known before you that were they to tear my flesh, my blood would not flow out. But even when we are studying the [laws of] leprosy and tent-impurity they interrupt their studies and say to me, 'David: He who has intercourse with a married woman - how is he put to death?"
And I say to them, "He who has intercourse with a married woman is put to death by strangulation, but he retains his share in the world to come. Yet the one who whitens the face of his fellow in public - he has no share in the world to come." (TB Sanhedrin 107a)

King David's nasty colleagues enjoy shaming him by alluding to his adulterous relationship with Bathsheva. Even when they are studying the most obscure and related topics, complicated laws of purity, they raise the question of the punishment for adultery, obviously intending to remind him his sin. For David, this humiliation is worse than corporeal violence. He claims that while he would not bleed even if physically attacked, the verbal assault "whitens his face" as if the blood flowed out. Not only did a sage risk humiliation by not being able to respond to an objection, he could be humiliated by questions with covert references to the embarrassing events his past.

Another midrashic tradition explains the name of Saul's son Mephiboshet - "for he used to shame David's face in legal [debate]" - making a play on miipeh, "from the mouth," and boshet, "shame" (TB Berakhot 4a). Jeffrey Rubenstein, The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud, p. 77

4. "IT NEVER REALLY HAPPENED" STRATEGY

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi who descends from the house of David, turns the verses upside down to give David the benefit of the doubt.
God challenges David: "Why did you despise the word of God to do evil (laasot ra)?" (II Sam 12:9).
Rabbi (Yehuda HaNasi) said: This evil is different than every other report of evil in the Torah, for in all the others it says vayaas = "he did" (in the past tense), but here it says laasot hara (in the future) which must mean that David intended to do evil but never actually carried it out. (TB Shabbat 56a)

5. LEGAL LOOPHOLE STRATEGY

God said: "You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword of Amon" (II Sam. 12:9).
But that only means David should have executed him by trial of the Sanhedrin, but David executed him without trial.
God said: "His wife you took for yourself as a wife."
But that means the “taking” counts as a valid legal act of “taking in marriage” [while adultery can never be a valid marriage]. That is according to Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani in the name of Rabbi Yonatan who said: Every soldier going to war for the house of David would write a get for his wife [so technically Bathsheva was divorced when David had intercourse with her].
God said: "You killed him with the sword of Bnai Amon."

Just as no one is legally responsible for death at the hands of the enemy, so you are not legally culpable for him. Why? Because Uriah is legally a rebel against the king’s authority [for which the penalty in the Sanhedrin is death] for Uriah refused the direct order of the king to go to his wife. (TB Shabbat 56a)

6. THE IRRESTIBLE SEDUCTRESS STRATEGY
Every day [Batsheva] would wear sheer silk, a thousand in the morning, a thousand in the afternoon and a thousand at dusk; dress herself up with 150 perfumes and wrap herself in 1080 gold bracelets. Then she would stand opposite David [window?] in order that he would see her and smile at her.
Since he did not pay any attention, she went up to the roof and sat there in the nude washing on the roof.
(Geniza fragments of Louis Ginsberg, p. 166)

In the Qur’an

The only passage in the Koran which has been brought into connection with the story of Bath-sheba is sura xxxviii. 20-25:

"And has the story of the antagonists come to you; when they climbed the wall of the upper chamber, when they came in to David? And when he feared them, they said, 'Fear not; we are two antagonists, one of us has wronged the other, so judge justly between us: . . . My brother had ninety-nine ewes and I had one. Then he said, "Give me control of her," and he overcame me in his plea.'
David said, 'Truly he has wronged you by asking for your ewe as an addition to his ewes, and truly most partners act injuriously the one to the other, except those who believe and work righteous works; and such are few.'

David supposed that we had tried him; so he sought pardon of his Lord and fell, worshiping, and repented. And we forgave him that fault, and he has near approach to us and beauty of ultimate abode."

From this passage one can judge only that some similarities of Nathan's parable. The Moslem world has shown an indisposition, to a certain extent, to go further, and especially to ascribe sin to David. As the commentator Baidawi (in loc.) justly remarks, this passage signifies only that David desired something which belonged to another, and that God rebuked him by a parable. At the very most, Baidawi continues, he may have asked in marriage a woman who had been asked in marriage by another, or he may have desired that another should abandon his wife to him—a circumstance which was customary at that time. The story of Uriah is regarded as a slander, filled with unnecessary violences and immorality, not the sort of thing that would happen to a man who is close to God.
"David, King of Israel, is Alive Forever" (Prayerbook – Blessing of the New Moon)
..."You are the Man" (II Samuel 12:7)

adapted from a translation by Chana Bloch

I
Recently I've been thinking a lot about King David,
not the one who is “alive forever” in the song, and not the one who is dead forever
under the heavy carpets on his tomb that is not really his tomb,
but the one who played and played for Saul
and kept dodging the spear
until he became king, the one who changed his temperament
so they [the Philistines] would think him mad, in order to save his life.
As for me, I change my temperament so they will think me sane, in order to save my life.
If he were alive today, he would tell me:
No, it's the other way around.
Every nation once had a first king like a first love.
The other way around.

2
King David loves Bathsheba,
hugs her tight, strokes her with his hands,
the very same hands that cut off the head of Goliath the Philistine, the very same hands.
The same man who tore his clothes when his son died and scattered ashes on his head,
the very same man.
And when the sun rose in the east, he raised himself above her [Bathsheba]
like the lion [of Judah] on the banner of Jerusalem
and said to her: "You are the woman."
And she to him: “You are the man!”
Sometime later the prophet [Nathan] told him the very same words: “You are the man!”

3
King David lies with Bathsheba on the heights of the roof.
They are heavy as a cloud and light as a cloud.
Her untamed black hair and the wild red hair of his beard entangled one in the other and
interwoven. Never have they seen each other's ears,
nor will they never see them.
He plays the weak one, weepy, lost, betrayed,
He flees into her body and hides himself inside it
As in the caves and crevices when he fled from Saul.
And she counts all his battle scars.
She tells him: "You will be mine,
you will be a tower, a citadel, a city, a street, a hotel.
You will be names, names, and in the end
you will be a desert wadi for two lovers in 1965
in the wadi of David in Ein Gedi.

4
King David took Bathsheba in the small hours between midnight and dawn.
Those are the best hours for a surprise attack and the best time for making love.
He declared to her: "Now you are permitted unto me, now you are a widow,
Now the attack is over in Rabbah [capital] of Ammon."
In their bodies, David and Bathsheba mimicked the death throes of Uriah the Hittite in the attack.
Their cries carried right up to Yom Kippur and up to our very own day.
The instruments of their love rang out like the bells of Bethlehem where he was born.
He took her coming from the west to the east,
the way his descendants turn to pray towards the east.

5
King David and Batsheba [Bat-Sheva = seven] are doing Sheva Brachot
[to celebrate their wedding with seven blessings], Seven Curses.
They lie as do mourners lying on the ground for Shiva [seven days].
King David sings, cries out from the high roof [the Psalm] “from the depths I cried out to You,” but God did not hear, God was hiding below.
Bat-Sheva sang, cried out: “David Melech Yisrael Chai v Kayam!
And her voice already knew that in a few thousand years
The cry “Chai v Kayam!” would turn into a cry of catastrophe for Jews in trouble:
“Chai v Kayam! Chai v Kayam! Save us! Save us! Chai v Kayam!”

6
King David loves many women. He has an ark of love
full of beautiful women, like the holy ark filled with Torah scrolls,
brilliant in their beauty, filled with prohibitions and orders, of Shall and Shalt Not,
weighted with ornaments, round and sweet as Sephardi Torah scrolls,
and heavy as Ashkenazi scrolls with a heavy crown,
dressed in silk and lace and soft velvet embroidered in many colors,
and the breastplates hanging like a pendant around the neck,
and the long, delicate hand-shaped pointers of silver inlaid with precious stones.
And on Simchat Torah, the Feast of the Law, which Is the Feast of Love,
he takes them all out of the ark,
and on Simchat Torah, the Feast of the Law, which Is the Feast of Love,
he takes them all out of the ark,
kisses them one by one and hugs them, makes seven rounds and dances with every one
– even with Michal and Meirav [Saul’s daughters]
who in their lives never wanted him to dance.
Then he puts them back into the depths of the ark,
closes the heavy curtain, and sits down to write psalms.
And all the women said: “Me he loved me, most of all.”
But only Abishag the Shunamite, the girl who came to him in his old age to keep him warm, said:
“I kept him warm, I stroked his battle scars and his love scars, I anointed him with oil, not for kingship, but for cure. I never heard him play or sing, but I wiped his mouth - toothless – after I fed him sweet porridge. I never saw his hands in battle but I kissed his old white hands.

I am the poor man’s ewe lamb, warm and full of compassion, I came to him from the pasture as he came from pasture to kingship. I am the poor man’s ewe lamb that rose out of the parable and I am yours until death do us part.”
ודד פלך ישראלי חי ימים
אחת חמש

1

ודד פלך שרף בא כמה פעמים
לא הוא וחוס比べ לאו חוס比べ
כמו מקדשי מקדשים מקדשים מקדשים
לא הוא והוא חוס比べ חוס比べ חוס雊ש.

2

ודד פלך בא כמה פעמים
לא הוא וחוס比べ לאו חוס比べ
כמו מקדשי מקדשים מקדשים מקדשים
לא הוא הוא חוס ypos חוס ypos.

3

ודד פלך שרף בא כמה פעמים
לא הוא וחוס比べ לאו חוס比べ
כמו מקדשי מקדשים מקדשים מקדשים
לא הוא הוא חוס ypos חוס ypos.

4

ודד פלך שרף בא כמה פעמים
לא הוא וחוס比べ לאו חוס比べ
כמו מקדשי מקדשים מקדשים מקדשים
לא הוא הוא חוס ypos חוס ypos.

5

ודד פלך שרף בא כמה פעמים
לא הוא וחוס比べ לאו חוס比べ
כמו מקדשי מקדשים מקדשים מקדשים
לא הוא הוא חוס ypos חוס ypos.
ודו ממלך בחסד עסיק ושבה ברברת.
שיבע קッと. זה שובב עסיק באלים.
שבביוס שבירה. דוד ממלך חבר וжд.
ון כל זכרperation חכם פיקה. חיו.
 оказа קכל לא שמע, לה שמא בלא עשה.
פּדֶה שבירה, דוד זכריאלtrak.E זכות.
חרול ככר זייד שבירה בלא שים.
לגוה זיוהו בкрас: מי קים מציין.
נשאלה! נאיל, זיוהו.

 vide alia.
שכון עזרה כמאנה ופי.
ונושיא מגוון, מאה
יר נפר נשר רך.
שניר. מפแช ר扦ה
לא לומד ומקבל.
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שכון עזרה כמאנה ופי.
An Analysis of Yehuda Amichai’s David

**Guidelines to Use Poetry as Interpretation of Torah**

1- What are the associations and expectations aroused by the **title**? How does that connect up to the Biblical text?
2- What does the **biographical background** on the poet contribute to the interpretation? Recall, for example, that Israeli poets live in a society that recreated itself based on an ideology of return to the Bible and its language made into a living language.
3- Examine the Biblical texts alluded to and how their phraseology and their facts have been transformed.
4- What images and what metaphors dominate?
5- What tensions, reversals, polarities are constructed?
6- Which Biblical scenes were chosen and which ignored?
7- What is the characterization of the Biblical character? Feelings? Does the poem speak in third person or first person, monologue or dialogue?
8- Is the poem set in the past or does it move from past to present and back?
9- How does modern Israel or other contemporary phenomena enter into the portrayal of the biblical scenes?

Yehuda Amichai

**Background connecting the poet with the poem’s subject.**

Yehuda Amichai is personally intertwined with David his subject, for they are both poets and warriors. Both are tied to the city of Jerusalem which David captured and in which Amichai resided (Amichai lived in the Yemin Moshe artist’s colony near the windmill opposite the walls of the old city) and about which both wrote. The city and both men became symbols of Israel (Recall that Israeli nationalism is called Zion-ism after the city of Zion = Jerusalem, city of David). Both are connected to Yehuda – Amichai’s first name, David’s tribe, and modern Jerusalem’s symbol – the lion of Judah.

Both poets reflect the private, the personal, and at the same time, the national. David’s poetry (as attributed to him in Psalms) has many private moments, just as Amichai’s poetry makes the personal its main theme (more than the previous generation of Hebrew poets who wrote mostly about the nation). Yet Amichai is Israel’s national poet and his personal life is intertwined with all the national events of its establishment – especially its wars in which he fought. He connects himself to David as Zionism’s most important forbearer who lent his name to the actual founder of modern Israel - “David” Ben Gurion. This identification, even over-identification, between David, Amichai and Amichai’s generation is reflected in the intentionally undisciplined passage in Amichai’s poetry between the Biblical past and personal or national present, then on to a sometimes messianic future and back.

Therefore **our guiding question for this poem is: what aspects or events of David’s life do and do not evoke Amichai’s identification? Why?**
Title – *David Melech Yisrael Chai v Kayam....Ata HaIsh –*

What associations and tensions arise between the two halves of this combined title?

The title combines a third person description of David from an Israeli popular song drawn from the traditional blessing of the new moon and a second person dialogue fragment from the prophet Nathan accusing David of murder, adultery and theft.

The song declares the immortality of David and hence of his nation’s political aspirations. Paradoxically, despite the literal meaning of its lyrics, it was first sung in blessing the new moon in an era of Galut when the Jewish people’s existence was in doubt and its political independence still merely a hope expressed defiantly as a counterfactual statement of fact *David Melech Yisrael Chai v Kayam* – “alive and standing.” As the moon is renewed, so will be the eternal kingdom of David. The poet’s family name – “Ami-chai = my nation lives” – reflects the nationalist revival of his generation who believed in the resurrection of a threatened people. Amichai came as a child as a refugee from Germany and changed his name to Amichai very early on. He fought in the Palmach reliving David’s military career (before he became a king and his nation an independent nation). The first half of the title of the poem evokes the rebirth of national life and emphasizes renewed life - *David Melech Yisrael Chai v Kayam* – alive and still standing!

Yet the second half of the title – “Ata Halsh = you are the man!” is taken from II Samuel 12: 7 where King David is identified by Nathan and the prophet as the criminal who killed Uriah and stole his wife. Here David loses his right to his kingdom and his life. The covenant of an immortal dynasty (II Samuel 7:8-16) seems about to be abrogated. Dream and reality are clashing, our selective national memory of David, the invulnerable hero of our songs, with the historic reality of a corrupt regime and the subsequent exile of our people.

On a more personal level, Ata Halsh may mean that Yehuda Amichai, the poet – he is the Ish – the true King David, who is to see his life reflected in David’s Biblical life. Just as Nathan taught King David to see himself in the parable that he had just told about the poorman’s sheep, so Amichai and his generation seek to find their own life mirrored in the Biblical story and its language, which they have turned into a living language. However they must choose the image David who is relevant to their self-understanding. Is it the first half of the title – the king – or the second half – the man? Is it the national symbol of success, the religious messiah or the guilt-ridden, corrupted and vulnerable human being? Is it the David of triumph and immortality or the David always seeking to hide in order to save his life?

**Stanza #1- Ani Hosheiv – “I think”**

Which image and scenes of David's life arouse the poet's identification?

The first line contrasts the “*ata = you*” of Nathan with the “*ani = I*” of the poet. Amichai is now himself an old man retrospecting on his whole life. In fact, the poem comes from Amichai’s collection of poems entitled *Patuach Sagur Patuach* (1998) which was written or at least edited at the end of his life as he died from cancer. The poet selects which of the many images of David to think about. The David with which the poet identifies is not the song’s “David Melech chai v kayam” - the immortal symbol of Israeli sovereignty and not the traditional religious symbol whose grave is a place of worship on Mount Zion and not the archeologist’s historic but dead David whom they claim was not buried in the religious grave site on Mount Zion. With which of these many Davids does the poet identify?

One David is the musician, the prototype of the poet, Amichai’s calling. (Note that the Hebrew term for song and for poem is almost identical – *shir/shira*). Here David’s singing brought from the fields into the palace to serve King Shaul who sought to kill him with a spear – twice – while David played. The other is David pretending to be crazy to escape the accusation of disloyalty from the Philistine king with whom he was taking refuge from King Shaul (I Samuel 21:11-16 and Psalms 34). In both images David is not royal or powerful or immortal or courageous but a survivor wholly vulnerable and fearful before two kings. He plays so the music goes on and he plays crazy, anything to survive.
How did David survive the political-military threats to his existence? David, taking refuge with the Philistines his great foreign enemy from his relentless Jewish enemy, King Shaul, pretends to be crazy with spittle dripping on his beard (I Samuel 21:13-16). The poet identifies with David but tries to reverse his survival technique. The poet is really crazy = meshuga but he pretends to be sane to save his own life. Yet David if he were to return would surely advise “the opposite” — survival means pretending to be crazy. (The theme may recall Rabbi Nachman’s story of the prince who thought he was a chicken. Meshuga can also mean a prophet, for prophets were men of inspired literary abilities, like Amichai the poet).

The poet confesses his love for David as his and his people’s first king – like one’s first girl friend. It seems that the first king is David – not Shaul whom the people never loved. David’s name means the “beloved” as well as the great lover and friend.

The poet’s personal idealization of the young David, the man (haish) - the vulnerable David escaping Saul’s spear while playing music and escaping the Philistine’s suspicions while playing crazy – is contrasted with the political idolization of the eternal David – hamelech whose kingdom is chai vKayam. It is the ephemeral life between birth and death that concerns the whole collection of poetry called Open, Closed, Open in which the poem was published. Survival requires constant “reversals” – Ithefech, Ithefech, as David tells the poet.

Stanza #2 “David loves Batsheva”

How do the Biblical scenes of David in the first stanza contrast with those in the second?
What words and images repeat? Why?

The poet now shifts scenes from David the musician – the master escape artist - to King David the victor over Batsheva and Goliath. Instead of the vulnerable David, we have the conquering David – conquering Batsheva in bed with “strong hugs” and conquering Goliath on the battle field with the same “hands” – yet also the mourning father tearing his clothes. Even the powerful mature David is inseparable from the mourning David burying his sons – aware of the limits of his power and perhaps his own personal failings that brought on their deaths.

The poet puns on the second half of the poem’s title – Ata HaIsh. Now it means not only “you are the man,” but “you are the same man = Oto HaIsh” – the same one who with his bare hands cut off Goliath’s head and with his bare hands stroked strongly Batsheva. You are the same man who tore his clothes mourning the death of his first illicit first child with Batsheva and then rose up from the mourning suddenly and inexplicably (II Samuel 12; 15-23). The repeating phrases, “the hands” and the title “ata haish”, are used to show David that he is one and the same in contradictory moods over a long lifespan.

Then the poet changes the phrase again by putting it into David and Batsheva’s mouths. Perhaps now it is the secret code of the reciprocal recognition of the lovers – David and Batsheva – that “you are the man who was meant for me” – and you are the woman who was meant for me. Perhaps we hear an echo of the first man – Adam - recognizing the first woman as his bashert – “This time is it.. You shall be called isha = woman because you were taken from ish – man.” (Genesis 2: 23). Ish means a husband, a lover, not a king. Here David and Batsheva’s relationship is one of mutual love, while a few lines previous, Batsheva was described as a conquered, even raped animal who was David’s prey from which he arose like the Lion of Judah after ravishing an animal pursued and eaten. Nathan had also

35 The image of David arising from his mourning over his first son from Batsheva is taken from Jacob’s blessing for Yehudah in Genesis 49:8-12 where Yehudah is described as rising like “gur arveh = a lion cub rising from the victim of his hunt, his son.” Lion is also the symbol of modern Jerusalem – on all the manhole covers and garbage trucks. Here Jacob predicts that David’s tribe will produce a dynasty of unending rulers. But they will be covered in blood. The “hands” will be at the enemies’ neck.
described Batsheva as an animal victim consumed by David. In the parable David is the rich man taking the poor man’s beloved pet lamb and slaughtering and eating her.

Now Nathan in the poem turns that phrase “you are the man” against David. By the very act of making love with Batsheva you are the lover, hence adulterer, hence murderer, hence thief! Here the phrase is an accusation, not a loving acknowledgement of commitment and oneness of those Divinely meant for one another. Nathan does not allow David or the Jews who love David to dissociate these contradictory images of the beloved David, the first king of the underdogs who defeated Goliath, from David the murderer, the abuser of power. In the Tanakh Nathan the prophet basically shamed David by showing him that the man he had become was not the man he had always seen himself to be – the man of the underdog. But the poet is insisting somehow that all of these Davids are authentic, the same man. The pun on the name of the poem gets at the mystery of our personal identity over multiple personalities doing contradictory things over many years of life.

Stanza #3 – David Melech lying with Batsheva on the roof

What is the imagery of the roof?
What are the metaphors of David’s love fantasy as opposed to Batsheva’s?

Here the poet explores the spatial imagery of David on the roof. In the Tanakh David spies Batsheva from his roof or on her roof but the location of their lovemaking is not mentioned. Amichai’s uses the rooftop as the place of the lovemaking to describe their liminal position between heavy and light, between heaven and earth. Then he adds colors to show the intersecting opposites – his red and her black hair.

Then he describes the love fantasies between them which are polar opposite images of the David. David plays the hiding game of the one who is vulnerable taking refuge in her body. This is not King David – chai v kayam - the one Amichai does not identify with, but the one who sees himself as hiding from Shaul and from the Philistines. In contrast, Batsheva fingers David’s military scars and praises him in the spatial language of all the sites to be named after David - the tower, the street, the hotel, the nature preserve in Ein Gedi where he hid from Shaul. His manliness, his national strength is what she sees, not his vulnerability. Thus the first half of the poem’s title, but it is a messianic image which does not fit David’s self-image. Even as a king, he still sees himself as a man in flight hiding in his lover’s body like a lover’s cave in Ein Gedi where David hid from the king.

Amichai the poet slips back into the present with mention of the Hotel King David – images of the national David - and suddenly he jumps to his personal midrash on David. He recalls his own love making in David’s vaadi in Ein Gedi in 1965. David’s name means lover but his famed exploits suggest the archetypal lover but still also the soldier. Amichai shares those two contradictory images – lover and warrior, so the next stanza mixes the metaphors again.

Stanza #4 – “David comes to Batsheva in the small hours of the night”

What phrases repeat? Hours, battle.
What scenes are juxtaposed?
What incongruous analogies are constructed?

The hour of David’s sexual conquest is compared to the hour of a surprise attack. (The word for battle – krav - is also related to the word “approach or being close.”) The scene of lovemaking has shifted from the first onetime adultery on the roof from the previous stanza to a second lovemaking just as David’s plan to have Uriah killed in battle in Amman is being “consummated.” David appears now as he does in some midrashim as a judge of women’s menstrual purity but here he declares her permitted – no longer a forbidden married woman but a permitted widow at the moment of the death of her husband. (TB Shabbat 56a excuses David’s adultery using the anachronistic legal loophole that soldiers would their wives a divorce writ before going to battle, so if there bodies were not found they would still not become
agunot for their divorce would kick in retroactively. So David is waiting for Uriah's death in battle to possess Bat Sheva — "legally."

The shaking of bodies in orgasm recapitulates the death rattle of the body. (In Shakespearean English, "to die" is to have an orgasm and in French the petite mort is the small death of lovemaking. The sexual organs — klei ahava — also have military connotations — zayin meaning in modern Hebrew both penis and weapon). Making war and making love become one for David's love motivated the deaths in battle of Uriah and his compatriots. Suddenly Israel's wars — the surprise attack of the Yom Kippur War — comes to mind.

Then the analogy of war and love is completed with the analogy of prayer — bowing toward the east — and making love from west to east. (In rabbinic tradition even the direction of lovemaking is also prescribed). The ringing of bells is compared to lovemaking36 recalling the church bell's of the church of the nativity in Bethlehem — David’s and therefore Jesus’ birthplace but also a place of battle in the Six Day War in 1967 when the West Bank was captured.

Stanza #5 David and Batsheva's Sheva Brachot

How are the traditional seven days or mourning and the seven days of wedding celebration related to the Biblical story in II Samuel 12:15-25?

What are the puns on sheva = seven?

How does the poet use this narrative to make his own points?

The story in II Samuel 11-12 and play on the word and the action shachav — lie on the ground or lie with a woman. David lay with Bathsheba. Uriah refused to lay with Batsheva but lay on the ground to sleep. After Nathan said: you are the man and this is your punishment, your curse, David and Batsheva’s first son became ill. Then David lay down in mourning and prayer to save him but to no avail. He then stopped his acts of mourning when the child died, though usually the shiva = the seven day mourning period of sitting on the ground begins after the death. After the death of their son, David went to lie with Batsheva to comfort her and produce their next son, Solomon.

The poem puns on:

(1) Bat-sheva = daughter of seven;
(2) the Sheva Brachot of the wedding celebration for seven days (after Batsheva had mourned for Uriah);
(3) seven curses identified here perhaps with Nathan’s cursing of David;
(4) the shiva period of lying on the ground for seven days of mourning.

Like the contrast of Batsheva’s and David’s love fantasies in stanza #3, now the poet contrasted their songs of prayer/mourning. David sings/screams on the roof recalling not only the death of his first son with Batsheva but of his rebel son Avshalom — II Samuel 19:1-4 — which is the result of Nathan’s curse about a sword emerging from David’s own house (II Samuel 12: 9-12). David cries out using the Psalm of mima’amakim = "from the depths," while up on the roof, but ironically God cannot hear him since God is hiding below. (Perhaps this a reference to the theological image from Psalms of God’s hester panim = the eclipse of God who abandons his royal office in heaven where God is meant to be guiding the world. It recalls David hiding from Saul mentioned in Stanza #2.

Batsheva representing the Jewish people in all ages sings/calls out for messianic help in the form of the poem’s title “David Melech chai v kayam.” In Yiddish the phrase “shreien chai vkayam” means to scream bloody murder when threatened with disaster. The Batsheva of the previous stanza was confident in her lover who would be an invincible tower of support but no longer. Perhaps Batsheva looks even beyond the Galut to the 1973 the surprise attack on Yom Kippur War (1973) which reversed the Biblical sense of a David versus Goliath miraculous victory in the Six Day War (1967). Israelis

36 Midrash Genesis Rabbah on Genesis 2:23 — “zot hapaam” — vayifaameini kol halaila
become again like the Jews of the Exile who sang *David Melech chai v'kayamin* hope for the messiah while suffering pogroms and crying out “save us!” The cry to welcome David in the prayer for the new moon becomes the prayer to God to save the Jews (God is called *chai v'kayam* in the evening Maariv prayer *maariv aravim* about the changing stars in the heavens). The transformation is described with the same verb root from *l'hfech* that marked David's survival strategy of hiding in Stanza #1.

**Stanza #6** – David loved many women

What scenes of David's life does the stanza recall?  
What traditional Jewish customs are evoked?  
What effect does this strange analogy have on you?

I Kings 10:1 reports that “Solomon [David’s son] loved many foreign women” and that led to his downfall but the poet’s David loved many women – from many edot, Ashkenazim and Sefardim, fat and thin etc – and his love brought them all together healing all rifts. The love for the Torah scrolls 37 on Simchat Torah when we take them out of the aron = the Torah ark/cabinet, march around, hug them and dance with them is analogized to David dancing before the aron – the portable ark – which so incensed a jealous Michal, his first wife (I Samuel 6). Now David dances even with Michal and her sister – his intended first wife – Meirav. Historical and biographical conflicts are healed in this love for David who united all the tribes because he loves them all. Then David turns these lovemaking experiences drawn from all stages in his life into poetry – he writes tehillim. Ironically *Tehillim sagen* – reciting Psalms - associated in Jerusalem with the ultraOrthodox is now associated with lovemaking that produces those life experiences that nourish the personal poetry of David and of Amichai.

**Stanza #7** All the women said: He loved me the most.

How does the imagery of the old age home shape the description of David’s relationship with Avishag?  
What images from the earlier stanzas return in new ways? The hands, the scars of war and now of love, the music and singing, coming of a man to a woman  
Why would the poet end his poem on this note? Is this a tragic ending?  
What is the role of the quote from Megillat Ruth 1:16-17?

David is portrayed as the one everyone loved – Shaul, Michal, Yonatan, the people, God, Amichai and his name means the beloved one. Even though the Tanakh never describes David as loving Batsheva or Batsheva as loving David, Amichai in this poem has described that love in detail. Despite all David has done in the Batsheva affair, he is still beloved. “All the women said: He loved me the most.”

Yet the poet chooses a winner - Avishag David’s last intimate, even though she never consummated sex with him (I Kings 1: 1-4), even though she only knew him as a physically decrepit old man whom she fed like a nurse in an old age home. The oil of coronation becomes the oil of massage, the hands of war are still beloved as the elderly hands of memory, the stroking of love and the coming into another’s body for love become acts of comfort. Yet this love is intense and it wins the field like the love of compassion (*hemla*) of the lamb of the poor man from the parable of Nathan where the lamb is described like a daughter = *bat* recalling Uriah’s love for Bat- sheva. Lying in his lap, feeding him is Avishag’s role as nurse. David the virile rich king has become David the impotent poor man. Now that is the love of Avishag for David. *Ata Hals* now means that David has become the poor man beloved of women and of his people, not the rich man who did not feel compassion and took and killed the lamb (II Samuel 12: 1-4). The poet has chosen the second half of the title over the first half. David is for him *not* the messianic king of the song/prayer but the vulnerable man of Nathan’s parable. So Avishag cleaning off the mouth of the aging David recalls perhaps the spittle on his beard when he played as if he were crazy before the king of the Philistines.

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37 According to Deuteronomy 17 all kings are supposed to write their own copy of the Torah scroll and studied it daily and follow its laws.
Ironically Avishag maintains she is the most loved, while David is described both in the last stanza of the poem and in the story of Avishag in I Kings 1 as impotent and passive. She in fact is the one who loves David the most – showing loyalty to him even in his decrepit old age. She is not treated by David as the poor man treated the lamb, but she treats him lovingly as if David were the poor man’s lamb – feeding him, holding him in her lap.

The poem’s ending appears to be sad and yet hopeful. The quote "until death do us part" from Megillat Ruth 1:16-17 “(often used in the Anglican marriage ceremony) recalls the unconditional loyalty of a young woman following an old barren woman – Naomi – back to the land of Yehudah, the city of Bethlehem. There in the future David will be born to her descendants and hope will spring up in place of tragedy. David’s death and even his corruption will not necessarily end the dream of messianic return for our love for and our loyalty to David is immortal.

I believe Amichai allows Avishag to be his spokeswoman. He too declares his undying loyalty to David, an immortal love that will never die but a love for the vulnerable David and for the remembered first love, not for the messiah and conqueror.
David Laments His Fate to God - Yaacov Fichman

These are the last words of David. It was said of him that for the last 22 years prior to his death, the joy of life was taken from him. Every single day he would cry rivers of tears and eat the bread of ashes. As it says in Psalm 102:10 "I have eaten ashes like bread and mixed my drink with tears because of your wrath and your fury, for You have cast me far away." These are David's last words.

(Seder Eliyahu Rabbah)

Fichman was born in a Hassidic family in Russia, left home at age 14 and ultimately settled in Eretz Yisrael in 1912 where he became a Zionist poet. He wrote poetry rooted in Israeli landscape and nature.

Midnight descends on the world.
An hour of mystery. Every trace of yesterday
Sinks into the blackness like a stone in the depths,
And an ancient darkness, like a rolling wave,
Fills every scheming rock-crevice, every sunken valley,
Every mountain cave.
Come, night, and fill my soul too,
With the cold moaning of midnight
And pour your shadows into my eyes.

Once I loved to rise in the middle of the night
And, like a prowling animal of the dark,
To walk unseen, nourished by the springs of God,
While the blackness rang and sang.
But no more will night's silence
Cause my harp to play:
Like a cursed forest
My strings stay silent at the touch of wind.
Since the clouds of my sin descended upon me,
My playing does not grace the dawn;
I do not praise the new-born day with song,
And the breath of God to which I pray secretly
Brings me only terror at its approach…
And so, as midnight comes,
When night flows like perfume on a garden and depths touch,
I'll sink my face despairingly in the lap of the universe
And wait for my sign.

So many nights I've waited
Since my fires went out
And my soul was turned to wilderness.
Of a sudden, I saw that the earth had changed its form.
But I failed to understand the signs,  
Of this, the curse that was to follow me  
**The curse is harder than all**  
That Nathan predicted on my day of trial.

As a ploughed field lies quiet  
Underneath a baking sun,  
My heart was quiet, at the prophet's anger,  
And the more strongly he berated me,  
I felt an easing in my soul.  
I sought a pain to cancel out my happiness –  
To blot it out.  
A hard prophecy, on my whole house, he sounded,  
That it rang in my ears.  
**My happiness, while sinning, was the hardest sin of all;**  
**A terrible thing to pay no price for sinning,**  
**And I waited for judgment eagerly and was not afraid.**  
And I blessed the predicted evils,  
And embraced the future price I'd pay  
Believing it would bring redemption.

But what haven't I suffered since?  
**I've raised up sons, created them from my own hot blood**  
**And suddenly I have seen how they are strangers to me.**  
And they for whom my heart melts daily with feeling  
Plotted my downfall –  
In such a way that no foe has ever done.  
Friends, closer to me than brothers, more faithful than my wives,  
Before whom I displayed nakedly my inner most shame,  
Behind my back schemed like birds of prey,  
Waiting, gloating, for my fall.  
**God, there's no punishment worse than this –**  
**To walk with others and never to trust them;**  
To escape from the grasp of open enemies,  
Who came at me honestly, awakening my courage  
In the sweetness of the battle,  
Only to fall prey to fawning hypocrites  
Hoping for my downfall  
With faces full of friendly deceit.

Yes, my world fell empty suddenly  
While in full flower,  
While the sun shone heartily on the stages of the world.  
**Was it me who changed, in my poverty?**  
**Or was all the emptiness of the world suddenly revealed?**

And I've found no escape. Nowhere to hide  
In the borders of my lands.
That's the price of royalty –
To stand always naked before the world,
Revealed to the eyes of those that love you
As much as those that hate you –
And to find no escape.
My people bring me everyday their love,
But, in so doing, they scrape the skin off my soul,
And divide up portions of my flesh between them.
And when they go, I know that I am that much poorer,
And many times emptier for their coming.

Sometimes, at night as sleep falls silently on the house,
And darkness wraps the mysteries of the garden,
I'll feel a sudden flowing in my heart
And I'll believe – deliverance is near.
Now the wrong will be righted and I will be replanted
In the earth, my roots nourished once again.
Only at midnight, the hour of forgiveness,
As darkness opens the gates to the heavenly throne
My blood cries out for salvation and will not stand silent,
And all that is destroyed in me and turned to dust,
Longs to cleave to You.
My pain screams out for You, oh God.

Guideline Questions:

1- Fichman's poem is set in the end of David's days perhaps in I Kings 1 when everyone about him is plotting to manipulate him or to ignore him in order to appoint a successor. Can you see references in the poem to that predicament?
2- Fichman recalls Nathan's curse. Reread the curse from II Samuel 12:8-12. How does the curse reflect itself in the poem? What would you say is the worst part of the Biblical curse? What for the poet's David is the worst part of the curse?
3- Highlight three lines that speak to you personally. What attracted you in their literary form? In their content? Did they make you see David in a new way?
4- David is himself a poet for God, to him many of the Psalms are attributed. What is David's relationship to God in this poem? Note the lines you found about David's relationship to God.
Retelling David’s Story for a Greco-Roman Audience, 100 CE
Josephus, Antiquities Book 7 Chapter 7

Josephus, former general in the Great Rebellion of 66-70 CE against Roman rule in Judea wrote a history of the Jews for his Roman captors while he resided in Rome. His sources include both the Tanakh and the oral traditions but the style and the values emphasized as well as the speeches he invents reflect the Greco-Roman historical conventions. Since his audience is very interested in military valor he details the battle strategies used.

Note that Josephus was a major source in the non-Jewish world where it was preserved by the Christians. Its sources influenced Dutch artists and Hollywood movie producers on Biblical themes like The Ten Commandments and the movie David and Batsheba (1951).

Comparison of his rewritten Bible with the version we have reveals very interesting interpretations.

We will reproduce only key selections from his extensive retelling where there are interesting revisions or additions to the Tanakh.

Pay attention to the bolded lines and ask yourselves: What questions in the Tanakh story is Josephus trying to answer?

1- What is Josephus’ image of the political and military leader?
2- How is Batsheba portrayed? What does she add to her message to David that is not explicit in the Tanakh? What does that tell us about her character and David’s motivations in summoning Uriah?
3- David is angry at Yoav in Josephus’ version but not in the Tanakh. Why?
4- Yoav takes advantage of Uriah’s reputation for being a valiant and courageous soldier, how?
5- According to Josephus, which of David’s crimes seems to bother God the most? How do you know?
6- In the Tanakh Yoav is afraid David will get angry about the loss of the battle in which Uriah is killed. Does King David actually get angry in the Tanakh? In Josephus’s version?
7- Nathan does not directly obey God’s order to deliver angry punishments to David until he first invents the parable. Why does Nathan modify God’s commands? Is that portrayed as a good change?
8- How does Josephus try to defend King David’s reputation in the eyes of the Romans as much as possible? See in particular the first and the last line of the narrative.
9- What did you like or dislike in Josephus’ retelling? What did you learn about the original story from his emphases and modifications?
10- Could you retell the story with a different audience in mind for example young children in first grade?
Josephus: How David fell in love with Bathsheba and killed her husband Uriah, for which he is reproved by Nathan.

1. (130) But David fell now into a very grievous sin, though he were otherwise naturally a righteous and a religious man, and one that firmly observed the laws of our fathers; for when late in an evening he took a view round him from the roof of his royal palace, where he used to walk at that hour, he saw a woman washing herself in her own house: she was one of extraordinary beauty, and therein surpassed all other women; her name was Bathsheba. So he was overcome by that woman's beauty, and was not able to restrain his desires, but sent for her, and lay with her.

(131) She conceived a child, and sent to the king, that he should contrive some way for concealing her sin (for, according to the laws of their fathers, she who had been guilty of adultery ought to be put to death).

So the king sent for Joab's armor bearer from the siege, who was the woman's husband, and his name was Uriah. And when he was come, the king inquired of him about the army, and about the siege; (132) and when he had made answer that all their affairs went according to their wishes, the king took some portions of meat from his supper, and gave them to him, and directed him to go home to his wife, and take his rest with her. Uriah did not do so, but slept near the king with the rest of his armor bearers.

(133) When the king was informed of this, he asked him why he did not go home to his house and to his wife, after so long an absence, which is the natural custom of all men when they come from a long journey.

He replied, that it was not right while his fellow soldiers and the general of the army, slept upon the ground, in the camp, and in an enemy's country, that he should go and take his rest, and solace himself with his wife. (134) So when he had thus replied, the king ordered him to stay there that night, that he might dismiss him the next day to the general.

So the king invited Uriah to supper, and after a cunning and dexterous manner plied him with drink at supper, until he was thereby drunk; yet did he nevertheless sleep at the king's gates without any inclination to go to his wife.

(135) Upon this the king was very angry at him and wrote to Joab, and commanded him to punish Uriah, for he told him that he had offended him; and he suggested to him the manner in which he would have him punished, that it might not be discovered that he was himself the author of this his punishment; (136) for he charged him to send him near to that part of the enemy's army where the attack would be most hazardous, and where he might be deserted, and be in the greatest jeopardy, for he directed him to order his fellow soldiers to retire out of the fight. When he had written thus to him, and sealed the letter with his own seal, he gave it to Uriah to carry to Joab.

(137) When Joab had received it, and upon reading it understood the king's purpose, he set Uriah in that place where he knew the enemy would be most troublesome to them; and gave him for his companions some of the best soldiers in the army and said that he would also come to their assistance with the whole army, that if possible they might break into some part of the wall, and enter the city.

(138) And he desired him to be glad of the opportunity of exposing himself to such great pains, and not to be displeased at it, since he was a valiant soldier, and had a great reputation for his valor, both with the king and with his countrymen.

And when Uriah undertook the work he set upon it with eagerness.

Joab gave private orders to those who were to be his companions, that when they saw the enemy make a sally, they should leave him.

(139) When therefore, the Hebrews made an attack upon the city, the Ammonites were afraid that the enemy might prevail over them, and get up into the city, and this at the very place where Uriah was ordered. So they exposed their best soldiers to be in the forefront, and opened their gates suddenly, and fell upon the enemy with great vehemence, and ran violently upon them. (140) When those that
were with Uriah saw this, they all retreated backward, as Joab had directed them beforehand: but Uriah, as ashamed to run away and leave his post, faced the enemy, and received the violence of their onset. He killed many of them; but being surrounded, and caught in the midst of them, he was killed, and some other of his companions were killed with him.

2. (141) When this was done, Joab sent messengers to the king, and ordered them to tell him that he did what he could to take the city soon: but that as they made an assault on the wall, they had been forced to retire with great loss; and directed them, if they saw the king was angry at it, to add this, that Uriah was killed also.

(142) When the king had heard this of the messengers, he took it angrily, and said that they did wrong when they assaulted the wall, whereas they ought, by undermining and other stratagems of war, to try the taking of the city, especially when they had before their eyes the example of Abimelech. the son of Gideon, who needed to take the tower in Thebz by force, and was killed by a large stone thrown at him by an old woman; and although he was a man of great prowess, he died ignominiously by the dangerous manner of his assault. (143) that they should remember this incident. and not come near the enemy's wall, for that the best method of making war with success was to mind the incidents of former wars, and what good or bad success had attended them in the like dangerous cases, that so they might imitate the one and avoid the other.

(144) But when the king was in this disposition, the messenger told him that Uriah was killed and also other soldiers in the army; whereupon David was pacified. So he directed the messenger go back to Joab and tell him that this misfortune is no other than what is common among mankind, and that such is the nature, and such the incidents of war, insomuch that sometimes the enemy will have success therein, and sometimes others; (145) but that he ordered him to go on still in his care about the siege, that no ill incident might befall him in it hereafter; that they should raise bulwarks and use machines in besieging the city; and when they 'have gotten it, to overturn its very foundations, and to destroy all those that are in it.

Accordingly the messenger carried the king's message with which he was charged, and hurried to Joab. (146)

But Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, when she was informed of the death of her husband, mourned for his death many days; and when her mourning was over, and the tears which she shed for Uriah were dried up, the king took her to wife presently; and a son was born to him by her.

3. (147) With this marriage God was not well pleased, but was thereupon angry at David; and he appeared to Nathan the prophet in his sleep, and complained of the king.

Now Nathan was a fair and prudent man; and considering that kings, when they fall into a passion, are guided more by that passion than they are by justice, he resolved to conceal the threatenings that proceeded from God, and made a good-natured discourse to him, and this after the manner following:

(148) He desired that the king would give him his opinion in the following case: "There were," said he, "two men inhabiting the same city, the one of them was rich, and the other poor. The rich man had a great many flocks of cattle, of sheep, and of cows; but the poor man had but one ewe lamb. (149) This he brought up with his children, and let her eat her food with them; and he had the same natural affection for her which anyone might have for a daughter. Now upon the coming of a stranger to the rich man, he would not give to kill any of his own flocks, and from there feast his friend; but he sent for the poor man's lamb, and took her away from him, and made her ready for food, and from there feasted the stranger."

(150) This report troubled the king exceedingly; and he pronounced to Nathan, that "This man was a wicked man who could dare to do such a thing; and that it was but just that he should restore the lamb fourfold, and be punished with death for it also."
Upon this Nathan immediately said that he was himself the man who ought to suffer those punishments, and that by his own sentence; and it was he who had perpetrated this great and horrid crime.

(151) He also revealed to him, and laid before him, the anger of God against him, who had made him king over the army of the Hebrews, and lord of all the nations, and those many and great nations around him; who had formerly delivered him out of the hands of Saul, and had given him such wives as he had justly and legally married; and now this God was despised by him, and affronted by his impiety, when he had married, and now had, another man's wife; and by exposing her husband to the enemy, had really killed him.

(152) God would inflict punishments upon him on account of those instances of wickedness; that his own wives should be raped by one of his sons; and that he should be treacherously supplanted by the same son; and that although he had perpetrated his wickedness secretly, yet should that punishment which he was to undergo be inflicted publicly upon him. That, moreover, said he, the child which was born to you of her shall soon die:

(153) When the king was troubled at these messages, and sufficiently confounded, and said with tears and sorrow that he had sinned (for he was without controversy a pious man, and guilty of no sin at all in his whole life, excepting those in the matter of Uriah), God had compassion on him, and was reconciled to him, and promised that he would preserve both his life and his kingdom; for he said that, seeing he repented of the things he had done, he was no longer displeased with him.
Shamir’s popular novel of 1956 critiqued the Israeli establishment that had strayed from its idealism to become a pragmatic and power hungry body politic. It reflects the generational mood of the autobiographical reflection of Amos Oz who wrote:

The War of Independence ended in 1948 with a great military victory. More than 1,000,000 Jewish refugees came to Israel within a period of a few years. However, the siege and the suffering did not cease, a general salvation did not occur, and the trivial troubles of a very little state also surfaced.

Shamir is a sabra born in Tel Aviv who grew up in the leftwing socialist movement of HaShomer HaTzair. He became a kibbutznik and then volunteered for the Palmach, the volunteer army that grew into the Israel Defense Forces. His earlier novel of 1947 idealizes the halutz but in the 1950s his novel turned a more critical eye inward on the sabra and his society and government. Uriah becomes Shamir’s spokesperson in the novel.

Uriah is portrayed as David’s most loyal supporter. Initially Uriah the Hittite comes in search of the secret to the rise and fall of nations. He finds that in David but also he discovers in the young David an idealism and a selfless leadership that leads Uriah to become a Jew. Yet after the establishment of the new kingdom as it becomes an empire and its leader becomes corrupted by power, Uriah has a crisis of political faith. He begins to suspect David of betraying his ideals and committing adultery with his wife who is attracted to David's virility. Uriah in his diary chronicles his search for truth and comes to realize what David had written in the letter entrusted to Uriah to take to Yoav, David's chief of staff, to have Uriah placed in the most dangerous battle position and there to abandon him to be killed by the enemy. Uriah maintains his loyalty to his king and his new land even as he is deeply pained by its betrayal of social justice, of the search for peace, and the betrayal of loyalty. (For more background, see David Jacobsen’s book on Biblical stories reused by Israeli literary figures for political critiques of contemporary Israeli society.)

Shamir uses his novel to express his ambivalence but not total rejection of the new State of Israel with its cult of power and pragmatism at the expense of morality, social justice and the pursuit of peace. The State’s worst corruption is its willingness to sacrifice its sons in war to promote petty political interests.

And if a man says to you: “Here are the strong on this side and over there down below we the weak,” ask him: Which is the strong and which is the weak? Shall the man who cannot stay alive without killing be called strong? He is weakest of all. …Not by war shall truth be tested….

An evil deed is evil, even though the loftiest motives engendered it, even if it results in the greatest good. Even the man who is forced to sin, sins; even the man who saves life by his sin, sins. Should you seek to save a life by sinning, save it; but you cease to be numbered among the righteous in the land….

Uriah the Hittite writes in his diary:

The years are spread before me now. I can see at a glance the point that separated the good years from the evil. The good years lasted until Hebron; the bad years started on the day David became king over Judah. They grew worse when he was crowned king over Israel [the northern tribes], worse still when he proclaimed Jerusalem his city, and worse again when he became the ruler of many lands and nations, conquering, victorious, and the mightiest of kings.

Until Hebron, David was my beloved friend. When he was anointed in Hebron, he became my beloved king, and he is my beloved king to this day. For David is good, great and wise. Even now when I am being sent to my death at his command, I cannot refrain from singing his praises. He is my blood. …What I went out to seek on the borders of distant kingdoms, I found in the land of Canaan, among the tribes of the Hebrews.

Steve Israel collected and taught the literary reflections of Moshe Shamir and Yaacov Fichman. Thanks to him for sharing his wisdom and his educational resources.
The novel retells the story of Avigail and Naval in the spirit of Nathan’s later parable. Uriah, who was David’s warrior since his earliest days in the desert hiding from Saul, recalls in the novel how the wealthy Naval served his guests with a ewe lamb stolen from a poor shepherd. David hears of this social injustice and rebukes Naval as Nathan would later rebuke David. Yet after Naval’s sudden mysterious death, David immediately takes Naval’s widow Avigail as his wife. Is this a dangerous foreshadowing of David’s future corruption, Uriah wonders, in retrospect.

Uriah’s final reflections on life and truth:
There I saw how a kingdom arises, how a boy becomes a king. Step by step, I saw how he destroyed all opposition, crushing and sweeping away everything under the sun which stood in his way, wiping out the house of Saul to its last member….How other hands performed his evil tasks…This is the wisdom of nations…

I shall not return to my native [Hittite] city, for I am no longer a son of the Hittites. If I am not a Jew, I am no longer a human being. Dead before my heart stops beating, lifeless before my breathing has ceased, I clung to two peoples. Which was the first to betray me?

…Ask: who is free and who is slave? Ask further: who is rich and who is poor? Who commands and who obeys? And know that only the man who is free of the lie is truly free – not the man who is free of a master or free of a god. Only the man who is stronger than the lie is truly strong, not he who is stronger than the sword; and only the man who is greater than the lie is truly great, not he who is greater than his neighbor. And only the man who obeys the lie is a slave, not he who obeys the truth.

The novel concludes:
Perhaps David’s sin did not end with Uriah…Somewhere in the innermost being of the royal house the curse of the betrayed man may tremble still, flowing in the blood of each generation; the end of the great and terrible punishment may still be to come.

1-Review the Uriah of the Biblical story in II Samuel 12. What do you think are his values, his personality, his personal relations with his wife and his king and his country?
2-Read the selections from the novel and mark out three lines that illuminate Uriah’s values, his personality, his personal relations with his wife and his king and his country according to the novel.
3-Uriah’s name means “the light of God” and his Biblical speech to David reveals his faith in God as well as his absolute loyalty to David, yet his name is never mentioned without describing his foreign origin – the Hittite. How does Shamir’s Uriah explain his initial conversion to Judaism?
4-Uriah notes a great transformation of David – what is it? When does it occur? Why does it occur? Does the author explain Uriah’s refusal to turn his back on God or his King after discovering David’s crimes?
5-What is Uriah’s critique of David? Who in the biblical story lives up to his standard of being free and being great and being strong? Does Uriah believe any state can be just? Is that a reason not to have state? Not to fight in any war?
6-Think about the early era of the State of Israel – its move from the idealism of 1948 to the establishment of political, military and economic power in the 1950s. What themes of protest and disillusionment does Shamir unleash by retelling David’s story from Uriah’s perspective?
7-Can you suggest similar critiques of contemporary political leaders? Are there young leaders whose ideals have become dirtied in power? Why do you think this frequently happens? Is Uriah’s and Nathan’s message to avoid all politics because all politics, all power corrupts inevitably?
8-Have you read about or seen in movies or met anyone who embodies Uriah’s commitment to truth? Explain and compare to Uriah.
9-Do you think a country like Israel or America should be judged by a heroic idealistic image or by the same standards of survival and success of any political organization?
The King David Report by Stefan Heym –
An Anti-Totalitarian Novel about Writing David’s “Official History”

Introduction by Walter Brueggemann, from
DAVID’S TRUTH IN ISRAEL’S IMAGINATION AND MEMORY. p. 69ff

The King David Report by Stefan Heym. Heym is a Jewish East German literary figure [who fled Nazi Germany for the United States in the 1930s but returned to communist East Germany in the 1950s out of a commitment to communism. However his experience as an intellectual and as writer with the East German Communist regime raised many doubts about the way governments manipulate history writing. So in East Berlin in 1972 he wrote a novel about a young writer Eitan (mentioned in I Kings 4:31 and author of Psalm 89) who is asked to produce the official history of King David, father of the present ruler, King Solomon.

In this novel he constructs a notion of how the David materials came to be written as they were. He conjures that at the initiative of King Solomon, there was a committee charged to produce a literary glorification of David, in order to enhance the legitimacy of Solomon which needed all the help it could get. That is, its work is the generation of literature that serves a quite specific political end. It is clear that Heym understands the material to be ideological, that is, truth in the service of the regime.

On this committee are Benayah, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, and Zadok, Solomon's high priest. Note that they are the survivors in the bureaucratic jungle after the purge of Abiathar, the alternative priest, and Joab, the older military man (I Kings 1:38; 2:26-35). These are the new young ones whose success is much too recent. The purpose of the committee is to produce ideological literature in the service of Solomon, but each of these committee members also has his own political well-being to consider along with that of the king. The mockery is that they must write ideology, but they must be generative and imaginative about it, almost a contradiction in terms.

As Heym imagines it, this committee hires a skilled but frightened scribe to write things down, because none of the principal men has such a skill. This nobody of a scribe is cast in a hopeless role, because he dares not displease any member of the committee or his life will be endangered. Yet obviously he cannot please them all, because they have very different truths they want to express, or at least they have very different versions of Solomonic truth they want to serve.

Its official title is:
The One and Only True and Authoritative, Historically Correct and Officially Approved Report on the Amazing Rise, God-Fearing Life, Heroic Deeds, and Wonderful Achievements of David the Son of Jesse, King of Judah for Seven Years and of both Judah and Israel for Thirty-three, Chosen of God, and Father of King Solomon.

Heym adds, "For short called The King David Report."

It is important to note that Heym treats the whole of the David account under this single rubric, Heym is not in fact writing about the Davidic material. His appeal to the Davidic material is heuristic, because his intention is to comment on the way in which his own totalitarian regime manipulates truth for the sake of the regime. It should come as no surprise to know that Heym is frequently in trouble with the regime. He has observed how memory is daily turned into propaganda, and he has the temerity to suggest that the same thing is happening in the Bible.
The King David Report by Stefan Heym

Author’s Note

This format offered itself for a new telling of the David story. If one retraced the steps of the editorial Commission which met under King Solomon, if one went back to the sources and let these speak – the royal annals, army records, letters, eye-witness testimonies, songs and myths from which the King David Report was carefully pieced together – one might be able to lay bare the essence of the King and to make the many-faceted man that David was come alive. That one is in this case Ethan of Ezrah, author of the 89th Psalm and secretary of the Royal Commission, the same Ethan about whom it is said in 1 Kings, 4, 31 that he was one of the wisest men in Israel; only King Solomon was alleged to have been wiser than he.

Then something occurred that frequently happens in the telling of a tale: Ethan, who was to be a mere narrator, assumed a life of his own. Around the David novel grew an Ethan novel, the story of an intellectual who must face the conflicts of his time and who is tormented by the limitations which are set to his writing the truth.

Whether Ethan is the protagonist of this book or whether it is David as seen through Ethan I couldn't say. Opinions might also differ on the question whether The King David Report is to be considered a historical novel or a biblical one, or a story of today, charged with political meaning. To me, it is all three.

Berlin, 1972 Stefan Heym

Questions to consider while reading Stefan Heym’s novel / political midrash:

1- What is King Solomon’s goal in asking that the King David Report be prepared? Do you think that Stefan Heym is correct when he writes that “The King David Report actually exists and it may be found in the Bible (I Samuel 6 - I Kings 2).” In other words, do you think the story of Batsheva as reported in the Shmuel II is edited to suppress all doubts about the Solomon’s glorious father David?

2- Yes-men. Define that concept. What arguments do David’s advisors make to him about his desire to sleep with Batsheva? Do you think political advisors of leaders are usually such yes-men? If so, why? Is this Nathan’s role in the Tanakh? Why not?

3- How is Bathseva portrayed in her interview, in her letter to her husband, and in King David’s comments about her? How do you feel about this political midrash? Does it fit your view of Batsheva from the Tanakh?

4- What is Nathan’s character like in Heym’s novel?

5- In comparing David’s confession in the Tanakh and in the novel what are the most important differences? Do you think Heym’s version recalls what Adam said to God when caught violating God’s law back in the Garden of Eden – “The woman you gave me, she gave me, so I ate”?

6- How do you understand Ethan’s blessing upon completing the report: “PRAISED BE THE NAME of the Lord our God, who has made man in his image; but his image is of many hues”?

7- Would you like to continue this political midrash by rewriting sections or interviewing the characters again?

EXERCISE: Compare Heym’s thesis about a censored official history of David (created by those claiming his legitimacy as their origin of authority –Solomon) to the historiographical approach of Chronicles. There David is the source of authority for the Temple and his genealogy is central to all Jewish rule. (See Chronicles I 28-29 compared to II Sam. 6). Notice what is left out of David’s history: rivalry with Saul; Batsheva affair; Amnon, rape of Tamar and Avshalom rebellion and Solomon’s rivalry with Adoniyahu.
KING SOLOMON CREATES THE KING DAVID REPORT COMMISSION

King Solomon said, "Israel abounds with stories about [my father King David], most of them useless, some even harmful. Just as I will build a temple for our Lord Yahveh to put an end to this praying and sacrificing on every hilltop behind every village, and to force under one roof what passes between a man and his God, so we must have one authoritative report, to the exclusion of all others, on the life and great works and heroic battles of my father, King David, who chose me to sit upon his throne."

And Jehoshaphat stepped forth and drew a clay tablet from his sleeve and read out:

"This is the Royal Commission on the Preparation of The One and Only True and Authoritative, Historically Correct and Officially Approved Report on the Amazing Rise, God-fearing Life, Heroic Deeds, and Wonderful Achievements of David the Son of Jesse, King of Judah for Seven Years and of Both Judah and Israel for Thirty-three, Chosen of God, and Father of King Solomon....
The King David Report is to be composed by careful selection from and judicious use of all materials extant on the Amazing Rise and so forth of the late King David, such as royal records, correspondence, and annals, as well as available testimony, further legends and lore, songs, psalms, proverbs and prophecies, especially those referring to the great love and preference shown by King David to his beloved son and successor, King Solomon.

The said Report is to establish for this and all time to come One Truth, thus ending All Contradiction and Controversy, eliminating All Disbelief of the Choice by our Lord Yahveh of David ben Jesse, and allaying All Doubt of the Glorious Promises made to him by our Lord Yahveh in regard to his Seed and Progeny."

Jehoshaphat bowed. King Solomon looked exceedingly pleased. (page 9)

The research began for the report and Ethan recalls (page 155 - 170, selections)

I HAD LONG DREADED having to deal with the story of Bathsheba. It was even more difficult to treat than the hanging of the seven surviving sons and grandsons of King Saul, for it directly concerned the Wisest of Kings, Solomon; moreover Queen Mother Bath-sheba is very much alive. All Israel knows that Uriah the Hittite, Bath-sheba's husband, died just in time for David to marry the widow and make their first-born a genuine prince of the blood. The matter was noised about everywhere as those involved in it behaved with a strange lack of discretion; but the facts of it are hard to separate from fable.

Nathan the prophet has written about it at length in his book of remembrances, and I am inclined to believe much of what he says: he watched the dangerous relationship develop, and he interfered in it according to his lights. Speaking as a historian, I feel we are fortunate in having Nathan and his book; it is most useful if one keeps in mind his official rank and the kind of person he is: self-important, self-righteous, self-seeking....

The Vision of Bathsheba: READING BY NATHAN FROM HIS BOOK OF REMEMBRANCES

Nathan reported to me that the King David had invited his intimates over to discuss a vision that was disturbing him mightily.

King David said: It was truly a vision!

Abiathar the priest, and Seraiah the scribe, and several others enquired as to the vision: had the King had it in his sleep and had it been more of an angel or more of a human, and suchlike questions; so there was tohubohu.
But the King, David stroked his beard, saying, he would have thought it an angel but for the fact that it was doing its ritual ablutions as he saw it from the roof of the palace, against the setting sun after he had risen from his bed.

Whereupon Seraiah the scribe said that certainly it must be Bath-sheba the daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite, who was captain of a thousand and serving under Joab in the siege of the city of Rabbath-ammon, for she and her husband had recently moved into the army officers' houses located to the west of the palace. If the King so wished, added Seraiah, he would go there and knock at her door and tell the woman that she was found pleasing to the eye of the King; and the rest would be simple. Not quite so simple, said the King.

But Seraiah asked: Did not all the daughters of Israel belong to the King, including those married to foreigners like Uriah the Hittite?

All, replied the King: Excepting the wives of soldiers who serve in the field. These may not be touched, neither by an elder of the tribe nor by the King; for how could a man be moved to go out and fight the Lord's battles, unless he knew his house protected and his wife?

And Abiathar the priest confirmed this, saying it was a law of the Lord which the uncircumcised call taboo, and that King David was exceeding wise and equitable.

But the King hit the table with his fist, and he cried out: Shall I then have this fire consume my bowels and not quench it?

Abiathar was so startled that the morsel in his mouth slid into his windpipe, and he had to be helped.

Having regained his breath, he said, The fire which consumes the bowels of the King must be quenched, for the well-being of the Chosen of the Lord is the overriding law. Moreover, did not Lord Yahveh plainly denote his will by his timing of the woman's washing herself and of the sun's setting and of the King's entering upon the roof?

And Seraiah the scribe said that the taboo did not apply in this case because Uriah the Hittite would not be deprived of a thing by the King's lying with Bath-sheba Uriah's wife; on the contrary, Uriah would be honored and enriched by the relationship.

And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

_Bathsheba’s Memoirs_

Ethan asked Nathan about the first night with Batsheba: "Since from the couple in question issued the Wisest of Kings, Solomon, we would not want the reader to assume that there was only the crudest form of copulation. Has not King David ever hinted at some tender dalliance, some words of endearment which he and the lady Bathsheba exchanged in their first night?"

Nathan answered: "King David once remarked to me he never found a male or female more capable than Bath-sheba the daughter of Eliam. As for what was said between them that night, Ethan, I fear you will have to enquire of the Queen Mother in person."

Ethan: "Then my lord could easily ask the Queen Mother to let me see her face for just a few questions?"

Nathan raised his faded brow. "You would find her most uncommunicative."...

Queen Mother Bath-sheba sat languidly on her cushions, observant eyes peering from between her veils now at Nathan, now at me.

I wanted to lead her gently to the point that interested me: had she been just the helpless soldier's wife coerced to quench the fire in the bowels of the King, or was she the moving spirit of the crimes which followed upon the original sin, using her body and the fruit of her womb to beguile the King until it was her son that sat on the throne—not Amnon, not Absalom, not Adonijah, not any of the older sons from wives of longer standing—but her Solomon, the late-comer, out of a junior wife?

I tried every way. I spoke of the misfortune of her first husband's untimely death; she said, as did David, "The sword devours one as well as another." I spoke of the kindness of the Lord, who caused Uriah to come to Jerusalem to see her one last time; she said. "The ways of the Lord were beyond our power to discern."...
Yoav's Archives

Ethan: I gained access to several letters found in the files of Joab, who commanded the siege of Rabbath-ammon. The first of these reads as follows:

To Uriah the Hittite, Captain of a Thousand, at present under the walls of Rabbath-ammon, from his Loving Wife Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam.

May Yahveh grant my husband long life and spoil aplenty. Your loving wife is wasting away, pining for the embrace of your arms.

Do come! The feel of your loins is unto me 'like paradise, I melt under you like snow in the sun.

Do come! King David has heard of your name and wishes you well; you will sit at his table and grow mighty in his sight; but at night you will lie with your little turtledove.

Do come! May Yahveh cause you to hear my sighs....

READING BY NATHAN FROM HIS BOOK OF REMEMBRANCES: Uriah rides into Town

Nathan: The best-laid plans of man are as chaff in the wind unto the Lord. And who would have thought that Uriah the Hittite would turn out to be such a paragon of virtue, such a model of temperance, such a stickler for principle?

Uriah rode into Jerusalem and reported to the palace; but King David bade him to come to his face, and demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered.

Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.”

And Uriah departed out of the king's palace, and there followed him a mess of meat from the King. But Uriah slept at the door of the palace, with the officers and the guard, and went not down to his house.

... A servant came from Bathsheba, saying unto King David, “Uriah the Hittite was seen riding into Jerusalem, and my mistress has readied water for his feet and has baked the meat which the King sent, and also the bed is prepared for Uriah to lie with her; but he has not gone down to his house.”

And the King sent, and was told that Uriah slept at the door of the palace; and he had him fetched to his face. And the King said unto Uriah, “Was not that a pretty hard ride you had from under the walls of Rabbath-ammon to Jerusalem all in four days? Why then did you not go down unto your house?”

But Uriah bowed his face, saying, “If it please my lord, I may be a Hittite, but I have embraced the true faith, so that I set principle above pleasure. The ark, and the host of Israel and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab and the officers of my lord Joab are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing!”

Bad News? Uriah’s Death In Battle and Bathsheba’s Mourning

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. And Eliam her father came, and her mother also, and the whole family came, even the cousins and nieces, and they sat in mourning and tore their clothes and wailed and yammered, so it reached the ear of the King.

The King said [to his servant], “Now I am all for honoring the dead, but Bath-sheba seems to be overdoing it, and I fear the evil tongues saying. Has the wife of Uriah not cherished her husband in life that she carries on so at his death? Has she by chance had a lover? Therefore, go you to the widow and console her, and tell her to send away the countless relatives who clutter up her house.”

He did as King David commanded and found Bath-sheba in torn clothes, and her hair in a simple knot, and looking altogether very striking.
Bathsheba said: "Why should I not weep, and wail, and mourn Uriah, and have my relatives lament him? Do I not carry a child inside me which will be born an orphan and have neither father nor inheritance, although it is of royal blood? It is one thing to have a poor helpless soldier's wife come unto the King, and have her lie with him and minister to him topwise and bottomwise, but another to stand by her in her distress and fulfill the royal promise."

And she held her hands to her face, and cried out loud, and said how too terrible it would be if Eliam her father and all her family were to learn of her predicament.

So the servant informed the King of the words of the lady Bathsheba, and enquired as to what royal promise he made her, if any. David replied, "How should I remember: a man says this and that when he lies with a woman."

The King said, "Go you, and tell the woman that when the time of mourning is past she can move into the palace, and I will marry her, but without ado, for enough has been noised about this among the people."

And after her time of mourning Bath-sheba moved into the palace, with all her coffers and rugs and earthenware and silver, and with her servants; and all Jerusalem talked of the wedding on which the woman insisted, for she was big with child when she walked with David under the baldachin/huppah, and she waddled like a duck.

(Ethan asked: "But why did the King behave so meekly and give in to the lady Bathsheba in all that she demanded of him?"
Nathan shrugged: "The Queen Mother is a forceful enough personality.")

Shortly after the wedding Bath-sheba bore King David a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

_Nathan's big Moment: The Parable and the King's Surprising Reaction_

N - Nathan recalls: And the Lord sent me unto David. I came unto him and said to him, There were two men .......[and I told him the whole parable].

And David's anger was greatly kindled against the rich man; and he said to me: "As the Lord lives, the man that has done this thing shall surely die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he had no pity."

N - I said to David, "You are that man!

D - But the King said, "I thought there was something surreptitious about your story; now, therefore, tell me: did the Lord truly appear to you, or have you been fibbing?"

N - My knees trembled greatly, but the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I said, "Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, I anointed you King over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul, and I gave you plenty of wives, and I gave you the house of Israel and of Judah: and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto you such and such things. Wherefore then have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the children of Ammon and have taken his wife to be your wife."

D - But the King said, "Either the Lord is truly speaking through you, Nathan, or you are the most insolent man this side of Jordan, for have you not been part of this from the beginning, and where was your fine righteous voice then?"

N - My bowels were filled with fear, but the Lord went on speaking through me unto David, saying, "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house. Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them unto your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."
I surely thought that the King would strike out at me, and that I should lose my place at his table and my emoluments and title.
D - But the King bowed his face and said, “Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. But it is mostly Bathsheba's doing, I don't know how and I don't know why, I am like clay in the hands of that woman.”

Thereupon I pleaded with the Lord; and the spirit of the Lord once more came down upon me and spoke unto David, saying, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.”

After which the spirit of the Lord departed from me. But as the King said nothing and seemed thoughtful, I left quietly and went my way.

(Nathan sighed deeply and put aside the last tablet of his chapter. I, Ethan, rose and gripped his hand, and in a voice deep from the chest said unto him, "Great! Just great! Shattering!")

_Ethan’s Postscript_

_Praised be the Name of the Lord our God, who has made man in his image; but his image is of many hues._

When I was done with the documents from the files of Joab and came to return them to Benaiah ben Jehoiada, he had me called unto him and enquired whether I was satisfied with what I had learned.

So I said that these letters and notations were of great value to the King David Report, and that they supplemented in the most curious manner the _story of the heart-warming, tender love of King David and the lady Bath-sheba_ as related in the book of remembrances of my lord Nathan.

Benaiah asked: "What precisely has he written on the subject?"
I told him in brief.

"And you believe all that?" Benaiah grinned, displaying his teeth. "Especially the part about the timely death of Uriah the Hittite?"
I said: "But for overly stressing the importance of his own person, my lord Nathan seems largely to have recorded what he saw with his own eyes and heard with his own ears."

"Which shows," commented Benaiah, "that man should use not only his eyes and ears, but also the bit of brain which the Lord gave him."...
Avishag by Shirley Kaufman

...AND LET HER LIE IN YOUR BOSOM THAT THE LORD MY KING MAY GET HEAT. I Kings 1:2

That’s what they ordered for the old man
to dangle around his neck
send currents of fever
through his phlegmatic nerves, something
like rabbit fur, silky,
or maybe a goat-hair blanket
to tickle his chin.

He can do nothing else
but wear her, pluck at her body
like a lost bird pecking in winter.
He spreads her out
like a road map, trying
to find his way from one point
to another, unable.

She thinks if she pinches
his hand it will turn to powder.
She feels his thin claws, his wings
spread over her like arms, not bones
but feathers ready to fall.

She suffers the jerk
of his feeble legs. Take it easy.
she tells him, cruelly
submissive in her bright flesh.
He’s cold from the fear
of death, the sorrow
of failure, night after night
he shivers with her breasts
against him like an accusation,
hers mouth slightly open,
hers hair spilling everywhere.
Abishag by Rainer Maria Rilke

I
She lay. And her childlike arms were bound
by servants around the withering king,
on whom she lay throughout the sweet long hours,
a little frightened of his many years.

And now and then she turned her face
in his beard, whenever an owl cried;
and all that was night came and flocked
around her with fear and longing.

The stars trembled just as she did,
a scent went searching through the sleeping room,
the curtain stirred and made a sign,
and her gaze went softly after it ---

But she kept clinging to the dark old man
and, not reached by what the nights call forth,
lay on his potent slumber's deepening chill
with virgin lightness, like a buoyant soul.

II
The king sat thinking through the empty day
of deeds accomplished, of unfelt pleasures,
and of his favorite dog, on whom he doted.
But in the evening Abishag arched
over him. His tangled life lay
abandoned like an ill-famed coast
beneath the constellation of her silent breasts.

And now and then, as one adept in women,
he recognized through his eyebrows
the unmoved, kissless mouth;
and saw: her feeling's green divining rod
did not point downward to his depths.
A chill went through him. He hearkened like a hound
and sought himself in his last blood.
Abishag by Walter Kaufmann

Draw nearer, Abishag, the night is cold
And gloomy as the grave; the chills of death
Are hugging me and take my breath –

Draw nearer, Abishag, for I am old
And may not live to see the rising sun
Dispel the spirits which besiege my bed.
You seem so far, I live among the dead –

Come closer, Abishag, beloved one,
Embrace me, with your burning lips awaken
A spark of feeling in my freezing heart.
Be you my lyre, and the ancient art
Which soothed King Saul when God had long forsaken
His royal head shall come to me again.
I see him in the dusk, his shape is vast,
He leers at me: your turn has come at last—

And where is David now to soothe your pain?
And where is Jonathan, where Abigail,
Where Amnon, where is Absalom, my son,
Where is my glory, where my loved ones gone,
Where are my prayers? Songs and music fail.

And you, a virgin whom I do not know,
Sigh in my arms and dream of years ahead.
Come back to me, for soon I shall be dead,
My heart will stop, and you, my love, can go
Psalm 51 is traditionally interpreted as a psalm of confession and renewal. Its poetry has contributed to the daily Jewish prayer liturgy as well as the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur services. Two verses, 13 and 20, have been set to music; one verse, 17, is repeated three times a day as a prelude to silent prayer, and verse 20 is sung in unison four times each week as the Torah is removed from the ark. A psalm so resonant is worthy of notice. I decided to enter it at a linguistic level.

Once inside, I found myself captured by the possibilities for exploration. Here, my examination of Psalm 51 begins with a new translation, and ends with a set of radically contrasting interpretive readings. ..is an original drama which calls forth the silenced voice of Bat Sheva herself.

Psalm 51 encourages such interpretive tampering. It is one of only nine psalms with an ascription tying it to a specific historical event. David composes it, we are told, after Nathan chastises him for taking his army general's wife to bed and later arranging for that loyal general's death. This great drama, summarized below, is found in 2 Samuel 11-12; it is among the most riveting accounts in the Bible....

At this moment of awareness and calamity, the ascription implies, David brings his sins before God, struggles with his passions and the deep grief he feels, and composes Psalm 51. The drama leaves hard questions in its wake. ...

Psalm 51

*For the conductor, a song of David*

*When Nathan the prophet came to him*
*After David had been with Bat Sheva:*

Be gracious to me, God, with your kindness  
With great compassion, erase my crimes  
Completely wash away my iniquities  
And make me pure despite my sins  
Because my crimes I acknowledge  
And my sins haunt me endlessly

---

39 Rosenblit has taught in myriad exotic locales, including Yerucham, an isolated town in Israel’s Negev Desert. She is studying in the Judaic Studies program at Emory University and is a Bible and literature teacher at the Weber Jewish day school in Atlanta, Georgia.
Before You and You alone I sinned
I did evil in your eyes
So that Your words will be justified
So that You will be right in Your verdict

Look! In iniquity was I born
Sinful was my mother's heated passion

'Here! You seek truth in my innermost being,
So, make me know wisdom in my innermost heart

Disinfect me with hyssop and I will be pure
Wash me and I will be as white as snow
Let me hear joy and gladness
Then the bones You crushed will rejoice

Hide Your Face from my sins
And erase all my iniquities
A pure heart create for me, O God
A proper spirit renew in my inner being

Don't send me away from Your presence
Don't take away Your holy spirit from me
Return to me the joy of Your salvation
And with a generous spirit support me
I will teach sinners Your ways
Sinners will return to You

Let my tongue sing joyously of Your righteousness
My Lord, open my lips

And my mouth will tell of Your praises
Since You do not wish an offering, else I would give it
Nor a burnt offering do you want
The slaughter offerings of God are a broken spirit
and a broken, battered heart
These God will not reject

Do good as is Your will, to Zion
Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem
Then You will desire righteous sacrifice,
burnt offerings and whole offerings
Then bullocks will be offered on Your altar.
Reading for Two Voices

David's psalm of confession and renewal
Bat Sheva's psalm of unremittent suffering

[Bat Sheva weeps from outside David's chamber.
Inside the room, David cries to God for forgiveness, approaching God with the gift-offering of the poet.
From the periphery, outside the inner sanctum, Bat Sheva sobs out her anger, her loss, her psalm. She hears David as he approaches God.
David cannot hear her. Hers is the marginalized voice of the silenced soul.]

Bat Sheva: I hate him. Rushing about. Howling. Shrieking. I despise him. Nathan is gone now and suddenly, he cries out, all contrition and tears. And I am left to mourn my dead husband, and to nurse this child of sin. His lips won't suck, his eyes are hollow. His tiny fingers cannot grasp my shaking hand.
    God, what have You done to me?

[From within the chamber she hears his voice, filled with weeping and remorse.]

David: Be gracious to me, God, with Your kindness With great compassion, erase my crimes Completely wash away my iniquities And make me pure despite my sins

Bat Sheva: How dare his guilty lips give voice to such a cry. He knows how to cry or forgiveness, while I live with this guilt. I know the guilt of women. I know the bargain we strike. I know my choices.
    I, too, acknowledge my crimes because my sins haunt me endlessly.
    Is there no comfort from my grief?

David: Before You and You alone
    I sinned I did evil in your eyes
    So that Your words will be justified
    So that You will be right in Your verdict

Bat Sheva: Before You and You alone!? Who? Before whom? Before God - and not before me!? Before whom will I repent? When you summoned me forth to sin, to whom should I have appealed? Let him never forget!
    I will never forget.
I will never forget that day. Air so clear. I had gone to the ritual bath late, as the sun began to set behind the Judean hills. The ritual waters surrounded me - they cleansed me. It was the last time I felt clean.

Could I have known? I was dressing when I saw the king's guard inquiring of the bathhouse attendant. She cast a glance my way and whispered to him. He grinned - it was a leer - when he looked my way.

I had rounded the corner to my house when they approached, those three men, snickering under their stinking robes. "Dress quickly, lucky lady. You have been chosen to warm the king's bed tonight."

He cries to You for mercy?! He cries to You for compassion, to make him pure?!

Who can make me pure?

Look! In iniquity was I born. Sinful was my mother's heated passion

And in sin this baby was conceived with the guilt of heat. Through me my sins have borne such sickly fruit.

David: Here! You seek truth in my innermost being
So make me know wisdom in my innermost heart
Disinfect me with hyssop and I will be pure
Wash me and I will be white as snow
Let me hear joy and gladness
Then the bones You crushed will rejoice

Bat Sheva: There is not water enough on earth to wash this stain from me.

I can still feel the blood leak down my legs. It stains me forever. I carry my sin in my arms. Blood pulsates through those tiny veins, that pallid flesh.

My shame envelops me, as once You did.

David: Hide Your Face from my sins

[As both speak "from my sins," David's voice fades, Bat Sheva's rises]

Bat Sheva: From my sins, too, erase all my iniquities. A pure heart create for me. O God, don't let my hatred consume me. Don't let my grief press me into the earth. Don't let this baby suffer for my sins. You love his father. Then love him. Save this child for his sake, if not for mine. Surely not for mine. Are You so cruel?

David: [His voice grows stronger:]

A proper spirit renew in my inner being
Bat Sheva: I deserved Your cruelty. For some sin of mine that I know not, God, forgive me. Don’t leave me. Don’t send me away from Your Presence.

[Bat Sheva weeps, for her blasphemy, for her sorrow, for the innocent child who she fears will be sacrificed to atone for her sin, far her dead husband, for her arrogant lover.]

David: [His voice stronger still]

Don't take away Your holy spirit from me.

Return to me the joy of Your salvation

And with a generous spirit support me
I will teach sinners Your ways
Sinners will return to You

Bat Sheva: Your lips are golden. How sweetly they form the words. And yet you dare to exclude me from your prayer? Those honeyed lips that dared to call me to your bed, that dared to call for the murder of my husband. What remorse did your lips form then? You. You! You will “teach sinners”?! Nathan came to tell you a children's story so you could understand what you had done. A story about sheep, so you could understand. You shepherd, in king’s robes - You arrogant self-centered killer! What were your prayers when you sent Uriah away, his own death warrant in his hand? Did nothing, no one, none of the deaths count to you until Nathan came and told you a story he made up? And oh, to watch you fly into a rage over a rich man who took another's sheep! It was comical, your anger so easily aroused. You! Too selfish to notice anyone or anything. Or to see yourself. What you had done.

David: Rescue me from this blood!

Bat Sheva: Rescue me from this blood.

David: God, God of my Deliverance
Let my tongue sing joyously of Your righteousness
My Lord, open my lips
And my mouth will tell of Your praises
Since You do not wish an offering, else I would give it
Nor a burnt offering do You want.
The slaughter offerings of God
are a broken spirit and a broken, battered heart.
These God will not reject.
[Bat Sheva falls to the ground, clutching the child in her arms. He does not cry out.]

Bat Sheva: The slaughter offerings of God are “a broken spirit and a broken, battered heart. These God will not reject.” My broken spirit, my battered heart I bring before You. I have only that to offer. Can I heal from this sorrow? O God, “open my lips too,” that my sorrow will give way to... to what? What? I cannot even say the words. As he opens his heart, so do I yearn for comfort. But You have turned from me. Taken from me to give to him.

David:
Do good as is Your will, to Zion
Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem
Then You will desire righteous sacrifice,
burnt offerings and whole offerings
Then bullocks will be offered on Your altar.

Bat Sheva: When will You have taken enough? When will I have given enough? I pray
Dear God,
Let the yelps and spraying blood of some dumb beast
Hurled helpless upon Your altar
Replace the sacrifice of this dying babe.

Rebuild the walls of my womb
to house the seed of Your people.

Heal me, O God. Heal me now.
For I am broken.
X. Educators’ Exercises

A. A Voyage of Discovery for Each of the Characters in II Samuel 11 by Haya Ben Natan,

B. Putting David on Trial by Diane Lavin

A. A Voyage of Discovery for Each of the Characters in the David-Batsheva Story, by Haya Ben Natan, from HaMikra V’Ani – The Tanakh and Me: Alternative Methods for Teaching Tanakh

Haya Ben Natan was for decades a most creative teacher of Tanakh pedagogy at the Seminar HaKibbutzim Teachers college in Tel Aviv. She availed herself of many psychodramatic tools used in family therapy to explore the relationships in Biblical narrative. She built group work inquiry into the story and its interpersonal meanings. However she also found surprising ways to lead the students to a very close analysis of the structure and terminology of the Biblical text. It is my honor to summarize her chapter and hope that her work will become more widely available to English speaking Jewish educators.

Her basic pedagogical approach consists of three steps:

▪ Identifying central concepts underlying the story

▪ Offering techniques for a close textual analysis in the light of that concept

▪ Proposing creative group activities translating our concepts and text analysis into a active personal knowledge about our characters and our lives.

I Samuel 11 – Concepts, Texts and Group Activities

Three main concepts are suggested as tools to explore the Biblical story of David and Batsheva.

1. The Anatomy of a Crime
2. Hiddenness and Dramatic Tension
3. Point of View – “What you see from here, you cannot see from there”
CONCEPT: The Anatomy of a Crime - Unpremeditated

Legally David's crimes are premeditated but psychologically and dramatically David's actions are not portrayed as premeditated in the sense that he always knew what he wanted and how to get it and what he was getting into. First, he is struck by beauty. Then opportunity is added to temptation combined with full knowledge of the fact of adultery. But David seems oblivious of the consequences, of the possible complications. The act, the pregnancy and then the cover-up escalate until - without premeditation - David安排s for a military casualty - murder. Finally God intervenes which is nothing David could have imagined when he began the adultery or carried out the cover-up.

The Anatomy of a Crime and The Dramatic Literary Structure of II Sam 11

1. The **background** – the **opportunity** - staying at home in Jerusalem and sleeping late one afternoon (II Sam 11:1-2).
2. The **development** – the **temptation** - seeing a beautiful woman bathing (II Sam 11:2)
3. The **act** of the main character – the **crime** – taking her and sleeping with her (II Sam 11:3-4)
4. The **complication** from the secondary character– **unforeseen consequences of the sin** – pregnancy (II Sam 11:5–6)
5. The **reactions** of the main character – **three cover-up attempts** – the first two fail and lead to escalation of efforts (II Sam 11:6 and 8, 10, and 14-15) – from adultery, to deceit and manipulation, to murder
6. The **resolution** – Uriah eliminated and Bathsheva married and the child becomes "legal" (II Sam 11:25-27)
7. Unraveled – the third attempt which seemed to have succeeded has failed because God sees through the cover-up and judges it otherwise than the adulterer. (II Sam 11:27b)


The narrative structure of II Sam. 11 can be summarized by the words of wisdom - **Proverbs 30: 18-20:**

"Three things are beyond me, four I cannot fathom.
How an eagle makes it way over the sky;
How a snake makes it way over a rock;
How ship makes its way through the high seas;
How a man has his way with a maiden?"

Such is the way of the adulteress:
She eats, she wipes her mouth,
And she says: “I have done no wrong!”
“How a man has his way with a maiden?” – Here is the male perspective of David spying Batsheva and deciding how to “have his way with her.”

2. The act of the main character— the crime taking her and sleeping with her (II Sam 11: 3-4). Here again it is David who is the adulterer but he can be compared to the way of the adulteress (Batsheva is not described as a seductress by II Sam 11).

**Such is the way of the adulteress: She eats...**(Proverbs 30:20)

In the imagery of Proverbs sexual consumption is compared to eating. Both are driven by instinctual needs to consume. Later in II Sam 11: 25 David compares the sword to an instrument that “eats /tokhal hakherev”.

3. The complication from the secondary character— unforeseen consequences of the sin – pregnancy (II Sam 11:5). However eating often involves getting oneself dirty, just as having intercourse involves becoming impure and needing purification (recall Batsheva’s bathing – sanctifying herself from impurity – II Sam 11:4). Hence the need to clean up the consequences of satisfying one’s physical desires.

4. The reactions of the main character – three cover-up attempts

she wipes her mouth...*(Proverbs 30:20)*

**Proverbs 30:29-32** goes on to describe the arrogance of the king which is also the arrogance of the adulterer and schemer, David:

There are three that are stately of stride, four that carry themselves well ....a king whom no one dares to rise against him.  
If you have acted scandalously with arrogance,  
if you have schemed to do evil, clap your hand over your mouth.

5. The resolution –  
Uriah eliminated and David blames the nature of war – it is the way of the sword to eat victims – no person is to blame – not Yoav and not David (II Sam 11:25)

And she says: “I have done no wrong!” *(Proverbs 30:20)*

6. Unraveling. Beyond the resolution in II Sam. 11 and beyond the proverb in II Sam. 12 there is Divine justice which is not initially in the purview of the sinner.
CONCEPT: Hiddenness and Dramatic Tension

The dramatic dynamic of II Sam. 11 is driven by the cover-up by David but also by all that is hidden from David and from the reader. David and the reader have no idea that Batsheva will get pregnant, though the bathing as purification after menstruation is a hint we understand after the fact. The reader has no notion of what Batsheva thinks or feels. Is she a seductress plotting her husband’s death? David has no expectation that a fellow soldier would prefer to sleep outside rather than sleep with his wife in his own bed, because David’s values and psyche do not work that way. Does Uriah ever find out what happened? Does he ever peek at the letter he is carrying? Neither David nor the reader knows that God will intervene, for the narrator avoids judging David’s acts directly but builds the narrative around the question of whether his cover-up will work or not. Literally it is quite satisfying that David succeeds in the end in his technical solution to the cover-up challenge. But what moral price must be paid no one is asking before God’s perspective is introduced.

Now the reader/student is requested to identify with half-drawn characters and to fill the gaps left by this hiddenness in an exercise called a “Voyage in the footsteps of the Character” (see below).

The Communications in this story of David’s coverup and Yoav’s fear of the king’s anger often go underground into the Subtext. The literal communications in II Sam 11 can be read ironically. Even Nathan in II Samuel 12 will speak through a parable before he lets loose with God’s condemnation.

Let us examine Four Ironies that reveal a hidden subtext beneath the explicit communication:

1. Read David’s irony in II Sam. 11: 7 –
   “David asked for the shalom of Yoav, the shalom of the people, and the shalom of the war.”
   What is the subtext?
   David really meant: Let’s get through the small talk of national matters, and get to the main thing – my own shalom – how to get you in bed with Batsheva without getting caught red-handed in my private indiscretion. The narrator has now ironized David to show us what hypocrite he is as a national leader.

2. Read Uriah’s ironies in II Sam 11: 11:

   Uriah said to David: “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in sukkot,
   [BUT Subtext says: while you, my king? are sleeping late and then restlessly walking on the roof?] And my lord Yo’av and my lord’s servants are camping on the face of the open-field
   [BUT Subtext says: But you are not my lord! I cannot be loyal to you as I am to them. You are back at home lacking solidarity with your men in the field.]
   And I, I should come into my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?
   [BUT Subtext says: You did exactly that – you lay with my wife!]
   By your very life, by your being, if I were I do this thing ... !”
   [BUT Subtext says: I swear I will not be part of your coverup. My life but also your life is on the line because I trust God to be a true judge who cannot be corrupted.]

   If Uriah has heard the rumors about Batsheva, then his ironies are intended. If not they are the narrator’s way of ironizing David the hypocrite.
3. Yoav's irony is II Sam 11: 20

18 Then Yo' av sent and had David told all the details of the battle, 19 he charged the messenger, saying:  
“When you have finished reporting everything about the battle to the king, 20 if the king's anger starts up and he says to you: 'Why did you draw-near the city to do battle? Didn't you know that they would shoot down from on the wall? 21 Who struck-down Avimelekh son of Yerubboshet--wasn't it a woman, (who) threw down on him a riding millstone from on the wall, so that he died at Tevetz? For what (reason) did you approach the wall?' –

[BUT the subtext is beware of women, David!. They have brought down great kings and warriors before. How did you let yourself get into such a vulnerable and unmanly position of being exposed to a woman's wiles.]

Then you are to say: 'Also your servant Uriah the Hittite died.'”

[BUT the subtext is “mission accomplished!” Remember you wanted this to look natural so no one would suspect. Don’t you dare blame me for this ignominious loss because it was your idea and because I have scandalous secret information that I can use against you. I now know you can betray your comrades-in-arms, so I will beware of you and you beware of me.]

4. Back to David’s irony in II Sam. 11:25

David said to the messenger:  
“Say thus to Yo' av: ‘Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes, for like-this and like-that the sword devours!”

[BUT the subtext is I am now off Scot –free. No one will blame me or you. That is just the way things go in this harsh cynical world of love and war.
CONCEPT:
Point of View – “What you see from her, you can see from there”

Family therapy and Biblical narrative share the concern for how the same event can be seen and evaluated from multiple perspectives. This recalls the Israeli popular song “What you see from there, you cannot see from here – ma she roim mi sham, lo roim mi-kaan.”

The group activity of inquiry now invites each student to go on a “Voyage in the footsteps of one’s Character.” Our goal is to move from a summary judgment of the character based on what happened to a close reading of what is said and what is left unsaid, then to an empathy with his/her inner world, and then on to evaluation.

STEPS:

- Choose a character from our story whom you wish to follow and into his/her head you wish to get. **David/Batsheva/Yoav/Uriah (optional - Messengers)** combining David’s messengers and Yoav’s.
  
  NOTE that often students want to avoid choosing David because he seems so disgusting and they have a hard time identifying with him. Yet they must go on this voyage and try to understand him sympathetically form the inside.

- Read the chapter line by line to collect information about your character’s interests, motives, personality, background, relation to all other characters etc

- Lay out four (or five) big poster boards each with the name of one of the characters and ask students to gather around their choice. Even out the “character groups” but David may require two groups since he plays such a major role.

- Each group spends 25 minutes (no more even if not finished) to flesh out their character with sources from the text and hypotheses filling in the gaps. Then summarize the character on regular paper and make a copy for each representative who needs to make their own notes. For Uriah add II Sam 23:34,39 and for Yoav add II Samuel 3:12-22, 31-32. 38; I Kings 2:1-6.

- One or two representative of each group form new “encounter groups” with representatives from each character. Each student must then present their character in **first person “I” language.** (For example, I was bathing on a cool night and really enjoying the water, when suddenly I felt someone’s eyes on me...). Remember the presentation is to the others who have not studied your character in such depth. Five minutes each should allow everyone to hear how the character sees itself and its world, **but no questions or interactions yet.**

- Now the group enters the “World of Truthfulness.” Here every other character may ask in character questions to the other characters. Here we explore what was hidden – what did you think when you heard Uriah was killed? What did you feel when you received the note “I am pregnant”? Here characters may confront one another emotionally: confess, accuse, cry, defend, plead. Here characters may come back from the dead (like Uriah) and ask questions they would never dare to ask when alive, since now they are safe and they know all that has happened. The other character is now asked to **answer truthfully** to his/her character, filling in gaps as necessary and filling out the character. 20 minutes is usually adequate.

- Return to character groups to prepare a collective summary of your character on **poster board.** But first do a debriefing and sharing how your character was received in each encounter group, what you learned about him/her, whether your character is based on the text or a product of filling in from our imagination.

- Optional: add traditional and modern **commentaries** on your character and evaluate them. They too may be included in the poster board summary. Often the board will display two or three alternative readings of each character (Batsheva as victim or Batsheva as seductress; Uriah as naïve victim or Uriah as ironic critic of the king; David as lover or as lecher; David as feeling guilty or as afraid or merely calculating how to save his political reputation).
Post the poster boards in an exhibition.
Make a one-line statement for your character:
- David – I sinned, but I am only flesh and blood;
- Uriah – Even if I die I will have preserved my integrity in this corrupt world.
- Batsheva – What could I do? After all he is the king!
- Yoav – I am loyal to my king no matter what, but will he be loyal to me?

Now let this lead into a general discussion: Did your attitude and understanding of your character grow through this process? Do you think your character is trustworthy (Uriah’s moralistic speech, David’s concern for the troops, David’s love for Bathes whom he marries, Batsheva’s mourning for her husband. Do you like your character?

Revisiting the crime: Did your evaluation of the crime change? Of David our king?

Reflecting on our learning. What do you think of this learning process as a whole? What was helpful and what was difficult for you personally? What would you change?

Haya Ben Natan’s the Board of Colored Light Bulbs Technique
- II Samuel 12: Nathan’s Parable

The literary aspects of the parable of Nathan are often read over by students too quickly, as they look beyond the mashal to the nimshal or to the final result – Nathan’s accusation and David’s confession. However to slow the rereading process down and to weigh how each word in this brief parable casts its own associative light on our story, let us use the Board of Colored Light Bulbs Technique.

1) Introduction: What great talent Nathan showed in his parable. His literary ability to compose and play act a short story posing as a real event that would transform King David’s perspective on his crime, the one he worked so hard to cover up, is amazing. Let us discover how each word contributes to this feat.

2) Read the parable II Samuel 12:1-4 to yourself and circle three words or short phrases that seem remarkable to you.

3) Optional: Share with the student next to you (or get up and walk around the room) comparing your three words with other student’s choices. Explain and ask for reasons for this choice of the key words.

4) Examine as a group the full text on the board and mark with colored markers the key words circles by your students. Think of the meaning, the associations, the figurative imagery of each word.

5) Imagine that each word of the parable is a differently colored bulb that when touched lights up and casts its particular light on the whole parable. (Recall the English phrase “to look at something through tinted glasses or rose colored glasses” because each angle of vision or color makes us focus on a different aspect of reality or of the text). Take a few examples and ask how the whole parable is understood differently “in the light of” those three words/bulbs.

6) Now ask each person to present their overall feeling of the parable through the eyes of his/her three words in a visual manner – poster/dance/tableaux/ etc and explain the presentation.

Haya ben Natan’s Actor’s Technique: “You are the man!”/ “I sinned to God!”
Actors must practice their lines with different tones of voice, different gestures, different facial expressions, different body language. Break up into pairs and assign one to be David and one to be Nathan at the critical moment when Nathan reveals that the story is a parable and it refers to David himself as the rich man whom King David has just condemned - not knowing it referred to him – to death. First one repeats Ata HaIsh – pointing, angry, standing etc as one has chosen.
Then the other playing David must react in gestures and facial expression and then say: Hatati LaAdonai. Repeat with different tones and gestures. Then after three times, switch the roles. Now what did you learn about interpreting David and Nathan’s lines
B, Putting David on Trial  
by Diane Lavin, Bible teacher at Agnon Middle School – 8th Grade

David unit. To begin at the end, we put David on trial for adultery and murder. There are defined roles for each student during the trial (prosecuting attorney, defense attorney, David, Bat Sheva, other witnesses, God, Natan, etc) and there are specific rules for how the trial proceeds (cause for objections, ruling on objections, order of testimony and cross examination, etc). The teacher plays no direct role in the trial itself, unless it starts to break down.

1- So the unit begins with the story of David and Bat Sheva, which we study in the original (primarily), and without commentary, for about a week. Then I propose that in order for David to be judged, we must know him as the complex individual that he was.

2- So we need to go back to his early life and see what kind of person he is, what patterns of behavior he exhibits, what values and principles he lives by, his relationships with women and with authority, etc. We study 4-5 stories (depending upon the size of the class), in small groups – with each group taking one story and then "teaching" it to the class for two consecutive days. Groups have requirements re: Hebrew verses to teach, etc., and they must give me a lesson plan for approval before they teach. They are required to assign homework before and/or during their teaching days and this homework is graded by me. Their assignments are also approved by me. Throughout the teaching of these stories, we consider potential textual evidence in support of or against David.

3- After these early stories we review the David and Bat Sheva story, to see it with informed eyes. Then we begin preparation for the trial.

4- The Trial. No one knows which role they will be assigned until one week before the trial, at which time they have that week to prepare. The outcome of the trial is the judgment of God (in consultation with Natan) and no one is to know it, including me, until it is announced. Reasons must be given for the judgment, and these are based upon a set of criteria worked out by God, Natan and me in advance of the trial.

Assessment. I grade students as they prepare their stories, as they teach, on how they participate when other groups teach (there is a strong difference to me between presenting and teaching, and I am not interested in presentations), as they prepare for the trial and as they participate in the trial. At the end of the unit, I give one of the toughest tests I would in good conscience offer 8th graders. They tend to sail through it.

The whole unit is about 12 weeks long. It’s become a highlight of the 8th grade year, and I have my son Josh, at the time, 14 to thank, because the original idea and much of the brainstorming was done together with him.

Goals:
- Student investment in holding, knowing, moving through, citing, quoting and interpreting text.
- Student skill in seeing a character come out of the text and stand in front of them full blown, with personality, ambivalence, a conscience, a capacity to lie and cheat, a capacity for greatness.
- Student capacity to work with text from multiple perspectives, to use text on their feet, to “be” the text and “be” the characters.
- Student capacity to follow criteria and create a dramatic process with minimal adult intervention.
- Development of biblical Hebrew skill.
- Enjoyment of spending time with peers over a text, because they are bringing the text to life.
The Trial of דוד המלך KING DAVID for Murder and Adultery

Diane Lavin - Agnon School – Cleveland - 8th grade

Participants:
Team for the Prosecution / Team for the Defense / David, the Defendant/
God, the Judge / the Prophet

I. Roles of Prosecution, Defense, God, Natan, and Witnesses

The role of the prosecution is to bring formal charges against the king for adultery and murder, and to present evidence and arguments to prove these charges to be true.

The role of the defense is to defend the king against the charges of adultery and murder, and to present evidence and arguments to prove these charges to be false.

For both the prosecution and defense, the biblical text is to be used, as often and as accurately as possible, to provide evidence and to support arguments.

God will serve as judge of the trial. She will rule, in consultation with Natan, on all objections. God will direct the courtroom to be quiet and orderly as necessary, and will explain and monitor all rules of the trial.

God and Natan will issue the final verdict on each charge separately. God may not be called as a witness and may not correct any testimony even if She knows it to be false.

Natan will serve the judge as a consultant on all decisions, including the final verdict. Natan will swear in each witness and ask them to state their names for the court. As God’s prophet, Natan communicates God’s message to Israel. Therefore, at the end of each day of the trial, Natan will report any messages God wants the people of Israel to know. In addition, as a prophet, Natan is free to interpret God’s message and to deliver any message the people of Israel want God to know.

God and Natan will determine the witness list based upon the requests handed to them in writing by each side during the first day of preparation. Should the sides both want a particular witness, God and Natan will decide on which side that witness will testify.

God and Natan will create a point system by which arguments, rebuttals, use of witnesses and use of text will be credited during the trial.

Witnesses may be real or fictitious, and may come from the text and time period or not. Each witness will testify for his or her side after being sworn in by Natan. The opposing side will have the opportunity to cross examine each witness.
II. Procedure

The trial will begin with brief opening statements read by the prosecution and defense. The prosecution will then present its case, calling each witness and directing them to give their testimony. Each witness will be sworn in by Natan, will be seated and state his or her name, and provide his or her testimony. After giving testimony, the witness will be cross examined by the opposing side. The prosecution may ask the judge to reexamine the witness one additional time, with defense cross examination before the witness is dismissed. The prosecution will have 2 ½ class periods to present its case, at which time the prosecution will rest its case.

The defense then presents its case, calling each witness to be sworn in by Natan and following the same procedure as above. King David must be called as a witness by the defense. The defense will have 2 ½ class periods to present its case, at which time the defense will rest its case.

At the end of each day, two minutes will be reserved for Natan to report to Israel the state of the trial. Two minutes will also be given Diane to make announcements.

Toward the end of Day 5, closing statements will be made by each side. God and Natan will then have one night to determine the verdict. The verdict will be announced the next day in class. No one is to know the verdict ahead of its final announcement. The verdict will be given, with a complete set of reasons, and will be final.

III. Objections

Both the prosecution and defense may raise an objection to statements by the opposing side on the following grounds, and only these grounds:

a. Leading the Witness – instead of the witness giving testimony in his or her own words, the attorney is making statements him or herself.

b. Badgering the Witness – the attorney is repeatedly and forcefully pressuring the witness.

c. Irrelevant Questioning – the question asked by the attorney appears to have no connection or relevance to the trial.

God and Natan will rule on all objections. Rulings are final.

Note that there is no objection for false testimony. Rather, it is up to the opposing side, either during cross examination or during the testimony of their own witnesses, to counter false testimony from the opposing side. In addition, note that God may not make a ruling based upon the truth or falsity of the testimony. Nor may God or Natan judge based upon false testimony. Rather, God and Natan must judge based upon whether false statements were adequately challenged during cross examination or the testimony of their witnesses.

IV. Batsheva and Natan

Batsheva and Natan must be called as witnesses, but could potentially be witnesses for either side. If both sides want them as witnesses, God will determine on which side each will testify. This determination must take place while the witness lists are being approved on the first day of preparation.

V. Preparation Time:

Day One: Begin deciding strategy for your side. Determine your preferred witness list, and place names in order of priority. Present this list to God and Natan for a decision.

Day Two: Continue developing the strategy for your side. Seek textual evidence for your side. Decide who will play the role of which witness. Begin to rehearse your witnesses.
Day Three: Decide who will deliver the opening statement, who will cross examine the witnesses of the other side, and who will direct your witnesses as they give their testimony. Share responsibility as fairly as possible.

VI. Grading

Students will be graded based upon the following:

a. Contribution to your team (or partner) 10 pts
b. Knowledgeable fulfillment of your role, including knowledge of the text. 10 pts.
c. Fairness and inclusion of team members and respect for everyone throughout the trial. 10 pts.
d. Following the rules of the trial. 10 pts.
e. Use of reasoning and textual evidence. 20 pts.

Total 60 pts.
Art Appendix:
see under separate cover

DAVID, AVIGAIL AND BATSHEVA –
ART AS MIDRASH

A. Guidelines for Analyzing Art as Parshanut on a Biblical Text

B. David and Avigail in Art – I Samuel 25: 18-27
   1-David Teniers (Holland 1582-1649) – Avigail Pleading before David
   2-Juan Antonio (Spain, 1630 -1670)

C. David and Batsheva - II Samuel 11: 2-5,26-27
   3-Illustrated Bible (Paris c.1250)
   4-Marc Chagall – From the Rooftop (Russia, Paris, 1887 -1985)
   5-Giacomo Manzu – From the Window (Italy, second half of the 20th century)
   6- Heinrich Fueger - Batsheva and the Letter (Germany, 1751-1818)
   7 -Peter Paul Rubens - Batsheva (Vienna, 1577-1640)
   8 -Rembrandt – Batsheva (Holland, 1606 – 1669)
   9-10 Jan Steen – Batsheva and the Letter (Holland, 1626-1679)

D. David and Uriah - II Samuel 11: 6-15
   11- Pieter Lastman – King David and Uriah (Holland, 1619)
   12- Govaert Flinck - King David and Uriah (Holland, 1615-1660)
   13- Ivan Schwebel - King David and Uriah in Kikar Zion in Today’s Jerusalem (Israel, 1982)

   14- Diedre Luzwick – Nathan enters David’s Chambers (USA, The Surrealistic Bible, 1976)
   15- Gebhardt Fugel – “You are the man!” (Germany, 19th century)
   16- Elinor Dickenson - “You are the man!” (USA, 1970s)
   17- Arendt de Gelder - King David (Holland, 1645 -1727)

F. David, Uriah and David in Rembrandt’s Sketches
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Moshe Garsiel, *Shmuel*

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David Gunn, “Bathsheba Goes bathing in Hollywood” published in Semeia, pp. 92ff, and reprinted in *Goliath’s Head: Sex, Politics, and the Authority of the Bible*

Josephus, *Antiquities* Book 7:7
When you're trying to get at what someone has to say and it's remarkably difficult, as it was with Jenoff, the hit man, you give them whatever support is available.

The entire situation was so unorthodox - a guy coming forward on his own, six years after the fact, gulping down coffee and puffing his way through half a pack of cigarettes in a family restaurant on a Friday afternoon. There was no interrogation; no pressure. In some way, it was too easy: The murdered wife Carol Neulander would finally have justice. And Jenoff, the hit man? What would he have? This guy was begging for forgiveness, for relief from the secret he'd been sitting on for six years.

Few cops have read The Compulsion to Confess by the psychoanalyst Theodore Reik. But their instincts tell them Reik was right when he said "Confession is the criminal's first step back to society." A confession is usually not an end in itself, but a way to appeal to certain authority figures for absolution, maybe even for affection. .

A member of Freud's inner circle, Reik framed confession in traditionally Freudian terms: just like a child's confession "unconsciously represents a new wooing for love," a criminal confesses because he wants "to re-enter society by declaring himself worthy of punishment. [He is] the outsider on his painful detour back to the family of man." Confessing was maybe this criminal's last chance to enter that family, to stop being an outsider.
BATHSHEBA by Yehiel Mar

Oh, the wiles of women! Not for nothing did you climb on the roof,
Not for nothing did your clothes drop down,
the one with the beautiful garment! Y'fat HaBeged
Your heart was wide, Bathsheba, it rejoiced -
And the king's palaces opposite glittered enticingly..

For many nights, certainly, when sleep eluded you
The fabric of yearning, you spun with feverish thirst.
You interwove the warp of shame with the weft of your desire
And shivers overcame you, waves of joy and fear...

Until the day you prepared your arrow, the arrow that never misses
The torch of your body burned, sealing the king's fate.
And you said innocently:
The king seduced me!
He is imprinted in your flesh,
And Uriah to the javelin!
Christian Children’s Books: David and Batsheva

"Happy children were reared to ora et labora [prayer and work] but unfortunate ones to idleness said a 1743 pamphlet. Children's Bible authors often identify sloth with illicit sexuality. Simon Wastell's seventeenth-century children's Bible tells how "lazy" David "lust[ed] for Bath Sheba." It was moral sloth that caused his grievous sin. "If David had been occupied with serious work at this time or ... [with] reflection or research," the shameful adultery and embarrassing pregnancy need not have come about. That was Protestant; view at the end of the eighteenth century.

A few years later a Catholic said virtually the same thing: on his rooftop David looked about him with curiosity, "like all indolent people who can't think of anything better to do than look out the window."40

40 An impoverished employee should be induced to read the Bible, stay hardworking, and leave off drinking and that the first activity, reading the Bible, should be used to reinforce the second and the third.

"Our Savior's entire life passed in useful business. He was an enemy of all indolence. He was a diligent boy and youth.... Learn diligence and the desire for work from him."

For work and not for sloth,
Are we, O Lord, on earth.
Thus keep me ever
From becoming an idler.

Each of these examples stands for many, and each bears witness to the increasing importance of work-as-physical-labor in Bibles for the poor between 1750 and 1850.
Introduction to *Crimes and Misdemeanors*

**JEWISH HERITAGE VIDEO COLLECTION**

Film, 1989  
Director: Woody Allen  
Screenplay: Woody Allen  
Lester: Alan Alda  
Clifford: Woody Allen  
Hally: Mia Farrow  
Dolores: Anjelica Huston  
Judah: Martin Landau  
Jack: Jerry Orbach  
Rabbi Ben: Sam Waterston  
Miriam: Claire Bloom  
Length: 104 minutes

The Judaism becomes a structuring principle in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. In this film, Allen attempts to explore the meaning and value of Judaism in contemporary American life.

*Crimes and Misdemeanors* is unique among Allen's works as a serious film with a leading Jewish character. Allen wrote and directed serious films before this one (like *Interiors* and *Another Woman*), but the focus was always on female, non-Jewish characters. His films with Jews were comedies. Allen clearly believed that any film starring himself had to be a comedy, so that *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, a serious film with a Jewish protagonist, needed someone else to play the lead. It fell, therefore, to Martin Landau to inhabit an archetypically Jewish character and to lend it serious, even tragic, overtones.

**Crimes**

*Clearly deriving his title from Dostoevsky’s inherently Christian *Crime and Punishment*, Allen set *Crimes and Misdemeanors* in a typically Jewish world: science and medicine (and country clubs).* Yet, like Dostoevsky’s tormented hero, the well-to-do ophthalmologist-protagonist of Allen's film is obsessed by a powerful loss of faith, gripped by a compelling existential angst, and possessed by a profound sense of guilt. A murderer like Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, Dr. Judah Rosenthal neither seeks nor finds any Christian redemption, but he is "saved" in a far different manner. Moreover, he actively recalls his Jewish upbringing and Judaic background as he engages in spiritual and intellectual dialogues with a sympathetic and deeply faithful rabbi. That Judah does not "return" to Judaism or, alternately, is not punished for his crime says something about Woody Allen's continuing doubts about the existence of God and the meaning of life, as well as his ambivalence about the belief of his ancestors.

**The Seder and Testing of Faith**

Judah Rosenthal struggles to make sense of his life through his past. Thus, at a moment of intense guilt after he has arranged for his mistress's murder, Judah returns to the New Old Country of neighborhood Queens, back to his boyhood home.

Here he remembers a typical family gathering, a *Passover seder*. Significantly, the scene, at least in Judah's memory, revolves around his father and his aunt arguing with each other but directing their arguments to him. Their debate further represents a symbolic battle for Judah's soul between faith and cynicism. Judah's father, Sol, quietly and insistently proclaims his faith in God against all secular doubters, while his aunt May invokes the searing memory of the Holocaust as proof of God's absence. To Sol's assertion that God sees everything and will punish the wicked, Aunt May incredulously cries.
"Oh, who, like Hitler? Six million Jews burned to death and he got away with it!" In the movie Judah’s daughter reports: "My father takes after his Aunt May. She rejected the Bible because it had an unbelievable central character." Sol will not hear of doubts, but Judah, his son the scientist, the sophisticated rationalist, is plagued by them. And Judah remains, until the end, torn about his own beliefs.

For Judah, the murder of Dolores, the most heinous crime he can commit, must ultimately be taken as a test of God's presence, just as on a much larger scale the Holocaust created a monumental rift in Judaic theology. That Judah is a murderer, whereas in the Holocaust Jews were murdered, is perhaps Allen's disguised response to the deterioration of Jewish ethical standards. When he goes unpunished, Judah takes grim satisfaction in proving his father, as well as previous generations of Jewish thinkers, wrong.

Yet Judah's stance does not go entirely unchallenged. Ben, a rabbi, goes blind despite Judah's best efforts to prevent it. He reminds Judah of Sol. Ben's faith in God permits him to maintain a firm belief in moral structure, in a life with real meaning and significance. These are beliefs about which Woody Allen is skeptical, as he allows Judah to go not only unpunished but untormented - Allen's proof of the meaninglessness of existence - and uses this to suggest the absence of moral structure. When the blind rabbi dances with his daughter at her wedding, his sadly triumphant promenade becomes both the height of rational folly and the sublime faith in God's goodness.

Rabbi Ben: It's a fundamental difference in the way we view the world. You see it as harsh and empty of values and pitiless, and I couldn't go on living if I didn't feel with all my heart a moral structure with real meaning and forgiveness and some kind of bigger power. Otherwise there's no basis to know how to live.

Misdemeanors and Loss of Faith

We have dealt thus far with only half of this film, those events implied by the "Crimes" of the title. The "Misdemeanors" are equally significant. Although Judaism does not function so clearly in this portion of the picture, it is still Jewish in sensibility. Both Cliff, a documentary filmmaker and something of a schlemiel, and Lester, a successful television producer, represent Jewish involvement in the entertainment industry. Moreover, Cliff's documentaries represent the Jewish concern for social justice. Even more to the point, his latest project, a documentary on philosopher Louis Levy, foregrounds the Holocaust and makes explicit the search for values and meaning via Levy's monologues.

Professor Levy: We are all faced throughout our lives with agonizing decisions, moral choices.... We are, in fact, the sum total of our choices.... Human happiness does not seem to have been included in the design of creation. It is only we, with our capacity to love, who give meaning to the indifferent universe.

Cliff desires a relationship with Hally, a shiksa, while he is in the process of breaking up with his Jewish wife. Even with Hally, an established and extremely intelligent professional, we see something of the education of the shiksa by the Jewish man. The film is a complex portrait of the urban milieu, the confused and confusing state of middle-class existence, Cliff's own deteriorating marriage, his sister's
disastrous date through the classified ads, Judah’s adultery, Lester’s womanizing. It is a contemporary portrait of a secular Jewish community enmeshed in a state of ambivalence and moral ambiguity.

Perhaps this ambivalence and ambiguity stem from a lack of faith. Certainly the question of faith, as we have seen, is strongly sutured into the film. On the other hand, Allen wonders if we are all quite literally blind to the world around us. Perhaps no American film of recent memory is so carefully and clearly symbolic as *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, with its motif of sight and sightlessness. Central to this motif is Judah’s own career as an ophthalmologist. In addition, more than once Judah recalls his father at prayer in the synagogue and his father’s claim that “the eyes of God are on us always.” Perhaps, he tells the gathered crowd in the film’s first scene, that is why he became an eye doctor. The belief that God sees all initially paralyzes him from contemplating Dolores’s murder and then plagues him after the deed is done. Judah goes to her apartment, looks into Dolores’s dead, sightless eyes, and remembers her belief that the eves are the windows of the soul.

The question of whether God sees is further symbolized by Ben, the rabbi who finally loses his sight. Yet Judah, the eye doctor who launched his career under the impetus of a desire to explore whether or not God sees, cannot see any meaning in his own life. Similarly Cliff, the documentary filmmaker whose job is to see the truth in people and in society, can see no meaning to his life after Hally marries Lester, nor can he understand or see what she values in him.

Thus Allen brings Judah and Cliff together in the film’s final scene to commiserate with each other over their inability to see any purpose in life. But it is the rabbi, retaining his faith while losing his sight, whose dancing image dominates the film’s final frames.

*While you watch, consider:*

- How the motif of sight (seeing and blindness) relates to the film’s major ideas.
- How do you feel about Judah as the film progresses? Are you sympathetic toward him?
- What links the film’s “crimes” and “misdemeanors”?
- What role does Louis Levy, the subject of Cliff’s documentary, play in the film?
- How does Allen, in a sense, return to his schlemiel persona in this film?
- How does Cliff relate to women in this film?
- How would you characterize Cliff, Judah, Lester, and Ben? What are their values, their world views? Can they be seen as four different kinds of individuals? Four different kinds of Jews?
- Judah and Ben are on opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of questions of God and faith. Can there be a middle ground?
- Do the ideas about religion and philosophy that are expressed reflect your attitudes or make you question your own beliefs?
- Is there more than one “crime” in this film?
- How does Woody Allen use comedy to attack some very serious issues in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*? What are the limits of comedy?
- Does the film show American Jewish life in a positive light in any way? What does Woody Allen love and hate most about middle-class, middle-aged Jews?

Judah: What do you mean? People carry awful deeds around with them. What do you expect him to do, turn himself in? I mean, this is reality. In reality, we rationalize. We deny or we couldn't go on living.
“People carry awful deeds around with them. What do you expect him to do, turn himself in? I mean, this is reality. In reality, we rationalize. We deny or we couldn’t go on living.” - Who am I? Now, you respond.

“We are all faced throughout our lives with agonizing decisions, moral choices... We are, in fact, the sum total of our choices... Human happiness does not seem to have been included in the design of creation. It is only we, with our capacity to love, who give meaning to the indifferent universe. Who am I? _____ Now, you respond.

It's a fundamental difference in the way we view the world. You see it as harsh and empty of values and pityless, and I couldn’t go on living if I didn’t feel with all my heart a moral structure with real meaning and forgiveness and some kind of bigger power. Otherwise there’s no basis to know how to love.” - Who am I? _____ Now, you respond.

“Wisdom is to know the difference between pleasure, adventure and lust which are short term... and love.” - Who am I? _____ Now, you respond.

Deuteronomy 11:12 Even Yisrael is “a land which God is inspecting, a land where God’s eyes are constantly upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.” How is this relevant to the movie? To David and Bathsheba?

How are these two characters similar? How are they different?

Level 1: Repetition and Betrayal in Repetition

How are these two characters similar? How are they different?

Level 2: Theme

Where do you see the following themes at work? Describe the scene elements.

Faith vs. Cynicism [hint: considerSol vs. Aunt May]

The Meaning of Existence [hint: consider Louis Levy]

Sight vs. Blindness

Power and Power Imbalance?

Revealing and Concealing?

Loyalty and Betrayal

Thematic Assertions or question:

Six million Jews burned to death and [title] got away with it? Who am I? Care to respond?

“The eyes of God are on us always.” Who am I? Care to respond?

Do the ideas about religion and philosophy that are expressed reflect your attitudes or make you question your own beliefs? Explain.
Evan Wolkenstein – Idea Tree Chart to Compare Movie with Bible:
Woody Allen and David-Batsheva

Level 1: Repetition and Breaks in Repetition
I. King David vs. Judah
   A. Similar:
   
   B. Different:
II. Bathsheva vs. Dolores
   A. Different:
   B. Similar:
III. Rabbi Ben vs. Nathan the Prophet
   A. Similar:
   B. Different:

Level 2: Theme
I. Where/how do you see the following themes at work? Describe the scene elements.
   A. Revealing and Concealing?
      1. Thematic Assertion(s) or question:
   B. Power and Power Imbalance?
      1. Thematic Assertion(s) or question:
   C. Faith vs. Cynicism: [hint: consider Sol vs. Aunt May]
      1. Thematic Assertion(s) or question:
   D. The Meaning of Existence [hint: consider Louis Levy]
      1. Thematic Assertion(s) or question:
   E. Sight vs. Blindness
      1. Thematic Assertion(s) or question:
   F. Loyalty and Betrayal
      1. Thematic Assertion(s) or question:

"It's a fundamental difference in the way we view the world. You see it as harsh and
empty of values and pitiless, and I couldn't go on living if I didn't feel with all my heart a moral structure with real meaning and forgiveness and some kind of bigger power. Otherwise there's no basis to know how to live." -Who am I? _____ Now, you respond.

"We are all faced throughout our lives with agonizing decisions, moral choices.... We are, in fact, the sum total of our choices.... Human happiness does not seem to have been included in the design of creation. It is only we, with our capacity to love, who give meaning to the indifferent universe. -Who am I?" ______ Now, you respond.

"People carry awful deeds around with them. What do you expect him to do, turn himself in? I mean, this is reality. In reality, we rationalize. We deny or we couldn't go on living." -Who am I? _____ Now, you respond.

"Wisdom is to know the difference between pleasure, adventure and lust which are short term... and love." -who am I? _____ Now, you respond.

Deuteronomy 11:12 Eretz Yisrael is " a land which God is inspecting, a land where God's eyes are constantly upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." How is this relevant to the movie? To David and Bathsheva?

Six million Jews burned to death and [Hitler] got away with it!" Who am I? ____

Care to respond?

"The eyes of God are on us always." Who am I? ____ Care to respond?

Do the ideas about religion and philosophy that are expressed reflect your attitudes or make you question your own beliefs? Explain.
David Commits Adultery with Bathsheba

11:1 In the spring of the year, at the time when kings normally conduct wars, David sent out Joab with his officers and the entire Israelite army. They defeated the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed behind in Jerusalem.

11:2 One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of his palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. Now this woman was very attractive.

11:3 So David sent someone to inquire about the woman. The messenger said, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?”

11:4 David sent some messengers to get her. She came to him and he had sexual relations with her. (Now at that time she was in the process of purifying herself from her menstrual uncleanness.) Then she returned to her home. 11:5 The woman conceived and then sent word to David saying, “I’m pregnant.”

11:6 So David sent a message to Joab that said, “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” So Joab sent Uriah to David. 11:7 When Uriah came to him, David asked about how Joab and the army were doing and how the campaign was going. 11:8 Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your home and relax.” When Uriah left the palace, the king sent a gift to him. 11:9 But Uriah stayed at the door of the palace with all the servants of his lord. He did not go down to his house.

11:10 So they informed David, “Uriah has not gone down to his house.” So David said to Uriah, “Haven’t you just arrived from a journey? Why haven’t you gone down to your house?” 11:11 Uriah replied to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah reside in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and my lord’s soldiers are camping in the open field. Should I go to my house to eat and drink and have marital relations with my wife? As surely as you are alive, I will not do this thing!” 11:12 So David said to Uriah, “Stay here another day. Tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem both that day and the following one.

11:13 Then David summoned him. He ate and drank with him, and got him drunk. But in the evening he went out to sleep on his bed with the servants of his lord; he did not go down to his own house.

11:14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. 11:15 In the letter he wrote: “Station Uriah in the thick of the battle and then withdraw from him so he will be cut down and killed.”

11:16 So as Joab kept watch on the city, he stationed Uriah at the place where he knew the best enemy soldiers were. 11:17 When the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, some of David’s soldiers fell in battle. Uriah the Hittite also died.
Then Joab sent a full battle report to David. He instructed the messenger as follows: “When you finish giving the battle report to the king, if the king becomes angry and asks you, ‘Why did you go so close to the city to fight? Didn’t you realize they would shoot from the wall? Who struck down Abimelech the son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn’t a woman throw an upper millstone down on him from the wall so that he died in Thebez? Why did you go so close to the wall?’ just say to him, ‘Your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead.’”

So the messenger departed. When he arrived, he informed David of all the news that Joab had sent with him. The messenger said to David, “The men overpowered us and attacked us in the field. But we forced them to retreat all the way to the door of the city gate. Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall and some of the king’s soldiers died. Your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead.” David said to the messenger, “Tell Joab, ‘Don’t let this thing upset you. There is no way to anticipate whom the sword will cut down. Press the battle against the city and conquer it.’ Encourage him with these words.”

When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband Uriah was dead, she mourned for him. When the time of mourning passed, David had her brought to his palace. She became his wife and she bore him a son. But what David had done upset the Lord.

2 Samuel 12
Nathan the Prophet Confronts David

So the Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to David, Nathan said, “There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing except for a little lamb he had acquired. He raised it, and it grew up alongside him and his children. It used to eat his food, drink from his cup, and sleep in his arms. It was just like a daughter to him.

“When a traveler arrived at the rich man’s home, he did not want to use one of his own sheep or cattle to feed the traveler who had come to visit him. Instead, he took the poor man’s lamb and cooked it for the man who had come to visit him.”

Then David became very angry at this man. He said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! Because he committed this cold-hearted crime, he must pay for the lamb four times over!”

Nathan said to David, “You are that man! This is what the Lord God of Israel says: ‘I chose you to be king over Israel and I rescued you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master’s house, and put your master’s wives into your arms. I also gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all that somehow seems insignificant, I would have given you so much more as well! Why have you shown contempt for the word of the Lord by doing evil in my sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and you have taken
his wife as your own!  

12:10 So now the sword will never depart from your house. For you have despised me by taking the wife of Uriah the Hittite as your own!’  

12:11 This is what the Lord says: ‘I am about to bring disaster on you  

19 from inside your own household!  

20 Right before your eyes I will take your wives and hand them over to your companion.  

21 He will have sexual relations with your wives in broad daylight!’  

12:12 Although you have acted in secret, I will do this thing before all Israel, and in broad daylight.’”  

12:13 Then David exclaimed to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord!” Nathan replied to David, “Yes, and the Lord has forgiven your sin. You are not going to die.  

12:14 Nonetheless, because you have treated the Lord with such contempt in this matter, the son who has been born to you will certainly die.”  

12:15 Then Nathan went to his home. The Lord struck the child that Uriah’s wife had borne to David, and the child became very ill.  

12:16 Then David prayed to God for the child and fasted.  

29 He would even go and spend the night lying on the ground.  

12:17 The elders of his house stood over him and tried to lift him from the ground, but he was unwilling, and refused to eat food with them.  

12:18 On the seventh day the child died. But the servants of David were afraid to inform him that the child had died, for they said, “While the child was still alive he would not listen to us when we spoke to him. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He will do himself harm!”  

12:19 When David saw that his servants were whispering to one another, he realized that the child was dead. So David asked his servants, “Is the child dead?” They replied, “Yes, he’s dead.”  

12:20 So David got up from the ground, bathed, put on oil, and changed his clothes. He went to the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then, when he entered his palace, he requested that food be brought to him, and he ate.  

12:21 His servants said to him, “What is this that you have done? While the child was still alive, you fasted and wept. Once the child was dead you got up and ate food!”  

12:22 He replied, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept because I thought, ‘Perhaps the Lord will show pity and the child will live.  

12:23 But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Am I able to bring him back? I will go to him, but he cannot return to me!’”  

12:24 So David comforted his wife Bathsheba. He went to her and had marital relations with her.  

37 She gave birth to a son, and David named him Solomon. Now the Lord loved the child  

25 12:25 and sent word through Nathan the prophet that he should be named Jedidiah for the Lord’s sake.  

David’s Forces Defeat the Ammonites  

12:26 So Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and captured the royal city.  

12:27 Joab then sent messengers to David, saying, “I have fought against Rabbah and have captured
the water supply of the city.\textsuperscript{42} 12:28 So now assemble the rest of the army\textsuperscript{43} and besiege the city and capture it. Otherwise I will capture the city and it will be named for me.”

12:29 So David assembled all the army and went to Rabbah and fought against it and captured it. 12:30 He took the crown of their king\textsuperscript{44} from his head – it was gold, weighed about seventy-five pounds,\textsuperscript{45} and held a precious stone – and it was placed on David’s head. He also took from the city a great deal of plunder. 12:31 He removed\textsuperscript{46} the people who were in it and made them do hard labor with saws, iron picks, and iron axes, putting them to work at the brick kiln. This was his policy\textsuperscript{47} with all the Ammonite cities. Then David and all the army returned to Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{48}
The Biblical man who gives full embodiment to the concept of Teshuvah is David. The Psalms attributed to him refer constantly to sin and forgiveness, especially Psalm 51 which is located by its opener in David’s biography “when the prophet Nathan came to him” in the Batsheva affair (Psalm 51:2). However a second major expression of David’s teshuvah is often overlooked – the sin of the David’s census and its role in identifying the place of the Temple – the place of atonement from sin. Surprisingly editorial ending of II Samuel does not follow the usual pattern by concluding with the death of David (which is postponed to I Kings 2). The pattern is well-known in Genesis (death of Jacob and Joseph), Deuteronomy (Moses), Joshua (Joshua, Elazar son of Aaron, and the burial of Joseph’s bones), II Kings and Jeremiah (with the liberation and the death of King Yehoyachin in Babylonia) and Nehemia with the writing of his memoirs.

Instead the sin of David with the census taking is the final narrative which we have in two versions – II Samuel 24 and I Chronicles 21. David insists on the census taking “to know the number of the people” (II Samuel 24:2; I Chronicles 21:2) even though his chief of staff Yoav objects and warns him of the guilt which will rest on Israel. Chronicles attributes the evil advice to Satan thus externalizes the origin of the sin. The language of royal arrogance suggests the sin of wanting total knowledge (perhaps the Tree of Knowledge that was meant to be restricted to Divine beings). In Chronicles God sees the this evil and “strikes Israel” – literally (with a plague?) while II Samuel says “David’s heart struck him” - in the metaphoric sense of feeling guilt and remorse. Then David confesses and ask for God to pass over his servant’s sin for David acted foolishly. The next day the prophet Gad offers David three choices (as Solomon was offered three choices in his dream – I Kings 3) but here all are horrendous options that punish God’s people, more than punish David personally: three years of drought, three months of successful attacks by your enemies, or three days of God’s sword – the plague.

David chose the Divine plague which is directly in God’s hands, rather than depending on the mercies of his human enemies. David hopes for Divine remorse to stop it before the three days were completed. In fact after God’s plague strikes down 70,000 and while God’s angel of destruction is approaching Jerusalem, God suddenly feels regret – vayinahem (as he did in the same language at the destruction of Israel regarding the sin of the Golden Calf). The God calls off his angel with words reminiscent of calling off Abraham who stretched forth his arm – at God’s command – to slaughter Isaac (Genesis 22:12). “The angel sent forth his arm to Jerusalem to destroy it and God regretted/revoked the evil he had planned and said to the angel destroying the people: Enough now, let up and the angle stopped as he stood at the granary of Arnon the Jebusite.” (II Samuel 24: 16 and similarly I Chronicles 21:15).

Then the editor introduces perhaps a flashback or perhaps as an alternative moment of reversal David’s second confession. “David said to God as he saw the angle striking the people: Look! I sinned, I transgressed and these sheep – what have they done? Let your hand strike me and
the house of my father!” (II Sam. 24:17 or similarly in more expansive language in I Chronicles 21: 16-17: “Strike me .. and do not send a plague against your people.”)

Now this second confession is big turning point in David’s leadership. To see this look at he plot line:

Previously David sinned both with Uriah and with the census in arrogance and used Yoav to do his dirty work. In the case of Uriah he not only betrayed his soldier letting him die to cover up and protect himself but even caused his army to lose a battle and many soldiers to effect the coverup. God confronts him through Nathan and David confesses and then his son dies in his stead, but David is forgiven. In the case of the census David confessed a first time in general language and asked that God forgive him, to pass over the sin and postpone or suspend the punishment. However implicitly God seems to have refused. So God’s prophet offers David a choice among three punishments for the census all of which will fall on his people, he chooses one hoping for God’s remorse. Actually it seems to work since God does renege in the midst of striking Jerusalem. Then surprisingly the text reports a second confession – more specific that explicitly asks God to punish David as an individual or as a leader by striking his dynasty, but the innocent people who suffer from their leaders’ hubris. Now David has taken individual responsibility for his people and agreed to sacrifice himself for the people, not the reverse.

So teshuvah, true confession, not only Divine mercy, lead God to call off the angel and to save the people who were about to be sacrificed as was Isaac. Now in both the Akeda and the census God has seen his chosen leaders prove themselves. Abraham’s test was to willingly sacrifice his son against his best interests as an individual and a founder of people. David’s test was to sacrifice himself for his people. In the end both leaders are let off the hook and their national project continues without further loss and their people are saved – ignoring the 70,000 victims which would have been much more if the plague had gone on for full three days.

Now both tests of self-sacrifice win the right to set the place of the future temple where Israel will pray and sacrifice for atonement. In Genesis 22 Abraham replaces his son with a ram and names the altar “God will see as we say to this very day ‘On the mountain of Adonai will God be seen’” (Genesis 22:14). Here is a midrash on the name of the land of Moriah – See-God (Gen. 22:2). Abraham is also cited as one fears God which is second midrash on the name: Fear of God (Gen 22:12).

In II Samuel 24:18 Gad the prophet commands David to build an altar at the granary of Arnanya and David buys it at a full price just as Abraham buys Sarah’s gravesite in Hebron. “David built the altar and sacrificed olot (= animals completely burned up to God, like Abraham’s ram) and thank offerings. Then God responded (to David’s request) and the plague stopped.” (II Samuel 24:25) In I Chronicles 21:26 “David calls to God (along with the sacrifices on the newly purchased place and on the newly built altar) and God answers by bringing down fire from heaven (as God did for Elijah on Mount Carmel).” “And God told the angel to return his sword to the scabbard (David had seen the sword drawn and hanging between heaven and earth over Jerusalem ready to strike – I Chronicles 21:16). At that point David saw that God had answered him at the granary of Armon and he sacrificed there” (I
Chronicles 21:26). “Now David declares: This is the house of Adonai the God and this is the altar for sacrifice for Israel.” (I Chronicles 22:1).

What caused the turnabout in David’s story? If we leave out the surprising second confession, then the sanctity of the Temple Mount derives first from God’s merciful change of mind which occurred when the angel was striking the people at the granary and secondarily from David’s act of buying that place, building an altar and making sacrifices. It is place of Divine mercy and of ritual replacement through sacrifice. However what if we focus on the second confession in both II Samuel 24 and I Chronicle 21 with the added drama in I Chronicles 21:16 where David and his elders are falling down in supplication wrapped in sackcloth (as if they were dying) before God and pleading implicitly for forgiveness for the people? Then the turning point is in David’s heart and his new confessing placing the guilt on his shoulders and asking not that the punishment be suspended but that it fall squarely on the guilty culprit – on the leader, on David and his dynasty.

That is the Temple site that the Jewish people needs to day. Not a temple of Divine mercy. Not a temple of Abraham’s willingness to blindly sacrifice his son because that is God’s request or in contemporary Israeli terms because that is the destiny of Israel to sacrifice their sons and the price of independence. But a temple of national atonement for the sin of leaders who make terrible political decisions and let the people carry the burden of punishment (The Second Lebanon War?) and who deny their own responsibility. In this temple the leadership needs to take responsibility off the backs of their people and confess their errors, then repent and confess and offer to sacrifice themselves and their dynasties and parties for the people. Such leaders may be forgiven by God and the people as was David.