

1 Samuel 18:1-30

Saul's Increasing Animosity Toward David

David had defeated Goliath, cut off his head and according to tradition nailed it on the gates of Jerusalem as a sign to the Jebusites, who still controlled the upper city garrison.

Like Abraham, who underwent seven trials or testings which served to prove his faith, David also experiences a series of trials while being pursued by Saul and throughout his life. His flight from Saul recalls the persecution of Jesus by the Herods, the religious establishment and the Romans.

David and Jonathan

1 Samuel 18:1-3 - "And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house."

knit = *qâshar* - to bind, tie, be in league with, join together

Both were valiant warriors, and also had been vessels that God used to bring miraculous victories to Israel.

Jacob's life was said to be "bound up" (*qâshar*) with that of his youngest son Benjamin (**Genesis 44:30**).

"Jonathan loved him as his own soul" - thus a fulfillment of the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (**Leviticus 19:18**).

After Jonathan died, David praised him, saying, "thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." (**2 Samuel 1:26**).

The rabbis interpret this to mean that a fellowship of two souls is stronger than even the bond between husband and wife. It is referring to what we would call *agape* love, whose source is God, not dependent on anything transient or material, neither requiring anything from the other.

Rather than coming to Saul's court periodically, David was now called into permanent service.

1 Samuel 18:3-4 - "Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle."

As the son of the king, these were royal garments, given to seal the covenant of loyalty

between them. Although Jonathan was himself a courageous warrior, he felt no jealousy toward David, but instead recognized a kindred spirit.

One line of thinking sees Jonathan recognizing David as the true successor to the throne instead of himself.

1 Samuel 18:5 - "And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants."

Compare this description with the snapshot of Samuel as youth:

- **1 Samuel 2:26** - "And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the LORD, and also with men."

...and with Jesus after his trip to Jerusalem as a lad:

- **Luke 2:52** - "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

The Jealousy of Saul

1 Samuel 18:6-7 - "And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

The women's song at the return of the soldiers from battle was probably not meant to elevate David at all. They were coming "to meet King Saul." David's intent was to remain as a submitted servant to Saul, so that any victory by David in the field was really a victory for Saul as king and commander-in-chief. But Saul didn't see it that way.

The rabbis said that Saul associated the phrase "ten thousands" with **Deuteronomy 33:17** - "they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh." Joshua was of Ephraim, and Saul suspected the women were predicting David as a new Joshua.

Also, **Psalms 91:7** says - "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." Since ten thousand is associated with the more powerful right hand, the women were seeing David as the primary military leader and Saul only secondary.

1 Samuel 18:8-9 - "And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward."

The Targum adds: "and he laid snares for him."

Saul felt since David now had the adoration of the people, all that was left for him to acquire was Saul's kingship. In the song, he was called merely "Saul" and not "King Saul." He constantly brooded on Samuel's prophecy that the kingdom was rent from him and given to another. Could David be the one?

The Sages point to Song of Solomon 8:6 - "Envy is hard as the grave." Saul is indicated by the word grave = "*sheol*" = Saul.

Spears Don't Kill People, Raving Jealous Kings Do

1 Samuel 18:10 - "And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand."

He "prophesied" = *nāḇā'* - in this context meaning Saul was raving in a kind of trance, caused by the evil spirit. The word means "to cause to bubble up" and usually means prophecy.

The Targum says he "acted like a mad man." The Jewish translation says he "raved incoherently."

1 Samuel 18:11 - "And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice."

Another Plan to Kill David

1 Samuel 18:12-13 - "And Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people."

Saul sent David away from the court to patrol the border and engage in skirmishes with the Philistines. Saul's hope was that, as a leader of 1,000 soldiers, he would have a greater chance of being killed in Battle. But this backfired.

1 Samuel 18:14-16 - "And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him. Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them."

Saul remembered that Samuel had said someone "better than you" will succeed him as King.

David was seen "going in and out" with his soldiers and so gained even more renown

with the people.

Even today Jews recite in the Kiddush Levanah at seeing the new moon, "David King of Israel is alive and enduring!" The phases of the moon are a metaphor for the Davidic dynasty, but with the coming of Messiah there would no longer be a waxing and waning of Israel's light.

An Offer of a Marriage

1 Samuel 18:17 - "And Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife: only be thou valiant for me, and fight the LORD'S battles. For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him."

Saul's intent was to encourage David to extend himself even more and expose himself to greater danger in order to win her hand in marriage. (Ironically, this is how Saul himself died - in battle with the Philistines, yet a suicide by his own hand. - **1 Samuel 31:4**)

1 Samuel 18:18 - "And David said unto Saul, Who am I? and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?"

David expressed no eagerness to join himself to royalty, pointing to his status as a shepherd, the youngest son in a small family. The rabbis said this may also be a reference to his lineage from Ruth the Moabitess. It's not clear whether he was actually refusing or just using non-committal language.

1 Samuel 18:19 - "But it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul's daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife."

Nevertheless, Saul changed his mind at the last minute, in order to try to anger or confuse David.

This plan had tragic consequences later. After Saul's death, David captures the five sons born from Merab and Adriel the Meholathite and, along with two of Saul's own sons, hands them over to the Gibeonites, who hanged them for the crimes Saul had committed against their tribe. Joshua had made a covenant with the Gibeonites after the destruction of Jericho and Ai. But Saul broke that covenant and tried to exterminate them all. God even sent a famine on the land because of Saul's actions (**2 Samuel 21:1-14**).

Michal

1 Samuel 18:20-21 - "And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Wherefore Saul said to David, Thou shalt this day be my son in law in the one of the twain."

This also backfired on Saul later. Instead of Michal being David's downfall, she warned him of Saul's intentions and allowed him to escape (**1 Samuel 19:11**).

1 Samuel 18:22-24 - "And Saul commanded his servants, saying, Commune with David secretly, and say, Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee: now therefore be the king's son in law. And Saul's servants spake those words in the ears of David. And David said, Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed? And the servants of Saul told him, saying, On this manner spake David."

Again, David pleads his humble circumstances. This time stating that he could not afford to give a royal-sized dowry, which at this time the husband was supposed to give to his wife's family.

1 Samuel 18:25-26 - "And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son in law: and the days were not expired."

It pleased him because he liked Michal, and knew he could easily obtain the dowry of foreskins.

Saul still seeks to drive David into dangerous situations where he might be killed by the Philistines by asking him to deliver "100 foreskins." These would be cut off the dead bodies of the enemy. Collecting their foreskins emphasized the "uncircumcised" status of the Philistines.

Similarly, the Egyptians would collect a severed hand from each dead enemy to establish a body count. And David of course, carried around Goliath's severed head. Today these acts would be considered war crimes.

This particular desecration of the dead was hatched in the deranged mind of king Saul, and is never sanctioned by scripture, merely recorded. But it could also be an act to ridicule the idols cherished by the Philistines, small clay models of the phallus found in numerous excavation sites, meant to induce fertility and success.

1 Samuel 18:27 - "Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife."

"they gave them in full tale" = *mala* - to fill, fulfill, satisfy

The rabbis note this same word *mala* is used in **Genesis 26:15** when the Philistines "filled" all the wells dug by Abraham with earth. So David's extra 100 foreskins was in retaliation for their ancient crime.

Foreskins aside, some commentators have noticed a parallel between Merab and Michal - representing Israel as the first/eldest wife of the Lord and the church as the second/younger bride of Christ.

1 Samuel 18:28-29 - "And Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal Saul's daughter loved him. And Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul became David's enemy continually."

The enmity of Saul against David was growing with each of these plots.

The Philistines React

1 Samuel 18:30 - "Then the princes of the Philistines went forth: and it came to pass, after they went forth, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was much set by."

The Midrash explains that having heard of the marriage of David, and understanding the Israelites had a law (**Deuteronomy 24:5**), that a newly married man might not go to the war the first year, took this opportunity of invading and spoiling them. But David understood that law better than they, and knew it referred not to a voluntary war, but to that which was the command of God against the seven Canaanite nations; and even in that case, as some think, it did not oblige such persons to remain at home, but left it to their choice to do as they pleased.