

DAVID'S LAST AND EARLY DAYS

Yair Zakovitch



ABSTRACT This article deals with the beginning and end of David's life. David's lonely end, a reflection of his incapacity to love, marks the tragic close to his promising beginnings. The author shows how the stories that introduce David are missing two elements: a birth story and a genealogy. This absence can be explained by the biblical author's desire to portray David as a male-Cinderella. The missing birth story can perhaps be reconstructed by reading between the lines in 1 Samuel 16–17, but also through the use of post-biblical traditions. Connections between the portrayals of the beginning and the end of David show that no progress has been made between the disappointing and tragic end of Saul and that of David.

The life of David is recounted in the books of Samuel and, briefly, in the first book of Kings. The story is not a self-contained unit: its beginning intersects with the life of David's predecessor Saul, the tragic king, and concludes with the rise of David's son Solomon to the throne. This is in accordance with the biblical narrator's view of man as permanently secondary, being in the main a mere vehicle for the unfolding of another chapter in the relationship of a people with its God.

The Davidic biography is, for the most part, complete: we meet David as a youth, see him anointed king by Samuel (1 Sam 17:1–13), and accompany him until his death and burial (1 Kgs 2:10). It is

noteworthy that the biography of Moses, although extending over a greater number of chapters, in four books of the Pentateuch (from the beginning of Exodus to the end of Deuteronomy), fails to inspire us as does the more concise account of David's life. The Mosaic narrative focuses on his public image and his dealings with God, leaving the reader practically in the dark as to his private life. Not so with David: the account given in the book of Samuel masterfully balances personal and public. Moreover, the stark dissonance between these two aspects imparts a tragic quality to the protagonist: David, King of Israel, enjoys unbounded success, while the man, husband and father suffers bitter domestic setbacks. It would seem that despite the unanimous love showered on him by the people, there is no love lost among the members of his own household, and disasters come thick and fast. By contrast, the book of Chronicles presents David in an altogether different light, omitting the personal aspect, and turning David into a flat, one-dimensional character, with only the public image made manifest, not the father, the man, the warrior. The Chronicler's David is in fact not unlike Moses in the Pentateuch. The tragic accent in Chronicles is that David is forbidden to build the Temple (1 Chron 22:8); strive as he might, David will not have the privilege of seeing it built.¹ David is thus like Moses, who sees the Promised Land from afar but may not approach it. It is David's successor, Solomon (his 'Joshua'), who will complete his father's undertaking and realize his dream.²

The tragedy of David's life as portrayed in the Former Prophets is well in evidence in the account of his dying, at the start of the book of Kings (1 Kgs 1:1). Even a venerable king is first and foremost an old man, prey to the ravages of old age. All David's bravery, conquests, and wealth, as well as the repute of the city and house that he built, fail to ward off the chill of old age. The king's servants come up with an original antidote to this sign of approaching death: »Let a young virgin be sought for my lord the king, to wait upon Your Majesty and be his attendant; and let her lie in your bosom, and my lord the king will be warm« (v. 2). The words of these loyal servants reveal a bitter truth: of all the many wives of David, the great lover, none will stand by him in his final hour, as his strength ebbs. Neither his wives nor his children gather round his bedside to confer on how to relieve his suffering. There has evidently been great upheaval in the royal family. His chill,

more than only physical, is symptomatic of his emotional state, his loneliness; as life ends, the old king is a lonely old man.

The proposal made by the king's attendants, however sincere, is painfully telling: the great womanizer is now dependent on others to find him a young virgin. It is nothing short of laughable that an old man is forced to seek a girl's favors. The servants, wary of the king's reaction, are cautious: they talk first of a companion for the king; only once they are sure they have said nothing to anger their master do they dare speak explicitly: 'let her lie in your bosom and my lord the king will be warm.'³

David, indifferent, makes no reply, and the story becomes something of a Cinderella tale: »So they looked for a beautiful girl throughout the territory of Israel. They found Abishag the Shunammite and brought her to the king. The girl was exceedingly beautiful...» (vv. 3–4). But, unlike Cinderella, this maiden doesn't get a handsome young prince; instead, she serves an old, enfeebled king: »She became the king's attendant and waited upon him; but the king was not intimate with her» (v. 4).

David's last days put his youth, his leap onto the stage of history, to shame. Something has gone wrong from meteoric rise to fall. We remarked above that David's biography begins when he is anointed king. Two elements are thus missing from his life story: his genealogy and the account of his birth. It is odd that when God orders Samuel to anoint a new king, »Fill your horn with oil and set out; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have decided on one of his sons to be king» (16:1), the narrator provides no further details of the family and its origins. Providing a genealogy indicates that the man under discussion is from a well-known, esteemed family. When Saul is first mentioned, the narrator is unstinting with genealogical background (1 Sam 9:1–2). Likewise, the prophet Samuel's story begins with mention of his father Elkanah and his genealogy (1 Sam 1:1). Given the generous information about these two figures whose lives intersect David's, it seems puzzling that knowledge about David's origins is withheld.

The episode of David and Goliath, following on David's anointing, once again introduces David's family, but without supplying the missing details: »David was the son of a certain Ephrathite of Bethlehem

in Judah whose name was Jesse» (1 Sam 17:12). This information is supplied only in a book written after the return to Zion, the Book of Chronicles, in the form of a genealogical list from Judah, son of Jacob, to David (1 Chron 2:3–15). This served as the nucleus of the ten-generation genealogy⁴ that concludes the book of Ruth (4:18–22), placed, in the Septuagint and the Vulgate, between Judges and the book of Samuel, providing thereby the necessary information about David's family for the reader about to come to the account of his life in Samuel.⁵ However, the amplification in the later writings fails to explain the lack in Samuel. The absence of David's genealogy in the ancient sources will be answered in the course of a discussion of another deficiency, the absence of an account of David's birth. This is surely a legitimate question, for the Bible recounts the birth of key figures in the people's history, such as the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, and Jacob's sons, the heads of the tribes; Moses, who freed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt; Samson, the judge who began the struggle for freedom from the Philistines; and Samuel, who anointed the first two kings, Saul and David. Moreover, most of the extant descriptions (the Moses story providing the exception) are of a decidedly miraculous nature. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson and Samuel were all born to barren women who were granted a child by God. Admittedly, David is not the only figure as to whose birth the biblical narrative remains silent: Abraham too enters the story immediately prior to the command that sets in motion the history of the people of Israel in their land: »Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you» (Gen 12:1). His greatness, then, lies in his faith, in obeying God's command, rendering unimportant everything prior to it. Joshua's origin's are not recounted either, since he is Moses' servant, found worthy thanks to his devotion and loyalty. We come to know all the judges, other than Samson, only when they are visited by divine inspiration, when God responds to the cry of the people and sends them a savior. Again, this indicates that it is not the man but the hour that is of significance. There is no account of the birth of Saul, the first king, as the initiative for having a king for Israel came not from God but from the people; they appealed to Samuel to give them a king like the other nations had, whereby God acceded and gave them Saul.

In light of the above, what can explain the absence of an account of

David's birth? Can one underlying explanation also clarify the absence of his genealogy? It might simply be that an account of his birth would interrupt the continuity of the plot, for the story of David (at least his early life) is interwoven with that of his master, Saul, so that it would seem artificial to divert attention away from Saul at some arbitrary point and focus on the birth of a child in Bethlehem. Moreover, the narrator-redactor of the book of Samuel has no desire to introduce David until Saul has sinned so greatly that he incurs God's wrath, as Samuel tells Saul: »The Lord has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you» (1 Sam 15:28).

Even granting some weight to this claim, another one would seem to be more decisive. The account of David's youth (to which we will return) shows him to be a kind of male Cinderella; he is admitted to the king's court and the battlefield due not to noble blood or any divine predestination – it is his personal attributes that make him the center of attention and the recipient of Divine favor. The Cinderella narrative-type is irreconcilable with miraculous birth: Cinderella's good fortune comes to the humble, least member of the family, despite her lack of noble birth. Therein lies the explanation for the twofold absence of the account of David's birth and of his genealogy.

As it is inconceivable that the story of David's birth would not have been famous throughout the land of Judah and Jerusalem, the question is whether we are able to eavesdrop on voices from the past and hear it. There may be an inkling of its nature in the first mention of David's father: »He had eight sons, and in the days of Saul the man was already old, advanced in years» (1 Sam 17:12). The emphasis is placed on Jesse as an elderly father and David as his youngest son. It introduces an elderly-father motif that we've seen in connection with Abraham and Isaac (Gen 18:12) and especially Joseph, son of the aged Jacob and his beloved and barren wife Rachel (Gen 37:3), as well as in another account of a barren woman who subsequently gives birth, the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4:14). Is this mention of Jesse's advanced age a hint that David was born to a barren woman? If so, Jesse had two wives: the mother of the rest of his sons, and the mother of the younger David. This possibility is supported by biblical accounts of barren women who then give birth: Abraham had a son with Hagar

before Sarah became pregnant; Jacob had many sons with Leah before Rachel gave birth to Joseph, and Elkanah had sons with Peninah before Hannah conceived and gave birth to Samuel. The possibility that an ancient tradition told that David had a different mother than that of Jesse's other sons is compatible with the tension between David and his brothers that is clearly in evidence when David approaches the battlefield before his fight with Goliath and is told by Eliab, his older brother, »Why did you come down here, and with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your impudence and your impertinence: you came down to watch the fighting!« (17:28). A youngest son, sent by his father to see how his brothers are faring, and the rivalry between them, is reminiscent of another biblical story: that of Joseph, the beloved son of Rachel the barren woman who finally conceived, who was sent to see how his brothers fared, and their taunting him upon his arrival (Gen 37:12ff.).

Tension between David and his brothers, a tension that follows the narrative-type of Cinderella and her stepsisters, can also be read between the lines of the account of the anointing of David (1 Sam 16:1–13). All the sons are invited to the sacrifice ceremony—except the young David, who is busy shepherding the flock. Only when it becomes apparent that God is not interested in the anointing of any of the sons who are present at the feast does Jesse reveal the existence of his youngest son and Samuel bids that David be summoned.⁶

Birth stories generally include both an act of naming and a name-derivation based on the name's phonological pattern. We have no account of the birth of David, nor any explanation of his name, but it cannot be ruled out that the account of his birth included a name-derivation explaining the name David by relating it to *dod* ('beloved'), *dodim*, *yedidot* ('love'), reflecting the father's love for the new mother. Much of the narrative of Samuel juxtaposes David's name with mentions of love: Saul's love for him (1 Sam 16:21), the love of Jonathan, son of Saul (1 Sam 18:3; 20:17; 2 Sam 1:26), and the love of Michal, daughter of Saul, for David (1 Sam 18:20). Interestingly, it is Solomon, David's son, who is given a second name signifying God's love for him – Jedidiah: »and He sent a message through the prophet Nathan; and he was named Jedidiah at the instance of the Lord« (2 Sam 12:24–25).⁷

The story in which we encounter David for the first time opens with

God addressing Samuel with a rhetorical question-cum-command: »How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and set out; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have decided on one of his sons to be king» (16: 1). These opening words sound like criticism of the prophet for loyalty to an undeserving king. Later, God will criticize the prophet openly, when Samuel stands before Eliab, Jesse's eldest, and Samuel supposes that »surely the Lord's anointed stands before Him» (1 Sam 16:6), for which God chides him: »Pay no attention to his appearance or his stature, for I have rejected him. For not as man sees [does the Lord see (LXX)]; man sees only what is visible, but the Lord sees into the heart» (v. 7). God's words express his distaste for Eliab, but they are equally revealing of his feeling for Saul, and the choice that granted him the kingship. The reader finds evidence of this first of all in the words »to his appearance or his stature», which refer to distinctive attributes of Saul that supposedly made him such a suitable choice as king (1 Sam 9:2; 10: 23–24). The tradition in which Saul was regarded positively, in chapter 9, cannot be blurred or effaced, but we can shed new light on it by looking at this covert reference to it, this interpretation of it within the account of David's anointing. Criticism of Saul is not limited to an allusion to his height, but continues with »for I have rejected him», recalling God's words to Samuel at the very beginning of the chapter: »since I have rejected him as king over Israel» (v. 1, and 15:23, 36).

In Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, God's criticism of Samuel in chapter 16 represents a response also to Samuel's words in the past, during the choosing of Saul: '. . . Where is your vision that your heart sees? Are you not the one who said to Saul, 'I am the one who sees'? And why do you not know whom you should anoint?' (59:2).⁸ This is also how the rabbinic sources understood it:

And he said, 'I am the seer' (1 Sam 9:19). The Holy One, blessed be He, replied, 'You are a seer? I tell you that you do not see'. And when did He tell him? When He told him 'Fill your horn with oil and set out; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have decided on one of his sons to be king'. What did Samuel say? 'When they arrived and he saw Eliab, he thought: 'Surely the Lord's anointed stands before Him.' The Holy One blessed be He said to him: 'Did you not say, »I am the seer»? Pay no attention to his appearance...' (Sifre D^evarim 17).

To proclaim Your steadfast love at daybreak, Your faithfulness
each night
With a ten-stringed harp, with voice and lyre together' (92:3–4).

The young David is suffused with religious sensibility, and since the hills and mountains—the Creation—do not praise God, it is up to him to do so. As soon as he begins, flora and fauna, trees and sheep, send David's words up and proclaim them on high. Once God sees that the young David praises him, he realizes that David alone is suited to be anointed king of Israel. The psalm tells how his brothers, 'handsome of figure and appearance . . . tall of stature and handsome by their hair', were not chosen. Here, Eliab is not the only tall and handsome one: all the brothers are equally impressive. Another detail about the brothers that has no parallel in the biblical narrative is their fine-looking hair, a motif that appears in the story of Absalom, son of David, whose hair symbolizes his good looks (2 Sam 14:25–26). The conclusion of the psalm echoes its beginning. David begins with mention of his father, »So he made me shepherd of his flock, and ruler over his kids,» and concludes with mention of his God: »And He made me leader to his people, and ruler over the sons of His covenant.» The correlation that this literary framework establishes between shepherding flocks and leading people appears in the Bible itself, e.g. Ps. 78:70–72: 'He chose David, His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds, He brought him from minding the nursing ewes to tend His people Jacob, Israel, His very own' (see also 2 Sam 5:2; 7:8).

The account of David's anointing concluded with the spirit of the Lord resting on him: »and the spirit of the Lord gripped David from that day on» (16:13). There is an important innovation here: no longer does God's spirit grip the hero for a limited time, for a single battle, as in the period of the Judges or even of Saul (see 11:6). Instead, it grips David indefinitely, 'from that day on'. The phenomenon of the Divine spirit coming to the hero thus remains a constant while nonetheless undergoing a change that corresponds to the fundamental shift in the new type of leadership.

Another understanding of the nature of the divine spirit—as the spirit of prophecy—can be discerned in the poem, 'The Last Words of David', from 2 Samuel 23. Its opening line, 'The utterance of David son of Jesse, The utterance of the man . . .' (23:1) is reminiscent of the

opening words of Balaam's prophecy: 'Word of Balaam son of Beor, Word of the man . . .' (Num 24:3, 15). And it continues, 'The spirit of the Lord has spoken through me, His message is on my tongue' (23: 2). A similar interpretation of the nature of God's spirit can be seen in the colophon to the Qumran Psalms scroll. There David's writing of the psalms is attributed to the 'spirit of the Lord' which consisted of the spirit of prophecy: 'And David, son of Jesse, was wise, and a light like the light of the sun, and learned, and discerning, and perfect in all his paths before God and men. And [blank] YHWH gave him a discerning and enlightened spirit. And he wrote psalms: three thousand six hundred; . . . All these he spoke through the spirit of prophecy which had been given to him from before the Most High'.¹⁰ This tradition was formed partially under the influence of the tradition of Solomon's writings: '[Solomon] composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered one thousand and five' (1 Kgs 5:12–13). This 'like son, like father' formula prevents the figure of David from being dwarfed by that of his son.

The next scene in the story of David's origins, that in 1 Samuel 16: 14–23, involves David's encounter with Saul. At the end of the first scene we heard that 'the spirit of the Lord gripped David from that day on' (v. 13), while the following scene begins with 'Now the spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul' (v. 14). In place of the divine spirit that departed from Saul there now comes an 'evil spirit from the Lord', and it is this spirit that will preside over the decline of the one king, and the rise of the other.

Saul's courtiers approach their master's awkward situation with caution. First they state the problem: 'An evil spirit of God is terrifying you' (v. 15); then, about to propose a solution, they hesitate, as if wishing to delay the moment when they will be forced to tell the king what to do, 'Let our lord give the order'. Music from the lyre, they believe, will prove beneficial for him, 'the courtiers will look for someone who is skilled at playing the lyre; whenever the evil spirit of God comes over you, he will play it and you will feel better' (v. 17). The king regards the idea favorably and bids his servants do what they suggested: 'Find me someone who can play well and bring him to me' (v. 17). One of the servants, more familiar with the king's subjects than the monarch himself, is quick to suggest a suitable candidate: 'I have observed a

son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skilled in music' (v. 18). In the previous story, God had said to Samuel 'I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have observed among his sons my king' (v. 1), and now the courtier remarks 'I have observed a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skilled in music'; David has found favor with God and men alike. A later writer has added to the recommendation of David's musicianship a list of other qualities that will be manifested later: 'he is a stalwart fellow and a warrior, sensible in speech, and handsome in appearance, and the Lord is with him' (v. 18). For the most part, these qualities are irrelevant to the present story; and it may be that this list was added in order to explain what it was that God saw in David, to anoint him king.¹¹

The story telling how David was chosen to play for Saul evokes the episode we began with: the quest that culminated in appointing Abishag the Shunammite as King David's handmaiden. The similarity between the two stories is striking: in both, the king's servants propose a solution designed to alleviate his suffering: 'Saul's courtier said to him . . . »Let our lord give the order [and] the courtiers in attendance on you will look for someone who is skilled at playing the lyre; whenever the evil spirit of God comes over you, he will play it and you will feel better»' (1 Sam 16:15–16); 'His courtiers said to him, »Let a young virgin be sought for my lord the king, to wait upon Your Majesty and be his attendant; and let her lie in your bosom, and my lord the king will be warm»' (1 Kgs 1:2). The conclusion of the two propositions emphasizes that the youth/maiden has the power to solve the crisis: 'you will feel better', 'my lord the king will be warm'. Moreover, the quest ends in finding a suitably young and handsome (1 Sam 16:18) or beautiful (1 Kgs 1:4) candidate, and both are brought to their kings, ready to serve: 'So David came to Saul and entered his service' (1 Sam 16:21); 'and they brought her to the king' (1 Kgs 1:3).

There are also discrepancies between the two accounts: while Saul is suffering from a divinely-sent affliction—the evil spirit torments him—David is the victim of old age. Saul agrees to his servants' suggested method to ease his suffering (1 Sam 16:17); David, however, remains apathetic and withdrawn. David is the youth in the tale of his master's suffering and the old man in the tale of Abishag the Shunammite. The young David who is brought before Saul will eventually in-

herit his master's throne, but Abishag will not be wife to the king.¹²

The mirroring of these two narratives, the narratives that frame the entire life story of David, is thought-provoking: the optimism sparked by the figure of the young David dissipates in light of the portrayal of the elderly king. The old David is no better off than was the old Saul. Saul provoked Divine wrath and sought the calming influence of the young David. David – never in want of companionship in his virile days – now needs a handmaid to warm him due to the animosity he has engendered even amongst women, who turn their back on him in his old age.

To complete the picture of David's origins we must return to the story of David and Goliath. Here we find, on the one hand, the desire to praise the young boy, this male Cinderella, the unknown boy who successfully thwarts the threat hanging over the Israelites, slays the Philistine giant, and gains the promised prizes: 'The man who kills him will be rewarded by the king with great riches; he will also give him his daughter in marriage and grant exemption to his father's house in Israel' (1 Sam 17:25). On the other hand, the story stresses that courage can only come from God.¹³ The Cinderella element in the story is especially clear in a secondary strand (vv. 12–31) that is missing in one of the important textual witnesses, Codex Vaticanus of the Septuagint, which reflects an ancient Hebrew version.¹⁴ The tension displayed between David and his brothers in this layer of the story is, as we observed, reminiscent of the Joseph story. While Genesis portrayed the rise of the shunned, young Joseph as symbol of future hegemony of the house of Joseph in the kingdom of Ephraim, the parallel account of David seeks to present the meteoric rise of the youth from whom will spring the house that will rule both Judah and Israel.

In the primary strand of chapter 17, the religious element comes to the fore: Goliath is a seasoned warrior, duly impressive in his array of armor. The Bible, which does not usually indulge in physical description, goes out of its way this time in furnishing copious detail: ' . . . he was six cubits and a span tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and wore a breast-plate of scale armor, a bronze breastplate weighing five thousand shekels. He had bronze greaves on his legs, and a bronze javelin [slung] from his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's bar, and the iron head of his spear weighed six hundred

shekels' (vv. 4–7). This man is a walking arsenal, more war machine than human. Goliath, who blasphemes the God of Israel (v. 10)—the 'God of the ranks of Israel' (v. 45)—leaves the Israelites no choice but to accept the challenge and send a warrior of their own to face him in a duel. When David volunteers to face Goliath, Saul is at first reluctant: 'You cannot go to that Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth!' (v. 33).

David must find a way to convince his king that he is the man for the job. To do so, he recalls an incident that had not yet been revealed: 'Your servant has been tending his father's sheep, and if a lion or a bear came and carried off an animal from the flock, I would go after it and fight it and rescue it from its mouth. And if it attacked me, I would seize it by the beard and strike it down and kill it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and that uncircumcised Philistine shall end up like one of them, for he has defied the ranks of the living God' (vv 34–36). Hitherto David believed his courage came from himself; it was his own strength and prowess that brought him the victory over the wild beasts (note the profusion of first-person verbs for the youth's actions). But from the moment that David mentions the God of Israel, and the Philistine's blasphemy, another thought enters his mind, and he perceives the past in a new light. Although there has in fact been no interruption in David's speech, the narrator marks this new phase with the sudden insertion of a discourse marker, 'David said' (v 37) (a common biblical technique for marking a new stage). The narrator thus conveys David's new idea: '»The Lord,» David said, »who saved me from lion and bear will also save me from that Philistine»' (v 37). David's attributing his victory to God persuades Saul to allow him to take on the daunting task: '»Then go,» Saul said to David, »and may the Lord be with you!»' (v 37).

The narrator has various means at his disposal to convince the reader that the victory is achieved thanks to Divine intervention. The first is the comical depiction of David struggling, with the help of the king, to don a warrior's garb: armor and weapons: 'Saul clothed David in his own garment; he placed a bronze helmet on his head and fastened a breastplate on him. David girded his sword over his garment. then he tried to walk; but he was not used to it. And David said to Saul, »I cannot walk in these, for I am not used to them.» So David took them

off' (vv 38–39). Following this botched attempt, the shepherd-boy will face the enemy armed with only stones and a slingshot (v. 40). Goliath, the renowned warrior, despises David 'for he was but a boy, ruddy and handsome' (v. 42); David resembles a rosy-cheeked girl more than a hardened soldier, and Goliath calls out, 'Am I a dog that you come against me with sticks?' (v 43).

David trusts in his God and takes up the challenge: 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come against you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defied' (v. 45). While the diminutive David seeks to teach a lesson to Goliath his words are primarily aimed at his own people: 'And this whole assembly shall know that the Lord can give victory without sword or spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and He will deliver you into our hands' (v. 47). David's speech comprises the nucleus of the story, and it is followed attentively even by Goliath himself. David slays Goliath with a weapon that is no weapon at all, a stone, and, as the narrator emphasizes once again: 'David had no sword' (v. 50). David uses the Philistine's own sword to decapitate the giant (v 51).

David, who hailed God's strength so eloquently before the battle, falls silent as women come forth to greet the victor and lavish their praises on him: 'The women sang as they danced, and they chanted: Saul has slain his thousands; David his tens of thousands!' (18:7). David is silent, while Saul is envious of the youth: 'Saul was much distressed and greatly vexed about the matter. For he said, »To David they have given tens of thousands, and to me they have given thousands. All that he lacks is the kingship!«' (v. 8). It is not hard to see that David's silent relishing of the women's praises drives the king into an envious rage that will lead to David's persecution from then on.

Even while fleeing Saul, David gives no further thought to the victory or to its necessary attribution to God. On the contrary, it seems that victory has gone to his head, and he is none too careful: in fact, he proceeds to Nob, the priestly city, to stock up on bread and arms. The priest offers David none other but Goliath's sword: ' »There is the sword of Goliath the Philistine whom you slew in the valley of Elah; it is over there, wrapped in cloth, behind the ephod. If you want to take that one, take it, for there is none here but that one.« David replied, »There is none like it; give it to me«' (21:10). With the sword of Goliath

the Gittite in his grasp, the foolhardy David will actually enter Gath, Goliath's hometown, where rumors of his victory have spread, while the Philistine officers inform their king, Achish: 'Why that's David, king of the land! That's the one of whom they sing as they dance: Saul has slain his thousands; David his tens of thousands' (21:12). The reader is puzzled at David's rashness: in the words of the midrash: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: David, you go to Achish when just yesterday you killed Goliath? ... his blood has not yet been absorbed and you go to his home with his sword in your hand?' (Midrash to Psalms 34:1)

David is self-confident. He still does not invoke Divine assistance, and in order to escape the lion's jaws he feigns madness (v. 14). The ploy succeeds, and David barely escapes from Achish. In time, David reaches the court of the king of Moab. We understand that he has learned his lesson: though he previously ignored God while facing the Philistine threat, he now acknowledges God's control over his fate: 'Let my father and mother come [and stay] with you, until I know what God will do for me' (22:3). This acknowledgment on David's part brings to him the word of God, spoken through the prophet, Gad (v. 5). Now that David's heart is open to God, God, too, is receptive to David.

David will continue to err, and to learn many lessons. The two dimensions of his life story—the public and the private—will move readers deeply. We have dealt here only with the tragic end and optimistic beginning of the story; in between we find great upheavals in David's household, teaching us that kingship brooks no comfort even for an innocent shepherd who trusts in God, like David. No man is worthy of kingship which, itself, is unsuited to God's chosen people.

Notes

1. On David's portrayal in Chronicles, see Japhet, 1989, 467–70.
2. On further parallels between the portrayal of David and of Moses—a feature exclusively of Second Temple biblical and post-biblical sources—see A. Shinan (in this volume).
3. There are many stories where the servants/wise men are smarter than the king, as e.g. in the story discussed below, where the servants advise Saul to seek a musician to alleviate his suffering (1 Sam 16: 15–16); the wise men of king Achish warn him of David (1 Sam 21:2); and the servants of Na'aman of Aram advising him to do as Elisha said, and dip in the Jordan River (2 Kgs 5:13).

4. Regarding the adoption of the Pentateuchal pattern in which the tenth generation is the chosen one, see Cassuto, 1944, 250.
5. The author of the book of Ruth intended it to be placed between Judges and Samuel; see Zakovitch, 1990 1–16. Since the book of Ruth was composed after the canonization of the Former Prophets, it was included in the later section of *Khetuvim* (Writings).
6. On filling the biblical lacuna regarding David's birth, in rabbinic literature, see A. Shinan (in this volume).
7. The use of the root *ahb* for explaining both the names *Jedidiah* and David is typical of a prominent biblical phenomenon of synonymous name-derivations; see Zakovitch, 1979.
8. See Harrington, 1985, 372.
9. Sanders, 1967, 136–7.
10. Col. XXVIII lines 3–12; see Sanders 1967, 96–7.
11. See Smith, 1899, 149.
12. On reflection-stories (stories in which one is the mirror-reflection of the other), see Zakovitch, 1993.
13. On double causality and the relationship between man's courage and that of God, see Seeligmann, 1963.
14. For various explanations of the relationship between chapters 16–17 in the Masoretic text and in the Septuagint (Codex Vaticanus), see Barthelemy, Gooding, Lust, and Tov, 1986.

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