DAVID IN DISTRESS

HIS PORTRAIT THROUGH THE HISTORICAL PSALMS

VIVIAN L. JOHNSON

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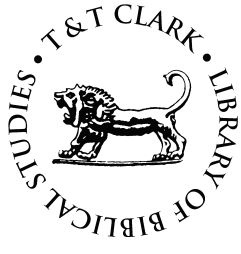

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His Portrait Through the Historical Psalms

Vivian L. Johnson

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This book is dedicated to my Aunt Minnie, who inculcated the aphorism:

"It's better to aim high and miss,
than to aim low and hit the mark."

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The first superscription in the Psalter, "A psalm of David, when he fled from his son Absalom" (Ps 3), is an historical one. It alludes to an episode in David's life history when his son took over his throne (2 Sam 15–18). In addition to this title, twelve more psalms have headings which refer to moments in the history of King David as recorded in the books of Samuel.[1] Nearly all of these "historical psalms" focus on one dimension of his history, namely, David in distress.[2] That is, the authors of the historical superscriptions appear interested in the aspects of David's history that are, as one commentator notes, "woven out of incidents of trouble."[3] Indeed, I have found that an intertextual reading of title, psalm, and corresponding narrative makes the situations David encountered seem more perilous. This intensification of trouble serves an important theological purpose: it illustrates David's level of faithfulness before God. The purpose of this book is to analyze each of these historical psalms to see how they work to reshape the image of David by focusing on his most difficult predicaments.

From the view of the historical psalms, David implored his deity during his most dire circumstances. This representation of David as prayerful, pious, and penitent constitutes a change in David's image from what one finds in the books of Samuel. The Deuteronomistic editors responsible for the final phase of the Davidic narrative in Samuel portray David as a consummate warrior, shrewd politician, talented musician, adulterer, and murderer. Seldom do the Samuel narratives reveal the private contemplations of David or report his gestures of contrition; in fact, the books of Samuel in general show little reservation in their disclosure of his most egregious deeds. The story of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam

1. Pss 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142.
2. In addition to mentioning the rebellion started by Absalom, the historical psalm titles refer to David's adultery with Bathsheba (Ps 51), his military battles (Pss 3, 18, 60), and his days as a fugitive (Pss 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59).
3. James L. Mays, "The David of the Psalms," *Int* 40 (1986): 152.

11–12), for example, does not go on at length about his remorse over his affair with Bathsheba or the execution of her husband, Uriah. David simply states after the prophet brings his unscrupulous activity to the fore: "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam 12:13). However, the title of Ps 51, "A psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him after he had gone to Bathsheba," appears to remedy the brevity of his remark by situating the psalm in the context of the story recounting David's affair with Bathsheba. The psalm title serves to expound on the narrative, providing for the reader an elaborate and pious version of what David may have said subsequent to recognizing the gravity of his actions when he murdered the husband of his mistress. When Ps 51 is read in the context of the corresponding Samuel narrative, it adds to the reading of the story that David exhibited vehement feelings of remorse after the prophet spoke with him.[4]

The "author of the superscriptions"[5] has recast David, a complex and sometimes troublesome figure in the Samuel narrative, into a devout man, ever praying before his God. This recasting of David, a distinctive hero of Israel's past, belongs in the larger phenomenon of Second Temple period biblical interpretation (515 B.C.E.–70 C.E.). Interpreters throughout these centuries looked to their ancient texts to determine how they bore on the present. According to Kugel: "It was as if the past had to be consulted—and touched up a bit—in order to find a program for Judea's future, or a legitimation for a particular outlook and approach."[6] Ancient texts held the key to the past and interpreters of these texts studied them meticulously. Their interpretations included linguistic corrections, clarifications, and updating of biblical characters to serve as positive or negative exempla.[7]

The Bible itself contains an updated version of King David in the book of Chronicles. While the author of the superscriptions has achieved a pious image of David by bringing out the more troublesome aspects of his career, the direct opposite holds true for the Chronicler. The author

4. Later rabbinic writers focused upon this remorse in order to elevate David as a model of repentance. See the discussion below (p. 38) for Ps 51.

5. It is not clear exactly who added the historical titles to the Psalter, and I therefore will call this anonymous person simply, the "author of the superscriptions."

6. James Kugel, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 37.

7. For example, Enoch, mentioned briefly in Gen 5:18–24 as a person who lived before the flood, is recast as a model of repentance. Also, for example, the biblical character Joseph is elevated as a model of virtue. See James Kugel, *The Bible as It Was* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 252–53, and *In Potiphar's House* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), 18–26.

of Chronicles accomplished an improved image of David and his history by omitting all embarrassing moments. In fact, only one of the settings chosen by the author of the superscriptions finds a correspondence in the Chronicler's narrative.[8] Moreover, the manner in which each author begins his rendition of David's history reveals his particular outlook. On the one hand, the author of the superscriptions begins the historical psalm headings with reference to the temporary loss of David's throne (Ps 3), while on the other hand; the Chronicler begins his version of David's history with his installation to the throne of a united Israel.[9]

The main point of concern for the Chronicler lay in David's role in the organization of the Temple. David captured the city which would house the Temple (1 Chr 11:4–9), brought the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chr 15:25–16:3), and organized the Temple personnel (1 Chr 13–16 and 23–26). For the author of Chronicles, David symbolized the relationship between God and Israel. His emphasis on David's ideal qualities aligned with his view of David as the founder of Temple liturgy.

Although the Chronicler focused on David as an ideal figure, he had nonetheless sketched an image for the people of his community that was attainable. According to Steussy, the Chronicler presented David as a public figure, as an Israelite par excellence, and an ideal model for people to follow.[10] She continues by stating: "His role in temple arrangements supplies a concrete point of contact with his activities. An untarnished David also provides an archetypal example of the blessing which follows from right conduct…"[11] David rewritten through the Chronicler's work becomes an exemplar of obedience, an accessible model that people could emulate to ensure good fortune for their own generation.

The historical psalms also depict David in a manner that seems accessible. In general, the titles do not emphasize David as an aloof king,

8. The title to Ps 60 is the only historical heading that alludes to an account in Chronicles. See the discussion of Ps 60, below (pp. 122–31).

9. David assumed office in the Chronicler's account without the difficulty described in 2 Sam 2–4. The beginning of David's history found in 1 Chr 11:1 has "all Israel gathered to David at Hebron," saying in unison, "we are your bone and flesh." The Samuel account, however, provides more details. After Saul's death (1 Sam 31:1–13), his general Abner installed Saul's son, Ishbaal, to the throne of northern Israel. War broke out between Judah and northern Israel which lasted a long time (2 Sam 2:8–3:1). The north suffered heavier losses (2 Sam 2:30–31), Abner was assassinated by Joab (2 Sam 3:27), and Ishbaal was assassinated by his own military leaders (2 Sam 4:5–8). Only after these events had transpired did David rule over all Israel (2 Sam 5:1–5).

10. Marti J. Steussy, *David: Biblical Portraits of Power* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 108.

11. Ibid.

set above all his subjects. Rather, the historical psalms focus on elements of David's history that would have been common to all. Naturally, most people do not experience coups, or life as a fugitive, but the historical titles tend to extract those features of David's life that would have resonated with ordinary human beings (e.g. being falsely accused [Ps 7], committing adultery [Ps 51], feeling isolated [Ps 142]). Steussy contends that, "the titles function to make the psalms a diary of David's prayers."[12] They serve to make the figure of King David more personal and accessible to the people who sought to model their deportment after his. Both the Chronicler and the author of the superscriptions interpret their sacred literature to bear on the changing contexts of their communities.

In addition to improving David's image, the thirteen historical psalms contribute to the important question of authorship of the Psalter. Although the tradition designating David as the author of the book of Psalms is well known, this claim is not explicit in the Hebrew Bible. A total of 73 out of 150 psalms bear his name in the superscription, לְדָוִד, but the precise connotation of this phrase remains uncertain. In as much as the preposition לְ could mean "to," "of," "for," "by," or "about," constructions beginning with it escape a definitive explanation. The same formulation, the preposition לְ followed by an individual (or group name), appears consistently in the Psalter with Asaph (Pss 50, 73–83), the Korahites (Pss 42–49, 84–85, 87–88), Solomon (Pss 72, 127), Heman (Ps 88), Ethan (Ps 89), Jeduthun (Ps 39),[13] and Moses (Ps 90). These superscriptions could well have reflected authorship (i.e. "by Asaph, the Korahites," etc.). Given, however, that the preposition לְ also appears in the expression לַמְנַצֵּחַ, "to the leader" which does not seem to indicate authorship, the formulation remains equivocal.

Syntactic constructions with the preposition לְ had multiple meanings and therefore לְדָוִד could have been read in a number of ways. The phrase could have meant "by David," or perhaps composed "for David," or a psalm written in a style "of David," or perhaps the phrase could refer to an autobiographer who composed psalms "about David." With regard to the phrase, לְדָוִד, I agree with Kugel's assertion that it "had no static existence but, having been used for one purpose early on, was reused and added on to other compositions later, perhaps with a new understanding or meaning."[14] Modern translations of Davidic psalm headings tend to

12. Ibid., 5.

13. Pss 62 and 77 have עַל־יְדוּתוּן.

14. J. L. Kugel, "David the Prophet," in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (ed. J. L. Kugel; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 49.

leave the phrase ambiguous with the translation "*of* David."[15] This rendering leaves open the possibility for various understandings of the phrase.

The historical titles aid in the debate given that they can be interpreted as psalms which David wrote on certain occasions. Some of these psalms seem very personal (e.g. Ps 51), and perhaps pushed the notion of authorship forward as readers reflected upon the poems in relation to David's life. Indeed, that the first לְדָוִד title of the Psalter (Ps 3) is connected to an occasion which inspired David to compose the psalm is suggestive of the claim that all titles bearing David's name should be read in the context of his life, even if the particular circumstance which inspired the psalm's composition is not given. Mays notes regarding the לְדָוִד psalm titles without an historical notice:

> These psalms, too, can be studied and sung with the same assumptions as the psalms with specific settings. Without having to settle the question of just where they fit in the David story, they offer words to guide thought and worship which hold their users in continuity with David and in relation to David's God.[16]

Certainly, the titles with the biographical notices do not necessarily presume authorship, for the semantic range of the preposition לְ does allow for these psalms to be read as "about" or "concerning" David, for example, "…when he fled from his son Absalom" (Ps 3). The psalms, however, have a greater impact on the story and the reader if they are imagined as having been uttered by David himself.

Whatever the original meaning(s) of the phrase לְדָוִד, later interpreters of the Bible had little difficulty attributing psalm compositions, and even the entire Psalter,[17] to David. The tendency to ascribe more and more psalms to David is evident in the Septuagint (ca. 275–150 B.C.E.) where more Psalms (LXX: Pss 33, 43, 67, 71, 91, 93–99, 104, and 137) appear with Davidic headings, in addition to those designated in the MT. Both the Septuagint and the Qumran Psalms Scroll, 11QPs[a] (ca. 50 C.E.), end their collections with psalms attributed to David. The former ends with a psalm inspired by the occasion of David's battle with Goliath (LXX: Ps 151), while the latter concludes its version of the Psalter with psalms

15. An exception to this tendency is the REB. In this Bible, the phrase לְדָוִד is translated as "for David." This translation rules out the possibility that the לְדָוִד headings could indicate authorship.

16. Mays, "The David of the Psalms," 152.

17. See, for example, *Pes.* 117a, where rabbinic writers emend the postscript at Ps 72:20 in order to ascribe all the psalms in the Psalter to David.

of David's final words.[18] Moreover, the epilogue of 11QPs[a] credits David with writing 3600 psalms and 446 songs.[19]

Although the Chronicler also connects David with psalmody, this association did not derive from an interest in attributing authorship of the Psalter to David.[20] Rather, the connection of David with music resolved the problem that the Pentateuch did not mention the music involved in Temple ritual. Thus, the Chronicler selected David as the one responsible for organizing the guilds of Temple musicians, and instituting liturgy. He needed the pious liturgical hymnist David to validate the rituals that accompanied worship in the Temple.

The Psalter, too, needed David, and Kugel has suggested a plausible reason for the attribution of so many psalms to David:

> For a moment arrived in the life of every biblical text when the fact of its being "hallowed by tradition" was no longer sufficient for Jews to treat it as sacred; it had to be of special provenance, communicated by one of God's chosen servants known from Israel's history. This is the essence of the issue of authorship… David was selected for superscriptions because David was above all…God's chosen one.[21]

David may have indeed been divinely chosen and designated author of the psalms; however, this biblical figure was not without his problems. Unlike the Chronicler's omission of difficulties David incurred throughout his life, the author of the superscriptions deals with these difficulties

18. See Peter W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Brill, 1997), 193–95, as well as "The Book of Psalms in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *VT* 48 (1998): 468.

19. See James Sanders, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 134–37.

20. According to Kugel, the Chronicler did not stress David as the composer of the psalms because the words spoken or sung in the Temple "were not supposed to be standardized but adjusted to a variety of situations." See Kugel, "David the Prophet," 51.

21. Ibid., 52. Kugel provides a nice illustration of the import of authorship in the *Martyrdom of Isaiah* (first century C.E.). Out of the 150 psalms in the Psalter, 126 of them bear some kind of title. The writer of the *Martyrdom of Isaiah* viewed the names in the psalm titles, such as Solomon, Korah, and Asaph, as an indication of authorship. Apparently troubled by the fact that some psalms had no name, or "author" attached (e.g. Pss 1, 2, 32, 42, 71, 91), the writer provided one for these untitled psalms. He ascribed all the untitled psalms to "an angel of the spirit" (*Mart. Is.* 4:22). Kugel captures the significance of authorship for this writer when he states: "the omission of the name [attached to a psalm] does not mean that they were written by just some uninspired anybody." It was necessary for this writer to acknowledge that these untitled psalms held similar authority as those with titles; hence he attributed them to a supernal provenance.

directly. It appears that the author of the superscriptions used the psalms to rehabilitate the problematic image of David. Even though his thirteen titles contribute to the idea that the Psalter as sacred literature required a special author, the primary impression his additions leave is that they rewrite David's history in a certain way. The addition of his psalms to the Davidic narrative seems to assert David's fidelity to and his continual reliance upon God. When all of the historical psalms are read into the corresponding Samuel narratives, they seem to underline that David secured his successes by prayer and divine deliverance.

A. *Need for Study*

Research on Psalms is abundant, and many scholars have maintained that the historical titles originate from literary additions made by Jewish exegetes some time during the period after the exile (sixth century B.C.E.). In general, however, contemporary scholarship has paid little attention to the situational/historical titles attached to the thirteen individual psalms because of their secondary nature and their inability to shed light on the original setting of the psalms.[22] Modern commentators of the Psalms often cite Childs's work in their discussion of psalm titles,[23] but none have explored his ideas at length, nor have any made the thirteen psalms the sole focus of their research. Even the most recent commentaries give the historical titles only a cursory treatment.[24]

Hermann Gunkel's study of the Psalms (1926) established the course of Psalms research for many decades, and the lack of attention given to

22. The following statement by Karl-Heinz Bernhardt captures the perspective of several scholars regarding this: "To be sure, there exists no doubt that the Psalm titles…cannot supply information for the dating of the Psalms; but they are however quite valuable as witnesses of the oldest Jewish exegesis of the Psalms and its method" [trans. mine]. See K.-H. Bernhardt, *Das Problem der altorientalischen Königsideologie im Altem Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 6. See also Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (2 vols.; New York: Abingdon, 1962), 2:98–100; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalm 1–50* (WBC 19; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983) 32; F. F. Bruce, "The Earliest Old Testament Interpretation," *OTS* 17 (1972): 52.

23. See H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; 2 vols.; Continental Commentaries; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 21; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part I* (FOTL 14; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 256; Jean-Marie Auwers, *La Composition littéraire du Psautier: un état de la question* (CahRB 46; Paris: Gabalda, 2000), 137–46; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 31–32.

24. John Eaton, *The Psalms* (London: T&T Clark International, 2003); Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1 (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

the titles in scholarship is largely due to his focus on determining the original, pre-literary, setting for the psalms.[25] Because of the accretive nature of the headings, they helped little in this regard. Gunkel made two important contributions which have become dominant in the field since his time: (1) he defined all the psalms according to their respective types (*Gattungen*); and (2) he situated many of the psalms in worship services of the cult (*Sitz im Leben*). Prior to Gunkel, Wilhelm de Wette (1811) had attempted to classify psalms into *Gattungen*,[26] but Gunkel took it further by identifying a regular sequence of features for each *Gattung*. His innovation was to employ form-critical methods fully as interpretive principles for understanding the psalms. Gunkel isolated five major *Gattungen*: (1) Hymns, (2) Communal Laments, (3) Individual Laments, (4) Royal Psalms, and (5) Thanksgiving Psalms. Convinced that the ultimate source for most of the psalmody lay in the temple cult, Gunkel tried to link these psalm types to their respective worship services.[27]

Scholars have attempted to refine or alter Gunkel's literary classification of the psalms, but not many of the proposed emendations have convinced a wide audience in the way Gunkel's did, nor has any consensus emerged.[28] Sigmund Mowinckel's research (1921–24) serves as an exception to this tendency.[29] Advancing the ideas of Gunkel, his mentor, Mowinckel elaborated on the nature of the cultic context for the psalms. His theory that many of the psalms find their cultic setting in a

25. Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926); and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933).

26. Wilhelm de Wette, *Commentar über die Psalmen* (Heidelberg: Mohr & Zimmer, 1811).

27. H. Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction* (trans. Thomas M. Horner; FBBS 19; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 10–33; Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, 175–80.

28. For example, Claus Westermann, in his book *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (trans. Keith R. Crim and R. N. Soulen; Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), proposed that the categories "Praise" and "Lament" were the dominant ones of the Psalter. He disagreed with Gunkel's isolation of the thanksgiving song from the hymn of praise and argued that the thanksgiving songs should fall under the primary category of "Praise." Hymns and thanksgivings are respectively called descriptive and declarative praise. See also Kraus, whose proposal to construct an entirely new system, devised of six categories of psalm types, has not gained widespread support. Kraus's six categories are: (1) Songs of Praise, (2) Songs of Prayer, (3) Royal Psalms, (4) Songs of Zion, (5) Didactic Poetry, and (6) Festival Psalms and Liturgies (*Psalms*, 38–62).

29. Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien* (2 vols.; Kristania: J. Dybwad, 1921–24; repr.; Amsterdam: Verlag P. Schippers, 1966).

ritual of the enthronement festival of Yahweh has enjoyed widespread recognition, and follows closely behind the hypotheses of Gunkel in stimulating discussion.[30] He contended that particular psalms, including 47, 93, 96–99, and many others, described the annual ritual of Yahweh enthroned as king during the autumn festival (Feast of Tabernacles).[31]

The foundational work of Gunkel and Mowinckel continues to stimulate form-critical studies, including those of Westermann (1981)[32] and Gerstenberger (1988),[33] and has made a decisive impact on biblical research. No other theory has yet successfully replaced the classic form-critical method for the study of the psalms, but Childs has questioned the value of pressing this method too much further, since the benefit to biblical studies seems minimal. Convincingly, he asserts: "Much of the exegetical gain of determining the original setting of a psalm is jeopardized when the proposed *Sitz im Leben* rests on an extremely fragile and hypothetical base."[34]

The focus on the original setting of the psalms has left pertinent topics concerning later exegetical activity, such as looking at the book of Psalms as a whole, or the historical titles specifically, relatively unexplored. Recent scholarship, however, has begun to appreciate the Psalter as a compilation exhibiting signs of deliberate editorial activity.[35] The

30. Aubrey R. Johnson, in his book *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), accepts much of Mowinckel's theory. Artur Weiser in his commentary *The Psalms: A Commentary* (OTL: Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 23–52, contra Mowinckel, finds that many of the psalms are best understood in light of a covenant festival which he reconstructs. Kraus also disagrees with Mowinckel's theory of locating psalms in an enthronement ritual and instead situates them in a cultic setting of a royal Zion festival. See his commentary, *Psalms*, 179–218.

31. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1:106–16.

32. Westermann, *Praise and Lament*.

33. Gerstenberger, *Psalms*.

34. B. Childs, "Reflections on Modern Study of Psalms," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God* (ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke, and P. D. Miller, Jr.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 378.

35. B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); James Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); J. Reindl, "Weisheitliche Bearbeitung von Psalmen: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Sammlung des Psalter," in *Congress Volume, Vienna 1980* (ed. J. A. Emerton; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 333–56; Gerald Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985); James L. Mays, "The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter," *JBL* 106 (1987): 3–12; J. Clinton McCann, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993).

division of the book of Psalms into five books (Pss 1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, and 107–150), demarcated by a series of doxologies (Pss 41:13; 72:18–19; 89:52; 106:48; 150:6), exemplifies one way in which editors purposely shaped the Psalter. In addition to the intentional arrangement of the psalms into five books, the Psalter also exhibits literary and theological shaping of material. Scholars have long recognized that the placement of Ps 1 was deliberate, serving as an introduction to the book. Whether Ps 1, a wisdom psalm, constitutes a guide and unifying element by which to understand the structure of the book of Psalms as a whole, however, is a relatively new issue of debate.[36]

Psalm 2, typically identified as a royal psalm, has received considerable attention in past and present research because of its key position, adjacent to Ps 1, at the beginning of the Psalter. Contemporary scholarship tends to focus on the effect these two opening psalms have upon the interpretation of the book of Psalms as a whole.[37]

36. Patrick D. Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in McCann, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, 93–107; Joseph Brennan, "Psalms 1–8: Some Hidden Harmonies," *BTB* 10 (1980): 25–29; Reindl, "Weisheitliche," 333–56; G. T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 136–44.

37. The discussion centers on the way in which these psalms point to a sapiential or eschatological reading of the Psalter. Childs, in his book *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 504–25, saw that, in its final form, the book of Psalms as a whole was governed by an eschatological interpretation. He argues that Ps 2 in its prominent place at the beginning of the Psalter underlines the "the kingship of God as a major theme of the whole Psalter… [T]he weight of the psalm falls on God's claim of the whole earth as his possession, and the warning of his coming wrath against the presumption of earthly rulers. In other words, the psalm has been given an eschatological ring… Indeed, at the time of the final redaction, when the institution of kingship had long been destroyed, what earthly king would have come to mind other than God's Messiah" (p. 516). Sheppard and Wilson, students of Childs, have developed his ideas further, and expanded on how the relationship of Pss 1 and 2 bear on understanding the entire Psalter. Wilson acknowledges that there is a marked wisdom emphasis on the final shape of the Psalter, especially with the placement of Ps 1 at the beginning, but argues the praise and kingship of Yahweh are at the heart of the book of Psalms: "the reader of the Psalter is called to encounter God as the eternal king enthroned on the praises of his people. To experience God in his majestic kingship in the central enthronement psalms is to step with Moses and Isaiah into the presence of Holy God." See Gerald H. Wilson, "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Int* 46 (1992): 141–42, and also his *Editing*, 199–228; "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *JSOT* 35 (1986): 85–94. Other essays that emphasize a more eschatological reading include Mays, "The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter," 3–12, and "The David of the Psalms," 143–55. Sheppard's view is that Pss 1 and 2 combined serve as

The present study aims to fill in a gap in Psalms research by working through the historical additions to thirteen psalms to see how they function to reshape the portrayal of David that is found in the Samuel narrative. David appeals directly to God for help just one time in the Samuel story (2 Sam 15:31), and offers confessions a total of three times (2 Sam 12:13; 24:10, 17). With the addition of the historical psalms, however, David is depicted as uttering prayers when his throne is taken over by his son, when he flees from Saul, and when he goes out for battle. Having all thirteen psalms inserted in David's narrative in Samuel provides a theological underpinning throughout his story.

As I discuss the historical psalms, it will become evident that the author of the superscriptions provides a different lens to view David's history. The historical psalms make David appear penitent in situations when the Samuel narrative does not disclose his emotions, they serve to fulfill death sentences on those people David did not enact revenge upon, they aid in heightening the suspense of the narrative, and they fill in gaps in stories. By adding the titles to certain psalms, the author of the superscriptions has, in effect, cleaned up David's image, even if this is sometimes done by attention to David during his worst moments.[38]

B. *Method*

My approach to analyzing the psalms is text based. The historical titles prompt the reader to make connections between the contents of the psalm and the incident to which the title alludes. Brevard Childs, Elieser Slomovic, and Yair Zakovitch have observed linguistic affinities and conceptual parallels between the historical psalms and the referent narratives.[39] Such connections would not have been suggested without the historical superscriptions. While it is not possible to know with certainty the motivation behind the addition of each psalm title, the superscription does provide another way of reading the Samuel narrative.

introduction to the Psalter and strengthen a sapiential reading of the book. See his, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, 142. Reindl, in his "Weisheitliche," also sees the final shape of the Psalter as having a marked wisdom character.

38. Historical titles refer to David pretending to be mad (Ps 34), his being dethroned and expelled from his royal city (Ps 3), his days as an outlaw from Saul's court (Pss 52 and 54), and his adultery and murder (Ps 51).

39. Elieser Slomovic, "Toward and Understanding of the Formation of the Historical Titles in the Book of Psalms," *ZAW* 91 (1979): 350–80; Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16 (1971): 137–50; Yair Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Tsevi, 1995 [Hebrew]), 152–60.

In my exegesis of the thirteen historical psalms, I have drawn especially on the suggestions put forth by Childs and Slomovic for examining the relationship between the narrative of David's history and the psalm titles that refer to it. Childs has argued that the content of the psalms with titles generated the connection to an historical moment in the history of David. He contends that the titles are the result of a midrashic approach which took its material from the psalm itself.[40] Linguistic associations, such as word plays or the use of identical syntactic constructions, between the psalm and the narrative alluded to in the superscription play a subordinate role when evaluated against the main reason for the attachment of the title to the psalm—comparable conceptual images. According to Childs, some conceptual image from the psalm spurred the connection with a particular Davidic episode. I have found, however, that the primary interplay between the historical psalm and the Samuel narrative is not limited to conceptual allusions and could indeed be based upon linguistic associations. I have found Slomovic's "connective midrash" as the operative method for linking the historical psalms to the narrative to be more flexible: linguistic as well as congruous conceptual images could serve as the basis for the linking of psalms to various events and people in the Samuel narrative. Slomovic suggests the following with regard to how connective midrash functions on a practical level:

> The rabbinic midrash may gloss over certain passages. It is not concerned with complete harmony between the Psalm and the connected unit. It selects mutual ingredients, points out reciprocal relationships and omits those parts which do not possess a connectable element.[41]

In this study, I will be examining a number of texts especially from the Psalms and the books of Samuel. Within this study, the translations of biblical passages are my own and were cited following the text of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (*BHS*). Text-critical problems abound, particularly in the books of Samuel, as is well-known. Only those text-critical problems, however, which are germane to the main point under discussion, will be treated. In several cases I have emended the text of *BHS* to take text-critical matters into account. I have inserted a footnote into the Hebrew text where I have made such an emendation.

Chapters in this book have been ordered based upon David's relations with important characters as related in the Samuel narrative. Chapter 2

40. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 143.

41. Slomovic, "Toward an Understanding," 355. Michael Fishbane also views the psalm titles as a form of midrash. See his discussion in *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 403–7.

is a discussion of the historical psalms pertaining to David's close family members, Absalom (Ps 3), Bathsheba (Ps 51), and Michal (Ps 59). Chapter 3, entitled, "David and Saul," is a discussion of Pss 54 and 52, which highlight the role of Saul's allies in his war against David. Chapter 4 analyzes Pss 35 and 56, which speak of David's involvement with the Philistines while fleeing from Saul. Three of the psalm titles (Pss 57, 63, and 142) point to David's days as a fugitive in the wilderness and I have isolated these psalms in Chapter 5 based on their thematic links.

Chapter 6 focuses on an analysis of Ps 18, the ancient victory poem of God's delivering David from Saul. In Chapter 7, I discuss the more obscure titles, Pss 7 and 60, which may direct the reader to narratives involving David's military commanders, Joab and Abishai. The last chapter summarizes the relevance of this book for the history of biblical interpretation.

Before the discussion of each historical psalm, I have included in parentheses the biblical narratives to which my analysis refers. Readers will gain greater understanding if they (re)familiarize themselves with the referent prose narrative. In the event time does not permit the reader to refer to the stated biblical narrative, I have provided a summary of the prose narrative for each psalm at the start of each psalm treatment.

Chapter 2

DAVID AND HIS FAMILY

A. ABSALOM'S UPRISING

(Read 2 Samuel 15–18)

Absalom, the third son of David by his wife Maacah, conspired to overthrow his father's kingdom. After gathering support from the masses, he declares kingship over Israel and ejects David from his capital city, Jerusalem. David leaves the city with no resistance, weeping as he travels on foot up the Mount of Olives. Absalom takes over David's palace and there, plans his military strategy to defeat his father. He summons two royal counselors, Ahithophel and Hushai, to advise him on the best plan of attack to usurp the throne. The advisors give Absalom opposing advice. Which royal strategist will he follow? This decision will seal his fate.

If the import of the royal counselors in the story of Absalom's revolt eludes the casual reader, the addition of Ps 3 into the narrative of 2 Sam 15–18 will remedy this oversight. The title of Ps 3, "A psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom, his son," links the psalm with the story of Absalom's uprising. An intertextual reading of the prose and poem underscores the intrigue surrounding the royal advisors as well as other elements, all of which serve to intensify the danger David encounters in the story. By linking Ps 3 with the story of the rebellion instigated by Absalom, the author of the superscriptions places emphasis on David's need for divine assistance during Absalom's coup. In this moment of distress, David calls out to his God, and Ps 3 affirms that God answered his prayer: God sends a man to do *exactly* that which David had asked.

1. *Psalm 3*

[1] *A psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom, his son.*
[2] O LORD, how many are my enemies!
Many rise up against me!

[3] Many are those saying about me:
"There is no deliverance for him from[1] God!" *Selah*.
[4] But you O LORD are a shield around me,
my glory and the one lifting up my head.
[5] I cried aloud to the LORD,
and he answered me from the mountain of his holiness. *Selah*.
[6] I indeed lay down and had gone to sleep,
I awoke because the LORD sustains me.
[7] I will not be afraid of the multitudes of people,
who, on every side, have set themselves against me.
[8] Rise up, O LORD!
Bring me deliverance, O my God!
For you smote all my enemies on the cheek.
You broke the teeth of the wicked.
[9] Deliverance belongs to the LORD.
Upon your people is your blessing. *Selah.*

This psalm speaks of a petitioner in a bad situation. It begins with a passionate cry of the supplicant to his God concerning a host of enemies established against him. The threat before him is not static. Indeed, the three-fold repetition of the word "many" at the psalm's start—רַבִּים, רַבִּים, רַבּוּ—conveys a sense of danger escalating right before the psalmist's eyes.[2] Not only does the petitioner find himself heavily outnumbered (vv. 2, 7), but he must also endure the derision of persecutors as they make known his bleak state (v. 3). Faced with the impending threat, the petitioner counters the invectives of his enemies with unshakeable trust in God. He appeals to the deity personally, as his "shield" (מָגֵן בַּעֲדִי),[3] "glory" (כְּבוֹדִי), and "one who grants him dignity" (מֵרִים רֹאשִׁי, v. 4). All three of the invocations suggest a close connection between him and the deity.

Although in the midst of a dire and seemingly inescapable circumstance, the psalmist calls upon his God in confidence that he will be delivered (v. 5). He attributes his ability to fall asleep and to awaken free from harm to the continual protection afforded him by the deity (v. 6). In the final verses of the psalm, he summons the warrior God to destroy

1. Following Mitchell Dahood who has argued based upon Ugaritic texts that the preposition בְּ can be translated as "from." See his commentary, *Psalms* (3 vols.; AB 16–17A; New York: Doubleday, 1965–70), 1:16.

2. Kraus, *Psalms*, 139; Wilson, *Psalms*, 1:129.

3. The imagery of God as a source of protection appears also in the book of Genesis. God himself announces his role as protector of Abraham (Gen 15:1). Perhaps the psalmist is invoking the God of Abraham who fulfilled the patriarch's promise to have an heir through Sarah, even when the realization of this promise seemed unlikely (Gen 17:17; 21:21–25).

his enemies at this particular moment, as God had done in the past, and he proclaims his confidence in the deity who delivers him from distress.

While the threat of imminent doom is evident in this psalm, the failure to specify the precise conflict confronting the supplicant clears the way for the author of the superscriptions to apply this psalm to the story of David's flight from Absalom in 2 Sam 15–18. A close reading of the narrative with Ps 3 brings out a heightened sense of danger for David at the time of Absalom's rebellion and suggests that he escapes his predicament with divine succor.

2. *To Sleep or Not to Sleep*

Just what spurred the connection of this particular psalm to this historical account? Brevard Childs suggests the most compelling reason for the linkage of these two texts:

> In *v.* 6 the psalmist speaks, "I lie down and sleep; I awake again for Yahweh sustains me." According to II Sam xvi.14ff, David arrived weary at the Jordan… [C]ould this have been the reason for the selection of this title?[4]

Childs offers this lucid suggestion without elaboration. The allusion to sleep in Ps 3, however, serves as a strong connection to the narrative because the military counsel given to Absalom by his royal advisors at the time of his coup centered on when and where David would sleep.

Shortly after Absalom takes over David's throne, the narrative introduces the reputable advisor, Ahithophel:

> וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא[5] אֶת־אֲחִיתֹפֶל הַגִּילֹנִי יוֹעֵץ דָּוִד מֵעִירוֹ מִגִּלֹה בְּזָבְחוֹ אֶת־הַזְּבָחִים
>
> He [Absalom] had summoned Ahithophel the Gilonite, the advisor of David, from his city Giloh while he was sacrificing. (2 Sam 15:12a)

The latter part of this verse reveals the magnitude of the revolt:

> וַיְהִי הַקֶּשֶׁר אַמִּץ וְהָעָם הוֹלֵךְ וָרָב אֶת־אַבְשָׁלוֹם
>
> Now the conspiracy intensified and the people who sided with Absalom continually increased. (2 Sam 15:12b)

4. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 143–44.

5. Reading with 4QSam[c], which has וישלח ויקרא את אהיתפל, the second verb added as a supralinear correction after being initially left out. The verb ויקרא is also missing from the MT, which adds the proper noun, "Absalom." LXX[L] combines both, reading the verb and proper noun.

Absalom has enough support to evict David from his capital city and intends to capitalize on his advantages by receiving judicious counsel before making his next move. That the notice of the heightened state of the cabal comes after the introduction of Ahithophel does not seem incidental. Rather, the information underscores the enormity of Absalom's machinations: not only has the conspiracy grown in strength, but Absalom would soon receive political and military advice from the best advisor in the country. Both David and Absalom regarded the counsel of Ahithophel highly.[6]

What exactly does this renowned royal counselor advise? Ahithophel first tells Absalom to demonstrate publicly his assumption of leadership by sleeping with David's concubines in the presence of all Israel:

> [21]וַיֹּאמֶר אֲחִיתֹפֶל אֶל־אַבְשָׁלֹם בּוֹא אֶל־פִּלַגְשֵׁי אָבִיךָ אֲשֶׁר הִנִּיחַ לִשְׁמוֹר הַבָּיִת וְשָׁמַע
> כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־נִבְאַשְׁתָּ אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְחָזְקוּ יְדֵי כָל־אֲשֶׁר אִתָּךְ [22]וַיִּטּוּ לְאַבְשָׁלוֹם הָאֹהֶל
> עַל־הַגָּג וַיָּבֹא אַבְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־פִּלַגְשֵׁי אָבִיו לְעֵינֵי כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל
>
> [21] Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Have intercourse with your father's concubines whom he has left to take care of the palace, so that all Israel may hear that you have become despicable to your father, and all of your supporters will be encouraged." [22] Accordingly, they stretched a tent for Absalom upon the roof and Absalom had intercourse with his father's concubines before the sight of all Israel. (2 Sam 16:21–22)[7]

The most critical advice Ahithophel gives to Absalom, however, occurs in 2 Sam 17:1–2:

> [1]וַיֹּאמֶר אֲחִיתֹפֶל אֶל־אַבְשָׁלֹם אֶבְחֲרָה נָּא שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר[8] אֶלֶף אִישׁ וְאָקוּמָה וְאֶרְדְּפָה
> אַחֲרֵי־דָוִד הַלָּיְלָה [2]וְאָבוֹא עָלָיו וְהוּא יָגֵעַ וּרְפֵה יָדַיִם וְהַחֲרַדְתִּי אֹתוֹ וְנָס כָּל־הָעָם
> אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ וְהִכִּיתִי אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבַדּוֹ
>
> [1] Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men that I may pursue David tonight; [2] that I may come upon him when he is weary and vulnerable. Then I will cause him to tremble and all the people who are with him will flee and I will strike down the king alone."

Ahithophel incisively advises Absalom to strike David the same evening of his coup so that Absalom would then have the advantage of encountering the king in a vulnerable position. He surmises that David and his men will need rest after their hasty retreat from Jerusalem and that a surprise attack upon David in this state of weariness will ensure victory.

6. See 2 Sam 16:23, which reports the widespread esteem Ahithophel enjoyed as an advisor.

7. This act by David's son, Absalom, fulfills Nathan's prophecy of rebuke against David for his affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:11–12).

8. Or "ten thousand" as in LXX^{L} and Josephus.

Ahithophel assures Absalom that the capture of David alone will secure his grip over the kingdom. It seems that Ahithophel tries to prevent a lengthy war between David's supporters and those of Absalom by killing only David. The death of the king might have sufficed to quash the opposition and to transfer the allegiance of all the people to Absalom.[9]

Regardless of Ahithophel's esteemed reputation, Absalom does not find his advice entirely satisfactory and thus requests counsel from another royal advisor, Hushai. When Hushai gives advice directly opposed to Ahithophel's, he also emphasizes the idea of sleep. This royal advisor, however, argues that David will not sleep with his troops; instead, the king will probably camp elsewhere. If Absalom decides to pursue David that evening, counsels Hushai, then the usurper will suffer irreparable defeat:

> 7וַיֹּאמֶר חוּשַׁי אֶל־אַבְשָׁלוֹם לֹא־טוֹבָה הָעֵצָה אֲשֶׁר־יָעַץ אֲחִיתֹפֶל בַּפַּעַם הַזֹּאת 8וַיֹּאמֶר
> חוּשַׁי אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אֲנָשָׁיו כִּי גִבֹּרִים הֵמָּה וּמָרֵי נֶפֶשׁ הֵמָּה כְּדֹב שַׁכּוּל
> בַּשָּׂדֶה וְאָבִיךָ אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה וְלֹא יָלִין אֶת־הָעָם 9הִנֵּה עַתָּה הוּא־נֶחְבָּא בְּאַחַת הַפַּחֲתִים
> אוֹ בְּאַחַד הַמְּקוֹמֹת וְהָיָה כִּנְפֹל הָעָם10 בַּתְּחִלָּה וְשָׁמַע הַשֹּׁמֵעַ וְאָמַר הָיְתָה מַגֵּפָה בָּעָם
> אֲשֶׁר אַחֲרֵי אַבְשָׁלֹם 10וְהוּא גַּם־בֶּן־חַיִל אֲשֶׁר לִבּוֹ כְּלֵב הָאַרְיֵה הֵמֵס יִמָּס כִּי־יֹדֵעַ
> כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־גִבּוֹר אָבִיךָ וּבְנֵי־חַיִל אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ

> [7] Hushai said to Absalom, "The counsel that Ahithophel has advised is not good this time." [8] Hushai said, "You yourself know your father and his men—they are mighty and embittered, like a bear bereaved of its young in the field.[11] Your father is a man of war and will not spend the night with the army. [9] Indeed, now he is hiding in some pit or in some other place. And when the army [of Absalom] begins to fall, whoever hears it will say, 'There has been a slaughter among the troops who follow Absalom'. [10] And even he who is a valiant warrior, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will surely melt [with fear]; for all Israel knows that your father is a warrior, and those who are with him are mighty fighters." (2 Sam 17:7–10)

9. Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 296.

10. Reading "the army" with the LXX^{L}: τὸν λαόν = העם.

11. McCarter emends the MT to read, "like a bear bereft in the wild or a sow snared in the wild," based upon the LXX^{B}, which adds the phrase, καὶ ὡς ὗς τραχεῖα ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ = וכחזירה רכסה בשדה. He argues that the phrase "or a sow snared in the wild" had fallen out of the MT because of haplography. See P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (2 vols.; AB 8–9; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980–84), 2:379, 382, 386. I am in agreement with J. Wellhausen who argues that the phrase should be omitted as the parallelism between a bear and a sow is unattested in Hebrew Bible. See his, *Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1871), 200.

Cleverly, Hushai depicts David as an alert and elusive rebel leader who will not dare to sleep, but who instead will hide in a remote place, waiting to attack Absalom's troops. Throughout his speech to Absalom, Hushai appeals to distinguished characteristics of David. Hushai invokes David as a legend, as one who kills bears and lions to protect his flocks, as a man whose entourage includes vicious and seasoned warriors.

Hushai's deliberate use of the word "bear" (דֹּב) not only intimates the danger Absalom would incur should he immediately pursue his father, but it also alludes to a key moment in David's life. The word for "bear" occurs three other times in the Samuel story (1 Sam 17:34, 36, 37). All of these occurrences appear in the first legendary incident in David's narrative to illuminate his expert capabilities in combat (1 Sam 17:31–51). In this scene, David tells Saul that his skill in killing any lion or bear that would try to attack his flock qualifies him to contend with Goliath. Convinced of his capabilities, Saul permits David to fight against the giant Philistine. David's victory over Goliath launches his career as a heroic leader of Israel and this story in particular demonstrates David's military capabilities in a difficult situation.

Right at the start of his counsel, Hushai uses cunning language to persuade Absalom to reject Ahithophel's sound plan. In his first statement, Hushai acknowledges Ahithophel as a great advisor, while at the same time he dismisses his counsel. Hushai suggests that Ahithophel gives good advice in general, but in this particular instance (בַּפַּעַם הַזֹּאת) he has made a mistake. Then Hushai immediately reminds the ambitious son of his filial relationship with David by referring to David as "*your father*" (2 Sam 17:8). In fact, Hushai refers to David as the "father" of Absalom three times in his counsel (2 Sam 17:8–10). The embellished language of Hushai's speech contrasts sharply with that of Ahithophel. The straightforward, practical words that Ahithophel declares do not include any mention of the relationship between David and Absalom. Rather, Ahithophel refers to David either by his personal name or as "the king" (2 Sam 17:1–3). Hushai adeptly brings to the forefront of Absalom's mind that the man against whom he plans to wage war is his *father*. Moreover, as the son of David, Absalom would probably have first-hand knowledge of the brutal acts committed by his father, earning him the reputation of a fierce warrior.[12]

12. In 1 Sam 17:51 David cuts off Goliath's head; in 1 Sam 18:27 he obtains the foreskins of Philistine soldiers for the hand in marriage of Saul's daughter, Michal; in 2 Sam 11 David has Uriah killed because of the pregnancy that resulted from his affair with Bathsheba. I discuss the David–Bathsheba episode in my analysis of Ps 51, below (pp. 27–39).

Having evoked the image of David as a vigilant fugitive, Hushai warns that an immediate, surprise military tactic will not work against such a formidable adversary. Absalom's best chance for prevailing against David will instead require proper, drawn-out preparation. Absalom follows this advice to his own detriment—Hushai is a loyal ally of David:

> 15וַיֹּאמֶר חוּשַׁי אֶל־צָדוֹק וְאֶל־אֶבְיָתָר הַכֹּהֲנִים כָּזֹאת וְכָזֹאת יָעַץ אֲחִיתֹפֶל אֶת־אַבְשָׁלֹם
> וְאֶת זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָזֹאת וְכָזֹאת יָעַצְתִּי אָנִי 16וְעַתָּה שִׁלְחוּ מְהֵרָה וְהַגִּידוּ לְדָוִד לֵאמֹר
> אַל־תָּלֵן הַלַּיְלָה בְּעַרְבוֹת הַמִּדְבָּר וְגַם עָבוֹר תַּעֲבוֹר פֶּן יְבַלַּע לַמֶּלֶךְ וּלְכָל־הָעָם
> אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ

> [15] Hushai said to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, "Ahithophel has advised Absalom and the elders of Israel one way, but I counseled in another. [16] Now, quickly send word and tell David, 'Do not spend the night in the fords of the wilderness, but immediately cross [the Jordan River] lest he annihilate the king and the entire army with him'." (2 Sam 17:15–16)

Ahithophel gave Absalom the correct advice: David did indeed camp with his troops and planned to sleep before he continued to travel across the Jordan. The protracted preparations Hushai advises cost Absalom the war. Hushai specifically sends word to David that he should "*not sleep*" (אַל־תָּלֵן) that evening, lest Absalom destroy him. Though fatigued, David and his troops press on and arrive across the Jordan in an advantageous position against Absalom's army.

Naturally, military leaders depend upon their advisors in order to determine the best strategies to follow in battle. Absalom's rejection of the wise counsel of Ahithophel proved to be the turning point of his rebellion. When Absalom fails to attack David while in his most vulnerable position, somnolent and off-guard, he denies himself the best chance of successfully usurping his father's throne. The mention of "lying down and sleeping" in Ps 3:6, then, alludes to a significant element in David's deliverance from Absalom—the urgent necessity of King David's finding out just when he should sleep.

3. *Sleep Endangers Kings*

Perhaps the story of another ruler caught off-guard during a night's rest provides a glimpse of the scene that Ahithophel had intended for David when he recommends to Absalom a military plan involving a swift strike upon David. Psalm 3 alludes to this story, lexically, with its use of the verbs "to sleep" (יָשַׁן) and "to awake" (קִיץ) in v. 6. The pair of verbs occur together in only one other verse in the Samuel narrative about David, 1 Sam 26:12. Even though this verse does not specifically pertain

to the story of Absalom's revolt, the narrative surrounding 1 Sam 26:12 does strengthen the connection between Ps 3 and 2 Sam 15–19 with its depiction of a king under attack while sleeping.

In 1 Sam 26, King Saul comes close to death as he sleeps in a bivouac one evening during his pursuit of David. David approaches the sleeping king, completely unnoticed by the guards protecting him:

> 6וַיַּעַן דָּוִד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אֲחִימֶלֶךְ הַחִתִּי וְאֶל־אֲבִישַׁי בֶּן־צְרוּיָה אֲחִי יוֹאָב לֵאמֹר מִי־יֵרֵד
> אִתִּי אֶל־שָׁאוּל אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִישַׁי אֲנִי אֵרֵד עִמָּךְ 7וַיָּבֹא דָוִד וַאֲבִישַׁי אֶל־הָעָם
> לַיְלָה וְהִנֵּה שָׁאוּל שֹׁכֵב יָשֵׁן בַּמַּעְגָּל וַחֲנִיתוֹ מְשׁוּכָה־בָאָרֶץ מְרַאֲשֹׁתָיו13 וְאַבְנֵר וְהָעָם
> שֹׁכְבִים סְבִיבֹתָיו14 8וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִישַׁי אֶל־דָּוִד סִגַּר אֱלֹהִים הַיּוֹם אֶת־אוֹיְבֶךָ בְּיָדֶךָ וְעַתָּה
> אַכֶּנּוּ נָא בַּחֲנִית בּוֹ15 וּבָאָרֶץ פַּעַם אַחַת וְלֹא אֶשְׁנֶה לוֹ

> [6] David answered and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother of Joab: "Who will go down with me to Saul, to the camp?" Abishai said, "I will go down with you." [7] David and Abishai came to the army at night and, right before them, Saul was lying asleep within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head and Abner and the army lying around him. [8] And Abishai said to David, "God has delivered this day your enemy into your hand this day; now I will pin him to the ground with his spear just one time, I will not need to strike him a second time." (1 Sam 26:6–8)

David forbids his officer, Abishai, to harm Saul and thought it best to leave Saul's fate in the LORD's hand (1 Sam 26:10–11). Instead of killing Saul, David decides to take Saul's spear as evidence to prove that he has spared his life:

> וַיִּקַּח דָּוִד אֶת־הַחֲנִית וְאֶת־צַפַּחַת הַמַּיִם מְרַאֲשֹׁתֵי שָׁאוּל וַיֵּלְכוּ לָהֶם וְאֵין רֹאֶה וְאֵין
> יוֹדֵעַ וְאֵין מֵקִיץ כִּי כֻלָּם יְשֵׁנִים כִּי תַרְדֵּמַת יְהוָה נָפְלָה עֲלֵיהֶם

> David took the spear and the water jug, which lay by Saul's head, and they [David and Abishai] went away. Now, there was no one who saw or knew of the missing spear because no one *awoke*, for all of Saul's men were *sleeping*, having succumbed to a deep sleep induced by the LORD. (1 Sam 26:12)[16]

13. Reading MT *qere*.

14. Reading MT *qere*.

15. Reading בחנית בו ובארץ as suggested by Wellhausen on the basis of the Hebrew construction found in 18:11 and 19:10. The MT reads בחנית ובארץ, "with the spear and into the ground." According to Wellhausen, the personal pronoun בו was lost. See Wellhausen, *Samuelis*, 137. McCarter reads with the LXX^{B}: τῷ δόρατι εἰς τὴν γῆν = בחנית בארץ "to the ground with the spear." He suggests that the MT reflects a misdivision of בחניתו בארץ, "to the ground with his spear," the suffixed pronoun being expansive. See McCarter, *Samuel*, 1:405.

16. The LORD brings about a deep sleep in other biblical texts. See, for example, Gen 2:21 and Isa 29:10.

Ahithophel may have had such a scenario in mind when he advises Absalom to attack David the very evening he usurps his father's throne. Just as Saul had lain among his troops, David too camped amidst the men of his army, presumably protected by his guards. In both stories, the kings and their men are at a disadvantage because of slumber. Ahithophel concerns himself only with the execution of David, leaving the troops to follow Absalom after knowledge of David's death. Similarly, David singles out King Saul as the object of attack. David did not seize the opportunity to kill Saul, but Ahithophel did not intend to show David such mercy (2 Sam 17:2). Thus, Ps 3:6, with its use of the pair of verbs, קיץ and ישן, increases the suspense in the narrative by allusion to a scene of royal vulnerability. Like Saul, David would have been in a vulnerable position had Absalom accepted the counsel of Ahithophel.

4. *Deriding David*

Ahithophel and Absalom do not act alone in their conspiracy against David. They indeed had "many"[17] who supported them. Just what prompted a segment of the population to follow Absalom in his subversion of David's throne is not explicated in the Samuel narrative. The reader gets a glimpse of the discontent that some of the population may have felt with the report of Shimei ben Gera publicly deriding David. Shimei's reviling of David has a nice parallel with Ps 3's depiction of antagonists mocking the petitioner.

David encounters Shimei while escaping from Absalom's coup. When Shimei casts aspersions upon David, he insinuates that David achieved his kingship by murder and usurpation:

[5]וּבָא הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד עַד־בַּחוּרִים וְהִנֵּה מִשָּׁם אִישׁ יוֹצֵא מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת בֵּית־שָׁאוּל וּשְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעִי
בֶן־גֵּרָא יֹצֵא יָצוֹא וּמְקַלֵּל [6]וַיְסַקֵּל בָּאֲבָנִים אֶת־דָּוִד וְאֶת־כָּל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד וְכָל־הָעָם
וְכָל־הַגִּבֹּרִים מִימִינוֹ וּמִשְּׂמֹאלוֹ [7]וְכֹה־אָמַר שִׁמְעִי בְּקַלְלוֹ צֵא צֵא אִישׁ הַדָּמִים
וְאִישׁ הַבְּלִיָּעַל [8]הֵשִׁיב עָלֶיךָ יְהוָה כֹּל דְּמֵי בֵית־שָׁאוּל אֲשֶׁר מָלַכְתָּ תַּחְתָּיו[18] וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה
אֶת־הַמְּלוּכָה בְּיַד אַבְשָׁלוֹם בְּנֶךָ וְהִנְּךָ בְּרָעָתֶךָ כִּי אִישׁ דָּמִים אָתָּה

[5] Now King David came to Bahurim when all of a sudden, a male relative from the house of Saul came forth. His name was Shimei, son of Gera, and as he came forth, he hurled insults. [6] He threw stones at David and at all of King David's servants, while all the troops and warriors were at his right and left. [7] When Shimei hurled his insults he said "Get out! Get out, you man of blood and vile fellow! [8] The LORD is paying you back for all

17. See 2 Sam 15:12b and the discussion of Ps 3:2, above (pp. 16–17).
18. Reading MT *qere*.

> the murder of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has given the kingship into the hand of Absalom, your son. Look at you now, in your predicament because of all the blood you have shed!" (2 Sam 16:5–8)

Shimei brings the psalmist's complaint of derisive antagonists (Ps 3:3) into relief when he proclaims that God himself has caused David's downfall. Shimei's vituperation does not provoke David to attack back. Indeed, David even has a willing assassin to decapitate the slanderer without hesitation:

> וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִישַׁי בֶּן־צְרוּיָה אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לָמָּה יְקַלֵּל הַכֶּלֶב הַמֵּת הַזֶּה אֶת־אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶעְבְּרָה־נָּא וְאָסִירָה אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ

> Abishai, son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king? Let me go over there and take off his head." (2 Sam 16:9)

David, however, prohibits Abishai from doing anything. Rather, David resigns himself to the insults because he thinks the LORD has ordered Shimei to deliver them:

> וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מַה־לִּי וְלָכֶם בְּנֵי צְרוּיָה כֹּה[19] יְקַלֵּל כִּי יְהוָה אָמַר לוֹ קַלֵּל אֶת־דָּוִד וּמִי יֹאמַר מַדּוּעַ עָשִׂיתָה כֵּן

> And the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he curses, it is because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David', and who can say, 'Why have you done this?'" (2 Sam 16:10)

As David and his men travel on foot, Shimei continues walking alongside them cursing, hurling stones, and kicking up dust (2 Sam 16:13).

The scene of Shimei's derision of the despondent king shares with Ps 3 the image of a person bearing verbal scorn when he is already undergoing a difficult situation (v. 2). David's submission to the defamatory remarks and hope for divine restoration corresponds to the psalmist's placing his trust in the deity (vv. 4–5). Also, Shimei's presence explicitly brings up the parallel to the house of Saul that is only implicitly present in the slumber scene of Saul. Thus, one scene (1 Sam 26:6–12) alludes to David's sparing of a vulnerable sleeping Saul, and the other scene (1 Sam 16:5–13) explicitly calls up the memory of David's violent usurpation of that throne.

19. Reading with the MT *qere* and LXX^{B}: כה…כי, "if…because." In LXX^{BL} this phrase is preceded by καὶ ἄφετε αὐτόν = והנחו לו, "Leave him alone…"

5. *Rising Against David*

David accepts the harsh words of Shimei because he thought the deity inspired Shimei to curse him. Perhaps the public humiliation reminded David of his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah. When his prophet Nathan reproaches him for his crimes, he predicts the intrigue and rebellion by his son. In Nathan's rebuke, he mentions a key detail of Absalom's revolt, namely, the public exhibition of Absalom having intercourse with the concubines of his father:

> כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה הִנְנִי מֵקִים עָלֶיךָ רָעָה מִבֵּיתֶךָ וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶת־נָשֶׁיךָ לְעֵינֶיךָ וְנָתַתִּי לְרֵעֶיךָ וְשָׁכַב עִם־נָשֶׁיךָ לְעֵינֵי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ הַזֹּאת

> Thus says the LORD: "I will *raise up* (מֵקִים) trouble *against you* (עָלֶיךָ) from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he will lie with your wives before the rays of this sun." (2 Sam 12:11)

The italicized words in my translation of this verse refer to the Hebrew phrase קום על, meaning "to rise against." This phrase serves as another lexical link between Ps 3 and the narrative of Absalom's rebellion. The phrase occurs in Ps 3:2 and appears twice in the episode of David's flight from his son Absalom. In 2 Sam 18:31–32, the text narrates that a Cushite envoy reports the death of Absalom to David. He first tells David that the king has successfully defeated the army of the usurper. Perhaps aware that David will not receive the information well, the Cushite messenger then cautiously tells David that the primary conspirator of the rebellion, Absalom, has died.[20] When he first approaches David, he does not tell him outright of Absalom's demise:

> וְהִנֵּה הַכּוּשִׁי בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר הַכּוּשִׁי יְתֻבַּשַּׂר אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי־שָׁפָטְךָ יְהוָה הַיּוֹם מִיַּד כָּל־הַקָּמִים עָלֶיךָ

> Now, the Cushite came and said, "Good tidings to my lord, the king! For the LORD has done justice this day against all those who have *risen against you*." (2 Sam 18:31)

David seems more concerned with the well-being of Absalom in the battle than with the military victory. Through circumlocution, the messenger then reports the death of the king's son:

> וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַכּוּשִׁי הֲשָׁלוֹם לַנַּעַר לְאַבְשָׁלוֹם וַיֹּאמֶר הַכּוּשִׁי יִהְיוּ כַנַּעַר אֹיְבֵי אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־קָמוּ עָלֶיךָ לְרָעָה

20. Reporting grievous news to the king was potentially a lethal business. See 2 Sam 1:14–15, where David kills the messenger bearing the news of Saul's death.

> And the king said to the Cushite, "Is it well for the boy, for Absalom?" The Cushite replied, "May the enemies of my lord, the king, and all who have *risen against you* for evil become like the boy." (2 Sam 18:32)

Although David expresses bitter anguish over the death of Absalom (see 2 Sam 18:33), he apparently overlooks that his son "stole the heart of the people" (2 Sam 15:6), and that Absalom had intended to kill him. In the end, David benefits from Absalom's death. Steven L. McKenzie correctly questions the genuineness of David's tears:

> Son or not, Absalom posed a serious threat to David's sovereignty and the unity of the kingdom… He [David] surely had Absalom killed for [his] rebellion. Support for this conclusion is…found in the fact that the narrative reports no effort by David to punish Joab for dispatching Absalom. Joab was probably following orders, not disobeying them.[21]

Regardless of David's reaction to Absalom's death, his son leads a conspiracy against his father with the support for his cause continually increasing (2 Sam 15:12). Indeed, the image of "many" (רבב) rising against the psalmist in vv. 2 and 3, has a nice parallel in the depiction of the steady rise of people who side with Absalom in the Samuel episode of his revolt.

The phrase קום על ties the psalm and Samuel narrative together well. To begin with, the phrase occurs in a prophecy of Nathan that is fulfilled in part by Absalom's revolt. David's own son rises against him and has a strong following. Second, in the psalm, the petitioner complains of numerous enemies who rise against him (קום על) and "who on every side" have "set themselves against" him. The story of Absalom's overthrow not only speaks of mounting support for Absalom, but also provides some detail of two defectors, Ahithophel and Shimei. Last, in the Samuel narrative we find the phrase קום על in the report of the Cushite envoy revealing to David that those who rose against him are dead. Absalom's death was the result of the military intelligence collected by Hushai, who seems miraculously to appear on the scene at time when all seemed lost for David.

6. *David Prays on a Mountain*

Even though many had risen against David, he focuses on the serious threat that Ahithophel, his own calculating and ruthless advisor, poses for him. Upon finding out that Ahithophel works for Absalom in his

21. Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 169.

conspiracy, David immediately invokes his deity: "Confound the counsel of Ahithophel, O LORD" (2 Sam 15:31b). This prayer is a rare instance of David speaking directly to God. Reading Ps 3 at this point into the narrative expands this brief prayer, amplifying the anguish and desperation of David that can only be inferred in 2 Sam 15:31.

Psalm 3 befits the scene in which David reaches a sacred mountaintop and utters a prayer hoping to be delivered from the coup that has taken place.[22] On a mountain summit during a grave moment in his life, David calls to his God, and asks to be saved from his enemies. Narrative sequencing suggests that right after his request, God responds by sending Hushai to make the advice of Ahithophel ineffective in the court of Absalom.[23] Hushai convinces Absalom to refuse the advice of the most reputable advisor in the land. He has, in fact, "confounded the counsel of Ahithophel." And, in line with the passionate convictions so eloquently expressed in Ps 3, it would seem that the LORD does indeed hear David's prayer on that mountain and brings "deliverance" to David from his son.

7. *An Enhanced Reading*

The thematic and linguistic associations that Ps 3 infuses into 2 Sam 15 heightens the drama of Absalom's rebellion. A primary link occurs with the idea of sleep, which is invoked by v. 6 of the psalm. When attention is paid to the idea of sleep in the narrative, the incredible danger David encounters and the clash between the royal counselors comes to the fore. Indubitably, David would be most susceptible to defeat while sleeping. Thus, both Ahithophel and Hushai focus their advice on figuring out when David will most likely go to sleep. The royal advisors suspect that the best time for Absalom to attack would have been the selfsame evening of the coup. Both advisors correctly assume that David will sleep that night after his escape from Jerusalem. One royal advisor, however, was a spy who sent word to David not to sleep; ultimately, this

22. Rabbinic writers also contend that one of the moments in which David could have composed the prayer of Ps 3 was on the Mount of Olives. See *Midrash on Psalms* (ed. Leon Nemoy; trans. William G. Braude; Yale Judaica Series 13; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 1:51. For an alternative view of where to read Ps 3 into the Samuel narrative, see Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 152. Zakovitch argues that the exegete who added the title tried to connect Ps 3 to the David story after 2 Sam 15:26, the point in the narrative where David expressed uncertainty to his priest Zadok as to whether he would be restored to his kingdom.

23. Josephus makes a strong connection between David's prayer and the arrival of Hushai who seemed to serve as God's answer to David's entreaty. See Josephus, *Ant.* 7.203 (Marcus, LCL).

information saves David's life. An image of a king sleeping and defenseless before his attackers is found in an earlier Saul–David narrative: this was the fate awaiting David had Absalom taken the advice of Ahithophel.[24]

Psalm 3 also brings out the verbal scorn David endures by Shimei and emphasizes that many supporters rose against him. As the psalm puts it, David was surrounded (vv. 2, 7). He escapes to a mountaintop and prays to his God who sends him Hushai. The deity's cameo appearance in the Samuel narrative receives the spotlight with the addition of the psalm. David as the petitioner in Ps 3 will have proclaimed during his flight from his son Absalom that his protection and deliverance comes from God (vv. 3–6). He invokes the deity to "smite all the enemies on the cheek and to break the teeth of the wicked,"[25] and in the end, the primary instigators of the rebellion, Absalom and Ahithophel,[26] are killed. According to the psalm, David sleeps and awakes, despite being in the midst of hostile enemies, because of the sustaining benevolence of his God.

* * *

B. David and Bathsheba

(Read 2 Samuel 11–12)

One day, Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, bathes upon a rooftop. King David notices her and commands his messengers to bring her to his palace. They have sex, which results in a pregnancy. With Bathsheba's husband off

24. Another example of a sleeping male, weary from battle that lay defenseless before his attacker is found in Judg 4, where the general, Sisera, is killed while asleep by Jael.

25. See J. Hackett and J. Huehnergard, "On Breaking Teeth," *HTR* 77 (1984): 259–75. These authors examine the relationship of the biblical phrase to others in the ancient Near East. The phrase pertains to a contract situation in which a person who falsely claims the property of another undergoes facial mutilation. Breaking teeth may derive from the punitive practice of putting a nail through someone's face or teeth for claiming property that did not belong to him. Sumerian nails have been found on which a penalty is inscribed. In the case of Absalom's rebellion, he laid claim to a throne that belonged to his father. While he did not receive facial mutilation, his head of hair that was his glory (2 Sam 14:25) served as the instrument for his death. Absalom's head got caught in a tree and he was suspended in the air. Joab saw Absalom hanging from the tree and struck the fatal blows upon the usurper (2 Sam 15:9–15).

26. Ahithophel hanged himself, but would surely have been killed for treason by David's men.

at war, he could not be the father. Thus, David sends word to have Uriah return from war for the sole purpose of covering up his adultery. He attempts to persuade Uriah to lay with his wife so that Uriah would think the child of the tryst belonged to him. His plan fails as the dedicated soldier refuses the comforts of his wife while his fellow fighters battle against the Ammonites. David then puts an alternate plan into action, which involves the deliberate death of Uriah on the battlefield. It works, and Uriah dies in the Ammonite war.

David almost gets away with murder. After all, who would question his connivance? The king of Israel holds the highest position in the land. Who will check his abuse of power? Only the deity could step in to limit David's authority and ensure that he ruled justly. Through Nathan, the prophet, God reveals to David that his actions did not go unnoticed and that he would suffer consequences for committing such a grievous injustice.

1. *Psalm 51*

[1] *To the leader: A Psalm of David.*
[2] *When the prophet Nathan came to him after he had gone into Bathsheba.*
[3] Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast kindness;
according to your abundant compassion
wipe out my transgressions.
[4] Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
[5] For my transgressions, I surely know,
and my sin is before me continually.
[6] Against you, you alone,
have I sinned,
and I have done what is evil in your eyes,
so that you are justified in your sentence,
and blameless when you judge.
[7] Surely in iniquity I was born;
in sin my mother conceived me.
[8] Surely you delight in integrity and truth;
therefore, teach me wisdom about that which is hidden.
[9] May you purge me with hyssop, that I may be clean,
may you wash me till I am whiter than snow.
[10] Make me hear exultation and joy;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
[11] Hide your face from my sins;
blot out all of my iniquities.
[12] Create for me a pure heart, O God;
make new within me a determined spirit.
[13] Do not cast me away from your presence,
or take away your holy spirit from me.
[14] Bring back to me the joy of your deliverance,
and sustain me with a willing spirit.

[15] I will teach transgressors your ways,
and the sinners will return to you.
[16] Deliver me from bloodshed,
O God, God of my deliverance,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your beneficence.
[17] O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
[18] For you do not delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering,
you would not be pleased.
[19] The sacrifices acceptable to God are a broken spirit,
and a remorseful, crushed heart;
O God, you will not despise these things.
[20] Make Zion prosper with your beneficence;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
[21] Then you will delight in the sacrifices offered in righteousness,
burnt and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

David had it all—riches, the kingdom, and a harem. He could have had any woman he desired, yet he took the wife of another man, Uriah, his faithful military officer. The title of Ps 51 refers to the Samuel narrative that reports the affair David had with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12), popularly known as the story of "David and Bathsheba." In this account, David observes Bathsheba, a woman noted for her "attractive appearance" (הָאִשָּׁה טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה מְאֹד), while he strolls upon his roof. Struck by her beauty, he had to have her. After David's messengers bring Bathsheba to him, he has sex with her and inadvertently impregnates her. Since she becomes pregnant while her husband battled the Ammonites, Uriah would have known that Bathsheba's child was not his. David then orders Uriah to come back from the battle lines in an attempt to convince him to sleep with his wife. If he has intercourse with her, Uriah would not suspect that the child Bathsheba conceived is a child of another man. David's scheme, however, fails. Uriah, a devoted warrior to David, refuses to have intercourse with his wife on the grounds that his fellow comrades lay encamped on the battlefield, risking their lives. He could not dishonor them by indulging in such pleasures while they served in the midst of war. Furthermore, fighting men on active duty had to refrain from sexual relations.[27] The loyalty and piety exhibited by Uriah foils David's plans. Since Uriah declines to lie with his wife, he, and probably

27. Deuteronomic law required ceremonial purity of the men and the battle camp because God was thought to accompany soldiers (Deut 23:9–14). Soldiers were required to practice sexual abstinence and David himself had abstained from sexual intercourse on his military missions (1 Sam 21:5–6).

everyone in the vicinity of his palace, would know that the child was David's. Frustrated by the allegiance of his soldier, David decides to have Uriah killed. David then sends a letter to his commander-in-chief, Joab, ordering him to put Uriah at the head of the fiercest opposition and then immediately withdraw the troops. To make matters worse, David sends the letter via Uriah himself. Yes, Uriah transports his own death warrant to his executioner Joab! David correctly assumes that Uriah, the faithful soldier, would not attempt to discover the contents of the letter for himself.[28] Joab receives the letter and orchestrates Uriah's death.

Not only does David commit adultery, but he also exacerbates the situation by trying to cover up his crime. When he fails to persuade Uriah to have sexual intercourse with his wife, David adds murder to the adultery. The murder seems unnecessary since people in David's court would have known that she conceived while her husband was at war. Moreover, David distances himself from his wrongdoing when he offers words of reassurance to Joab right after the general carried out the king's bloody orders:

> וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־הַמַּלְאָךְ כֹּה־תֹאמַר אֶל־יוֹאָב אַל־יֵרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה כִּי־כָזֹה
> וְכָזֶה תֹּאכַל הֶחָרֶב הַחֲזֵק מִלְחַמְתְּךָ אֶל־הָעִיר וְהָרְסָהּ וְחַזְּקֵהוּ
>
> David said to the messenger, "Thus you will say to Joab, 'Do not let *this thing seem evil in your eyes*, for arbitrarily does the sword devour; intensify your battle against the city and destroy it'. Give him my full support!" (2 Sam 11:25)

The sword, however, did not arbitrarily kill Uriah. David had him killed and the matter should have seemed evil in the eyes of Joab.

The ensuing narrative seems to have a happy ending: Joab has Uriah killed in battle, Joab receives a blessing from the king for it, and then David and Bathsheba marry with a baby on the way. Things, however, begin to change as the deity takes center stage. In 2 Sam 11:27e, David's own words seems to propel God into action:

> וַיֵּרַע הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה דָוִד בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה
>
> But the thing which David did *was evil in the eyes of the* LORD.

Fokkelman comments on the import of the deity's prominence at this point in the narrative:

28. In L. Torgny's imaginative retelling of this episode, he depicts Uriah as completely cognizant of David's scheme. Uriah had offered himself willingly as a sacrifice to King David, who castrated Uriah before sending him off to Joab with death warrant in hand. See Torgny's *Bathsheba* (trans. Tom Geddes; New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 35–42.

> The scene that now follows [speaking of 2 Sam 11:27e–12:15] introduces a new protagonist who is completely unique in II Sam 9–20… [I]t is God himself who here, and here alone, participates in the continuing action… David's behavior literally provokes heaven, and God himself intervenes.[29]

David's actions in this episode mark the "darkest blot on the portrait of Israel's most famous king,"[30] and the Bible itself notes this moment as one of its worst in the book of Kings:

> אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה דָוִד אֶת־הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וְלֹא־סָר מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּהוּ כֹּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו רַק בִּדְבַר אוּרִיָּה הַחִתִּי
>
> because David did that which was just in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn aside from that which he commanded him all the days of his life, *except in the matter of Uriah, the Hittite*. (1 Kgs 15:5)

By situating Ps 51 into this narrative, the author of the superscriptions has ensured that the magnitude of David's crime matched well with a prayer that demonstrates an earnest outpouring of contrition.

2. *You Are the Man*

Somehow, the gravity of what David had done escaped him, and the prophet Nathan has to jolt him out of his stupor. Nathan approaches David after he did his misdeeds and the title of Ps 51 directs the reader to this point in the Samuel narrative. The prophet uses a parable of a poor man who had only one ewe lamb to bring the heinous acts David committed to the forefront of his mind (2 Sam 12:1–6). In the parable, a poor man has one ewe lamb that he treats as a "daughter."[31] A wealthy man with many flocks comes along and steals the poor man's ewe because he did not want to slaughter one of his own sheep for a visitor traveling to his home. Disturbed by the injustice done to the poor man in the parable, the narrative reports that David's anger ignites against the man responsible for the theft of the lamb and he says to Nathan:

> 5b חַי־יְהוָה כִּי בֶן־מָוֶת הָאִישׁ הָעֹשֶׂה זֹאת 6 וְאֶת־הַכִּבְשָׂה יְשַׁלֵּם אַרְבַּעְתָּיִם[32] עֵקֶב אֲשֶׁר
> עָשָׂה אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְעַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־חָמָל

29. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*. Vol. 1, *King David: II Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 71.

30. Ibid., 60.

31. This is a play on the word "daughter." Bathsheba's name means "daughter of seven."

32. LXX[B] reads "sevenfold." The MT, LXX[L], Josephus, *Ant*. 7.150 read "fourfold."

> 5b "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die;[33] 6 he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and because he had no pity." (2 Sam 12:5b–6)

In this outburst, David determines that the man should die for the robbery of the lamb. According to biblical law, however, the requisite punishment for such thievery calls for fourfold restitution, not death (see Exod 22:1). Perhaps racked with guilt and burdened by the adultery and cover-up, David uses his power as judge to defend the poor man. In an attempt to restore some sort of balance in his psyche, he would have subjected the man in the parable to a punishment that does not fit the crime. David sinks deeper into the abyss of his guilt. As far as he understood, Nathan has presented him with an actual case.[34] He does not know that the tale serves to reveal to him the magnitude of his own crimes. Therefore, as king and judge of the land, David's verdict carried weight. David would have consigned the rich man of the story to death. Thus, the possibility of more unnecessary bloodshed looms large. Fokkelman vividly conveys the psychological dimension of David's anger and impetuous verdict:

> He is deeply disturbed by his having committed adultery and his having concealed it by a cynical murder. Since then, he has had to expend enormous amounts of energy to conceal these outrages and to assure himself of his own sound condition. What is happening here is that his energy comes out as anger at an injustice that has been committed… The force which enabled David to consummate the absolute act of murdering Uriah is the selfsame force which enables him to commit the absolute act of imposing the death penalty upon the rich man. One execution counterbalances the other. David attempts to secure his own equilibrium in this

33. McCarter translates בֶּן־מָוֶת as "fiend of hell." He conjectures that this expression is comparable to בֶּן־בְּלִיַּעַל, meaning "scoundrel, damnable fellow," and does not indicate a death threat. See McCarter, *Samuel*, 2:299.

34. See Alter, *David Story*, 257, where he posits that David's desire to compensate for the injustice done against Uriah clouded his ability to recognize the obvious artifice of Nathan's parable. According to Alter, "Given the patently literary character of Nathan's tale, which would have been transparent to anyone native to ancient Hebrew culture, it is a little puzzling that David should so precipitously take the tale as a report of fact requiring judicial action." For an alternative reading of Nathan's parable, see Uriel Simon, "The Poor Man's Ewe Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable," *Bib* 48 (1967): 207–42. Simon argues that Nathan was effective in bringing about the desired result of the parable. The person telling the parable, according to Simon, had to strike, skillfully, a delicate balance between concealing to the offender that the story pertained to him, while at the same time ensuring that the guilty party had passed judgment upon himself. See his discussion, especially pp. 220–32.

> magical-pathological way. The great satisfaction which he hopes to gain by the condemnation of another is meant to fill the emptiness brought about in David's soul by Uriah's liquidation.[35]

Nathan tells the parable to trap David. Once David condemns the rich man of the tale, he in turn condemns himself and Nathan subsequently unleashes his rebuke:

> 7וַיֹּאמֶר נָתָן אֶל־דָּוִד אַתָּה הָאִישׁ כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָנֹכִי מְשַׁחְתִּיךָ לְמֶלֶךְ
> עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָנֹכִי הִצַּלְתִּיךָ מִיַּד שָׁאוּל 8וָאֶתְּנָה לְךָ אֶת־בֵּית אֲדֹנֶיךָ וְאֶת־נְשֵׁי אֲדֹנֶיךָ
> בְּחֵיקֶךָ וָאֶתְּנָה לְךָ אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וִיהוּדָה וְאִם־מְעָט וְאֹסִפָה לְךָ כָּהֵנָּה וְכָהֵנָּה
> 9מַדּוּעַ בָּזִיתָ אֶת־דְּבַר יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינָי[36] אֵת אוּרִיָּה הַחִתִּי הִכִּיתָ בַחֶרֶב
> וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ לָקַחְתָּ לְךָ לְאִשָּׁה וְאֹתוֹ הָרַגְתָּ בְּחֶרֶב בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן

> [7] Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" Thus says the LORD, the God of *Israel*: "Indeed, I was the one who anointed you as king over *Israel* and I, myself, delivered you from the hand of Saul. [8] I gave you the house of your master and I set in your lap, the wives of your master. I gave you the house of *Israel* and Judah. Now if that were not enough, I would have given you much, much more. [9] Why did you despise the word of the LORD to do this evil in my sight? You struck Uriah the Hittite with the sword and you took his wife as your own wife, and you killed him by the sword of the Ammonites." (2 Sam 12:7–9)

As the divinely anointed king of Israel, David brought opprobrium to the nation's deity by his actions. When Nathan reproaches David, he mentions Israel three times in these verses (vv. 7, 8), and by doing this, the prophet raises the corporate dimension of King David's crimes. As the king of Israel and the anointed one of the LORD, David held a prominent place in the eyes of the people and the deity. He serves as an important vehicle through which Israel would receive her blessings. The role of king, however, did not exempt him from the laws by which *all* had to abide (see Deut 17:18–20). According to biblical law, the penalty of death awaits those who commit murder: "Whoever strikes a person mortally shall be put to death" (Exod 21:12; see also Lev 24:17). The offense of adultery also carries a death sentence: "If a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman. So you shall purge the evil from your midst" (Deut 22:22; see also Lev 18:20; 20:10). Thus, David

35. Fokkelman, *King David*, 77. For a less literal reading, see Simon, "Poor Man's Ewe Lamb," 30. He questions whether David's reaction in executing a judgment upon the rich man implies an actual death sentence. He considers the verdict as hyperbole, said to convey the enormity of the offense done to the poor man.

36. Reading MT *qere*.

should have died for his double offense of adultery and murder. Why does he not? According to Goulder, David's role as king has its benefits:

> How then can he get away with it? The answer must surely be: because he is the king. Only the king would have the position and influence to be above the law in this way; and we have an instance of the king's so being in that David was not executed for the murder of Uriah.[37]

David, however, does not avoid punishment entirely and does suffer consequences for his crimes.

3. *David's Punishment*

Did David undergo some kind of punitive ritual in order to escape death? According to Goulder, David was permitted to live only after enduring an expiation ritual that entailed flogging, drinking hyssop, and washing.[38] He extracts this interpretation from reading the psalm, especially vv. 9–10, into the narrative.

Although Goulder's suggestion that David subjected himself to painful expiatory rites must remain conjectural, the author of the superscriptions has made such a reading possible by inserting this psalm into the David–Bathsheba story. This psalm speaks of a person who pleads for a complete (הֶרֶב) cleansing by his God. He urges God to eradicate or blot out (מְחֵה) his wrongdoings by cleansing (כַּבֵּס) and purifying (טַהֵר) his iniquities. The words for cleanse and purify occur frequently in cultic contexts and, together, these words capture the sense of the profound purification desired by the petitioner. One commentator, Tanner, notes that the root for the word "cleanse," כבס, often refers to ridding clothes of impurities by a physical, external washing.[39] An internal cleansing is suggested by the word for "purify," טהר, given that the petitioner exhorts to be purged by ingesting a bitter drink. Moreover, as Tanner insightfully posits, the chiastic structure of the words כבס and טהר in vv. 4 and 9 reinforce the totality of the cleansing. She asserts that the "one praying is asking to be cleansed both outside and in…and inside and out…so that no trace of sin remains."[40] That David received divine restoration only after undergoing rites of expiation seems dubious, but the contents of the psalm do encourage such an interpretation.

37. Michael D. Goulder, *The Prayers of David* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 60.
38. See ibid., 56–57.
39. Beth Tanner, "Preaching the Penitential Psalms," *Word and World* 27 (2007): 89. See Exod 19:10; Lev 6:20; 13:6.
40. Ibid.

Another explanation for why David did not receive capital punishment lies in the fact that the LORD subjects his child to judgment.[41] The LORD spared David from death and instead transferred (הֶעֱבִיר) the punishment to David's unborn child.[42]

When his child becomes ill, David tries to sway the deity to reverse the punishment inflicted upon his child:

> 15וַיֵּלֶךְ נָתָן אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיִּגֹּף יְהוָה אֶת־הַיָּלֶד אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה אֵשֶׁת־אוּרִיָּה לְדָוִד וַיֵּאָנַשׁ
> 16וַיְבַקֵּשׁ דָּוִד אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים בְּעַד הַנָּעַר וַיָּצָם דָּוִד צוֹם וּבָא וְלָן וְשָׁכַב אָרְצָה 17וַיָּקֻמוּ
> זִקְנֵי בֵיתוֹ עָלָיו לַהֲקִימוֹ מִן־הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא אָבָה וְלֹא־בָרָא אִתָּם לָחֶם
>
> [15] Nathan went to his house and the LORD afflicted the boy, whom the wife of Uriah bore to David so that he became incurably ill. [16] David sought God on behalf of the boy; he fasted and spent the night lying on the ground. [17] The elders of his house stood over him in order to lift him from the ground, but he would not budge, nor would he eat food with them. (2 Sam 12:15–17)

Once the deity enacts the sentence, he carries it out and the child dies. Right after his son's death, David stops all rites of mourning. He fails to achieve the desired result and goes back to business as usual. His quick resumption of daily activities befuddles David's servants and they question his behavior:

> וַיֹּאמְרוּ עֲבָדָיו אֵלָיו מָה־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָה בְּעוֹד43 הַיֶּלֶד חַי צַמְתָּ וַתֵּבְךְּ וְכַאֲשֶׁר
> מֵת הַיֶּלֶד קַמְתָּ וַתֹּאכַל לָחֶם
>
> His servants said to him, "What is going on here? While the boy was still alive, you fasted and wept for the boy, but now that the boy is dead you have gotten up and eaten food." (2 Sam 12:21)

In David's response to them, he recognizes the irreversibility of his son's death:

> 22וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעוֹד הַיֶּלֶד חַי צַמְתִּי וָאֶבְכֶּה כִּי אָמַרְתִּי מִי יוֹדֵעַ וְחַנַּנִי44 יְהוָה וְחַי הַיָּלֶד
> 23וְעַתָּה מֵת לָמָּה זֶּה אֲנִי צָם הַאוּכַל לַהֲשִׁיבוֹ עוֹד אֲנִי הֹלֵךְ אֵלָיו וְהוּא לֹא־יָשׁוּב אֵלָי

41. James Ackerman argues that four of David's sons are subject to divine punishment for his crimes: the newborn child, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. This number corresponds to the fourfold punishment David meted out to the rich man in the parable. See Ackerman's "Knowing Good and Evil: A Literary Analysis of the Court History in 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2," *JBL* (1990): 49–51.

42. See McCarter, *Samuel*, 2:301; Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Lund: Gleerup, 1976), 30; Ackerman, "Knowing Good and Evil," 50.

43. Reading with LXX^{L}: ἔτι γὰρ τοῦ παιδίου ζῶντος. See Wellhausen, *Samuelis*, 185; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 298. The MT reads בַּעֲבוּר הַיֶּלֶד.

44. Reading with the MT *qere*. LXX^{BL} have εἰ ἐλεήσει με = אם יחנני "whether (Yahweh) will show mercy."

> 22 He [David] said, "When the boy was alive, I fasted and I wept, for I thought, 'Who knows, the LORD may show me mercy and let the boy live'. But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? 23 Am I able to bring him back again: I will go to him, but he will not return to me." (2 Sam 12:22–23)

He has lost his son and no postures of penance, no matter how sincere, will bring him back. This poignant passage reveals David's deep sense of loss after receiving punishment.

4. *Uriah*

While David's response to the death of his son casts him in a sympathetic light, he does not acknowledge his guilt in bringing about his son's death. Nowhere in this episode does David ask forgiveness for the wrongful death of Uriah. David as the petitioner of Ps 51, however, would have specifically asked that God deliver him from bloodshed, and this entreaty would befit his involvement in the death of Uriah.

In the scene of David mourning for his son in the Samuel narrative, David and his dying son become the focal point. The wrong he does to Uriah seems to fade into the background. David engages in ritual acts of mourning and hopes that the deity would show him mercy (חנן) because he does not want his child to die. He does not necessarily regret having Uriah killed, however. When David as the petitioner in Ps 51 pleads for the deity to show him mercy (חנן), his entreaty is followed by a sincere recognition of guilt: "For my transgressions, I surely know, and my sin is before me continually" (v. 5). Uriah fades back into the story as the psalmist admits his injustice and takes responsibility for his actions (vv. 5–8). Psalm 51 thus improves on the unsympathetic stance David exhibits toward Uriah, even in a scene where David appears particularly devout.

Uriah's role in the Samuel narrative takes on a different spin in several rabbinic interpretations. In order to improve upon David's image, rabbinic writers alter the meaning of Nathan's words of reprobation to David. Uriah, himself, is responsible for his death because he disobeys a royal command to go home to his wife. The rabbis extract this interpretation from the wording of Nathan's rebuke of David in 2 Sam 12:9:

> *And thou has slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon:*[45] just as thou art not [to be] punished for the sword of the Ammonites, so art thou not [to be] punished for [the death] of Uriah the Hittite. What is the

45. 2 Sam 12:9.

> reason? He was rebellious against royal authority, saying to him, *and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open field.* (*b. Sanh.* 107a)

It appears that the royal status of David's command trumps Uriah's loyalty to his men and adherence to laws of sexual abstinence during battle. In this text (see also *b. Qidd.* 43a), the rabbis transfer the blame of Uriah's death away from David; instead, Uriah is depicted as rebelling against the royal leader and as violating the allegiance which he owed to the king.

In another midrash on 2 Sam 12:9, the rabbis clear David's name by arguing that he did not *actually* commit a crime against Uriah, but only had the *intention* of harming him:

> *Wherefore hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do that which is evil in his sight?*[46] He wished to do [evil], but did not. Rab observed: Rabbi, who is descended from David, seeks to defend him, and expounds [the verse] in David's favour. [Thus:] The "*evil*" [mentioned] here is unlike every other "*evil*" [mentioned] elsewhere in the Torah. For of every other *evil* [mentioned] in the Torah it is written, "*and he did*," whereas here it is written, "*to do*": [this means] that *he desired to do, but he did not*.[47]

The defense for David continues, at Uriah's expense, in one interpretation where the rabbis argue that David did not commit adultery with Bathsheba. Uriah as a solider on active duty divorced his wife when he had gone to battle. David, therefore, had marriage rights in Bathsheba. This claim is based on a intricate interpretation of 1 Sam 17:18:

> Every one who went out in wars of the house of David wrote a bill of divorcement for his wife, for it is said, *and bring these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge* (עֲרֻבָתָם) [ʿarubatham]. What is meant by *ʿarubatham*?… The things which pledge (ערב) a man and woman [to one another].[48]

The marriage of the man who had gone out into the battlefield was contingent upon his return. If the man did not return, then his "divorce" became valid, starting from the moment he set out for battle. That is, the divorce was conditional and became valid retroactively in the event of the husband's death.[49] Uriah had to return alive from battle in order not

46. 2 Sam 12:9.
47. *b. Šabb.* 56a (ed. Epstein here and throughout). Emphasis added.
48. *b. Šabb.* 56a. Hebrew script added in parentheses for clarification of the wordplay on ערב, "to pledge."
49. *b. Šabb.* 56a (n. 5).

to be divorced from Bathsheba. When David had an affair with Bathsheba, according to this claim, she technically was not married to Uriah, since he had died in battle. Even though the affair occurred before Uriah had died in battle, his death dissolved his marriage from the day he had left for the battlefield.

Both the rabbinic writers and the author of the title to Ps 51 improve upon the Samuel narrative's depiction of David. With regard to Uriah, they achieve this end through different interpretations of his role in the story. Rabbinic exegetes tend to view Uriah as culpable in his downfall. They argue that he was guilty of treason, he relinquished his rights as husband by going to battle and not returning alive, and that David did not *actually* commit a crime against him. The author of the title to Ps 51, on the other hand, sees Uriah as a victim of murder (v. 16). By holding David accountable, the author of the superscriptions has made him a quintessential model for confession and contrition.

5. *Paragon of Penitence*

Rabbinic writers argue that God had preordained David to commit adultery for a didactic purpose: to teach others how to repent (*b. ʿAbod. Zar.* 4b–5a). The author of the superscriptions also, with Ps 51, teaches just how to say "I'm sorry," and really mean it. David as the petitioner of Ps 51 becomes an exemplar of repentance.

The opening for David's elevation as a model of repentance comes via a gap left in the Samuel narrative. After Nathan confronts the king with his crimes, David merely declares, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam 12:13). This brief remark does not suffice as an appropriate response for David's malicious acts, and Ps 51 offers a gesture of contrition that the narrative lacks.

By attaching the title to the psalm, the author has made David the contrite petitioner of Ps 51, appealing to the benevolence of the deity. He serves as the psalmist earnestly pleading for the deity to forgive and purge him from his wrongdoing (vv. 3–4). Fully aware of the magnitude of his misdeeds, David as the supplicant knows that the deity is justified in imposing punishment (v. 5). Guilt stands as a barrier between him and the deity and he declares that the sin committed was done against God alone, regardless of which other parties were involved (v. 6a). Unlike David in the narrative, who was ready to exact an unfair verdict upon the rich man of Nathan's parable, he as the petitioner acknowledges the point of contrast between him and the deity: God is fair when he passes judgment (v. 6b). The psalmist feels the profundity of his faults and proclaims that his mother conceived him in sin (v. 7). Not all is lost,

however, for the tone of the ensuing verses seems hopeful. That which pleases the deity can be made known and he implores the deity to grant him this knowledge (v. 8). Restoration can be achieved for the psalmist if the deity can be moved to forgiveness (vv. 10–11). The psalmist urges the deity not to take away his presence (vv. 12–14) and vows that he will show others the proper path once he is restored (v. 15).

Having David serve as a model of repentance evinces the magnitude of divine mercy. As Tanner asserts, "[t]he superscription tells all who read this psalm that there is no sin, no matter how vile, that cannot be blotted out by God's steadfast love and mercy (Ps 51:1)."[50] Psalm 51 is a confession of guilt incomparable to any other in the Hebrew Bible. The author of the superscriptions has put the words of this psalm into the mouth of David thereby rectifying the troubling image of him presented in the Samuel narrative.

* * *

C. David and Michal

(Read 1 Samuel 19:1–18)

One day, Saul's rage gets the best of him. While David was playing music in Saul's court, Saul attempts to kill David by impaling him to the wall with his spear. The projectile misses its target as David dashes out of harm's way. Saul, however, follows up on his death wish and orders David's execution. Saul's own daughter, Michal, who is also David's wife, devises a getaway plan for David to escape from her father. The plan works and David flees from Saul's court safely. Reading Ps 59 into the narrative, however, reveals that there is more to the story.

1. *Psalm 59*

[1] *To the leader: Do not destroy. Of David. A miktam, when Saul ordered that his house be guarded in order to execute him.*
[2] Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;
protect me from those rising against me.
[3] Deliver me from those doing evil,
save me from bloodthirsty men.
[4] Look, they lie in wait for my life,
powerful ones have stirred up strife against me
for no transgression or sin of mine, O Lord,

50. Tanner, "Preaching the Penitential Psalms," 89.

[5] for no offense of mine do they run
to establish themselves against me.
Awake, meet me in my distress, and see!
[6] You, O LORD God of hosts,
God of Israel,
be incited to punish all the nations,
do not show mercy to any treacherous evildoer. *Selah*.
[7] They return in the evening growling like a dog,
as they roam the city.
[8] See how they attack with their mouths,
swords are in their lips;
for (they think), "Who can hear us?"
[9] But you, "O LORD will laugh at them,
You will mock all nations.
[10] O my strength,[51] I will watch for you;
for (you) O God are my haven.
[11] My munificent God will come to meet me,
God will enable me to gloat over those lying in wait for me.
[12] Do not execute them, lest my people forget;
with your strength make them wander,
bring them down, O LORD, our shield.
[13] For the sin of their mouths, the words on their lips,
let them be conquered by their pride;
For their imprecations and the lies they tell,
[14] consume them in wrath;
consume them until they exist no more;
that it will be known till the ends of the earth,
that God rules over Jacob.
[15] They return in the evening growling like a dog,
as they roam the city.
[16] They roam for food,
and linger all night if they are not sated.
[17] But I will sing of your strength,
and in the morning, I will rejoice for your kindness;
for you have become my haven,
a refuge in my day of distress.
[18] O my strength, to you I will sing praises;
for God is my haven, my munificent God.

A telling image of Ps 59 is the one in which the dogs prowl throughout the city at night (vv. 7–8, 15–16). The psalmist imagines his foes as these wild dogs that lurk about the streets in search of food until their appetites are sated (vv. 7, 15–16). This comparison of his enemies to wild dogs illustrates the baseness of the psalmist's attackers; they pursue him like hungry animals foaming at the mouth. They are "bloodthirsty" and

51. Lit. "his strength."

"mighty" adversaries who pose problems too great for him to resolve alone. Unless God intervenes, the psalm suggests that the petitioner will fall victim to them (v. 5). The psalmist sees himself as innocent and appeals to "The LORD of hosts" (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) for help. He urges the deity to protect him from those who falsely accuse him and calls upon him to sit in judgment over them (v. 6).

The petitioner shows confidence that his prayers will be answered and envisions the deity laughing at his enemies and bringing about their defeat (vv. 9–11). Interestingly, the psalmist specifically asks that the deity not kill his antagonists. Instead, he pleads for God to scatter them as an enduring reminder of divine intervention on behalf of his people (v. 12). At the end of the psalm, the supplicant trusts that the deity will rescue him and he offers thanks to God for providing him with protection.

The title of Ps 59 refers to 1 Sam 19:10–17, the episode in which Saul commands his men to guard David's house so that Saul could kill him the next day. While it is not apparent why Saul waits until morning (בַּבֹּקֶר) for David's execution, the delay provides David with the opportunity for escape. Psalm 59 serves several functions when read along with the narrative. First, the psalm furnishes a perspective of the story that is absent from the one reported in the books of Samuel, namely, the view from the external surroundings of David's house. The psalm's imagery of enemies lurking in the streets like ravenous animals describes the danger that looms right outside of David's abode. Second, the psalm emphasizes that the deity was responsible for his rescue that night, while the narrative underlines the initiative David's wife took in securing his safety from Saul. Third, in the psalm, the supplicant makes an appeal for his innocence (vv. 4–5), something David does not do when he finds out about the order of execution Saul decreed. Rather, David is a passive recipient of his wife's plan of action, and makes no plea of innocence in the story.

2. *Inside and Outside of the Home*

In the narrative of 1 Sam 19:11–17, the camera, so to speak, focuses on the inside of David's house and captures the scene between David and his wife, Michal. With the camera lens directed into the home, Michal's role in arranging her husband's getaway is highlighted. Psalm 59, on the other hand, gives a panoramic view of the same scene. With this wide-angled lens, the psalm captures the picture of peril brewing outside. By emphasizing the threat that lies in wait for the petitioner outside, the

psalm articulates David's need for divine succor. Indeed, this scene in the Samuel narrative ends with David leaving his home, but does not report what happens afterward. If the scenario of what ensues is anything like the description in the psalm—enemies as vicious as starving animals in relentless pursuit of prey—then only by the grace of God did David escape.

In the episode of 1 Sam 19:11–17, the narrative indicates that David escapes from Saul because of the quick thinking of his wife, Michal. Immediately after Saul sends word to his messengers that David will be executed, the narrative states:

> וַתַּגֵּד לְדָוִד מִיכַל אִשְׁתּוֹ לֵאמֹר אִם־אֵינְךָ מְמַלֵּט אֶת־נַפְשְׁךָ הַלַּיְלָה מָחָר אַתָּה מוּמָת
>
> Now, *Michal, his wife, told* David thus: "If you do not escape tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." (1 Sam 19:11b)

Michal takes center stage, as David's *wife*, in ensuring his rescue. That the narrative explicitly identifies Michal in relation to David intimates her loyalty to her husband over loyalty to her father.[52] When she learns that her father, Saul, has ordered David's death, she initiates and enacts a plan to secure David's release from his court:

> וַתֹּרֶד מִיכַל אֶת־דָּוִד בְּעַד הַחַלּוֹן וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּבְרַח וַיִּמָּלֵט
>
> Michal let David down through the window, and then he took off and escaped. (1 Sam 19:12)

David did not utter a single word and appears simply to follow the details orchestrated by his wife.[53] The story does not continue with what happens to David once he has been let out of the window. Rather, the story resumes with Michal and her attempts to facilitate David's escape. In order to provide David a lead ahead of Saul and his henchmen, she forms a dummy made out of *teraphim* and goat's hair (1 Sam 19:13). When Saul's messengers confront her, Michal does not surrender David. Instead, she directs them to the bed, in which she has prepared, unbeknown to them, a dummy made to look like a body underneath the covers. She tells them that the figure in bed is David, who lies there sick. (1 Sam 19:14).

52. Her allegiance to David may have something to do with her being a daughter in a patrilineal society. That is, women were born into one family, but were married into another. Her father's line would have been passed down via her brother, Jonathan. It seems that her best bet would be to remain loyal to the household into which she is married.

53. It could be the case that the sense of urgency demanded a quick getaway and that David did not have time for words. See Alter, *David Story*, 120.

Michal lies to Saul's messengers, for David was not lying sick underneath the covers; she just smuggled him out of the window. Her ruse works only for a short time because Saul is determined to capture David as soon as possible. He does not want to delay David's execution and orders his men to seize David, bed and all:

> וַיִּשְׁלַח שָׁאוּל אֶת־הַמַּלְאָכִים לִרְאוֹת אֶת־דָּוִד לֵאמֹר הַעֲלוּ אֹתוֹ בַמִּטָּה אֵלַי לַהֲמִתוֹ
>
> Saul sent messengers to see David and said: "Bring him to me in the bed that he may be killed!" (1 Sam 19:15)

When Saul learns of Michal's ruse, she justifies her actions by stating that David had threatened her:

> וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל־מִיכַל לָמָּה כָּכָה רִמִּיתִנִי וַתְּשַׁלְּחִי אֶת־אֹיְבִי וַיִּמָּלֵט וַתֹּאמֶר מִיכַל אֶל־שָׁאוּל הוּא־אָמַר אֵלַי שַׁלְּחִנִי לָמָּה אֲמִיתֶךָּ
>
> Saul said to Michal, "Why did you deceive me and send off my enemy so that he could escape?" And Michal said to Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go, why should I kill you?'" (1 Sam 19:17)

Nowhere in this episode does the narrator specify that David threatened Michal for trying to stop him from fleeing that night. On the contrary, given the lie she tells about David being ill, one could assume that she fabricates this remark as well.

Perhaps this scene in which David's escape is dependent upon the use of questionable idols and untruths told on his behalf troubled the author of the superscriptions. Neither he, nor his wife, calls out to the deity for help. Rather, they both rely upon their own tactics to get out of the immediate danger. In this story, the narrator does not explicitly attribute David's escape from Saul that night to divine intervention.

On the other hand, the panoramic view of the psalm alters the basis of David's escape: instead of his sole reliance on human aid (Michal), he turns to God for deliverance and protection.[54] The story of 1 Sam 19:11–17 does not relate what happens to David once Michal let him down through the window, and Ps 59 supplements the narrative by providing a scene of what goes on outside that night. David as the petitioner in the psalm knows that he is surrounded and that his enemies will not stop until they find him (vv. 15–16).

3. *David Pleads His Case*

In addition to expanding on the nighttime scene, Ps 59 also suggests that David offers a case against the position of Saul to have him killed. The

54. So also Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 158.

psalm presents the supplicant proclaiming his innocence: "for no offense of mine do they run and establish themselves against me. Awake, meet me in my distress and see!" (v. 5). David as the speaker of these words adds the notion that he put forward his own defense before God, a feature lacking in this episode. In fact, in the first section of 1 Sam 19, when David learns that Saul wants to kill him, he seems to adhere to the plan of Saul's son Jonathan without question. The beginning of 1 Sam 19 reports that Saul makes known to all of his servants that he wants to kill David (1 Sam 19:1). Because of his ardent affection toward David, Jonathan notifies David of the death warrant and comes up with a plan for him to avoid the death sentence:

> וַיַּגֵּד יְהוֹנָתָן לְדָוִד לֵאמֹר מְבַקֵּשׁ שָׁאוּל אָבִי לַהֲמִיתֶךָ וְעַתָּה הִשָּׁמֶר־נָא בַבֹּקֶר וְיָשַׁבְתָּ בַסֵּתֶר וְנַחְבֵּאתָ
>
> Jonathan told David: "Saul, my father, seeks to kill you, so now be careful in the morning and remain in the secret place and hide yourself." (1 Sam 19:2)

In the later scene with Michal (1 Sam 19:11–17), however, David seems unaware of Saul's intentions to kill him. Even after finding out that Saul decreed his execution, he makes no gesture to defend himself and does not request to go before the king to plead his case.[55] In the psalm, the supplicant makes a statement of defense with the phrase לֹא־חַטָּאתִי, "for no sin of mine" (v. 4). A similar phrase, לוֹא חָטָא, is used when Jonathan argues to his father Saul on behalf of David:

> [4]וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוֹנָתָן בְּדָוִד טוֹב אֶל־שָׁאוּל אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַל־יֶחֱטָא הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּעַבְדּוֹ בְּדָוִד כִּי לוֹא חָטָא לָךְ וְכִי מַעֲשָׂיו טוֹב־לְךָ מְאֹד [5]וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ בְכַפּוֹ וַיַּךְ אֶת־הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה תְּשׁוּעָה גְדוֹלָה לְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל רָאִיתָ וַתִּשְׂמָח וְלָמָּה תֶחֱטָא בְּדָם נָקִי לְהָמִית אֶת־דָּוִד חִנָּם
>
> [4] Jonathan spoke favorably to Saul, his father, about David and he said to him: "Let not the king sin against his servant, David, for *he has not sinned* against you, and his deeds have been very honorable toward you. [5] He took his life in his hands and struck down the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great deliverance for all Israel. You saw this and you rejoiced, so why should you endanger innocent blood to execute David without cause?" (1 Sam 19:4–5)

The words of his son seem to move Saul and he decides that he would not have David killed (1 Sam 19:6). Jonathan brings David back into Saul's service at his court. Jonathan's efforts, however, do not have a

55. His son, Absalom, went through extraordinary measures to go before his father, King David. See 2 Sam 14:28–33.

lasting effect, and Saul attempts to kill David again (1 Sam 19:8–10). That David dodges the thrust of Saul's spear and escapes, precipitates Saul's order to have his men bring David from his house for execution. When David escapes into the night the order is put in effect; he leaves Saul's court for good, without saying a word.

David's reticence in 1 Sam 19:11–17 may have been a point of concern for the author of the superscriptions. Psalm 59 gives David a voice in the narrative, and, through lexical connections, points to a biblical hero offering a speech of defense before his father-in-law. In Ps 59, the noun חטאת occurs with its stock pair word, פשע. The words used in the phrase, "not for my transgression, not for my sin," occur like this in another biblical account, Gen 31. Here, the patriarch Jacob pleads his innocence before his father-in-law, Laban, in order to put an end to Laban's pursuit:

> [36]וַיִּחַר לְיַעֲקֹב וַיְרֶב בְּלָבָן וַיַּעַן יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר לְלָבָן מַה־פִּשְׁעִי מַה חַטָּאתִי כִּי דָלַקְתָּ
> אַחֲרָי [37]כִּי־מִשַּׁשְׁתָּ אֶת־כָּל־כֵּלַי מַה־מָּצָאתָ מִכֹּל כְּלֵי־בֵיתֶךָ שִׂים כֹּה נֶגֶד אַחַי וְאַחֶיךָ
> וְיוֹכִיחוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵינוּ

> [36] Jacob became angry and he pleaded with Laban. Jacob answered and said to Laban, "What is *my transgression*, what is *my sin* that you hotly pursue me? [37] You have searched through all of my belongings; what have you found out of my things that is from your household? Present it before my kin and your kin that they may judge between the two of us." (Gen 31:36–37)

The author of the superscriptions probably did not miss this connection with the patriarch Jacob. Jacob resolves the dispute with Laban by going directly to his father-in-law and challenging his claims publicly. He then gives a lengthy speech clearing himself of any wrongdoing and asserts that God has sided with him (Gen 31:42). In contrast, David makes no attempt while in Saul's court to confront his attacker, nor does he appeal to the favor God has shown him in the past to get out of the volatile situation. When David does offer words to absolve himself of any offense later in the narrative, it does not halt Saul's quest for his life.[56] In fact, David has to join the army of the Philistines, the archenemy of the Israelites, in order to stymie Saul's incessant pursuit:

> [1]וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־לִבּוֹ עַתָּה אֶסָּפֶה יוֹם־אֶחָד בְּיַד־שָׁאוּל אֵין־לִי טוֹב כִּי אִם[57] אִמָּלֵט
> אֶל־אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים וְנוֹאַשׁ מִמֶּנִּי שָׁאוּל לְבַקְשֵׁנִי עוֹד בְּכָל־גְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִמְלַטְתִּי מִיָּדוֹ
> [2]וַיָּקָם דָּוִד וַיַּעֲבֹר הוּא וְשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת[58] אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ אֶל־אָכִישׁ בֶּן־מָעוֹךְ מֶלֶךְ גַּת

56. See 1 Sam 24:9–16; 26:14–20.

57. Reading כי אם אמלט with LXX^{BL}: ἐὰν μὴ (δια)σωθῶ. See McCarter, *Samuel*, 1:412; Wellhausen, *Samuelis*, 138.

> [1] David said in his heart, "Now, I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to be sure that I will get away to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will desist from continuously seeking after me throughout all the territory of Israel and I will be freed from his hand." [2] So David arose and crossed over, he and six hundred men who were with him, to Achish, son of Maoch, King of Gath. (1 Sam 27:1–2)

David is not only given a voice in the narrative with the addition of the psalm, but he is also imagined as speaking words similar to those of a famous patriarch of Israel's past. The appearance of the name Jacob in this psalm (v. 13) strengthens this connection. Furthermore, the connections to the Jacob story do not end with links between Jacob and David. Indeed, there are similarities also between their wives, Rachel and Michal.

4. *Michal and Rachel*

The narratives of Gen 31 and 1 Sam 19 feature stories in which wives side with their husbands against their fathers. In both accounts, the women use *teraphim* as a means of deceiving their fathers.[59] Rachel steals Laban's *teraphim* when she flees from him with her husband, Jacob, and hides them under the camel saddle when he comes to search her tent (Gen 31:34). She sits upon the hidden *teraphim* and claims to her father, Laban, that she cannot get up because she is menstruating. Alter discusses further similarities between the wives of David and Jacob in these episodes:

> Like Rachel, who pleads her period and does not get up from the cushions under which the *teraphim* are hidden, Michal invokes "illness" (verse 14) to put off the searchers. Both stories feature a daughter loyal to her husband and rebelling against her hostile father. Michal uses goat's hair at the head of the bed, [and] goats are also prominent in Jacob story. Finally, the cloth or garment (*beged*) used to cover the dummy recalls the repeated association of garments with deception in the Jacob story.[60]

Neither Rachel's nor Michal's tricks alleviate the pursuit of their antagonistic fathers. The effective speech of Jacob in which he acknowledges

58. Reading with the MT and LXX^{L}. LXX^{B}, OL, and probably 4QSam^{a} have "four hundred."

59. Given that the idol Michal uses simulates David in bed, it appears to be the size of an adult male. On the other hand, Rachel's *teraphim* seem smaller since she is able to hide them in the cushions of a camel saddle and sit upon them.

60. Alter, *David Story*, 120.

the deity's role in protecting him had turned the matter with his father-in-law around. Jacob makes a covenant before God and the matter is resolved (Gen 31:36–54). By contrast, David says nothing in his defense, relies on Michal's plan for his rescue, and the matter is not resolved. Saul continues his pursuit of David.

5. *Rabbinic Interpretations*

Michal's quick thinking prevents David from being killed the night Saul ordered his execution, and rabbinic literature looks favorably upon her role in helping David escape:

> …*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a great good*. Such was Michal, Saul's daughter, who loved her husband David more than she loved her father, for she saved David from her father. When? When Saul sent men to watch David's house.[61]

The Samuel narrative does not indicate how Michal "let David down the window" (1 Sam 19:12). One can imagine that she helped him down via some kind of cord or rope, but some rabbis add suspense to this detail by noting that David got away only because of Michal's assistance:

> How did David escape?… The Rabbis maintained: David had only one gate, and they [Saul's men] stood by the gate and watched that he not escape. What did Michal do? With a rope she lowered David from a window, and so he escaped.[62]

In the text below, Michal is given a new name because of the loyalty she demonstrates to David in defiance to her father:

> And why was the name Eglah, "heifer," given to Michal? Because like a heifer that will not take the yoke upon her neck, so Michal did not take the yoke from her father, but bucked against it.[63]

Two of Saul's children, Jonathan and Michal, were fond of David and openly defy their father in support of David. When they aid David, the rabbis note that, "Michal saved David from danger inside the house, and Jonathan from danger outside the house."[64] The addition of Ps 59 to the narrative, however, would minimize the role of either of Saul's children, whether inside or outside the home. Psalm 59, instead, underlines the import of divine deliverance (vv. 2–3, 6, 9–11, 14, 17–18).

61. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:511.
62. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:511.
63. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:512. Michal is identified with Eglah, David's wife mentioned in 2 Sam 3:5. See *EncJud* 11:1494.
64. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:509.

6. *David's Divine Deliverance*

The insertion of the psalm into the narrative of 1 Sam 19 supplies David's thoughts, which are not articulated in the story. David as the petitioner in the psalm expresses his anguish over finding out that Saul officially ordered his death (Ps 59:4) and that he does not solely rely on human aid. The psalm indicates that God provides David with needed protection (vv. 11–12, 17–18) and informs the reader that David anticipated deliverance. Thus, the psalm affirms that the death sentence pronounced against David (1 Sam 19:11) would not be realized. Saul intended to have David killed "in the morning," and Ps 59 provides an imaginative scene of that night outside, once David had gone down the window. It directs attention away from the scene of Michal and Saul inside the home to David's making his escape. With the psalm the reader can imagine David skirting Saul's agents as they scoured the city in search of him. David would be seen as an alert fugitive, in a desperate situation. The psalm would add David's saying a prayer and having confidence that the execution which Saul ordered to be carried out against him would be replaced by David's singing songs of thanksgiving to his God for deliverance (Ps 59:17, 18).

Chapter 3

DAVID AND SAUL

A. DAVID, SAUL AND THE ZIPHITES

(Read 1 Samuel 23–25; 2 Samuel 15–16)

David served as a member of Saul's court as a musician and warrior. His success angered Saul and Saul's envious rage came to a head when the women of Israel sang of David's superior accomplishments: "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam 18:7). Ever since this tribute, Saul has directed his attention to killing David. The Ziphites voluntarily provide Saul with necessary intelligence for capturing his prized fugitive. Saul came close, but David miraculously escaped.

1. *Psalm 54*

[1] *To the leader: with stringed instruments. A maskil of David.*
[2] *When the Ziphites came and told Saul, "David is hiding among us."*
[3] O God, deliver me by your name,
and by your might vindicate me.
[4] O God, hear my prayer,
listen to the words of my mouth.
[5] For foreigners have stood up against me,
ruthless ones seek my life;
they do not set God before them. *Selah*.
[6] Indeed, God is my help,
the LORD is the One who sustains my life.
[7] He will repay the evil to those lying in wait for me;
in your truth, annihilate them.
[8] I will sacrifice to you willingly,
I will give thanks to your name, O LORD,
for it is good.
[9] For he has delivered me from every distress;
and has let me gaze in triumph over my enemies.

This psalm speaks of a petitioner imploring the deity for deliverance from ruthless foreign enemies. The supplicant calls upon God's name and appeals to his authority as divine judge in vindicating him (v. 3; cf. Deut 32:36). After he pleads for a hearing (vv. 4–5), he anticipates rescue and divine support in his struggle against his opponents (vv. 6–7). He hopes for his day of reckoning in which the deity, acting on his behalf, would inflict the selfsame destruction on his adversaries that they had intended for him.

Psalm 54 is situated in the stories of Saul's encounter with the Ziphites in 1 Sam 23:19–24:1 and 1 Sam 26. Although the Samuel narrative contains two accounts of the Ziphites' revealing David's hideout to Saul, the person inserting the title to Ps 54 thought that the story needed even further elaboration. Both accounts share the same scheme: the Ziphites informed Saul of David's location, Saul went after David based upon this information, and David did not get caught.[1] Neither account, however, suggests why some Ziphites, on their own accord, divulged the location of David to his archrival Saul. Nor do the Samuel narratives suggest that they suffered any retribution for their role in Saul's near capture of David. In the account narrated in 1 Sam 23:19–29, their report instigated an attack by Saul and his troops that had nearly cost David his life. Regardless of the Ziphites' motive for betraying David, whether it derived from a desire for an award or out of fear that Saul would inflict a similar punishment on them as he had on the priests of Nob (1 Sam 22:18–19),[2] their eagerness to reveal his hideouts to Saul could have had fatal consequences for David and his men. With one stroke of the quill, the author of the superscriptions has proffered a reason for the Ziphites' opposition to David, "they did not have God before them" (v. 3). And even if David had failed to take revenge upon the Ziphites for their offense against him, the author of the superscriptions suggests to the reader of the psalm that the deity *did* judge them and *did* mete out the appropriate punishment for their actions (vv. 3, 7).

2. *Saul's Advantage*

The part of psalm title that mentions the Ziphite informants appears to have been copied straight out of the Samuel narrative, for the exact

1. McCarter posits that 1 Sam 23:19–24:1 goes with the following narrative in 1 Sam 24:2–23. When these two texts are arranged together, they form another account of how David spared Saul's life shaped by the version in 1 Sam 26:1–25. See McCarter, *Samuel*, 1:379.

2. Alter, *David Story*, 138.

phrase occurs in the title and in the Saul–Ziphites narrative: הֲלוֹא דָוִד מִסְתַּתֵּר עִמָּנוּ (Ps 54:2b; 1 Sam 23:19b). In the narrative sequence of this story, the verse containing this phrase occurs directly after the episode of Jonathan and David's encounter in the wilderness. When Jonathan meets up with David, he assures David that Saul will not find him and that his future entails his ruling over Israel. In order to confirm his loyalty to David, Jonathan makes a covenant with him.[3] The narrative following this assurance speaks of David in trouble again:

> וַיַּעֲלוּ זִפִּים אֶל־שָׁאוּל הַגִּבְעָתָה לֵאמֹר[4] דָּוִד מִסְתַּתֵּר עִמָּנוּ בַּמְּצָדוֹת בַּחֹרְשָׁה בְּגִבְעַת הַחֲכִילָה אֲשֶׁר מִימִין הַיְשִׁימוֹן

> Some Ziphites *went up* to Saul at Gibeah and said: "David is hiding among us in the strongholds, in the forest, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of the wasteland." (1 Sam 23:19)

Without any evident prompting, the narrative states that some Ziphites "went up" to see Saul for the purpose of disclosing David's hiding places. Up to this point in the Saul–David narrative, Saul has had difficulty acquiring information on David.[5] On several occasions, his own son betrays him in favor of David, and in the preceding chapter, only one of his servants, Doeg, volunteers details of his sighting of David (1 Sam 22:5).[6] Although it appears that Saul comes up against obstacles when he tries to obtain information, he does, typically, find the location of David and his troops. In the narratives of the Ziphites, however, we have the first and only explicit reference of a *group* of people seeking out Saul in order to furnish him with critical intelligence. The information provided by the Ziphites catapults Saul into an advantageous position over David.

Given that David eludes capture and that the Ziphites play only an ancillary role in the narratives of 1 Sam 23 and 26, the details which speak of their aid to Saul may very well have gone undetected. As the psalmist in Ps 54:7 emphasizes the fact that his adversaries are rising up against him, the actions of the Ziphites come to the fore. The Ziphites acknowledge Saul as their "king," and travel about twenty-five miles north from Ziph to Gibeah to turn David in to their ruler:

3. See 1 Sam 23:15–18. Also see the discussion of Ps 63, below (pp. 89–91).

4. Reading with 4QSam[b], which clearly omits the הלוא found in the MT. LXX[BL] have a somewhat different rendering of this phrase: λέγοντες οὐκ ἰδοὺ Δαυείδ, which reflects לאמר לא הנה דוד.

5. According to Robert Alter, the Saul–David stories "interlock antithetically on the theme of knowledge. Saul, from first to last, is a man deprived of the knowledge he desperately seeks." See Alter, *David Story*, xix–xx.

6. See the discussion on Ps 52, below (pp. 60–62).

וְעַתָּה לְכָל־אַוַּת[9] הַמֶּלֶךְ לָרֶדֶת יֵרֵד[8] וְעָלֵינוּ[7] הַסְגִּירוֹ בְּיַד הַמֶּלֶךְ

> And now, whenever it is the king's desire to come down, then please, come down! It will be our duty to deliver him into your power, O King. (1 Sam 23:20)

Saul's response to the Ziphites indicates that his receiving information about David usually required greater effort:[10]

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה כִּי חֲמַלְתֶּם עָלָי

> Saul answered, "You are blessed ones to the LORD for you have shown me compassion." (1 Sam 23:21)

The Ziphites tell their king the precise location of David's hideouts, namely, in the forests on the hill of Hachilah. Saul, nonetheless, requires even more specific information:

לְכוּ־נָא הָכִינוּ עוֹד וּדְעוּ וּרְאוּ[12] אֶת־מְקוֹמוֹ אֲשֶׁר תִּהְיֶה רַגְלוֹ מִי רָאָהוּ[11] שָׁם כִּי [22]
אָמַר אוּלַי[13] עָרוֹם יַעְרֹם הוּא [23]וּרְאוּ וּדְעוּ מִכֹּל הַמַּחֲבֹאִים אֲשֶׁר יִתְחַבֵּא שָׁם וְשַׁבְתֶּם
אֵלַי אֶל־נָכוֹן וְהָלַכְתִּי אִתְּכֶם וְהָיָה אִם־יֶשְׁנוֹ בָאָרֶץ וְחִפַּשְׂתִּי אֹתוֹ בְּכֹל אַלְפֵי יְהוּדָה

> [22] Go now and verify your facts again, that you may know and identify the place where his foot has been; who has seen him there, for [Saul] said, perhaps he will attempt an underhanded maneuver.[14] [23] Mark and know all the hideouts in which he is concealing himself and return to me with absolute certainty, and then I will go with you. And if he is there in the land, I will seek him out among all the clans of Judah. (1 Sam 23:22–23)

7. Reading עלינו with 4QSam[b]. LXX[LB]: πρὸς ἡμᾶς = אלינו "to us." This phrase is read with the preceding verbs κατάβασιν κατβαινέτω. The Greek translation reads: "According to all the king's desire to come down, let him come down to us…" The MT reads וְלָנוּ.

8. Reading ירד with 4QSam[b]. The MT reads רֵד.

9. Reading with LXX[BL] πᾶν τὸ πρὸς (τὴν) ψυχὴν τοῦ βασιλέως. The MT has לכל אות נפשך המלך, lit. "according to all the desire of your soul, O king!" See McCarter, *Samuel*, 1:377, who argues that the appearance of both words, אות and נפשׁ, represents a conflation of variants.

10. See also 1 Sam 22:7–8.

11. McCarter emends מי ראהו to המהרה on the basis of LXX ἐν τάχει. He argues that the MT's מי ראהו is a corruption of מהרה, "quickly," which he finds preserved in *Vorlage* of LXX in ἐν τάχει, "swift, fleet." See McCarter, *Samuel*, 1:377, and Wellhausen, *Samuelis*, 129. I read this verse here with the MT, Targ., and Syr.

12. McCarter omits וראו with LXX[B]. See his *Samuel*, 1:377.

13. Read אולַי with LXX.

14. Lit. "he is very cunning."

While we have seen above how Absalom's protracted preparations led to his defeat as he sought the life of his father, David,[15] Saul's hesitation does *not* impede his efforts to find David. Saul, in contrast to Absalom, does catch up with David and nearly defeats him.

3. *David's Advantage*

The episode of Saul and the Ziphites in 1 Sam 26:1 reveals a different view of Saul on the occasion of the Ziphites reporting news of David's location to him. While Saul delays in making a move immediately in 1 Sam 23:19–24, the direct opposite holds true for the account in 1 Sam 26. In this version, Saul wastes little time and attempts to capitalize on the news he obtains effortlessly. Right after the Ziphites tell him David's whereabouts, Saul "arose," "went down," and "set up camp" at the site reported to him by the Ziphites:

> [1]וַיָּבֹאוּ הַזִּפִּים אֶל־שָׁאוּל הַגִּבְעָתָה לֵאמֹר[16] דָּוִד מִסְתַּתֵּר בְּגִבְעַת הַחֲכִילָה עַל פְּנֵי
> הַיְשִׁימֹן [2]וַיָּקָם שָׁאוּל וַיֵּרֶד אֶל־מִדְבַּר־זִיף וְאִתּוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת־אֲלָפִים אִישׁ בְּחוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
> לְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־דָּוִד בְּמִדְבַּר־זִיף [3a]וַיַּחַן שָׁאוּל בְּגִבְעַת הַחֲכִילָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הַיְשִׁימֹן
> עַל־הַדָּרֶךְ
>
> [1] The Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah and said: "David is hiding in the hill of Hachilah which faces the wasteland." [2] Thus, Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph and with him three thousand carefully selected men of Israel, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. [3a] Saul encamped beside the road on the hill of Hachilah which faces the wasteland. (1 Sam 26:1–3a)

Conversely, in this version of the Ziphite story, David appears as the cautious opponent, reluctant to make a move until he receives intelligence of greater accuracy:

> [3b]וְדָוִד יֹשֵׁב בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיַּרְא כִּי בָא שָׁאוּל אַחֲרָיו הַמִּדְבָּרָה [4]וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד מְרַגְּלִים
> וַיֵּדַע כִּי־בָא שָׁאוּל אֶל־נָכוֹן
>
> [3b] Now David stayed in the wilderness and saw that Saul had come after him in the wilderness. [4] David sent spies and he knew with absolute certainty that Saul had come. (1 Sam 26:3b–4)

In the same way as Saul acts in the previous account, here David sends others to determine the precise location of his adversary. In both stories, the reconnaissance plays a pivotal role. The phrase "absolute certainly"

15. See the discussion of Ps 3, above (pp. 17–20).
16. Note the change to indicate dependence upon the parallel passage of 1 Sam 23:19.

(אֶל־נָכוֹן) declared by David in 1 Sam 26:4 was also stated by Saul in 1 Sam 23 when he sends the Ziphites back to ascertain David's exact location. Apparently, David already knows that Saul is encroaching upon him (1 Sam 26:3b), but he does not know exactly where he and his troops have encamped. Immediately after he sends his spies for reconnaissance, he not only finds the precise site of Saul's camp, but he also comes upon Saul at an opportune moment—the king and his army lay defenselessly fast asleep. A few verses later, in 1 Sam 26:12, the narrative reveals that God created the moment for David to secure the upper hand at this juncture by causing a deep sleep to fall upon Saul's men.[17]

The deity made Saul and his men vulnerable to attack. David, however, does not kill Saul or any of his men. Instead, he takes his spear, a symbol of his kingship. According to Alter,[18] "[t]he spear is an alternative image of kingship, obviously more directly associated with martial potency, and so this version conveys a greater sense that David is depriving Saul of something essential in the token of kingship he bears off."[19] Indeed, the next time the narrative reports Saul with his spear, he does not appear as he does earlier in the story, as the royal figure who sat under a tamarisk tree surrounded by his servants (1 Sam 22:6). Nor do we find him randomly wielding it to kill David (1 Sam 18:10–11; 19:9–10). Rather, the next and final reference to Saul with his spear occurs when David graciously hands it back to him at the end of this episode (1 Sam 26:22).[20]

David gains the advantage in this situation rather quickly. Unlike the previous version, in which the Ziphite informants have difficulty trying to convince Saul to come down to Ziph, this text depicts Saul as aggressive. He goes down to Ziph straightaway with his finest men. The text at 1 Sam 26 seems to be missing the reason for David's rapid control of this situation. The insertion of Ps 54 at the beginning of 1 Sam 26 would provide a cause for his sudden advantage—David has divine help from the start and his enemies ultimately fail because they do not set God before them. It has already been noted that God was directly involved in this text when he causes a deep slumber to fall upon Saul and his troops (1 Sam 26:12). A prayer of David requesting assistance from God added at the introduction of the narrative would give emphasis to the deity's role throughout this episode.

17. See discussion of 1 Sam 26 under Ps 3, above (pp. 20–22).
18. See the doublet account of this story in 1 Sam 24.
19. Alter, *David Story*, 164.
20. Saul does appear again with a *sword* when he falls upon it himself in order not to be killed by the Philistines. See 1 Sam 31:3–5.

4. *Let God Decide*

Both Ps 54 and 1 Sam 26 acknowledge the deity as the one who determines culpability. In vv. 3–6 of the psalm, the supplicant earnestly asks God to hear his case and to relieve him of his distress. Similarly, David invokes God as divine judge to relieve him from the distress of Saul's pursuit:

> [18]וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶּה אֲדֹנִי רֹדֵף אַחֲרֵי עַבְדּוֹ כִּי מֶה עָשִׂיתִי וּמַה־בְּיָדִי רָעָה [19]וְעַתָּה
> יִשְׁמַע־נָא אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵת דִּבְרֵי עַבְדּוֹ אִם־יְהוָה הֱסִיתְךָ בִּי יָרַח מִנְחָה וְאִם בְּנֵי הָאָדָם
> אֲרוּרִים הֵם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כִּי־גֵרְשׁוּנִי הַיּוֹם מֵהִסְתַּפֵּחַ בְּנַחֲלַת יְהוָה לֵאמֹר לֵךְ עֲבֹד
> אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים

> [18] And he [David] said: "Why is it that my lord chases after his servant, for what have I done, and of what offense am I guilty? [19] Now, let my lord, the king, hear the words of his servant. If the LORD has incited you against me, let him be appeased by an offering. But if it is men, cursed are they before the LORD, for they have driven me out today from joining in the inheritance of the LORD, saying, 'Go serve other gods'." (1 Sam 26:18–19)

As David pleads his case before Saul, he suggests that others might have fueled Saul's hunt for him. That the words of others would incite Saul is evident at the beginning of 1 Sam 26, when he immediately advances against David based upon the report of the Ziphites.

The deity not only decides, but he also enacts judgment. The idea of divine retribution provides another thematic tie between Ps 54 and 1 Sam 26. Passionately does the psalmist cry that God will avenge those ambuscading him (v. 7). Similarly, David trusts that God would intercede and exact judgment on his adversaries when he forbids his officer, Abishai, to harm Saul:

> וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד חַי־יְהוָה כִּי אִם־יְהוָה יִגְּפֶנּוּ אוֹ־יוֹמוֹ יָבוֹא וָמֵת אוֹ בַמִּלְחָמָה יֵרֵד וְנִסְפָּה

> David said, "As the LORD lives, the LORD will smite him, or his day will come and he will die, or in battle he will go down and perish." (1 Sam 26:10)

Abishai urges David to let him kill Saul with one thrust of his spear, bringing to mind Saul's attempts to kill David with his spear (1 Sam 26:8).[21] David, however, leaves the matter in God's hands.

21. See 1 Sam 18:10–11; 19:9–10. For Hebrew and translation of 1 Sam 26:8, see the discussion of Ps 3, above (p. 21).

5. *Lexical Links*

The last scene in 1 Sam 26 supplies a linguistic tie between the narrative and the psalm. After David returns Saul's spear he announces his hope that God would consider his life precious and deliver him from every distress (וַיַּצִּלֵנִי מִכָּל־צָרָה, 1 Sam 26:24). Psalm 54 shares with the narrative this phrase in v. 9 when the petitioner proclaims that God has delivered him from every distress, כִּי מִכָּל־צָרָה הִצִּילָנִי. This linguistic connection seems to be a significant link given that the phrase נצל מן צרה only occurs this one time in the books of Samuel.

Another lexical link occurs with the phrase בקש נפש, "to seek my life." When Mowinckel argues that 1 Sam 23 serves as the context for Ps 54, his analysis rests on the verbal connection of the phrase בקש נפש which appears in Ps 54:5 and 1 Sam 23:15.[22] Childs would agree that the psalm fits in the context of 1 Sam 23, but contends that בקש נפש occurs too frequently in the Samuel narrative to be of import. He also does not think that "verbal similarities played a major role."[23] But, in fact, I have found that this phrase does not emerge too frequently in the books of Samuel and a linguistic connection could indeed be a factor in attaching a title to a psalm.[24] In this case, the verbal phrase בקש נפש appears only five times in 1 Samuel (1 Sam 20:1; 22:23 [twice]; 23:15, 25:29). With the exception of 1 Sam 25:29, which is not a story of Saul and David,[25] this phrase is most often uttered or thought of by David himself.

The first occurrence of the phrase בקש נפש appears after David eludes Saul when he had tried to pin David down with his spear. After the third attempt on his life, he decides to leave Saul's court and meet up with Jonathan. He questions Jonathan on the reasons behind his father's desire to kill him:

> וַיִּבְרַח דָּוִד מִנָּיוֹת[26] בָּרָמָה וַיָּבֹא וַיֹּאמֶר לִפְנֵי יְהוֹנָתָן מֶה עָשִׂיתִי מֶה־עֲוֹנִי וּמֶה־חַטָּאתִי לִפְנֵי אָבִיךָ כִּי מְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־נַפְשִׁי
>
> David fled from Naioth in Ramah and came to say before Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my offense? What is my crime before your father who *seeks my life*?" (1 Sam 20:1)

22. Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, 2:88–89.
23. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 145.
24. See the Introduction to and discussion of Ps 3, above (pp. 20–22).
25. 1 Sam 25 is a story of David, Nabal, and Abigail. The rabbis have connected 1 Sam 25 with Ps 54. They creatively suggest that like the Ziphites, Nabal slandered David (1 Sam 25:10). See *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:489.
26. Reading the MT *qere*.

The second and third time the phrase occurs in 1 Samuel is when David converses with Abiathar after Saul's massacre of priests at Nob. Abiathar manages to escape and David offers him protection given that David was the ultimate cause for the killings. He says to Abiathar:

שְׁבָה אִתִּי אַל־תִּירָא כִּי אֲשֶׁר־יְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־נַפְשִׁי יְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־נַפְשֶׁךָ כִּי־מִשְׁמֶרֶת אִתָּה עִמָּדִי

> "Remain with me! Do not be afraid, for *whoever seeks my life seeks your life*, for you will be safe with me." (1 Sam 22:23)

The final reference of the phrase בקש נפש occurs in connection with the territory of Ziph. David flees to Ziph and knows that Saul is not too far behind him:

וַיַּרְא דָּוִד כִּי־יָצָא שָׁאוּל לְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ וְדָוִד בְּמִדְבַּר־זִיף בַּחֹרְשָׁה

> David saw that Saul had set forth *to seek his life*. Now David was in the wilderness of Ziph, in the forest. (1 Sam 23:15)

The use of the verbal phrase in 1 Samuel touches upon David's own awareness of danger. Each use of the phrase points to various moments in Saul's pursuit of David: the beginning of the chase (1 Sam 20:1), the slaughter of Ahimelech and other priests of Nob (1 Sam 22:23), and the pursuit in the wilderness of Ziph (1 Sam 23:15). David has dependable support in each of these instances. In 1 Sam 20:1 and 1 Sam 23:15, he has the assistance of Saul's son, Jonathan, and in the story surrounding 1 Sam 22:23, he has the backing of the priests, Ahimelech,[27] and his son Abiathar. All of these episodes speak of the help David obtains from various supporters.

A few verses after the final attestation of בקש נפש, in the context of a David–Saul episode, we have the Ziphite report to Saul. This is the first mention of Saul's receiving unsolicited assistance in the narrative. The collaboration of the Ziphites with Saul comes to a head on a mountain in Maon where Saul almost catches his prized fugitive. Psalm 54 will be particularly relevant to the Ziphite episode in 1 Sam 23 because it serves as a clear example of people rising against David. This time it is not merely Saul, but willing neighbors of Judah. At this moment, it is possible to imagine that David would say a prayer along the lines of Ps 54, especially vv. 4–7. Moreover, in Ps 54:3, the psalmist urges that God would vindicate him. If nearby inhabitants willingly turn him over to

27. See the discussion by P. Tamarkin Reis, *Reading the Lines: A Fresh Look at the Hebrew Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 131–46, where she posits that Ahimelech suspected that David was on the run from Saul during their encounter and he still supported David.

Saul without explicit provocation, then perhaps this would be a time when David would question his actions and ask for divine justification (vv. 3–5). David as the psalmist would seek God as judge to hear his case and vindicate him.[28]

Mowinckel makes a plausible suggestion that a lexical connection between the psalm and Samuel narrative occurs with the wordplay for Ziphites (זפים) and strangers (זרים).[29] The psalm would read in v. 5 that "*Ziphites* have stood up against me…" Childs disagrees with this argument asserting, instead, that "[t]o the redactor the historical fact that the Ziphites were not technically 'strangers' would not have gone unnoticed."[30] According to him, the tie between the texts lies in the fact that the Ziphites "were a hostile people who had betrayed David and thus matched admirably the psalmist's description."[31] To elaborate on Childs's view, with which I agree, the psalm may be read quite nicely in the narrative. The Ziphites who "stand" (קום) and go ahead of Saul when he seeks (בקש) David would provide a match for the ruthless strangers who "stand" (קום) against the petitioner and "seek" (בקש נפש) his life in the psalm.

6. *God Intervenes for David*

Zakovitch, following rabbinic interpreters, suggests that the messenger who comes to tell Saul that the Philistines have raided the land was in fact a messenger of God. Zakovitch would have Ps 54 added during the scene narrated in 1 Sam 23:19–26 before the messenger informs Saul of a Philistine invasion. That Saul has to stop chasing David when he comes so close to capturing him indicates, according to Zakovitch, that God accepts David's prayer (Ps 54) for rescue.[32]

Prior to the appearance of the Ziphites in the Samuel narrative, David has only one person who clearly sides against him, Doeg. Given that Doeg was a high ranking official in Saul's administration, his loyalty to Saul was not surprising. With the appearance of the Ziphites into the story, however, we have people who side with Saul for no obvious reason. Adding the psalm to either account, 1 Sam 23 or 26, elucidates their motivation: they do not acknowledge the same God as that of the petitioner (Ps 54:5).

28. So also Wilson, *Psalms*, 1:798–99.
29. Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, 2:89.
30. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 145.
31. Ibid.
32. Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 156.

Psalm 54 also remedies a problem in the beginning of 1 Sam 26, namely, how is it that David finds himself in complete control of the scene at the wilderness of Ziph? This psalm may be inserted after 1 Sam 26:4, when David ascertains that Saul is close behind him, and before 1 Sam 26:5, when he locates Saul and his men. At this juncture, David could offer a prayer that would be followed by deliverance.

By reading Ps 54 in connection with the accounts of the Ziphites, we see David as the petitioner of this prayer calling upon the deity to judge him in the face of attack. He implores God to seek vengeance on those who have injured him (Ps 54:7) and at the psalm's end, he witnesses the demise of his enemies. David, as far as the Samuel narrative reports, does not "get to gaze in triumph" (Ps 54:9) over the Ziphites. Given that Saul comes very close to killing David with their help, Ps 54 ensures that the Ziphites were paid back in kind.

* * *

B. David, Saul, and Doeg

(Read 1 Samuel 21–22)

Ahimelech, a priest of Nob, supplies David with food and a weapon when David flees to his city. Unbeknown to the priest, David is an outlaw. David cons the priest by acting as if he worked as an agent for Saul. Doeg, Saul's top man, witnesses their encounter in Nob. He not only reports to his master what he has seen and heard, but he also embellishes the story with a lie that costs Ahimelech his life.

1. *Psalm 52*

[1] *To the leader. A maskil of David,* [2] *when Doeg the Edomite came and reported to Saul thus: "David came to the house of Ahimelech."*
[3] Why do you boast in malice, O mighty man?
God's kindness is present every day.
[4] Your tongue plots destruction,
like a sharpened razor,
O worker of treachery!
[5] You loved evil more than good,
to lie more than speaking truth. *Selah*.
[6] You love all words that devour,
you love a treacherous tongue.
[7] Thus, God will wrench you out forever,
he will grab and rip you from your tent,
and uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah*.

[8] Let the righteous see and fear (God),
let them laugh at the pernicious one and say:
[9] "Look at the bold one who did not make
God his refuge,
but trusted in his abundant riches,
and the ruthlessness of his destruction."
[10] But I am like a luxuriant olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in God's kindness forever and ever.
[11] I will thank you forever,
for what you have done,
and I am confident in your name because it is reliable
in the presence of your faithful ones.

Psalm 52 begins with a direct and acrimonious denunciation by the petitioner to the antagonist. With impudence, the psalmist questions why the "mighty man" (גִּבּוֹר) revels in his cruelty when his fate falls under God's jurisdiction (v. 7). He accuses the "cunning man of power"[33] of having a pernicious tongue, the effects of which the psalmist likens to the slashes of a sharpened blade (v. 4). The slanderer presumes that he has immunity from danger and that he will get away with what he has done. In this psalm, however, the man of malice not only gets his deserved punishment (v. 7), but he also must bear the taunts of the righteous ones. They will all witness his downfall and his mistake in relying on wealth and evil devices (vv. 8–9). After he receives punishment and becomes a public mockery, the righteous stand upright "like a luxuriant olive tree in the house of God" (v. 10). This imagery contrasts with that of the boasting man whom God uproots from his home and humankind (v. 7).

The man who vaunts his crimes, so prevalent at the beginning of the psalm, completely disappears from the prayer at the end. Instead, the psalm gives way to the petitioner confirming his commitment to the deity (v. 10b) and giving thanks to God (v. 11). In contrast to the wicked one who puts his trust in riches and is banished, the righteous trust in God's kindness (חֶסֶד) and live securely under God's protection in the temple area.[34]

2. *Doeg's Tale*

Psalm 52 is set in the context of 1 Sam 22:6–19, an episode in which Saul has difficulty extracting information from his men on David's location. In the midst of his servants, Saul bemoans their unwillingness to tell him where David has been hiding:

33. Kraus, *Psalms*, 510.
34. Compare with Ps 92:13–15.

7וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל לַעֲבָדָיו הַנִּצָּבִים עָלָיו שִׁמְעוּ־נָא בְּנֵי יְמִינִי גַּם־לְכֻלְּכֶם יִתֵּן בֶּן־יִשַׁי
שָׂדוֹת וּכְרָמִים לְכֻלְּכֶם יָשִׂים שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת 8כִּי קָשַׁרְתֶּם כֻּלְּכֶם עָלַי וְאֵין־גֹּלֶה
אֶת־אָזְנִי בִּכְרָת־בְּנִי עִם־בֶּן־יִשַׁי וְאֵין־חֹלֶה מִכֶּם עָלַי וְגֹלֶה אֶת־אָזְנִי כִּי הֵקִים
בְּנִי אֶת־עַבְדִּי עָלַי לְאֹרֵב כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה

[7] Saul said to his servants who were stationed around him, "Listen, O Benjaminites! Will the son of Jesse give to each and every one of you fields and vineyards, will he set any of you as captains of thousands or leaders of hundreds? [8] For all of you have conspired against me and there was not one who revealed to me when my son made a covenant with the son of Jesse, and not any of you feels sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has incited my servant against me, to lie in wait as he is doing this day." (1 Sam 22:7–8)

Doeg stands out as the only one of Saul's servants who provides him with information on David. Perhaps Doeg's position as a high-ranking officer encourages him to step forward and report to Saul that he has seen David communicating with Ahimelech the priest:

9וַיַּעַן דֹּאֵג הָאֲדֹמִי וְהוּא נִצָּב עַל־עֲבָדֵי־שָׁאוּל וַיֹּאמַר רָאִיתִי אֶת־בֶּן־יִשַׁי בָּא נֹבָה
אֶל־אֲחִימֶלֶךְ בֶּן־אֲחִיטוּב 10וַיִּשְׁאַל־לוֹ בַּיהוָה וְצֵידָה נָתַן לוֹ וְאֶת חֶרֶב גָּלְיָת הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי נָתַן לוֹ

[9] Doeg, the Edomite, who was in charge of Saul's servants, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Nob, to Ahimelech son of Ahitub. [10] He inquired of the LORD for him, he gave him provisions and he also gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine." (1 Sam 22:9–10)

The reader knows from the previous account of David's meeting with Ahimelech (1 Sam 21:1–10) that most of the information of Doeg's report does in fact match the contents of that narrative: David does encounter Ahimelech in Nob; the priest does provide him with food; and does give him the sword of Goliath. Nowhere, however, in this text does the story indicate that Ahimelech actually consulted the LORD for David. Does Doeg deliberately mislead Saul with regard to this detail? Given that the primary focus of the petitioner's complaint in Ps 54 is the adversary's treacherous and destructive use of words, the author of the superscriptions may have attached the title to this psalm to raise the issue of Doeg's veracity.

Saul not only has had difficulty obtaining information from his own men, but has also had difficulty obtaining information from the deity. Two texts in the Samuel narrative explicitly reveal the problems he encountered when attempting to get information from God:

וַיִּשְׁאַל שָׁאוּל בֵּאלֹהִים הַאֵרֵד אַחֲרֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים הֲתִתְּנֵם בְּיַד יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא עָנָהוּ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא

Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?" But he did not answer him on that day. (1 Sam 14:37)

וַיִּשְׁאַל שָׁאוּל בַּיהוָה וְלֹא עָנָהוּ יְהוָה גַּם בַּחֲלֹמוֹת גַּם בָּאוּרִים גַּם בַּנְּבִיאִם

> Saul inquired of the LORD, but he did not answer him, not by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. (1 Sam 28:6)

Doeg, as a high-ranking member of Saul's entourage, presumably knows of Saul's difficulties with acquiring information. When he tells Saul of his sighting of David, Doeg provides the damaging detail of Ahimelech consulting for David, which shatters the priest's and the fugitive's credibility in Saul's eyes. Does Doeg prevaricate this added bit of information? Some commentators conjecture that Doeg did indeed lie;[35] some argue that he told the truth;[36] while other critics leave the matter unresolved.[37] For the supplicant in Ps 52 (vv. 4–6), the matter is clear: Doeg certainly lies when he tells his version of David and Ahimelech's encounter at Nob. The fabrication of this particular detail has lethal consequences for Ahimelech and his fellow priests.

3. *Goliath's Sword*

Surprisingly, as Tamarkin Reis insightfully notes, one of the two details that Doeg mentions does not seem to enrage Saul, namely, David's possession of Goliath's sword.[38] David makes much of it, as seen in his enthusiastic response to Ahimelech, after the priest told him what weapon he had available:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַכֹּהֵן חֶרֶב גָּלְיָת הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי אֲשֶׁר־הִכִּיתָ בְּעֵמֶק הָאֵלָה הִנֵּה־הִיא לוּטָה בַשִּׂמְלָה אַחֲרֵי הָאֵפוֹד אִם־אֹתָהּ תִּקַּח־לְךָ קַח כִּי אֵין אַחֶרֶת זוּלָתָהּ פֹּה וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֵין כָּמוֹהָ תְּנֶנָּה לִּי

> The priest said: "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the valley of Elah, is right here covered in the cloth behind the ephod. If it is something you would want, take it, for there is nothing else here except that." David said: "There is none like it. Give it to me!" (1 Sam 21:10)

35. See Alter, *David*, 137; Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 159.

36. Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, 2:88; Peter D. Miscall, *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 135.

37. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel.* Vol. 2, *The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 389–91.

38. Tamarkin Reis, *Reading the Lines*, 142.

Commentators, too, have made much of the sword and maintain its import. Alter, for example, raises the idea that, while the size of the sword may have inhibited David from using it effectively, David's mere possession of it held significance: "The fact that this huge sword might be too big for David is submerged by the symbolic notion that it is the weapon of the Philistine champion he vanquished which he now takes up."[39] Fokkelman also maintains the sword's importance. He posits that David came to Nob specifically for the sword and to eat holy bread. He contends that David's partaking of the bread and receiving the weapon damages Saul's reputation.[40] Tamarkin Reis, however, rightly questions the import of the weapon's provenance in the case of Saul's finding out Ahimelech's role in helping David.[41] When Saul determines Ahimelech's role in helping David, that the sword originally belonged to Goliath appears to matter little:

> וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו[42] שָׁאוּל לָמָּה קָשַׁרְתֶּם עָלַי אַתָּה וּבֶן־יִשַׁי בְּתִתְּךָ לוֹ לֶחֶם וְחֶרֶב וְשָׁאוֹל לוֹ בֵּאלֹהִים לָקוּם אֵלַי לָאֹרֶב כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה

> Saul said to him: "Why did you conspire against me, you and the son of Jesse, by giving him bread, *a sword* and inquiring of God for him, in order for him to launch an ambush against me this very day?" (1 Sam 22:13)

Saul's indictment of and anger towards Ahimelech concerns the priest's assistance to the outlaw in general. I agree with Tamarkin Reis that if *Goliath's* sword held such prominence for Saul's status and authority, he would have definitely included it to bolster his case against Ahimelech.[43]

4. *Ahimelech's Veracity*

The charge of giving David the sword does not seem to matter as much to Ahimelech as Saul's accusation that he has obtained divine information for David. Indeed, the only charge Ahimelech contests is the one that Doeg may have made up. Even though the Hebrew text of Ahimelech's refutation to Saul is equivocal, it is clear that the crux of his defense lay in vindicating himself from the disputable charge of obtaining information from God:

39. Alter, *David*, 133.
40. Fokkelman, *Crossing Fates*, 352.
41. Tamarkin Reis, *Reading the Lines*, 136.
42. Reading with the MT *qere*.
43. Tamarkin Reis, *Reading the Lines*, 136.

14 וַיַּעַן אֲחִימֶלֶךְ אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמַר וּמִי בְכָל־עֲבָדֶיךָ כְּדָוִד נֶאֱמָן וַחֲתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ וְשֹׂר44
עַל מִשְׁמַעְתֶּךָ וְנִכְבָּד בְּבֵיתֶךָ 15 הַיּוֹם הַחִלֹּתִי לִשְׁאָל־לוֹ בֵּאלֹהִים חָלִילָה לִּי אַל־יָשֵׂם
הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּעַבְדּוֹ דָּבָר בְּכָל־בֵּית אָבִי כִּי לֹא־יָדַע עַבְדְּךָ בְּכָל־זֹאת דָּבָר קָטֹן אוֹ גָדוֹל

> 14 Ahimelech answered the king and said: "Now who of all your servants is as faithful as David, the son-in-law of the king, commander over your guard, and honored one in your house? 15 Did I begin today to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me! Do not let the king impute anything to his servant or on anyone of the house of my father, for your servant did not know anything at all of this matter." (1 Sam 22:14–15)

In Hebrew, the first part of 1 Sam 22:15 (הַיּוֹם הַחִלֹּתִי לִשְׁאָל־לוֹ בֵּאלֹהִים חָלִילָה לִּי), can be interpreted as a declarative, confessional sentence: "[Yes] Today, I for the first time inquired of God for him. God forbid!" It also can be translated as a question, "Was this the first time I have inquired of God for him? God forbid?"[45] The meanings here underline either that Ahimelech performed divination for David just one time, or that he had consulted the deity on prior occasions for David. Ahimelech, then, in both of these readings would acknowledge that he has provided these services for David, and then pleads for forgiveness ("God forbid!"). Presumably, David, as a member of Saul's court, could legitimately make such a request to the priest. Ahimelech would thus have carried out divine consultation in innocence. If one reads Ahimelech's words as a request for clemency, then David would be guilty of deceiving the priest, and Doeg would have told the truth.

Psalm 52 favors reading Ahimelech's words as I have done in my translation, as a rhetorical question in which Saul's accusations appear preposterous. Ahimelech's words translate more loosely as follows: "Are you kidding me? I have never inquired of God for David. That would be the last thing on my mind!" With this reading, Doeg unmistakably lied.

Psalm 52 portrays the "malicious one" as a liar (vv. 4–6), and emphasizes the destruction of the slanderer (v. 7). This psalm makes more sense in the narrative if it is read as an indictment against Doeg for his lies. The psalm underlines the deadly consequences of the slanderer's words (v. 4), which would match the fact that Doeg's lie results in a massacre. When Ps 52 is read along with the narrative, it clears Ahimelech of any wrongdoing and favors a particular reading of an ambiguous verse in the Samuel narrative (1 Sam 22:15).

44. Reading ושר על, on the basis of 1 Chr 11:25. The MT reads סָר. David is said to have put Benaiah in charge over (על) his royal bodyguard (מִשְׁמַעְתּוֹ). There seems to have been confusion with ש and ס. Also compare LXX^{B} καὶ ἄρχων παντός = ושר כל, lit. "and chief/executor of all." Syr. and Targum also reflect שר. See McCarter, *I Samuel*, 362, 364.

45. See ibid., 360.

Rabbinic writers also assert Doeg's incrimination of Ahimelech in their reading of Ps 52 into the narrative:

> *Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul* (Ps. 52:1). *"And told Saul":* that is, "And embittered[46] Saul." What did he say to him? He said this: "Ahimelech has made David king while thou art still living: For though inquiry may not be made of the Urim and Thummin on behalf of any man except the king, or members of the court, or one upon whom the needs of many people depend, yet inquiry has been made of the Urim and Thummin on behalf of David!" When Doeg told him this, a spirit of bitter envy entered into Saul.[47]

5. *Doeg Slays Priests*

Doeg may not be the only character in this episode to tell a lie in the Samuel narrative. That David does not, in fact, speak the truth to Ahimelech at Nob when he tells the priest that Saul sent him there on a secret mission (1 Sam 21:2), may serve as the catalyst for adding Ps 52 into this narrative. Zakovitch views this as a problem: David goes to a city of priests and tells a lie to a priest. According to Zakovitch, the addition of this psalm into this story cleanses David of his sin in lying given that the psalm portrays him as someone who wants to dwell in the house of God, and as someone who trusts in God (Ps 52:10–11).[48]

It seems that Doeg's words incense Saul to the point that it did not matter what the priest said in his defense. Ahimelech assists David and Saul orders the execution of the priest, his family, and others. None of Saul officers, however, dare to have the blood of priests on their hands, and so refuse to commit such a sacrilege. All, that is, except one: Doeg. He agrees to carry out Saul's reprisal against Ahimelech and the city of Nob:

> [16]וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מוֹת תָּמוּת אֲחִימֶלֶךְ אַתָּה וְכָל־בֵּית אָבִיךָ [17]וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לָרָצִים
> הַנִּצָּבִים עָלָיו סֹבּוּ וְהָמִיתוּ כֹּהֲנֵי יְהוָה כִּי גַם־יָדָם עִם־דָּוִד וְכִי יָדְעוּ כִּי־בֹרֵחַ הוּא
> וְלֹא גָלוּ אֶת־אָזְנִי[49] וְלֹא־אָבוּ עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ לִשְׁלֹחַ אֶת־יָדָם לִפְגֹּעַ בְּכֹהֲנֵי יְהוָה [18]וַיֹּאמֶר
> הַמֶּלֶךְ לְדוֹאֵג סֹב אַתָּה וּפְגַע בַּכֹּהֲנִים וַיִּסֹּב דּוֹאֵג הָאֲדֹמִי וַיִּפְגַּע־הוּא בַּכֹּהֲנִים וַיָּמֶת
> בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא שְׁמֹנִים וַחֲמִשָּׁה[50] אִישׁ נֹשֵׂא אֵפוֹד בָּד [19]וְאֵת נֹב עִיר־ הַכֹּהֲנִים הִכָּה
> לְפִי־חָרֶב מֵאִישׁ וְעַד־אִשָּׁה מֵעוֹלֵל וְעַד־יוֹנֵק וְשׁוֹר וַחֲמוֹר וָשֶׂה[51]

46. A play on the words נגד, "to tell," and גיד, "wormwood, bitter herb." See *Midrash on Psalms*, 2:475.
47. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:479.
48. Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 156.
49. Read with the *qere* of the MT and LXX^{B}: אזני, "my ear."
50. LXX^{BA} read "three hundred five." LXX^{L} reads "three hundred fifty."
51. Omit second occurrence of phrase לפי חרב with LXX^{B}.

> [16] The king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and the entire house of your father!" [17] And the king said to the officers stationed there with him, "Turn around and kill the priests of the LORD for they have allied also with David since they knew he was a fugitive and did not reveal it to me!" But the servants of the king were not willing to send forth their hand to strike the priests of the LORD. [18] The king then said to Doeg, "You, turn around and strike the priests!" Doeg, the Edomite, turned around and surely, he struck the priests and killed on that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. [19] And he struck down Nob, the city of priests by the blade of the sword, man and woman, children and infants, ox, donkey, and sheep. (1 Sam 22:16–19)

This episode inspired some ancient interpreters to link Doeg's name with the blood bath he carried out. In one midrashic tradition, Doeg is called "the Edomite" not because that is place of origin, but because of the murders at Nob. There is a play, in this case, on the word for Edom (אדם) and blood (דם): he was called Doeg the *Edomite* because he shed the *blood* of the priests of Nob.[52] Other interpretations make a connection with Doeg's name and the geographical region, Edom:[53]

> R. Hanina said: Doeg was called the *Edomite*, because like Edom which smirches the attainments of Israel, so Doeg smirched the attainments of David. Our Masters said: Doeg was called the *Edomite*, because like Edom which seeks vengeance and bears a grudge in its heart, so Doeg sought vengeance and bore a grudge in his heart against David.[54]

6. *David's Vengeance*

For some reason, David does not exact revenge upon Doeg, even though he claims responsibility for the lives lost at Nob (1 Sam 22:22). Psalm 52 would then remedy his failure to avenge the priests' murder with the insertion of the judgment in v. 7: "God will wrench you out forever…rip you from your tent and uproot you from the land of the living." Perhaps this gap in the narrative spurred the rich midrashic tradition that

52. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:478–79.

53. Edom is often identified with Rome in Jewish literature after the destruction of the Second Temple. Edom is represented in the Bible as having problems with Israel from their inception (Gen 25:22–26) and is often depicted as an enemy (Amos 1:11; Ezek 35:5; Obad 11–16). In Second Temple literature, hatred of Edom grew, as they were believed to have had a hand in burning the First Temple (1 Esd 4:45). The belief that Edom played a role in destroying the First Temple seemed to aid in forging the connection between Edom and Rome after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE by the Romans. See *EncJud* 6:378–79.

54. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:479.

expounds on Doeg's death. While the causes for his death vary, ancient interpreters make sure that Doeg's end was one of disaster. In one tradition he dies a leper (*m. Sanh.* 106b), while in another three angels cause in his downfall: one angel causes him to forget his learning, one burns his soul, and one scatters his ashes in the synagogues and schoolhouses. If this were not bad enough, after his death, he has no share in the world to come.[55]

Last, in one tradition of Doeg's demise there is a connection between Ps 52 and the Samuel narrative through the idea of slander. The lethal potential of slander is evinced in the following midrashic excerpt:

> …*Death and life are in the power of the tongue.* Slander is more vicious than murder. He who murders a man murders only one, but he who speaks slander murders three: him who speaks it, him who accepts it, and him of whom it is spoken. Whose history proves this? Doeg's. For he slandered Ahimelech before Saul, and the three of them, Saul, Ahimelech, and Doeg were slain: Ahimelech, as it is said *Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech* (1 Sam. 22:16); Saul, as it is said *So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord* (1 Chron. 10:13); and Doeg, who was banished from the world, as is said *God will likewise break thee for ever* (Ps 52:7), that is, from the world-to-come. And what caused his banishment? Slander, as is said *When Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul*."[56]

7. *Psalms 52 and 54*

The titles attached to Pss 52 and 54 refer to people who speak words that have deadly consequences. In the case of Ps 52, Doeg speaks words against David which lead to the death of the priests and people of Nob, while in Ps 54, it is the Ziphites who speak words which nearly cost David his life. Neither Doeg nor the Ziphites receive retribution in the Samuel narrative, but throughout the psalms associated with them judgment is exacted by divine intervention. That David does not retaliate against these antagonists seems peculiar, given that he customarily takes revenge on those whom he considered guilty. Hence, David has the Amalekite who mercifully killed Saul put to death (2 Sam 1:1–16).[57] He has Rechab and Baanah killed when they show their loyalty to David by

55. According to rabbinic writers, all Israelites have a share in the world to come except three kings, Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh, and four commoners, one of whom is Doeg. See *m. Sanh.* 10:1–2.

56. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:477.

57. This story contradicts the one in 1 Sam 31 where Saul died by falling upon his own sword (v. 4).

beheading the heir to the house of Saul and bringing the head to him (2 Sam 4:7–12). He strikes back at the Philistines for their attack on Keilah (1 Sam 23:1–18) and takes revenge on the Amalekites for their raid of Ziklag (1 Sam 30:16–20). He would even have slain Nabal and his men for his failing to agree to pay David for his unsolicited protection of his shepherds and flocks (1 Sam 25). And even upon his deathbed, David gives Solomon his "hitlist," the people he had not yet, himself, had a chance to kill. Included in that list are Joab (for his role in the deaths of Abner and Amasa), and also Shimei, the Benjaminite who cursed David as he fled during Absalom's coup (1 Kgs 2:5–12).

Perhaps David did not kill Doeg when David knew that he was at Nob because he did not want to commit murder in the priests' city of residence. Or, conceivably, he did not want to mark Ahimelech as a collaborator by killing a high-ranking officer of Saul's court in the town of the priest. Had he killed Doeg right away, the priest probably would not have been safe. As it turns out, the presence of Doeg triggered the slaughter of Ahimelech and all the priests residing in Nob nonetheless.

Like Ps 54, Ps 52 is a text that, when read into the David story, fills out the narrative providing explanatory details. When Ps 52 is read along with the narrative, it becomes apparent that (1) Doeg lied, Ahimelech did not consult the deity for David, (2) David also lied but requested forgiveness, and (3) Doeg was ultimately punished (Ps 52:7).

Chapter 4

DAVID'S MADNESS

A. MAD FOR ACHISH OR ABIMELECH

(Read 1 Samuel 21:11–22:1; 29)

David's fame became a liability. Women sang of his military prowess as exceeding that of Saul's. David surmises that Saul will not take his popularity well and fears for his life. His apprehension is so great that David thinks it safer to flee to Gath, enemy Philistine territory. Royal agents of Gath recognize David immediately as their enemy and bring him to their king, Achish, presumably for execution. But like his patriarchal forebears who faced a threat from Philistine kings, David too will escape death.

1. *Psalm 34*

[1] *Of David when he feigned insanity before Abimelech, who expelled him and he left.*
[2] I will bless the LORD in every moment,
his praise will be in my mouth continually.
[3] My soul will rejoice proudly in the LORD,
afflicted ones will hear and rejoice,
[4] Magnify the LORD with me,
that we may exalt his name together.
[5] I sought the LORD and he answered me,
he delivered me from all my fears.
[6] Look to him and be radiant;
do not let your[1] faces be ashamed.
[7] This afflicted one called,
and the LORD heard (him),
and from every distress, he saved him.

1. Reading with the LXX and Syr.

[8] The angel of the LORD camps
around those who fear him,
and delivers them.
[9] Taste and see that the LORD is good;
jubilant is the man who takes refuge in him.
[10] Fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for there is no want for those who fear him.
[11] Lions may be reduced to starvation,
but those who seek the LORD.
will not lack any good thing.
[12] O children, come, listen to me;
I will teach you fear of the LORD.
[13] Who is the man who desires life,
who loves a long life for enjoying good things?
[14] Guard your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.
[15] Turn from evil and do good,
seek peace and pursue it.
[16] The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
his ears attentive to their cry for help.
[17] The face of the LORD is on the doers of evil,
to cut their remembrance off from the earth.
[18] The righteous ones[2] cry out and the LORD hears,
he delivers them from all of their calamities.
[19] The LORD is near to those who are brokenhearted,
the ones crushed in spirit, he delivers.
[20] Many are the misfortunes of the righteous,
but the LORD delivers him from them all.
[21] He guards all of their bones,
not one of them will be broken.
[22] Evil kills the wicked,
and the ones hating the righteous will bear punishment.
[23] The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
all who take refuge in him will not be condemned.

This psalm begins with the petitioner proclaiming his loyalty to his God. Showing reverence determines the psalmist's course of life as he ever praises his deity (v. 2) and calls upon him during moments of fear (v. 5). He sets his experience as an example for others to follow (v. 3). Together, he and the "afflicted ones" exalt the name of the deity responsible for their deliverance (vv. 7–8). The psalmist asserts that whenever he sought the LORD, his prayers were answered: he was delivered from all of his fears and every distress (vv. 5, 7).

2. Reading with the LXX, Syr., and Targums in adding "the righteous" from v. 16.

In the apostrophic section beginning with v. 12, the psalmist appears as a teacher of wisdom instructing his students on the proper conduct for those who fear God (vv. 13–17). The psalmist tells others to turn to the deity as he did when he was in trouble. Just as God delivered him, the psalmist assures others that the deity will grant the same deliverance and protection to all who fear God (v. 8). Because of his own experience with the deity, which has proven beneficial for him, the supplicant invites those hearing his message to "taste" (טַעֲמוּ) and "see" (רְאוּ) divine munificence. The word for "taste," טעם, connotes taking a small sample,[3] and it seems that the psalmist is suggesting to his listeners that they try God out for themselves in order to ascertain the value of serving God. He assures his hearers that a life without want awaits the righteous ones. This bountiful life, however, does entail hardships. The psalmist thus does not proffer a simplistic view of retribution. Rather, he strikes a balance between the abundance available to those following the proper path and the reality of life's misfortunes (vv. 16–23). Adhering to the righteous way ensures deliverance from distress and guarantees divine proximity (v. 19).

2. *Abimelech or Achish?*

The superscription sets Ps 34 in the context of David pretending to be insane before a figure named Abimelech. David, however, never feigns madness before Abimelech. According to the biblical record, it is King Achish of Gath who witnesses David's ruse as a madman. The text that recounts this episode is found in 1 Sam 21:12–16. In fact, the author of the superscriptions uses the same phrase as that of 1 Sam 21:13, "to pretend to be mad" (שׁנה את טעם), in the title to Ps 34.

What prompted this change of name for the Philistine king? Commentators have suggested several reasons for the variant names in the psalm title and narrative. One view claims that the name Abimelech is the generic or *nomen dignitatis* of all Philistine kings, as in the case of the designation, "Pharaoh," used for all Egyptian kings in the Bible.[4] Childs and Zakovitch both suggest that the name may have served to call attention to the ties between 1 Sam 21 and patriarchal stories in Gen 20 and 26.[5] All three accounts share striking details, as they all have an expression of fear by the central biblical figure, who then employs a trick to avoid the danger.

3. See 1 Sam 14:24, 29; 2 Sam 3:35; Jon 3:7.
4. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 144; Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 153.
5. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 144; Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 153–54.

The narrative in Gen 20 recounts Abraham and Sarah's journey to Gerar. As Zakovitch observes, the Genesis story and 1 Sam 21 speak of a threat to the life of the people who arrive at the court of a Philistine king: Abraham fears that he will be killed on account of his wife (Gen 20:11), and similarly, David fears that he will be killed when the Philistines recognize him.[6] In both stories, Zakovitch posits that the fear leads to *disguising*: Abraham claims Sarah is his sister, while David takes on the appearance of a mad man.[7] Similar associations also occur with Gen 26 in Isaac's journey to Gerar. This story of Isaac and his wife Rebecca parallels that of Abraham and Sarah. Isaac, too, fears for his life and claims his wife as his sister during his stay in the Philistine region of Gerar (Gen 26:6–11).

Linguistic connections between Gen 20 and 1 Sam 21, according to Zakovitch, occur with verbs and nouns taken from the roots ראה ("to see") and ירא ("to fear"). In the latter part of Gen 20:8, King Abimelech speaks to his men after having a dream in which God reveals to him that Sarah is Abraham's wife.[8] The narrative reports that King Abimelech's men "were *greatly afraid*" (וַיִּירְאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים מְאֹד). Also, when Abraham gives the reason for trying to pass off Sarah as his wife in v. 11, he says, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no *fear* of God at all in this place'."[9] In the Samuel narrative, David had been *greatly afraid* of King Achish (1 Sam 21:13).

With regard to the ראה, Zakovitch finds connections between the two Philistine kings in Gen 20 and 1 Sam 21. In Gen 20:11, King Abimelech questions Abraham as to why he did not disclose the truth about Sarah being his wife. He asks Abraham, "What were you thinking, that you did such a thing?" (מָה רָאִיתָ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה). And in 1 Sam 21:15, when King Achish expresses his annoyance with his servants for bringing a prisoner before him drooling and seemingly mentally disturbed, he says to them: "Look, you see the man is mad!" (הִנֵּה תִרְאוּ אִישׁ מְשֻׁתַּגֵּעַ). While the lexical links via the root ראה are less compelling given the high frequency of this root in the Hebrew Bible, the cumulative evidence suggests that the author of the superscriptions makes a deliberate association of Achish with Abimelech. By changing Achish's name to Abimelech in the psalm's title, he brings stories of the two patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac, into the reading of David's narrative. Thus, the answer concerning to which king the title refers is, *both*!

6. Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 154. See also the discussion of Ps 56, below (p. 78).
7. Ibid.
8. This is assumed based upon Gen 20:2–7.
9. The MT reads כִּי אָמַרְתִּי רַק אֵין־יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה.

3. *David Expelled from Gath*

Zakovitch finds a tie between Ps 34 and the Samuel narrative based upon the final words of the psalm's title, "and he expelled him and he left" (וַיְגָרְשֵׁהוּ וַיֵּלֶךְ).[10] This remark adds to the reading of 1 Sam 21, that David was *expelled* from King Achish's court. Zakovitch astutely points out that the narrative at the end of 1 Sam 21 does not speak of David's release by the Philistine king. David's imposed departure from King Achish's court would serve as the logical conclusion to King Achish's reaction to David's strange behavior. The title to Ps 34 thus adds the notion of David's *expulsion*, which does not have a counterpart in the narrative,

In 1 Sam 29, the text explicitly reports that King Achish sends David away. David's expulsion in this particular story does not have to be inferred as in 1 Sam 21. Zakovitch suggests that the phrase, וַיְגָרְשֵׁהוּ, may be based on a detail of David's second escape to Achish's court in 1 Sam 29. In this episode, King Achish actually releases David from his service:

> [9]וַיַּעַן[12] אָכִישׁ אֶל־דָּוִד יָדַעְתִּי כִּי טוֹב אַתָּה בְּעֵינַי[11] אַךְ שָׂרֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים אָמְרוּ לֹא־יַעֲלֶה
> עִמָּנוּ בַּמִּלְחָמָה [10]וְעַתָּה הַשְׁכֵּם בַּבֹּקֶר אַתָּה[14] וְעַבְדֵי אֲדֹנֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ אִתָּךְ וַהֲלַכְתֶּם[13]
> אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הִפְקַדְתִּי אֹתְכֶם שָׁם וּדְבַר בְּלִיַּעַל אַל־תָּשֵׂם בְּלִבְּךָ כִּי טוֹב אַתָּה לְפָנַי
> וְהִשְׁכַּמְתֶּם בַּדֶּרֶךְ[15] וְאוֹר לָכֶם וָלֵכוּ

> [9] Achish answered David, "As far as I know, you are a good man. The Philistine commanders, however, have said, 'He should not go up with us to war'." [10] So now rise early in the morning, *you* and the servants of your lord who came with you. *You should go to the place which I designate for you. And, as for those speaking ill of you, do not set your heart on such gossip; for you have served me well.*[16] Be on your way early, at daybreak, and leave." (1 Sam 29:9–10)

10. Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 154.
11. Omit כמלאך אלהים with LXX^{B}; see McCarter, *I Samuel*, 1:426.
12. Omit ויאמר with LXX^{B}.
13. The MT is defective here and the text is reconstructed based upon LXX^{B}: καὶ πορεύεσθε εἰς τὸν τόπον οὗ κατέστησα ὑμᾶς ἐκεῖ · καὶ λόγον λοιμὸν μὴ θῇς ἐν καρδίᾳ σου, ὅτι ἀγαθὸς σὺ ἐνώπιόν μου. See Wellhausen, *Samuelis*, 143; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 426.
14. Reading with LXX^{B}.
15. Reading with LXX^{B}: ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ = בדרך instead of the MT: בבקר. See Wellhausen, *Samuelis*, 143; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 426.
16. Given the defective text here, I have italicized my reading of the text where it differs from the MT.

David has a more favorable rapport with King Achish in this episode, but nonetheless, he is forced to leave Gath by the order of the king.

While the story of David having to leave the Philistines in 1 Sam 29 corresponds to Ps 34, the episode of David's feigned insanity and escape from Achish's court in 1 Sam 21 serves as a better connection based upon lexical linkages and the psalm's capacity to fill in a gap in the narrative. At the end of the episode in 1 Sam 21, the reader is left to surmise that King Achish orders David's release from his court. The addition of the psalm makes this assumption explicit.

4. *David's Fear*

Narrative sequencing indicates that David goes to the Cave of Adullam after he escapes from Gath. Part of David's escape plan included making himself so repugnant to King Achish that he would be driven to expel David from his court. David purposefully humiliates himself in order to stave off his execution[17] because, "he was *very* afraid" (וַיִּרָא מְאֹד, 1 Sam 21:13). This is the only overt reference to David exhibiting fear in the Samuel narrative. Thus, Ps 34 intersects with this episode on the notion of fear.

That David exhibits fear and pretends to be insane in order to escape from Gath was a problem for later interpreters and rabbinic writers have elaborated on this aspect of the story. In one midrash, the rabbis amplify the story by imagining that David wrote the following words on the doors of King Achish's palace: "Achish, king of Gath, owes me one hundred myriads, and his wife owes me fifty myriads."[18] Another midrash expounds on David's feigned madness through a particular interpretation of the first stanza of Ps 34:

> In that instant David rejoiced that madness had come to his aid, and in his rejoicing composed this acrostic Psalm, saying to the Holy One, blessed be He: How very good is madness! *I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth* (Ps. 34:1) both in time of reason and in time of madness.[19]

17. I infer this from the story. See the discussion of Ps 56 (pp. 77–80).

18. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:410. This midrash is used to explain why Achish used the plural *madmen* in 1 Sam 21:15. The words David scratched on the doors were said to drive Achish's wife and daughter to madness. Achish was, then, referring to David, his wife, and daughter when he said "madmen."

19. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:410.

Finally, one rabbinic interpretation states that David composed a prayer at the time he became afraid. This midrash also cites Ps 56, an historical psalm that also alludes to the scene of David's escape from Gath:

> In that instant, David grew afraid, but he said: *What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee* (Ps. 56:4). And he began to beseech God and make supplication to Him saying: "Master of the universe, in this hour of need answer me!" The Holy One, blessed be He, asked: "What dost thou require?" David said: "Give me a touch of that madness which Thou hast created."[20]

This midrash highlights David turning to God in his moment of fear. The title of Ps 34 also emphasizes David relying upon the deity when he was threatened by perhaps a ghastly death at the hands of the Philistines. In the brief scene related in 1 Sam 21:13–15, David appears to act on his own devices to free himself from the Philistines. Reading Ps 34 into the narrative adds a prayer in which David would have prayed: "I sought the LORD and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears" (v. 5). David has to act in a repulsive manner in order to escape from Gath, but because he turns to God, the psalm asserts, there is no shame (v. 6). Later rabbinic writers see that the madness as something divinely created and given to David when he asked God for it in his time of trouble.

5. *Lexical Connections*

The word for "taste" (טעם) appearing in the psalm title, v. 9 of the psalm, and 1 Sam 21:14, may have spurred the connection of this psalm with 1 Sam 21. Given that this word (טעם) does not occur that often in the Hebrew Bible, the mere presence of the word[21] may have prompted the linkage of this psalm with the narrative.

I have already discussed the similarity of phrasing used to indicate the change of David's behavior, "to pretend to be mad" (שׁנה את טעם), in the psalm title and 1 Sam 21:14. Another lexical connection occurs via the root הלל. This word occurs in v. 3 of Ps 34 and in 1 Sam 21:14, albeit with different meanings. The Hitpael form of the word in the psalm means "to rejoice proudly," while the Polel form in 1 Sam 21:14 means "to make into a fool." Remarkably, this word directs the reader to the same verse in the narrative as does the psalm title. In 1 Sam 21:14, the text states that David pretended to be mad and then further explicates that "he made himself as a fool."[22]

20. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:410.
21. The word טעם also appears in Ps 119:66.
22. See my translation of this verse in my discussion of Ps 56 (p. 78).

6. *David's Dangerous Dance*

Psalm 34 would befit either scene in which David engaged in a risky dance with the Philistines. With the emphasis on David's pretense of madness, the psalm most readily points to 1 Sam 21. The added notation of the phrase in the psalm title, "and he expelled him," would elaborate on this narrative by stating what happens after David effects his ruse. This phrase also encourages an association with 1 Sam 29, a story in which King Achish actually casts David out of his land.

That the author of the superscriptions proffers the name of a Philistine Abimelech instead of Achish prompts associations with stories in which Abimelech appears. Patriarchal encounters with Abimelech found in the stories of Genesis make the aspect of "fear" more prominent in all of the stories. The psalm too places emphasis on the idea of fear, but proclaims that the only thing one has to do is fear God.

* * *

B. David in Philistine Custody

(Read 1 Samuel 21; 27; Judges 16)

1. *Psalm 56*

[1] *To the leader: according to the Dove of Far-Off Terebinths. Of David.*
A miktam, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.
[2] Have mercy on me, O God,
for men trample me,
every day an adversary oppresses me.
[3] My vigilant enemies trample me every day;
indeed many are those fighting me, O Exalted One.
[4] When I am afraid,
I surely put my trust in you.
[5] In God whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I am not afraid;
what can flesh do to me?
[6] Each day they dictate my affairs,
their evil thoughts weigh heavily upon me.
[7] They stir up strife, they lurk;
they watch my every move,
as they hope to have my life.
[8] Repay them according to their iniquity,
cast the people down in your anger, O God.
[9] You have kept count of my wanderings,
set my tears in your flask.
Are they not in your record?

[10] Then my enemies will retreat,
on the day I call (to you).
This I know, God is for me.
[11] In God, whose word I praise,
in the LORD whose word I praise,
[12] in God I trust; I am not afraid.
what can man do to me?
[13] Upon me, O God, are your vows,
I will submit thank offerings to you.
[14] For you delivered my life from death,
my feet from stumbling,
in order to walk before God in the light of life.

In this psalm the petitioner indicates a dire situation with the cry, "Have mercy on me, O God." He then describes his lamentable circumstances; men of war relentlessly hunt after him and he is afraid. The psalmist complains of physical assault (vv. 2–3) and emotional torment (vv. 4–6, 9, 12). His attackers plan schemes for his downfall, pursue him vigilantly, and lie in wait for ambush. All of their malevolent actions determine his daily existence (v. 6). A description of a physical assault (vv. 2–3) is followed by imagery of men plotting for his downfall (vv. 6–7). Even though the notion of fear is repeatedly invoked in this psalm (vv. 4, 5, 12), it does not demoralize the petitioner. Rather, it motivates him to confide in God and put his trust in the deity. He hopes that God has kept a careful record of his trials. His confidence in the ability of the deity to deliver him dissolves all apprehension (vv. 5, 12), and he is certain that divine intervention will cause the enemies to retreat (v. 10). The psalm concludes with the petitioner offering vows and thanks to the deity for rescuing him from death. Imagery of God sustaining his worshipper by preventing him from stumbling ends the psalm (v. 14). This description of the deity keeping the psalmist steady evokes the imagery from v. 7 in which the petitioner laments of adversaries in such close pursuit that they "watch his heels" (הֵמָּה עֲקֵבַי יִשְׁמֹרוּ).[23]

2. *David's Arrest*

The title of Ps 56 situates its contents in an episode in which Philistines in Gath seize David. No biblical account, however, corresponds to these details. While the Samuel narrative includes two stories in which David ventures to Gath, 1 Sam 21:11–15 and 1 Sam 27, neither of the stories speaks of the Philistines taking him into custody. The two times David

23. I translate this verse above in English idiom as "watch my every move."

risks entering enemy Philistine territory were due to the pressure of Saul's incessant hunt for him. While both of the accounts in 1 Sam 21 and 27 exhibit a general connection with the psalm's description of the adversaries' aggressive pursuit, more detailed associations occur with the scene reporting David's ruse of madness in 1 Sam 21. Even though Ps 34 has a title referring to this episode, the superscription of Ps 56 adds a vivid depiction of David being bound and captured by the Philistines to the reading of this story.

As with Ps 34, the notion of fear is raised repeatedly in Ps 56 (vv. 4, 5, 12). The only explicit reference in the Samuel narratives to David experiencing fear occurs in connection with his flight from Saul to Gath in 1 Sam 21:13.[24] In this text, he secures relief from Saul by fleeing inside the borders of enemy territory, but then lands straightaway in danger. As soon as he arrives in Gath, David is discovered:

> [11]וַיָּקָם דָּוִד וַיִּבְרַח בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא מִפְּנֵי שָׁאוּל וַיָּבֹא אֶל־אָכִישׁ מֶלֶךְ גַּת [12]וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַבְדֵי
> אָכִישׁ אֵלָיו הֲלוֹא־זֶה דָוִד מֶלֶךְ הָאָרֶץ הֲלוֹא לָזֶה יַעֲנוּ בַמְּחֹלוֹת לֵאמֹר הִכָּה שָׁאוּל
> בַּאֲלָפָיו[26] וְדָוִד בְּרִבְבֹתָיו[25]
>
> [11] Then David fled, on that day, from Saul and he came to King Achish of Gath. [12] The servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David, king of the land? Is he not the one whom they declare while dancing: 'Saul struck down his thousands, but David his tens of thousands'?" (1 Sam 21:11–12)

After the servants of King Achish recognized David, the narrative reports that "he took these words to heart" (וַיָּשֶׂם דָּוִד אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בִּלְבָבוֹ, 1 Sam 21:13a). And, in the very next scene, David disguises himself as a madman. The text states that "David feigned madness before *them*." Presumably the pronoun here refers to the servants. If David puts on this ruse to avoid detection before Achish's servants, the trick does not work, for Achish's servants recognize David and detain David on the spot! By inserting the title of Ps 56 at the start of 1 Sam 21:14, the verse would read as follows:

> (בְּאֲחֹז אֹתוֹ פְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּגַת) וַיְשַׁנּוֹ אֶת־טַעְמוֹ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם וַיִּתְהֹלֵל בְּיָדָם
>
> (When the Philistines seized him in Gath), he pretended to be mad right before their eyes and made himself as a fool when they held him… (1 Sam 21:14a)

24. See discussion of Ps 34, above (pp. 74–75).
25. Reading the MT *qere*.
26. Reading the MT *qere*.

Certainly, the phrase "in their hand" (בְּיָדָם) from this verse would lean in favor of an arrest. Both Childs and Zakovitch maintain that the author of the superscriptions interpreted these words (בְּיָדָם) as if the servants of the Philistine king had physically held David.[27]

Childs and Zakovitch both suggest that the idea of a physical seizure by the Philistines finds support in the narrative when King Achish reproaches his men for "bringing" David to him:[28]

> [15]וַיֹּאמֶר אָכִישׁ אֶל־עֲבָדָיו הִנֵּה תִרְאוּ אִישׁ מְשֻׁתַּגֵּעַ לָּמָּה תָּבִיאוּ אֹתוֹ אֵלָי [16]הֲחָסַר
> מְשֻׁגָּעִים אָנִי כִּי־הֲבֵאתֶם אֶת־זֶה לְהִשְׁתַּגֵּעַ עָלָי הַזֶּה יָבוֹא אֶל־בֵּיתִי
>
> [15] King Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is mad! Why would you *bring* him to me? [16] Do I lack madmen that you should *bring* this man to act like a madman before me? Should this man come into my house?" (1 Sam 21:15–16)

King Achish emphasizes the absurdity of his men "bringing" a "crazy"[29] person before him. While David's ruse does not fool the guards, it certainly fools the King of Gath. The story does not explicitly mention an incident where the king's royal guards apprehended David, but the addition of the title prompts the reader to expand the text in order to imagine such a scene.

3. *David and Samson*

With the figure Samson in the book of Judges, as Zakovitch observes, the Bible presents a story of an Israelite in bondage by the Philistines.[30] In the scene of the Philistines taking Samson into custody, the text reports that they "seized" (אחז) him and bound him in shackles:

> וַיֹּאחֲזוּהוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיְנַקְּרוּ אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיּוֹרִידוּ אוֹתוֹ עַזָּתָה וַיַּאַסְרוּהוּ בַּנְחֻשְׁתַּיִם וַיְהִי טוֹחֵן
> בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִים
>
> The Philistines *seized* him [Samson] and they gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and they bound him with bronze shackles; he was among the prisoners[31] who turned the hand-mill as a slave. (Judg 16:21)

27. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 146; Zakovitch *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 156–57.
28. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 146; Zakovitch *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 156–57.
29. Note the appearance of the root שגע, "to be mad," three times in these two verses.
30. Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 157.
31. Reading הָאֲסוּרִים with the MT *qere*, lit. "the ones being bound."

Does David avoid such a gruesome fate by acting mad? As stated in the discussion of Ps 34, the biblical passage of David at the court of Achish is the only explicit reference to David exhibiting fear. If the scene of Samson is brought to bear on this episode then David indeed had much to fear.

4. *David Resides in Gath*

The next time the narrative reports David in Gath, David resigns himself to settling in enemy territory because he knew that Saul would ultimately kill him:

> וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־לִבּוֹ עַתָּה אֶסָּפֶה יוֹם־אֶחָד בְּיַד־שָׁאוּל אֵין־לִי טוֹב כִּי הִמָּלֵט אִמָּלֵט
> אֶל־אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים וְנוֹאַשׁ מִמֶּנִּי שָׁאוּל לְבַקְשֵׁנִי עוֹד בְּכָל־גְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִמְלַטְתִּי מִיָּדוֹ

> David thought to himself, I will now certainly be killed[32] one day by Saul's hand. There is nothing better for me than to escape as soon as possible to the land of the Philistines. Only then will he tire of seeking me without end inside Israel's territory and I will be free of his death threat.[33] (1 Sam 27:1)

This account of David's flight to Gath reflects the enemy city as a refuge for David. The Philistine king, Achish, accepts David and then Saul "no longer sought him" (1 Sam 27:4). David's plan works this time.

The contents of Ps 56 would fit into this context of his stay with the Philistines. David as an Israelite among the ranks of the Philistines would certainly raise suspicion and he would probably be under constant watch. The verses of the psalm, which mention foes keeping close watch of the supplicant (vv. 6–7), would correspond to David's venture to make Gath his new residence. That Philistine leaders did not trust David is evinced by their refusal to permit David and his men to fight along with Philistine soldiers (see 1 Sam 29:4).

Either 1 Sam 21:10–22:1 or 1 Sam 27 would match the impression given by the contents of Ps 56. The psalm, however, works better when reading it into the context of 1 Sam 22 because it generates an intensified version of David in the court of Achish. Imagine, David arrested, perhaps beaten, and facing a horrific execution like the one Samson undergoes at the hands of the Philistines. David then would say a prayer like the one in Ps 56 while the guards took him away, or while he remained in a detention cell. In this degenerating situation he would proclaim his confidence in divine deliverance. He would assert that "flesh" (v. 5)

32. Lit. "I will be swept away."
33. Translating מִיָּדוֹ loosely; lit. "from his hand."

could do him no harm even though he faced the threat of physical mutilation (Judg 16:21). In a moment of impending torture and death, David affirms that he has no need to "fear," for his life would be saved and he would "walk before God in the light of life" (v. 14).

Chapter 5

DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

A. *Divine Sustenance*

(Read 1 Samuel 23–25; 2 Samuel 15–16)

On a number of occasions, David found himself in the wilderness in flight from someone who wanted him dead. Living in the wilderness under constant threat would require supplies, especially food and water. More than once, David obtains sustenance while escaping from an enemy. In spite of his physical necessities, the psalm below underlines that David clings to his God, the ultimate source of his needs.

1. *Psalm 63*

[1] *A psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.*
[2] O God, you are my God,
I eagerly seek you;
my throat thirsts for you,
my flesh faints for you,
in a land that is parched and worn out,
where there is no water.
[3] I gaze upon you in the sanctuary,
to see your power and glory.
[4] For your kindness is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
[5] I will bless you my whole life,
in your name I lift my hands.
[6] My throat is sated as with marrow and fat,
and with joyful lips, my mouth praises you.
[7] If I reflect on you upon my bed,
I meditate on you
in the latest hours of the night.
[8] For you are my help,
and in the shadow of your wings
I joyously sing.

[9] My soul clings to you,
your right hand sustains me.
[10] But those who seek me for my ruin
will go into the depths of the earth;
[11] They shall be delivered over to
the power of the sword,
they shall be prey for jackals.
[12] But the king shall rejoice in God;
all who swear by him
shall boast,
for the mouth of those speaking deceit
will be shut.

Psalm 63 expresses the yearning of a petitioner for his deity. At the outset, the petitioner proclaims: "O God, you are my God" (v. 2). This acclamation sets in motion the intimate and deep connection between the petitioner and God. Corporeal imagery abounds (throat, flesh, lips, palms, blood, hand) as the psalmist speaks of the essential necessity of divine presence. The situation afflicting the supplicant is so great that he compares his predicament to that of an exhausted wanderer exposed to scorching conditions.

The superscription prompts the reader to examine episodes of David's stay in the wilderness of Judah in order to determine when he might have uttered such a prayer as Ps 63. Since David fled into the wilderness on a number of occasions,[1] the person attaching the title to the psalm may have wanted to make several connections with the Samuel narrative.[2] Each of these instances in the books of Samuel is discussed below. I will also discuss a David story in which an association with the psalm is made based on conceptual similarities and not because of the appearance of the word for "wilderness."

2. *David Thirsts*

The remarkable imagery of the supplicant's longing for his deity, illustrated in terms of a desiccated wilderness, triggers associations to stories which relate David suffering from thirst. In 2 Sam 23:15–17, David thirsts for water from Bethlehem. Although, the word for "wilderness"

1. 1 Sam 23:14, 15, 24, 25; 24:2; 25:1, 4, 14; 26:2, 3; 2 Sam 15:23, 28; 16:2; 17:16, 29.

2. Zakovitch puts this title in a group including Pss 18, 57, 142, which make general, and not specific, connections with the Samuel narrative. See Zakovitch's *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 158.

(מִדְבַּר) does not occur in this account, there are connections between this text and Ps 63.

This text appears in the context of a list (2 Sam 23:8–39) which gives details concerning David's military leaders and their feats over the Philistines. While discussing the military exploits of David's leading men, the narrative recalls a moment when David desires to drink water from the well of his home-town, Bethlehem:

> וַיִּתְאַוֶּה דָוִד וַיֹּאמַר מִי יַשְׁקֵנִי מַיִם מִבְּאֵר בֵּית־לֶחֶם אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁעַר
>
> David had a craving and said, "Who will give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate?" (2 Sam 23:15)

When David speaks these words, the Philistines control Bethlehem. Three of David's men take his request literally and retrieve the water for him from an enemy-occupied location. They accomplish the dangerous mission and bring the water to him. David, however, refuses to drink it because of the enormous risk involved in obtaining it:

> 16וַיִּבְקְעוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת הַגִּבֹּרִים בְּמַחֲנֵה פְלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּשְׁאֲבוּ־מַיִם מִבְּאֵר בֵּית־לֶחֶם אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁעַר
> וַיִּשָּׂאוּ וַיָּבִאוּ אֶל־דָּוִד וְלֹא אָבָה לִשְׁתּוֹתָם וַיַּסֵּךְ אֹתָם לַיהוָה 17וַיֹּאמֶר חָלִילָה לִּי יְהוָה
> מֵעֲשֹׂתִי זֹאת הֲדַם הָאֲנָשִׁים הַהֹלְכִים אֶשְׁתֶּה[3] כִּי הֶבִיאוּם בְּנַפְשׁוֹתָם וְלֹא אָבָה לִשְׁתּוֹתָם
> אֵלֶּה עָשׂוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת הַגִּבֹּרִים
>
> 16 And three of the warriors broke into the camp of the Philistines and they drew water from the well of Bethlehem which was by the gate. They carried it and presented it to David. He, however, was not willing to drink it, and poured it out to the LORD. 17 He said, "The LORD forbid me from doing such a thing. Is it the blood of the men who went for it that I would drink? For they risked their lives to retrieve it!" Therefore he was not willing to drink it. The three warriors did these things. (2 Sam 23:16–17)

Zakovitch considers this episode as the basis for the connection with Ps 63.[4] The psalm depicts the petitioner as a man in a parched land without water to drink. Even though his need for water is immediate, instead of focusing on *that* thirst, he speaks of his thirst (or longing) *for the deity*. Similarly, according to Zakovitch, David may have wanted to taste the water he remembers from Bethlehem, but upon receiving it, he instead offers it to God. Zakovitch suggests that the connection of Ps 63 with this story gives a more didactic character to the event. David pours the

3. Reading reconstruction suggested by McCarter: הדם האנשים ההלכים אשתה כי הביאום בנפשותם, which is based on the LXX and 1 Chr 11:19. The MT is defective here (הֲדַם הָאֲנָשִׁים הַהֹלְכִים בְּנַפְשׁוֹתָם) and all manuscripts show confusion. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 491.

4. Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 158.

water out to the LORD, to teach that his thirst—his yearning for his God—is greater than his thirst for water.[5]

To be sure, the author of the superscription did not miss the connection of the psalm with the story of David's craving for waters from Bethlehem. Though this event occurs in a "stronghold" (מְצוּדָה) and not in a "wilderness" (מִדְבַּר), David could be imagined as the psalmist uttering this prayer as he pours out the water to honor his deity.

3. *Help in the Wilderness (I)*

David's flight from his son Absalom in 2 Sam 15–18 provides a strong lexical point of contact with Ps 63. Indeed, the word for wilderness occurs five times in this episode (2 Sam 15:23, 28; 16:2; 17:16, 29). In addition to the appearance of the word for wilderness, this story also shares similar concepts as those present in Ps 63.

To begin with, a thematic and lexical connection between the psalm and the story of Absalom's revolt occurs in 2 Sam 15:23–25. The petitioner's desire to see God in his sanctuary (v. 3) is reminiscent of the scene in which Absalom forces David out from his capital city. As soon as Absalom takes control of Jerusalem, David flees straightaway into the wilderness:

> וְכָל־הָאָרֶץ בּוֹכִים קוֹל גָּדוֹל וְכָל־הָעָם עֹבְרִים וְהַמֶּלֶךְ עֹבֵר בְּנַחַל קִדְרוֹן וְכָל־הָעָם עֹבְרִים עַל־פְּנֵי־דֶרֶךְ אֶת־הַמִּדְבָּר
>
> And all the land was bitterly weeping as all the people were passing by. The king crossed over the Wadi Qidron, and all the people were heading toward the *wilderness*. (2 Sam 15:23)

David's priests, Zadok and Abiathar, initially go with him carrying the ark of the LORD during his escape into the wilderness. He, however, tells the priests to go back to Jerusalem because he hopes to be restored to his royal city (2 Sam 15:24–25). Like the petitioner yearns to see God in his sanctuary, so too does David. He explicitly expresses this wish to the priests in 2 Sam 15:25–26. David, who finds himself exiled in the wilderness, anticipates gazing upon the ark in its place of holiness. He could be imagined as uttering a prayer such as that in Ps 63 as he waits for word from his sacerdotal agents.

In addition to the theological motive for David's charge to send the priests to his royal city, he has a military motive as well: he plans to use them as spies. Later in the story, when David urges the royal advisor, Hushai, to go back to Jerusalem as a double agent, he assures him that

5. Ibid.

he already has a network of intelligence in place through the priests, Zadok and Abiathar:

34וְאִם־הָעִיר תָּשׁוּב וְאָמַרְתָּ לְאַבְשָׁלוֹם עַבְדְּךָ אֲנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶהְיֶה עֶבֶד אָבִיךָ וַאֲנִי מֵאָז
וְעַתָּה וַאֲנִי עַבְדֶּךָ וְהֵפַרְתָּה לִּי אֵת עֲצַת אֲחִיתֹפֶל 35הֲלוֹא עִמְּךָ שָׁם צָדוֹק וְאֶבְיָתָר
הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהָיָה כָּל־הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמַע מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ תַּגִּיד לְצָדוֹק וּלְאֶבְיָתָר הַכֹּהֲנִים
36הִנֵּה־שָׁם עִמָּם שְׁנֵי בְנֵיהֶם אֲחִימַעַץ לְצָדוֹק וִיהוֹנָתָן לְאֶבְיָתָר וּשְׁלַחְתֶּם בְּיָדָם אֵלַי
כָּל־דָּבָר אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמָעוּ

34 But if you return to the city and should say to Absalom, "I will be your servant, O king! A servant of your father was I formerly, but now I am your servant," you will overturn for me the counsel of Ahithophel. 35 For is it not true that Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, are already there? Now every word that you hear from the king's palace, you should tell to Zadok and to Abiathar, the priests. 36 To be sure, two of their sons are with them—Zadok's son Ahimaaz, and Abiathar's son Jonathan—now you should send through them anything that you find out. (2 Sam 15:34–36)

After David sends the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, back to Jerusalem, he acknowledges that he has to continue on into the wilderness:

רְאוּ אָנֹכִי מִתְמַהְמֵהַּ בְּעַרְבוֹת הַמִּדְבָּר עַד בּוֹא דָבָר מֵעִמָּכֶם לְהַגִּיד לִי

"See I will tarry in the steppes of the *wilderness* until word comes from you to inform me." (2 Sam 15:28)

While David continues his flight into the wilderness, his network of spies who work on his behalf prove reliable as all three men furnish David with vital military intelligence. Another incidence of the word for "wilderness" occurs in connection with all three agents in their coordinated efforts to inform David of the urgent necessity to cross the River Jordan immediately:[6]

15וַיֹּאמֶר חוּשַׁי אֶל־צָדוֹק וְאֶל־אֶבְיָתָר הַכֹּהֲנִים כָּזֹאת וְכָזֹאת יָעַץ אֲחִיתֹפֶל אֶת־אַבְשָׁלֹם
וְאֶת זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָזֹאת וְכָזֹאת יָעַצְתִּי אָנִי 16וְעַתָּה שִׁלְחוּ מְהֵרָה וְהַגִּידוּ לְדָוִד לֵאמֹר
אַל־תָּלֵן הַלַּיְלָה בְּעַרְבוֹת הַמִּדְבָּר וְגַם עָבוֹר תֵּעָבוֹר פֶּן יְבֻלַּע לַמֶּלֶךְ וּלְכָל־הָעָם
אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ

15 Hushai said to Zadok and to Abiathar, the priests, "Ahithophel has counseled Absalom and the elders of Israel in one way, but I counseled in another. 16 Now quickly send word to inform David the following: 'Do not lodge tonight in the steppes of the *wilderness*, but you should definitely cross over right away, lest disaster fall to the king and to all of the people who are with him'." (2 Sam 17:15–16)

As seen in the discussion above on Ps 3, that David does not sleep that night enables him to win the war against his son.

6. See the discussion of Ps 3, above (p. 20).

4. *Help in the Wilderness (II)*

Two other instances of the word מִדְבַּר appear in contexts in which David is located in the wilderness and unexpectedly receives provisions for himself and his troops. The first instance occurs after David crosses the River Jordan. He and his army land in Mahanaim, a city in Gilead. When David and his men reach Mahanaim, they encounter a group of local officers who bring the hungry and exhausted troops provisions:

27וַיְהִי כְּבוֹא דָוִד מַחֲנָיְמָה וְשֹׁבִי בֶן־נָחָשׁ מֵרַבַּת בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹן וּמָכִיר בֶּן־עַמִּיאֵל מִלֹּא
דְבָר וּבַרְזִלַּי הַגִּלְעָדִי מֵרֹגְלִים 28הֵבִיאוּ7 מִשְׁכָּב וְסִפּוֹת וּכְלִי יוֹצֵר וְחִטִּים וּשְׂעֹרִים
וְקֶמַח וְקָלִי וּפוֹל וַעֲדָשִׁים29 29וּדְבַשׁ וְחֶמְאָת צֹאן8 וּשְׁפוֹת בָּקָר הִגִּישׁוּ לְדָוִד וְלָעָם
אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ לֶאֱכֹל כִּי אָמְרוּ הָעָם רָעֵב וְעָיֵף וְצָמֵא בַּמִּדְבָּר

[27] When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, Machir son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim [28] brought beds, bowls, pottery utensils, wheat, barley, flour, roasted grain, beans and lentils, [29] honey and cream from sheep, and cheese from the herd to David and the people who were with him to eat, for they thought, "The people are famished, weary, and thirsty from the *wilderness*." (2 Sam 17:27–29)

It is revealing that David receives support at Mahanaim, a city which served as the seat of government for the house of Saul.[10] After Saul has been killed in battle, his military commander, Abner, installs Ishbosheth at Mahanaim and establishes it as his capital city. McCarter finds the support David receives from two of the men who aided David at Mahanaim, Machir and Barzillai, unexpected: "…it is surprising to find Machir, once the guardian of Meribbaal (2 Sam 9:4), and Barzillai of Gilead—an old stronghold of Saulide sympathy—supporting David with such enthusiasm."[11] This scene is even more striking when compared to the one in which Shimei, a member of Saul's line, curses David.[12] Shimei's antipathy was shared by at least a thousand Saulides, who accompany him to pay homage to David after David reclaims his throne (2 Sam 19:17).

7. Add הביאו on basis of LXX^{BL}, Syr., and Vulg. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 293; Wellhausen, *Samuelis*, 201.

8. Text changed to וחמאת צאן on the basis of Syr. The MT has וְחֶמְאָה וְצֹאן. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 392.

9. Omit second וקלי with LXX^{B}.

10. McCarter advances this idea in *2 Samuel*, 395.

11. Ibid.

12. See 2 Sam 16:5–8, translated above in the discussion of Ps 3 (pp. 22–23).

Prior to its use as a Saulide capital city, the patriarch, Jacob, had an encounter at Mahanaim with divine messengers. In fact, the region gets its name from Jacob, who comes upon this place after leaving his father-in-law:

[2]וְיַעֲקֹב הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ וַיִּפְגְּעוּ־בוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים [3]וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם מַחֲנֵה
אֱלֹהִים זֶה וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא מַחֲנָיִם

> [2] Jacob went on his way and angels of God encountered him. [3] Jacob said when he saw them, "This is a camp of God." He therefore named that place, "Mahanaim." (Gen 32:2–3)

I have explicated similarities between David and Jacob in my analysis of Ps 59. Here too we have another connection between them: they both receive encouragement before a deadly threat posed by a family member. David's familial threat comes from his son, Absalom, while Jacob's threat comes from his brother, Esau. Jacob's altercation with his brother Esau escalates to lethal proportions, for Esau wanted to kill Jacob for stealing his blessing (Gen 27:41). Jacob has to flee to Haran for safety (Gen 27:42–43) because Esau wanted revenge. After spending a number of years in Haran in the service of his father-in-law, Jacob plans to meet Esau. Before his impending meeting with his aggrieved brother, Jacob encounters divine messengers. These messengers serve an important purpose according to one commentator, who asserts: "Without doubt, Gen. xxxii 2–3 in its present context intends to point out that, facing the approaching meeting with Esau (*vv*. 4ff.), Jacob can depend on God's proximity."[13]

Thus, at the same site where Jacob is given a sign of God's presence, David receives support unexpectedly. Even without reading the story of Jacob into the text of David at Mahanaim, it is possible to view the gestures by the men of Mahanaim as an implicit indication of divine support. The psalm and the story of Jacob's encounter at Mahanaim strengthens this reading.

The second instance of David's receiving provisions unexpectedly occurs toward the beginning of his flight from Jerusalem. Shortly after David has climbed over a hill, he is suddenly greeted by a member of Saul's house, Ziba, with an ample supply of food and transportation:

[1]וְדָוִד עָבַר מְעַט מֵהָרֹאשׁ וְהִנֵּה צִיבָא נַעַר מְפִי־בֹשֶׁת לִקְרָאתוֹ וְצֶמֶד חֲמֹרִים חֲבֻשִׁים
וַעֲלֵיהֶם מָאתַיִם לֶחֶם וּמֵאָה צִמּוּקִים וּמֵאָה קַיִץ וְנֵבֶל יָיִן [2]וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־צִיבָא
מָה־אֵלֶּה לָךְ וַיֹּאמֶר צִיבָא הַחֲמֹרִים לְבֵית־הַמֶּלֶךְ לִרְכֹּב וְלַחֶם וְהַקַּיִץ לֶאֱכוֹל
הַנְּעָרִים וְהַיַּיִן לִשְׁתּוֹת הַיָּעֵף בַּמִּדְבָּר

13. C. Houtman, "Jacob at Mahanaim: Some Remarks on Genesis 32:2–3," *VT* 28 (1978): 41.

> [1] David crossed a little beyond the summit and all of a sudden, there was Ziba, the servant of Mephiboshet, ready to meet him, with a yoke of saddled donkeys that were loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred raisin cakes, a hundred measures of summer fruit, and a jug of wine. [2] The king said to Ziba, "What are you doing with all these things?" Ziba answered, "The donkeys are for those of the house of the king to ride, and as for the bread and summer fruit, they are for the lads to eat and the wine for the exhausted to drink in the *wilderness*." (2 Sam 16:1–2)

Thus, in two incidents during David's flight from Absalom, he manages to obtain supplies and provisions without any effort on his part. Possibly Ziba, Machir, and Barzillai thought David would win the war against Absalom. Nonetheless, both scenes, 2 Sam 16:1–2 and 2 Sam 17:27–29, involve David in need of sustenance while in the wilderness, and both cases report that he was supplied with provisions. David himself expresses surprise at receiving provisions in 2 Sam 16:12 when he asks Ziba what he planned to do with all the items he brought along with him. Ziba then told him that the foods were indeed for David and his men. And, the text explicitly points out that Ziba takes care of *thirst* by providing wine for David and his men to drink. Perhaps the psalm could be injected into this episode—David reaches the summit of the Mount of Olives, where his physical needs of food and water are met.

The scene of David's receiving provisions at Mahanaim later in the narrative could also be read with Ps 63. David could be imagined as saying a prayer before the enthusiastic reception from members of his former rival's entourage.

Although Ps 63 speaks of a spiritual thirst, it adumbrates the physical needs of the petitioner through corporeal imagery: "my throat thirsts" (v. 2), "my throat is sated" (v. 6), "your right hand sustains me" (v. 9). David would have had to take care of his and his troops' physical needs. The addition of Ps 63 in these contexts would have David receiving sustenance after uttering a prayer. His physical needs would have been satisfied after he expressed his spiritual hunger for God.

5. *Help in the Wilderness (III)*

There is a concentrated use of the word מִדְבַּר in one narrative in which David was on the run from Saul, 1 Sam 23. The word occurs six times in vv. 13–15 and 24–25. One occurrence of the word is particularly worthy of note because it reveals David's self-awareness of danger:

> וַיַּרְא דָוִד כִּי־יָצָא שָׁאוּל לְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ וְדָוִד בְּמִדְבַּר־זִיף בַּחֹרְשָׁה

> David saw that Saul had set out to seek his life. Now David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in the forest. (1 Sam 23:15)

This verse indicates that David "saw" (וַיַּרְא) that Saul set out on a mission to kill him. Presumably, David knows that Saul's pursuit is an organized threat heading straight toward him.

McCarter has changed the vocalization of the first word in 1 Sam 23:15 from "he saw" (וַיַּרְא) to "he was afraid" (וַיִּרָא).[14] His translation makes a stronger case for David's having a heightened sense of the danger that lay before him. McCarter's conjectural emendation for 1 Sam 23:15 links nicely with the subsequent narrative in which Jonathan says upon finding David in the wilderness, "Do not fear" (אַל־תִּירָא). In this passage, Jonathan also comforts David by assuring him that he would indeed rule over Israel as king:

> וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַל־תִּירָא כִּי לֹא תִמְצָאֲךָ יַד שָׁאוּל אָבִי וְאַתָּה תִּמְלֹךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה־לְּךָ לְמִשְׁנֶה וְגַם־שָׁאוּל אָבִי יֹדֵעַ כֵּן
>
> He [Jonathan] said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul, my father, will not find you. You will surely rule over Israel and I will become your viceroy; even Saul, my father, knows this." (1 Sam 23:17)

Is Jonathan's sudden appearance to David in the wilderness fortuitous? Whether or not one agrees with McCarter's emendation, David knew of the severe threat Saul posed and may have been very afraid. Inserting the prayer of Ps 63 after 1 Sam 23:15 would emphasize that David has a deep connection with the deity, and that he felt desperate, perhaps needing the assurance Jonathan provides.

The addition of the psalm to the narrative in 1 Sam 23 would provide texture to this text, which perfunctorily reports (1) Saul seeks David; (2) David is cognizant of Saul's pursuit; and (3) Jonathan comes to comfort David in his adversity.

In as much as the last verse of Ps 63 speaks of a king, Childs associates this psalm with narratives that relate to David's life as king. This psalm does converge well with David's days as king especially in v. 12. Psalm 63 speaks of the psalmist's anticipation of rejoicing in a divinely brought about victory and at the end of the Samuel narrative recounting Absalom's revolt, David wins back his throne, and his enemy, Absalom, is killed. Even though David expresses reluctance to rejoice over his dead son, a celebration follows news of Absalom's downfall and David's restoration as king over Israel.[15]

14. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 373–74.

15. See 2 Sam 19:1–9. David's men naturally wanted to celebrate the victory of the coup, but David's grief over his son turned the day of victory into one of mourning; that is, until Joab reproached David for his behavior. Joab insisted that David present himself to his men, or else Joab would lead them to withdraw their support from David.

Although none of the Saul–David episodes refer to David specifically as "king" (מלך), I disagree with Childs's elimination of these stories from consideration for Ps 63. The mere mention of "king" in this psalm does not preclude an association with events in the narrative pertaining to Saul and David. Indeed, Ps 63 would fit well into 1 Sam 23, a Saul–David narrative in which the fugitive David flees into the wilderness and receives assurance that he would be king from Jonathan.

To summarize, the ambiguous title of Ps 63 lends itself to a number of episodes in the Samuel narrative in which David has to flee into the wilderness in order to escape danger. The mention of "king" at the end of the psalm encourages an association with David's experiences as king, but this does not rule out stories prior to his installation to the royal office.

* * *

B. David Captures Saul?

(Read 1 Samuel 22; 24)

Saul, who has pursued David with intensity, now finds himself in a seemingly defenseless position as David comes upon him while Saul urinates in a cave. The man who has tried to kill David repeatedly is himself now only a swift sword-stroke away from death at the hand of his foe. David, however, refrains from killing Saul. Is this move an act of pardon or a strategic act done by David in order to save his own life? The addition of Ps 57 to the reading of the story aids in answering this question.

1. *Psalm 57*

[1] *To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A miktam, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.*
[2] Have mercy on me O God have mercy on me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
until the devastation passes by.
[3] I call to God Most High,
to the God who accomplishes things for me.
[4] He will send from the heavens and save me,
he will reproach the one eagerly pursuing me. *Selah*.
God will send his loving-kindness and his faithfulness.

[5] I lie down among lions,
who voraciously consume men;
their teeth are spears and arrows,
their tongue is a sharp sword.
[6] Rise up above the heavens, O God!
Let your glory be upon all the earth.
[7] They have prepared a net for my steps,
my soul is bowed down.
They dug a pit before me,
but they fell in it. *Selah*.
[8] My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast.
I will sing and praise.
[9] Awake, my glory!
Awake the harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn!
[10] I will give thanks among the people, O my Lord,
I will praise you among people.
[11] For your loving-kindness reaches the heavens,
your faithfulness extends to the clouds.
[12] Rise up over the heavens, O God!
Let your glory be upon all the earth.

This psalm begins with the cry of petitioner: "Have mercy on me O God, have mercy on me" (חָנֵּנִי אֱלֹהִים חָנֵּנִי). The twofold repetition of the phrase emphasizes the sense of urgency for the supplicant. He trusts that God will intervene on his behalf and proclaims that he will take refuge under the protective wings of the deity (v. 2).[16] After the opening words of assurance, the psalmist describes his difficult straits through dramatic imagery. He envisions his enemies as rapacious lions whose mouths are comprised of lethal weapons—spears, arrows, and swords (v. 5). The supplicant complains that these foes have carefully designed a snare for his downfall; they have prepared a net and dug a pit in anticipation of capturing him (v. 7a). Their devices backfire, however, and they themselves fall into the trap that they have set for the petitioner (v. 7b). At the end of the psalm, the petitioner gives thanks as his enemies receive their punishment.[17]

16. Cherubim wings were an iconographic representation of the deity's throne on top of the ark. Kraus interprets the phrase "in you I have taken refuge" (v. 2) literally, as a safe haven or asylum to which an accused person would have gone for protection. See Kraus's commentary, *Psalms*, 530. See also Weiser, *Psalms*, 427. When reading in light of the Samuel narratives, however, the wings as a source of refuge might be taken figuratively.

17. Ps 57:8–12 is repeated in Ps 108:2–6.

The title of Ps 57 sets the poem in an episode in which David flees into a cave while trying to get away from Saul. But to which story does the superscription allude? There are two scenes in the Samuel narrative which explicitly mention David at a "cave" (מְעָרָה), 1 Sam 22 and 1 Sam 24.[18] Even though there are connections between the psalm and 1 Sam 22, a stronger case can be made for linking Ps 57 with the narrative of 1 Sam 24.

Not only does the word for cave appear five times in 1 Sam 24, but the cave also serves as the site of action in this episode. Additionally, the word for "wing" (כנף), in v. 2 of the psalm, appears four times in the narrative of 1 Sam 24 as the key item in the story. In addition to these lexical connections, the psalm and narrative contain conceptual similarities.

2. *Clipping Saul's Wing*

The narrative of 1 Sam 24 continues the story from ch. 23; David flees eastward from Keilah to the cliffs of En-gedi.[19] Right after Saul has completed the battle against the Philistines, he turns his attention back to the pursuit of David (1 Sam 24:2). Once Saul locates David's hideout, he picks the best men out of all Israel, three thousand in number, to search for David (1 Sam 24:3). Although Saul has a superior infantry, the story indicates that David secures the advantage when Saul enters a cave to relieve himself:[20]

וַיָּבֹא אֶל־גְּדֵרוֹת הַצֹּאן עַל־הַדֶּרֶךְ וְשָׁם מְעָרָה וַיָּבֹא שָׁאוּל לְהָסֵךְ אֶת־רַגְלָיו
וְדָוִד וַאֲנָשָׁיו בְּיַרְכְּתֵי הַמְּעָרָה יֹשְׁבִים

> He came to the fences of the sheep along the road and there was a *cave*. Saul went into it in order to relieve himself, while David and his men were sitting in the innermost part of the *cave*. (1 Sam 24:4)

In the next verse, David's men urge him to capitalize on Saul's apparent vulnerability:

18. In 1 Sam 22, the word appears only once in the topographic name, the *Cave* of Adullam. David had escaped to this cave after he pretended to be mad before King Achish of Gath. Ps 57, with its imagery of an opponent in pursuit of the supplicant, would fit this context, as David could be imagined as the psalmist asking God to be merciful to him, especially after he had to save his life by humiliating himself (21:14).

19. I discuss 1 Sam 23 at length in connection with Ps 142, below (pp. 105–8).

20. Lit. "to cover his feet" which is a euphemism for "defecate." Compare the phrase in Judg 3:24.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אַנְשֵׁי דָוִד אֵלָיו הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר יְהוָה אֵלֶיךָ הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן אֶת־אֹיִבְךָ[21]
בְּיָדֶךָ וְעָשִׂיתָ לּוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר יִטַב בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַיָּקָם דָּוִד וַיִּכְרֹת אֶת־כְּנַף־הַמְּעִיל אֲשֶׁר־לְשָׁאוּל בַּלָּט

David's men said to him, "The day is here which the LORD said to you, 'I will indeed give your enemy into your hand that you may do to him whatever seems appropriate to you'." Then David got up and stealthily cut off the border (*wing*) of Saul's cloak. (1 Sam 24:5)

The words of David's men, "The day is here which the LORD said to you…" presume more than that which is recorded in the books of Samuel. To be sure, the Samuel narrative does report that the prophet Samuel has secretly anointed David (1 Sam 16). Nowhere, however, does the narrative relate that God will deliver Saul over to David. It seems that David, being just as enthusiastic as his men, cut off a piece (*wing*) of Saul's clothing. But then David feels sorry for what he has done to Saul and the narrative reveals his inner thoughts:

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי־כֵן וַיַּךְ לֵב־דָּוִד אֹתוֹ עַל אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת אֶת־כְּנַף מְעִלוֹ[22]

And afterwards, David's heart was troubled because he had cut off a border (*wing*) of his cloak. (1 Sam 24:6)

David then reproaches his men for suggesting that he harm to Saul:

[7]וַיֹּאמֶר לַאֲנָשָׁיו חָלִילָה לִּי מֵיהוָה אִם־אֶעֱשֶׂה אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לַאדֹנִי לִמְשִׁיחַ יְהוָה
לִשְׁלֹחַ יָדִי בּוֹ כִּי־מְשִׁיחַ יְהוָה הוּא [8]וַיְשַׁסַּע דָּוִד אֶת־אֲנָשָׁיו בַּדְּבָרִים וְלֹא נְתָנָם לָקוּם
אֶל־שָׁאוּל וְשָׁאוּל קָם מִהַמְּעָרָה וַיֵּלֶךְ בַּדָּרֶךְ

[7] He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should have done this thing to my lord, to the anointed one of the LORD, to send my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." [8] David vehemently censured his men [lit. "tore his men to pieces with words"] and did not let them rise against Saul. Saul got up and left the *cave* to go on his way. (1 Sam 24:7–8)

It is questionable whether David's words here are sincere. While David's words could have been an expression of genuine sympathy, they could also have been said out of self-interest. After all, David, too, is an anointed one of the LORD (1 Sam 16).[23] Perhaps his assertion of the sanctity of Saul's kingship is pre-emptive: to deter his own men from making an attempt on *his* life when he reigns as king of Israel. Or perhaps these verses serve an apologetic purpose, showing David's restraint in the matter of killing Saul, thereby bolstering the view that he had *nothing* to do with Saul's ultimate death (1 Sam 26:9–11; 2 Sam 1).

21. Reading the MT *qere*.

22. Reading with LXX τὸ πτερύγιον τῆς διπλοίδος αὐτοῦ instead of MT כנף אשר לשאול, "the skirt which belonged to Saul."

23. Alter, *David Story*, 148.

If David's "heart was troubled" for cutting off a piece (*wing*) of Saul's robe, he seems to get over it rather quickly. That is, he has little difficulty in flaunting the piece of cloth before Saul to prove that he has had Saul at his mercy:

> וְאָבִי רְאֵה גַּם רְאֵה אֶת־כְּנַף מְעִילְךָ בְּיָדִי כִּי בְּכָרְתִי אֶת־כְּנַף מְעִילְךָ וְלֹא הֲרַגְתִּיךָ
> דַּע וּרְאֵה כִּי אֵין בְּיָדִי רָעָה וָפֶשַׁע וְלֹא־חָטָאתִי לָךְ וְאַתָּה צֹדֶה אֶת־נַפְשִׁי לְקַחְתָּהּ

> Now my father, look! See the edge (lit. *wing*) of your cloak in my hand, for when I cut off the edge (*wing*) of your cloak and did not kill you, know with certainty that there is no wrong or crime in my hand and I have not sinned against you. Yet, you lie in wait in order to take my life. (1 Sam 24:12)

David speaks with much confidence for a man who has an inferior infantry to that of Saul's (1 Sam 23:13). Moreover, David is deep inside the cave into which Saul enters. If David had killed Saul right away, it does not seem reasonable that Saul's men would sit by idly and accept David as their leader. We would expect that Saul's military commander, Abner (1 Sam 14:15), would act, in such a situation, in a manner similar to the manner in which Joab, David's general, would act. Joab would not have passively accepted the demise of his leader. He would undoubtedly have capitalized on the greater number present in Saul's army and would have used it to defeat the opposing army, either in the name of the slain king, or, perhaps, in his own name.[24] With a capable second-in-command and a choice company comprised of Israel's best, Saul may not have succumbed to defeat as easily as the narrative depicts. Had David killed Saul instantly, Saul's troops could have feasibly overpowered David's.

This idea that Saul's men may have attacked David, which would make him even more vulnerable than Saul, is noted by rabbinic writers:

> As soon as Saul departed, his mighty men said: "Is David to be esteemed a righteous man because he did not slay thee in the cave? He knew that if he did anything to thee, we would enter the cave, and at once destroy him; and because David was aware of this, he was afraid."[25]

David, then, may have decided to go against the implicit recommendation of his men to slay Saul in order to prevent what could have been a dreadful defeat for him. Even the slicing off of a piece of Saul's cloak was a daring move on David's part. Had Saul detected him, a reprisal may have instantaneously ensued. David's risk-taking continues when

24. See 2 Sam 12:26–30, where Joab threatened David with calling an Ammonite city by his name if David had not arrived quickly to finish off the battle and claim the city.

25. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:503–4.

he later uses the cloth to convince Saul that he had spared his life. Alter conveys nicely the danger involved when David uses the torn cloth as evidence:

> David is taking a calculated risk. Saul could, after all, order his troops to attack David and the men behind him in the cave. David first throws Saul off his guard by paying obeisance to him as king and prostrating himself—hardly what one would expect of a fugitive or rebel. He then counts on the persuasive power of his own rhetoric, and on the tell-tale scrap of the king's cloak that he clutches, to deflect Saul from his lethal intentions.[26]

David's smooth talking triggers strong emotions in Saul, who responds by saying, "Is that your voice my son David?" Then, Saul cries bitterly and proclaims that he knew David did not desire to harm him (1 Sam 24:17–18). For a time, Saul halts his pursuit of David.

The psalmist's description of his predicament would match with the potential danger that looms over David if his plan to appease Saul did not work. Psalm 57 describes a petitioner in the midst of predatory lions whose jaws resemble military weapons—spears, arrows, and swords. Had David's cajoling failed, he may have had two hostile armies, Saul's and his own, "voraciously consuming" him (v. 5). Given that Saul had a stronger army than David's, it is conceivable that David's own men would have betrayed him in order to stave off an attack by Saul.[27]

The uncertain nature of David's power has surfaced several times in the narrative, and his men did not always instantaneously agree to accompany David into battle. His men, for example, show their reluctance to accompany him in battle at Keilah and their doubts propel David to consult the deity via the *ephod* twice before he convinces them to unite with him in this battle.[28] Also, the speed with which they have pronounced a death sentence on David when situations have not gone their way evokes the instability of David's power during his days as a fugitive (1 Sam 30:4). The urgency revealed in Ps 57, "Have mercy… have mercy…I call to God Most High," emphasizes the need for David to rely on his God, especially in the midst of two armies with lethal weaponry. Instead of relying upon human aid, the psalmist asserts that he takes refuge in the shadow of the deity's wings (כנף), and David would have needed such protection, especially after he ripped off the *wing* of Saul's robe.

26. Alter, *David Story*, 148.

27. See 2 Sam 21:14–22 where the death of Sheba alone thwarts the destruction of the city and the death of people within it.

28. See the discussion of Ps 142, below (p. 106).

In Saul's history, the tearing of a robe holds particular symbolic significance in that it represents his loss of kingship (1 Sam 15:24–29). David may have done this deliberately in order to take away some token of Saul's kingship, and to remind Saul that he had been rejected by God from ruling as king (1 Sam 15:28). The mere sight of the torn cloak may have prompted the passionate response from Saul in which he comes to tears and publicly makes known that David will rule after him (1 Sam 24:16–22). In the following passage, rabbinic interpretation very tightly links Saul, David, and the tearing of a robe as an indication of loss or attainment of kingship:

> At the time that Saul violated the decree of the Holy One, blessed be He, concerning Amalek, Samuel came and rebuked him, saying *Thou has rejected the word of the Lord* (I Sam. 15:26); and as Samuel turned to go away, he rent Saul's robe, as it is said *And as Samuel turned to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his robe, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him: "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou*" (I Sam 15:27–28). Saul asked, "And who is this neighbor of mine who is better than I, and who will rule instead of me?" Samuel answered, "I shall give thee a clue: he who rends thy robe shall take away thy kingship." And when Saul entered the cave, and David cut off the skirt of his robe, Saul remembered at once what Samuel had told him. Thereupon Saul said, "*I know that as king thou wilt rule* (I Sam. 24:21).[29]

3. *Thematic Links*

Psalm 57 also brings out thematic elements in the narrative of 1 Sam 24. First, the imagery of slander has similarities with the story under discussion. Vituperative speech as a dangerous weapon emerges in the psalm[30] and in 1 Sam 24. David complains to Saul that he should not listen to the defamatory statements that have been declared against him:

> וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד לְשָׁאוּל לָמָּה תִשְׁמַע אֶת־דִּבְרֵי אָדָם לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה דָוִד מְבַקֵּשׁ רָעָתֶךָ

> David said to Saul, "Why should you listen to the words of people who say, 'David seeks to harm you?'" (1 Sam 24:10)

Second, David's accusation that Saul has listened to slander and then has acted upon it by his vigilant pursuit, corresponds conceptually to Ps 57 when the petitioner laments that his opponents "have prepared a net for my steps " (v. 7).

29. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:501.

30. This idea is found elsewhere in the Psalter. See Pss 52:3–5; 55:22; 59:8, 13; 64:3; 140:3.

Third, in the latter part of this verse, the psalmist expresses his hope that the adversary's wrongdoing will revert back to the evildoer. The narrative at 1 Sam 24 echoes this idea when Saul finds himself at the mercy of the fugitive he has aggressively pursued.

4. *Lacuna*

David, at least on the surface, regrets cutting off the edge of Saul's cloak. That David would have offered some words to his God after having regret over a wrong he has committed is suggested by 2 Sam 24:10, a text which shares exact phrasing with 1 Sam 24:6. In 2 Sam 24:10, the expression "his heart was troubled" (וַיַּךְ לֵב) is used to express David's contrite feelings for taking a census of the people in Israel. He realizes that this mistake would have grievous consequences and then immediately says a prayer:

> וַיַּךְ לֵב־דָּוִד אֹתוֹ אַחֲרֵי־כֵן כִּי[31] סָפַר אֶת־הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־יְהוָה חָטָאתִי מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי וְעַתָּה יְהוָה הַעֲבֶר־נָא אֶת־עֲוֹן עַבְדְּךָ כִּי נִסְכַּלְתִּי מְאֹד

> David's heart *was troubled* afterward because he had counted the people. David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now O LORD, remove the guilt of your servant for I have been very foolish." (2 Sam 24:10)

David explicitly asserts his wrongdoing (חָטָאתִי מְאֹד) here in 2 Samuel, but he does not admit guilt in 1 Sam 24. The addition of Ps 57, while not a prayer expressing guilt, reveals David as a deferential figure who submits completely to his God (vv. 2–4, and 8). That David offers a prayer after his "heart was troubled" in 2 Sam 24:10, but does not do so in 1 Sam 24:6 could be a gap that the author of the psalm's superscription was attempting to fill with the addition of Ps 57 in this story.

Even without relating Ps 57 to the story of David's regret of census-taking in 2 Sam 24, the addition of Ps 57 to the story of 1 Sam 24 improves David's image by making him appear more reverent. He offers a prayer because he feels sorrowful for an offense, the fact that he had humiliated the LORD's anointed while he "uncovered his feet." Also, Ps 57 added to 1 Sam 24 makes David appear more desperate. This reading places emphasis on Saul's larger army, the fragility of David's support, and his general need for the deity in this episode. Although the text mentions the LORD several times, the human aspect of this narrative is in the forefront. David's success can be attributed to his own cleverness and instinct for self-preservation. Reading Ps 57 into the narrative,

31. כִּי added on the basis of LXX^{L}.

however, would clarify any ambiguity—the favorable outcome for David comes from God. He asks for divine help when the situation at the cave of En-gedi bore heavily upon him. He faced a threat from two fronts—Saul's army and his own. The psalm reveals that he called out "to the God who accomplished things for him," (v. 3) and the narrative affirms that his God came to his aid.

* * *

C. David's Refuge

(Read 1 Samuel 22:1–2; 23:1–15; 24)

Saul's obsession with killing David forces David into the wilderness where he hides in caves. These natural structures served as a source of protection from his pursuers. The psalm, however, highlights that David's ultimate refuge lay in his deity, who takes note of him, especially when he experiences the depths of his despair.

1. *Psalm 142*

[1] *A maskil of* David *when he was in the cave. A prayer.*
[2] I cry aloud to the LORD,
I make supplication to the LORD.
[3] I pour out my complaint before him,
I tell him of my distress.
[4] When my breath is faint,
You indeed know my way.
In the path that I traverse,
a trap is set for me;
[5] Look to the right and see,
there is no one who notices me;
escape perishes from me,
there is no one who cares for me.
[6] I cry to you, O LORD!
I say, "You are my refuge"
my portion in the land of the living.
[7] Pay attention to my cry,
for I am greatly brought low.
Deliver me from the ones pursuing me,
for they are stronger than I.
[8] Bring me out of the prison,
in order to give thanks to your name;
Righteous ones will surround me,
Indeed, you deal benevolently with me.

Psalm 142 speaks of an anguished person who cries aloud to God in a time of trouble. He "pours out" (שׁפך) his lament to his God, for he "knows" (ידע) that the deity will bring about a resolution to his problem. The supplicant complains of exhaustion (v. 4a), a waning inner spirit (v. 5), and adversaries who have laid traps for his demise (v. 4b). In the midst of his desperate situation, he laments that he cannot rely on human support. Vividly does the petitioner express his emotions of exclusion and isolation in v. 5:

הַבִּיט יָמִין וּרְאֵה וְאֵין־לִי מַכִּיר
אָבַד מָנוֹס מִמֶּנִּי אֵין דּוֹרֵשׁ לְנַפְשִׁי

Look to the right and see, there is no one who notices me;
escape perishes from me, there is no one who cares for me.

Not only does the supplicant lack human help, but his enemies are also stronger than he (v. 7). He is unable to defend himself from these more powerful foes and clings to his God.

It would take little effort to imagine David appealing to the deity as the petitioner in this psalm. Certainly, the lonely, hunted man in desperate straits of Ps 142 would describe King David in a number of incidents reported in the Samuel narrative. The title of Ps 142, however, does not indicate the precise episode to which to incorporate the psalm. All of the psalms with an historical title specify a personal or geographical name, except for Ps 142. In fact, Ps 57, which also has a title mentioning David "in a cave," specifies that he had "fled from *Saul*." It explicitly gives the name from whom David fled. The heading on Ps 142, on the other hand, merely notes that David said a prayer in some unspecified cave.

Why did the person attaching the title decide not to indicate the location of the cave or provide a character from the narrative to help pinpoint the Davidic episode(s) that he wanted the reader to associate with this psalm? Does the title refer to David in a cave fleeing from Absalom, Saul, or the Philistines? Caves often served as the place of reprieve from enemies,[32] and David undoubtedly used these natural structures for safety. The lack of specificity in the title of Ps 142 readily permits connections with any episode in which David may have fled into a cave out of desperation. The author of the superscriptions, or the final

32. See Josh 10:16–27 where Amorite kings fled into a cave at Makkedah. In Judg 6:2, the Israelites hide in caves to escape Midianite oppression. The Israelites also used caves for refuge when they were in battle with the Philistines (1 Sam 13:6). See also 1 Kgs 18:4, 13, where Obadiah hides fifty prophets in a cave to save them from Queen Jezebel.

editor of the Psalter,[33] may have intentionally concluded the historical psalms with a vague superscription in order to highlight the deity's involvement in David's escape from adversaries in general. The psalm would then serve as the final affirmation among the historical psalms that David had repeatedly demonstrated faithfulness in his God, who always came to his aid. Rabbinic writers have also viewed the general nature of the title of Ps 142 as a way to assert David's ever reverent deportment throughout the difficult moments of his life:

> I. *Maschil of David, when he was in a cave; a prayer. With my voice I cry unto the Lord* (Ps. 142:1–2)…when David fled before Absalom, he composed a Psalm to none other than the Holy One, blessed be He. And when David was in the wilderness of Judah, he called to mind the name of none other than the Holy One, blessed be He. For whenever David found himself in trouble, he put his trust in the Holy One, blessed be He: When David was in the cave, he cried out to none other than to the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said *Maschil of David, when he was in a cave; a prayer. With my voice I cry unto the Lord*, etc, (Ps. 142:1–2).[34]

While Ps 142 is general enough to fit a number of episodes, I have limited this study to those texts in which the word for "cave" (מְעָרָה) appears during David's flight from Saul. In addition, I will argue that 1 Sam 23 shows compelling lexical and conceptual affinities with Ps 142 even though the word for "cave" does not appear.

As stated in the previous exposition on Ps 57, the Samuel narrative mentions two caves into which David fled in times of trouble: the Cave of Adullam (1 Sam 22:1) and the Cave of En-gedi (1 Sam 24:3). Both of these stories show some linguistic and conceptual connections that require discussion.

2. *Cave of Adullam*

1 Samuel 22:1 opens with David fleeing from Saul to the Cave of Adullam:

> וַיֵּלֶךְ דָּוִד מִשָּׁם וַיִּמָּלֵט אֶל־מְעָרַת עֲדֻלָּם וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶחָיו וְכָל־בֵּית אָבִיו וַיֵּרְדוּ אֵלָיו שָׁמָּה
>
> David went from there and fled to the Cave of Adullam. His brothers heard, and everyone from the house of his father went down to him there.

33. The author of the superscriptions may not have been the final editor of the Psalter. That is, the titles on the psalms may have appeared first and then the psalms were arranged in the collection as it stands now.

34. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:352.

In the preceding chapter, David barely escapes execution by the Philistines by making himself appear insane in the sight of King Achish.[35] Now David finds himself alone at this cave. Psalm 142 would fit well at this point in the narrative: David could be imagined as offering a prayer while he remained isolated in the cave. He probably would have been tired (v. 4), feeling dejected (vv. 5, 7, 8), and may have thought that his only hope lay in his God (v. 6). Even after the situation improves for David with the arrival of his family and militia, the narrative reports that he was not in a stable position. Not too long after David had assembled with his family and soldiers, trouble awaits him:

> וַיֹּאמֶר גָּד הַנָּבִיא אֶל־דָּוִד לֹא תֵשֵׁב בַּמְּצוּדָה לֵךְ וּבָאתָ־לְּךָ אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה וַיֵּלֶךְ דָּוִד וַיָּבֹא יַעַר חָרֶת

> Gad the prophet said to David, "Do not stay in the fortress; leave and go to the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth. (1 Sam 22:5)

The nature of this support is suspect and one commentator questions the efficacy of David's reinforcements at this juncture: "David's family, at least his parents, are more of a hindrance than a help since David leaves them in the custody of the king of Moab, 'until I know what God will do for me' (1 Sam 22:3–4)."[36]

A comparison of David's army with Saul betokens the fragility of David's support:

> וַיִּתְקַבְּצוּ אֵלָיו כָּל־אִישׁ מָצוֹק וְכָל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ נֹשֶׁא וְכָל־אִישׁ מַר־נֶפֶשׁ וַיְהִי עֲלֵיהֶם לְשָׂר וַיִּהְיוּ עִמּוֹ כְּאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ

> Every man who was distressed, every man who owed money, and every man who was embittered gathered himself to him; and he became a leader over them. There were approximately four hundred men with him. (1 Sam 22:2)

His militia pales in comparison to the army of Saul:

> וְגַם־שָׁאוּל הָלַךְ לְבֵיתוֹ גִּבְעָתָה וַיֵּלְכוּ עִמּוֹ בְּנֵי הַחַיִל[38] אֲשֶׁר־נָגַע יְהוָה[37] בְּלִבָּם

> Saul also went to his house at Gibeah, and with him went valiant men whose hearts the LORD touched. (1 Sam 10:26)

35. See 1 Sam 21 and discussion of Ps 56, below (pp. 74–75).
36. Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 138.
37. Reading יהוה with 4QSam[a] and the LXX. The MT reads אלהים.
38. Reading בני החיל with 4QSam[a] and the LXX, which has υἱοὶ δυνάμεων.

וַתְּהִי הַמִּלְחָמָה חֲזָקָה עַל־פְּלִשְׁתִּים כֹּל יְמֵי שָׁאוּל וְרָאָה שָׁאוּל כָּל־אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר
וְכָל־בֶּן־חַיִל וַיַּאַסְפֵהוּ אֵלָיו

> The battle against the Philistines was difficult all the days of Saul and whenever Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant warrior, he took him into his service. (1 Sam 14:52)

Thus, David must press on with a suspect group of warriors, even though he is up against a superior military force. Saul's relentless pursuit precipitated his immediate departure from his family after only a short reprieve. He leaves without showing any emotions over the abrupt break from his family, and he also does not demonstrate any fear about the life-threatening situation before him. And, the next episode clearly indicates the urgency of David's flight from the Cave of Adullam, for this pericope details Saul's ordering of the deaths of many people at Nob (1 Sam 22:6–23).

Psalm 142 would also befit the narrative after 1 Sam 22:5, the moment when Gad warns David to leave the cave at Adullam. The addition of the psalm at this point would vivify David, a figure who is otherwise described in this text as emotionless, perfunctorily moving from one precarious situation to another. The insertion of the psalm would bring out the isolation and uncertainty that David may have felt when a force mightier than his chased him (Ps 142:4, 7). Furthermore, the insertion of the psalm right after 1 Sam 22:5 would highlight David's need for continued assistance from the deity (Ps 142:4–7).

3. *Cave of En-gedi*

We have seen in the discussion of Ps 57 that there are five attestations of the word for "cave," מְעָרָה, in 1 Sam 24 and several associations between this psalm and the narrative. The episode between Saul and David at En-gedi also contains several connections with Ps 142.

To begin with, in v. 7 of the psalm, the petitioner prays for God to deliver him from his persecutors, who are stronger than he. As I have explicated above, the text reveals Saul's superior infantry.

Second, in the narrative at the Cave of En-gedi, David complains to Saul that he pursues him without cause and David invokes God as Judge to adjudicate the case (1 Sam 24:11–16). Saul's response to David contains strong lexical and conceptual links with Ps 142. He replies to David as follows:

> [18]וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־דָּוִד צַדִּיק אַתָּה מִמֶּנִּי כִּי אַתָּה גְּמַלְתַּנִי הַטּוֹבָה וַאֲנִי גְּמַלְתִּיךָ הָרָעָה
> [19]וְאַתָּה[41] הִגַּדְתָּ לִי[40] הַיּוֹם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתָה אִתִּי טוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר[39] סִגְּרַנִי יְהוָה בְּיָדֶךָ
> וְלֹא הֲרַגְתָּנִי
>
> [18] Saul said to David, "You are more *righteous* than I, for you have *repaid* me good but I have *repaid* you evil. [19] And you have told me today how you dealt well with me when you did not kill me although the LORD *delivered* me into your hand." (1 Sam 24:18–19)

The italicized words in my translation represent words that also appear in v. 8 of the psalm—צדק ("righteous"), גמל ("to repay"), and סגר ("to deliver"). Slomovic argues that it is these three words that serve as the basis for the title.[42]

Like Slomovic, Zakovitch also bases the connection between psalm and this scene at En-gedi on the occurrence of these words in Saul's response to David. Zakovitch, however, elaborates on the conceptual correspondences between the two texts. He perceptively observes a link between the petitioner's affirmation that God "will deal bountifully" with him (v. 8) and the narrative. According to Zakovitch, this assertion from the psalmist reveals that David did not expect deliverance from any human, especially not the indecisive king, but rather from his God alone.[43] The narrative corroborates that David could not rely upon Saul's words, no matter how well-meaning they were at the time Saul spoke them. Saul may have acknowledged that David was more righteous than he, but he had not ultimately desisted from hunting David.

In another insightful observation, Zakovitch notes that the petitioner's request to be brought out of the prison can be associated with David's hideout in the cave at En-gedi. Zakovitch identifies the cave as a kind of prison and suggests that the author of the superscriptions assumed that David said this psalm when he was in this "prison," before Saul got there. He argues that the prayer of Ps 142 would have been said prior to Saul's arrival. Thus, when Saul enters the cave and David gains the upper-hand, it is not a coincidence. Rather, it is a divine act that comes about as an answer to David's prayer (Ps 142:4).[44]

39. Reading אשר with 4QSam[a] instead of the MT, which has את אשר. The MT seems to have duplicated the words from earlier in the verse. See McCarter, *I Samuel*, 383.
40. Adding לִי with LXX[B]. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 383, omits with the MT.
41. Read *qere* of the MT: אתה.
42. Slomovic, "Toward an Understanding," 377.
43. Zakovitch, *From Shepherd to Messiah*, 159.
44. Ibid.

David himself attributes his victory to God when he declares: "The Lord delivered me into your hand" (1 Sam 24:19). An intertextual reading of this narrative with the psalm, in Zakovitch's provocative view, leaves the impression that the deity answers David's prayer and punishes Saul in equal measure.

4. *Imprisonment at Keilah*

Building upon Zakovitch's idea of imprisonment, I have found a connection between Ps 142 and another story in which David finds himself, figuratively speaking, in a "prison." In Ps 142, the word "prison" (סגר) occurs in v. 8 and this root appears a total of five times in 1 Sam 23:1–13. Although the root in the narrative does not have the same meaning as it does in the psalm, that the stem shows up in utterances of Saul, David, and God is remarkable.

The episode of 1 Sam 23:1–13 recounts Saul's pursuit of David in the town of Keilah, a town located just south of Adullam facing the eastern border of Philistine territory. The story opens with a Philistine raid on Judah. David's men have reluctantly agreed to join him in battle against the Philistines in Keilah, and they defeat the Philistines.

After this battle, the narrative alerts the reader that David is in danger again. Saul has found out that David has escaped to Keilah, and upon discovering this information, Saul anticipates victory:

> וַיֻּגַּד לְשָׁאוּל כִּי־בָא דָוִד קְעִילָה וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל נִכַּר[45] אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים בְּיָדִי כִּי נִסְגַּר לָבוֹא בְּעִיר דְּלָתַיִם וּבְרִיחַ

> It was told to Saul that David had gone to Keilah, and Saul said, "God has rejected him and given him into my power, for he *has shut himself up* by entering a city with gates and a bolt." (1 Sam 23:7)

Saul thought the city's structure with its walls and locked gates provided a ready-made prison for David and that David had trapped himself inside the city of Keilah. Saul's perception of David's imprisonment is emphasized through wordplay. According to Fokkelman, the text highlights the word for "imprisonment" נִסְגַּר (*nisgar*) through the use of rhyme and alliteration with נִכַּר (*nikkar*), the word Saul used to indicate the deity's estrangement from David.[46] The situation appears fortuitous for Saul and he wastes no time in his efforts to secure a victory over David.

45. Reading נכר, "to treat as a stranger," with the MT. The LXX reads πέπρακεν = מכר, "to sell." For an emendation of נכר to סכר, "to shut up (in the hand of)," see Isa 19:4; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 369.

46. That is, Saul perceived this estrangement, even though this was not the case. See Fokkelman, *Crossing Fates*, 425.

David somehow knows of Saul's intentions to capture him and he consults the deity via use of the ephod:[47]

> 9 וַיֵּדַע דָּוִד כִּי עָלָיו שָׁאוּל מַחֲרִישׁ הָרָעָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אֶבְיָתָר הַכֹּהֵן הַגִּישָׁה הָאֵפוֹד
> 10 וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁמוֹעַ שָׁמַע עַבְדְּךָ כִּי־מְבַקֵּשׁ שָׁאוּל לָבוֹא
> אֶל־קְעִילָה לְשַׁחֵת לָעִיר בַּעֲבוּרִי

> 9 David knew that Saul was plotting for his downfall, and he said to Abiathar, the priest, "Bring the ephod." 10 David said to the LORD, the God of Israel, "Your servant has certainly heard that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah and destroy the city on my account." (1 Sam 23:9–10)

In the next part of David's inquiry to the LORD, the root סגר occurs in the utterances of both David and the deity. The root appears as an indication of the rapidly declining situation confronting David—he suspects that the people he has liberated from Philistine control would deliver him over into Saul's authority. His suspicion is corroborated by the deity:

> 11b הֲיֹרֵד שָׁאוּל כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע עַבְדֶּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַגֵּד־נָא לְעַבְדֶּךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה יֵרֵד
> 12 וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד הֲיַסְגִּרוּ בַעֲלֵי קְעִילָה אֹתִי וְאֶת־אֲנָשַׁי בְּיַד־שָׁאוּל וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה יַסְגִּירוּ

> 11b "Will Saul go down as your servant has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant." The LORD answered, "He will go down." 12 David said, "Will the leaders of Keilah *deliver* me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will *deliver* (you into Saul's hand)." (1 Sam 23:11b–12)[48]

That the inhabitants of Keilah would "deliver" (סגר) David over to Saul seems disloyal. Their betrayal, however, may have been warranted. Reports of Saul's cruelty at Nob may have reached Keilah. Knowledge of the havoc he wreaked on the people of Nob may have served as a horrific reminder of the danger involved in harboring David. Alter eloquently articulates David's predicament:

> The political paradox of the situation that has evolved is evident: David has achieved a victory against Israel's principal enemy; Saul now moves to destroy that victory, enlisting the aid of the people David saved.[49]

Fortunately for David, the military intelligence he receives via the ephod proves effective and he leaves the city of Keilah undetected:

47. Unlike the previous episode in 1 Sam 22, information did not automatically come from a prophet like Gad who told David that he needed to flee the Cave of Adullam (1 Sam 22:5). Rather, David had to find out what lay ahead by summoning God through this divination device.

48. For a discussion of the text of v. 11a, see McCarter, *I Samuel*, 370.

49. Alter, *David Story*, 142.

וַיָּקָם דָּוִד וַאֲנָשָׁיו כְּשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת[50] אִישׁ וַיֵּצְאוּ מִקְּעִילָה וַיִּתְהַלְּכוּ בַּאֲשֶׁר יִתְהַלָּכוּ וּלְשָׁאוּל הֻגַּד כִּי־נִמְלַט דָּוִד מִקְּעִילָה וַיֶּחְדַּל לָצֵאת

> David and his men, about six hundred in number, arose and went forth from Keilah. They wandered about wherever they could, and Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah. Saul then ceased going forth (after David). (1 Sam 23:13)

In Ps 142, the root סגר is used to describe the depths to which the petitioner has fallen. He descends to a level so low that it feels like a prison. In each instance of the use of the root in 1 Sam 23, David is at a low point: (1) Saul knows that he will not be able to get out the city without being captured,[51] (2) the people of a city he has saved turn on him, (3) the deity confirms his predicament.

The situation outlined in 1 Sam 23 corresponds well with the description of Ps 142 of an isolated fugitive who, in desperation, turns to the deity for help. At the outset, this chapter intimates David's isolation during his negotiations with his men on whether they should do battle in Keilah. His men do not immediately agree (1 Sam 23:3–5). Undoubtedly, their strained circumstances fueled their resistance to support David in fighting for the people of Keilah. Fokkelman finds the hesitation of David's army understandable for the following reasons: "these outlaws are living under continuous pressure, and we understand the argument of David's men that they do not want to double the danger of their life style by yet again finishing off a national battle, being themselves pursued by the crown."[52] David has to inquire of the deity twice before his men decide to join him in battle and could not automatically assume their enlistment. Then, after fighting for the people of Keilah, he discovers that the very Keilites he has saved would deliver him into the hands of his enemy.[53]

50. The LXX has "four hundred."

51. In fact, at the end of ch. 23, Saul almost captures David, but has immediately to halt the chase in order to do battle with the Philistines (1 Sam 23:26–28). See the discussion of this episode in Ps 18, below (pp. 116–18).

52. Fokkelman, *Crossing Fates*, 418.

53. Not only could self-interested Keilites turn against him, but David's own troops could exhibit similar betraying tendencies. In 1 Sam 30:4, for example, David's men considered stoning him when the Amalekites destroyed Ziklag and carried off the women. Evidently, the men blamed him for leaving Ziklag open to this attack. That David had successfully led his troops through a host of dangers did not seem to bear on the immediate blame they had cast upon him. These embittered warriors did not consider that the Amalekites indiscriminately took women into captivity, including the wives of David (1 Sam 30:5–6). David deflected the assault

David could be imagined as uttering the words of Ps 142 on two occasions in the episode at Keilah. It would befit the beginning of the story, when David has to prove to his men that a battle against the Philistines would be successful. The psalm would work equally well at the end of the episode when David discovers that the inhabitants of Keilah will deliver him to Saul. The incredible impression of loneliness evoked in the psalm would match the situation here. Also, the psalmist's complaint of a trap being set at his every step (v. 4) would be relevant in this story. Last, the lament that no one notices or cares for the petitioner corresponds to the fragility of loyalty exhibited by his own men and the people of Keilah.

The lexical correspondence through the word סגר only strengthens the conceptual connections between Ps 142 and 1 Sam 23. Even though David is not located in a "cave," the idea of imprisonment and isolation, which is a key concept in Ps 142, finds a compelling association in the chapter, 1 Sam 23, located in the middle of the two chapters, 1 Sam 22 and 24, in which the word for "cave" does appear.

That the title of Ps 142 does not specify a particular person or geographical location opens the psalm up to application in a number of stories in the Samuel narrative. While I have addressed specific situations to which the psalm would apply in 1 Sam 22–24, the general nature of the heading lends itself to be used for any story that affirms David's need of his God to deliver him.

that his men contemplated by consultation of God through the ephod. The ephod confirmed David's success in a retaliatory attack upon the Amalekites. See the story in 1 Sam 30.

Chapter 6

DAVID'S LOVE OF GOD

A. A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

(Read 1 Samuel 18; 22–24; 30; 2 Samuel 22)

David, a mighty warrior, fought and won many battles against his enemies. Psalm 18 alludes to two of his enemies, Saul and the Amalekites. Against those tenacious foes David claims victory. He however does not accomplish these feats alone: God comes down from heaven to save him. This psalm underlines the special connection between David and his deity. Indeed, David as the psalmist begins the prayer with a proclamation of his love for his God.

1. *Psalm 18*

[1] *To the leader: A Psalm, of the servant of the LORD. Of David who spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.*
[2] He said:
I love you, O LORD, my strength!
[3] O LORD, my rock, my fortress, and my rescuer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, my mighty deliverer,[1]
my stronghold.
[4] I called on the LORD,
the one who is praiseworthy,[2]
and from my enemies I was saved.
[5] Cords of death surrounded me,
torrents of a swallowing abyss[3] frightened me.

1. Lit. "horn of my escape." "Horn" here denotes strength or power.
2. Lit. "one being praised" (מְהֻלָּל).
3. The Hebrew word בְּלִיַּעַל points to the netherworld and is used in parallelism with "death" and Sheol. The meaning of the word is debated. I have taken the suggestion of Dahood, *Psalms*, 105, in my translation because it fits with the idea of gushing waters encompassing the petitioner. Also, the underworld is often marked by imagery of chaotic waters. Cross and Freedman contend that this verse supports

[6] Cords of Sheol encircled me,
snares of death confronted me.
[7] In my distress, I called on the LORD,
and I cried out to my God.
He heard my voice from his temple,
and my cry was heard in his ears.[4]
[8] The earth quaked and trembled;
the foundations of the mountains shook,
they quaked because he was angry.
[9] Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and a devouring fire from his mouth,
fiery coals blazed forth from him.
[10] He stretched out the heavens and came down,
with heavy clouds beneath his feet.
[11] He rode on a cherub and flew,
and soared on the wings of the wind.
[12] He set darkness around him as his covering,
dark rain clouds, dense clouds of the sky
were his canopy.
[13] From the brilliance before him,
hailstones and burning coals shot through his clouds.
[14] The LORD thundered in the heavens,
and the Most High pronounced his voice.[5]
[15] He sent forth his arrows and scattered them,
shot flashes of lightning and dispersed them.
[16] Then the channels of the sea appeared,
and the foundations of the world were revealed
because of your rebuke, O LORD,
by the blast of breath from your nostrils.
[17] He reached down from on high, he took me,
he drew me out from mighty waters.
[18] He delivered me from my powerful foe,
and from those hating me;
for they were mightier than I.
[19] They confronted me in the day of my misery,
but the LORD was my support.
[20] He brought me forth to safety,
he drew me out because he was pleased with me.
[21] The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness,
he requited me according to the purity of my hands.

a different etymology, עלה + בלי, "that which does not come up." See F. M. Cross, Jr., and D. N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (SBLDS 21; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 97.

4. Lit. "my cry to him came to his ears."

5. The words "hailstone and burning coals" appearing in this verse have been omitted based upon 2 Sam 22:13. The words in Ps 18:14 appear to be the result of dittography from v. 13.

[22] For I have kept the ways of the LORD,
and I have not acted wickedly (by straying) from my God.
[23] For all of his rules are before me,
and his statutes I did not allow to depart from me.
[24] I have been blameless before him,
I have kept myself from sin.
[25] The LORD repaid me according to my righteousness,
according to the purity of my hands before his eyes.
[26] With the faithful, you deal faithfully,
with the blameless, you deal accordingly.
[27] With the pure, you act purely,
with the perverse, you are cunning.
[28] For you save afflicted people,
and bring down haughty eyes.
[29] For you light my lamp,
the LORD, my God, turns my darkness into light.
[30] For with you, I can charge through a troop,
and with my God, I can leap over a wall.
[31] The way of God is complete,
the utterance of the LORD is pure;
he is a shield for all who seek refuge in him.
[32] For who is God except the LORD,
and who is a rock besides our God?
[33] God girded me with strength,
and made my way perfect.
[34] He set my feet like deer,
and made me stable on my heights.[6]
[35] He trained my hands for battle,
and my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
[36] You gave me the shield of your deliverance
and your right hand sustained me,
your help[7] has made me great.
[37] You have lengthened my stride,
and my feet did not stumble.
[38] I pursued my enemies and overtook them,
I did not turn back until I destroyed them.
[39] I slashed them,
and they were not able to rise;
they fell at[8] my feet.

6. The imagery here seems to allude to the remarkable agility of deer on rocky heights. But see also Hab 3:19 where the imagery is of God clearing the path on a height.

7. A parallel version of this psalm is found in 2 Sam 23. 4QSam[a] reads ועדרתך for וענותך of the MT. See Frank M. Cross, Jr., et al., eds. *Qumran Cave 4* (DJD 17; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

8. Lit. "under."

40 You girded me with strength for battle,
you have made those rising against me
cower at my feet.
41 You gave to me the advantage[9] of my enemies,
and I annihilated all those hating me.
42 They cried out but there was no deliverer;
they cried to the LORD,
but he did not answer them.
43 I utterly crushed them, like dust in the wind,
I beat them down flat, like mud for pavement.
44 You have rescued me from the strife of people,
you have set me at the head of nations;
people I did not know served me.
45 When they heard of me, they obeyed,
foreign people submitted to me;
46 foreign people lost courage,
and trembled out of their strongholds.
47 The LORD lives! Blessed be my rock!
Let the God of my deliverance be exalted!
48 God who gave me vengeance,
and subdued[10] peoples under my authority;
49 the one who rescued me from my enemies.
You exalted me above those rising against me,
you delivered me from men of violence.
50 Therefore, I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.
51 He magnifies the victories of his king,
shows steadfast kindness to his anointed,
to David and his descendants forever.

Psalm 18 has the longest of the historical titles attributed to David and is set in the context of his successes in battle. This psalm also occurs with some minor variation in 2 Sam 22,[11] a text which is later than Ps 18 but appears to go back to an earlier manuscript.[12] In this psalm, David is called "the servant of the LORD" (עֶבֶד יְהוָה), and the entire psalm is attributed to him as a thanksgiving song to his deity for military success.

9. Lit. "neck."

10. Reading with the MT: וַיַּדְבֵּר. There is a similar usage of the root דבר in the Hiphil in Ps 47:4. The parallel verse in 2 Sam 22:48 has ומוריד, "one who brings down." 4QSam[a] of this verse reads מרדד, "one who subdues." According to Cross, these different readings reflect three different traditions. For further discussion, see Cross et al., eds., *Qumran Cave 4*. See also McCarter, *II Samuel*, 462.

11. The insertion of poems into biblical narratives is somewhat common. See, e.g., Gen 49; Deut 32; 33; Judg 5; 1 Sam 2:1–10; 2 Sam 1:19–27.

12. Cross and Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, 125–58.

The psalm begins with a proclamation, "I love you O LORD" (אֶרְחָמְךָ יְהוָה), a phrase which troubles commentators because the Hebrew root, רחם, does not usually occur as an expression of love originating from humans toward God. Rather, the verbal root רחם typically designates the direct converse; deep compassion originating from God.[13] That the root does not occur elsewhere in the Bible in the Qal conjugation adds to the problems of translating this phrase at the beginning of Ps 18. Given that the root רום ("to exalt") occurs several times in the opening lines of psalms in the phrase, אֲרוֹמִמְךָ, "I exalt you,"[14] commentators sometimes emend the verbal root in Ps 18:1 from רחם, "to love," to רום, "to exalt."[15] The text as it stands with the verb רחם, however, underlines the personal relationship between the petitioner and the deity.

After the initial exclamatory words of praise, a string of divine appellations ensues, each ending with the pronoun, *my*. The psalmist affirms the deity as the personal agent of his rescue through the use of epithets: "my rock" (סַלְעִי), "my fortress" (מְצוּדָתִי), "my rock" (צוּרִי), "my shield" (מָגִנִּי), "my mighty deliverer" (קֶרֶן־יִשְׁעִי), "my stronghold" (מִשְׂגַּבִּי). An intimate connection between the petitioner and God comes up again in v. 20: "he brought me to safety…because he was pleased with me"; and also in v. 36, "your right hand sustained me; your gentleness made me great."

Following the introductory hymn, the psalm turns to a description of the peril confronting the petitioner. Vividly does the metaphor of Sheol capture the severity of his predicament: the psalmist has descended to Sheol, the underworld, where cords of death entangle him and torrents of a swallowing abyss terrify him.[16] The appeal to mythic images brings into relief the necessity of divine succor, for no deliverance was possible from the human sphere.

In his moment of distress, the petitioner calls upon the deity who appears, ushered in by an earthquake. The deity emerges as a furious warrior[17] who plunges down from heaven amid a violent storm (vv. 11–13). He descends riding upon a "cherub"[18] soaring on the winds of a

13. See, e.g., Exod 33:19; Deut 13:18; 30:3; 2 Kgs 13:23; Isa 14:1.

14. Pss 30:1; 145:1; and Isa 25:1.

15. Kraus, *Psalms*, 254–58; J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Psalm 18: A Rhetorical Analysis," *JSOT* 26 (1983): 9.

16. Sheol was the dwelling place of the dead (Gen 37:35; 2 Sam 12:23; Ps 6:5). Several times in the Psalter it is used to describe the experience of mortal danger (Pss 16:10; 30:3; 88:3–4; 116:3). It is also used to express the hope in the punishment of the wicked (Pss 9:18; 31:18; 141:7).

17. See Pss 77:16–19; 97:2–5; Judg 5:4–5; Hab 3:3–15.

18. The cherub or cherubim are creatures associated with the presence of the deity. They represented the throne for the deity's invisible presence (see Isa 6;

storm cloud hurling lightning lances, scattering fiery coals and hail. This imagery is characteristic of theophanies in which the deity appears as a warrior.[19] Thus, in Ps 18, the deity intervenes as a divine warrior to rescue the petitioner: "He reached down from on high, he took me; he drew me out from the mighty waters" (v. 17). He spans the cosmos to come to the aid of the petitioner, to pluck him from drowning waters. The description here, according to Kraus,

> reaches over into the conceptual world of primeval chaos and the origin of the earth. Yahweh's intervention disperses the powers of chaos and institutes the foundations of the earth (מוסדות תבל). Here we are dealing with cosmological terms that refer to the foundation of the land freed from the sea of chaos.[20]

Prominence is given to God as the rescuer of the petitioner who, according to Weiser, "owes his life to the love of God and to his miraculous power."[21]

In vv. 21–25, the psalmist submits the reasoning for the benevolence granted to him by the deity: his conduct is flawless. His hands are clean (v. 21b); he adheres to the ways of the LORD (v. 22a) and his statutes (v. 23). Kuntz argues that, "this strophe is committed to the assumption that as Yahweh's servant, the king's righteousness is firmly anchored in his unwavering commitment to Yahweh and his covenant."[22]

Loyalty to God and his covenant begets divine favor. In the view of the psalmist, how one conducts oneself will generate a favorable or an unfavorable response from the deity (vv. 26–28). Every loyal person is granted protection and can seek God as a place of refuge (v. 31). The psalmist believes that human behavior determines the manner in which God deals with all people.

The next part of the psalm begins with a hymnic proclamation which takes the form of a rhetorical question: "For who is God except the LORD; and who is a rock besides our God?" (v. 32). Following this assertion, the petitioner describes how God had prepared him for battle by instructing him in proper military techniques (vv. 33–37). The petitioner appears as some kind of divine protégé, in whom God takes a personal interest. His military success depends upon this divine undergirding: God

Ezek 10). In the Hebrew Bible, there are depictions of the deity enthroned above cherubim of the ark (see, e.g., Pss 80:1; 99:1; cf. 1 Sam 4:4).

19. See Exod 13:21; 15:1–3; 19:9; Judg 5:4–5; Job 38:1; Ps 97:2–4; Isa 30:27; Hab 3:3–6.

20. Kraus, *Psalms*, 260.

21. Weiser, *Psalms*, 190.

22. Kuntz, "Psalm 18," 12.

equips him for battle and the king overtakes his enemies (vv. 38–43). After his victories the king is elevated as the "head of nations" (v. 44).

In the final verses of the psalm, the petitioner submits praise to a living God who is responsible for the rescue of him from his enemies. God's steadfast kindness to the king is proclaimed as a perpetual promise to David and his descendants (v. 51).

The title of Ps 18 connects the body of the poem with the military struggles of David, particularly those he encountered with Saul. The Samuel narrative does not explicitly report that the incidents between David and Saul were of the magnitude that would necessitate the anger depicted in this psalm (vv. 8–10). Nor do the stories convey that David enacted any revenge upon Saul (vv. 38–43). Lexical connections, however, bring out various scenes from the Saul–David stories which suggest that David's predicaments with Saul and his enemies necessitated his reliance upon God. The impression gained from reading this psalm into the Samuel narrative is that David had undergone greater difficulty than that which is reported in this version of his encounters with his adversaries, and especially, Saul.

2. *Sheol/Shaul* (שְׁאוֹל/שָׁאוּל)

To begin with, the psalm intimates that the situation between Saul and David was "hell." The Hebrew word for "hell," or more properly translated, "underworld," is Sheol (שְׁאוֹל). This word shares the same consonantal spelling as Saul's name in Hebrew, Shaul (שָׁאוּל). These words differ only in vocalization.

In the description of his condition, the psalmist laments: "Cords of *Sheol* envelop me, snares (מוֹקְשֵׁי) of death confront me" (v. 6). The petitioner views his predicament as grave and considers it like a descent into Sheol. In the Samuel narrative, David's involvement with Saul proves also to be life-threatening as Saul (Shaul) uses a "snare" to precipitate David's downfall:

> וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶתְּנֶנָּה לּוֹ וּתְהִי־לוֹ לְמוֹקֵשׁ וּתְהִי־בוֹ יַד־פְּלִשְׁתִּים
>
> Saul thought, "I shall give her to him that she may become a snare for him and fall by the hand of the Philistines."[23] (1 Sam 18:21a)

In this text, Saul connives in offering his daughter, Michal, for marriage to David. Saul hopes David will die in his attempt to acquire the bride price of one hundred Philistine foreskins (1 Sam 18:25). The story

23. The latter part of the verse is ambiguous because the preposition with the suffix, בוֹ, could refer to Saul rather than David. LXX^{B} reads καὶ ἦν ἐπι Σαοὺλ χεὶρ ἀλλοφύλων, "Now the hand of the Philistines was against Saul."

recounted in 1 Sam 18:6–30 reveals the intricate lengths to which Saul goes in order to rid himself of his nemesis. His plan, however, fails as David returns with the requisite number of foreskins (1 Sam 18:27).[24]

Psalm 18 adds intensity to the story. When the Samuel narrative recounts David's retrieval of the foreskins, it does not reveal David's inner thoughts. To be sure, securing the flesh of the Philistines was not an easy task: it involved risk of death or serious injury. Saul knows of the danger when he requests the bride price for his daughter. The psalm suggests that David calls out to his God (v. 4), God hears his cry (v. 7), and that God comes to his aid (vv. 18–20).

3. *Rock and Fortress* (סֶלַע/צוּר/מְצוּדָה)

Further allusions to the Saul–David narratives are made through the divine appellatives which occur in the introductory hymn of Ps 18. When the psalmist designates his deity as a "rock" (סֶלַע/צוּר) and "fortress" (מְצוּדָה), he appeals to the metaphorical use of the words. Each of the epithets describes the dependable and unshakeable nature of the deity. In addition to their symbolic connotations, these epithets are also, as Slomovic notes, "identical with the topographic settings where David takes refuge in his flight from Saul."[25]

The crevices of mountain rocks provided hiding places for David during his days as a fugitive. When he flees from Saul in the wilderness of Maon (1 Sam 23:25, 28), David takes refuge at a place called "Rock of Separation" (סֶלַע הַמַּחְלְקוֹת).[26] The place name mentioned here is an etiological notice explaining the "separation" between Saul's troops and David's. That is, David's army had gone one way and Saul's another.

24. The MT indicates in this verse that David brought back *two* hundred foreskins, twice as many as required by Saul. LXX^{BL} and OL have "one hundred." Given that David states at a later point in the narrative that he paid for Michal with "one hundred" foreskins (2 Sam 3:14), the augmented number in 1 Sam 18:25 seems exaggerated. So also, McCarter, *I Samuel*, 316. It seems that the verse in 2 Sam 3:14 would have included a larger number in order to bolster David's claim for Michal who had married another man. In short, the reading of LXX^{BL} and OL, rather than the MT, is to be preferred in 1 Sam 18:27.

25. Slomovic, "Toward an Understanding," 368.

26. The root חלק has two meanings which befit the scene at this point in the narrative. The first meaning of חלק, "to be bald," could refer to the appearance of rock. I have opted for the second meaning of חלק, "to divide," since it is descriptive of David's and Saul's departures in separate directions.

Rabbinic exegetes put forth lively interpretations regarding the meaning of the name "Rock of Separation."[27] One line of interpretation sees that the separation indicated the debate among Saul's men as to whether they should pursue David in the face of the Philistine threat:

> *Therefore they called that place "The Rock of Divisions"* (1 Sam. 23:28). Why was the place called *Rock of Divisions?* R. Samuel bar Naḥmani said: The rock was so called because there Saul's men were divided concerning David, some saying, "Now that the son of Jesse is in our hands, let us not turn away from him," others saying, "Israel's war comes first! This son of Jesse can always be found."[28]

That Saul has to cease his chase of David precisely at the moment of nearly capturing him was seen as no less than a miracle:

> What prompted David to praise God as a *rock?* Surely because a miracle was done for David at a rock, as it is said *David came down into a rock… And…Saul…pursued after David…and David made haste to get away… for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about… But then came a messenger unto Saul, saying: "Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land." Wherefore Saul…went against the Philistines.*[29]

Thus, Saul leaves at once in order to prevent the Philistine advance into Israelite territory,[30] and the lexical link through the word, סֶלַע, alludes to this scene. David's escape at the Rock of Separation is due to divine action: God sends a messenger just in the nick of time.

Another word for "rock," צוּר, also occurs in the Saul–David narratives. After Saul battles with the Philistines (1 Sam 23:28), he continues his pursuit of David at a site called "The Rocks of the Wild Goats" (צוּרֵי הַיְעֵלִים). It is at this location that David refrains from a direct attack upon Saul. David's opportune moment comes about when Saul enters a cave to relieve himself (1 Sam 24:3). Saul seems defenseless inside the cave while David and his men determine his fate (1 Sam 24:4–5). I have argued above[31] that Saul may not be as vulnerable as the narrative depicts *prima facie*. Reading Ps 18 into this narrative would, like Ps 57, affirm that David's rescue is brought about by divine assistance.

27. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:236–37.
28. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:236.
29. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:235.
30. The episode of David and Saul at Keilah is discussed in my analysis of Pss 63 and 142 (pp. 89–91, 105–7).
31. See the discussion of Ps 57 (pp. 95–96).

Finally, the divine epithet מְצוּדָה, meaning "stronghold, hideout," also appears in the Saul–David stories. In the hymn at the psalm's beginning, the word designates the deity as a stronghold, or a place of refuge. The "stronghold" at which David lands during his flight from Saul in 1 Sam 22, however, does not serve as a source of refuge. Indeed, he and his family have to leave a מְצוּדָה, abruptly, when Saul discovers he is hiding out in Moab (1 Sam 22:4–5).[32]

The word מְצוּדָה also occurs in the final scene of the episode at the Rock of the Wild Goats mentioned above. In 1 Sam 24:23, Saul and David separate on good terms with Saul going home, while David and his men go to their stronghold. Saul, however, continues his pursuit of David and therefore, David, as the historical psalms insist, would continue to need his God for deliverance.

Thus, through the divine epithets, מְצוּדָה/צוּר/סֶלַע, Ps 18 can be read in the context of the Saul–David stories in which these words appear: the near capture of David at the Rock of Separation (1 Sam 23:25); the near death of Saul at the Rock of the Wild Goats (1 Sam 24:3–5); the separation of David from his family at a "stronghold" (1 Sam 22:4–5); and the amicable separation of Saul and David after a heated pursuit, also at the Rock of the Wild Goats (1 Sam 24:23). In all of these situations, David incurred difficulty with Saul, the man after whom he would rule.

4. *Troop* (גְּדוּד)

Although the title of Ps 18 draws particular attention to Saul, it also mentions that God delivers David from "all of his enemies" (v. 1). The petitioner proclaims that with God's help he could charge through a troop (v. 30). The word for troop, גְּדוּד, appears in the story of David's military battle with the Amalekites. When this tenacious enemy of Israel attacks Ziklag, a territory in Judah, they raid it, burn it down, and take the inhabitants away as captives (1 Sam 30:1–2). This incident provokes David's men to turn on him and they threaten to stone David to death (1 Sam 30:7). In the face of mortal despair, David turns to God to find out whether he will win the war. In his inquiry, not only does the word for troop occur, but also two other words from Ps 18, נשׂג ("to overtake") and רדף ("to pursue"):

32. I discuss these verses in my analysis of Ps 142, below, (pp. 102–3).

7וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־אֶבְיָתָר הַכֹּהֵן בֶּן־אֲחִימֶלֶךְ הַגִּישָׁה־נָּא לִי הָאֵפֹד וַיַּגֵּשׁ אֶבְיָתָר
אֶת־הָאֵפֹד אֶל־דָּוִד[34] 8וַיִּשְׁאַל דָּוִד בַּיהוָה לֵאמֹר הַאֶרְדֹּף[33] אַחֲרֵי הַגְּדוּד־הַזֶּה הַאַשִּׂיגֶנּוּ
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ רְדֹף כִּי־הַשֵּׂג תַּשִּׂיג וְהַצֵּל תַּצִּיל

> [7] David said to Abiathar, the priest, son of Ahimelech, "Bring to me the ephod." And Abiathar brought the ephod to David. [8] David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I *pursue* after this *troop*? Shall I *overtake it*? And he [the LORD] said to him, "Charge, for you will surely *overtake* and you will surely deliver." (1 Sam 30:7–8)

The words גְּדוּד, נשׂג, and רדף occur in situations in which David finds himself in trouble and receives divine reassurance of his success.

We find the word גְּדוּד occurring again in the Samuel narrative when David attempts to find out the location of the Amalekites from an Egyptian slave:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו דָּוִד הֲתוֹרִדֵנִי אֶל־הַגְּדוּד הַזֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר הִשָּׁבְעָה לִּי בֵאלֹהִים אִם־תְּמִיתֵנִי
וְאִם־תַּסְגִּרֵנִי בְּיַד־אֲדֹנִי וְאוֹרִדְךָ אֶל־הַגְּדוּד הַזֶּה

> David said to him, "Will you bring me down to this *troop*?" And he [the Egyptian slave] said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or hand me over to the authority of my master and I will take you down to this *troop*." (1 Sam 30:15)

With the information David gathers from the Egyptian, he launches a stealthy attack and comes upon the unsuspecting Amalekites as they celebrate their military victories in Judah. David is victorious, showing no mercy on the Amalekites, and would likely have killed all them if some of them did not escape:

וַיַּכֵּם דָּוִד מִנֶּשֶׁף וְעַד־עֶרֶב וְהַמָּחֳרָת[35] וְלֹא־נִמְלַט מֵהֶם אִישׁ כִּי אִם־אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת
אִישׁ־נַעַר אֲשֶׁר־רָכְבוּ עַל־הַגְּמַלִּים וַיָּנֻסוּ

> David struck them down from dawn until evening, and the next day. Not one man escaped except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. (1 Sam 30:17)

33. Reading the interrogative marker with the verb, הארדף, on the basis of האשׂגנו in this verse, as well as LXX^{B}: εἰ καταδιώξω. See McCarter, *I Samuel*, 431; Wellhausen, *Samuelis*, 144.

34. Reading with the MT and LXX^{L}. LXX^{B} omits ויגש אביתר את האפד אל דוד, and McCarter follows this reading. See his *I Samuel*, 431.

35. Manuscripts differ here. The MT has מהנשף ועד הערב למחרתם. The reading of למחרתם, "on their next day," is anomalous. Wellhausen leaves most of the MT intact and changes the phrase to להחרמם, "until their utter destruction." McCarter opts for reading with LXX^{L}, καὶ τῆς ἐπαύριον, καὶ ἐθανάτωσεν = למחרת וימיתם, which he translates as "(David battered them from first light of dawn until evening) of the next day. He put them to death…" See McCarter, *I Samuel*, 430. I have read with LXX^{B}: ἀπὸ ἑωσφόρου ἕως δείλης καὶ τῇ ἐπαύριον.

David's triumph over the Amalekites seems to verify the prediction he obtains from the ephod, as he "surely overtook" his enemies.

Last, the word for troop appears again in another context of David's battles with the Amalekites. David has to settle a conflict brewing among his men over spoil. Right before David and his men advance against the Amalekites, one third of his army, two hundred men, could not join the rest of the company because they were exhausted. The four hundred men who fight in the war win the battle against the Amalekites and do not want to share booty with the two hundred men who stayed behind. In this scene, the men who argue against equal distribution of the plunder are described by a word occurring in Ps 18, בְּלִיַּעַל. Here the word connotes the baseness of the men who refuse to divide up the booty evenly:

> וַיַּעַן כָּל־אִישׁ־רָע וּבְלִיַּעַל מֵהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הָלְכוּ עִם־דָּוִד וַיֹּאמְרוּ יַעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָדְפוּ עִמָּנוּ[36] לֹא־נִתֵּן לָהֶם מֵהַשָּׁלָל אֲשֶׁר הִצַּלְנוּ כִּי־אִם־אִישׁ אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו וְיִנְהָגוּ וְיֵלֵכוּ
>
> Every evil and vile fellow who was among the men who went with David said, "Since they did not join us in the pursuit, we will not give them anything from the booty that we retrieved. We will, however, let each man take his wife and children and go." (1 Sam 30:22)

David, in a diplomatic stance, declares that all the plunder will be divided equally and the men who stayed behind had served an important purpose by guarding the supplies:

> וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד לֹא־תַעֲשׂוּ כֵן אָחַי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן יְהוָה לָנוּ[37] וַיִּשְׁמֹר אֹתָנוּ וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַגְּדוּד הַבָּא עָלֵינוּ בְּיָדֵנוּ
>
> David said, "You must not do so, my brothers, with that which the LORD has given to us. (For indeed) he has kept watch over us and has given the *troop* that raided us into our hand." (1 Sam 30:23)

In addition to mentioning the important role the men played by staying behind, David mollifies the dissension among his men by appealing to the main source of the victory—God.

Rabbinic writers have connected Ps 18 with David's victory over the Amalekites related in the Samuel narrative. They identify the enemies mentioned in Ps 18:38 as the Amalekites based upon common wording in psalm and narrative:

36. Reading with LXX^{B}: ὅτι οὐ κατεδίωξαν μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν. The MT reads הלכו עמי לא. "They did not go with me."

37. The MT phrase, את אשר נתן יהוה לנו, is a problem. I read with the MT and agree with McCarter that some kind of anacoluthon must be assumed. Hence, I have added the phrase, "For indeed…" in parentheses in my translation. See McCarter, *I Samuel*, 433.

> In *I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them* (Ps. 18:38), *enemies* refers to Amalek's troops concerning which David inquired of the LORD, saying: "Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them?" (1 Sam. 30:8). The words, *Neither will I turn again till they are consumed* (Ps. 18:38), refer to the verse, "David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day; and there escaped not a man of them" (1 Sam. 30:17).[38]

Through several lexical correspondences, especially the repeated frequency of the word גְּדוּד, the psalm directs the reader to David's defeat over the Amalekites. Interestingly, they point to a story in which David triumphs over an enemy that Deuteronomic law commands Israel to remember (Deut 25:17–19). Indeed, this injunction to remember Amalek was determinative in rabbinic writers' identification of Israel's significant enemies as descendants of Amalek; Rome, for example, was identified as such.[39]

Psalm 18 adds to the reading of David's battles in the Samuel narrative a remarkable religious dimension. Through strong mythic language the psalm reveals how God descends from the sky to come to David's rescue. This psalm affirms David's personal relationship with God. He is Yahweh's servant who calls out to his deity in his moments of distress. His prayers are answered because of his impeccable conduct. The rewards he receives are available to all who follow his example. This seems to be the message gleaned by the association of the psalm with David's deliverance from all his enemies, and particularly Saul and the Amalekites as recounted in the Samuel narrative.

38. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:264–65. They also connected the psalm with other enemies, including the Jebusites (1:254); Edom (1:253); Babylon, Media, Persia, Greece, Edom (1:238–41).

39. *EncJud* 2:791.

Chapter 7

OBSCURE PSALM TITLES

A. DAVID'S MILITARY STRUGGLES

(Read 2 Samuel 8; 10; 1 Chronicles 19)

The Samuel narrative reports David's sweeping military victory over nearby territories, and the title to Ps 60 alludes to these battles. Given David's notable reputation as a military hero, one would anticipate a prayer of thanksgiving to follow a heading referring to his battles. One would perhaps imagine David as the psalmist thanking his God for military success. Psalm 60, however, is a prayer that speaks of defeat. The seemingly disjunctive nature of title and psalm leaves the reader to explore why a superscription referring to David's battles is attached to a psalm of lament.

1. *Psalm 60*

[1] *To the leader: according to the Lily of the testimony. A miktam of David, for teaching;* [2] *when he struggled with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.*
[3] O God, you have rejected us,
    you have torn us away;
    you have been angry,
    but now restore us!
[4] You have made the land quake;
    you have split it open.
  Repair its cracks for it is tottering,
[5] You have made your people see hardship,
    you have caused us to drink wine that has made us stagger.
[6] You have given to those who fear you a banner,
    to be flown for faithfulness. *Selah*.
[7] In order that your beloved ones may be set free,
    deliver by your right hand and answer us.

[8] God has spoken in his holiness:
"With exultation, I will divide up Shechem
and apportion the Valley of Sukkot;
[9] Gilead and Manasseh are mine,
Ephraim is my helmet,
Judah my scepter,
[10] Moab is my washbasin;
upon Edom I hurl my shoe;
I shout in triumph over Philistia."
[11] O that one would lead me to a fortified city,
O that one would lead me to Edom.
[12] Have you not, O God, rejected us?
You do not go forth with our armies, O God.
[13] Give us help against the enemy,
for aid from man is worthless.
[14] With God we will triumph,
for he will trample our enemies.

The title of Ps 60 is connected to episodes in which David fights against the Arameans and sends Joab to battle against the Edomites. None of the historical accounts of David's battles in the Hebrew Bible align perfectly with the details of the heading. Commentators, however, often link the title and psalm to the survey of David's campaigns in 2 Sam 8 based upon the common references to the geographical regions—Moab, Philistia, Edom, and the mentioning of a battle at the Valley of Salt. The texts, Ps 60 and 2 Sam 8, differ on a few details. In the psalm, the heading indicates that Joab was the one who killed Edomites in the Valley of Salt, and not David as the narrative in 2 Samuel reports. Additionally, the actual number of Edomites killed varies in the two accounts. The psalm title notes the number of 12,000 dead in Edom, while the Samuel narrative has a higher number of 18,000 casualties. These texts also differ with the name of the Aramean states involved in the battle against David. According to 2 Sam 8, David battled with *Zobah and Damascus*, while in Ps 60 the Aramean states mentioned are *Aram-naharaim and Zobah*. Despite these variances, there still exists a general match between 2 Sam 8 and Ps 60.

The author of the superscriptions appears to have situated this psalm in the context of 2 Sam 8 in order to underline the deity's role in the narrative and to accentuate David's piety during his battles. Obvious divine activity is sparse in the account of David's conquests in 2 Sam 8 and the addition of this psalm makes the divine source of David's victories clear (vv. 7–10, 13–14). Twice does the narrative of 2 Sam 8 reports that "The LORD gave victory to David wherever he went" (vv. 6, 14). These two verses, which attribute David's deliverance to God rather

than to David himself, come from the hand of the narrator. The addition of the title depicts David as uttering a prayer in which he places his complete trust in God's ability to render his (David's) enemies into his (David's) hands (vv. 13–14). Having this prayer read at the beginning of 2 Sam 8 would connect with the statements made in the narrative, asserting God's continuing support for David's military exploits (especially Ps 60:7, 13–14).

2. *Divine Intervention Delayed?*

As Childs perceptively observes, the contents of Ps 60 intimate that David's military successes may not have been as swift as the Samuel narrative reports.[1] Indeed, the opening lines of the psalm speak of the deity causing his people to experience hardship and suggests that his aid did not come right away (vv. 3–5). These verses register a catastrophic defeat and convey a more difficult situation than the one described in the report of David's conquests in 2 Sam 8. As one Psalms critic notes, "[w]ere it not for the addition of the title to this psalm, we should have had no inkling of the resilience of David's hostile neighbors at the peak of his power."[2] While this is an overstatement,[3] this commentator rightly observes that the psalm highlights the sense of struggle, rather than victory.

Military losses are alluded to in v. 12, where the psalmist bemoans the absence of divine help when the Israelite army goes out to battle. The petitioner likens his calamity to tremors of seismic activity and the dizzying effects of sipping from God's wine of wrath.[4] He requests relief from his hardship and pleads that God deliver and answer him (v. 7). When the deity responds, he appears as a warrior announcing ownership of Israelite territories and parceling them out as he sees fit (vv. 8–10). The deity refers to himself ten times in three verses: "*I* exult, *I* divide, *I* apportion (v. 8), Gilead is *mine*, Manasseh is *mine*, Ephraim is *my* helmet, Judah is *my* scepter (v. 9), Moab is *my* washbasin, upon Edom, *I hurl*, *I shout* in triumph over Philistia" (v. 10). Boldly does the deity

1. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 146.
2. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72* (TOTC; London: Inter-Varsity, 1973), 215.
3. Biblical narratives do provide some traces of the tenacity of David's adversaries. See the discussion below on David's conflicts with the Arameans (pp. 126–28).
4. Similar imagery is found in Isa 51:17. In this text, the people suffering from the destruction of Jerusalem are said to have drunk deeply from God's cup of wrath. See also Isa 51:22; Jer 25:15–16; Ps 75:9.

declare in the psalm that certain territories fall under his jurisdiction. These territories *will* include foreign ones. In fact, he claims responsibility for the subjugation of the selfsame countries David is said to have subdued in 2 Sam 8—Moab, Edom, and Philistia (v. 10).

Even though mention of God's deliverance does appear at the end of Ps 60, much of the Psalm is concerned with the difficulties faced by God's people. Reading the psalm in the context of 2 Sam 8 would point to the strenuous nature of waging war. In the psalm, the strain experienced by the petitioner is grave and a situation matching the magnitude of disastrous earthquakes and extreme drunkenness is absent from the narrative. It seems that the reader of the psalm must, inevitably, imagine that David's battles were more difficult than 2 Sam 8 narrates, and that during these moments of military distress, David uttered a prayer.

3. *David Struggled*

Childs posits a provocative suggestion for the intersection between the title of Ps 60 and the Samuel narrative. He argues that the use of the word for "to struggle" (נצה) in the title of Ps 60 may point to an extended period of conflict between David and the Arameans.[5] In the psalm title, it states that David "struggled" (נצה) with Aramean states. The Hebrew word here does not have the same meaning as the word typically used to denote the decimation of an enemy, נכה, "to strike down, kill." In fact, in 2 Sam 8, the word נכה occurs to describe David's successful military campaigns a total of seven times (2 Sam 8:1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 13), while the root נצה does not occur at all. Perhaps the author of the superscriptions deliberately uses the root נצה to underscore the idea of military struggle in David's narrative.

Rabbinic writers noted the peculiarity of the word נצה used in the title and have interpreted it in several ways:

> It means that Joab set Aram on fire.[6] Or it may mean that he riddled it with arrows.[7] Again, it may mean that he took up the people of Aram-naharaim and set them in Aram-zobah, and that he set the people of Aram-zobah in Aram-naharaim.[8]

The author of this superscriptions may have intentionally used this word to allude to the particular difficulty David may have incurred with the

5. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 147.
6. A play on the Hebrew word צוּת, "to kindle, set on fire."
7. A play on the Hebrew word חֵץ, "arrow."
8. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:514.

Aramean states. That the conflict between David and the Arameans was somehow different from those with other nations is intimated in 2 Sam 8 by the use of the individual name of the Aramean king, Hadadezer. For all of the other regions that David defeats, the narrative records them by a geographical name—Philistia, Moab, and Edom. The conflict with Aram, however, is discussed in terms of David's defeat over an individual, King Hadadezer, whose name appears eight times in the report of David's military campaigns against the Arameans:

3וַיַּךְ דָּוִד אֶת־הֲדַדְעֶזֶר בֶּן־רְחֹב מֶלֶךְ צוֹבָה בְּלֶכְתּוֹ לְהַצִּיב10 יָדוֹ בַּנָּהָר9 4וַיִּלְכֹּד דָּוִד
מִמֶּנּוּ12 אֶלֶף רֶכֶב וּשְׁבָעָה אֶלֶף פָּרָשִׁים11 וְעֶשְׂרִים אֶלֶף אִישׁ רַגְלִי וַיְעַקֵּר דָּוִד
אֶת־כָּל־ דָּוִד הָרֶכֶב וַיּוֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ מֵאָה רָכֶב 5וַתָּבֹא אֲרַם דַּמֶּשֶׂק לַעְזֹר לַהֲדַדְעֶזֶר מֶלֶךְ
צוֹבָה וַיַּךְ בַּאֲרָם עֶשְׂרִים־וּשְׁנַיִם אֶלֶף אִישׁ 6וַיָּשֶׂם דָּוִד נְצִבִים בַּאֲרַם דַּמֶּשֶׂק וַתְּהִי אֲרָם
לְדָוִד לַעֲבָדִים נֹשְׂאֵי מִנְחָה וַיֹּשַׁע יְהוָה אֶת־דָּוִד בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר הָלָךְ 7וַיִּקַּח דָּוִד אֵת שִׁלְטֵי
הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל16 עַבְדֵי הֲדַדְעֶזֶר15 וַיְבִיאֵם יְרוּשָׁלִָם14 8וּמִמִּבְחַת13 וּמִמִּבְרֹתַי עָרֵי
הֲדַדְעֶזֶר לָקַח הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד נְחֹשֶׁת רַבָּה מְאֹד17 9וַיִּשְׁמַע תֹּעִי מֶלֶךְ חֲמָת כִּי הִכָּה דָוִד
אֵת כָּל־חֵיל הֲדַדְעֶזֶר 10וַיִּשְׁלַח תֹּעִי אֶת־יוֹרָם־בְּנוֹ אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ־דָּוִד לִשְׁאָל־לוֹ לְשָׁלוֹם
וּלְבָרְכוֹ עַל אֲשֶׁר נִלְחַם בַּהֲדַדְעֶזֶר וַיִּכֵּהוּ כִּי מְתַחֲרֶה הָיָה בַּהֲדַדְעֶזֶר18 וּבְיָדוֹ הָיוּ כְּלֵי־

9. The MT *qere* adds פְּרָת. The LXX and 1 Chr 18:3 also add the name of the river. Omit פְּרָת with the MT *ketib*.

10. Reading להציב, "to leave, put," with 1 Chr 18:3. The use of the verb in this context is also found in 1 Sam 15:12, so Wellhausen, *Samuelis*, 174–75. The MT has לְהָשִׁיב, "to restore," which could be repointed to לְהוֹשִׁיב, "to cause to sit, leave, put," and have the same meaning as להצב. The LXX reading ἐπιστῆσαι reflects either verb with the meaning "to leave, put," יצב or Hiphil of ישב.

11. Reading אֶלֶף רֶכֶב וּשְׁבָעָה אֶלֶף פָּרָשִׁים on basis of LXX^{B} χίλια ἅρματα καὶ ἑπτὰ χιλιάδας ἱππέων. 4QSam^{a} corroborates the first part of this phrase with [ ]אלף ר. See also 1 Chr 18:4. The MT has the following: אֶלֶף וּשְׁבַע־מֵאוֹת פָּרָשִׁים, "one thousand seven hundred horsemen."

12. 4QSam^{a} may not have ממנו. For text-critical analysis, see Eugene Ulrich, *The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 57. See also McCarter, *II Samuel*, 244.

13. Reading טבח on basis of LXX^{L}, 1 Chr 18:8, and Syr.

14. Reading with the MT. 4QSam^{a}, LXX, OL, and Josephus (*Ant*. 7.105) seem to reflect a longer text not extant in the MT or 1 Chr 18. According to McCarter (*II Samuel*, 244), the MT preserves the best reading as it probably "stands closer to the primitive situation. There is considerable evidence of a tendency toward conflation of the present passage and I Kings 14:26."

15. LXX^{L} has added text here. For a discussion of the text-critical issue, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 244, 250.

16. Reading עַל for MT's אֶל based on the LXX: ἐπι τῶν παίδων. See Wellhausen, *Samuelis*, 175.

17. Reading נחשת רבה מאד with 4QSam^{a} and 1 Chr 18:8. The MT reads נחשת הרבה מאד. After this phrase, several manuscripts exhibit a long plus. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 245, for analysis.

כֶּסֶף וּכְלֵי־זָהָב וּכְלֵי נְחֹשֶׁת [11]גַּם־אֹתָם הִקְדִּישׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד לַיהוָה עִם־הַכֶּסֶף וְהַזָּהָב
אֲשֶׁר הִקְדִּישׁ מִכָּל־הַגּוֹיִם[20] אֲשֶׁר כִּבֵּשׁ [12]מֵאֱדוֹם[19] וּמִמּוֹאָב וּמִבְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וּמִפְּלִשְׁתִּים
וּמֵעֲמָלֵק וּמִשְּׁלַל הֲדַדְעֶזֶר בֶּן־רְחֹב מֶלֶךְ צוֹבָה

[3] David struck down *Hadadezer* son of Rehob, king of Zobah as he [David][21] went to leave his monument at the river. [4] David captured from him one thousand chariots, seven thousand cavalrymen, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. David hamstrung all the horses except one hundred of them. [5] Aram-Damascus came to help *Hadadezer*, King of Zobah, but David struck down in Aram, twenty-two thousand men. [6] David installed prefects[22] in Aram-Damascus and the Arameans became David's vassals who were obligated to pay tribute. The LORD made David victorious wherever he went. [7] David took shields of gold carried by the servants of *Hadadezer* and he brought them to Jerusalem. [8] From Tebah and Berothai, the cities of *Hadadezer*, King David took a great deal of copper. [9] King Toi of Hamath heard that David struck down all the troops of *Hadadezer*, [10] and Toi sent his son, Joram, to King David to greet him and to congratulate him for having fought against *Hadadezer* and defeating him, for he himself detested *Hadadezer*. [Joram] brought with him vessels of silver, gold, and bronze. [11] Even these did King David consecrate to the LORD, together with the silver and gold which he consecrated from all the nations which he had subdued; [12] from Edom, from Moab, from the Ammonites, from the Philistines, from Amalek, and from the plunder of *Hadadezer*, son of Rehob, King of Zobah. (2 Sam 8:3–12)

Aramean states flourished in the eleventh to ninth centuries B.C.E. with Aram-Zobah dominating during the late eleventh century.[23] As David and Hadadezer attempt to expand their kingdoms, they naturally come head-to-head as they vie for control of valued territory. The high frequency of King Hadadezer's personal name in this passage, as well as the detailed description of David's defeat[24] over King Hadadezer could point to

18. The MT reads כִּי־אִישׁ מִלְחֲמוֹת תֹּעִי הָיָה הֲדַדְעֶזֶר. Reading with LXX^{B}, ὅτι κείμενος ἦν τῷ Ἀδραάζαρ, and taking McCarter's innovative retroversion of the Hitpael participle of חרה, "to heat oneself in vexation," for κεῖσθαι. He bases this upon the retroversion of αντικείμενοι σοι (= הנחרים בך) in Isa 41:11. For further text-critical analysis, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 245.

19. The LXX, Syr., and 1 Chr 18:11 have "Edom." The MT reads "Aram."

20. So MT. LXX^{BL} read "cities."

21. The phrase is ambiguous and could refer to either David or Zobah. I read "David" with McCarter. See his *II Samuel*, 247.

22. The MT and Josephus (*Ant.* 7.104) have plural. LXX^{BL} read "prefect."

23. Wayne Pitard, "Aramean," *ABD* 6:1108.

24. The description of David's battles with the other territories is not told in as much detail. See 2 Sam 8:1–2, 12, 14 for the report of victories over the Philistines, Moab, and Edom.

Aram's tenacity. In fact, Childs proposes that even the sequence of the Aramean battles listed in the psalm title may allude to the drawn out nature of battles fought against the Arameans. In the Samuel narrative, the battle with Aram-Zobah (2 Sam 8) precedes the battle with Aram-naharaim (2 Sam 10). In the heading, however, the latter region, Aram-naharaim, is written first. According to Childs, the author of the superscription purposefully inverts the sequence of battles in the titles in order to "de-emphasize strict chronological sequence" and to describe "a general period in which David was engaged with the Arameans."[25] It could also be the case, however, that the reversal of the order added by the author of the superscriptions was done to serve as a correction or clarification to the Samuel narrative.

2 Samuel 10 proffers a different point of view of David's wars than the account in 2 Sam 8. In this episode, the Ammonites play a leading role as they put David's men to shame. David makes a seemingly gracious gesture toward the new leader of Ammon, King Hanun, by sending emissaries to console him upon the death of his father (2 Sam 10:1–2). The military leaders of Ammon, however, were suspicious of David's men and humiliate them by shaving their beards and cutting off their clothing (2 Sam 10:3–4). The public degradation of David's men signaled war and the Ammonites hired help from the Arameans.[26]

That 2 Sam 8 speaks of a complete defeat of the Arameans suggests that the details of this account came after those recounted in 2 Sam 10. It is feasible to have the story of Hadadezer's subjugation to David following the account in which he appears independent and ready for battle. Thus, it makes sense that the contents of 2 Sam 10 came before 2 Sam 8,[27] and the author of the superscriptions could have intentionally reversed the order of the battles in the psalm title to clarify the chronological order of historical events from lost records. The corrective nature of the psalm title reinforces its primary purpose; namely, to elaborate upon David's struggle during time of war.

When the author of the superscriptions cites the geographical name, Aram-naharaim, he draws into the reading of the psalm the battles recounted in 2 Sam 10, for only in 2 Sam 10 and 1 Chr 19[28] do the

25. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 147.

26. Pitard ("Aramean," 6:1108) suggests that Ammon may not have "hired" the Aramean armies. Rather, he argues that, "Ammon was a vassal of Zobah (or was offering to become one in exchange for protection) and Hadadezer decided to use this opportunity to deal with the new threat to his empire."

27. Ibid., 93.

28. 1 Chr 19 uses 2 Sam 10 as its source.

geographical names Aram-Zobah and Aram-naharaim occur together.[29] He has thus drawn upon 2 Sam 8, 10, and 1 Chr 19 in order to underscore the difficulty the Arameans states may have posed for David. All of this supports the idea that while David may have been militarily successful, he encountered difficulty along the way, prayed, and was granted deliverance.

4. *Battle at the Valley of Salt*

The title of Ps 60 ascribes a battle to Joab that has been credited to David in the Samuel narrative. There is considerable divergence on the notice of the battle at the Valley of Salt:

> וַיָּשָׁב יוֹאָב וַיַּךְ אֶת־אֱדוֹם בְּגֵיא־מֶלַח שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר אָלֶף
>
> Joab returned and smote *Edom* in the Valley of Salt, twelve thousand. (Ps 60:2b)
>
> וַיַּעַשׂ דָּוִד שֵׁם בְּשֻׁבוֹ מֵהַכּוֹתוֹ אֶת־אֲרָם בְּגֵיא־מֶלַח שְׁמוֹנָה עָשָׂר אָלֶף
>
> David made a name [for himself] when he returned from smiting *Aram* in the Valley of Salt, eighteen thousand. (2 Sam 8:13 [MT])
>
> ובשבו הכה את ארום…שמונה עשר אלף
>
> When he returned, he smote Edom…eighteen thousand. (2 Sam 8:13 [LXX])[30]
>
> וְאַבְשַׁי בֶּן־צְרוּיָה הִכָּה אֶת־אֱדוֹם בְּגֵיא הַמֶּלַח שְׁמוֹנָה עָשָׂר אָלֶף
>
> Abishai, son of Zeruiah smote *Edom* in the Valley of Salt, eighteen thousand. (1 Chr 18:12)

Many manuscripts have Edom instead of Aram. Confusion of the letters *resh* and *dalet* was common in scribal transcription. The book of Chronicles has neither David nor Joab as the victor of the battle in the Valley of Salt. Rather, in this version, the battle is attributed to Abishai, son of Zeruiah. According to McCarter, the title composer of Ps 60 had a version before him that read, "son of Zeruiah…" and inserted Joab's name. Josephus has both sons of Zeruiah, Joab and Abishai, mentioned

29. Aram-naharaim is the geographical name for the territory west of the Euphrates in Syria. In 2 Sam 10:16, the text does not explicitly name the area as "Aram-naharaim." Rather, it designates the area as "Aram which is beyond the river."

30. There is variation among Greek witnesses regarding the location. LXX^{L} has "in the Valley of Salt." But LXX^{BM} have "in their territory."

in his telling of this verse. But, like the verse in Chronicles, Josephus attributes the killing of eighteen thousand Edomites to Abishai:

> Now it was not only when he himself fought and led the army that God granted him victory and success, but even when he sent Abishai, the brother of Joab the commander-in-chief, with a force into Idumaea, God gave David, through him, victory over the Idumaeans, of whom Abishai slew eighteen thousand in battle.[31]

McCarter reconstructs the original text of 2 Sam 8:13 as follows:

> בשׁבו מהכות את ארם ואבשׁי בן צרויה הכה את אדם
>
> When he returned from smiting Aram and Abishai son of Zeruiah smote Edom.[32]

Even if the title composer had this reconstructed text[33] before him, the question still remains as to why he attached a title which presumes victory onto a psalm that speaks of devastation. I agree with Childs's view that text-critical problems with this title notwithstanding, signs of deliberate exegetical activity are apparent.[34] To begin with, the author of the superscriptions uses the rare verb נצה, instead of the frequently occurring verb נכה, in the title. Second, he selects a psalm with a strong tone of defeat upon which to attach his title. Last, ascribing the battle at the Valley of Salt to Joab brings into the reading of this psalm another biblical text, 1 Kgs 11:15. This text, like Ps 60, has Joab as the person responsible for the killing at Edom, but also mentions the burial of Israelite casualties:

> וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹת דָּוִד אֶת־אֱדוֹם בַּעֲלוֹת יוֹאָב שַׂר הַצָּבָא לְקַבֵּר אֶת־הַחֲלָלִים וַיַּךְ כָּל־זָכָר בֶּאֱדוֹם
>
> When David was in Edom, Joab the commander of the army went up to bury those who were slain, and he struck down every male in Edom. (1 Kgs 11:15)

Childs argues that the reference to Joab burying the dead in this verse alludes to a defeat prior to the battle at the Valley of Salt.[35] Thus, this text would support his view of the prolonged nature of David's battles.

31. Josephus, *Ant*. 7.109 (Marcus, LCL).

32. My translation of McCarter's reconstruction of the original text. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 246.

33. It is possible that the variations are due to authors drawing upon oral tradition. Each account could be drawing upon oral tradition in their own particular ways.

34. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 14.

35. See Mordechai Cogan, *I Kings* (AB 10; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 331. Cogan raises the issue of whether the slain men that Joab buried were foreigners or Israelites.

Whether the battle in the Valley of Salt is ascribed to Joab or to David, the reference of this implied victory is attached to a psalm that speaks of ruin. Most of the historical psalm titles point to moments in David's life-history when he was in some kind of trouble. The reading of Ps 60 in light of its title and in light of the texts of David's wars elicits the idea that these battles were not so easily won. By underscoring the difficulty David had during warfare, the author of the superscriptions tones down the image of David as military hero. In the place of David, the deity stands as the valiant military victor before whom David dutifully prays.

* * *

B. I AM INNOCENT

(Read 1 Samuel 24; 2 Samuel 16; 18–19)

The title of Ps 7 speaks of Cush, a Benjaminite. This person, however, does not exist in the Hebrew Bible. Is the name Cush a cipher for another Benjaminite in the Samuel narrative? Does the name refer to Absalom? Or perhaps the name may refer to a person no longer recoverable in biblical history. The cumulative evidence of the historical psalms may provide a clue to the identity of the elusive figure, Cush.

1. *Psalm 7*

[1] *A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the* LORD *according to the words of Cush, a Benjaminite.*
[2] O LORD, my God, in you, I take refuge;
deliver me from each one of my pursuers and save me.
[3] Lest they tear me apart like a lion,
snatch me away, without any hope of rescue.[36]
[4] O LORD, my God, if I have done this;
if there is injustice in my hands,
[5] if I have dealt underhandedly with my friend,
I who rescued my enemy without reward
[6] then let the enemy pursue and overtake me;
and let him trample my life to the ground,
and make me lie in the dust. *Selah*.
[7] Arise, O LORD, in your anger,
defy[37] the rage of my enemies.

36. Lit. "there is no deliverer."
37. Lit. "lift yourself up against."

Awake, on my behalf;[38]
you have decreed justice.
[8] Now, the assembly of peoples gathers around you,
Sit[39] above them, from on high.
[9] Let the LORD judge the peoples;
judge me, O LORD,
according to my righteousness,
and according to my innocence.
[10] Let the evil of the wicked end,
that you may establish the righteous;
you who scrutinize the heart and conscience,[40]
O righteous God.
[11] God is my shield,[41]
the deliverer of those who are righteous.[42]
[12] God is a righteous judge,
a God who expresses his indignation daily.
[13] If a man does not turn back,
then God[43] sharpens his sword;
he bends his bow and aims it.
[14] he prepares deadly weapons for him;
and makes his arrows fiery shafts.[44]
[15] Look, he is in labor with iniquity,
and is pregnant with mischief,
and gives birth to deception.
[15] He has dug a pit and hewed it out,
he fell into the hole that he was making.
[16] His mischief returns on his own head,
upon his forehead his violence descends.
[17] I will praise the LORD for his righteousness,
and I will sing the name of the LORD Most High.

This psalm tells of an innocent man's prayer for protection in the midst of false accusations by enemies. The petitioner, unjustly accused of treachery, approaches Yahweh with his plea of innocence (vv. 3–5) and

38. The LXX has "O my LORD" and many translations follow this reading.
39. Reading שְׁבָה instead of שׁוּבָה.
40. Lit. "kidneys."
41. Lit. "My shield is upon God." I am reading the line in the sense of Ps 3:4, namely, that God is a shield or source of protection for the Psalmist.
42. Lit. "the upright of heart."
43. Lit. "he."
44. An alternative reading of vv. 13–14 has the one who rejects God as the subject and would read as follows: "If one does not turn back, he sharpens his sword, / he bends his bow and prepares it / for himself he prepares deadly weapons, / and makes his arrows fiery shafts."

appeals to the righteous justice of the deity. He requests that God vindicate him (vv. 6–9) and allow the false charges and their consequences to rebound onto the head of the guilty accuser (vv. 12–17).

Psalm 7 has an obscure title: David sang the psalm, according to "the words of Cush, a Benjaminite." Nowhere, however, in the Hebrew Bible do the narratives of David mention an incident concerning a Benjaminite named Cush. The Hebrew Bible does contain several accounts of problems David had with the tribe of Benjamin during the time of Saul and afterward (1 Sam 24–26; 2 Sam 16:5; 20:1), and this superscription may preserve David's reaction to an accusation declared by a Benjaminite, which he deemed false. The psalm would then serve as a declaration of David's innocence regarding the slander. While the precise context of Ps 7 cannot be known with certainty, I will outline the scholarly conjectures made for the identity of Cush, the Benjaminite.

Some scholars argue that the figure mentioned in the title refers to an indeterminate legendary source which did not get included in the Samuel narrative,[45] while others contend that the title does not refer to an historical figure at all.[46] Given that most of the historical psalms refer to David's story as reported in the Samuel narrative, it is reasonable to associate Ps 7 with a person from this narrative. It is also reasonable to assume that the referent in the title of Ps 7 would be a person with whom David has a problematic encounter.

2. *Cush is Saul*

Interpreters, both ancient and modern, have sought the identity of Cush in the biblical figure, Saul. This identification, by some rabbinic writers, was based on Saul's persistent pursuit of David:

> …*Shiggayon of David, which he sang unto the Lord concerning the matter of Cush the Benjaminite* (Ps. 7:1)… For David said: Master of the universe, only after Thou didst bring them out of Egypt…did the children of Israel sing to Thee, As for me, though Saul still pursues me, my song of praise to Thee does not cease.

45. Rodney Hutton, "Cush the Benjaminite and Psalm Midrash," *HAR* 10 (1986): 127.

46. See Childs, "Psalm Titles," 138; Dahood, *Psalms*, 40. Their proposal suggests Cush to be the author of the lyrics of the psalm and that *ʿal* used in the psalm titles belongs in a liturgical setting (e.g. "according to the Doe of the Dawn," Ps 22:1; "according to the Lily of the Covenant," Ps 60:1). Certainly the early interpreters of rabbinic literature interpreted the title as a reference to history rather than some kind of liturgical notation.

> Why did David call Saul *Cush?* Because, as David said: Although Saul's mood toward me changes constantly, yet he continues to pursue me.[47]

According to other rabbinic interpreters, the psalm title uses Cush instead of Saul's real name because cursing a king by name posed great danger.[48] Another explanation proffered by rabbinic interpreters for the substitution of the name of Cush for Saul concerns the dark skin characteristic of Cushite peoples. The rabbis used this distinctive feature for a comparison with Saul's deeds; just as a Cushite was distinguishable by his dark skin, so Saul was distinguished by his good[49] and treacherous[50] deeds.

Modern commentators have also linked the name Cush with Saul based on lexical and conceptual considerations. By orthographic emendation, Hengstenberg has proposed to read *Cush* (כּוּשׁ) as *Qish/Kish* (קִישׁ), the name of Saul's father.[51] The title could therefore relate to a member of Kish's clan, namely, Saul. The historical psalms refer repeatedly to the moments of difficulty that David have encountered with Saul, and it is feasible to associate Psalm 7 to a problematic encounter between David and Saul.

Slomovic argues that Cush in the psalm title refers to Saul by connecting the psalm to the interaction between David and Saul at the cave of En-gedi (1 Sam 24:8–22). As the psalmist maintains his innocence, David too persisted in his blamelessness at En-gedi. Saul, according to David, charged him falsely and, in order to confirm his veracity, David calls upon God to judge between him and Saul.[52] He further demands that Saul punish him if he could find him guilty of any crime. Saul, moved by his words, proclaims David's innocence and acquits him of any offense (1 Sam 24:17–21).

47. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:112. The word for "Cush" seems to denote a sense of pursuit. Braude suggests that the word for "Cush" may be a derived form of נכשׁ, "to come in near contact." See *Midrash on Psalms*, 2:421.

48. See *b. Môʿed Qatan* 16b; *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:101.

49. See *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:112–13. The Rabbis draw a comparison from Moses' wife, Zipporah, who was distinguished by her dark skin and good deeds done for Moses. Similarly, Saul was distinguished by his deeds and good looks (1 Sam 9:2).

50. *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:103. Here the rabbis recall the wife of Potiphar's dealings with Joseph. As she lied about Joseph, Saul lied against David.

51. Ernst Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Psalms* (trans. Patrick Fairbairn and John Thomson; 3 vols.; 4th ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867), 1:106.

52. I have discussed this scene in my analysis of Ps 142, above (pp. 93–97, 103–5).

Linguistic parallels that Slomovic has observed reinforce the linkage of the title of the psalm with the scene at En-gedi.[53] To begin with, the root גמל, "to deal," occurs in both texts. The word occurs in the first stanza of v. 5, in one of the conditional clauses the psalmist invokes to declare his innocence:

אִם־גָּמַלְתִּי שׁוֹלְמִי רָע וָאֲחַלְּצָה צוֹרְרִי רֵיקָם

> If I have *dealt* maliciously with my ally, I who rescued my enemy without reward. (Ps 7:5a)

The root appears twice with the same meaning in Saul's affirmation of David's innocence found in 1 Sam 24:18–19.[54]

Slomovic also identifies lexical connections through the roots, שפט and דין, both meaning "to judge."[55] The words occur is v. 9 of the psalm and in David's remarks of defense to Saul in 1 Sam 24:3a, 16:

יְהוָה יָדִין עַמִּים שָׁפְטֵנִי יְהוָה כְּצִדְקִי וּכְתֻמִּי עָלָי

> Let the LORD *judge* the peoples; *judge* me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to my innocence. (Ps 7:9)

[13a]יִשְׁפֹּט יְהוָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ
[16]וְהָיָה יְהוָה לְדַיָּן וְשָׁפַט בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וְיֵרֶא וְיָרֵב אֶת־רִיבִי וְיִשְׁפְּטֵנִי מִיָּדֶךָ

> [13a] Let the LORD *judge* between me and you… [16] The LORD as *judge* will determine the proper *judgment* between me and you. May he take notice, plead my case, and *vindicate* me from your charges. (1 Sam 24:13a, 16)

Last, Slomovic has found a connection between the psalm and narrative through the Hebrew root צדק, "righteous," in v. 9 of the psalm and 1 Sam 24:18.[56]

In addition to the lexical connections outlined by Slomovic, I would add an association between Ps 7 and the Samuel narrative through the words רשע, "wicked," and לב, "heart." After the psalmist calls upon God as judge (v. 9), he requests that the deity make the wrongdoing of the wicked (רשע) end (v. 10). In 1 Sam 24:13a, David invokes God to judge between him and Saul. In the following verse, David makes use of a proverbial adage using the root רשע twice to bolster his claim of innocence:

53. Slomovic, "Toward an Understanding," 367.
54. See my translation of this verse in the discussion of Ps 142, above (p. 104).
55. Slomovic, "Toward an Understanding," 367.
56. Ps 142 also contains a link via the root צדק. See the discussion, above (p. 104).

כַּאֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר מְשַׁל הַקַּדְמֹנִים מֵרְשָׁעִים יֵצֵא רֶשַׁע וְיָדִי לֹא תִהְיֶה־בָּךְ

> As the proverb of the ancients[57] says: "From *wicked* ones comes *wickedness*." So, my hand will not be against you. (1 Sam 24:14)

There is also a lexical correspondence through the word לֵב, "heart" (v. 10). In the psalm, the petitioner acknowledged that God examines the "heart" of men and the Samuel narrative reports that the "heart" of David felt grieved over cutting Saul's cloak (1 Sam 24:6). The psalmist invites God to scrutinize the intentions (hearts and minds) of men because the psalmist knows of his own innocence. David as the psalmist, then, would be certain that he acted justly with Saul. The insertion of Ps 7 into the scene at En-gedi would clear up any ambiguity of David's actions at that site: he refrains from murdering Saul when the opportunity presented itself (v. 5), and feels genuine remorse about humiliating the leader of Israel by slicing off a piece of his clothing (v. 10).

That Cush refers to Saul in the title of Ps 7 has merit and complements the scene of David and Saul at the cave in En-gedi. The psalm adds to the reading of the narrative the idea of God testing the essential character of human beings. David as the psalmist would be innocent. If there had been any doubt with regard to David's intentions of harming Saul at En-gedi, the psalm would exculpate him.[58]

That there was something amiss with the episode in 1 Sam 24 is intimated in Josephus' account. A significant variant in Josephus's version occurs precisely in David's speech declaring his innocence before Saul. Josephus has a lengthier report of David's plea in which he specifies that Saul could determine his innocence or guilt by examining his *actions*:

> [David said] "Thou oughtest not, O King, to give ear to miscreants and fabricators of lying charges and do them honour of believing their lies… [N]o, but *by their actions shouldest thou judge* the character of all men. For calumny only deceives, while *actions clearly reveal the honest friend*; words are of two-fold nature, either true or false, but *deeds lay bare to sight of intention*… How indeed could the opinion not be false which thou didst hold of me, namely that I wished to kill thee, or how canst thou be other than impious toward God when thou are eager to destroy, and accountest as an enemy, a man who this day had in his

57. Reading with 4QSam[a]: מניים[הקד]. The MT has a singular the form, "the ancient one."

58. The connection of these two texts would also bolster the apologetic *Tendenz* of the Samuel account for David. See McKenzie's *King David: A Biography*, in which he persuasively argues throughout that a great deal of the history recorded in the books of Samuel is an apology for David.

> power to avenge himself and to punish thee, and yet refused to avail himself of an opportunity. For when I cut off the skirt of thy mantle, I might at the same time have cut off thy head."[59]

Like the author of the superscriptions, Josephus appears interested in affirming David's innocence. In his version of the Samuel narrative, David calls for a scrutiny of his conduct. Any examination would vindicate him. He considers Saul's insistence to chase him an act of irreverence toward God. Josephus's version provides a more dramatic rendering of the story at En-gedi, especially in its inclusion of the detail that David could have decapitated Saul instead of cutting his garment.

3. *Cush is Shimei*

After the death of Saul, David continues to have difficulty with members of the Benjaminite tribe (2 Sam 16:5; 20:1). Scholars have surmised that the Benjaminite mentioned in the title of Ps 7 refers, not to Saul, but to another from this tribe; namely, Shimei ben Gera. This argument is based upon a general match between the psalm's depiction of a person being unjustly accused and Shimei's cursing of David in 2 Sam 16.

When David flees from Jerusalem after his son had taken over his throne, Shimei curses David and throws stones at him. David, however, does not retaliate, nor does he submit any statement defending his innocence. Instead, David leaves the matter for the deity to judge (2 Sam 16:11–12). Commentators have linked Shimei with Ps 7 also because of lexical associations of the words שוב and ראשׁ that occur in the psalm and historical narrative. In text recording Shimei's execution, King Solomon uses these two words in his indictment of Shimei:

> וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־שִׁמְעִי אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֵת כָּל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר יָדַע לְבָבְךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ לְדָוִד אָבִי וְהֵשִׁיב יְהוָה אֶת־רָעָתְךָ בְּרֹאשֶׁךָ

> The king [Solomon] said to Shimei, "You indeed know all the wrong which is harbored[60] in your heart. [You know] what you did to David, my father. Now, the LORD will *cause* your evil to *return* upon *your head*." (1 Kgs 2:44)

In the psalm, the words occur in v. 17, when the petitioner expresses hope that the wrongdoing of the wicked one would return (יָשׁוּב) upon his head (בְּרֹאשׁוֹ).[61]

59. Josephus, *Ant.* 6.285–89 (Marcus, LCL) (italics mine).
60. Lit. "which your heart knows."
61. Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, 85; Bruce, "The Earliest Old Testament Interpretation," 48–49.

Another connection between this psalm and the figure Shimei may be drawn from the book of Esther. This text mentions the name Shimei in the genealogy of Mordecai as "Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite." The reference to *Kish* is considered an allusion to Cush in the title of Ps 7.[62]

One Psalms commentator, Barnes, posits that Cush in the title of Ps 7 refers to Shimei based upon his translation of v. 5. Barnes suggests that the second half of v. 5 reflects a late gloss to show that David delivered Shimei twice, in 2 Sam 16:10–11 and 19:22–24.[63]

It seems that Shimei could have been the intended referent in the title of Ps 7. In the context of Shimei's cursing of David, the psalm would fit after 2 Sam 16:12. The insertion of the psalm at this point would strengthen the idea that David was innocent of the charges launched against him by Shimei. The addition of the psalm in the context of Shimei's cursing of David would also foreshadow the text in 1 Kgs 2:44 in which all the evil that has been cast upon David by Shimei returns to him.

4. *Cush is Cushi*

Hutton has put forth a provocative theory for the identity of the Benjaminite in the title of Ps 7.[64] He posits that Cush refers to a forgotten historical figure named, "Cushi, the Benjaminite." The basis of his argument relies upon the Septuagint transmission of the name "Cushi" in its title to the psalm. Hutton notes that the word "Cushi" can be a personal name, since it occurs as such in Jer 36:14 and Zeph 1:1. Moreover, Hutton observes, that the word occurs without a definite article in 2 Sam 18:21, pushing forward the idea of its use as a personal name.

Hutton's suggestion that the superscript of Ps 7 refers to a certain "Cushi, the Benjaminite" raises a number of problems, however. First, his view that the Septuagint tradition preserves an intentional ancient interpretation of the psalm title is speculative, especially given that the

62. Eaton, *Psalms*, 42.

63. W. Barnes, *The Psalms* (London: Methuen, 1931), 29–30. Barnes posits that the latter half of v. 5 was added. He contends that vv. 5 and 6 read originally, as follows: "If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me / Let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it // Yea, let him tread my life down to the earth / And lay my glory in the dust." The added clause of v. 5, which Barnes translates as follows, "Yea, I have delivered him that without cause was mine adversary," has the petitioner articulating that he has done nothing wrong against friend or foe. This parallelism was according to Barnes a purposeful emendation brought about by a scribe remembering that David had delivered Shimei twice.

64. Hutton, "Cush the Benjaminite," 123–37.

Septuagint may have changed the name Cushi based upon 2 Sam 18. Another difficulty encountered by Hutton's theory concerns the designation of the man in the title as "Cushi, *the Benjaminite*." Never does the passage in Samuel indicate a Benjaminite origin for the messenger bearing the tragic news to David.

Hutton situates Ps 7 in the context of 2 Sam 18–19 and identifies Joab as the unnamed person that the petitioner laments. He contends that reading Ps 7 in the context of 2 Sam 18–19 satisfies a gap in the narrative; namely, why David appoints Amasa in place of Joab (2 Sam 19:14). The psalm thus serves as an explanation for the new appointment: Joab had fallen out of favor with David because of murdering Absalom. He supports this view by observing that similar imagery occurs between psalm and narrative: Absalom is killed by spears and then later thrown in a pit (2 Sam 18:17), and in the psalm God prepares fiery arrows for the one filled with iniquity (v. 14), and he falls in the very pit which he hews out (v. 16).

While Hutton's thesis is lively, it does not seem likely that the selection of a new commander would prompt David to utter a prayer. This reasoning also does not align well with the tendency of the historical psalms to correspond with situations of incredible distress. Moreover, there are two Benjaminites in particular with whom David had difficulty—Saul and Shimei. David's defending himself before Saul at the cave in En-gedi, and deflecting the taunts of Shimei during his escape from Jerusalem serve as more likely contexts for the setting of Ps 7.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

A reading that combines the historical titles in the Psalms with the Samuel narrative serves to recast David into a model of repentance and piety. Characteristics of David known from Samuel—strong conqueror, man who laid the foundation of the Temple, sire of an eternal dynasty, court musician—are not emphasized in the historical superscriptions. Many of the titles recall moments in which David did not explicitly express his piety or reliance upon God to help him get out of a situation. The historical titles also open the door for psalms without a specific setting to be read in the context of David's history. Having all of these psalms read into David's story recounted in the Samuel narrative alters the story and the biblical hero: both the story and David are given a marked religious character.

This revision of David and his story has precedence in the Chronicler's rewriting of David's history, which was done to align the story with the changing needs of his community. The updating or recasting of biblical figures was common in the Second Temple period. The character Enoch in Genesis, for example, is given only a few lines in the book of Genesis (Gen 4:17–18; 5:18–24), but he is recast as an exemplary figure of repentance.[1] Another example is found in the change of the biblical figure, Joseph, who becomes a model of virtue based upon his interaction with the wife of the Pharaoh.[2] The Second Temple period shows interest in updating its heroes in order that they bear on the current situations.[3]

The view that comes across from the historical titles seems to correspond with Josephus' presentation of David in his version of the Samuel narrative. According to Louis Feldman, Josephus "stresses his [David's] dependence upon God saying that it was because David was

1. See Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*.
2. See Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, and *The Bible as It Was*; Harm W. Hollander, *Joseph as an Ethical Model* (Leiden: Brill, 1981).
3 See Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*.

everywhere attended by G-d that he achieved success (*Ant.* 8.196)."[4] Josephus also shows David as pious throughout his version of the history. He has notices that, like the historical titles, enhance the religious character of the narrative. He repeatedly stresses God's care in all of David's affairs.[5] In the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17), for example, Josephus's account includes the following elements not found in the MT: (1) Goliath is said to have cursed God in addition to being derisive of the Israelite army (1 Sam 17:46); (2) David asserts his confidence in his God before Goliath by stating that God was his protector when all other forces are unavailing; and (3) Josephus emphasized David's dependence upon God for his victory by dedicating Goliath's sword to God (*Ant.* 6.192).[6] Josephus seems to add and omit notices in order to underline David's faithfulness to God.[7] Feldman suggests that Josephus underscores David's piety in order to diminish David's status by attributing his achievements to God.[8] The authors of the superscriptions, likewise, emphasize the deity's role in coming to David's rescue throughout his life history.

The author of the superscriptions is best seen in the context of Second Temple period literary activity. His addition of historical titles set in the life history of David seems to reflect a trend of Second Temple period literature to have important figures uttering prayers. Newman nicely describes this tendency in her discussion of Second Temple period prayer:

> In contrast to pre-exilic literature, characters in Second Temple narratives are more frequently depicted as praying. There is also a proliferation of prayer texts in the books themselves. Chronicles, for instance, includes many more prayers than its source in Samuel–Kings. Long prayers appear in Ezra–Nehemiah, the books of Daniel, Judith, and Tobit, as well as pseudepigraphical works like *Jubilees* and Pseudo-Philo… In short, the literary evidence indicates that prayer and praying became a central feature of religious life in the centuries following the return from the Babylonian exile.[9]

Moreover, in the Septuagint version of the book of Esther, prayers are added to accentuate God's role in the story. God's name does not appear

4. Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 550.
5. Josephus, *Ant.* 6.181, 196, 203, 280; 7.65, 71–77, 90, 122.
6. In the MT David is said to have taken the sword to his own tent (1 Sam 17:54).
7. See Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation*, 556–61.
8. Ibid., 559.
9. Judy Newman, *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 1.

in the MT of the book of Esther. In the version, however, prayers appear interspersed throughout the narrative, and the Septuagint version makes a stronger statement of divine deliverance. Similarly, in the Septuagint version of the book of Daniel, we find prayers added to the story to provide more detail about the manner in which God saved Daniel and his companions.

The author of the superscriptions also interspersed prayers into David's narrative in the books of Samuel by attaching David's name to thirteen psalms. He selected problematic moments in David's life as the basis for attaching David's name to a particular theological affirmation: David becomes an exemplar of personal piety that succeeded because he prayed to God in every instance of distress.

In conclusion, in the remaining pages I offer examples of how the historical psalms could be read when they are added to the Samuel narrative. I have selected three scenes from the David's story and have inserted the psalms to which the author of the superscriptions has associated them. Words that appear in italics are my own additions. These additions reflect my interpretation of how David's story would read with the inclusion of the historical psalm.

A. *David and Michal in Saul's Court*

1 Samuel 19:11–18a with Psalm 59:

> 1 Sam 19:11 Saul sent messengers to David's house to guard David's house in order to execute him in the morning. Now, Michal, his wife, told David thus: "If you do not escape tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." 12 Michal let David down through the window, and then he took off and escaped. *David was terrified and prayed to the* LORD:
>
> Ps 59:2 Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;
> protect me from those standing against me.
> 3 Deliver me from those doing evil,
> save me from bloodthirsty men.
> 4 Look, they lie in wait for my life,
> powerful ones have stirred up strife against me
> for no transgression or sin of mine, O LORD,
> 5 for no offense of mine do they run
> to establish themselves against me.
> Awake, meet me in my distress, and see!
> 6 You, O LORD God of hosts,
> God of Israel,
> be incited to punish all the nations,
> do not show mercy to any treacherous evildoer. *Selah*.

[7] They return in the evening growling like a dog,
as they roam the city.
[8] See how they attack with their mouths,
swords are in their lips;
for (they think), "Who can hear us?"
[9] But you, "O LORD will laugh at them,
You will mock all nations.
[10] O my strength, I will watch for you;
for (you), O God, are my haven.
[11] My munificent God will come to meet me,
God will enable me to gloat over those lying in wait for me.
[12] Do not execute them, lest my people forget;
with your strength make them wander,
bring them down, O LORD, our shield.
[13] For the sin of their mouths, the words on their lips,
let them be conquered by their pride,
for their imprecations and the lies they tell,
[14] consume them in wrath;
consume them until they exist no more;
that it will be known till the ends of the earth,
that God rules over Jacob.
[15] They return in the evening growling like a dog,
as they roam the city.
[16] They roam for food,
and linger all night if they are not sated.
[17] But I will sing of your strength,
and in the morning, I will rejoice for your kindness;
for you have become my haven,
a refuge in my day of distress.
[18] O my strength, to you I will sing praises;
for God is my haven, my munificent God.

At that moment, God had answered his prayer and sent a messenger to instruct Michal to delay Saul's pursuit. [1 Sam 19:13]Michal took the idol and laid and set it on the bed; she put goat's hair on the idol's head. Then, she covered it with a blanket.[10] [14] Saul sent messengers to capture David, but Michal said to them, "he is sick." [15] Saul sent his messengers in to see David and said: "Bring him up to me in the bed in order that I may kill him." [16] The messengers went [to get David] but they found instead the idol on the bed with goat's hair at its head. [17] Saul said to Michal, "Why did you deceive me and send off my enemy so that he could escape?" And Michal said to Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go, why should I kill you?'" *In the meantime, he had enough time to get away from Saul* [18] and David fled and escaped.

10. Lit. "she covered it with a garment."

B. *David Detained in Gath*

1 Samuel 21:11–22:1 with Psalm 56:

1 Sam 21:11 David fled on that day from before Saul and he came to Achish,
king of Gath. *As soon as he arrived he was discovered*, 12 and the servants
of Achish said to him, "Is not this David, king of the land? Is he not the one
about whom they sing and dance saying, 'Saul has killed his thousands, but
David his ten thousands'?" 13 *The Philistine servants seized him on the spot
in Gath and* 14a he disguised himself right before their eyes and pretended
to be mad as they held him. *They led him to the quarters of the prisoners
and David was greatly afraid. He bowed his face to the ground and prayed*:

Ps 56:2 Have mercy on me, O God,
for men trample me,
every day an adversary oppresses me.
3 My vigilant enemies trample me every day;
indeed many are those fighting me, O Exalted One.
4 When I am afraid,
I surely put my trust in you.
5 In God whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I am not afraid;
what can flesh do to me?
6 Each day they dictate my affairs,
their evil thoughts weigh heavily upon me.
7 They stir up strife, they lurk;
they keep track of my steps,
as they hope to have my life.
8 Repay them according to their iniquity,
cast the people down in your anger, O God.
9 You have kept count of my wanderings,
set my tears in your flask.
Are they not in your record?
10 Then my enemies will retreat,
on the day I call (to you).
This I know, God is for me.
11 In God, whose word I praise,
in the LORD whose word I praise,
12 in God I trust; I am not afraid.
what can man do to me?
13 Upon me, O God, are your vows,
I will submit thank offerings to you.
14 For you delivered my life from death,
my feet from stumbling,
in order to walk before God in the light of life.

And a messenger of the LORD allayed his fears and said that he would indeed escape from Achish's court and see his family again. The messenger encouraged him to continue his pretense of insanity before King Achish.

David did as the messenger told him and maintained his madness. When the guards brought him before the Philistine king, [14b] he scratched marks on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle run down his beard.[15] King Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is mad! Why would you *bring* him to me? [16] Do I lack madmen that you should *bring* this man to act like a madman before me? Should this man come into my house?" [22:1] David left there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; when his brothers and all his father's house heard of it, they went down to meet him there.

C. *David and Hushai Meet on a Mountain*

2 Samuel 15:30–32 with Psalm 3:

[1 Sam 15:30] Now David went up the hill of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he ascended with his head covered and walking barefoot. All the people who were with him also had their head covered and wept while they ascended [the hill]. [31] David was told that Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom. David *knew how shrewd an advisor Ahithophel was and* said, "Thwart the counsel of Ahithophel, O LORD." [32a] Now David went up to the summit [of the mountain] and he prayed[11] to God:

[Ps 3:2] O LORD, how my enemies have increased!
Many rise up against me!
[3] Many are those saying about me:
"There is no deliverance for him from God!" *Selah*.
[4] But you, O LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory and the one lifting up my head.
[5] I cried aloud to the LORD,
and he answered me from the mountain of his holiness. *Selah*.
[6] I indeed lay down and had gone to sleep,
I awoke because the LORD sustains me.
[7] I will not be afraid of the multitudes of people,
who, on every side, have set themselves against me.
[8] Rise up, O LORD!
Bring me deliverance, O my God!
For you smote all my enemies on the cheek.
You broke the teeth of the wicked.
[9] Deliverance belongs to the LORD.
Upon your people is your blessing.

Right after David finished his prayer, [2 Sam 15:32b] Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his tunic torn and dust upon head. *Hushai said to David, "I am at your service, O king." God had sent Hushai to "thwart the counsel of Ahithophel."*

11. Lit. "bowed down, worshipped."

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