

1 SAMUEL 18

DAVID POPULAR AND PROSPERING ... SAUL PETRIFIED AND PLOTTING

INTRODUCTION

It is fascinating to observe the parallels which exist between the way in which scripture introduces us to Saul and the way it introduces us to David.

Saul

(a) Saul's *anointing by Samuel* in chapter 10 is followed by Saul's *vindication – by way of a great military victory* – in chapter 11.

(b) Both chapters make reference to *the popular reaction to Saul*.

(c) By far *the majority of the people responded favourably and enthusiastically to him*.

(d) There were a few *exceptions* at first, but they were men of no great account, 10.27, who *barely escaped with their lives*, 11.12-13.

David

(a) David's *anointing by Samuel* in chapter 16 is followed by David's *vindication – by way of a great military victory* – in chapter 17.

(b) Chapter 18 draws attention to *the popular reaction to David*.

(c) By far *the majority of the people responded favourably and enthusiastically to him*.

(d) There was just one *exception*, but he was a very notable exception, for he happened to be the king, and from his many assaults and plots David *barely escaped with his life*.

A number of threads run through chapter 18. We find repeated reference to :

(i) *David's successes*. David's wise and prudent manner brought prosperity and success to all his ventures, vv.5, 14, 15, 30.

(ii) *Love for David*. With the exception of Saul, everyone loves David.¹ Jonathan loves David, vv.1, 3; Michal loves David, vv.20, 28; all Israel and Judah love David, v.16; and all Saul's servants love David, v.22. In some ways, chapter 18 focuses more on the reaction of Saul and his family to David than it does on David himself. The chapter opens with mention of the love which Saul's eldest son had for David, v.1, and closes with mention of the love which Saul's younger daughter had for him, v.28.

(iii) *The Lord being 'with' David*. This refrain is found three times in the chapter; introduced by 'because', v.12, 'and', v.14, and 'that', v.28.

(iv) *Saul's emotions, inner thoughts and motives*. These are evident throughout the chapter. See his anger, v.8, his suspicion, v.9, the things he says to himself, vv.11, 17, 21, his pleasure, v.20, and his fear, vv.12, 15, 29 (Saul 'was afraid of David', v.12; 'he was afraid (a stronger word than in v.12) of him', v.15; and 'Saul was yet the more afraid of David', v.29.)

(v) *'The hand of the Philistines'*. Three references come in the second half of the chapter, vv.17, 21, 25.

CHAPTER DIVISION

Verses 1-4	Jonathan's covenant with David
Verses 5-9	The song which changed everything
Verses 10-16	David avoids Saul's spear
Verses 17-30	David survives Saul's cunning scheme

EXPOSITION

Verses 1-4 Jonathan's covenant with David

Verse 1. David's conversation with Saul took place immediately following David's return from the slaughter of Goliath, when Abner brought David before the king with the trophy of the Philistine's head in his hand, 17.57-58. Little did any of these men foresee that, when Saul died, *his* head would be a trophy in the Philistines' hands, 31.9! As Saul's firstborn², Jonathan was more than a prince; he was the crown prince. He was the heir-apparent to the kingdom of Israel. By everyone's expectation, Jonathan would be the next king of Israel. Indeed, in the light of his outstanding exploits in chapters 13 and 14, this son of Saul must have appealed to the people as the ideal man to be in line for the kingship – in contrast to the sons of Eli and Samuel whose lifestyles proved them totally unworthy of inheriting any form of leadership, 2.22-25; 8.3.

No man lost more than Jonathan by David's victory in Elah (well, apart from Goliath!) – or had more reason to begrudge David that victory. Naturally speaking, there was every reason for prince Jonathan to be jealous of David and to view him as his rival.

But instead

'The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David'. His soul was *'bound'* to David's soul – the same expression is used of Jacob's soul and Benjamin's soul; Judah reported to his (as yet unrecognised) brother Joseph, 'when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life (literally,

'his soul *is bound to the lad's soul*'); it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die', Gen. 44.30.³

Nothing is said about Jonathan's feelings when Goliath had challenged the armies of Israel. Perhaps his father – or the people generally⁴ – forbade him taking up the champion's challenge. Perhaps Jonathan himself held back from risking his own life as crown prince in what may well have seemed a hopeless cause. We do not know. It does seem, however, that Jonathan had been present to witness David's exploit – and to witness his own father's enthusiastic response; 'he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine ... thou sawest *it*, and didst rejoice', 19.5.⁵

Jonathan was himself a man of great faith and proven courage; see 14.1-15. And he was quick to recognise in David a true soul-brother – to recognise in David a man who, like himself, was prepared to risk his very life for the good of Israel and for the glory of God. He shared with David his faith in the Lord's ability to deliver His enemies into their hands against all odds. The two men had even expressed themselves in similar terms. Jonathan had assured his armour-bearer, 'there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few', 14.6; David had assured Goliath, 'Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts ... this day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand', 17.46. They even spoke of the Philistines in the same way. Jonathan had described a garrison of the Philistines as 'these uncircumcised', 14.6; David had described the champion of the Philistines as 'this uncircumcised', 17.36. It was small wonder that these two men had a deep affection and profound mutual respect for one another.

'*Jonathan loved him as his own soul*'. Two things should be noted about the relationship between Jonathan and David::

(a) It is likely that Jonathan was considerably older than David – in all likelihood at least 25 years older. At this time David was probably about 20 years of age and Jonathan perhaps as old as 50 years of age. The relevant biblical data is summarised in Annex A. If the age disparity between the men was of this order, their relationship was more that of a father and son than that of brothers.

(b) When it says that 'Jonathan *loved* him', v.1 – a point repeated, not only in v.3, but also in 20.17 – there is no question whatever of there being anything improper or abnormal about their relationship. It is important to note that the Hebrew word translated 'love' here (*'ahab*) is nowhere used to describe either homosexual desire or activity.⁶ When homosexual relationships are in view, the word employed consistently throughout the Old Testament is the word translated 'to know' (*yada*), in the sense of 'to have sex with'. For example, the men of Sodom 'called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where *are* the men which came in to thee this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may *know* them', Gen. 19.5; and, in very similar circumstances, certain worthless men in Gibeah 'beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may *know* him', Judg. 19.22. This word (*yada*) is never used of the relationship between David and Jonathan. Theirs was a pure and close friendship, built on a common faith in God and a common delight in His service.

The word 'love' (*'ahab*) was sometimes used as a technical term in the context of a covenant, describing pacts of loyalty and reciprocal responsibility. An example of this treaty/covenant use of 'love' is found in 1 Kings 5.1, which informs us that Hiram, the king of Tyre, 'was ever a lover of David'. The word refers, in such contexts, to a relationship between two parties who were able to depend on one another. God, knowing the future trials and troubles to which David was soon to be exposed, graciously provided him in Jonathan with a kindred spirit, and a devoted friend in whom he could confide.

Verse 2. '*Saul ... would let him go no more home to his father's house*'. This contrasts with the former arrangement, by which 'David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem', 17.15. Perhaps David's close friendship with Jonathan combined with Saul's personal appreciation of David's worth to prompt the king to make David a permanent member of his household.

Verse 3. '*Jonathan and David made a covenant*'. Literally, 'Jonathan and David cut a covenant'. In ancient times, a covenant was inaugurated between two parties by them severing an animal sacrifice and both passing between the pieces of the sacrifice. In effect this was saying, 'If I prove unfaithful to the terms in this covenant, may I end up in pieces as this covenant victim'.⁷ Jonathan's name appears first here and it seems clear from David's later words to him that Jonathan had in fact taken the initiative in entering into the covenant; 'thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for *thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the Lord with thee*', 20.8.

It has been suggested that this particular covenant was a one-way covenant only; 'The covenant of friendship referred to ... was a unilateral (binding on one party only) covenant in which Jonathan committed himself to David with complete disregard for self. The gift given by Jonathan served to ratify the covenant and honour David'.⁸

But it may well be that, in this covenant, both Jonathan and David bound themselves together under mutual obligations. This was certainly true of the later forms of covenant into which they entered, 'Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as *we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord*, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever', 20.42; '*they two made a covenant before the Lord*', 23.18.

And both men certainly kept their covenant faithfully. For his part, David went out of his way in all his dealings with Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, to abide by the terms of his covenant with Jonathan. And this both (a) in a *positive way* ('David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, *that I may shew him kindness* for Jonathan's sake?' ... David said unto him, Fear not: for *I will surely shew thee kindness* for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father', 2 Sam. 9.1,7) and (b) in a *negative way* when the Gibeonites required that seven of Saul's sons be delivered to them, for them to hang up in Gibeah ('The king said, I will give them. But *the king spared Mephibosheth*, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, *because of the Lord's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan* the son of Saul', 21.6-7).

For his part, Jonathan kept faithfully to his commitment (a) by standing up so loyally and bravely on David's behalf before Saul, 20.27-32, and (b) in later sticking by him when the going got extremely rough; for example in 23.16-18. Prior to David's conflict with Goliath, David's own brother in the flesh Eliab had made it very clear that he for one wasn't over-impressed with David, 17.28! But in Jonathan David now gained a true and faithful friend. It was Solomon who later wrote, 'there is a friend that sticketh ('cleaves to someone or something') closer than a brother', Prov. 18.24. Perhaps Solomon's father had told him about Jonathan!

The structure of the passage suggests that the transactions of vv.3-4 were separated in time from David's meeting with Saul in 17.57-18.1. (Note the interval required by v.2.)

Verse 4. 'His robe'. The word translated 'robe' would include the ordinary dress of the relatively wealthier classes.⁹ It was used also, however, of royal robes – 'David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe', 24.4; 'with such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins appareled', 2 Sam. 13.18; 'David was clothed with a robe of fine linen', 1 Chron. 15.27; 'all the princes ... shall come down from their thrones, and lay away their robes', Ezek. 26.16. Here it probably refers to Jonathan's princely and royal robe.

'His garments'. Possibly referring to Jonathan's personal military dress – his tunic or armour; see 17.38-39.

It was high honour indeed for someone to be given royal clothing to wear; 'Haman answered the king (Ahasuerus), For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear ... let this apparel ... be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour', Esther 6.7-9. But, in the circumstances, for Jonathan to give his royal clothing to David meant far more to both of them than Jonathan simply honouring David.

'And ... his bow'. Jonathan's famous bow! This was his own special – and doubtless highly prized – weapon; 'From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty', 2 Sam. 1.22.¹⁰ Jonathan was as capable with his bow as David was with his sling!

'Stripped himself ... gave ... to David'. It was a remarkable moment indeed when the first-born son of a king¹¹ handed his most prized possessions to the last-born son of a sheep-farmer!

And Jonathan's act of stripping himself and handing his garments and weaponry to David had staggering significance and implications – for both of them.

In Israel to strip off one's garments and to pass them to another often indicated the passing on of one's office and position. See (a) for a priest: 'strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there', Num. 20.26, and (b) for a prophet: Elijah 'found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him ... and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah', 1 Kings 19.19-20. For the heir to the kingdom to strip himself and to present his garments and weaponry – the symbol's of his princely status – to another must be regarded as an act of 'virtual abdication'.¹²

The significance of Jonathan's action can be illustrated from an Akkadian¹³ document discovered at Ugarit. The document speaks of a thirteenth-century BCE king of Ugarit, Utrisharruma, who entered into a divorce settlement with his queen. The couple's son, the crown prince, was able to choose which of his two parents he would live with. But, if he chose to live with his mother, he was required to abdicate – to relinquish all right to the throne. If he decided to do that, he was required to indicate this decision symbolically by leaving his clothes on the throne.¹⁴

For Jonathan to make a gift of his robe¹⁵ and armour to David was, in effect, for him to renounce his position as crown prince and to convey, so far as his own purpose of heart went, to David the right of succession to the kingship of Israel. Jonathan was effectively bowing out and transferring his own status as heir-apparent to David.

Rather than trying to perpetuate Saul's dynasty, as Abner later tried to do, Jonathan willingly turned over to David the symbols of the crown prince. He was saying in effect, 'I know that you will be the next king of Israel. You should therefore be dressed and armed as the crown prince – not me. These rightfully belong to you'.¹⁶

Jonathan's selfless action is all the more remarkable since, as we have already noted, he may have been anything up to 30 years older than David.¹⁷ And yet the heir apparent was prepared to step down and from then on to play second fiddle to David; 'Fear not', he said later, 'for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee', 23.17. We need perhaps to ask ourselves how well we react when we find ourselves outshone and overshadowed by others. C. H. Spurgeon made the point admirably, 'It takes more grace than I can tell, to play the second fiddle well'.

It is just possible that Jonathan's selfless action also expressed his willing submission to God's word, spoken earlier to Saul his father through Samuel, to the effect that, as a consequence of his disobedience, Saul would not have a continuing dynasty – and that he, Jonathan, would therefore never become king; 'now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people', 13.14. If this did motivate Jonathan to any extent, it meant, not only that Saul had made him aware of Samuel's words, but that Jonathan had thought through the implications of David's recent victory – namely that this pointed David out as God's choice of a successor for Saul – that David was this 'man after his own heart'.¹⁸

Certainly the penny had yet to drop with his father – it would take the lyrics of a song to make that happen!

David had declined the offer of 'garments' ('armour', AV) and a 'sword' from Saul, 17.38-39. But he accepts both 'garments' (the same word as in 17.38) and a 'sword' from Jonathan. Saul's garments and sword were not only 'untried', 17.39, they just didn't fit David *spiritually*! David and Saul valued and trusted in very different things. But David would take Jonathan's garments and sword, not because he had 'tried' them any more than he had 'tried' Saul's, but, far more importantly, because they fitted him spiritually! He and Jonathan were one in soul.

Verses 5-9 The song which changed everything

Verse 5. This is summary verse¹⁹, embracing David's continued successes after chapter 17. Clearly Saul's promotion of David to a high rank ('over the men of war' – perhaps the equivalent of something like a general in Israel's army) follows the return of the army from their pursuit of the Philistines – which return coincides with the next section, vv.6-9.

'Behaved himself wisely'. There is some doubt about the correct translation of the word translated 'behaved wisely', vv.5, 14, 15, 30.²⁰ In the context it probably indicates that David acted in such a wise and prudent manner as to bring success to his ventures. Note the carefully marked progression – 'behaved himself wisely', v.5; 'behaved himself wisely in all his ways', v.14; 'behaved himself very wisely', v.15; 'behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul', v.30. Is my life marked by spiritual progression? Am I 'adding', 2 Pet. 1.5. Is my 'fruit' becoming 'more fruit', John 15.2, and then 'much fruit', v.5?

'Saul set him over the men of war'. By any yardstick, this was a remarkable promotion. A shepherd, no older than in his early twenties, was put in command of one or more army units – akin to the rank of 'general' in Israel's army. Yet, I guess, David's instant promotion pales into insignificance in comparison with that of Joseph, who was raised with one swift step from 'the dungeon' to 'over all the land of Egypt', Gen. 41.14,41! And yet even that is as nothing compared to the change which takes place every-time a sinner is converted – and exchanges the kingdom of darkness for the kingdom of God's Son, exchanges Satan for God, exchanges death for life, exchanges condemnation for justification, exchanges distance for nearness, exchanges despair for hope, exchanges enmity for reconciliation, exchanges hell for heaven, and so on, John 5.24; Acts 26.18; Eph. 2.5, 12-13; Col. 1.13, 21! Both Hannah and an unnamed psalmist unite in telling how God 'raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar/needful from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory', 1 Sam. 2.8; Psa. 113.7-8. Count me in – praise His name!

'And he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants'. Because of the merits of the case – coupled no doubt with David's attractive personality – his rapid promotion caused no ill-will – at least at this stage. David was accepted 'in the sight of Saul's servants', even though they were mainly of a different tribe – namely Benjamin, 22.7, not Judah. Sadly, this state of affairs was not to last!

Verse 6. But, notwithstanding David's widespread popularity, not quite everyone was rushing to join David's fan club – and vv.6-9 explain why. For David's impressive victory had an immediate double effect – for it brought about, not only Jonathan's fervent love and friendship, but Saul's equally fervent hatred and envy. Indeed, there may be an intended contrast in the narrative between Jonathan's attitude toward David in vv.1-4, and Saul's attitude toward David from v.8 and onwards.

'When David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine'. This was clearly when Saul and his forces returned from the pursuit of the Philistines and the gathering of the spoil – and it would have taken them a little time to have reached Gath and Ekron and returned, 17.52,53.²¹

'The women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing ... with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music'. Victory celebrations were normally led by the womenfolk, who came out to meet the triumphant warriors, and escorted them home, with 'singing' and 'dancing', accompanied by 'tabrets' ('tambourines').²² Note the cases mentioned in Exod. 15; Judg. 11 and Psa. 68; (i) 'Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel (tambourine – the same word as 1 Sam. 18.6) in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels (tambourines) and with dances', Exod 15.20; (ii) 'Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels (tambourines) and with dances', Judg. 11.34; and (iii) 'The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the damsels playing with timbrels' as well as with 'singing', Psa. 68.25.²³

Later, around the turn of the era, Strabo (64BC-AD22), the Greek geographer, described the singing girls from Palestine as the most musical in the world!

'Came out ... to meet king Saul'. With no justification, the Septuagint gives, 'came out to meet David'. Now that really would have put the cat among the pigeons!

Verse 7. *'The women answered one another as they played'*. That is, they sang in alternate choruses – as in Exod. 15.21.

'Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands'. The combination 'thousand(s) ... ten thousand(s)' is common in the Old Testament. See, for example, 'A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee', Psa. 91.7; and 'Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?', Mic. 6.7. In contexts such as those, both numbers are hyperbolic for a large number.²⁴ Since, in such instances, it isn't necessary to interpret the second part of the expression as having greater significance or value than the first, some have suggested that the women intended to lavish equal praise on both Saul and David.²⁵ But the most natural understanding of the song is that which Saul reached!²⁶

The justification for the women ascribing 'ten thousands' to David lay, in part, in the fact that Goliath had been the Philistines' appointed representative, 17.51b, and in one sense his defeat was therefore worth the defeat of 10,000 Philistines.²⁷ There was no getting away from it – Goliath was an army in himself!

The crediting of a victory to kings and rulers – even if they physically played no active part in it – was not unusual.²⁸ Yet there is considerable truth in Chrysostom's observation that, in ascribing thousands to Saul, the women credited Saul with far more than he deserved – 'for he suffered the Philistine to vaunt himself forty days together, and yet cowardly sat still'.

'Saul hath ... and David ...'. It is not that it is always wrong to distinguish between the achievements and service of one and another. We must be honest and we must be realistic. Paul certainly was. In Romans 16, he seems to make a deliberate distinction between those who 'labour' (Tryphema and Tryphosa, v.12) and those who 'laboured much' (Mary, v.6, Persis, v.12). But we do need to be careful! Comparisons made between God's servants can be

dangerous – especially if made publicly as in 1 Sam. 18.7. After all, God's servants are only human. David behaved himself wisely, v.5. But is highly questionable whether the women of Israel did!

In many ways, it is sad that this particular song caught on – hitting the number one spot not only in Israel but in Philistia, 21.11; 29.5. For the lyrics of the song not only proved unnecessarily provocative; they were in themselves 'godless'. This song attributes the victory and deliverance to men, and not, as David would have insisted, to the work of God. In this, the song compares very unfavourably with earlier victory songs in Israel. The song of Moses and Miriam celebrated and extolled, not the great achievement of the man with the rod, Exod. 14.27, but 'the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea', Exod. 15.1, 21. The song of Deborah and Barak celebrated and extolled, not the successes of Barak and his chariots, Judg. 4.16, or the courage of Jael, vv.17-21, but 'the Lord for the avenging of Israel', Judg. 5.2.

It is important that we reach beyond the music and the tunes to pay attention to the spiritual *content* of the hymns and spiritual songs we sing. And let us, in a day of 'hero worship' (a spirit which sadly has infected even professedly evangelical churches), avoid exalting and eulogising men.

In this particular case, Israel's dancing women certainly 'stepped on the toes' of Saul! And he now came to fear for his kingdom – as well he might.

Verse 8. '*Saul was very wroth*'. The music which David had played to him had 'refreshed' him, 16.23. But the music Saul heard on this day certainly didn't 'refresh' him – it incensed him – it 'caused him to burn', lit. And his different reaction was nothing to do with the fact that David had played only a small lyre whereas the women of Israel had come out with tambourines and three-stringed instruments ('instruments of music', AV), v.6. It was *what* the women sang which turned everything sour for Saul – and soon for David too.

'*They have ascribed ...*'. Being both the king and a much older man than David, this must in itself have been galling to Saul. But the underlying – albeit unspoken – message of the song wasn't wasted on Saul.

'*What can he have more but the kingdom?*' In a flash, Saul saw it all clearly. Perhaps he recalled Samuel's ominous revelation to him, 'The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou', 15.28. No doubt, from the moment Samuel had said this to him, Saul had been on the lookout for any tell-tale signs of the identity of the man destined to be his successor – and, as events were soon to prove, Saul was no more willing to brook a rival for his 'throne' than would be Herod the Great!

To defeat the enemies of Israel had been Saul's main kingly work, 'Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side', 14.47 – after all, that was why the people had wanted a king in the first place; 'we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles', 8.19-20. And the Lord had told Samuel that the king to be anointed 'shall save my people out of the hand of the Philistines', 9.16. But, when the crunch had come in the valley of Elah, Saul had not 'gone out' ... he had not 'fought Israel's battles' ... he had not 'saved' God's 'people out of the hand of the Philistines'. He had done none of these things. But David had! And all Saul had felt able to do was to offer the young warrior some clothes, some weapons and his best wishes!

Verse 9. '*And Saul eyed David*'. The word translated 'eyed' occurs nowhere else. It probably signifies, not so much that Saul henceforth viewed David with envy, as that Saul henceforth viewed David with suspicion'.²⁹ Saul looked at David askance – with mistrust, and, as we will find in vv.12, 15, 29, even with fear.

'*The thing displeased him*'. Literally, it 'was bad in the eyes of' Saul. Which stands in contrast to the way in which David 'was good in the eyes of' all the people, v.5 literally.

Saul's developing resentment and hatred towards David stands in contrast also to his earlier warm affection for him; 'David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly', 16.21. Indeed, on a strictly personal level, Saul seems still to have loved him; 'Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept', 24.16; 'Then said Saul, ... return, my son David ... blessed be thou, my son David', 26.21, 25. What a wretched and miserable existence for Saul.

The writer H. G. Wells says of one of his strange characters, Mr. Polly, 'He was not so much a human being as a civil war'.³⁰ This would have been an apt description for Saul 'from that day and forward!' Suspicious, angry and jealous, yet, on his better moments, capable of far higher and more generous feelings.

But there was probably one word which summed up Saul's dominating feeling for David now – envy! And envy doesn't sit at all well with love; 'love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up', 1 Cor. 13.4. Where envy lives, love dies.

Did Solomon learn from David the words of one of his proverbs, 'who is able to stand before envy?', Prov.27.4.³¹ And, over the millennia, what terribly ugly flowers have grown on the stalk of envy. It was envy which was responsible for Joseph's brothers selling him into Egypt; was responsible for Korah's rebellion in the wilderness; was responsible for the princes of Babylon having Daniel thrown to the lions; and, most dreadful and hideous of all, was responsible for the Jewish leaders delivering the Lord Jesus to Pilate to be crucified, Matt. 27.18!

Verses 10-16 David avoids Saul's spear

Verse 10. '*On the morrow*'. It is noticeable that 'the spirit of distress' came back the day after the onset of Saul's bad feelings towards David. Scripture makes no explicit connection between these events – and there may therefore not have been any. But there may have been! And certainly *we* are under warning that, when we indulge feelings of anger, we make way for a truly 'evil' spirit - indeed for the most evil of all spirits, the devil; 'let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place (an opportunity) to the devil', Eph.4.26, 27. be on your guard against envy and hatred – they are windows through which Satan climbs into the soul.

On more than one occasion in the past, it had been the Spirit of God who had come upon Saul in power, 10.10; 11.6, but now it was 'the spirit of distress' which came upon him (the same Hebrew verb in each case).

'He prophesied'. I understand that this actual form of the verb is never used of true prophecy, but only of that which is false. It seems to signify an altered state of consciousness – even a state of frenzy. This suggests that Saul lost complete control of himself and his actions. He was as a man possessed – babbling and raving like a man not in his right mind. 'Really Saul was in a state of frenzy, unable to master himself, speaking words of which he knew not the meaning'.³²

'David played with his hand, as at other times'. What a truly humble and unassuming man David was! His praises were on the lips of the nation. Everyone in Israel knew his name. He was a celebrity. And yet David didn't let his fame and popularity go to his head. With no complaint, he is content to pick up his lyre³³ and minister to Saul through his music – just as he had in the past, 16.23, before the splendid demolition job he had, with the help of God, performed on the Philistine champion. David's 'lowliness of mind' is the more remarkable given his youth. For the young are often prone to vanity and conceit. Hence Paul's instruction about church elders; 'Not a novice (a new convert), lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil (that is, the same judgement to which the devil is subject on account of his pride)', 1 Tim. 3.6.

'David played with his hand ... and there was a javelin in Saul's hand'. What a contrast we see between David's hand and Saul's hand! If, in David's hand, there was an instrument of soothing music, in Saul's hand there was an instrument of attempted murder!

'Javelin'. Better, 'spear'.³⁴ Saul's spear served as a kind of sceptre - it was a distinctive symbol of Saul's kingship. See the frequent mention of Saul's spear in 19.10; 20.33; 22.6; 26.7, 16, 22 – and, if we care to believe anything which the Amalekite said, Saul had it with him before he died, 2 Sam. 1.6.³⁵

Verse 11. *'David avoided out of his presence twice'*. The word 'twice' tells you that Saul missed the first time, and the word 'avoided' tells you he missed the second time too!

But why did David stay around to give Saul a second pot shot? Wouldn't Saul's first throw have alerted David to the fact that his life was in very real danger? I assume that David probably recognised symptoms of 'the spirit of distress', v.10, and simply concluded 'Saul certainly isn't himself today'. As with Saul's servants, he may have come to recognise the tell-tale signs; see 16.14-15. In which case, David would have had no reason to suspect anything sinister in Saul's first outburst. David may well have thought that Saul was more than usually moody that day – not that he harboured malicious or murderous intentions! David would never have guessed what was going on in Saul's mind ...

'I will smite David even to the wall'. Nor would this be the last occasion when Saul would attempt to pin David to the wall with his spear, 19.10. Indeed, when sufficiently mad, he wasn't even beyond having a go at impaling his own son, 20.32-33.

And it would have been ironic indeed if, having recently survived Goliath's monstrous spear, David had fallen to Saul's! And how fitting that, when he had every opportunity (and encouragement!) to pin Saul to the ground with his (Saul's) spear, David made it clear that he would never 'stretch forth' his 'hand' against him, 26.7-11.

Interestingly, 'According to an ancient Asiatic custom, when a dart is thrown at a man, and he escaped it by flight, he was thereby absolved from all allegiance to his master', 'Manners and Customs of the Bible, James M. Freeman, Logos, 1972, page 139. Godly David would never have agreed with that! Let us remember Peter's word, 'Servants (i.e. 'domestic, household servants'), be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward (i.e. 'the perverse, unfair and surly'), 1 Pet. 2.18 – though if they are disposed to throw spears at you, you are perfectly entitled to duck and leave the premises!

Verse 12. *'Saul was afraid of David'*. In normal circumstances, we should have expected David to be afraid of Saul rather than the other way around. Saul holds all the cards – he has the kingdom, he has the army, he has the spear. And yet it is Saul who was not only apprehensive and nervous but actually 'afraid' of David. Earlier, 'Saul and all Israel ... were greatly afraid' (same word) - of Goliath, 17.11. But now that Goliath is dead, Saul is afraid of Goliath's slayer. And he had very good reason to be afraid of David – not because David had proved more than a match for the loud-mouthed Philistine – but 'because the Lord was with him (to protect, preserve and prosper him)'. Such men often inspire the godless with a sense of awe – remember how 'Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy', Mark 6.20.

God's presence with David and God's blessing on David was obvious to Saul. Compare how the chief captain of Abimelech's host acknowledged to Abraham, 'God is *with thee* in all that thou doest', Gen. 21.22 – what a testimony coming from a heathen! And, when Joseph was in the house of Potiphar, we read that, 'his master saw that the Lord was with him', Gen. 39.3. Would anyone ever have reason to believe that God is with me?

'And was departed from Saul'. Saul knew this only too well. He later disclosed to the 'brought-up' Samuel that 'God is departed from me', 28.15 – an assessment which the man back from the grave confirmed, v.16.

Verse 13. *'Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand'*. Saul made him 'commander' of a 'thousand' – a word which some scholars believe may signify a sizeable military unit without necessarily requiring the unit to comprise literally a thousand men. The important thing for us is that Saul's purpose in this was no doubt partly sinister. By setting David at the head of a unit of troops, Saul no doubt intended to increase the chances that he would in time be 'killed in action'.

'He went out and came in before the people (i.e. in context, his troops)'. This expression has clear military connotations. Compare the prayer of Moses prior to the selection of Joshua, 'Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, *Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd*', Num 27.16-17. Compare also the word of Caleb, 'As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, *both to go out, and to come in*', Josh 14.11.³⁶

Verse 14. *'David behaved himself wisely'*. See the note to v.5.

Verse 15. *'He was afraid of him'*. This is a stronger word for 'fear' than in v.12. This word means to 'to stand in awe of', 'to be frightened of'. It carries the idea of 'trembling and great dread'.³⁷

Verse 16. *'All Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them'*. It is clear that Israel's warriors never forgot these days. Many years later, 'the tribes of Israel' spoke warmly of how, 'in time past, even when Saul was king, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel', 1 Chron. 11.2. Clearly, David's 'style' of leadership had made a lasting impression – it stayed in their memories for well over 10 years.³⁸ The assembly elder of today can learn from David's early example – not 'lording it over' God's people and giving orders to others to do what he himself would never stoop to do, but leading from the front while sharing the toils and experiences of God's people. The apostle Peter voiced it well, 'The elders which are among you I exhort ... neither as being lords over ... but being ensamples to', 1 Pet. 5.1, 3.

Verses 17-30 David survives Saul's cunning scheme

Verse 17. *'Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab ...'*. When Saul's reason returned, he shrank from laying hands on David directly. And so, instead of hurling spears, he resorts to hatching plots – switching from violence to cunning – switching from using his 'hand', vv.10,11, to 'using his head', so to speak. His actions in vv.10-11 had been on impulse. From now on his actions are largely premeditated. But the latter would meet with no more success than the former!

'Her will I give thee to wife'. Clearly the young shepherd, who had twice enquired carefully into the precise details of the reward to be given to the slayer of the Philistine, 17.26-27, 30, though having risked his life to slay Goliath, had done nothing to claim his reward. It is possible that, although no dowry was mentioned in 17.25 ('it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel'), it was understood by all that an appropriate dowry would be expected. And, as later events confirm, David was certainly in no position to pay an adequate dowry.

'Be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles'. Saul was certainly clever. He planned to take advantage both (a) of David's loyalty and patriotism ('be valiant for me'), and (b) of David's courage and zeal for God ('fight the Lord's battles'). With his lips Saul implied that anyone who waged the wars of the Lord could surely count on the help of the Lord, but in his heart he nursed only the worst of intentions. Saul's faith lay, not in the protection of the Lord of heaven, but in the operation of the law of averages! Sooner or later, he believed, some Philistine would get him.

'Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him'. 'Why dirty my hand with this', Saul is thinking, 'Philistine spears and swords are just as sharp as mine'.

Already the Philistines had no love for the Giant-slayer. And if he was also brought into the royal family of Israel, the Philistines would have a second motive for getting him in their sights. It was a smart idea.

We could almost imagine that David had Saul in mind when he wrote Psa. 55.21, 'The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords'.

'The hand of the Philistines'. This expression dominates this entire section, featuring again in vv.21, 25. It is surely ironic that, under God's over-ruling hand, in due time it was 'the hand of the Philistines' which ended Saul's own career, 31.1-5!

It is probably impossible to miss the close correspondence between Saul's efforts to rid himself of David and David's later efforts to rid himself of Uriah, 2 Sam. 11.14-17. Manoeuvring somebody into a dangerous military situation is a clever way to eliminate him without getting blood on one's own hands. Did David learn such a devious and underhand technique from Saul – as he may well have learnt how to feign madness from him, 21. 13?

Verse 18. *'Who am I? and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son in law to the king?'* Did David's response ring any bells with Saul? Did it remind him of his own response many years before when he had been told by Samuel that the desire of Israel was toward him; 'Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?', 9.20-21. If David's words did trigger any memories, Saul didn't let them deter him from his purpose.

Verse 19. *'She was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife'*. We are not told why this happened, but the implication of vv.24-25 may be that Adriel had paid a rich dowry – which David certainly couldn't match. (It is very unlikely that the marriage was cancelled or deferred on account of David's youth. Saul would have known about this before he made the offer.)

Seven sons were born of the union of Merab and Adriel, but they all met an unhappy end one harvest time; 'the king took the two sons of Rizpah ... and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite: And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the Lord: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest', 2 Sam. 21.8.

Verse 20. In concert with her older brother, vv.1, 3, Michal loved David. And it was not long before David had won not only her heart but also her hand in marriage. It is rare – though not unknown – for scripture to speak of a woman's love for a man; see 'Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth ... where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon', Songs 1.7; 3.1-4. Although Michal knew that, in David's case at least, he had now said goodbye to his flock, v.2.

Verse 21. *'My son in law in the one of the twain'*. That is, 'If not through marrying one of my daughters then by marrying the other'.

Verse 22. *'Saul commanded his servants, saying, Commune with David secretly ('privately', 'unnoticed')*'. The king was probably nervous that, after the Merab episode, his own word would carry little weight with David. And so he craftily made use of his servants to win David around.

Verses 23-24. *'Seemeth it to you a light thing (that is, 'a trivial thing') to be a king's son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?'* 'A poor man' – that is, in the context here, one unable to afford a decent and respectable dowry – certainly not the kind of dowry which would be expected for a king's daughter. I cannot help wondering whether David's own description of himself as 'a poor man' this day came back to haunt him many years later in the parable told by Nathan; 'the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb', 2 Sam. 12.3. Ah, but, when the prophet told him the parable, David had become 'the rich man with exceeding many flocks and herds!' Uriah the Hittite was then the 'poor man', whose 'little ewe lamb' was stolen from him by that same 'rich man'!

Matthew Henry aptly comments, 'If David thus magnified the honour of being son-in-law to the king, how highly then should we think of it to be sons to the King of kings! "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" (1 John 3.1). Who are we that we should be thus dignified?' Well said, Mr Henry.³⁹

Verse 25. *'The king desireth not any dowry'*. Normally the dowry was paid by the groom to his prospective father-in-law, and, alas for David, the more well-to-do and prestigious the bride and her family, the higher the dowry price would be. The dowry served a double purpose. On the one hand, it was paid *as compensation* to the bride's family for the loss of a family 'worker'.⁴⁰ It was not regarded as a purchase price – which in law was a different consideration. In the case of a dowry, the husband thereby secured his rights over his wife but she was not regarded as some 'merchandise' which had been 'bought' by him or 'sold' by her father. On the other hand, the dowry was paid to the father *as a kind of 'life insurance'*. If the husband died or divorced his wife, and she needed to return to her father's household, he would have the resources to support her.

It was not unknown for some heroic deed to be substituted for a dowry; compare 'Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife ... And Othniel ... took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife', Josh 15.16-17. And it was this kind of 'substitute dowry' which Saul proposed. Saul knew that David was from a humble home, 17.58, and that there was therefore no way in which he could pay the 'going rate' in monetary value for one of the two daughters of Israel's king. To Saul's mind, this represented a ready-made opportunity, while seemingly doing David honour, to throw onto providence the responsibility for the death of David. Now, is that clever, or what!

'An hundred foreskins of the Philistines'. From Saul's point of view the supplying of 100 Philistine foreskins served two purposes; the one obvious and the other less so.

The obvious purpose. It was a sure – but simple – way of ensuring that 100 Philistines were in fact dead. Such gruesome methods of keeping tally of the numbers of enemies slain were common. There is evidence that the Assyrians counted heads. Not much room for error there!

It is possible that there were occasions in Israel when bodily members were severed as a way of keeping tally; 'the princes of Succoth said (to Gideon), Are *the hands* of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?', Judg. 8.6. Certainly the Egyptians went for 'a show of hands' (sorry about that one!). On an interior wall of his mortuary temple at Medinet Habu, Rameses III (1198-1166 B.C.) commissioned scenes depicting the counting of hands which had been severed from his enemies in battle – as a means of establishing a body count. As it happens there is a panel on the same temple walls which has been interpreted by some scholars as picturing a pile of foreskins collected for the same purpose – possibly (wait for it) from Philistines – whose armies were driven out of Egypt by Rameses III. It does seem that the Egyptians sometimes cut off and counted the male organs of the sea peoples they killed in battle.⁴¹

So the first, and obvious reason, for requiring a fixed number of foreskins was that this guaranteed that the numbers hadn't been fiddled.

But there was a second, and less obvious, reason for opting for the foreskins of Philistines – as opposed to their heads or hands. Philistine males did not practice circumcision on principle – which, not only Israel, but many other ancient nations did – such as the Moabites and Ammonites. The Philistines were distinctively – and were so deliberately – 'the uncircumcised'. They hated circumcision. And so, for David not only to slay 100 Philistines, but then to desecrate their bodies by mutilating their male organs would completely outrage the Philistine people. In their eyes, it would be the ultimate form of humiliation and dishonour. It is difficult to imagine a more provocative course of action. The Philistines would be looking for revenge – and guess who would be in their sights!

Oh, this was a well thought out 'bride-price'!

'The king's enemies'. Even when at his most cunning, Saul failed to hide his current outlook on life. The Philistines were not perceived by Saul so much as *God's* enemies as *his own*. Compare how the summary of his military achievements is expressed, 'Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all *his enemies* on every side, against Moab ...and against the Philistines', 14.47. That's it - 'his enemies'. He always seems to have thought in such terms; 'Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away *mine enemy* ...?', 19.17. Alas for Saul, the day would come when Samuel would have to speak to him of another 'enemy' - an 'enemy' which nobody in his right mind would ever chose to have; 'Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing *the Lord* is departed from thee, and *is become thine enemy*?', 28.16.

Verse 26. *'When his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son in law'*. In Saul's eyes, Michal was to be the bait to lure David into a provocative and hazardous – and hopefully unsuccessful and fatal – raid on the Philistines. In David's eyes, all was solved. Although he had no great monetary wealth, he had been told he can have his royal bride in exchange for a rather unusual currency – proof of the death of a hundred Philistines. To someone like David, eager in any case to do battle for the Lord, things couldn't be better. He would

have the best of both worlds. Fighting the Lord's battles – and getting paid (handsomely!) for doing so. So he readily accepted the offer.

'The days were not expired'. 'The days' refer to a stipulated period of time fixed either for David to make up his mind to either accept or decline the king's offer, or to deliver the appointed dowry.

Verse 27. *'He and his men'*. This is the first mention of 'David's men'.⁴² They probably formed the nucleus of the famous four hundred - and later six hundred - who distinguished themselves by numerous remarkable exploits later. *'Slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins'*. David obviously thought that Michal was worth twice what her father had required, because he slew two hundred Philistines, and returned - unscathed - with the double tally of gruesome tokens.

But all Saul's malice, mischief and ingenious scheming was met head-on by God's providential care of David – and David emerged unscathed. It is wonderful to know that our lives are in the same hands!

'Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife'. I note that men had first to die for David to secure several of his wives. David's marriage to Michal followed after the death of two hundred Philistines. Clearly David had no regrets about that.

David's marriage to Abigail followed after the death of Nabal, 'the fool of Maon'. Thanks to Abigail's timely intervention, which prevented him from slaughtering all the males in Nabal's household in cold blood, David had no reason to regret Nabal's death either.

But David's marriage to Bathsheba followed after the death of one of his finest and noblest men, Uriah the Hittite. And then David had just about everything to regret. (The wronging and the murder of Uriah was the one big black mark on David's copy-book; 'David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, *save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite'*, 1 Kings 15.5.)

Perhaps even in such matters God was signalling his disapproval of multiple wives. 'Jesus answered and said unto them ... from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh', Mark 10.5-6.

Verse 28. *'Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal Saul's daughter loved him'*. See the notes on v.12 and v.20.

Verse 29. *'Saul became David's enemy continually'*. The irony is that the man who 'became David's enemy' had become God's enemy; 'the Lord is ... become thine enemy', 28.16.

In that David was now the Lord's anointed, Saul, by setting himself against David, was setting himself against God. David wouldn't lay his hand on the man he regarded as God's anointed, but Saul would gladly have laid his hands – or anyone else's! – on the man who was God's choice of a king. Until the day of his death, Saul will persist with his fight against God and His known will, 24.20. Had Saul lived a little over a millennium later, Gamaliel of Jerusalem (a 'moderate' Pharisee, who taught Saul's New Testament namesake) could have told him that it is never a good idea 'to fight against God', and that, if something is 'of God, ye cannot overthrow it', Acts 5.39.

Verse 30. *'Then the princes of the Philistines went forth'*. Quite likely in retaliation for the terrible disgrace which the Philistine people had suffered in the death and mutilation of 200 of their number. It seems that, if the Philistine offensive followed soon after David's marriage to Michal, v.27, David didn't enjoy the 'newly-wed' husband's year free from fighting; 'When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up ('bring joy and gladness to') his wife which he hath taken', Deut. 24.5.

'His name was much set by'. That is, it was 'highly valued and esteemed'. Back in chapter 2, the man of God had informed Eli, 'The Lord saith ... them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed', 2.30. Not for one moment had David 'despised' the Lord. His faith and courage, displayed not only at Elah but in protecting his father's sheep from predators and in leading Israel against the Philistines, had brought only honour to God. Under God's hand, David was 'honoured' in Saul's house, 22.14, and far from 'lightly esteemed'! David had earlier regarded himself as 'lightly esteemed', v.23, but, in that he 'honoured' God, God 'honoured' him, and made his name to be 'highly esteemed'. The Lord Jesus promised, 'if any man serve me, him will my Father honour', John 12.23. What higher ambition can any of us have than to be honoured by the Father? Whether or not the Lord sees fit to make our names 'highly esteemed' among men, let us devote ourselves to His service and thereby secure that – highest of all – honour!

The chapter opened with an account of Jonathan's love for David and his covenant with him. The chapter more or less closes with an account of Michal's love for David and her marriage covenant with him. And so, by the time our chapter ends, two of Saul's own children are bound to David both by love and covenant. Though Saul's fear of David and his murderous intentions, are masked by Saul in chapter 18, they are unveiled in all their ugliness in chapter 19. But chapter 19 will also show us what critical roles Saul's two children play in delivering David from their father's schemes. No, you can't fight God!

End-notes

¹ And so too once had Saul – and that ‘greatly’, 16.21.

² 1 Sam. 14.49; 1 Chron. 9.39.

³ The word translated ‘knit’ is used of walls being ‘joined together’; ‘So built we the wall; and all the wall was *joined together* unto the half thereof’, Neh. 4.6 (the only other use of the verb in the Niphal.).

⁴ Compare 14.45.

⁵ The implication of 17.57-18.1 is that Jonathan had been there when David fought Goliath.

⁶ This word for ‘love’ (*’ahab*) is used, for instance by the Lord of Himself in Hos.11.1, ‘When Israel was a child, then I loved him’, and in Mal.1.2, ‘yet I loved Jacob’.

⁷ See the language of Jer. 34.18-20; ‘I will give the men ... which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof ... into the hand of their enemies’. And contrast the Lord’s action in passing alone through the severed pieces of the covenant victims in Gen. 15.9-21. The Lord was indicating to Abraham that this was an unconditional covenant; it was all of God. Gen. 15.18 is, literally, ‘The Lord cut a covenant with Abram’.

⁸ J. Carl Laney, ‘First and Second Samuel’, Everyman’s Bible Commentary series, Moody Press, 1982. (Quoted by Dr. Constable.)

⁹ See 1 Sam. 2.19; 28.14; Ezra 9.3,5; Job 1.20; 2.12.

¹⁰ Jonathan saw that he got plenty of target practice; ‘I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark’, 1 Sam. 20.20.

¹¹ ‘Kish begat Saul; and Saul begat Jonathan, and Malchishua, and Abinadab, and Eshbaal (i.e. Ishbosheth)’, 1 Chron. 9.39.

¹² NIDOTTE, Vol.4, page 505.

¹³ Akkadian was one of the great cultural languages of early human history. It (or ‘Babylonian-Assyrian’) is the collective name for the spoken languages of the culture, in the three millennia BCE, of Mesopotamia, the area between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris – approximating to modern Iraq. The name Akkadian – so called in ancient time – is derived from the city-state of Akkad, founded in the middle of the third millennium BCE and capital of one of the early great empires.

¹⁴ Stan Rummel, ‘Clothes Maketh the Man — An Insight from Ancient Ugarit,’ *Biblical Archaeology Review* 2 (June 1976): 6–8.

¹⁵ Saul had once torn Samuel’s ‘robe’ - the same word as in 1 Sam. 18.4. Samuel had then told Saul, ‘The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou’, 15.27-28. Significantly, the ‘robe’ was there taken to be a symbol for the kingdom of Israel.

¹⁶ I note also, in the last scene of the next chapter, that Saul, rendered harmless by the power of God’s Spirit, strips off (the same verb as in 18.4 of Jonathan) his clothes, 19.24 – which could be taken as signifying that even Saul (though oblivious to the fact of course) was compelled to acknowledge symbolically that he had forfeited the kingship; see Robert P. Gordon, ‘1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary’, Zondervan, 1986, page 165.

¹⁷ See the first section of Annex A.

¹⁸ It is hardly likely that Jonathan was aware of David’s anointing by Samuel. The prophet would surely have taken every precaution he could to see that the anointing was kept secret.

¹⁹ See 17.50, and the note there.

²⁰ The basic facts are as follows. The word occurs 74 times in the Old Testament – if we include the form ‘*maschil*’, which appears in the titles of many psalms. The word occurs particularly frequently in the ‘wisdom’ books. In the majority of cases, the word means ‘to act with intelligence and understanding; to act circumspectly or prudently’. For instance, ‘Behold, my servant shall *deal prudently*, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high’, Isa. 52.13. ‘A process of thinking through a complex arrangement of thoughts resulting in a wise dealing and use of good practical common sense’, TWOT, Vol.2, page 877.

There are contexts, however, in which the word probably does mean ‘to prosper, to be successful’. For example, ‘Be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest *prosper* (or ‘act wisely’) whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have *good success*’, Josh. 1.7-8; ‘the pastors (the shepherds) are become brutish, and have not sought the Lord: therefore they shall not *prosper*, and all their flocks shall be scattered’, Jer.10.21.

Translations differ as to how the word should be understood in 1 Samuel 18:

(i) On the one hand, NASB and JND adopt ‘prosper’, and ESV, NRSV, Holman’s and NIV go for ‘success’; whereas

(ii) On the other hand, KJV, NKJV, RV, Young’s and the NET Bible prefer wise behaviour.

When discussing the use of the word in Isa. 52.13, Delitzsch (preferring (ii)) stated his view that, ‘It is only by way of sequence that the idea of “prosperously” is connected with that of “prudently” and cited Josh. 1.8 and Jer. 10.21 as above.

We will probably not be far from the meaning of 1 Sam. 18.5,14 and 15 if we merge the two ideas, and understand the word as signifying that David acted in such a wise and prudent manner as to bring success to all his ventures.

²¹ Note the distinction between the timing of this event and that of David's appearance before Saul. The introduction to his appearance before Saul is rendered 'as David returned' in KJV, RV and JND and 'as soon as David returned' in ESV. The introduction to the welcome of the women is rendered 'when David was returned' in all of these translations. This is consistent with the fact that the events of 18.6 and onwards follow after 17.53. The meetings between Saul and David, 17.57-18.1, and subsequently between David and Jonathan, 18.3-4, followed after 17.51 but before the events of 17.52-53.

²² Not that the singing was always the exclusive province of the women. Note Barak's participation in the song of victory in Judges 5; 'Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day', v.1.

²³ Compare also Psa. 149.3; Jer 31.4.

²⁴ See G.B. Caird, 'The Language and Imagery of the Bible', Westminster, 1980, page 133.

²⁵ See Stanley Gevirtz, 'Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel', Oriental Institute, 1963, page 24.

²⁶ And it really does matter whose praises are celebrated! I have read that, following his victory over Antony at Actium in 31 BC, Augustus Caesar came back to Rome in triumph. Among the huge crowd who greeted him was a man who had a bird that he had taught to say, 'Hail, Caesar victorious!' Caesar was suitably impressed and bought the bird for a large sum. Then someone got Caesar aside and whispered to him that the man had another bird which was just as talented. The man was summoned and Caesar asked for a demonstration of what the other bird could do. The man was reluctant to provide the demonstration, but Caesar insisted. When the bird was produced it squawked, 'Hail, Antony victorious!' My written source offered no information of the outcome for either the second bird or its trainer!

²⁷ Compare the words of David's men to him later, 'thou art worth 10,000 of us', 2 Sam. 18.3.

²⁸ Compare, though with a slightly different twist, 2 Sam. 12.26-30; 'Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city. And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, I have fought against Rabbah ... Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it: lest I take the city, and it be called after my name ... David went to Rabbah ... and took it. And ... their king's crown was set on David's head'.

²⁹ As NIDOTTE, Vol.3, page 385 – the full article runs to page 390.

³⁰ H. G. Wells, 'The History of Mr. Polly', page 5.

³¹ This particular proverb comes from the section of the book of Proverbs headed, 'These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out', Prov. 25.1.

³² 'The conjunction employed here (Hithaphel) is never used of real, true prophesy (which is always the Niphal), but of a bastard imitation of it. Really Saul was in a state of frenzy, unable to master himself, speaking words of which he knew not the meaning, and acting like a man possessed', R. Payne Smith, '1 Samuel' of The Pulpit Commentary. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co, 1897.

³³ 'David did not play a harp ... but a lyre, and wherever the word *harp* appears in the Old Testament it should be translated *lyre* ... The harp has more and larger strings than the lyre ... the harp is different from the lyre in that it has a bridge about two-thirds of the way down the instrument over which the strings pass', Howard F. Vos, 'The Music of Israel', Bibliotheca Sacra, V106 #424; Oct 49.

³⁴ This is the word of 1 Sam. 17.7 – not that translated 'target' (i.e. javelin) in 1 Sam. 17.6.

³⁵ It is noticeable that the Amalekite didn't produce the spear for David – as he did Saul's diadem and armlet, 2 Sam. 1.10. But then Saul's spear may have been too much to carry with everything else – or possibly just too conspicuous.

³⁶ See too 1 Sam. 29.6.

³⁷ See TWOT, Vol.1, page 156. The noun form of the word is '*māgor*', made familiar to us from Jeremiah's '*māgôr missābīb*' ('fear/terror on every side'), Jer. 6.25; 20.10; 49.29.

³⁸ The account in 2 Sam. 5.2 is more or less identical. The memories of these men were long! Between 1 Sam. 18.13 and 2 Sam. 5.2 there were not only the years of David's persecution by Saul but also the seven and half years that David had reigned over Judah alone, 2 Sam. 5.5.

³⁹ 'That we should be called children of God', literally. And, not only is such a title and designation ours; it corresponds to reality – 'and so we are'. What amazing honour and dignity is ours. We are the children – nothing less – of Him who is God – no-one less!

⁴⁰ See Edwin Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):244.

⁴¹ See Claus Schedl, *History of the Old Testament*, 5 vols, Alba House, 1972, 3.118.

⁴² See 23.3, 5; 24.3; 25.12-13.

THE RELATIVE AGES OF DAVID, JONATHAN AND MICHAL

DAVID

David began to reign at the age of thirty, 2 Sam. 5.4. This 'reign' clearly covered both his seven and a half years 'reign' over Judah only and his thirty-three years 'reign' over all Israel and Judah; see 2 Sam. 5.5. That is, it dates from 2 Sam. 2.4 - 'the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah'. This appears to have followed very quickly after the death of Saul, 2 Sam. 2.1. We conclude that David was 30 years old at the time of Israel's defeat at Mount Gilboa.

As Saul reigned for 40 years, Acts 13.21, David must have been born 10 years into Saul's reign.

David was probably about 20 years of age at the time of his victory over Goliath. This would allow about 10 years for his subsequent persecution by Saul and his time spent with the Philistines - the latter occupying sixteen months, 1 Sam. 27.7.

There is no evidence by which we can establish David's age at the time of his anointing by Samuel. But, given that he was then entrusted by his father to look after the sheep alone, 1 Sam. 16.11, he was unlikely to have been less than 15 years of age.

JONATHAN

The evidence suggests that Jonathan was in command of one third of Israel's standing army *at a very early stage in Saul's reign*, 1 Sam. 13.1-2.

The existing Hebrew text of 1 Sam. 13.1 is defective - and the Septuagint offers no help¹. Rendered literally, the verse reads, 'Saul was a son of year when he began to reign; and he reigned two years over Israel. Saul chose ...'. The most likely meaning is that 'Saul was [...] years old when he began to reign; and he reigned two years in Israel. Saul chose him ...'; see RV, ESV, JND etc. By far the most likely relevance of the 'two years' is that this functions as a time-note by which we to date the subsequent events.²

We are left to supply an age to go into the [...]. The most likely candidates are 30, 35 or 40.

We are told that, when Saul was appointed king, he was a 'young man', 1 Sam. 9.2. The word indicates a young adult: see its use in 'Rejoice, O *young man*, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth', Eccles. 11.9; and 'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the *young men* shall utterly fall', Isa. 40.30. But this proves little. We must remember that Paul addressed Timothy as a young man, and Timothy must have been around 40 years of age at the time.

If Jonathan was old enough to lead Israel into battle, 13.3, he must have been at least 17 years old - and would therefore have been at least 15 years of age when Saul began to reign. This probably means that Saul began his reign when he was either 35 or 40 years of age - rather than 30 years of age - see above. Jonathan was Saul's firstborn, 1 Chron. 9.39. It is by no means impossible therefore that he was born when Saul was no more than 20 years of age.

If this was so, Saul would have been 35 years of age when he began to reign, and Jonathan would have been 15 years old. (Keep in mind that this is at *the lower end* of the age range. Saul may have been 40 years of age and Jonathan several years older than 15.)

That is, by the time of his and Saul's death, Jonathan would have been at least 55³ - and Saul at least 75!

If David's fight with Goliath took place ten years before the death of Saul and Jonathan (for which see above), then at that time David would have been 20 years of age and Jonathan at least 45.

We conclude therefore that Jonathan was considerably older than David⁴ - at least 25 years older and quite possibly 30 years older.⁵

When Jonathan 'smote the garrison of the Philistines' (two years into Saul's reign), David wasn't yet born - nor would he be born for another eight years (being born 10 years into Saul's reign - see above).

It is important to note that the difference in age between Jonathan and David rests critically on the translation adopted at 1 Sam. 13.1. The critical question is whether or not a second number has dropped out of the Hebrew text – this time before the 'two'; see the NRSV text and footnote⁶. The NASB suggests 'and he reigned thirty-two years over Israel'. (Clearly this could not relate to the whole of Saul's reign; see Acts 13.21. It must act as the time-note for the later events in chapter 13.)

If the conjecture in the NASB text is correct, it could affect dramatically the conclusion reached about the age disparity between David and Jonathan.

If Jonathan was about 20 years of age at the time of 1 Sam. 13.3, he would have been born 12 years into Saul's reign – just two years before David.⁷ But, attractive as this particular dating undoubtedly is, it flounders on account of the biblical data about Ish-bosheth. See the last two paragraphs under 'Michal' below. For Jonathan to have been Saul's firstborn, he would have – at the very least – have been born at the very beginning of Saul's reign. (Ish-bosheth was born five years into that reign and there two other brothers were born between Jonathan and Ish-bosheth.) This would point to Jonathan being in his early thirties at the time of 1 Sam. 13.3, rather than about 20 years of age.

It should be noted that the section 14.47-48 does not *necessarily* mean that the events of chapter 13 came at the outset of Saul's reign and before he waged his other campaigns. The section functions as a summary of Saul's entire reign, commencing 'So Saul took over the kingdom over Israel, and ... '.

The NASB conjecture also has implications for the David's age at the time of his anointing and his fight with Goliath. Clearly, if there was only eight years between 1 Sam. 13.1-3 and Saul's death, and if we assume that all the events from the beginning of chapter 13 to the anointing of David, 16.1-13 were compressed into two years, there would have been six years at most for the events between David's fight with Goliath and Saul's death. This would mean that David was about 24 years of age when he fought the Philistine – as he was thirty when Saul ended his 40-year reign.⁸

The comments of Eugene Merrill on pages 192-194 of 'Kingdom of Priests' are well worth reading. Merrill suggests supplying 'forty' into the gap in 1 Sam. 13.1 and accepts the reading in the existing Hebrew text of 'reigned for two years' – arguing against any conjectural insertion at that point.

MICHAL

Presumably, both Saul's daughters - Merab and Michal - were considerably younger than Jonathan. Although by no means conclusive, the evidence suggests that Jonathan was the oldest of Saul's six children, ' Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, and Ishui, and Melchishua: and the names of his two daughters were these; the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal', 1 Sam. 14.49.

For Michal to have been about David's age, she would have had to be born around ten years into Saul's reign - see above. But this seems most unlikely. Consider the information we possess about Ish-bosheth.

The list of Saul's son's in 1 Sam. 14.49 makes no mention of Ish-bosheth.⁹ The most natural assumption is that he was born after the list was compiled, and therefore after Michal, who is included in this particular list of Saul's offspring.

We can locate the birth of Ish-bosheth very accurately in the reign of Saul. We are told explicitly that Ish-bosheth became king over Israel at the age of 40 - and that he reigned for only *two years*, 2 Sam. 2.10. At that time, 'the house of Judah followed Judah', 2 Sam. 2.10. But David reigned over Judah for *7½ years* before being made king over all Israel and Judah following the defection of Abner and the murder of Ish-bosheth; see 'then', 2 Sam. 5.1.¹⁰

As Ish-bosheth began to reign about five years after the death of Saul - at which point he was 40 years of age - he must have been born about five years into Saul's 40-year reign.¹¹ If then Merab and Michal were born before Ish-bosheth, they must both have been born before Saul's fifth year of rule over Israel. But David wasn't born until the tenth year of that rule - see above. Michal would therefore have been at least five years older than David - and Merab older again.

Footnotes

¹ The Septuagint leaves out 1 Sam. 13.1 altogether, beginning the chapter, 'And Saul ...'.

² The events of 1 Sam. 13.1-3 lead directly into the events of vv.4-15 and beyond. That is, the early date for 13.1-3 means that Saul had, in effect, forfeit any future dynasty after only two years of his reign; see 13.14.

³ At the time, Mephibosheth was only 5 years of age, 2 Sam. 4.4. Jonathan would therefore have been about 50 years of age when Mephibosheth was born.

⁴ This might add extra force to Jonathan's concern over David's attitude to his descendants - his 'house' and 'seed', 20.14-15, 42. As Mephibosheth had not then been born (see end-note 1), Jonathan either spoke theoretically - on the assumption that he would later father some children - or he had already had other sons, who in the event died before 2 Sam. 9.1-6.

⁵ The evidence for the wide disparity in age between David and Jonathan rests therefore on a much broader base than the simple fact that Jonathan was Saul's 'firstborn' and David was Jesse's 'last-born'. Indeed, that would have been a weak argument in that the text makes it clear that, when David was about 20 years of age, Jesse was a very old man, 17.12.

⁶ 'Two is not the entire number; something has dropped out'.

⁷ Mephibosheth would then have been born when Jonathan was 23 years of age; compare end-note 3.

⁸ Adopting the NASB conjecture would mean that Saul forfeit any future dynasty after thirty-two years of his reign – and only eight years before its end. Compare end-note 2.

⁹ Ish-bosheth - under the name Eshbaal, *is* included in the full list of Saul's sons in 1 Chron. 9.39.

¹⁰ This means that Abner must have held the power in Israel for about 5½ years between the death of Saul and the reign of Ish-bosheth. Ish-bosheth died when he was 42 years of age, 2 Sam. 2.10. When David soon commenced his reign over all of Israel and Judah, he was about 37 years of age, 2 Sam. 5.4-5.

¹¹ If Ish-bosheth was aged 35 at the time of the death of Saul, why wasn't he on Mount Gilboa to die alongside his father and his older brothers? It is possible that Saul had partnered Ish-bosheth with Abner – Saul's commander and cousin, 1 Sam. 14.50 – for the battle. Abner clearly survived Israel's defeat and there is no reason to doubt that Ish-bosheth could have done so as well if in Abner's company at the time. It was, of course, Abner who was responsible to installing Ish-bosheth as king over Israel, 2 Sam. 2.8-9.