

Escalate

1 Samuel 18:10-30

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I. Physical Attacks vs. 10-16

a. Saul Raving

i. Evil Spirit from God

1. So enraged was **Saul** at the diminishing of his glory that he, inspired by the demonic **spirit** (v. 10; cf. 16:14–16; 19:9)
2. The narrator’s portrayal of Saul prophesying under the influence of an evil/troubling spirit identifies Saul as a false prophet (cf. 1 Kgs 22:21–23) and therefore one who was not to be feared (Deut 18:22). Like Goliath (cf. 1 Sam 17:7), a previous adversary of David, “Saul had a spear in his hand.”
3. The evil spirit from God (cf. 16:15, 16, 23; 19:9) rushed on Saul (cf. 10:6, 10; 11:6 for Saul; 16:13 for David), showing that the king’s rejection by God was related to his hostility to David. The result was ecstatic or abnormal behavior (literally: “he prophesied”). We should probably contrast 10:10, 13 where such “prophesying” is viewed positively and 19:20–24, which would seem to view Saul’s ecstatic behavior quite negatively.

ii. Throws spear

b. David Playing the Harp

i. Day to day

1. David as usual (cf. 16:16–23 and 19:9) was trying to soothe the king musically at just this time.

ii. Escaped twice

1. Not once, but twice Saul hurled the spear at David with the intention of pinning him to the wall (v. 11). David’s willingness to remain in the room long enough for Saul to retrieve the spear after the failed first attempt and then take a second shot at him portrays the incredible depth of David’s loyalty to the king and his commitment to helping Saul overcome his torments.

iii. The Lord was with him

1. Lord was with him - **in company with, together with**: a) with all words: expresses communal action or action in company
2. The addition in v 12a gives the theological rationale for Saul’s fear of David (cf. v 29). That Yahweh was with David was asserted already in 16:18 and had in fact been promised by Saul himself in 17:37. Compare also 18:14, 28.

- c. Saul was afraid of David
 - i. Afraid of Saul- emotional fear
 - 1. Typical examples of fearing as an emotional reaction are the Jews' fear of the fires on Mount Sinai (Deut 5:5) and the fear of the Jews at Mizpah when they heard of the Philistine mobilization (I Sam 7:7). Other examples give more emphasis to the anticipation of evil without necessarily pointing to the emotional reaction. David's recognition while in Achish's court that his reputation was a danger to him (I Sam 21:13) is an example along with Jacob's anticipation that his family might be taken from him (Gen 31:31).
 - 2. Ironically, the spear episode incited fear—not in David, but in Saul. Saul reasoned correctly that the only way the young man was able to evade the point of his spear at such close range was that “the LORD was with David but had left Saul” (v. 12).

II. Removal vs. 13-16

- a. Saul
 - i. Removed David from his presence
 - ii. Appointed him commander of a thousand
 - 1. When **Saul** then saw that he could not destroy **David** personally, he determined to let **the Philistines** kill him.
 - 2. His first attempt at killing David having failed, Saul tried a different tactic. David was removed from the protected confines of the royal residence and was sent to lead Saul's troops in battle.
 - a. These circumstances clearly posed risks for both David's reputation and his well-being. Failure to perform his duties successfully even once on the battlefield would reduce or erase David's prestige and popularity and perhaps even end his life.
 - b. Saul's fears led him to appoint David as commander of a thousand (cf. 8:12 and 17:18) in order to get him out of sight. Apparently he hoped that David might fall in battle.
- b. David
 - i. Went out and came in before the people
 - 1. “Going out” and “coming in” are common cliches meaning to fight battles, and to go out and come out “before” someone means to be the leader in fighting (cf. Num 27:17; 1 Sam 8:20; 2 Sam 5:24).
 - ii. He was prospering -to have success
 - 1. Imagine Saul's disappointment when the new and presumably more dangerous position led to greater success (vv 14 and 15; cf. 18:5 and 30).

2. Not only David's own tribe of Judah, but all Israel (v 16; cf. vv 6 and 28) hailed David for his military prowess. Reference to Israel and Judah may express the two main constituencies of the United Kingdom. These tribes' love for David is a kind of de facto recognition of him as king
 3. The verb also may mean to prosper or have success. Saul feared David because the latter was prospering greatly as a result of the Spirit's presence in his life to guide. Indeed, by this successful behavior David in effect ousted Saul from his position of leadership (I Sam 18:14, 15). [Jeremiah emphasizes that judgment was pronounced on the shepherd leaders of a favored nation. The leaders were regarded as stupid because they did not seek the Lord. As a result, they would not prosper and their flocks would be scattered \(Jer 10:21\).](#)
- c. Saul Dreaded David
- i. Dreaded – to be afraid

III. Maneuver vs. 17-19

- a. Saul
- i. Give David Older Daughter
 1. (Vv 17–19) This supplementary passage records that Saul once promised his oldest daughter Merab to David (cf. 14:49). Marriage to the oldest daughter would presumably have offered an even stronger right to kingship than marriage to Michal.
 - ii. Go be a valiant warrior
 1. he gave the promise a new twist: David could have the daughter in virtue of *future* heroic deeds. David, who was known as a גבור חיל (“mighty man of valor”) according to 16:18, is asked by Saul in v 17 to be a (warrior).
 - iii. Fight “the Lord’s Battles”
 - iv. Not my hand
 1. Hand of the Philistines
 2. This he arranged by proposing that **David** marry his oldest **daughter, Merab**. Saul had already reneged on one marital promise to David (17:25).
 3. Knowing that David's chances of being killed increased in proportion to the amount of time spent on the battlefield, Saul cunningly honored his offer to give his daughter in marriage to the one who slew Goliath (cf. 17:25). However, Saul's offer was subtly nuanced; David was to be given Saul's “older daughter Merab” (v. 17), but not as a reward for past accomplishments as had been implied in the original proposal. Instead she would be acquired

with the dual currencies of ongoing military service and zeal for the Lord.

b. David

i. Who am I

1. **David** protested, however, that he was a commoner and had no sufficient bridal **price**

ii. What is my life

iii. Father's Family

1. David possessed an undistinguished genealogy, so that he felt unqualified to "become the king's son-in-law" (v. 18). Saul was from a wealthy family; David was not. Saul was king of Israel; David was a rural shepherd who possessed Moabite blood (cf. Ruth 4:13–17).

iv. To be Son in Law

c. Older Daughter

i. Given to Adriel

1. David could not be dissuaded in the matter, so Merab "was given in marriage to Adriel of Meholah" (v. 19). This union produced five sons who were later killed by the Gibeonites (2 Sam 21:8–9) as a lingering result of Saul's sin.

IV. Trap vs. 20-30

a. Saul

i. Agreed to give Michal

1. Michal loved David

- a. breathe heavily, to be excited
- b. First it was the king who loved him (16:21), then Jonathan the eldest son (18:1, 3; 20:17).
- c.
- d. Michal loved David - The noun *'ahăbâ* describes the love of husband toward wife, as that of Jacob for Rachel (Gen 29:20). God's "love" for his people is designated by the same word (Deut 7:8; II Chr 2:11; et al.). Jonathan's affection for David is also *'ahăbâ* (I Sam 18:3; 20:17; cf. II Sam 1:26).
- e. Saul's daughter Michal loved David, and this romantic attachment connoted also political allegiance, just as the love of Jonathan had (18:1, 3) and would (20:17).
- f. What's more, all Israel expressed its allegiance through dancing women who met the victorious returning hero. All Israel and Judah also loved him, that is they showed him political loyalty because of his military success (vv 16, 28

2. Asked him to be Son in Law

- ii. She will be a Snare
 - 1. Snare - **wooden snare** for catching birds
 - a. Saul intended Michal to be a trap, something like the trigger of a trap with bait laid on it
 - b. A snare metaphorically is something that allures one from his real purpose and then destroys him.
 - c. The term translated as “snare” (Hb. *môqēš*) is a theologically significant one, used three times in the Torah to describe the dangers of idols and idol worshipers (Exod 23:33; 34:12; Deut 7:16). Perhaps Saul was spiritually astute enough to recognize that in marriage his daughter’s idolatrous inclinations (cf. 19:13) could easily lead David astray
 - d. David had previously eluded the king’s spear and the Philistines’ weapons, but perhaps he could be ensnared and ruined by a woman.
 - e. As Saul envisioned it, David would be facing a double threat: “the hand of the Philistines” (v. 21) and Michal herself, who would be a “snare to him.” Michal could be a snare in two ways: first, she could motivate David to place his life at extreme risk in battle with the Philistines; second, she could corrupt David spiritually.
 - f.
 - 2. The Hand of the Philistines will against Him
- iii. Set Up
 - 1. Sending a lie
 - a. King delights in you
 - b. All servants will love you
 - c. He had the word “leaked” through the bureaucracy that the king had pleasure in David and that all his officials “loved” him.
 - d. These officials play a major role in the rest of the chapter (vv 23, 24, 26, 30), and their support for David is also affirmed in the supplementary 18:5
- b. David Unchanged
 - i. Trivial
 - 1. I am a poor man
 - a. David was a poor man, presumably unable to pay the bride-price due for a princess; he was a totally insignificant person, without royal ambition (cf. Isa 3:5 where “insignificant” is used as the opposite of the word “honored”)
 - 2. Lightly esteemed
- c. Saul

- i. Removes dowry
 - ii. Tell him to get 100 Foreskins
 - iii. Planned to have David fall by the hand of the Philistines
- d. David
 - i. Pleased with the words
 - ii. Struck down 200 Philistines and brought the foreskins
 - 1. David “presented the full number” of severed portions of Philistine genitals to the king “so that he might become the king’s son-in-law.” The fact that David exceeded by a hundred the required number of deaths underscores David’s commitment to the king and his eagerness to join the royal family.
 - 2. He did it before the time set by the king had expired (26a) he got twice as many foreskins as were required (27a) and he gave the king an exact count (27b) While this was hardly the result Saul wanted or expected, he had to stick by his word, at least temporarily. According to 1 Sam 25:44, however, he later gave Michal to another man.
- e. Saul
 - i. Gave David his daughter
 - ii. Michal loved David
 - iii. Knew that the Lord was with David
 - 1. He outshone Saul’s officials and was honored everywhere. Whether Saul’s actions are motivated by goodwill (16:21–22), fear and suspicion, or downright malice, they all lead to David’s success (McCarter).
 - iv. Saul feared David even more
 - 1. Now his fear reached a new plateau, which may have formed a transition to the attempt to enlist Jonathan and others in a plot to kill David
 - 2. As the chapter ends, Saul is more and more afraid while David is repeatedly successful against Philistine raids.
 - v. Made him an enemy
 - 1. Enemy - The basic meaning of the verb is “to be hostile to,” “to be or treat as an enemy
 - 2. Didn’t stop hating him
- f. David
 - i. Battled won often
 - 1. Whenever the commanders of the Philistines (for the term see 29:3, 4, 9) marched out, David got the upper hand (cf. his success in vv 14 and 15, and in 18:5). The pericope ends as it began, with David being honored all around.
 - ii. Behaved himself more wisely
 - 1. Behaved Wisely – to have success
 - 2. Than all the servants

- iii. Name Highly esteemed
 - 1. Highly Esteemed ***be precious, valuable, costly, esteem***
 - 2. Saul could see the handwriting on the wall. Yahweh was with this pretender to the throne (cf. the supplement in v 12), and all Israel loved him (cf. the women from all the cities of Israel in v 6, and the reference in all Israel in v 16).

Word Studies

Evil Spirit-

Afraid of Saul- emotional fear

Typical examples of fearing as an emotional reaction are the Jews' fear of the fires on Mount Sinai (Deut 5:5) and the fear of the Jews at Mizpah when they heard of the

Philistine mobilization (I Sam 7:7). Other examples give more emphasis to the anticipation of evil without necessarily pointing to the emotional reaction. David's recognition while in Achish's court that his reputation was a danger to him (I Sam 21:13) is an example along with Jacob's anticipation that his family might be taken from him (Gen 31:31).¹

Lord was with him - **in company with, together with**: a) with all words: expresses communal action or action in company²

Prospering - to **have success**

The verb also may mean to prosper or have success. Saul feared David because the latter was prospering greatly as a result of the Spirit's presence in his life to guide. Indeed, by this successful behavior David in effect ousted Saul from his position of leadership (I Sam 18:14, 15). Jeremiah emphasizes that judgment was pronounced on the shepherd leaders of a favored nation. The leaders were regarded as stupid because they did not seek the Lord. As a result, they would not prosper and their flocks would be scattered (Jer 10:21).³

Dreaded David - to be afraid

David Loved breathe heavily, to be excited⁴

Michal loved David - The noun *'ahăbâ* describes the love of husband toward wife, as that of Jacob for Rachel (Gen 29:20). God's "love" for his people is designated by the same word (Deut 7:8; II Chr 2:11; et al.). Jonathan's affection for David is also *'ahăbâ* (I Sam 18:3; 20:17; cf. II Sam 1:26).⁵

Snare- **wooden snare** for catching birds⁶

¹ Andrew Bowling, "[יָרָא 907](#)," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 399–400.

² Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 839.

³ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., [Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament](#) (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 877.

⁴ Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 17.

⁵ Robert Alden, "[אָהַב 29](#)," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 14.

⁶ Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 560.

A snare metaphorically is something that allures one from his real purpose and then destroys him. In such a light Saul to ruin David gave his daughter Michal to him in marriage so that she might become a snare to David (I Sam 18:21).⁷

Afraid

Enemy - The basic meaning of the verb is “to be hostile to,” “to be or treat as an enemy”⁸

Behaved Wisely - to have success

Highly Esteemed *be precious, valuable, costly, esteem*⁹

Observations

Evil Spirit from God

David Escaped twice

Saul was Afraid of David

The Lord was with Him

Saul removed him

David was prospering in all his ways The Lord was with him

He dreaded him

Israel and Judah loved him

⁷ John E. Hartley, “[906 יקטש](#),” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 399.

⁸ Thomas E. McComiskey, “[78 איב](#),” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 36.

⁹ John E. Hartley, “[905 יקר](#),” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 398.

Set up to fight Lord's battles

Saul set him up Philistines

Don't understand verse 19

Michal loved David

Saul tried to set him up. She may become a snare

David's response v.23

David won in battle despite the trap

Daughter loved him

David behaved more wisely, highly esteemed

Commentary Studies

(Vv 10–11) These supplementary verses, which seem to have been modeled on 19:9–10, date Saul's violent attacks on David to a very early period. The evil spirit from God (cf. 16:15, 16, 23; 19:9) rushed on Saul (cf. 10:6, 10; 11:6 for Saul; 16:13 for David), showing that the king's rejection by God was related to his hostility to David. The result was ecstatic or abnormal behavior (literally: "he prophesied"). We should probably contrast 10:10, 13 where such "prophesying" is viewed positively and 19:20–24, which would seem to view Saul's ecstatic behavior quite negatively. David as usual (cf. 16:16–23 and 19:9) was trying to soothe the king musically at just this time. Saul's spear seems to be almost a sign of his kingship, much like a scepter (cf. 22:6 and 26:7). It is not completely clear whether the words cited from Saul in v 11 were things that he thought or which he actually said (cf. vv 17 and 21). Later David's assistant Abishai wanted to pin Saul to the ground with his own spear, thus forming a fit reprisal for this incident (26:8). David, however, rejected the idea.

(Vv 12–16) The addition in v 12a-¹⁰a gives the theological rationale for Saul's fear of David (cf. v 29). That Yahweh was with David was asserted already in 16:18 and had in fact been promised by Saul himself in 17:37. Compare also 18:14, 28. The redactor could appeal to 16:14

¹⁰12a-a MT; lacking in LXX^B. See 8.a.-a.

in support of the idea that Yahweh had departed from Saul. Saul's fears led him to appoint David as commander of a thousand (cf. 8:12 and 17:18) in order to get him out of sight. Apparently he hoped that David might fall in battle. This devious appointment contrasts with the notice in 18:5 (a supplementary passage), that Saul appointed David over the men of war *in order to honor him*. "Going out" and "coming in" are common clichés meaning to fight battles, and to go out and come out "before" someone means to be the leader in fighting (cf. Num 27:17; 1 Sam 8:20; 2 Sam 5:24). Imagine Saul's disappointment when the new and presumably more dangerous position led to greater success (vv 14 and 15; cf. 18:5 and 30). Drive¹¹r detected a gradual escalation in Saul's anxiety from mere fear (v 12) to awe (v 15) to yet more fear (v 29). Not only David's own tribe of Judah, but all Israel (v 16; cf. vv 6 and 28) hailed David for his military prowess. Reference to Israel and Judah may express the two main constituencies of the United Kingdom. These tribes' love for David is a kind of de facto recognition of him as king (cf. Moran, *CB¹²Q* 25 [1963] 77–87, and the love of Jonathan noted in 18:1).

(Vv 17–19) This supplementary passage records that Saul once promised his oldest daughter Merab to David (cf. 14:49). Marriage to the oldest daughter would presumably have offered an even stronger right to kingship than marriage to Michal. The redactor may have had the promise of 17:25 in mind (Grønbaek¹³k), but if so, he gave the promise a new twist: David could have the daughter in virtue of *future* heroic deeds. David, who was known as a גבור חיל ("mighty man of valor") according to 16:18, is asked by Saul in v 17 to be a (warrior). According to 14:52 Saul added many such warriors to his standing army (cf. also 10:26 LX¹⁴X; 2 Sam 2:7; 17:10). The "battles of Yahweh" (cf. Num 21:14) are mentioned in 25:28, a deuteronomistic passage, where Abigail acknowledges that David has in fact fought them. Saul's ulterior motive for offering his daughter (again probably a thought and not a word spoken aloud, cf. vv 11 and 21) is repeated in v 21. Saul wanted to put David in danger with no blame coming to himself (cf. the appointment of David as a commander over a thousand, v 13). Later David expressed abhorrence at anyone laying a hand on Yahweh's anointed (24:6; 26:9). David replied to Saul's offer with a show of humility, which may also connote acceptance of the authority of the divine will (Ackroyd). Such self-abasement in response to appointment to a challenging office or to a divine oracle is frequently mentioned (cf. Judg 6:15; 1 Sam 9:21; 2 Sam 7:18; for other examples and discussion see Coats). McCarter interprets the words of David as a rejection of Saul's offer. The relatively rare word "kinfolk" (cf. perhaps Ps 42:9 [EVV¹⁵. 8]: "God of my kinfolk") is pointed in the M¹⁶T as if it were the more common noun "life." "My father's family" (v 18), which we have placed in a parenthesis, is apparently an ancient attempt to explain "kinfolk."

David's status as the king's son-in-law is repeatedly emphasized throughout the rest of the chapter (vv 21, 22, 23, 26, 27). Ahimelech also refers to David as the king's son-in-law, via Michal, in 22:14. Saul's double dealing comes out when he gives Merab to Adriel. Adriel,

¹¹Driver Driver, S. R. *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*.*

¹²*CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

¹³Grønbaek Grønbaek, J. H. *Die Geschichte vom Aufstieg Davids*.*

¹⁴LXX Septuagint

¹⁵EVV. English versions or verse numbers

¹⁶MT Masoretic Text

apparently the Aramaic equivalent of Azriel (cf. Jer 36:26; 1 Chr 5:24; 27:19), means “God is my help.” Meholah, or Abel Meholah, is identified with Tell Abû Sûs (M¹⁷R203197; Stoebe, *Das Erste Buch Samuelis*; and Student Map Manua¹⁸) on the west bank of the Jordan, about 23 miles S of the Sea of Galilee, or with Tell el-Maqlub (M¹⁹R214201; Glueck, *ZA*²⁰W 77 [1965] 72–81; McCarter) about 7.5 miles NE from this site, on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead. This marriage proved to be ill fated since the Gibeonites, with David’s permission, killed off the couple’s five children (2 Sam 21:5–9).

(Vv 20–27) Michal’s love for David seemed to provide an opportunity for both Saul (v 20) and for David (v 26). For Saul it was a chance to put David in jeopardy with no repercussions on himself; for David it was a chance to enhance his claim on the throne (v 26; cf. McCarter). David found ever-increasing political support in the Saulide family. First it was the king who loved him (16:21), then Jonathan the eldest son (18:1, 3; 20:17). Saul intended Michal to be a trap, something like the trigger of a trap with bait laid on it (cf. Drive²¹r). The addition in 21a-²²a is part of the redaction involved with the inclusion of vv 17–19. If vv 17–19 were original, we would be amazed that David took Saul’s second offer seriously. The translation “a second time” seems to be demanded by the context (cf. Job 33:14; other suggestions in Stoebe, *Das Erste Buch Samuelis*). In the original version of chap. 18, Saul’s approach to his prospective son-in-law was much more discreet. He had the word “leaked” through the bureaucracy that the king had pleasure in David and that all his officials “loved” him. These officials play a major role in the rest of the chapter (vv 23, 24, 26, 30), and their support for David is also affirmed in the supplementary 18:5. The translation “within earshot of” in v 23 may be overprecise; the officials may have spoken this message directly to (“in the ears of”) David. As with the offer of Merab, David replied humbly. To become the king’s son-in-law was no small matter. David was a poor man, presumably unable to pay the bride-price due for a princess; he was a totally insignificant person, without royal ambition (cf. Isa 3:5 where “insignificant” is used as the opposite of the word “honored”).

The bride-price in Israel was paid by the groom to the woman’s father. It is mentioned explicitly only here, in Exod 22:15–16 [EVV²³. 16–17], a law requiring a man to pay a bride-price to the father of a woman he has violated, and Gen 34:12. The latter passage is interesting because it indicates that a father could set the price he desired (cf. de Vau²⁴x, 27). Saul suggests a form of service instead of money (cf. Gen 29:15–30 and Josh 15:16–Judg 1:12), but the offer is

¹⁷MR Map Reference

¹⁸Student Map Manual *Student Map Manual: Historical Geography of the Bible Lands*. Jerusalem: Pictorial Archive (Near Eastern History) Est. n. d.

¹⁹MR Map Reference

²⁰*ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

²¹Driver Driver, S. R. *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*.*

²²21a-a MT; lacking in LXX^B. This gloss was added in order to harmonize the Michal incident with the secondary vv 17–19.

²³EVV. English versions or verse numbers

²⁴de Vaux de Vaux, R. *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*. Tr. J. McHugh. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961.

more one of deceit than of mercy. Saul hoped that in carrying out this task David would fall by (or into) the hands of the Philistines. This bride-price of foreskins, which strikes the modern reader as altogether gross, reflects the same kind of ethnic humor, stirred by long antagonism, that we find in the Samson stories. In informing David of his price, the king expressed the seemingly pious wish that he would thereby be avenged on his Philistine enemies. We are not told whether David saw through the tricky offer, but, in any case, it provided him the opportunity he wanted to enhance his royal credentials. With dispatch David and his “men” (first mentioned here; cf. 23:3. Of course, David was now a commander of a “thousand”) killed 100 Philistines and delivered the foreskins to the king. The M²⁵T seems to exaggerate the deed of David. He did it before the time set by the king had expired (26a-²⁶a), he got twice as many foreskins as were required (27²⁷a), and he gave the king an exact count (27b-²⁸b)! While this was hardly the result Saul wanted or expected, he had to stick by his word, at least temporarily. According to 1 Sam 25:44, however, he later gave Michal to another man.

(Vv 28–30) Saul could see the handwriting on the wall. Yahweh was with this pretender to the throne (cf. the supplement in v 12), and all Israel loved him (cf. the women from all the cities of Israel in v 6, and the reference in all Israel in v 16). Now his fear reached a new plateau, which may have formed a transition to the attempt to enlist Jonathan and others in a plot to kill David (19:1–7; McCarter). The M²⁹T informs us that Saul not only *saw* these things, but he *knew* them to be true. The redactor adds that Saul became an enemy to David (v 29) just after he had asked David to get vengeance over all his enemies (v 25). Whenever the commanders of the Philistines (for the term see 29:3, 4, 9) marched out, David got the upper hand (cf. his success in vv 14 and 15, and in 18:5). The pericope ends as it began, with David being honored all around.

Explanation

The materials in this pericope describe the painful dilemma of Saul. The more jealous and devious he became, the more successful David was. Irritated by the popular acclaim for David’s heroics, he attempted twice to kill him (v 11) and promoted him only in order to get him out of the way and to expose him to danger. When Saul saw David’s success (vv 14, 15) his fear turned into awe. Saul offered two daughters in marriage to David, but linked the offer in both cases with dangerous military exploits, hoping that the Philistines would get rid of his rival for him. Although Saul reneged on the offer of the first daughter and stated an outrageously dangerous bride-price for the second, David carried out the task assigned. He became his predecessor’s son-in-law. As the chapter ends, Saul is more and more afraid while David is repeatedly successful against Philistine raids. He outshone Saul’s officials and was honored everywhere. Whether Saul’s actions are motivated by goodwill (16:21–22), fear and suspicion, or downright malice, they all lead to David’s success (McCarter).

²⁵MT Masoretic Text

²⁶26a-a MT; lacking in LXX^B. Cf. 8.a.-a. The addition shows David’s zeal and eagerness.

²⁷27a LXX^B. MT escalates the number to 200. Cf. 8.a.-a.

²⁸27b-b MT; lacking in LXX^B. Cf. 8.a. The gloss may be related to 26.a. (cf. the similarity of the Hebrew).

²⁹MT Masoretic Text

These results are no mere political gains and losses. Yahweh was with David (vv 12, 14, 28) and Saul's spiteful and even irrational behavior (ecstasy) was as much a theological as a psychological problem according to the final redactor: an evil spirit from God rushed on Saul (v 10) and Yahweh had departed from him (v 12).

Saul's daughter Michal loved David, and this romantic attachment connoted also political allegiance, just as the love of Jonathan had (18:1, 3) and would (20:17). What's more, all Israel expressed its allegiance through dancing women who met the victorious returning hero. All Israel and Judah also loved him, that is they showed him political loyalty because of his military success (vv 16, 28).³⁰

18:10–12 Saul wasted no time in attempting to eliminate David as Israel's next king. At the royal quarters in Gibeah, during an apparently tranquil scene, an "evil/tormenting spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul."³¹ The narrator's portrayal of Saul prophesying under the influence of an evil/troubling spirit identifies Saul as a false prophet (cf. 1 Kgs 22:21–23) and therefore one who was not to be feared (Deut 18:22). Like Goliath (cf. 1 Sam 17:7), a previous adversary of David, "Saul had a spear in his hand."

Not once, but twice Saul hurled the spear at David with the intention of pinning him to the wall (v. 11). David's willingness to remain in the room long enough for Saul to retrieve the spear after the failed first attempt and then take a second shot at him portrays the incredible depth of David's loyalty to the king and his commitment to helping Saul overcome his torments.

Ironically, the spear episode incited fear—not in David, but in Saul. Saul reasoned correctly that the only way the young man was able to evade the point of his spear at such close range was that "the LORD was with David but had left Saul" (v. 12).³²

18:13–16 His first attempt at killing David having failed, Saul tried a different tactic. David was removed from the protected confines of the royal residence and was sent to lead Saul's troops in battle. These circumstances clearly posed risks for both David's reputation and his well-being. Failure to perform his duties successfully even once on the battlefield would reduce or erase David's prestige and popularity and perhaps even end his life. However, David was successful in carrying out every assignment "because the LORD was with him." David's divinely

³⁰ Ralph W. Klein, [1 Samuel](#), vol. 10, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1983), 188–191.

³¹ Baldwin suggests that Saul's prophetic activity consisted of an "experience of ecstasy" (*1 and 2 Samuel*, 130).

³² Robert D. Bergen, [1, 2 Samuel](#), vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 201–202.

assisted success in these military campaigns had two effects on others: it added to Saul's fears, and it increased the people's love for David.

18:17–19 Knowing that David's chances of being killed increased in proportion to the amount of time spent on the battlefield, Saul cunningly honored his offer to give his daughter in marriage to the one who slew Goliath (cf. 17:25). However, Saul's offer was subtly nuanced; David was to be given Saul's "older daughter Merab" (v. 17), but not as a reward for past accomplishments as had been implied in the original proposal. Instead she would be acquired with the dual currencies of ongoing military service and zeal for the Lord. Though David might not be motivated to risk his life in order to gain the hand of the king's daughter in marriage, perhaps he could be persuaded to do so as a demonstration of his commitment to the Lord. If David accepted the offer, Saul could passively "let the Philistines" destroy his most feared adversary. Thus, David's love for God could be used to destroy God's youthful anointed one.

A historical precedent existed for David to accept the conditions set by Saul for gaining entrance into the royal family: Jacob had once used work as an alternative to paying the customary bride price for a wife (cf. Gen 29:15–19); so could David. David, who was indeed a gifted and enthusiastic warrior for the Lord, was not troubled by the stipulations in the king's agreement; he would fight on behalf of his God with or without the opportunity to win a royal bride. Yet David refused the offer because of another consideration: David possessed an undistinguished genealogy, so that he felt unqualified to "become the king's son-in-law" (v. 18).⁷³³¹ Saul was from a wealthy family; David was not. Saul was king of Israel; David was a rural shepherd who possessed Moabite blood (cf. Ruth 4:13–17).

David could not be dissuaded in the matter, so Merab "was given in marriage to Adriel of Meholah" (v. 19). This union produced five sons who were later killed by the Gibeonites (2 Sam 21:8–9) as a lingering result of Saul's sin.

18:20–25 Not to be stymied, Saul saw in his "daughter Michal" (v. 20) a third means of destroying David. Saul learned to his delight (lit., "it was straight in his eyes") that this daughter "was in love with David." David had previously eluded the king's spear and the Philistines' weapons, but perhaps he could be ensnared and ruined by a woman. As Saul envisioned it, David would be facing a double threat: "the hand of the Philistines" (v. 21) and Michal herself, who would be a "snare to him." Michal could be a snare in two ways: first, she could motivate David to place his life at extreme risk in battle with the Philistines; second, she could corrupt David spiritually.

The term translated as "snare" (Hb. *môqēš*) is a theologically significant one, used three times in the Torah to describe the dangers of idols and idol worshipers (Exod 23:33; 34:12; Deut 7:16). Perhaps Saul was spiritually astute enough to recognize that in marriage his daughter's idolatrous inclinations (cf. 19:13) could easily lead David astray, in which case David would become the Lord's enemy and come to a disastrous end. Thus Saul was especially eager to

³³⁷¹ G. W. Coats understands David's statement "Who am I, and what is my family that I should become the king's son-in-law?" (v. 18) as an example of a standard self-abasement/insult formula that would be standardly employed in the presence of a social superior, especially royalty (cf. "Self-Abasement and Insult Formulas," *JBL* 89 (1970): 14–26).

provide David with “a second opportunity” to become a “son-in-law” to the king and spoke to David directly about it.

Saul reinforced his offer to David with a covert disinformation campaign. Previously David had heard from unnamed servants of Saul about the offer regarding Goliath; now from similar sources he would be informed of important particulars regarding the marriage offer. Of greatest priority, David was to be told that “the king is pleased with you” (v. 22); David would surely interpret this to mean that Saul was willing to overlook David’s undistinguished background, thus clearing the way for David to “become [Saul’s] son-in-law.”

When David heard these words, however, he balked. Saul may be willing to disregard social proprieties, but David could not; he was “a poor man and little known” (v. 22). So for a second time he refused the offer to join the royal family.

Saul extended the offer to David a third time, this time providing David with an honorable means of overcoming all other shortcomings. David’s “price for the bride” (v. 25)—and thus for the right to become the king’s son-in-law—was “a hundred Philistine foreskins,” implying one hundred Philistine deaths. As an added inducement, the offer was presented to David as a patriotic duty; David must fight the Philistines to help the king “take revenge on his enemies.”

18:26–30 David’s mind was changed; he was now “pleased to become the king’s son-in-law” (v. 26; lit., “the matter was straight[ened out] in his eyes”). A deadline was set for David to meet the challenge, but before it came, David had succeeded abundantly (v. 27).³⁴⁷² Then in a macabre ceremony David “presented the full number” of severed portions of Philistine genitals to the king “so that he might become the king’s son-in-law.” The fact that David exceeded by a hundred the required number of deaths underscores David’s commitment to the king and his eagerness to join the royal family. Saul had no choice but to give David “his daughter Michal in marriage.”

Because Saul was an eyewitness to David’s prodigious success, he “realized [knew] that the LORD was with David” (v. 28). That, added to the fact that two of his own children were now bonded to David in friendship and love, rekindled Saul’s anxieties concerning David. Michal’s love for David had not eliminated him as a menace as had been hoped; instead, it had brought him into the inner circle of legitimate contenders for the throne. As Saul viewed things, David had now become the most serious threat to the Saulide dynasty, and so “he remained his enemy the rest of his days” (v. 29).

Saul’s efforts against the Philistines, including those involving David, were not sufficient to stem the tide of Philistine aggression against Israel. But David continued to go out to battle, even though he had already gained the coveted marital status. And when he went, he exceeded

³⁴⁷² The Codex Vaticanus and Lucianic recensions of the LXX state that David killed a hundred Philistines. McCarter (*I Samuel*, 316) accepts the lower figure, citing 2 Sam 3:14 as his justification. However, 2 Sam 3:14 and the present passage suggest that David understood the מֵהָר to be one hundred Philistine foreskins (cf. v. 25). There is no substantive reason to doubt that the MT preserves the original reading. To the contrary, the larger number emphasizes David’s commitment to Saul and his zeal for pleasing his master, thus underscoring the thesis that David was Saul’s loyal servant throughout his lifetime.

all others in victories.⁷³⁵³ As a result, David's name "was highly acclaimed" (NIV "became well known").³⁶

17–19. David and Merab.—Saul offers his older daughter, Merab, to David in marriage, on the vague condition that he be courageous and fight the enemies of Yahweh. The king was really moved in this by the hope that David would fall in battle. When this did not prove to be the event, he unscrupulously broke his word and gave his daughter to another.

The section is one of those lacking in ^{37B}, and we naturally connect it with the others. In one of these we find that Saul's daughter was to be the reward of the man who should smite the Philistine champion, 17:25. It is natural to suppose that the present paragraph is intended to show how Saul failed to carry out that offer. With this agrees the manner in which this section opens. Saul proposes his daughter without any evident occasion, unless it be that David has a claim on her already; there is no question of a price to be paid. It seems evident, therefore, that this story is the sequel of 17:25. On the other hand, it is quite irreconcilable with the following paragraph, which recounts David's marriage with Michal. As we shall see, the proposition there made is quite a new thing, and the form in which it is made shows entire ignorance of a previous similar proposal such as we have now before us.

17. Saul takes the initiative and offers Merab to David, with the stipulation (if such it can be called): *Only be a valiant man, and fight the battles of Yahweh*] for the last phrase, cf. 25:28 and the title 'Book of the Battles of Yahweh,' Num. 21:14. In this proposition, Saul's real thought was: *Let not my hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him*] as is set forth also in the bargain struck for Michal.—**18.** David's reply is modest: *Who am I, and what is my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?* It was the part of a gentleman to depreciate his own worth. Similar language is used by Saul himself when the kingly dignity is

³⁵⁷³ The word translated by the NIV here as "met with ... success" is שָׂכַל, a verb that elsewhere may mean "possess understanding/wisdom." The occurrence of the verb here marks the fourth time in this chapter the verb is used with David as a subject (cf. also vv. 5, 14, 15). This verb is used to describe David more than any other person in the Hebrew Bible. Possession of this characteristic is elsewhere associated with a knowledge of the Torah (Ps 119:99). The author's repeated employment of the verb to describe David is likely meant to reinforce the theme of David as a man of the Torah—in other words, a man after God's own heart.

³⁶ Robert D. Bergen, [1, 2 Samuel](#), vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 202–205.

^{37B} The Greek version: Codex Vaticanus

Ⓞ The Greek version: Codex Vaticanus

offered him.—**19.** The appointed time came, *but she was given to Adriel the Meholathite*] in the received text the same man is mentioned, 2 S. 21:8, but as the husband of Michal. The historical uncertainty is obvious. Saul's action as here represented is, of course, a deadly affront.³⁸

20–30. David marries Michal, Saul's daughter.—The account shows no knowledge of the preceding paragraph. Michal is called *the daughter of Saul*, without reference to any other. Her affection for David comes to Saul as a welcome occasion to bring David into danger. He opens negotiations indirectly. All these indications point to the independence of the narrative. The step taken is the second of Saul's attempts to overthrow David, the first having been to give him service in the field, v. 13.

20. Michal loved David, and when they told Saul, *the matter was right in his eyes*] 2 S. 17:4.—**21.** The reason was that he thought to make use of her *as a snare*, or, more properly, *as a bait*, to lure him on to his destruction, so that *the hand of the Philistine should be upon him*] as above, v. 17. The remainder of the verse is an interpolation.—**22.** It would be unbecoming in the king to make advances. He therefore commands his servants: *Speak to David privately*] after giving a favourable account of David's standing with the people, they were to advise: *now become son-in-law to the king*] the verb is used elsewhere of *intermarrying* with families or tribes, Dt. 7:3.—**23.** David objects his lack of the qualifications: *Is it an easy thing, in your estimation, to become son-in-law to the king when I am poor and of no reputation?* cf. v. 18.—**24, 25.** When the reply was reported to Saul, he instructed his courtiers to meet the material objection, which was that David was too poor to pay the usual price for a king's daughter: *The king has no desire for a price*] the word is regularly used of the price paid by a man for a wife. Our word *dowry* conveys a wrong impression. Marriage by purchase can be traced in many regions. For example, *coemptio* seems to have been one method of marriage among the Romans. Old Testament examples are familiar, such as Jacob, who paid the price in service. A sum of money is supposed to be given in the Book of the Covenant, Ex. 22:16. *But the king's desire is for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines.* If the Philistines alone were uncircumcised among the inhabitants of Palestine, the kind of trophy chosen is explicable. The ostensible object was: *to be avenged on the king's enemies*; the real purpose was *to cause David to fall by the hand of the Philistines.*—**26, 27.** The proposition was acceptable to David, who *rose and went, he and his men, and smote among the Philistines a hundred men*] which the received text has made two hundred; *and brought their foreskins and paid them in full to the king in order to become son-in-law to the king.* The king had, therefore, no pretext for further delay, *and gave him Michal, his daughter, to wife.* The original continuation of this verse seems to be

³⁸ Henry Preserved Smith, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1899), 171.

19:11. What follows here is an account of the mental, or moral, state of Saul, with a renewed panegyric of David.—**28.** *And Saul saw that Yahweh was with David, and that all Israel loved him*] the double favour (of Yahweh and of the people) increased Saul's dread. Vv. 28b, 29b, 30 are lacking in ^{39B}. See the critical note.—**29.** The climax of the chapter is here reached—*So Saul feared David yet more.*—**30.** A panegyric of David, such as we have had to superfluity. It simply says that as often as the Philistines made their incursions *David acted wisely above all the servants of Saul, and his name was exceeding precious.* It is intended to point the contrast afforded by Saul's conduct, as related in the following verse.⁴⁰

18:8–16. So enraged was **Saul** at the diminishing of his glory that he, inspired by the demonic **spirit** (v. 10; cf. 16:14–16; 19:9), tried to **spear** David (18:10–11; 19:9–10). But God delivered **David** and gave him even greater popularity (18:12–16).

18:17–30. When **Saul** then saw that he could not destroy **David** personally, he was determined to let **the Philistines** kill him. This he arranged by proposing that **David** marry his oldest **daughter, Merab**. Saul had already reneged on one marital promise to David (17:25). **David** protested, however, that he was a commoner and had no sufficient bridal **price** (18:25, *mōhar*, not “dowry” as in ⁴¹v and others). Before anything further could develop, **Merab ... was given** to another man (v. 19). Again **Saul** offered his second daughter, **Michal**, who at that time loved **David** (v. 20; cf. 2 Sam. 6:16). But again **David** argued that he was unsuitable to be a **son-in-law** of the king because of his low status (1 Sam. 18:23). In an act of apparent generosity **Saul** waived the usual bridal payment and demanded only that David kill **100** Philistines and bring back their **foreskins** (v. 25), a requirement he more than met by slaying **200** (v. 27). **Saul** had been hoping, of course, that the exploit would cost **David** his life (v. 25). As a result, Saul was again **afraid of** David (v. 29; cf. vv. 12, 15). But **David** became Saul's **son-in-law** by marrying **Michal** (v. 27), and his military **success** and his popularity increased (v. 30).

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^{39B} The Greek version: Codex Vaticanus

Ⓔ The Greek version: Codex Vaticanus

⁴⁰ Henry Preserved Smith, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1899), 172–174.

⁴¹_{KJV} King James Version

⁴² Eugene H. Merrill, [*“1 Samuel.”*](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 449–450.