

## ABSTRACT

**OF KINGS AND KIN: בֵּית AND THE DYNASTIC FAMILY OF DAVID**

This dissertation argues that 2 Sam 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 (traditionally known as the Succession Narrative) should be understood to be a weaving of two themes: succession and family. This thesis proposes that the narrative describes the dynastic house of David, in which the inseparable themes of politics and family are employed by the writer to reveal the complexities of paternal, maternal, fraternal, and other kinship relationships as a result of rivalry for the throne.

Recognizing that we are dealing with issues pertaining to family, this study begins by presenting the role of the family in biblical Israel and how that affects the way Israel locates herself in history and her language for expressing her relationship with humanity and Yahweh. Since בֵּית is a familial term and a keyword in First and Second Samuel, chapter three presents a study of its function in the two books. Chapter four explores Yahweh's familial relationship with David's dynastic family with respect to the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7:1-17 in light of covenant making and adoption in the ancient Near East.

The preceding chapters form the foundation for the development of the thesis statement in chapter five, which analyzes 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 for the dual themes of politics and family. As an implication of this study, chapter six examines the concept of the house of Yahweh in light of our understanding of the Davidic covenant, revealing the presence of the triple motifs of kingdom, family, and temple in all the major

divine covenants (i.e. Yahweh's covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the New Covenant).

**OF KINGS AND KIN: בְּיָתֵי AND THE DYNASTIC FAMILY OF DAVID**

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## CHAPTER 1

### בִּיָּת AND THE DYNASTIC FAMILY OF DAVID

#### 1.1 Introduction

Since Leonhard Rost's book *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids*<sup>1</sup> was first published in 1929, his hypothesis of a "Succession Narrative" has become the lens through which much of the scholarly discussion on 2 Samuel has been viewed. Although different scholars have raised questions regarding Rost's hypothesis, his proposition of a Succession Narrative continues to dominate current theological views of the narrative in the second book of Samuel.

Rost's formulation of the Succession Narrative begins with the first two chapters of 1 Kings. He posits that the central issue of 1 Kings 1–2 is to answer to the exigent question of who the successor of David will be. Reading backwards into 2 Samuel, Rost finds a single author writing the Succession Narrative with the purpose of substantiating the rightful accession of Solomon to the throne after the sequential elimination of the new king's rivals.<sup>2</sup> Based on this theme of succession to David's throne, Rost traces the extent of the boundaries of the Succession Narrative. Rost then concludes that the

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<sup>1</sup> Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, trans. Michael D. Rutter and David M. Gunn (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> This view is also held by Blenkinsopp. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Treasures Old and New: Essays in the Theology of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 105.

Succession Narrative comprises of 2 Sam 6:16, 20–23; 7:11b, 16; 9–20; and 1 Kings 1–2. Rost’s political reading is further strengthened by subsequent scholars, so much so that the theme of “succession” has become the dominating lens through which the narrative is understood.<sup>3</sup>

However, the political theme of 2 Sam 9–20 has not gone without challenge. Among the scholars who question the validity of the Succession Narrative purported by Rost, some particularly disagree with the notion that succession to David’s throne governs the way one should understand the story of David, or even the very existence of a succession narrative. Among the earliest voices raised against Rost is R. A. Carlson, who posits the dual theme of “blessing” and “curse” in 2 Samuel.<sup>4</sup> Following Carlson, Joseph Blenkinsopp also asserts that other than the struggle for the succession to David’s throne, a complementary theme is that of the legitimization of David’s own claim to the throne.<sup>5</sup> James Flanagan, on the other hand, argues for the weaving of two themes—Solomon’s succession and the legitimization of David’s kingship—by a skillful redactor that forms the Court History.<sup>6</sup> The challenge against a single political theme governing

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<sup>3</sup> Gerhard von Rad, “Der Anfang der Geschichtsschreibung im alten Israel,” *Archive für Kulturgeschichte* 32 (1944): 1–42; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Theme and Motif in the Succession History (2 Sam. XI 2ff.) and the Yahwist Corpus,” *Volume du Congrès. Genève 1965* (VTSup, 15; Leiden: Brill, 1966), 44–57; L. Delekat, “Tendenz und Theologie der David-Solomo-Ezrahlung,” in *Das ferne und nahe Wort*, ed. F. Maas (BZAW, 105; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967), 26–36; R. N. Whybray, *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Sam. 9–20 and I Kings 1 and 2* (London: SCM Press, 1968); T. C. G. Thornton, “Solomonic Apologetic in Samuel and Kings,” *CQR* 169 (1968): 159–166; James. W. Flanagan, “Court History or Succession Document? A Study of 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 172–181.

<sup>4</sup> R. A. Carlson, *David the Chosen King: A Traditio-Historical Approach to the Second Book of Samuel* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> Blenkinsopp, “Theme and Motif,” 47.

<sup>6</sup> Flanagan, “Court History or Succession Document?” 172–181.

the Succession Narrative was further taken up by David Gunn in the 1970s. Gunn proposed that the narrative should be understood as “serious entertainment,” though not to be misunderstood as one of pure fiction, but reminiscent of one of the Icelandic “family sagas.”<sup>7</sup> Gunn also disregards the notion of a single theme in the Succession Narrative, but sees the story as depicting both the public and private life of David.<sup>8</sup> The story is both about David the king as well as David the man (as husband and father). Gunn concludes that “the way in which the political and personal spheres of [David’s] life were interrelated, often creating a tension through the conflict of political and personal (especially family) interests, is of central interest in the narrative.”<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Gunn’s treatment of the personal spheres of David’s life, particularly as it relates to his family, has few followers.<sup>10</sup> Charles Conroy argues that 2 Sam 13–20 is a literary unit by itself, and can be understood independent of 1 Kings 1–2.<sup>11</sup> Without reading through the lens of the first two chapters of 1 Kings as put forward by Rost, Conroy maintains that the theme of succession is non-prevalent in 2 Sam 13–20. Read on its own, Conroy posits that the two emerging themes from 2 Sam 13–20 are

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<sup>7</sup> D. M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Philip R. Davies and David M. Gunn (*JSOTSupp.* 6; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), 61.

<sup>8</sup> Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 110.

<sup>9</sup> Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 110.

<sup>10</sup> While not building on Gunn’s view, Long sees the theme of sibling rivalry (Burke O. Long, “A Darkness Between Brothers: Solomon and Adonijah,” *JSOT* 19 (1981): 79–94), and Wesselius posits the theme of fratricide as a direct result of David’s sin with Bathsheba (J. W. Wesselius, “Joab’s Death and the Central Theme of the Succession Narrative,” *VT* 40 (1990): 336–351).

<sup>11</sup> Charles Conroy, *Absalom Absalom!: Narrative and Language in 2 Sam 13–20* (*Analecta Biblica* 81; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978).

return/restoration and contrast/reversal.<sup>12</sup> More recently, Gillian Keys' analysis of 2 Sam 10–20 posits that there is a main theme—"sin and punishment"—which largely determines the structure, and a complementary theme—"David the man"—as the author's material for his approach on the subject matter.<sup>13</sup>

As it stands now, efforts to deny the existence of a Succession Narrative as such have not been very successful. Rost's proposal continues to dominate discussions of the structure and interpretation of 2 Samuel. But beyond that general acceptance, there is considerable disagreement, as has been shown above, as to the extent of that narrative, or even what its primary theme may have been.

## 1.2 Statement of Research

It should not surprise even the most casual reader of the so-called Succession Narrative to find political connotations in this passage, and there is no need to disagree with those who see political underpinnings in this text. It is more surprising that the apparent familial connotations that are found in this narrative have received little attention. After all, if contest for the throne in a dynasty is the issue (as posited by Rost), then familial strife is an inseparable subject since a dynasty entails succession of members within the same family. Furthermore, in its present form, the pivotal role of 2

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<sup>12</sup> Conroy, *Absalom Absalom!*, 97-101.

<sup>13</sup> Gillian Keys, *The Wages of Sin: A Reappraisal of the 'Succession Narrative'*, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies. (*JSOTSup.* 221, Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996), 123-151.

Samuel 7 to the rest of the narrative should not be ignored.<sup>14</sup> Some of the disagreements concerning the theme of the Succession Narrative relate directly to the function of 2 Samuel 7 in the narrative, and scholars are known to have found Rost's treatment of 2 Samuel 7 to be problematic.<sup>15</sup> If it can be shown further that Nathan's oracle in 2 Samuel 7:1–17 contains familial connotations, this will lend support to seeing the rest of the narrative as a combination of two themes—succession and family. To be sure, the concepts of covenant and adoption that undergird this oracle point to a familial dimension in the Davidic Covenant. Additionally, the wordplay around the use of the key term “בֵּית” in 1 and 2 Samuel is crucial in allowing the author to weave the two themes of succession and family into one long narrative.

The purpose of this study is to argue that 2 Sam 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 (traditionally known as the Succession Narrative) should be understood to be in fact a weaving of two themes comprising of not only succession, but that of family as well. I agree with the minority of scholars that the assignment of succession as the sole theme of

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Kaiser lists 2 Sam 7 as one of the four great moments in biblical history (“The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity,” in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974], 298); Robert Gordon refers to this chapter as the “ideological summit...in the Old Testament as a whole” (*I and II Samuel: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1988], 235); for Walter Brueggemann, 2 Sam 7 is considered as the “dramatic and theological center of the entire Samuel corpus,” as well as “the most crucial theological statement in the Old Testament” (*First and Second Samuel* [Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990], 253 & 259); Ronald Youngblood claims that 2 Sam 7 is “the center and focus of...the Deuteronomic history itself” (“1, 2 Samuel,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelien [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992] 3:880).

<sup>15</sup> See Sigmund Mowinckel, “Israelite Historiography,” in *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), 10. Gunn (*The Story of King David*, 66) comments that this is the weakest part of Rost's argument. Ironically, Gunn himself does not even discuss 2 Sam 7 in his book. George P. Ridout (*Prose Compositional Techniques in the Succession Narrative [2 Sam. 7, 9–10; 1 Kings 1–2]*, Dissertation Graduate Theological Union, 1971; p. 175) argues for most of 2 Sam 7 to be the introduction to the Succession Narrative.

the said narrative is in fact too narrow a reading of the unit.<sup>16</sup> My thesis investigates the underappreciated theme of family in the narrative that describes the dynastic house of David. It seeks to demonstrate that the writer employs the themes of politics and family in an inseparable way to reveal the complexities of paternal, maternal, fraternal, and other kinship relationships that were involved in rivalry for the throne.

### 1.3 Methodology

The bulk of this study will be given to an analysis of familial motifs in the so-called Succession Narrative and the approach is strictly literary in nature.<sup>17</sup> In order to establish the foundation for examining familial motifs in the Succession Narrative, I will begin with the study of the ancient Israelite family in chapter two. We will first look at the role of the family in biblical Israel and how that affects the way Israel locates herself in history and her language for expressing her relationship with humanity and Yahweh. This is foundational to our analysis of the Succession Narrative since it is part of a bigger narrative—that is, the Books of Samuel—which accounts for the history of Israel’s early monarchy.

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Ackroyd, in his article (“The Succession Narrative [so-called],” *Int* 35 (1981): 396), sums up well: “We must not be hindered by restrictions imposed by artificial and hypothetical categorizing of the text; and one such may appear to have been the supposition that there is an identifiable unit to be described as the “succession narrative,” when, in reality, such a unit is to be seen rather as the product of a too narrow reading and too great a desire to find uniformity where there is in reality diversity and richness. A less rigid reading may open up a wider perspective.”

<sup>17</sup> The writer is aware of the possibly complex redactional history that may lie behind the present text. However, for the purpose of this investigation the final form of the text will serve as the base.

Since בַּיִת is a keyword in the Books of Samuel, we will study its function in 1 and 2 Samuel in chapter three. The use of בַּיִת is a major literary feature in the Books of Samuel not only because of the frequency of its occurrence but, more importantly, because it plays out the various meanings associated with “family” such as “house” (as in a physical building structure; e.g. 1 Sam 10:25), “palace” (as in the king’s house in 2 Sam 7:2), “temple” (e.g. 2 Sam 7:6), the designation for family, clan or tribe (e.g. “the house of Eli” in 1 Sam 3:14), and “dynasty” (e.g. 2 Sam 7:11). It is these possible nuances in the word בַּיִת that, I will argue, allow the dual themes of dynasty and family to be ingeniously woven in 2 Sam 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 by the narrator.

In chapter four, my dissertation will focus on the study of the dynastic oracle in 2 Samuel 7:1–17. Since this is the text that records Yahweh’s establishment of his covenant with David concerning an enduring dynasty, it is critical to our analysis of the Succession Narrative. This chapter will examine the familial understandings behind two ancient Near Eastern phenomena—that of covenant making and adoption. With regard to the forming of covenant, this study will show that when YHWH makes a covenant with David, a kinship bond is formed between the two parties.<sup>18</sup> As to the study on adoption theology, our understanding of the subject will help underscore the familial ideology

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<sup>18</sup> See D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 254–273; J. P. Kalluveetil, *Declaration and Covenant* (AnBib 88; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982), 130–135, 203–210; Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3–21; Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*.



behind the phrase “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me” in 2 Samuel 7:14 (and also many of the royal psalms, e.g. Ps. 2 etc.).<sup>19</sup>

Having established the foundational issues for the analysis of the Succession Narrative, chapter five will focus mainly on the development of the thesis statement. This will be accomplished by ordering the discussion around the familial theme (other than the succession theme) in the narrative. The approach to this study will be mainly literary in nature, examining the text for themes, motifs, plots, keywords, and the like.<sup>20</sup> This chapter seeks to show that the entire section of 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 consists of the two inseparable themes of politics and family.

As an implication of this study, chapter six will examine the concept of the house of Yahweh in light of our understanding of the Davidic covenant. This chapter will examine the major divine covenants in the Bible (Yahweh’s covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the New Covenant) for the triple motifs of kingdom, family, and temple.

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<sup>19</sup> F. Charles Fensham, “Father and Son as Terminology for Treaty and Covenant,” in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1971); Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 257–258; Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: a Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977); David R. Tasker, *Ancient Near Eastern Literature and the Hebrew Scriptures About the Fatherhood of God* (SBL 69, New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> P. K. McCarter has noted that “the high literary qualities of the stories in this book have been remarked by virtually all interpreters.” See P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 9, Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1984), 16.

The working assumption applied to this study is the literary unity of 2 Samuel 9–20 + 1 Kings 1–2.<sup>21</sup> Understanding 2 Sam 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 as having both the themes of succession and family will affect one’s reading of the narrative concerning the dynastic house of David. In addition to the theme of who will accede to David’s throne, the familial dimension necessitates reading the narrative in terms of a father’s relationships with his sons. This allows the reader to see David as both king and father. Understanding the said narrative in familial terms also broadens one’s understanding of Yahweh’s redemption plan in the metanarrative running from Genesis through Revelation. Yahweh’s redemption plan began with a family and will end with a family. In addition, understanding the familial connotations of Nathan’s Oracle, the Davidic Covenant, as the covenant that bridges between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant, is thus not only the “taproot of the messianic hope,”<sup>22</sup> but also the seedbed for speaking of Christian believers as “children of God,” and of God as father in the New Testament, and of the “Father’s house” that Jesus is preparing for us.

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<sup>21</sup> Although there is no agreement among scholars as to the limits and unity of the Succession Narrative, the unity of 2 Samuel 9–20 + 1 Kings 1–2 is widely accepted. See A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), xxvii.

<sup>22</sup> Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 203.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ISRAELITE FAMILY AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

#### 2.1 Introduction

As a result of recent research on life in ancient Israel, we now have a clearer perspective of the Israelite family life and a better understanding of its social structure.<sup>23</sup>

While such research informs us of the way in which the ancient Israelite families organized themselves socially, economically, and religiously, explaining how these realities affect Old Testament theology remains a huge task.<sup>24</sup> In this chapter, in view of the particular focus of this study, we will restrict ourselves to a discussion of the centrality of the family in biblical Israel, how that centrality affects the way Israel locates herself in history, and how she expresses her relationship with Yahweh.

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<sup>23</sup> See Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Paula McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999); Leo G. Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol Meyers, *Families in Ancient Israel*, The Family, Religion, and Culture, ed. Don S. Browning and Ian S. Evison (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Gordon J. Wenham, et. al., *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*, ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003); and Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: MI, Wm. B. Eerdsman, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Leo G. Perdue, "Household, Theology, and Contemporary Hermeneutics," in *Families in Ancient Israel*, eds. Don S. Browning and Ian S. Evison (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 223.

## 2.2 Centrality of the Family in Biblical Israel

### 2.2.1 The Structure of the Family

Our typical understanding of a modern family (particularly in the West) is usually made up of a couple and their dependent children, otherwise also known as the “nuclear family.” While this definition served us well in the past, it is no longer adequate to describe the makeup of a family in this century. Today, additional adjectives are necessary to more accurately nuance the composition of a “family”, such as “single parent,” “blended,” and so on.<sup>25</sup> In a similar but different way, the modern understanding of family stands in stark contrast to the Old Testament’s understanding of family in the ancient Near East.

In the Old Testament, the concept of family is much larger and more complex than the modern-day nuclear family. The Old Testament uses various terms to describe the kinship institution of its time—**שֵׁבֶט**/**מִטָּה**, **מִשְׁפָּחָה**, and **בֵּית**. We find in Joshua 7:16-18 that the identification of Achan as the culprit for Israel’s defeat at Ai was tracked down the kinship structure of Israel from “tribe” (**שֵׁבֶט**) to “clan” (**מִשְׁפָּחָה**) to “household” (**בֵּית**).<sup>26</sup> In the preceding list, the “household” is elsewhere also known as the “father’s house(hold)” (**בֵּית־אָב**) in the Old Testament. This would include “the head of the house and his wife (or wives), his sons and their wives, his grandsons and their

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<sup>25</sup> Joel F. Drinkard Jr., “An Understanding of Family in the Old Testament: Maybe not as Different from Us as We Usually Think,” *Review and Expositor* 98/4 (2001): 485.

<sup>26</sup> For an elaborate delineation of Israel’s kinship structure, see C. J. H. Wright, “Family,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 2, ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 761–762.

wives, plus any unmarried sons or daughters in the generations below him, along with all the nonrelated dependents.”<sup>27</sup> Studies have shown that the Israelite **בֵּית־אָב** could have as many as three generations of up to thirty persons.<sup>28</sup>

“For ancient Israel *the family* is the basic and elemental unit of solidarity.”<sup>29</sup> The members of the **בֵּית־אָב** live in the same compound, sharing agricultural labor and produce as well as resources and fate.<sup>30</sup> Using the story of Achan as an example again, we can see the ripple effect of Achan’s sin on the community. When Achan stole some of the things which Yahweh had put under the ban, it brought about Israel’s defeat at Ai and cost the lives of about thirty-six Israelites (Josh 7:1–5). Achan’s story also demonstrates the detrimental effect of his sin on the solidarity among members of a **בֵּית־אָב**. When Achan has been identified as the culprit for Israel’s defeat at Ai, his sin led to the destruction of not only him but also his entire family and belongings of the family (Josh 7:24–25). The Israelites understood the solidarity of the community well as the erection of a questionable altar by the Transjordan tribes on the east brought fear to the rest of the people. In the indictment against the eastern tribes, the incident of Achan’s sin

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<sup>27</sup> Wright, “Family,” 762.

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence E. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” *BASOR* 260 (1985): 20; c.f. Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 39–40.

<sup>29</sup> James Muilenburg, “Father and Son,” in *Hearing and Speaking the Word: Selections from the Works of James Muilenburg*, ed. Thomas F. Best (Chico, CA: Scholar Press, 1984), 283.

<sup>30</sup> Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 26. For a more extensive discussion, see Carol Meyers, “The Family in Early Israel,” in *Families in Ancient Israel*, eds. Don S. Browning and Ian S. Evison (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1–47.

was used as a case in point, reminding the people that “did not Achan the son of Zerah act unfaithfully in the things under the ban, and wrath fall on all the congregation of Israel? And that man did not perish alone in his iniquity” (Josh 22:20).

### 2.2.2 The Family in Social Understanding

To a person in ancient Israel, the household was central to understanding one’s individual and corporate identity.<sup>31</sup> This can be seen in the emphasis placed on genealogies and kinship terminologies. Hence, in the previous reference to Achan, we see that he is being identified as “son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah” (Josh 7:18), where Carmi is the father, and Zabdi is the head of the **בֵּית־אָב**, which is part of the clan of Zerah, a tribe of Judah.<sup>32</sup> Leo G. Perdue is right that “Israel’s identity and self-understanding as the people of God frequently are expressed in the titles of members of the household, including members related by kinship and marriage and marginal members as well.”<sup>33</sup> Israelite names show the common use of patronymic references to individuals such as “Laban the son of Nahor” (**לָבָן בֶּן־נָחֹר**; Gen 29:5) and “Rebecca the daughter of Bethuel” (**רֵבֶקָה בַּת־בְּתוּאֵל**; Gen 25:20). On rare occasions, matronymic references are also used such as “Joab the son of Zeruah” (**בֶּן־צְרוּיָה**; 2 Sam 2:13). When a person’s father is dead and he lives with another

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<sup>31</sup> J. Andrew Dearman, “The Family in the Old Testament,” *Interpretation* 52/2 (1998): 118.

<sup>32</sup> David T. Tsumura, “Family in the Historical Books,” in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*, eds. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carrol R. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 61.

<sup>33</sup> Perdue, “Household, Theology, and Contemporary Hermeneutics,” 230.

family, his name becomes associated to the person of this new household he comes under. Hence when Lot's father died and he lived under the care of Abraham, "Lot the son of Haran" (לוֹט בֶּן-הָרָן; Gen 11:31) became "Lot the son of his (Abraham's) brother" (לוֹט בֶּן-אָחִיו; Gen 12:5). Similarly, Esther "the daughter of Abihail" (Est 2:15) was referred to as "his (Mordecai's) uncle's daughter" (Est 2:7) because Mordecai was the one who brought her up since she was an orphan. Israelites also understand their close relationship with Yahweh in kinship terms as reflected in their theophoric names such as Abijah, "my father is Yahweh" (1 Sam 8:2); Ahijah, "my brother is Yahweh" (1 Sam 14:3); and Ammiel, "my kinsman is God" (Num 13:12).<sup>34</sup>

The importance of kinship ties can be seen by its role in the plot of the story in First and Second Samuel. The formation of kinship association can be found between two individuals such as in the covenant between Jonathan and David (1 Sam 20:15–16). It is also evident in the forging of loyalty between two parties, such as when the tribes of Israel pledged their allegiance to David (2 Sam 5:1). Familial expressions are also used in circumstances involving reconciliation. When David had a chance to kill Saul who was going after his life, he spared Saul and addresses Saul as his father in a speech to prove that he has no intention to harm the king (1 Sam 24:11). Similarly, Saul showed

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<sup>34</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, "'Abbā' in the Old Testament?," *JETS* 31 (1988): 393. For more detailed discussions on theophoric names, see Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1928); Ziony Zevit, "A Chapter in the History of Israelite Personal Name," *BASOR* 250 (1983): 1–16; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (Atlanta, GA: Scholar Press, 1986); Jeaneane D. Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names in Ancient Hebrew: A Comparative Study*, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (*JSOTSup* 49; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988); Richard S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11* (*AOAT* 234; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993).

his relenting from killing David by calling David his son (1 Sam 24:16). Kinship terminology is also used in situations of negotiation. When David was offered Saul’s daughter in marriage, he skillfully declined by resorting to lowly family origin (1 Sam 18:18).<sup>35</sup> In 1 Sam 25:6 where David requested for food supplies from Nabal<sup>36</sup>, he appealed to the kinship relationship between them by calling Nabal his brother.<sup>37</sup> More strikingly, familial expressions can be used in a derogatory way. In 1 Sam 22, Saul, in his anger concerning David’s escape and Jonathan’s allegiance to David, spoke of David in dismissive term, calling him the “son of Jesse” in order to highlight his insignificant origin.<sup>38</sup> This term is quickly picked up by the cunning Doeg who sought to curry favor with Saul. Saul’s displeasure with his son’s friendship with David is earlier seen in his use of profane language in a burst of outrage, calling Jonathan “son of a perverse, rebellious woman” (1 Sam 20:30).<sup>39</sup> The use of euphemism in biblical translation obscures (for a good reason) the coarse language in this verse that invokes references to one’s mother in a derogatory way.

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<sup>35</sup> NASB translates יָיָא as “my life” but *HALOT* purports that יָיָא should be read as יָיָא and thus translated as “my kinsmen.”

<sup>36</sup> Halpern suggests that David was running a protection racket (Baruch Halpern, *David’s Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdsman, 2001], 284) but Firth argues that it is a skillfully crafted speech that emphasizes the kinship relationship between David and Nabal (David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, AOTC, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009], 267).

<sup>37</sup> Here, following the reading of Jerome’s Vulgate for לְאָחֵי to be emended to לְאָחֵי (‘‘to my brothers’’).

<sup>38</sup> Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 242.

<sup>39</sup> The NLT translates בֶּן־זִנָּה as “you stupid son of a whore,” whereas the NET note says that “you stupid son of a bitch” would be closer to bringing forth the force of vulgarity in modern-day jargon.



Kinship relationship also plays a huge role in the turn of events surrounding David's life. Many of David's important decisions take into consideration familial ties, the most obvious being that of his dealings with his children, which we will discuss in more detail in a later chapter. After David became king over all Israel, he inquired of Saul's descendants in order to show kindness to them: "Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Sam 9:1). When David was still reigning as king, he spared the life of Joab. However, David instructed his son Solomon to execute Joab's death during his last days (1 Kgs 2:5-6). While political prudence is an obvious consideration on David's part, the matronymic reference of Joab as the son of Zeruah (David's sister) may suggest that kinship relationship is also a factor for David's reluctance to kill Joab himself. It is also interesting to note the two occasions where a parable is used to elicit judgement from David concerning the law, namely the oracle of Nathan (2 Sam 12:1-15) and the story of the wise woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:1-20). Both vignettes are formulated around familial situations to help David see clarity concerning the interpersonal issues involved that he was otherwise unable to see.

While the attention to kinship ties might have been expected in the patriarchal narratives, it is somewhat surprising to find the same attention to kinship ties in the Books of Samuel. However, based on a better understanding of the importance of kinship in the Israelite family, it is easier to understand that events were still intricately attached to familial associations even in the early monarchy. As a result of the institution of monarchy, the traditional family structure faces the threat of disintegration. When

Israel asks for a king, Yahweh tells Samuel what a king will do to them. In 1 Sam 8:10-18, Samuel warns the people that a king will “take” (לָקַח) —he will take their sons (v. 11); he will take their daughters (v. 13); he will take their land (v. 14); he will take their servants (v. 16). The extended speech of Samuel and the repeated use of לָקַח not only serves to warn Israel of the nature of a king, but the extensive reiteration of familial components (sons, daughters, land, servants) underscore the effects that this kingship will have on the family. Essentially, not only will a king take goods, but he will break up the family unit. That the monarchy inevitably impinges on the family becomes evident in David’s dealing with the death of Absalom. There, the king is torn between two roles—that of the king and father—one public and the other private.

Family and its place in society essentially affect the people of Israel in all aspects of their lives. It governs the interpersonal relationship of the nation so much so that a person’s action can have major impact on another person in the community. As a result, a person’s decision has to take into consideration the implication it may have on other kinsman. Familial relationships affect life at so many levels that it naturally finds itself expressed in the language of the people—in names, terminologies and metaphors. Thus, the concept of family becomes an important framework for Israel to understand her own history as well as a metaphor for depicting essential relationships between Yahweh and Israel and even the entire humanity. It is certainly true that “the makeup of the household

provides the primary matrix and language system for the Old Testament writers' theological reflection and articulation."<sup>40</sup>

### 2.3 “Family” as a Framework for Israel’s History

Recent research on ancient Israelite households has helped us understand that “the family and household provide the central symbol about which the ancient Israelites created their cosmion [sic], the world in which members of that society expressed their relationships to each other, to their leaders ... and to their deity.”<sup>41</sup> This is reflected in much of the biblical narratives of the Old Testament, where the telling of Israel’s history is centered on families.

The use of family as a framework for Israel’s history can be seen in Genesis where its composition is built around the structure of genealogies (תולדות). Genesis is in fact a weaving of family history that eventually accounts for the national history of Israel, which we can observe through the accounts of the patriarchs.<sup>42</sup> The characters in the family stories are presented as they are, with stark strengths as well as weaknesses—murder, rape, deceptions, favoritism, and sibling rivalries. As J. Andrew Dearman puts it, “such portraits testify to the fragile nature of the community found in a family, to the

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<sup>40</sup> Perdue, “Household, Theology, and Contemporary Hermeneutics,” 230.

<sup>41</sup> Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, The Biblical Seminar 12, ed. David E. Orton (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1991), 239.

power of human sinfulness to destabilize human relationships, and yet to the mysterious ways in which God works to preserve and bless in spite of human fallibility.”<sup>43</sup>

Hence the grand narrative of Genesis outlines how the world begins with the family of Adam. It traces the preservation of the entire human race through the family of Noah and attributes the birth of a nation to the family of Abraham, where the author is careful to detail the preservation of Sarah’s fidelity as Abraham’s wife. Special attention is given to family feuds. Thus we read of how Cain murdered Abel and of Esau’s anger against Jacob for taking away his birthright and blessing through deception. The author even describes at length the sibling rivalry among Joseph and his brothers and the reconciliation that eventually takes place. In fact, the two longest cycles in Genesis are the ones that narrate Jacob (Gen 25–35) and Joseph (Gen 37–50), and they both talk about fratricidal hatred, forgiveness, and reconciliation.<sup>44</sup>

The plot line regarding the family continues through the Book of Ruth, where the reader is prepared for the coming of King David. The account is narrated through the interrelation between Elimelech’s **בֵּית-אֵב** and Boaz, one the family’s kin. The Book of Ruth shows us how Yahweh sets into motion his great plan for the future of Israel’s monarchy through the life decisions of the protagonists, which are based on covenantal loyalty. The main characters in the narrative embody the Deuteronomic laws of family, kinship, and land—all of which concerns the survival of the family line. The story ends

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<sup>43</sup> Dearman, “The Family in the Old Testament,” 119.

<sup>44</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, “Family in the Pentateuch,” in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*, ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 29–30.

finally with the family of origin that precedes King David. The Book of Ruth acts as a bridge for the theological and historical continuity between the patriarchs and the Davidic dynasty,<sup>45</sup> accomplished through the recounting of Israelite family history.

When we come to the history of Israel's early monarchy recorded in First and Second Samuel, we continue to find the narration of the nation's history through the weaving of accounts surrounding families. First, we read of the continuity of the priesthood through the events concerning the household of Elkanah and the household of Eli. The birth of Samuel is introduced by way of Yahweh's provision in the midst of a family crisis pertaining to Hannah's barrenness. Following that, we are told of the succession of Samuel to the priestly order through another family crisis—that of the failure of Eli to discipline his recalcitrant sons. Subsequently, we also discover that Samuel faced a similar plight regarding wayward sons in his old age because they “did not walk in his ways” (1 Sam 8:3). Incidentally, Saul also had to deal with a son (Jonathan) who would not obey him, though in this case it is for righteous reasons that Jonathan refused to follow his father's instructions.

The section of the story between Saul's reign and David finally establishing himself as king over all Israel is also filled with struggles between the house of Saul and the house of David. As for the time when David becomes king, we see history repeating itself in terms of David's failure to discipline his sons. The reason for trouble in David's family is his adulterous act with Bathsheba, which is an encroachment into the solidarity of Uriah's house (2 Sam 12:10). Such an extended elaboration on the family life of

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<sup>45</sup> Jason Driesbach, “Ruth,” in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary vol.3, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), 500.

David is not something that we would expect to read in the regular annals of kings during that time.<sup>46</sup> Not only does the account of David's dynastic family stand in stark contrast to the ancient Near Eastern king lists in terms of its elaboration on the family life of the king, so also when it is compared to such a biblical account as that of Jehu's dynasty in 2 Kings, the story of David's succession shows distinct attention to details of his family dynamics.

We have seen thus far that unlike many modern societies where individualism is emphasized, ancient Israelite societies were quite different. The identity of an individual Hebrew in biblical times was defined by the family that he or she belonged to. In Israelite culture, a person's career, property, and even burial place was determined by the family into which he or she was born.<sup>47</sup> The regulations governing the Israelite community are built around family structures. As Edesio Sánchez points out, even "the central feast in the Old Testament, the Passover, was a family festival, which took place in the home. The entire context of the ritual was the home, and it was the father who presided."<sup>48</sup> During the Passover meal, it was also the practice for children to ask about the meaning behind this festival, and for the father to recount the redemptive history of the nation. This redemption story revolved around the lives of Israelite families, and the

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<sup>46</sup> Dearman, "The Family in the Old Testament," 122.

<sup>47</sup> Wenham, "Family in the Pentateuch," 20.

<sup>48</sup> Edesio Sánchez, "Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch," in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*, ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 41.

practice was passed on from generation to generation even up to the days of Jesus.<sup>49</sup> In such a society where structure was built around kinship ties, naturally the terminologies and language of kinship became a part of daily conversations.<sup>50</sup> In the same way, family has also become the way by which Hebrew society reflected theologically on their history. Commenting on the importance of the family narratives in Israel's history, James Muilenburg writes,

The traditions of the *Urgeschichte* (Gen. 1–11) from the first man to Abraham are drawn from many sources. Yet all these materials, utterly diverse ... have been fashioned into a family narrative, from first man to first Hebrew, from first Hebrew ... to Israel the people of God. It is a work for which we vainly seek any parallel in the history of world literature.<sup>51</sup>

In the same vein, we will discover in the next section of our discussion that familial relationships also provide images for how the Israelite society conceptualizes interpersonal relationships and the nation's relationship with Yahweh.

#### **2.4 “Family” as Metaphor in the Old Testament**

Not only does “family” provide the framework for understanding Israel's history, it also provides vivid images for metaphorically expressing Israel's relationship with humanity and Yahweh.

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<sup>49</sup> Sánchez, “Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch,” 41.

<sup>50</sup> Robert R. Wilson, “The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 180.

<sup>51</sup> Muilenburg, “Father and Son,” 283–284.

### 2.4.1 “Family” as Metaphor for Humanity

The Genesis account presents the origin of human beings in a very different manner than that found in ancient Near Eastern myths.<sup>52</sup> In the biblical account, man was created by divine design. On the contrary, ancient Near Eastern myths were more concerned with the origin of the deities, and the creation of human beings was merely an afterthought (e.g. *Enuma Elish*) or for the purpose of serving the gods in burdensome labor which the gods themselves would not do (e.g. *Atrahasis*).<sup>53</sup> In addition, the creation account in Genesis distinguishes itself from the other ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies in its emphasis on the creation of not only the male but the female as well.<sup>54</sup> This mention of both genders in Yahweh’s creation is also unique when contrasted with the lack thereof where the creation of the animals was concerned. When Adam encounters Eve for the first time, he calls her “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). This is an expression signifying relationship (cf. Gen 29:14; Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:13).<sup>55</sup> Following this, Gen 2:24 provides the etiology for family by saying that “for this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” It can thus be rightly said that the second chapter of Genesis “concludes with the social institution of marriage” and that “the primordial communal

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<sup>52</sup> See Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible*, ed. Michael L. Barré (CBQ 26; Washington, DC: Catholic Bible Association, 1994) for a discussion on the different creation accounts in the ancient Near East.

<sup>53</sup> John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology* vol. 1: *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 99.

<sup>54</sup> Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, 106.

<sup>55</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 179. See also Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Phil.: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 29 for his treatment on “flesh” with regard to human relationship.



unity of the first two humans ... becomes a paradigm for all marriages.”<sup>56</sup> Hence, by divine design, the climax of Yahweh’s creation is the marital union of a man and a woman.

The word “flesh” eventually signifies more than just nuptial relationship. It is also a kinship terminology for relatives as seen in Gen 29:14. Here, Jacob was instructed by his father to go to the house of Laban (Jacob’s uncle) in Paddan-aram to look for a wife. When they met for the first time, Laban called Jacob his “bone and flesh.” Similarly, in 2 Sam 19:13, David calls his nephew, Amasa, “my bone and my flesh.” In Judges 9:2, the scope of the meaning of “flesh” broadens to include kinship among members of the same clan. During the time of the monarchy, the term “flesh” is used even for intertribal kinship as we find in 2 Sam 5:1. The idea of “flesh” as a term for relationship extends beyond the first couple in Gen 2:24 to eventually include all human beings, indicating that the Old Testament understands all human beings to be of common origin.<sup>57</sup> The purpose of the genealogy in the tenth chapter of Genesis (also known as the “Table of Nations”) is precisely to show that all the different peoples of the world are essentially from one family.<sup>58</sup> This underlines the importance of kinship to the people of ancient Israel. As Carol Meyers aptly puts it, “It is no wonder that biblical genealogies weave a comprehensive fabric of kin relationships for all the family households...

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<sup>56</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, ed. Ben Witherington III, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: University Press, 2009), 61.

<sup>57</sup> N. P. Bratsiotis, “בִּשְׂרִי,” in *TDOT*, trans. John T. Willis, ed. Botterweck, Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Hinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 2:326.

<sup>58</sup> Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies: With Specific Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, SNTS 8, ed. Matthew Black (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 77.

People everywhere tend to think of themselves as kin, or use kinship language to characterize their commonality, if they have some historical experience, standards, and life patterns in common.”<sup>59</sup>

#### 2.4.2 “Family” as Metaphor in Nuptial Terms

As discussed above, the account of human origin in Genesis is understood in familial terms. In addition, the marital union of the first man and woman also employs a nuptial terminology, which is an even more intimate aspect of the family.<sup>60</sup> To be sure, the nuptial metaphor begins in Genesis 2, but it develops later into a metaphor for understanding the intimate relationship between God and his human creatures in the Old Testament.<sup>61</sup> The nuptial metaphor that figuratively presents God as the husband and Israel as his wife are particularly evident in the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea.<sup>62</sup> Using the nuptial metaphor, “the earliest days of God and Israel’s relationship were cast as the period of courtship; the covenant in the wilderness became a marriage; Israel’s idolatry was interpreted as betrayal and adultery; Israel’s estrangement was divorce; and the reunion of God and Israel was reconciliation.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Meyers, “The Family in Early Israel,” 37.

<sup>60</sup> Dennis F. Kinlaw, *Let’s Start with Jesus: A New Way of doing Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 67.

<sup>61</sup> Kinlaw, *Let’s Start with Jesus*, 57.

<sup>62</sup> N. P. Bratsiotis, “שׂוֹן,” in *TDOT*, trans. John T. Willis, ed. Botterweck, Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Hinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 1:230.

<sup>63</sup> Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 26.

Hosea is the first known prophet to utilize the nuptial metaphor for Yahweh's covenantal relationship with his people Israel.<sup>64</sup> Capitalizing on the view that marriage is a covenant between husband and wife, Hosea employs the marital metaphor to highlight Yahweh's relationship with Israel.<sup>65</sup> The nuptial metaphor in Hosea compares Israel's adulteration with the Canaanite gods to an unfaithful wife of harlotry.<sup>66</sup> In particular, the first half of Hosea chapter 2 (Hos 2:2–13) portrays the promiscuous infidelity of Israel as a harlot, but the second half (2:14–23) promises the hope of restoration.<sup>67</sup> The wordplay on **בַּעַל** in 2:16 appropriately underscores the wavering faith of the people of Israel between Yahweh and the Canaanite god, thus making vivid Hosea's nuptial metaphor in indicting Israel's infidelity.<sup>68</sup>

Isaiah picks up the nuptial metaphor in the fifty-fourth chapter, and uses it to offer a word of hope to the people of Israel in exile. In Isa 54:1–10, the earlier mentioned rejected wife (Isa 51:17–20) is now offered the hope of being restored to her husband.<sup>69</sup> It is apparent that Yahweh is the husband in this metaphor, for in verse 5 we read: “For your husband is your Maker, whose name is the LORD of hosts; And your Redeemer is

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<sup>64</sup> J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 34.

<sup>65</sup> Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 50–51.

<sup>66</sup> Irene Kerasote Rallis, “Nuptial Imagery in the Book of Hosea: Israel as the Bride of Yahweh,” *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 34 (1990): 198.

<sup>67</sup> Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 106–107.

<sup>68</sup> Helmer Ringgren, “The Marriage Motif in Israelite Religion,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia, MA: Fortress Press, 1987), 425–426.

<sup>69</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 415.

the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth” (Isa 54:5). In the context of Israel’s history, the hope of restoration refers to the return from exile. William J.

Dumbrell rightly comments:

We learn in these verses of a widowed mother, the wife of Yahweh’s youth, and of the reproach of her youth, which seems to have been the period before the call of Israel in Egypt. The shame of her widowhood seems to be a direct reference to the exile. Zion, in whom the hopes for Israel have been gathered together, is depicted as a woman who was espoused in her youth, cast off because of her sin, but then recalled to the status of a wife. In this personification is a direct reference to Sinai since marriage is a frequent prophetic metaphor for the covenant.<sup>70</sup>

Jeremiah also uses marriage as a root metaphor in Jeremiah 2–3.<sup>71</sup> Jeremiah first portrays Israel as Yahweh’s bride in Jer 2:2, whose subsequent infidelity is delineated by the triple use of the word “forsake” (Jer 2:13, 17, 19).<sup>72</sup> As an unfaithful wife, Israel has turned from “following after” Yahweh in her youth (2:2) to “following after” foreign gods (2:5 and 8).<sup>73</sup> The message of Jeremiah 3:1–4:4 changes from a tone of indictment to a tone that entreats Israel to “return” (3:1, 7, 10, 12, 14, 22; 4:1) to Yahweh. In light of the Deuteronomic law on divorce (Deut 24:1–4) that prohibits the first husband from taking back the wife who has defiled herself in a second relationship, this metaphor must have shocked the reader to see that Yahweh’s love compels him to break even the

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<sup>70</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 121.

<sup>71</sup> A. R. Pete Diamond and Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Unfaithful Passions: Coding Women and Coding Men in Jeremiah 2–3 (4:2),” *Biblical Interpretation* 4 (1996), 291.

<sup>72</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25: To Pluck Up, To Tear Down*, ITC, ed. Fredrick Carlson Holmgren and George A. F. Knight (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 31–38.

<sup>73</sup> Gary E. Yates, “Jeremiah’s Message of Judgment and Hope for God’s Unfaithful ‘Wife’,” *Bib Sac* 167 (2010): 146.

Torah.<sup>74</sup> It is intentional that Jeremiah “employed the graphic imagery of the promiscuous wife for emotive effect, attempting to waken the people out of their spiritual stupor so that they might see the extent of their sinfulness”—and I would add the extent of Yahweh’s love—“and change their ways.”<sup>75</sup>

Ezekiel recounts the history of Israel by first portraying her as an unwanted child abandoned by her Amorite father and Hittite mother (Ezek 16:3–5). When Yahweh finds her, he takes care of her until she grows up and then takes her as his wife, exalting her to the position of royalty (Ezek 16:6–14). However, like an adulterous wife, Israel prostitutes herself among the foreigners (Ezek 16:15–34). The nuptial metaphor is employed here to demonstrate that Yahweh sees his election of Israel and his covenantal relationship with her comparable to that of a marriage.<sup>76</sup> Israel’s harlotry thus refers to her alliances with the foreign nations of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon instead of trust in Yahweh’s care.<sup>77</sup>

The nuptial metaphor very aptly describes the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as husband and wife. The marital bond connotes vivid images of loyalty and fidelity, and invokes powerful emotions of love and jealousy. As Renita J. Weems puts it:

The marriage metaphor had the potential to bring coherence to a host of unstated assumptions and imperceptible rules that shaped behavior, attitudes, and reactions, which communities share and by which they governed themselves. Moreover, the subplots of love, sex, and jealousy, which the marriage metaphor invariably

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<sup>74</sup> Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 40–41.

<sup>75</sup> Yates, “Jeremiah’s Message of Judgment and Hope for God’s Unfaithful ‘Wife’,” 146.

<sup>76</sup> Kinlaw, *Let’s Start with Jesus*, 57.

<sup>77</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 497.

propels upon the divine-human drama, introduced an element of unpredictability to the affairs of God and Israel that other metaphors could not paraphrase... As a controlling metaphor, therefore, the marriage metaphor has the symbolic potential to illuminate a range of behavior the prophets saw as characteristic of, but more specifically as idiosyncratic to, Israel's history with God.<sup>78</sup>

Nuptial metaphor is scarce in the Books of Samuel. The terms “bride” and “husband” appear in 2 Sam 17:3 if we follow the LXX. Thus the New Living Translation renders the first part of the verse as “and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride returns to her husband.” Other than this, we may also consider verses where inferences are made concerning the human genitals. Saul, in his outrage towards Jonathan, considers his son's allegiance to his enemy David a choice “to the shame of your mother's nakedness” (1 Sam 20:30). In Hebrew, עֲרֹוֹת often refers to genitals, but here it should be understood euphemistically as a means of using coarse language to shame someone.<sup>79</sup> In 1 Sam 25:22 (and also v. 34), the Hebrew word for which the English translations render as “one male” or “one man” is the participle of שִׁי, which literally means “one who urinates against the wall.”

Apparently, the use of nuptial metaphors in 1 and 2 Samuel are not only scarce but also of little significance to the overall plot of the story. However, this should not obscure the importance of marriage as a major theme in the story particularly in terms of polygamy and adultery. While polygamy is not new in David's time, David sets the precedence for the accumulation of many wives which his son Solomon took to new

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<sup>78</sup> Weems, *Battered Love*, 26.

<sup>79</sup> David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 520.

levels after him.<sup>80</sup> In addition, the story of David's adultery with Bathsheba is key to understanding the consequences of the troubles that followed in his family as announced by Nathan: "Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife" (2 Samuel 12:10). Incidentally, the nuptial metaphor in the Old Testament is used primarily in the negative sense. As seen above, the prophets use the marital metaphor to indict Israel of the sin of adultery against Yahweh. While David committed adultery physically with a woman, the kings of Israel committed adultery metaphorically with foreign nations and foreign deities.

### 2.4.3 "Family" as Metaphor for the Nation of Israel

The father figure plays an important role both in the private and the public domain of the Israelite community.<sup>81</sup> Besides the natural meaning of one's biological father, we find in the Old Testament the use of "father" in a metaphorical sense in order to honor someone of superior status in relation to another person.<sup>82</sup> A person in higher authority can be referred to as "father." We find, for example, the servants of Naaman addressing him as "father" in 2 Kings 5:13. Similarly, David also calls Saul his "father" in 1 Sam 24:11, though arguably David is Saul's son-in-law. Also, a protégé can address his

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<sup>80</sup> Levenson and Halpern argue for political motives behind David's marriage, though admitting that it is only speculative. See Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *JBL* 99 (1980): 507-518.

<sup>81</sup> Eva Maria Lassen, "Family as Metaphor: Family Images at the Time of the Old Testament and Early Judaism," *SJOT* 6 (1992): 249.

<sup>82</sup> James Earl Harriman, "Our Father in Heaven: The Dimensions of Divine Paternity in Deuteronomy," PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005 provides a detailed discussion on the use of "father" as metaphor.

mentor as “father,” as seen in the relationship between Elisha and Elijah in 2 Kings 2:12. The Jews in particular understood Abraham to be the father of the nation (Gen 17:4).

The Old Testament is not lacking in the use of “mother” in the metaphorical sense. For example, Eve is referred to as the “mother” of all human beings (Gen 3:20). Sarah, Abraham’s consort, shares in her husband’s status and is known as the “mother” of nations (Gen 17:16). As the protector and deliverer of Israel during the time of the Judges, Deborah considers herself a “mother” of Israel.<sup>83</sup> Finally, it is worthwhile to note that cities in the Old Testament also bear the metaphor of “mother” (2 Sam 20:19; Isa 66:12).<sup>84</sup>

From the above, we see that the Old Testament uses “father” and “mother” in the metaphorical sense to refer to persons and sometimes cities. More significantly, as we shall see below, is the use of parental references to the relationship between and Yahweh and his people. Given the centrality of the family in the nation of Israel, it is not surprising to find the use of family as a metaphor for describing Israel’s relationship to Yahweh, particularly in depicting Israel as the son of Yahweh.

The Old Testament is reticent to speak of Yahweh as father in the contexts of cultic practices.<sup>85</sup> This is probably due to Israel’s rejection of the concept of divine parenthood, a notion prevalent in the pagan and mythological practices in the nations

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<sup>83</sup> Lassen, “Family as Metaphor,” 250. But see Lawson G. Stone, “Judges,” in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary vol.3, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), p.262 for a different opinion. Stone understands Deborah as identifying herself with the people in light of the context which is a song of celebration.

<sup>84</sup> Lassen, “Family as Metaphor,” 250–251.

<sup>85</sup> Though it is interesting to note the extant of theophoric names that attributes Yahweh as father such as Abijah “Yahweh is my father” (1 Sam 8:2); Abiel “El is my father” (1 Sam 9:1); Joab “Yahweh is father” (2 Sam 2:13); and Eliab “El is father” (Num 1:9).



surrounding her.<sup>86</sup> Christopher Wright comments: “In the polytheistic environment, gods and goddesses engaged in sexual congress and gave birth to all kinds of phenomena, including some nations. The monotheistic faith of Israel rejected such a view of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel.”<sup>87</sup> Although the Old Testament does not speak of the Israelites as physical descendants of Yahweh, it does infrequently describe Yahweh as Israel’s “father.” But it does so metaphorically, emphasizing parental roles rather than primogeniture. The notion of Yahweh as “father” is an important concept for understanding Israel’s relationship with Yahweh across the Old Testament.<sup>88</sup>

Even before Israel was a nation and Yahweh’s people were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, we already have the metaphor of God as father. In Exodus 3, Yahweh appears to Moses in a burning bush and gives Moses his mission of leading his people out of the land of Egypt. Predicating the instruction to ask Pharaoh to let his people go, Yahweh tells Moses to say, “Israel is my son, my firstborn...let my son go” (Ex 4:22–23). Here we see Yahweh depicting himself as Israel’s father. Later, coming right out of Egypt, Yahweh describes his historic act of deliverance using the image of an eagle, telling his people that “you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself” (Ex 19:4).<sup>89</sup> The picture depicted here is that

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<sup>86</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing God the Father Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 22.

<sup>87</sup> Wright, *Knowing God the Father*, 22.

<sup>88</sup> See Abera Mitiku Mengestu, “God as Father in Paul: A Study of Kinship Language and Identity Formation in Early Christianity,” PhD diss., Brite Divinity School, 2011 for a detailed discussion on Yahweh as the father of Israel.

<sup>89</sup> I take this as an imagery for “father” since the noun אֱלֹהֵינוּ is masculine.

of an eagle, catching its falling offspring on its wings when the little nestling is learning to fly.<sup>90</sup>

In Deuteronomy, the metaphor of Yahweh as Israel's father is very evident (1:31; 8:5; 14:1; 32:6, 18–19). Appearing near the beginning of the book, Yahweh's leading of his people through the wilderness is portrayed as a father carrying his son (1:31). The word here for "carry" (נָשָׂא) is incidentally the same word used of the eagle bearing its young from Ex 19:4 and again in Deut 32:11. In addition, we see that the use of נָשָׂא is a deliberate choice on the part of the author of Deuteronomy. The description of the father carrying (נָשָׂא) the son is a contrast to Moses' earlier complaint that he alone is not able to bear (נָשָׂא) the burden of the people by himself (Deut 1:9 and 12). Eugene Merrill claims that "without doubt Exodus 19:4-6 is the most theologically significant text in the book of Exodus, for it is the linchpin between the patriarchal promises of the sonship of Israel and the Sinaitic Covenant whereby Israel became the servant nation of Yahweh."<sup>91</sup>

In Deut 8:5, we see another side to the imagery of Yahweh as Israel's father. Here, Yahweh is said to be disciplining Israel just as a father disciplines his son. The context here is the wilderness experience. The disobedience of the people of Israel in the wilderness, as we know, had grave consequences. The word for discipline here is מוֹסֵר. It is also the same word used in Deut 21:18 where the parents testify to having already

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<sup>90</sup> William H. Gispén, *Exodus*, trans. Ed van der Maas (BSC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 179.

<sup>91</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 32.

disciplined their recalcitrant son. While Deut 1:31 depicts a loving and nurturing father, Deut 8:5 provides an additional angle for understanding the father-son image. On one hand, the father is responsible for loving and caring for his son. On the other hand, when the son is disobedient, the father is also required to discipline him. Just as in the imagery of the father carrying the son, Yahweh cared for his people in their journey through the desert. However, when the people refused to obey him and enter the land, Yahweh disciplined them.

Deut 14:1 begins by addressing Israel as “the sons of Yahweh your God.” It is then followed by a law prohibiting pagan practices. Self-mutilation and the shaving of foreheads are Canaanite funeral rites, and they are associated with idolatry.<sup>92</sup> Two things need to be mentioned here. First, the command given in this verse is undoubtedly expected to be adhered to. This brings us to another aspect of the father-son relationship imagery—that the relationship is one that is based on obedience. Second, the issue of obedience here is not mere coercion and compliance. Because this command concerns idolatrous practices, something deeper than mere compliance is involved here.

Essentially, “to indulge in the pagan rite is simply using a specific way of denying the fundamental relation to Yahweh.”<sup>93</sup> Therefore, obedience here is necessary to ensure the continuation of the father-son relationship. Deut 14:1 emphasizes that Israelites, as Yahweh’s children, should distinguish themselves from their pagan neighbors,

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<sup>92</sup> John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan: the Ras Shamra texts and their relevance to the Old Testament* (SuppVT 5; Leiden: Brill, 1965), 252.

<sup>93</sup> Dennis J. McCarthy, “Notes of the Love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-Son Relationship Between Yahweh and Israel,” *CBQ* 27/2 (1965): 146.

particularly in terms of the mourning for the dead. The basis for this is the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel whom Yahweh had chosen for his own possession (Deut 14:2).

The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 uses familial metaphors to address Yahweh's relationship with Israel (vv. 5–6, 18–20). Nevertheless, the health of this relationship is threatened when Israel chooses to disobey Yahweh and becomes unfaithful to him (vv. 19–25). At the outset, Moses announces that the Israelites are “a perverse and crooked generation” who has “acted corruptly” towards Yahweh (32:5). Moses then questions the congruence of their behavior to their status as Yahweh's children (32:6). The song continues with a call to remember the days when Yahweh took care of them (32:7–14). However, Yahweh's people turned towards idolatry and the worship of other gods (32:15–17). Moses then indicts Israel using the parent-child metaphor. Verse 18 says that Israel has forgotten the God who has given birth to her, and verse 19, calling Israel Yahweh's sons and daughters, says that they have provoked him to anger. In Deut 32, the author mixes the metaphors of “rock” and “eagle” to give an even fuller picture of Yahweh as Israel's father.<sup>94</sup> Understood in the context of deliverance from Egypt, the Song of Moses poetically portrays Yahweh as a father who metaphorically “birthed” this people and saved them from slavery.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Harriman, in his dissertation “Our Father in Heaven,” pp.155–194 has convincingly argued this point.

<sup>95</sup> Harriman, “Our Father in Heaven,” 162.

In the Davidic promise in 2 Sam 7 we also find the father-son relationship being established between Yahweh and David's descendants.<sup>96</sup> After Yahweh had given David rest from all his enemies, David had the intention of building a house/temple (בַּיִת) for Yahweh. Instead, Yahweh promises David that he will build a house/dynasty (בַּיִת) for David. Although the term בְּרִית is not to be found here, it has been understood as a covenant based on later references (1 Kgs 8:23; Isa 55:3; Jer 33:20–21; Ps 89:4, 29, 35, 40; 132:12; 2 Chron 6:14; 7:18; 13:5; 21:7) and particularly from David's own perspective in his last words (2 Sam 23:5).<sup>97</sup> The phrase in 2 Sam 7:14—"I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me"—is regarded as an ancient Near Eastern adoption formula (cf. Ex 4:22; Jer 3:4, 19; Ps 2:7; 89:27f; 1 Chron 22:10; 28:6).<sup>98</sup> Fensham thus claims that we can "establish without doubt that in 2 Sam 7:14 'father' is used as a covenant term."<sup>99</sup> Although this covenant is made between Yahweh and David, it is important to realize that the emphasis is on the enduring nature of the Davidic line, not on an individual person or king.<sup>100</sup> It is interesting to note that earlier in the patriarchal narratives, Yahweh was "father" to a people, but during David's time, it was narrowed down to the descendants of a particular person. It was out of this covenantal

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<sup>96</sup> The same incident is recounted in 1 Chron 17:13; 22:10; and 28:6.

<sup>97</sup> Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: a Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977)107-108.

<sup>98</sup> Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel*, 108. The issue of adoption formula will be discussed in more details in chapter four.

<sup>99</sup> Fensham, "Father and Son as Terminology for Treaty and Covenant," 130.

<sup>100</sup> John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 25.

relationship between Yahweh and the descendants of David that the idea of royal messianism was born.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, Gerald Cooke is right to note that “the figure of Israel’s sonship appears to have offered the main content for the Davidic divine sonship.”<sup>102</sup> In the same vein, Diane Chen concurs that “the sonship of Israel’s king cannot be understood apart from the sonship of Israel ... the familial image of a father and his children is corporate by nature. God is first and foremost the Father of a people, among whom the king occupies a special place.”<sup>103</sup>

The metaphor of Yahweh as father can also be found in the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Malachi.<sup>104</sup> Most scholars agree that Isa 63:7–64:11 is a community lament and that 63:15 begins the lament proper.<sup>105</sup> In the attempt to call Yahweh into action, the author invokes the metaphor of Yahweh as Israel’s father. More shockingly, calling Yahweh “father” is done to the extent of renouncing Abraham and Israel (i.e. Jacob) as the nation’s fathers. Referring to Yahweh as “father” picks up the familial metaphor found earlier in v. 8 where Yahweh already spoke of Israel as his children.<sup>106</sup> Near the end of the lament (64:8), the author once again employs the

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<sup>101</sup> Roland E. Murphy, “Notes on Old Testament Messianism and Apologetics,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 19 (1957): 7.

<sup>102</sup> Gerald Cooke, “The Israelite King as Son of God,” *ZAW* 73 (1961): 225.

<sup>103</sup> Diane G. Chen, *God as Father in Luke-Acts*, SBL 92, ed. Hemchand Gossai (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2006), 104.

<sup>104</sup> Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10.

<sup>105</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 603 & 611.

<sup>106</sup> Mengestu, “God as Father in Paul,” 184.

metaphor of Yahweh as father, recognizing that he is the creator (potter) and they his creation (clay).

We have already mentioned above that Jeremiah 3 uses the nuptial metaphor. However, this chapter is also marked by the occurrence of other familial terminologies. In particular let us look at the two references that speak metaphorically of Yahweh as father (3:4 & 19). The message of the prophet in Jeremiah 3 is the urging of Israel to repent of her ways and return to Yahweh.<sup>107</sup> Twice Yahweh refers to Israel as “faithless sons” and calls her to “return” (3:14 & 22). To be sure, שׁוּב is a keyword in Jer 3 for portraying on one hand Israel’s turning away from Yahweh and, on the other hand, Yahweh’s yearning for Israel’s return. Yahweh reminds Israel that he is her father (3:4), and looks forward to the day when she will call him “father” again (3:19). Walter Brueggemann aptly paints for the reader what the prophet Jeremiah intends to convey:

The poet portrays for us a parent who has labored and dreamed for the glorious day when the child will be old enough, responsible enough, and responsive enough to receive all that has been saved for the child from the beginning. The father wants to give the child this inheritance even more than the child wants to receive it. But the moment of gift never comes, because the child neither knows nor cares. The wounded father is left with the shambles of hard work and broken dreams and knows the bitter combination of deep hurt and heavy resentment.<sup>108</sup>

Although there are only two explicit references to Yahweh as Israel’s father in Malachi (Mal 1:6; 2:10), this theme “runs through Malachi’s prophecy.”<sup>109</sup> In Mal 1:6,

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<sup>107</sup> VanGemenen, “‘Abbā’ in the Old Testament?,” 396.

<sup>108</sup> Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 43–44.

<sup>109</sup> Richard A. Taylor & E. Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, NAC vol. 21A, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 324.

the prophet uses the idiom “a son honors his father” to indict the priests precisely for their lack of respect for Yahweh. Based on the accepted norm that a son should honor his father,<sup>110</sup> Yahweh rebukes the priests for the contempt they show towards him. The use of the paternal metaphor here highlights the expected attitude and behavior that the priests should have towards Yahweh who is a “father” to them. While Mal 1:6 addresses one’s proper response to Yahweh, Mal 2:10 emphasizes the right behavior that one should have towards another in Yahweh’s covenanted community—hence the rhetorical question of “do we not all have one father?” The improper behavior that is underscored here is faithlessness (בְּיָדָיִם), found concentrated in the section here (Mal 2:10, 11, 14, 15 & 16) but nowhere else in Malachi.<sup>111</sup> The two specific examples of faithlessness are found in verses 11 and 14, and they are both related to marital issues. While scholars are divided concerning the meaning of verse 11,<sup>112</sup> the familial context here is clear, especially since the indictment in verse 10 literally concerns “a man against his brother” in Hebrew. The metaphor here implies that the Israelites are spiritual siblings from one and the same father: Yahweh.<sup>113</sup>

One final occurrence of Yahweh as Israel’s “father” needs to be mentioned. This is found in Hosea 11. Hosea 11 is Yahweh’s divine speech concerning Israel. The speech opens in a remarkable way because Yahweh speaks about his love (בְּרַחֲמָיו) for

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<sup>110</sup> Taylor & Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, 262.

<sup>111</sup> Martin A. Shields, “Syncretism and Divorce in Malachi 2, 10-16,” *ZAW* 111 (1999): 69.

<sup>112</sup> See Ralph L. Smith, *Micah—Malachi*, WBC vol. 32, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 321–325 for a detailed discussion on the various views.

<sup>113</sup> Taylor & Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, 324.



Israel in the first person and calls Israel his son (v. 1). In the speech, Yahweh continues to describe himself as a father who trains his child to walk (v. 3). It is unclear whether verse 4 continues with the human imagery or whether it has switched to an imagery involving animals. In any case, the picture of Yahweh tenderly leading and feeding is clear. On the other hand, Israel is depicted as persistently rebellious (v. 2) and obstinately willful (v. 7). Verse 8 expresses the height of Yahweh's emotional struggle. This internal turmoil is described using the Niphal of  $\text{פָּדַח}$ . In the end, Yahweh's compassion takes over (v. 8) and he does not execute the punishment due Israel (vv. 9–11). In light of the capital punishment required of the recalcitrant son (Deut 21:18–21), like Yahweh the “husband” in Jer 3, Yahweh the “father” (who is “God, not man”; v. 9) hereby breaks another Deuteronomic law because of his love for his “son” Israel.

In summary, the metaphor of Yahweh as “father” first emphasizes that the formation of Israel as a people and nation finds its cause in Yahweh. As Israel's “father”, Yahweh expresses care but also expects obedience. When Israel disobeys, Yahweh urges her to return to him. If Israel does not listen, Yahweh will discipline her, though his love constrains him from meting out capital punishment. Second, Yahweh being the “father” of all emphasizes the kinship ties among the people of Israel. The understanding of this familial relationship governs the behavior of the community in how they should treat one another.

More can be said of the family metaphor that depicts Israel as a child in relation to Yahweh, such as the occasional portrayal of Yahweh as mother (e.g. Num 11:12 and Isa

66:13) or Jerusalem as daughter (e.g. Isa 1:8 and Mic 4:8).<sup>114</sup> Suffice it to say that family is an important metaphor for Israel in understanding her relationship to Yahweh.

## 2.5 Conclusion

There are a few conclusions we can draw from our study thus far. First, the family is central to the governance of the people. This is seen in the need for solidarity at different levels of the kinship organization—the household, the clan, and the tribe. Second, the centrality of the family permeates the language of the people in its common day use. Most evidently, familial language is used in names, kinship terminologies, the forging of relational ties, negotiations, and even coarse language. Third, family is the framework for Israel in the recounting of history. Israel's history is narrated in familial settings and through familial narratives. Fourth, through the use of familial metaphors the social reality of the family became a paradigm for theologizing Israel's relationship to Yahweh and the rest of humanity.

To summarize the discussion to this point, I shall quote the words of Perdue:

Throughout its history, ancient Israel's major understandings of God, creation, the nation, the nations, and morality were forged in large part by the social character and experience of the family household. Many of the key metaphors for imaging God, Israel, the land and the nations originated in the household... Major metaphors for Israel's self-presentation were drawn from household roles... These are the principal theological metaphors that demonstrate how very important the social reality of the household became for theological reflection and articulation in the Old Testament.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> See Perdue, "Household, Theology, and Contemporary Hermeneutics," 223–257 for a detailed discussion.

<sup>115</sup> Perdue, "Household, Theology, and Contemporary Hermeneutics," 225.

## CHAPTER 3

### HOUSE TO HOUSE

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we have seen how the centrality of family forms the framework for Israel in her self-identification and understanding of history. In addition, the social reality of the family provides a paradigm for theologizing Israel's relationship to Yahweh and the rest of humanity through the use of familial metaphors. We have already mentioned a number of familial metaphors in the last chapter, but I have intentionally kept the metaphor of the house (בַּיִת) to be discussed here because of its important role in the Books of Samuel. This chapter will focus on the study of בַּיִת as a keyword with regard to its usage in First and Second Samuel both literally and metaphorically.

In the Old Testament, בַּיִת is used primarily in the sense of "house," as in a physical building structure (e.g. Gen 33:17).<sup>116</sup> If the occupant of the building is a king, בַּיִת can be translated as "palace" (e.g. "the king's house" in Jer 39:8). If the building is constructed for a deity, then בַּיִת can be translated as "temple" (e.g. "the house of

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<sup>116</sup> Gerald G. Wilson, "בַּיִת," in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 1:655.

Yahweh” in Dan 1:2).<sup>117</sup> Spatially, בַּיִת can denote part of a large house such as a “banquet hall” (Est 7:8, literally “the house of the drinking of wine”), some sort of habitat (e.g. Job 17:13, Sheol and Job 8:14, spider web), or even the general sense of “inside” (e.g. Ex 28:26).<sup>118</sup> When referring to persons, בַּיִת can mean family (Gen 30:30), clan (Gen 24:38), or tribe (e.g. “the house of Eli” in 1 Sam 3:14). In the instance where the head of the house is a king, בַּיִת can refer to “dynasty” (as in “the house of David” 2 Sam 7:11).<sup>119</sup> Finally, בַּיִת can simply refer to the things in the house or one’s estate and possessions (Ex 20:17).<sup>120</sup>

### 3.2 Houses in First and Second Samuel

It should be obvious, even to the casual reader, how בַּיִת (“house”) is an important concept in the Books of Samuel. בַּיִת occurs 176 times in First and Second Samuel<sup>121</sup>, but more importantly the emphasis of the word and the possible meanings that it can refer to makes בַּיִת a keyword in the narrative. A survey of the Books of Samuel

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<sup>117</sup> Harry A. Hoffner, “בַּיִת,” in *TDOT*, ed. Botterweck, Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Hinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:111–113.

<sup>118</sup> Hoffner, “בַּיִת,” 113.

<sup>119</sup> So Hoffner (p. 114), who posits that “if the ancestor after whom the house was named was a king, we should translate the word *bayith* ‘dynasty’.” But strictly speaking, a dynasty requires a succession of kings from the same family.

<sup>120</sup> Hoffner, “בַּיִת,” 115.

<sup>121</sup> Since the first two chapters of 1 Kings are considered part of the Succession Narrative, there are seven more occurrences of בַּיִת in addition to the 176 occurrences in 1 and 2 Samuel.

tells the reader that special attention is given to material houses because some of the most grievous sins of murder and rape, as we shall see, took place at home. Special houses such as the palace and temples of Yahweh and other deities also play important roles in the story. Similarly, the stories of families, clans, and tribes are materials for the recounting of Israel's early monarchy. With the introduction of the monarchy, the meaning of **בֵּית** as dynasty becomes possible where before the existence of kings such a rendition is hardly necessary. Now that we have a broad picture of the use of **בֵּית** in First and Second Samuel, let us look at it in more detail.

### **3.2.1 Family Stories**

The Books of Samuel concern three main characters—Samuel, Saul, and David. The family stories of these three characters became materials for the narrator in selecting and weaving together the history of Israel's early monarchy. A common pattern can be seen in the stories of these three characters in where they came from, how they were Yahweh's elect, and how they related to their descendants. The three components in the patterning of Samuel, Saul, and David are all familial in nature. First, there is a reference to the character's family of origin. Second, the appointment of the character to office is set in a familial situation. Third, there is evidence that the character has problems with his son/sons. The narrator is also careful to delineate the interrelationship of these three characters by showing how the events surrounding the appointment of each character into office are linked to the failure of his predecessor.

It is interesting to note that the beginning of the history of Israel's early monarchy is set in a story surrounding the house (i.e. the family line) of Elkanah "the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite" (1 Sam 1:1). Without delay, the narrator lays out the crisis faced by this family—a household crisis involving Elkanah's two wives (Peninnah and Hannah) where one was barren (1 Sam 1:2). Following immediately, the narrator draws the reader's attention to the first scene where this story takes place: in the house of the LORD (1 Sam 1:3–7). Year after year, Hannah, the barren wife of Elkanah, would go to the house of the LORD to pray for a child. Subsequently, when Samuel was born to her, Hannah dedicated him to the LORD and Samuel ministered in the house of the LORD. Thus the story begins with the family origin of Samuel wherein the narrator intentionally shows that Samuel's appointment to office was intended by Yahweh. In the text it is mentioned twice concerning Hannah that "the LORD had closed her womb" (1 Sam 1:5, 6). This phrase is significant when compared to other women in the Old Testament because a woman without child is typically described as "barren" (Gen 11:30).<sup>122</sup> Here it is clear that the narrator stresses Yahweh's initiative in the conception of Samuel, reinforced by the circumstances surrounding Hannah's intimacy with her husband (1 Sam 1:19) and the naming of the child (1 Sam 1:20). After birth, Samuel's call to ministry is described at length (1 Sam 2:18–21 and 3:1–21) and he is confirmed as Yahweh's prophet (3:20). The call took place in Yahweh's house, and his first prophetic oracle concerns the devastating outcome of Eli's family. Samuel's accomplishment is also seen through his efforts to secure peace

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<sup>122</sup> David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham (*AOT* 8; Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 55.

for Israel against the Philistines. The portrayal of Samuel in the text is for the most part positive. In his own words, Samuel claims not to have taken (קָבַץ) anything from the people by fraud (1 Sam 12:3) against his earlier warning of what a king will do to them (1 Sam 8:10–18). Samuel’s assertion of innocence is in turn validated by the people (1 Sam 12:4–5). Although it is not explicitly mentioned whether it was through any fault of his, it is simply stated that Samuel’s sons “did not walk in his ways” (1 Sam 8:3, 5).

Saul’s family of origin is told in similar fashion as Samuel’s, beginning with his father Kish “the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite” (1 Sam 9:1). Saul’s divine appointment to office is also set in a family “crisis,” though one of lesser degree. The donkeys of Saul’s family were lost, and his father sent him out with a servant to look for them. It seems strange at first that the narrative elaborates extensively on Saul’s travel involving the three-day search through many places, some whose names appear only once in the Old Testament. Eventually the narrator leads the reader to realize that Yahweh had engineered the whole event to bring Saul to Samuel (1 Sam 9:15–16). Eventually, Saul was anointed as king over Israel by Samuel (1 Sam 10:1) and later presented to the people (1 Sam 10:17–27). What seemed at the outset to be some kind of domestic problem turns out to be Yahweh’s design for appointing Saul as king.

Saul also had issues with one of his sons, Jonathan, who knowingly or unknowingly disobeyed him. On one occasion, Saul almost brought about the death of Jonathan because he put his men under a foolish oath of abstaining from food (1 Sam 14:24–46). Although Jonathan did not follow Saul’s order out of ignorance, notice that

he openly showed his disapproval of Saul's order when he realized what happened: "My father has troubled the land" (1 Sam 14:29). Saul's problem with his son, Jonathan, is further intricately connected to his problem with David, his son-in-law. On more than one occasion, Jonathan acted against his father's desire and protected his friend David from Saul who sought to kill David. When Saul announced his desire to kill David, Jonathan became an informant for David in Saul's court (1 Sam 19:1-7). During the king's new moon feast, Jonathan covered up for David's absence at the meal (1 Sam 20:28). This made Saul so angry that he cursed Jonathan using familial language (1 Sam 20:30), after which Jonathan left the feast burning with anger (1 Sam 20:34). The next day, Jonathan secretly met David and warned him to run away. Jonathan's allegiance to David was done in open defiance against his father. Saul knew about it (1 Sam 20:30), and Jonathan knew that his father was aware of it (1 Sam 23:17).

The account of David's family of origin is also mentioned though it differs slightly from that of Samuel and Saul. The narrator's presentation of David's ancestry is briefer, mentioning only his father, Jesse the Bethlehemite (1 Sam 16:1). An explanation for this can be suggested in terms of narrational artistry. If we follow the book order of the Hebrew Bible, Ruth does not come before Samuel. Thus we would have no clue as to who the character of Jesse was. Similarly, the name David would also not have been mentioned up to this point if we read the Hebrew Bible beginning from Genesis. Hence I believe that the narrator intentionally withheld the revelation of Yahweh's choice of Israel's king par excellence to hold the reader in suspense as to who was this person that would eventually replace Saul. This is reinforced by the other difference in the family of



origin where the names of David's brothers are mentioned. Again, going down the name list creates the suspense for the final revelation of the true protagonist. This also shows the family situation surrounding David's appointment as king. The passing over of David by Jesse hints at the father's common oversight of his youngest son. David, being slighted by his oldest brother Eliab when he took up the challenge to fight Goliath gives us further insights into his brother's view of him (1 Sam 17:28). In light of how Jesse and Eliab treated David, it is reasonable to suspect that there might be tension within the family among the siblings.

In terms of relationship with his sons, the narrator shows the weak side of David in his failure to discipline them. With regard to Amnon, the LXX and Qumran add "But he did not grieve the spirit of Amnon his son, because he loved him, since he was his firstborn" to 2 Sam 13:21, referring to David not taking any action to discipline Amnon for raping Tamar. As for Adonijah, it is said that "his father had never grieved him at any time by asking, 'Why have you done so?'" (וְלֹא־עִצְבוֹ אָבִיו מִיָּמָיו לְאֹמֶר מַדּוּעַ) עֲשִׂיתָ כִּכָּהֶן; 1 Kgs 1:6).<sup>123</sup> When it comes to Absalom, David similarly failed to take disciplinary actions against his misconducts. After Absalom murdered his brother Amnon, David did nothing but vacillate between his longing for Absalom (2 Sam 13:39) and his unwillingness to see him (2 Sam 14:24).

Besides the similarities in family situation among Samuel, Saul, and David, the rise of one person to appointment is intricately connected to the failure of the previous

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<sup>123</sup> Holladay glosses over עִצַּב as "find fault with;" LXX translates as "restrain" (ἀπεκώλυσει). The basic idea is that David had never disciplined his son Adonijah.

person in his role as a father. We have already seen how Samuel's call to prophetic office began with an oracle concerning Eli's family. The particular indictment against Eli was his failure to discipline his sons (1 Sam 3:13). The narrator is careful to link Eli's failure and the coming of Samuel into office clearly for the reader. First, there is the connection using the word "worthless" (בְּלִיעֵל). Just as Eli mistook Hannah for a "worthless woman" (בַּת־בְּלִיעֵל, 1 Sam 1:16; literally "daughter of worthlessness") while she was actually fervently praying for a child, his own sons were described by the narrator as "worthless men" (בְּנֵי בְּלִיעֵל; 1 Sam 2:12; literally "sons of worthlessness"). The play on the word "worthless" inevitably links the birth of Samuel to the death of Eli's sons. Another word that connects the events of Samuel's birth and the death of Eli's sons is the word "honor" (כְּבוֹד). The word כְּבוֹד first appears in Hannah's song after Yahweh granted her Samuel (1 Sam 2:8). The same word is used by a man of God in indicting Eli for honoring his sons more than Yahweh (1 Sam 2:29). Incidentally, a play on the same word appears again at the end of Eli's life and the birth of his grandson. At the news of his son's death and the capture of the Ark by the Philistines, Eli died from a fall because he was old and heavy (כָּבֵד, 1 Sam 4:18). The compound news of deaths and the loss of the Ark also resulted in the death of Eli's daughter-in-law when she was delivering Phinehas's son, and the newborn was named Ichabod (אִי־כְבוֹד, 1 Sam 4:19–22). Furthermore, the birth of Samuel (1 Sam 1:19–28) and his growth (1 Sam 2:18–21 and 3:1–21) is juxtaposed against the sins of Eli's sons (1 Sam 2:12–17 and 22–36). It is

clear that the narrator wishes for the reader to see the connection between Eli's failure as a father and the coming into office of Samuel.

Similarly, the request of a king is tied to Samuel's failure as a father. Although Israel's request for a king may at first blush appear to be related to the problem with the Philistines, the narrator seems to place emphasis on the failure of Samuel's sons as the precipitating event for such a request. First, in the order of story-telling, the Philistines had already withdrawn from Israelite territories for good during Samuel's time (1 Sam 7:13–14) so they did not appear to pose any immediate threat. We are then told that Samuel was getting old and that his sons were not walking in his ways (1 Sam 8:1–3). Verses 1 and 2 circumstantially introduce the aging of Samuel and give background to the fact that he had two sons to succeed him. However, the adversative *waw* in verse 3 brings to our attention that unlike Samuel, his sons did not follow his good examples. These three verses set the stage for a reading of verse 4 as consequential: “*So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah*” (italics mine to emphasize the translation of imperfect *waw* consecutive as consequential in sense).<sup>124</sup> In all truthfulness, the real reason for wanting a king was a desire to be like other nations (1 Sam 8:5). Hence it was really Yahweh that Israel was rejecting (1 Sam 8:7) but Samuel's delinquent sons became an excuse for demanding a king. Nevertheless, the failure of Samuel's line provided grounds for introducing Saul into the story.

The connection between Saul's failures to David's coming into office is a little different from the previous two. First, there is Saul's perspective on how his “kingdom”

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<sup>124</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 471.

(מִלְכוּת) had gone out from his hand and second, there is the narrator’s perspective on how Saul’s “kingdom” was removed from him. In Saul’s opinion, David was the threat to his “kingdom” (1 Sam 18:8) and his son’s alliance with David was the reason for losing it (1 Sam 20:31). As for the narrator, the reason that Saul’s “kingdom” would not endure was the result of him acting presumptuously by offering the sacrifice against the instruction to wait for Samuel’s arrival (1 Sam 13:13–14). The reason for Saul being rejected as king and having his “kingdom” removed from him was his disobedience with regard to the battle against the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:23, 26, and 28). Hence, Jonathan’s disobedience to Saul was not the direct reason for Saul’s loss of the kingdom such that David could become king, but only the basis for Saul’s blame. Nevertheless, Jonathan’s disobedience to his father did indirectly help David rise up as king after Saul.

We have seen thus far how the narrator of First and Second Samuel weaved together the history of Israel’s early monarchy utilizing three major characters: Samuel, Saul, and David. We have discussed the familial nature of the events surrounding the characters in terms of family of origin, appointment to office, and problems with their sons. We remember too that Eli has a part in the story as well, albeit a lesser role as a character compared to Samuel, Saul, and David. Thus, the narrative is woven together not so much by these characters themselves but by their family stories. So the second most frequent use of בֵּית in the Books of Samuel has the meaning of “family” and the majority of these occurrences refer to the families of Saul and David.<sup>125</sup> It is evident that

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<sup>125</sup> References to David’s family include 1 Sam 18:2; 2 Sam 6:20; 7:18; 12:10, 11, 17; 15:16; 16:2; 19:19, 42; and 24:17. References to Saul’s family include 1 Sam 9:20; 2 Sam 9:1, 2, 3, 9; 12:8; 16:5, 8;

בֵּית as “family” is a key concept in First and Second Samuel. As we shall see, David’s family story occupies a major part of Second Samuel, but we will leave that discussion to a later chapter.

### 3.2.2 Kith and Kin

Besides father-son relationships, the Books of Samuel also involve a complicated web of other relationships, such as those between tribes and brothers. The struggle for kingship between Saul and David was also a struggle between the house of Saul and the house of David. As we come to 2 Samuel, the tension between the houses of Saul and David becomes even more prominent. In the first chapter, the narrator deals with the death of Saul and Jonathan. Chapter 2 begins with the anointing of David as king. However, the narrator is quick to note in verse 4 that this kingship was only over the “house of Judah.” As readers, we wonder why David would not be king over all Israel since Saul and his son Jonathan were dead. We are then introduced to another son of Saul, Ish-bosheth, a new character not previously mentioned. This is when the reader realizes that David’s reign was not yet secure since Saul had a surviving descendent. Until the death of Ish-bosheth, who ironically died in his own house (2 Sam 4:5) at the end of chapter 4, the story revolves around the battle between the house of David and the house of Saul. Although Saul had died, and the present battle was between David and one of Saul’s sons, the narrator explicitly states it twice that this was a war “between the

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19:18, and 29. Other references of family include those of Elkanah (1 Sam 1:21); Eli (1 Sam 2:30, 31, 32, 33, 36; 3:12, 13, and 14 [2x]); Joab (2 Sam 3:29); Obed-edom (2 Sam 6:11 and 12); Ziba (2 Sam 9:12) and the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:9). There is a reference to an unnamed person in 1 Sam 17:25 and in 1 Sam 2:35, though it is unclear whether the reference is Samuel or David.

house of Saul and the house of David” (בֵּין בֵּית שָׁאוּל וּבֵין בֵּית דָּוִד; 2 Sam 3:1 and 6). However, we gain from the narrator’s insight in 2 Sam 3:1 where this war was heading—David was growing stronger while the house of Saul grew weaker. It is clear that the narrator’s intent was to show that the emerging “house of David” was going to eventually replace the “house of Saul.” With the death of Ish-bosheth, Saul’s house was no longer a threat to David. All the tribes of Israel thus came to David to seal a kinship covenant with him, acknowledging David as king over all Israel (2 Sam 5:1–3).

Even after David had become king, his dealings with the house of Saul continued to concern (sometimes even bother) him until almost the end of the book. In 2 Sam 6, when David brought the Ark back to Jerusalem, his wife Michal (whom the narrator noted as “the daughter of Saul”) was unhappy with his behavior and despised him and hurled sarcastic remarks at David. Apparently David understood that Michal’s remarks were motivated by something more than merely his behavior before the Ark. This is seen in his response: “It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house” (2 Sam 6:21). This encounter between David and Saul’s daughter ends abruptly with the narrator’s comment about the barrenness of Michal, thus indicating no further blood relationships between the house of Saul and the house of David.<sup>126</sup>

Another person from Saul’s house that David had to deal with was Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son. After having rest from his surrounding enemies, David remembered his covenant with Jonathan and sought for members of Saul’s house to whom he could show kindness (2 Sam 9:1). Mephibosheth was brought to David and David provided care for

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<sup>126</sup> Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 379.

him. Ziba, a servant of Saul's house, was designated by David to take care of Mephibosheth, but his character was shady. His accusation of Mephibosheth's revolt against David ("Today the house of Israel will restore the kingdom of my father to me;" 2 Sam 16:3) seems untenable since the actual conflict was a civil war within David's house and not a battle between the house of Saul and David. Mephibosheth's defense seems more plausible, referring to his incapacity and the weakness of Saul's house (2 Sam 19:26–28). Nevertheless, David made the decision to divide the property between Mephibosheth and Ziba, but his kindness towards Mephibosheth continues to be evident at the end of the story. When the seven lives from Saul's descendants were required for his slaughter of the Gibeonites, David spared Mephibosheth because of his covenant with Jonathan (2 Sam 21:7).

During the time when David was running away from Absalom, a man by the name of Shimei who was from the house of Saul kept cursing David for what had happened to Saul and his house (2 Sam 16:5–8). When Abishai offered to kill Shimei, David spared him. When the civil war was over and David returned to Jerusalem as king, he spared Shimei a second time (2 Sam 19:16–23). However, when nearing his death, David's last words to Solomon his son were to execute Shimei (1 Kgs 2:8–9). Only at the end of David's life was there finality to his personal struggle against the house of Saul.

The web of relationships gets more complicated as we look at the next generation in David's house. Part of the reason for the complication is that the characters' relationships to the key figures are not always given at the first mention of their appearance. For example, the three sons of Zeruah play important roles as key generals

in David's army, with Joab as the leader of the three. But Abishai first appeared on the scene, and was introduced as "Joab's brother" (1 Sam 26:6), thus assuming that the reader already knew who Joab was. Joab was only introduced later during the war against Ish-bosheth's army led by Abner (2 Sam 2:13). Finally, a few verses later, we are told that Joab and Abishai had a brother named Asahel, all sons of Zeruiah (2 Sam 2:18). Still, we have no idea who Zeruiah was until 2 Sam 17:25 where the reader is somewhat surprised to find that Zeruiah is the mother and not the father of Joab and his brothers. In fact, we know nothing more of Zeruiah in the Books of Samuel, and only the genealogy of the Chronicler enlightens us that she is David's sister (1 Chron 2:16). This is probably common knowledge for the first audience, but without putting all the pieces of information together, it is hard for the present reader to realize that the three sons of Zeruiah were David's nephews, his familial relatives.

As the chief-in-command of David's army, Joab was involved in the deaths of a number of people. Of these killings, I would like to highlight three in particular: that of Abner, Absalom, and Amasa. Even before Joab was mentioned, Abner had been introduced as the commander of Saul's army and was with Saul at major events in 1 Samuel. Fortunately for the reader, Abner's relationship to Saul as cousin was told from the beginning (1 Sam 14:50–51). He was present at David's defeat of Goliath (1 Sam 17:55–57). Even when David was absent from the feast of the New Moon, Abner was there (1 Sam 20:25). Abner was also guarding Saul when David and Abishai sneaked up on them (1 Sam 26:5–15). After Saul's death, Abner made Ish-bosheth king as a replacement for Saul (2 Sam 2:8). At the battle of Gibeon, Abner's army was defeated by



Joab's army (2 Sam 2:12–32). Joab's brother, Asahel, gave chase to Abner, who persuaded Asahel to let him go because Abner did not want to kill him. In his appeal to Asahel to stop pursuing him, Abner made use of familial terminology: "Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab?" (2 Sam 2:22). When Asahel refused to give up, Abner struck him in the belly and killed him. However, Joab and his remaining brother, Abishai, continued to pursue Abner. Again, Abner resorted to kinship terminology to dissuade Joab from continuing on with the battle: "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the end? How long will you refrain from telling the people to turn back from following their brothers?" (2 Sam 2:26). This seems to work on Joab who, repeating the same kinship terminology, called the battle to a stop. Nevertheless, Joab was not done with Abner. When Abner defected from Ish-bosheth to David, he was welcomed by David, but Joab went to meet Abner in private and killed him (2 Sam 3:26–27). That this was an act of revenge is seen in the expression "struck him in the belly," which was used of both Asahel's and Abner's deaths. The narrator also comments twice that the killing of Abner was attributed to Asahel's death at Abner's hands, and he was careful to remind the reader that Asahel was the brother of Joab and Abishai (2 Sam 3:27 and 30). We see here again, at least initially, the struggle between the house of Saul and the house of David. The breakdown of Saul's house was evident through Abner's (Saul's cousin) subsequent defection from Ish-bosheth (Saul's son) to David. This would not go by Joab (David's nephew) since Abner had killed his brother Asahel. Joab then took matters into his own hand and killed Abner in revenge, thus making a clean break

between Saul and David's houses. Although Abner and Joab were "brothers" by kinship, Asahel was Joab's familial brother, making true the saying "blood is thicker than water." Perhaps David was also taking advantage of the familial bond between the sons of Zeruah as a means of ensuring loyalty among his men.

Next we look at Joab's dealings with Absalom. With the identity of Joab clarified above, we now know that Joab and Absalom were cousins. It all began with Amnon's rape of Absalom's beautiful sister Tamar. Amnon's rape of Tamar was instigated by Jonadab, who we are told was also a nephew of David by Shimeah, David's brother (2 Sam 13:3). Absalom harbored his hatred for Amnon for two years before he killed Amnon in revenge for raping Tamar, after which he fled from David. Subsequently, Joab helped in the bringing back of Absalom through the story of the woman of Tekoa, but perhaps his considerations were for David rather than Absalom as 2 Sam 14:1 implies. Joab's disregard for Absalom can be seen in his unwillingness to come into contact with Absalom since David refused to see his son (2 Sam 14:29). Absalom then resorted to burning Joab's field in order to get his attention. Later when Absalom usurped David's throne, Joab was instrumental in putting Absalom to death despite the reminder from the soldier who discovered the entrapped Absalom that this was the king's son (2 Sam 18:12). With Saul's house diminishing in power, we find a power struggle beginning to surface in David's house. Where before it had been struggle at the tribal level, now it was brought home, between brother and sister, brother and brother, and between cousins.

We now look at the plot involving Joab and Amasa. Amasa was chief-in-command of Absalom's army when he made himself king, and accordingly he was the

son of Ithra, the husband of Abigail, who was the sister of Zeruiah (2 Sam 17:25). This means that Amasa was also David's nephew through his sister and hence a cousin of both Absalom and Joab. Not only was Amasa an enemy because he sided with Absalom against David, but he was also a threat to Joab's position, for after Absalom died David intended to replace Joab with Amasa (2 Sam 19:13). We are not told of David's reason for doing so, but since it follows close after the death of Absalom, two reasons can be offered. One possible reason is that Amasa was now in control of the army since David and his smaller band of men were fugitives. Another reason could be Joab's assassination of Absalom against David's clear orders to deal with him gently. Whatever the reason, it is interesting that David appealed to familial language as he resumed his position as king and promised Amasa the position of commander over the army. In expediting his restoration to king, he sent words to the elders of Judah addressing them as "brothers" and "my bone and my flesh" (2 Sam 19:12; cf. 5:1). Again, he called Amasa "my bone and my flesh" and swore that he would make him the new chief-in-command (2 Sam 19:13). Later, during the rebellion of Sheba, David ordered Amasa to send men after Sheba, apparently putting him above Joab. Under the guise of friendliness, Joab met Amasa on the field, delivered the kiss of betrayal, and killed him in broad daylight. No explanation was given for Joab's action, so the reader is left to make the connection. It is not difficult to make, though, for jealousy and protection of one's own position clearly lay behind the homicide. Joab pretended to come in peace (הַשְּׁלוֹם אֲתָהּ), called Amasa his "brother," and did to Amasa what he had also done to Abner—struck him in the belly (2 Sam 20:9–10). In this discussion we have seen how the struggle shifted from

being between the house of Saul and the house of David to one occurring within the same house, between father and son and between cousins.

We have discussed how the Books of Samuel describe the battle as moving from an intertribal level to a familial level. We are now ready to leave the public domain of “house” and move indoors.

### 3.2.3 Behind Closed Doors

The most frequent use of **בַּיִת** in First and Second Samuel is in the sense of a physical house, as in the home of a person. Ideally speaking, a person’s home should be a safe place where he or she feels the love and warmth of a family. However, just as the home in today’s society is not necessary a place of security and happiness, the homes in Israelite society during the early monarchy as presented in the Books of Samuel also turn out to be places of violence and relational tension. The only exception is the first home we encounter in the narrative where the home is described as a place where the intimate act between Elkanah and Hannah took place, resulting in the conception of Samuel (1 Sam 1:19). We are not sure if it is intentional on the part of the narrator, but coincidentally, the occurrences where Israelite homes are mentioned subsequently up to the point of Saul’s appointment as king are simply location references in the plain sense of people’s residences.<sup>127</sup> Latter mention of homes after Saul returned to his house as a newly appointed king seems to be mostly associated with events of dispute and

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<sup>127</sup> 1 Sam 1:19; 2:11; 7:1; 7:17; 9:18; 10:25, and 26; with two more occurrences in 2 Sam 6:19 and 14:8 which also use **בַּיִת** simply for location purpose.

destructive behavior. Hence going home can be a way to express estrangement between two persons. In two cases, it was after a prophet rebuked a king. In the first case, after Samuel announced to Saul that his kingdom would be torn from him, they parted way and each returned to his home (1 Sam 15:34). The second case concerns Nathan’s rebuke of David because of his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. After convicting David and announcing the death of the child conceived during the adulterous relationship, Nathan left David in his house and went home (2 Sam 12:15). Another incident where home is mentioned in the context of an estranged relationship is when Absalom finally returned home from having run away after killing his brother Amnon (2 Sam 14:24). Although David consented to Absalom’s return, David did not want to see him in person. The gravity of the estrangement is underscored by the fact that it is mentioned both as a direct speech of David’s (“Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face”) and a confirmation by the narrator (“So Absalom turned to his own house and did not see the king’s face”). The double use of “turn” (סָבַב) gives a vivid picture of the separation between David and Absalom.<sup>128</sup> Home is a place for confrontation as in the case where Joab questioned Absalom for setting his barley field on fire (2 Sam 14:31). Home is also a place of desolation for the rape victim (2 Sam 13:20).

For the most part in the Books of Samuel, homes are mentioned in the context of hideous behavior. Home is a place of attempted murder as Saul tried to pin David with a spear (1 Sam 18:10). Home is the crime scene of homicide, emphasized three times

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<sup>128</sup> Contra the use of הִלָּךְ and עָלָה for the breakoff between Samuel and Saul, and the use of הִלָּךְ when Nathan left David to go home. Also, the estrangement between Solomon and Adonijah where Solomon sent his brother home is found in 1 Kgs 1:53.

within a short span of space (2 Sam 4:5, 6, and 7). The horror of the assassination is heard in David's response: "How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood from your hand and destroy you from the earth?" (2 Sam 4:11). There are a few more instances where death is associated with homes. There is the sudden death of Uzzah that happened between the home of Abinadab (2 Sam 6:3 and 4) and the home of Obed-edom (2 Sam 6:10, 11, and 12). There is also the haunting account of Ahithophel who, in a nonchalant manner, went home, put his house in order, and committed suicide (2 Sam 17:23).<sup>129</sup> We remember also the trusted home of a sibling turned into the place of sexual assault in the case of Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam 13:7 and 8). The word **בַּיִת** appears twice in 2 Sam 13:7. Ironically, Tamar was brought from the safety of her own house (presumably a residence within David's palace since she was not married) and sent to the house of Amnon, her half-brother.

In 2 Sam 11:1, although the word **בַּיִת** is not mentioned, it is brought to our attention that while it was the time of the year when kings went out to battle, David stayed behind in Jerusalem, presumably in his own house. Contrary to his common practice, David "who has been a hands-on king, now becomes a stay-at-home, one who conducts military affairs at a distance."<sup>130</sup> Because he did not go out to battle, the next verse tells us that David was walking around on the roof of the king's house which led

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<sup>129</sup> If we include 1 Kings 1–2, we also have the account of Joab's death where he was buried in his own house (2:34) and Shimei's death when he did not stay within the confines of his house (2:36).

<sup>130</sup> Robert Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: 2 Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 109.

him to spy Bathsheba taking a bath (v. 2). Here we are introduced to another nuance of **בַּיִת** which means “palace,” as it is the house that belonged to the king. Following this, the narrator does not spend many words to describe the illicit affair between David and Bathsheba. In fact, the narrator specifically mentions that David “took” (**לָקַח**) Bathsheba, fulfilling what Samuel earlier warned about kings who will seize their possessions (1 Sam 8:10–18). After the fling, the reader is told that Bathsheba returned to her house (v. 4), which must be the house where she lived with her husband Uriah as mentioned in the previous verse (v. 3). In the next verse, we are given the only two Hebrew words that Bathsheba ever spoke in 1–2 Samuel, informing David that she was pregnant (v. 5, **הִרְרָה אֲנֹכִי**). After these words, Bathsheba exits the scene and does not appear until after the death of her husband Uriah at the end of the chapter (vv. 26–27). The curt account of David’s adulterous affair with Bathsheba sets the stage for the more extended description of David’s dealings with Uriah. In addition, the use of **בַּיִת** as both “house” and “palace” prepares the reader for the shock of the infringement that the state has on the household. **בַּיִת** occurs eleven times in 2 Sam 11. Seven of these occurrences refer to Uriah’s house (vv. 4, 8, 9, 10[2x], 11, and 13) and four of these occurrences refer to the palace of David (vv. 2, 8, 9, and 27). As the account goes, David tried to manipulate Uriah into going home and spending a night with his wife so as to provide the appearance that the child in Bathsheba was actually Uriah’s. However, Uriah refused to go home but instead stayed in the palace with the other servants. Because his plan did not work, David set Uriah up to be killed in battle and finally took Bathsheba into his

palace. By juxtaposing Uriah’s house with David’s palace, the narrator attempts to show the negative impact that monarchy has on the household as Samuel the prophet had warned earlier. David’s abuse of his power as king is further made clear by the theme word “sent” (שָׁלַח) in this chapter.<sup>131</sup> Because בַּיִת can be used for both the nuances of “house” and “palace,” the narrator is able to play with the word to bring out the effect of how the political institution directly impinged on the solidarity of the household.

The remaining occurrences of בַּיִת as houses are not totally devoid of malevolent situations, but are somewhat more positive in that they provide a safe place for those whose lives were in danger. In 2 Sam 9:4 and 5, Machir’s house was used to shelter Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth. The house of an unnamed couple in Bahurim was used to hide David’s informants who were running away from the servants of Absalom (2 Sam 17:18 and 20). On a somewhat sad note is the account of David running away from his son Absalom, leaving his palace-house with his ten concubines (2 Sam 15:16) and lingering at the last house before his final departure (2 Sam 15:17). Subsequently Absalom took over the palace (2 Sam 15:35) and slept with David’s concubines in public (2 Sam 16:21), while David stayed in another house (2 Sam 19:5). Even when David finally returned home to his concubines, the king’s house—the palace—became ironically a “house of confinement” (בֵּית־מִשְׁמֶרֶת) for the harem.

Our survey of the use of בַּיִת as houses shows that places in the narrative where residences are mentioned are mostly associated with events of violence and estranged

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<sup>131</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 540.



relationships. It gives the reader the picture that home is no longer the safe place that it should be. Instead, the narrator vividly describes how the home can be broken into by murderers and rapists. The juxtaposition of בַּיִת as both palace and house in 2 Sam 11 additionally shows the tension between state and household. In fact, much of the domestic violence in the Books of Samuel is intricately associated with politics. Without having to enter into a scholarly debate concerning the different attitudes towards the nascent monarchy, it is clear enough that “the process of political, economic, and military centralization...had a direct and negative impact on the typical rural household.”<sup>132</sup>

### 3.2.4 The Big Houses

We have already seen the narrator’s use of בַּיִת as physical houses. We now turn to the narrator’s special attention to the “big” houses in his story—namely the king’s palace and the Temple of Yahweh.

2 Sam 5 begins with all the tribes of Israel pledging allegiance to David (2 Sam 5:1). Here, the Israelites appeal to David with an intimate familial term—“bone and flesh”—to secure the relationship between them. The phrase “עֲצָמָי וְבָשָׂרִי” indicates a blood relationship (Gen 29:14; Judg 9:2), which David also appeals to later in the narrative (2 Sam 19:12–13).<sup>133</sup> With the allegiance of the people, David was anointed as king over Israel (v. 3). Following that, David swiftly captured Zion and made that the

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<sup>132</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Family in First Temple Israel,” in *Families in Ancient Israel*, eds. Don S. Browning and Ian S. Evison (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 86.

<sup>133</sup> Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 362.

city of David (vv. 6–9). What is interesting to note following David’s entry to Zion is that Hiram, the king of Tyre, offered to build a house for David (v. 11). This verse is sandwiched between the narrator’s noting that David became greater and greater because Yahweh was with him (v. 10) and his comment that David knew that it was Yahweh who established him as king over Israel (v. 12). After that, we are told that David took wives and concubines from Jerusalem (presumably from the foreigners who originally lived there) and had more sons and daughters (vv. 13–16). Robert Polzin rightly notices that David’s perception of his successful establishment as king over Israel by Yahweh (v. 12) is evident by the infusion of foreign elements before and after the verse—the building of the palace with the help of Hiram (v. 11) and the expansion of his household through foreign wives (v. 13).<sup>134</sup> However, I disagree with Polzin that “this conjunction of foreign hands helping to construct both the literal and dynastic house of David seems to receive approbation here through the authoritative statements of the narrator in vv. 10 and 12.”<sup>135</sup> The text tells us that the building of an “enduring house” (בֵּית נְאֻמָּה) is the work of Yahweh (1 Sam 2:35 and 25:38. Cf. 1 Kgs 11:38 and Ps 127:1). Eventually, it is Yahweh who will build a house for David (2 Sam 7:11). In fact, I believe that the infusion of foreign help casts a sinister shadow over both the literal and dynastic house of David. Hiram’s offer to build David’s temple and David’s acceptance of Hiram’s offer

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<sup>134</sup> Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 58.

<sup>135</sup> Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 58.

was probably economically motivated.<sup>136</sup> As for David's amassing of wives and concubines, although the narrator withholds his judgment here, it is definitely something against Yahweh's will in light of the King's law in Deut 17:17. In fact, both the literal and dynastic house of David eventually came to an end because of foreign hands.

If the concern of Chapter 5 is about building a physical house for David, then Chapter 6 of 2 Samuel is concerned with finding a house for the Ark. A high frequency of the occurrence of the word "house" is found in the narrator's description of the process of relocating the Ark. The Ark of Yahweh was last found in the *house* of Abinadab (v. 3 and 4). David and all the *house* of Israel were celebrating as they transported the Ark (v. 5). However, the Ark was unstable during the move, and Uzzah who stretched out his hand to stabilize the Ark ended up being struck dead. The transportation process thus ended abruptly, and the Ark detoured instead to the *house* of Obed-edom (v. 10) and remained in that same *house* (v. 11), and Obed-edom's *house* was blessed as a result of that for three months (v. 11). When David saw that the *house* of Obed-edom was blessed by the Lord (v. 12), he decided to try to retrieve the Ark from Obed-edom's *house* (v. 12). So David and all the *house* of Israel made a second attempt to transport the Ark (v. 15). Eventually the Ark was placed inside a tent, and all the people went back, each to his own *house* (v. 19). David returned to his own *house* (v. 20), but his wife Michal showed her displeasure regarding David's behavior. David justified his behavior by claiming that Yahweh had chosen him above the *house* of Saul, Michal's father (v. 21). This chapter ends with Michal becoming barren for the rest of her life, which seems to indicate that

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<sup>136</sup> A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, WBC vol. 11, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 86.

David was doing the right thing. Polzin observes that in this chapter “domestic matters involving physical, familial, dynastic, or national houses are taking control of the story” with the frequent use of the word **בַּיִת**.<sup>137</sup> Thus it can be argued that the narrator in 2 Sam 6 is most concerned with the relocation of the ark of Yahweh, from one house to another, ending only temporarily in the tent that David pitched for it. As the Ark was a visible symbol of Yahweh’s presence with his people, the intention of housing the Ark in a temporary tent shelter eventually developed into the housing of Yahweh in a more permanent and elaborate Temple in the next chapter.

The word **בַּיִת** continues to be an emphasis in 2 Sam 7, occurring even more frequently than in chapter 6. The chapter begins with David living in his house, and that he was free from the threat of his enemy (v. 1). Now that David was well settled in a house of cedar, he started to think of the Ark of Yahweh which was still housed in a tent and planned to build a house for it. David’s intention to build a house for Yahweh is not explicitly expressed in the text but it seemed to have been understood by Nathan (v. 3) and Yahweh’s reply in verse 5 seems to imply it as well. In verse 5, Yahweh’s reply to David’s intention is in the form of a question: **הֲאֵתָה תִבְנֶה־לִּי בַיִת לְשִׁבְתִּי**. The use of the second personal pronoun and its emphatic position in the sentence indicates that David is the focus of the question. This is to be contrasted with **הוּא יִבְנֶה־בַיִת לְשִׁמִּי** later in verse 13, where **הוּא** refers to one of David’s descendants. Hence, Yahweh was not rejecting the idea of having a house built for him, but rather that David should be the

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<sup>137</sup> Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 65.

one who builds it.<sup>138</sup> While David’s desire to build a house for God was rejected, Yahweh instead offered to build a house for David (v. 11). Yahweh’s words as related through Nathan are כִּי־בַיִת יַעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ יְהוָה. The sentence structure indicates that the focus is on the house. Since David already has a palace of cedar and a large family, “house” here must refer to a “dynasty” as the context of Yahweh’s promise also shows it.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, this house of David will be for perpetuity (v. 16). What needs to be highlighted here concerning the house of David is its contrast with the house of Saul (v. 15). Saul’s house could have endured (1 Sam 13:13–14), but because of his disobedience, it did not. What then would secure David’s house forever? First, the text hints to us that Yahweh saw something in David’s character that was not found in Saul (“The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart,” 1 Sam 13:14; “God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart,” 1 Sam 16:7). We know that David was not without flaw. However, when we look deeper into the two characters, we find that when confronted with sin, Saul was concerned with saving face (1 Sam 15:30) whereas David was ready to admit to his sin (2 Sam 12:13). Second, Yahweh’s relationship with David’s dynasty was further sealed through the use of adoption language in 2 Sam 7:14-15 (אֲנִי אֶתְּיָה־לּוֹ לְאָב וְהוּא יְהִיָה־לִּי לְבֵן).

However, while the relationship is permanent, and Yahweh’s חֶסֶד will not depart from David’s house, nevertheless the new father-son relationship also entails parental

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<sup>138</sup> P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 9, Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1984), 198.

<sup>139</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 205.

discipline should the child disobey. Therefore in this chapter, we find that Yahweh not only builds a house for David, he essentially adopts David's house as his own house.

The narrator's concern for Yahweh's house can also be seen in the last chapter of the second book of Samuel. At the end of the unit of chapters 21 through 24 (deemed by many scholars as the Appendix to Samuel), we find the account of David taking the census, the resulting plague, and the building of altar that stopped the plague. The Books of Samuel end with the verse "David built there an altar to the LORD and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the LORD was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel" (2 Samuel 24:25). The place where David built the altar was the threshing floor of Araunah, but it was also the site for the future Temple (1 Chron 22:1 and 2 Chron 3:1).<sup>140</sup> Just like Moses who was only able to see the Promised Land from afar but not enter it, David was noted as having built an altar to Yahweh since he was not permitted by Yahweh to build the actual Temple. David's insistence on paying for the threshing floor marked the beginning of his preparation of the resources subsequently used by Solomon to build the Temple. David's building of an altar laid the foundation for the building of the Temple. David's prayer was an initiation for the Temple to be a house of prayer. Just as David's prayer at the altar (2 Samuel 24:25) stopped the plague in the land, prayers offered in the Temple would also bring healing to the land (1 Kgs 8:37–40 and 2 Chron 7:14). The two prayers also form a sort of *inclusio* as the first prayer is at the beginning of the events surrounding the building of the Temple

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<sup>140</sup> In fact, 1 Chron 22:1 has David calling the place "the house of Yahweh" (בֵּית יְהוָה).

(“the house of Yahweh,” 1 Chron 22:1; 2 Chron 7:2) while the second is at the end of the process.

The Books of Samuel thus begin with the history of Israel’s early monarchy in “the house of Yahweh” (1 Sam 1:7). The ark narrative (1 Sam 4:1b–7:1 and 2 Sam 6)<sup>141</sup> describes the period when Yahweh was, in a sense, without a house. Nevertheless, even Dagon was no match for a homeless Yahweh on his own home ground (1 Sam 5:2 and 5). David’s desire to build Yahweh a permanent house—a Temple—was rejected, but instead Yahweh promised to build David a dynastic house. Finally, David could only make preparations for the house of Yahweh, while the actual building of the Temple was left to his son Solomon.

### 3.3 House of Yahweh or House of David?

In Nathan’s oracle in 2 Sam 7, the two motifs of the “house of Yahweh” and the “house of David” are inseparably intertwined. The language of this chapter shows that it is not merely narrating an incident, but that the narrator is trying to communicate a theological truth. McCarter has rightly observed:

At first glance it seems that Yahweh’s promise is given *in reward for* David’s promise. But a second glance, focused this time on the opening words of the oracle proper, suggests that perhaps Yahweh’s promise is given *in spite of* David’s promise. Yet if we look a third time, we may conclude that Yahweh has had his own plan all along and that his promise is actually made *without regard to* David’s! ... at this point we can observe that...the two motifs of temple and dynasty, after wandering more

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<sup>141</sup> As the demarcation of the ark narrative has been a point of contention among scholars, the parameters chosen here follows Bill Arnold’s delimitation in his NIV Application Commentary on 1 & 2 Samuel, p. 27.

or less independently across the surface of the text, are finally brought together in Yahweh's proclamation concerning David's offspring in v. 13: "He will build a house for my name, and I shall keep his throne forever stable."<sup>142</sup>

The promise that Yahweh will build a house (dynasty) for David probably refers to a series of generation that will come after David. However, the personal pronoun **הוא** in verse 13a narrows the scope to only a single offspring of David's who will build the physical house for Yahweh.<sup>143</sup> This is thus a motivation for the reader to read on and find out which of David's son would fulfill this promise. Hence, the narrator does have an intention to move the reader towards the revelation that Solomon will turn out to be the one at the end. This makes 2 Sam 7 an equally viable text that drives the narrative as Rost purports 1 Kings 1 does. In fact, verses 12 and 13 tells us that the successor to David's throne and the one who will build the temple is one and the same person. In other words, 2 Sam 7 anticipates not only who will ultimately succeed David but also who will ultimately build Yahweh's house due to the narrator's skillful play on the word **בית**.

A closer reading of 2 Samuel will show that there have been some hints as to who this person, who is going to build Yahweh's house will be. This is linked together by the rare but critical appearance of the character of Nathan the prophet in the story. Nathan only appears in four scenes, but they are all critical for the narrator to accomplish his story. Nathan's first appearance is in 2 Sam 7. We have already seen that his critical role

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<sup>142</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 210.

<sup>143</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 205.



here is to convey Yahweh's message regarding David's house. Up to this point and even until chapter 10, David seems like a promising king, and everything is going well.

However, chapter 11 turns the story around where, David was in his physical house (בֵּית), while his men were out in battle. Because David remained in his "house" (palace), his "house" (family) was plunged into darkness. This led to his adultery with Bathsheba, which brought Nathan to him for the second time in the narrative in chapter 12.

In chapter 12, Nathan's role is to convict David of his sin with regard to Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. With David's sin, and the memories of the failure of Saul's house, the reader wonders about the outcome of David's house. Notice Nathan's words which conveys Yahweh's indictment of David. David is reminded that Yahweh had given him Saul's house and the houses of Israel and Judah (v. 8). Because of David's sin, it is pronounced that the sword will never depart from David's house (v. 10). As David's house has become Yahweh's house in 2 Sam 7, David's dynasty will continue, but he will be disciplined "with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men" (v. 14). Hence, Yahweh's promise stands sure. After Nathan's speech, it is interestingly reported that the prophet goes back to his own house (v. 15).

The third time that Nathan appears on the scene is during the birth of Solomon (2 Sam 12:25). Although the *qere-kethib* leaves us uncertain as to which of the parents named the child, we know that the son is named Solomon. The name Solomon could possibly suggest the idea of peace (1 Chron 22:9), or it could mean "his replacement," in

view of the death of the first child of Bathsheba, or even possibly Uriah.<sup>144</sup> However, Yahweh sends word through Nathan that the child should be named Jedidiah (a name which means “beloved of Yahweh” but appears nowhere else in the Bible) because the LORD loved him. We know well that names are important. Sometimes Yahweh changes a name (such as in the cases of Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob). Sometimes he tells people what to name a child (such as Isaac and Hosea’s children). But here it is said that Yahweh specifically names the child Jedidiah. If the name of Solomon means “replacement,” then **וַיִּהְיֶה אֵהָבוֹ** in verse 24 should be understood as a contrast. David and Bathsheba see Solomon as a replacement, *but* Yahweh loved him. Indeed, much can be seen in David’s love for his other sons (Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah), but we see nothing of his love for Solomon in the entire narrative. It turns out that the successor to David’s throne, the one who is going to build a physical house for Yahweh is none of those sons whom David loved, but Solomon (or Jedidiah) whom David seems not to show any concern for, but whom the LORD loved.<sup>145</sup>

Nathan’s final appearance comes at the end of the narrative where David is old (1 Kings 1). Here, the prophet’s role is to help secure the kingship of Solomon against the self-proclaimed king of David’s other son Adonijah. Thus we see that although Nathan appears rarely in the narrative, his role is a crucial one from the beginning of Yahweh’s promise that one particular son of David will both succeed him and build a house for

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<sup>144</sup> Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 429.

<sup>145</sup> Incidentally, so was the case when Yahweh was looking for a king to succeed Saul from among Jesse’s sons. David was also not on his father’s shortlist.

Yahweh (2 Sam 7) all the way to the revelation of who this son will be who finally sits on David's throne as successor and eventually builds Yahweh's house (1 Kings 1).

As the mouthpiece of Yahweh, Nathan's words are important. When Nathan announced Yahweh's promise to David in 2 Sam 7, בַּיִת allowed for both the meaning of Yahweh's Temple and David's dynasty. In 2 Sam 12:10 when Nathan brought Yahweh's indictment against David saying that "the sword shall never depart from your house," בַּיִת is used here to refer to David's family. Thus we have Yahweh's words spoken through Nathan where בַּיִת ties together three things—Temple, dynasty, and family—inseparably connected from this point and extending even into the future of Israel's history.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter set out to look at use of בַּיִת as a word and also as a concept in First and Second Samuel. בַּיִת as "family" forms the scaffold for the writing of Israel's history during the early monarchy, constructed together by the familial stories of Samuel, Saul, and David (and Eli). בַּיִת as "extended family" including clans and tribes are the structures that connect and shape the interior of the house. בַּיִת as "physical houses" invites us into the private spaces of the rooms in the house. Finally, בַּיִת as "palace and Temple" envisions the perfect house in the future.

It is the range of meanings made possible by the single word בַּיִת that allows the narrator to write his account seamlessly, moving between his concerns for family, dynasty and the Temple. It begins with the house of David replacing the house of Saul. It continues with the building of David's physical house to the housing of the Ark. It peaks at David's concern with building a house for Yahweh. It turns on Yahweh's promise to build a dynastic house for David by adopting David's house as his own. The narrative then develops the story of David's dynastic house—a story of succession as well as familial strife. Using the single word בַּיִת, the narrator weaves a story about human aspiration and weakness, and the providence of Yahweh. Polzin rightly observes:

All these uses of “house” are figures of speech operating on the scaffold of that physical building which houses occupants related to one another either familiarly, tribally, or nationally. And it is this *material house*, understood as a literal locus of habitation, that enables the Deuteronomist to explore issues that transcend merely human concerns about national fratricide or suicide.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 55.

CHAPTER 4  
THE DYNASTIC ORACLE (2 SAMUEL 7:1–17)  
IN THE LIGHT OF ITS ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN BACKGROUNDS

**4.1 Introduction**

In chapter two we have discussed how the centrality of the family in biblical Israel affects the way Israel locates herself in history, and how she expresses her relationship with Yahweh. In chapter three we saw how the keyword **בַּיִת**, with its possible meanings for house, family, dynasty, palace and temple, is used in First and Second Samuel to recount Israel's history during the early monarchy period—a history involving familial stories and Yahweh's covenant with the Davidic dynasty. In this chapter we will look at familial components in the dynastic oracle in 2 Samuel 7:1–17.

The importance of the dynastic oracle in Israel's theological and political self-understanding is indisputable.<sup>147</sup> Scholars agree that 2 Samuel 7 has an important, if not pivotal position in the Books of Samuel and perhaps the entire Old Testament.<sup>148</sup> In its literary context, 2 Samuel 7:1–17 describes Yahweh's promise of the Davidic kingdom, an issue of major concern for the rest of 2 Samuel and the Books of Kings. Thus a closer

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<sup>147</sup> Tony W. Cartledge, "A House for God and a House for David," *Word & World* 23 (2003): 395.

<sup>148</sup> See p. 5, n. 14.

look at this text is necessary before proceeding with the analysis of the so-called Succession Narrative.

As argued in the previous chapter, 2 Samuel 7, with the promise of one of David's son as the builder of the Temple, drives the plot for the Succession Narrative, culminating in the identification of this person in 1 Kings 1–2.<sup>149</sup> In addition, as we shall see, the dynastic oracle in 2 Sam 7:1–17 continues the use of family as a framework for Israel's history, and the wordplay on בִּית is a linchpin for understanding the father-son relationship between Yahweh and Israel as Israel transits from a tribal league to a monarchical state. In order to grasp the familial components in the dynastic oracle, this chapter will examine two ancient Near Eastern concepts—covenant and adoption—in light of Israel's kinship-based society. An understanding of these concepts will in turn affect the way we read the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7.

#### 4.2 Covenant in a Kinship-based Society

For decades, scholars have been researching the meaning of Old Testament covenants.<sup>150</sup> For the purpose of this study, we will look only at those works that have made an impact on the familial understanding of covenant in a kinship-based society. Since Wellhausen's proposition of covenant as a late Deuteronomic development, the

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<sup>149</sup> So agrees Gwilym H. Jones who writes: "Whereas 1 Kings 1–2 forms the climax of the Succession Narrative, 2 Samuel 7 provides an introduction for it." See Gwilym H. Jones, *The Nathan Narratives*, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, (*JSOTSup* 80; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 59.

<sup>150</sup> For earlier research on covenant, see Dennis J. McCarthy, "Covenant in the Old Testament: The Present Stage of Inquiry," *CBQ* 27 (1965): 217–240; and idem., *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978. For more recent research on covenant, see Scott Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994–2004)," *CBR* 3 (2005): 263–292.

original and natural concept of familial relationship between Yahweh and Israel has, according to him, been replaced by an ethical pact between the two parties.<sup>151</sup> Following Wellhausen, major contributions to the understanding of covenant tend to highlight only specifics like the cultic (Mowinckel), social (Weber), or juridical (Mendenhall) aspects.<sup>152</sup>

A series of publications by George Mendenhall bring to light similarities in form between the OT covenants and ancient Near Eastern treaties, particularly between the Mosaic covenant and the Hittite Suzerainty Treaty.<sup>153</sup> However, the form-critical study of Mendenhall does not deal adequately with the Davidic covenant since it is appreciably different from the Hittite treaty in structural form. More profitable to our understanding of the covenant in a kinship-based society is D. J. McCarthy's article which points out that the covenant was perceived by ancient Israel as a kind of familial relationship.<sup>154</sup> McCarthy expands on Mendenhall's analysis of the Hittite treaties by including treaties from Syria and Assyria, which covers a longer time span in history.<sup>155</sup> He demonstrates in his studies that even the vassal treaties of Hatti did not rigidly conform to one form comprising of the six components purported by Mendenhall, but allowed for flexibility

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<sup>151</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), 417–419.

<sup>152</sup> E. W. Nicholson, "Covenant in a Century of Study since Wellhausen," in *Crises and Perspectives: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Polytheism, Biblical Theology, Palestinian Archaeology and Intertestamental Literature*, OTS 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1986): 54–69.

<sup>153</sup> George E. Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law," *BA* 17 (1954): 26–46; "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17 (1954): 50–76.

<sup>154</sup> D. J. McCarthy, "Israel, My Firstborn Son," *The Way* 5 (1965): 186.

<sup>155</sup> D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, Analecta Biblica 21A (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978).

within a general uniformity.<sup>156</sup> Besides the components usually found in vassal treaties, McCarthy points out that the Mosaic covenant also included additional cultic rites involving a covenantal meal (Ex 24:9–11) and sacrifices of communion (זָבַחִים שְׁלָמִים; Ex 24:5) that are for the purpose of forging familial ties between the two parties.<sup>157</sup> McCarthy concludes by saying: “The Sinai covenant then is an affair of ritual. The rites constitute it and give it a special meaning. More than a matter of agreement it is a question of adoptive kinship. Israel is not only subject of Yahwe [sic], but His adopted family. And so the laws are not the terms of a treaty but the conditions covering continued union in the family.”<sup>158</sup>

A student of McCarthy, Paul Kalluveettil furthers the study of covenant in the area of oral declarative formula.<sup>159</sup> Kalluveettil’s studies show that covenants that involve the declaration of kinship terminologies such as “father” and/or “son” (e.g. 2 Sam 7:14; Isa 63:16; and Jer 31:9b) denote those where the two parties are in a superior-subordinate relationship, whereas those that involve the term “brother” (e.g. 2 Sam 1:26 and 1 Kgs 20:32–33) represent covenants between parties of equal status. The idea behind such declarations is the creation of fictive kinship, or in Kalluveettil’s words, an

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<sup>156</sup> McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 51–81.

<sup>157</sup> McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 253–256.

<sup>158</sup> McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 295.

<sup>159</sup> Paul Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, Analecta Biblica 88 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982).



“adoption into the household.”<sup>160</sup> Kalluveettil’s conclusion of his study on declaration formula in covenant says:

The idea, “I am yours, you are mine” underlies every covenant declaration. This implies a quasi-familial bond which makes sons and brothers. The act of accepting the other as one’s own reflects the basic idea of covenant: an attempt to extend the bond of blood beyond the kinship sphere, or, in other words, to make partner one’s own flesh and blood. The study of the DF [declaration formula] has shown that covenant is relational.<sup>161</sup>

Subsequently, Frank Moore Cross asserted that a kinship-based West Semitic society was the basis for the institution of covenant.<sup>162</sup> In a tribal society where the forging of ties are necessary for survival, there must be “legal fictions...by which outsiders, non-kin, might be incorporated into the kinship group.”<sup>163</sup> This is made possible by means of a covenantal relationship. According to Cross, “those incorporated, an individual or a group, gained fictive kinship and shared the mutual obligations and privileges of real kinsmen...and fictive kinship became kinship of the flesh or blood...kinship-in-law became kinship-in-flesh.”<sup>164</sup>

The assertion made by Cross has important implications. Because covenant exists in the context of kinship solidarity, Cross’s assertion allows for the integration of earlier scholarship which tended to emphasize single aspects of the covenant such as the cultic

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<sup>160</sup> Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 205.

<sup>161</sup> Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 212.

<sup>162</sup> Frank Moore Cross, “Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel,” in *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3–21.

<sup>163</sup> Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 7.

<sup>164</sup> Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 7.

(Mowinckel), social (Weber), or juridical (Mendenhall).<sup>165</sup> As Scott Hahn puts it: “The covenant bears all these aspects because it is an extension of familial relationship, and the extended family, the *bet ‘ab*, was the central framework for the legal, religious and political activities of ancient Semitic society.”<sup>166</sup> Cross’s assertion also argues against previous views that consider terms such as “brotherhood,” “fatherhood,” “love,” and “loyalty” as “covenant terminology.” According to Cross, this is to “turn things upside down” because “the language of covenant, kinship-in-law, is taken from the language of kinship, kinship-in-flesh.”<sup>167</sup> Thus when Ahaz king of Judah was attacked by the joined forces of Rezin king of Aram and Pekah king of Israel, he made an alliance with Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria. Since Ahaz is making Judah a vassal to the Assyrian king, he calls himself Tiglath-pileser’s “son” (2 Kgs 16:7)—a familial terminology that aptly expresses his subordinate position. In the example of Solomon and Hiram, we find a parity covenant between the two kings that is supposedly mutually beneficial (1 Kgs 5:12).<sup>168</sup> In such a relationship, the term “brother” is being used (1 Kgs 9:13).<sup>169</sup> In another instance, the tribes of Israel made a covenant with David calling themselves his “bone and flesh” (2 Sam 5:1–3), which they took from the language of marriage that was used of the first union between a man and a woman (Gen 2:23–24).

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<sup>165</sup> Hahn, “Covenant in the Old and New Testaments,” 265.

<sup>166</sup> Hahn, “Covenant in the Old and New Testaments,” 265.

<sup>167</sup> Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 11.

<sup>168</sup> Though we see Solomon’s shrewd dealings with Hiram when it was time to pay the king of Tyre for his service in helping Solomon with his building projects (1 Kgs 9:10–14).

<sup>169</sup> See Amos 1:9 where the term “covenant of brotherhood” is used.

The concept that familial and social relationships form the basis for understanding covenant is earlier brought up by Gordon P. Hugenberger in his monograph *Marriage as a Covenant*.<sup>170</sup> Although the major focus of Hugenberger's work is seeking to show that marriage is understood as a form of covenant throughout the Old Testament, he points out in his study that "familial or social relationships appear to provide a model for the obligations of a covenant and, consequently, for the terminology by which reference is made to the partners of a covenant."<sup>171</sup> Adding to this discussion, Seock-Tae Sohn demonstrates through the similarities between the covenant formula ("I will be your God and you will be my people") and the verbal proclamation associated with marriage and adoption that covenant terminology is derived from the language of marriage and adoption.<sup>172</sup>

Hugenberger, Cross, and Sohn have moved beyond the earlier reductionistic approaches to covenant and have demonstrated the dependence of covenantal concepts on kinship relations. This is aptly summarized by Cross's assertion: "Kinship relations defined the rights and obligations, the duties, status, and privileges of tribal members, and kinship terminology provided the only language for expressing legal, political, and religious institutions."<sup>173</sup> Based on the foregoing understanding that the natural, kinship-

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<sup>170</sup> Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994).

<sup>171</sup> Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 177.

<sup>172</sup> Seock-Tae Sohn, "'I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People': The Origin and Background of the Covenant Formula," in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*, ed. Robert Chazan, William W. Hallo and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 355–372.

<sup>173</sup> Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 3.

based society provides the paradigm for the covenant institution, Hahn further argues that “the root metaphors of covenant and kinship underwrite the father-son relationship between Yahweh and Israel throughout the various Old Testament traditions and periods of salvation history.”<sup>174</sup> This is seen in the biblical portrait of the nation of Israel as one large extended family under Yahweh who is the head of the household. Hahn further substantiates his argument by citing Cross: “The [Israelite] league in ideal form was conceived as twelve tribes, related at once by covenant and kinship...called the ‘*am Yahweh*, which we generally translate the ‘people of Yahweh.’ However... ‘*am(m)* is a kinship term, and...is better translated the ‘kindred’ of Yahweh. Yahweh is...the Divine Kinsman.”<sup>175</sup> Hahn then concludes his argument that the root metaphors of family and covenant are applied theologically to the father-son relationship between Yahweh and Israel by quoting C. J. H. Wright:

Although the idea of the fatherhood of Yahweh is overshadowed by the covenant concept in the Hebrew Bible, there is a close link between the two. When you analyze the texts where father-son language is used for God and Israel, they show up an interesting dual aspect which is quite similar to the dual nature of the covenant itself, namely that the relationship between Israel and God was both a fact which God achieved, and also a demand which Israel must fulfill. The covenant was both a statement and a claim; in technical terms, an indicative and an imperative. . . . So what we find then, is that both poles of the covenant (God’s initiative and Israel’s obedience) are held together within the same relational metaphor of father and son.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 42.

<sup>175</sup> Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 12. It should be noted, however, that the semantic range of ‘*am* is broader than Cross’ definition here.

<sup>176</sup> C. H. J. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament* (London: Marshall Pickering/Harper Collins, 1992), 122–123.

Hahn then proceeds to analyze three examples of secular kinship covenants in the Book of Genesis (21:22–34; 26:26–33; and 31:43–54) to reveal in them both a relational core as well as familial properties. He also argues that the mutual sprinkling of blood during the covenant ritual at Sinai (Ex 24:1–11) depicts the sharing of one blood, thus conveying the idea that two parties have now become kin.<sup>177</sup> Observing that this forging of kinship is cast in terms of a father-son relationship (Ex 4:22), Hahn posits that the Sinai covenant “represents a crucial theological adaptation of the kinship covenant, whereby a familial bond between God and Israel is established on the basis of a father-son relationship.”<sup>178</sup>

From the brief survey above, we can see that recent scholarship on covenant has moved beyond the study of forms and functions to explore the original *Sitz-im-Leben* for the institution of covenant. There is general agreement among scholars now that the kinship-based organization of the Semitic tribes provided the paradigm and language for covenant institution. With this in mind, we now move on to look at the concept of adoption.

### 4.3 Adoption Language and the Fatherhood of God

In the ancient Near East—Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Canaan—a variety of divine father-figures can be found in their pantheons.<sup>179</sup> The Sumerians have five different

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<sup>177</sup> Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 47.

<sup>178</sup> Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 48.

<sup>179</sup> David R. Tasker, *Ancient Near Eastern Literature and the Hebrew Scriptures About the Fatherhood of God* (SBL 69, New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 15.

deities to whom they relate as father: An, Enlil, Enki, Nanna, and Utu. In their religion, the Egyptians also have five father-gods: Nun (or Ptah), Re (or Ra, originally known as Atum), Shu, Geb, and Osiris. In the Ugaritic pantheon, however, only El is referred to as “father.”<sup>180</sup>

Common also among Israel’s neighbors is the regard of their kings as divine (or sacred), and furthermore these kings are associated as sons of various deities.<sup>181</sup> In the Ugaritic legend of King Keret, the monarch, who is thought to be the son of El, is seriously ill. His sickness is lamented precisely because it is unthinkable that death can befall a divine king:

Wilt thou die then, father, like the mortals,  
Or thy joy change to mourning,  
To a woman’s dirge, O father, my song?  
How can it be said, ‘A son of El is Keret,  
An offspring of the Kindly One, and a holy being’?  
Shall, then, a god die,  
An offspring of the Kindly One not live?’<sup>182</sup>

However, because of the prevalent notion of divine parenthood among Israel’s neighbors, and the mythological practices that this understanding is associated with, the Old Testament is reticent to speak of Yahweh as Father in the contexts of cultic practices.

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<sup>180</sup> Tasker, *Ancient Near Eastern Literature and the Hebrew Scriptures About the Fatherhood of God*, 32, 48, 69.

<sup>181</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4,” *WTJ* 24 (1962): 191.

<sup>182</sup> *ANET*, 147

With regard to the deification of the king in the metaphysical sense, the Old Testament is silent.<sup>183</sup>

It has also been known that in the ancient Near East, when two rulers become allies, their relationship can become one of *abûtum* (paternity) to *marûtum* (sonship), where the superior lords over the subordinate.<sup>184</sup> Such is the case where a political alliance is made using the familial language of adoption. We have an example of this in the treaty between Suppiluliuma I of Hatti and Shattiwaza of Mittanni. The adoption relationship is recorded in the words of Shattiwaza:

“Suppiluliuma, Great King, King of Hatti...took me by the hand and...spoke as follows: ‘If I conquer Shuttarna and [the troops of] the land of Mittanni, I will not reject you but will adopt you as my son. I will stand by you and place you on the throne of your father. And the gods know My Majesty, Suppiluliuma...never goes back on the words which issue from his mouth.’”<sup>185</sup>

In the ancient Near East, adoptive ties could be forged and dissolved by solemn declarations. An example of adoption formula can be found in the Code of Hammurabi (§170) where the father calls the offspring that his slave girl bore to him “My children!”

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<sup>183</sup> The phrase “today I have begotten you” in Psalm 2:7 should not be understood as the physical procreation of the king. The predicating phrase “you are my son” indicates that this is a relationship of adoption. John Goldingay argues that the speaker of this psalm, who is the king, “heard Yhwh give this decree, so the occasion was hardly the day of his physical birth, but his designation or coronation. Yhwh did not bring him into being then but did enter into a fatherly commitment to him in adopting him as a son.” See John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, vol. 1, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 100.

<sup>184</sup> J. M. Munn-Rankin, “Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millennium B. C.,” *Iraq* 18 (1956): 76.

<sup>185</sup> Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 49–50.

and makes them legitimate heirs to his estate.<sup>186</sup> In the case of dissolution of adoption, in the text of Old Babylonian Nippur:

Ilabrat-tayyar has adopted Patiya as his son. House, field, orchard, all that there is, Ilabrat-tayyar has given to Patiya his son. If Patiya says to Ilabrat-tayyar his father, “You are not my father,” he will pay 1/3 mina of silver, and if Ilabrat-tayyar says to Patiya his son, “You are not my son,” he will pay [1/3+(?)] mina of silver and he will forfeit his house and all his property.<sup>187</sup>

The Old Testament speaks little concerning the concept of adoption. We are not able to find in the Old Testament any law regarding adoption, and even the few actual cases mentioned are open to more than one interpretation.<sup>188</sup> While the Old Testament does not speak much concerning actual cases of adoption, using adoption as a metaphor to describe one’s relationship to Yahweh is an important concept. McCarthy has listed the few occurrences where proclamation formulas in adoption can be found in the Old Testament.<sup>189</sup> Spoken by the inferior party, we have the phrase “You are my father” in Isaiah’s prophecy (63:16 [twice] and 64:8), and once in Ps 89:26. For adoption formula with regard to “sonship,” we find two evident occurrences. One is found in Ps 2:7 (“You are my son”) and the other is found in Ex 4:22 where Moses was instructed by Yahweh to tell Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Israel is my son, my firstborn.’” A third occurrence in reference to adoptive sonship may be argued for Hosea 11:1 where Yahweh had said of Israel: “When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” The

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<sup>186</sup> *ANET*, 173.

<sup>187</sup> Sohn, “I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People,” 371.

<sup>188</sup> Shalom M. Paul, “Adoption Formulae: A Study of Cuneiform and Biblical Legal Clauses,” *MAARAV* 2 (1980): 173–175.

<sup>189</sup> McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 130.



two verbs “love” and “call” are terms of election while the references to “youth” and “son” function together to convey the idea of a dependent/subservient familial relationship.<sup>190</sup> Where references to both “father” and “son” appear in the same verse, we find one occurrence in Jer 31:9 (“For I am a father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn”) and the remaining three occurrences describing Yahweh’s covenant with David (“I will be his father and he will be my son,” 2 Sam 7:14 and 1 Chron 17:13; 22:10). Ezekiel 16:6 stands as a unique case because neither of the terms “father” or “son/daughter” are used, but instead the idea of adoption lies in the word “live.” Here Yahweh is seen calling a dying baby girl to live (חַיִּי). This is semantically equivalent to the Akkadian expression “*bullutu*” (“to keep alive”), used by parents in special emergency situations to plead others to adopt their children so as to save them and keep them alive.<sup>191</sup>

Besides being cast in a declarative form, adoption relationship in relation to Yahweh is also found in descriptive form. In Ps 89:27, Yahweh’s covenant with David is described in adoption language: “I also shall make him my firstborn.” In addition, Shalom Paul argues that the Hebrew expression אָשִׁיתֶךָ בְּבָנִים in Jer 3:19 is semantically equivalent to the Akkadian phrase *ana mārūti šakānu* and the Sumerian phrase NAM.DUMU.NI.ŠÛ.IN.GAR which is translated as “to establish sonship relations,”

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<sup>190</sup> J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 278.

<sup>191</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 481.

meaning “to adopt.”<sup>192</sup> Sohn further proposes two concepts—the changing of name and the inheritance of land—as customs that indicate adoption.<sup>193</sup> Hence, Yahweh’s special reference of Israel as “my people who are called by my name” (עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר נִקְרָא־שְׁמִי) (עֲלֵיהֶם; 2 Chron 7:14; cf. Isa 43:7; 63:19; Jer 14:9; 15:16; and Dan 9:19) is understood in light of the adoption custom where the adoptee takes on the name of the adopter. Also, the reference of Israel as “the people of inheritance” and the promise of “the land that Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess” connote “the concept of a grant to an adopted son, who will retain the נַחֲלָה as his inheritance after the death of his adoptive father.”<sup>194</sup>

Looking at the biblical references that contain verbal declarations of adoption with respect to Yahweh, we conclude that there are only two categories: the nation of Israel and the dynasty of David. Putting together our understanding of covenant and adoption language, we can now see that both legal and familial aspects underlie the covenant at Sinai and the covenant with David. The covenant at Sinai bears both the form of a treaty as well as sacraments of kinship ties consisting of blood ritual and covenantal meals (Ex 24:1–11), premised on an adoptive relationship (Ex 4:22). This adoptive relationship is further understood by the prophets Isaiah (63:16 and 64:8), Jeremiah (Jer 31:9), and Hosea (Hos 11:1). Similarly, the covenant with David is also both dynastic (2 Sam 7:13) and familial (2 Sam 7:14). This is reiterated in 1 Chronicles

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<sup>192</sup> Paul, “Adoption Formulae,” 184.

<sup>193</sup> Sohn, “I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People,” 372.

<sup>194</sup> Sohn, “I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People,” 372.

(17:13 and 22:10) and affirmed in the royal psalms (2:7 and 89:26). It is to the Davidic covenant which we now turn.

#### **4.4 2 Samuel 7:1–17 in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Background**

As discussed in the previous chapter, 2 Samuel 7 makes use of a play on the word **בַּיִת**. 2 Samuel 7 begins with the note that David now lives in his house/palace and Yahweh has given him rest from all his enemies. As David lives in a state of peace, his concern moves toward the Ark of Yahweh which is housed in a temporary tent. David then comes up with the idea of building a house/temple for Yahweh. However, Yahweh objects to David's proposal of building a temple for him. How are we to understand Yahweh's objection to David's seemingly pious proposal?

##### **4.4.1 Gods, Kings, and Temples**

It is known that in the ancient Near Eastern world, “kingship and temple building were inextricably linked.”<sup>195</sup> It was thought that the stability of a king's dynasty was guaranteed through temple building.<sup>196</sup> In the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish*, Marduk returns from a victory in battle and, in the section regarding the building of Babylon, it is recorded:

Marduk made his voice heard and spoke, ...  
I shall make a house to be a luxurious dwelling for myself  
And shall found his cult centre [sic] within it,

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<sup>195</sup> Sandra L. Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology: l'škkēn š' mō šām in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, BZAW 318 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 72.

<sup>196</sup> Antti Laato, “Second Samuel 7 and Ancient Eastern Royal Ideology,” *CBQ* 59 (1997): 255.

And I shall establish my private quarters, and confirm my kingship.<sup>197</sup>

From the Mesopotamian accounts of temple building, it is found that the source of initiative can be either divine or human, but the approval has to come from the deity for whom the temple was built.<sup>198</sup> Hence Sandra Richter submits that “David is really asking for permission to secure his throne and his people by building a permanent cultic structure in his capital city...[which] would ensure the presence of the numinous, legitimize his rule, and, of course aggrandize his own ego.”<sup>199</sup> Having finally experienced a degree of peace in the kingdom, there is no doubt that David sees the need to secure this stability. Therefore it is reasonable that David adopts what he observes being done in surrounding nations. However, whether David’s motive was pure personal piety or self-aggrandizement is hard to tell based on the present text alone.<sup>200</sup>

Nonetheless, with the understanding of the close association between kings and the sanctuaries of their national gods in the ancient Near East, and considering the wordplay on **בֵּית** in 2 Samuel 7 that ties the idea of temple with dynasty, it is safe to say that political interest definitely played a part in David’s desire to build Yahweh’s temple. The motive of political interest is augmented by the fact that David’s kingdom, at that point,

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<sup>197</sup> Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford, NY: University Press, 2000), 259. Other sources for The Epic of Creation include: Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, vol. 1 (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1996), 350–401; idem. “Epic of Creation,” in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, ed. William W. Hallo (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 390–402; Wilfred G. Lambert, “Enuma Elisch,” *TUAT* 3/4 (1994): 565–602.

<sup>198</sup> Victor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings*, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, (*JSOTSup* 115; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 163–164.

<sup>199</sup> Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 74.

<sup>200</sup> By the same implication, we would have to question David’s piety in his psalms.

consisted not only of Israelites whereby the symbol of the Ark alone would suffice for national identity, but included adjacent territories under Israel's domination for whom a more formidable permanent sanctuary was required as an internationally understood symbol of regnal legitimacy.<sup>201</sup> It is not necessary, though, to conclude that a politically driven action has to be merely self-serving in nature. Maybe, as Brueggemann puts it, "it is an act of faith, perhaps tinged with ideology, which dares to claim God's peculiar solidarity with the Davidic establishment, a solidarity Yahweh has never before undertaken."<sup>202</sup>

David's desire to build a temple is declined by Yahweh. The first and immediate objection concerns the person who is to build the temple. This is seen in Yahweh's question to David: "Are you the one who should build me a house to dwell in?" (v. 5). Yahweh's second reason for objecting to David's proposal appears to be the king's presumptuousness that he needs a permanent residence. This is understood from David's earlier comparison of his own palace as a "house of cedar" to Yahweh's Ark which lies "within tent curtains" (v. 2), a contrast (adversative *waw* in וַאֲרֹן) of the permanency of the two structures. Furthermore, Yahweh indicates that he has always been moving about in a tent and had never asked for a permanent residence (vv. 6–7). It is possible, therefore, that underlying Yahweh's rejection of David's proposal was his rejection of the king's pagan concept behind the intricate relationships among gods, kings, and temples.

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<sup>201</sup> Carol Meyers, "David as Temple Builder," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia, MA: Fortress Press, 1987), 360–364.

<sup>202</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation, 256.

The ancient Near Eastern temple was the place where deities and mortals met.<sup>203</sup> It was the “fulcrum of dependence” where “the gods had their needs met through the temple...and the people had their needs met by the beneficence of the contented deity.”<sup>204</sup> In pagan religion, man on one hand understood his dependence on the gods for help while, on the other hand, knew that he could manipulate the gods for his benefits.<sup>205</sup> Hence the temple was a means to house the deity in the midst of the people in order that they might obtain protection and prosperity through offering the deity their gifts and services.<sup>206</sup> As Michael Hundley explains, “through regular and regulated interactions in the temple, people could gain some measure of control over both their own fate and that of the world around them.”<sup>207</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Yahweh’s Abode

From the catchword **יָשַׁב** in the first seven verses of 2 Samuel 7, we see that David had assumed, as had other ancient Near Eastern monarchs, that he needed to ensure the presence of the numinous in his kingdom. It is already said of David that he was dwelling (**יָשַׁב**) in his own house (v. 1). David then compares the fact that he is

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<sup>203</sup> Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 3.

<sup>204</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 128.

<sup>205</sup> Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. Moshe Greenberg (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 23–24.

<sup>206</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 3.

<sup>207</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 3.

dwelling (יָשַׁב) in a permanent house with the fact that the Ark of Yahweh is dwelling (יָשַׁב) in tent curtains (v. 2).<sup>208</sup> It is implied that David intended to build a permanent residence for Yahweh, which Yahweh rejected. Yahweh saw that David’s intention for building a permanent house was to “יָשַׁב” him (לְ with infinitive construct of יָשַׁב)—that is, to somewhat “settle him”—to tie him down to a fixed location.<sup>209</sup> Hence Yahweh asserts that he had never dwelt (יָשַׁב) in a house (i.e. tied down to a fixed temple), but had always enjoyed freedom of movement (הִלָּךְ) and his dwelling place (מִשְׁכָּן) in the past had been a tent/tabernacle (v. 6). The pericope is concluded with reference again to the permanent residence—the house of cedar—which Yahweh emphasized is something he had never requested (v. 7). David’s desire to localize Yahweh is in line with the storyline of the narrative in the previous two chapters. The construction of David’s own house/palace is mentioned in 2 Sam 5, after which David’s concern for housing Yahweh’s Ark is described in 2 Sam 6. 2 Sam 7:1–7 is the culmination of David’s desire to locate Yahweh in a fixed place. In light of the ancient Near Eastern practice of kings building temples for their national deities, we have gained insight into what could possibly be the motive behind David’s offer to build Yahweh a temple. This is aptly put in the words of Mark George: “One reason kings in the ancient Near East built temples

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<sup>208</sup> We find similar phraseology to this in ancient building accounts. E.g. in the Baal Epic, we read of the refrain “Baal has no palace like the other gods.” See Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House*, 103.

<sup>209</sup> M. Görg has demonstrated the difference in nuance between *yšb* “the process of settling and consolidating one’s presence at a fixed location” and *škn* “settling without any enduring ties” in M. Görg, “יָשַׁב,” in *TDOT*, trans. John T. Willis, ed. Botterweck, Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Hinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 14:695–696.

was to make their gods stay put, and to know where their gods were. If David, accordingly, can build a house in which Yhwh can be said to dwell, then David and the people will always know where to find their God, who thus becomes more predictable and stable.”<sup>210</sup>

While Yahweh will not be domesticated in a permanent temple, this is not to be misunderstood as his unwillingness to be among his people. From the text, we see Yahweh reminding David of his immanent presence with the king in the past (vv. 8–9a) and promising David future blessings (vv. 9b–11a). In fact, Yahweh’s assertion of his sojourn in a tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן) since he brought Israel out of Egypt (v. 6) recalls his instruction to Israel to build him a tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן) so that he may dwell (שָׁבַע) among them (Ex 25:8). Two things are significant here. First, the instruction to make a dwelling for Yahweh was of his own initiative. It is Yahweh’s prerogative to decide how he will restrict his own presence in order to be with his people, but he will not allow anyone to conceive the idea of domesticating him with human structures such as temples. Second, the setting was the making of the covenant at Sinai and, just as it was Yahweh’s desire to dwell among his people after he had brought them out of Egypt (v. 7), it was still his desire to dwell among his people as indicated by Yahweh’s companionship with David in the king’s experience (v. 9). At first it seems like an oxymoron to connect Yahweh’s freedom to move around (indicated by the catchword הִלַּךְ in v. 6) with his immanent presence with the people of Israel (v. 7) and David (v. 9). It only goes to emphasize

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<sup>210</sup> Mark K. George, “Fluid Stability in Second Samuel 7,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 22.



Yahweh’s transcendence and his prerogative when it comes to limiting himself geographically. The fact is that Yahweh is transcendent and therefore cannot be housed or contained in a fixed geographical location such as a temple. This is later understood by Solomon when the temple was finally completed (1 Kgs 8:27), reiterated in Isaiah (Isa 66:1), and eventually became part of Israel’s theology through the destruction of the temple and its rebuilding (Jer 7:12–14; 23:24; Ps 11:4; 103:19; Matt 5:34–35 and Acts 7:49).<sup>211</sup>

#### 4.4.3 Yahweh’s “Family”

Although Yahweh rejects David’s offer to build him a temple, in return he offers to build a “house” for David (v. 11). Up to this point, the word **בַּיִת** has been used to denote the physical buildings of palace and temple. Here in verse 11, the wordplay on **בַּיִת** brings in a new meaning of “dynasty.” David’s desire to build Yahweh a temple is turned down, but Yahweh promises instead to build David an enduring dynasty through one of his sons (v. 12). That son will build a temple for Yahweh’s name and his throne will be established “forever” (v. 13). In addition to the twist of events, Yahweh will further adopt David’s successor as his son as indicated by the adoption language “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me” (v. 14). By implication of the enduring throne of David (v. 13 and 16), David’s subsequent descendants—hence the entire

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<sup>211</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 666.

Davidic dynasty—will be Yahweh’s adopted family.<sup>212</sup> Thus we can see that Yahweh is more interested in having enduring human relations than being “housed” with a “house.”

Besides the ancient Near Eastern concept of adoption (which we have already discussed above), we see here another concept involving promise of succession which is also notable in ancient treaties. It is interesting to draw comparisons between the Davidic promise and ancient treaties as seen in the promise of succession that Hattusili III of Hatti made to Ulmi-Teshshup of Tarhuntassa:

I, My Majesty, will [not depose] your son. [I will accept] neither your brother nor anyone else. Later your son and grandson will hold [the land] which I have given [to you]. It may not be taken away from him. If any son or grandson of yours commits an offense, then the King of Hatti shall question him. And if an offense is proven against him, then the king of Hatti shall treat him as he pleases. If he is deserving of death, he shall perish, but his household and land shall not be taken from him and given to the progeny of another. Only someone of the progeny of Ulmi-Teshshup shall take them.<sup>213</sup>

The parallel between the above Hittite treaty and the Davidic covenant is remarkable. Though the basis for such a gracious promise of a perpetual dynasty is not specifically mentioned in this particular treaty,<sup>214</sup> we know from other similar treaties that

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<sup>212</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 476. Tomoo Ishida also argues for the expansion of the meaning of זָרַע in 2 Sam 7:12 to eventually include all descendants of the House of David in later biblical texts, in Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: a Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977)103-104. Patrick Miller also asserts that “contexts which speak more specifically of Yahweh building (bānāh) a house...regularly have to do with a family line or a dynasty, as in God’s promise to build a sure or faithful house for his faithful priest (1 Sam 2:35),” in Patrick D. Miller, Jr., “Psalm 127—The House that Yahweh Builds,” *JSOT* 22 (1982): 123.

<sup>213</sup> Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 109.

<sup>214</sup> The sections on preamble and historical prologue have been lost and the remaining lines in the beginning are too fragmentary for translation.

the dynastic grant is based on the faithful conduct of the present vassal king.<sup>215</sup> First, we notice the common factor in both the Davidic promise and the Hittite treaty: a guarantee of perpetual succession in the family. The unconditional nature of the promise to the vassal king, as well as the limitation of the successor within the dynasty inevitably adds a kinship dimension to the political treaty, binding the family of the faithful covenant partner with the suzerain's family.<sup>216</sup> Second, there is a similar warning about punishment for disobedience as seen in 2 Sam 7:14. However, of greater importance to us are the differences which distinguish the Davidic promise from the Hittite treaty. Among the Hittite treaties, the adoption is always made between the patron and the immediate vassal, and the promise of succession to the vassal's descendants. In the covenant with David, Yahweh does not adopt David himself but his descendants. In other words, Yahweh has made himself the patriarch of the Davidic dynasty, and the patrilineage is Yahweh's rather than David's.<sup>217</sup> This makes David's successor a son of David and a "son" of Yahweh simultaneously. Next, we see that unlike the pagan treaties where the relationship between the two parties of the covenant are primarily legal and formal in nature, in the Davidic covenant Yahweh shows vested interest in his relationship with David and concern for his welfare. This is seen in Yahweh's companionship with David ("I have been with you wherever you have gone," v. 9); his concern for David's reputation ("I will make you a great name," v. 9), security (v. 10),

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<sup>215</sup> The OT does hint at the fact that the fidelity of David is the reason why his dynasty endures (1 Kgs 11:34–36).

<sup>216</sup> Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 15.

<sup>217</sup> George, "Fluid Stability in Second Samuel 7," 27.

and “נִוְדָה” (v. 11); and his promise that his חֶסֶד will not depart from David (v. 15).

Furthermore, in the pagan treaties where even a father-son relationship, real or adoptive, can be dissolved as a result of the son’s recalcitrance, Yahweh restricts his punishment to the extent of what a human father would employ (v. 14b; בְּשִׁבְטֵי אֲנָשִׁים וּבְנִגְעֵי בְּנֵי אָדָם). The point of this self-limitation is “to rule out the obvious, but much more drastic, sanction, that is, to repudiate the adoptive father-son relationship with any erring member of the dynasty.”<sup>218</sup>

In light of this, there is perhaps another way to understand the phrase “הוּא” in verse 13. Earlier we have said that this phrase speaks of Yahweh promising that a son of David will build a “temple” (בַּיִת) for Yahweh’s name. This stands in contrast with David’s idea of a temple which is for Yahweh to dwell (יָשָׁב) in (vv. 2 and 5). Richter explains that a temple marked by Yahweh’s name “is the ultimate symbol of YHWH’s past and present relationship with his people...which serves to memorialize and perpetuate YHWH’s acts of redemption in the midst of Israel and the nations.”<sup>219</sup> P. K. McCarter further argues that while temples may serve as memorials for someone’s name, a person’s name is also perpetuated in his progeny.<sup>220</sup> We have already

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<sup>218</sup> Donald F. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension: Pragmatics, Poetics and Polemics in a Narrative Sequence about David (2 Samuel 5.17–7.29)*, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, (*JSOTSup* 264; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 193.

<sup>219</sup> Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 90.

<sup>220</sup> P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 9, Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1984), 203.

seen in chapter 2 how the familial metaphor plays a major role in Israel’s understanding of her relationship with Yahweh. We have also noted the familial language of covenant, adoption, and discipline which underlie this pericope. Thus, with the intentional wordplay on בַּיִת in 2 Samuel 7, it is possible that besides the meaning of “temple,” we can also understand לְשֵׁמִי בַּיִת as referring to the “family” or “dynasty” of Yahweh.<sup>221</sup> Once again, the range of meanings made possible by the single word בַּיִת allows the author/editor of 2 Samuel 7 to address the issues of temple, dynasty and family. Whether intentional or otherwise, the equivocal nature of בַּיִת becomes programmatic for New Testament authors to speak of Yahweh as the Father of all believers, the community of faith as a family and a household of faith (Rom 1:7; 8:14; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3–4; 4:6; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; 4:20; and Col 1:2).<sup>222</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have dealt with understanding the relationship between Yahweh and David’s dynastic house. We started with the issue of covenant, and have come to see that there is general agreement among scholars now that the kinship-based organization of the Semitic tribes provides the paradigm and language for covenant institution. In the biblical progression of covenants, we note that after Yahweh’s covenant with Adam (which includes all humanity) was broken as a result of the Fall, he

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<sup>221</sup> George also understands the phrase לְשֵׁמִי בַּיִת as possibly meaning “dynasty for his name” in George, “Fluid Stability in Second Samuel 7,” 26.

<sup>222</sup> Mark V. Vander Hart, “Resurrecting the House,” *MAJT* 25 (2014): 86.

started over again with Noah and his immediate family. With Abraham, Yahweh's covenant was extended to a growing **בֵּית־אָב**. By the time we come to Moses, Yahweh's covenant was made with an entire nation. The last covenant instituted in the Old Testament is the Davidic covenant. On one hand, it appears to narrow down to just the royal family of David. On the other hand, the promise of a perpetual kingdom has an ever expanding quality to it. While the Davidic covenant restricts the rule to a descendant of David, it does not put a limit on who can be part of this kingdom. This aspect will become important for the writers of the New Testament.<sup>223</sup> This is an act of Yahweh's fatherly grace in response to a disobedient child. Whether it was a covenant with a person, a family, or an entire nation, Yahweh "condescends to [Israel's] needs and specific circumstances,"<sup>224</sup> but the underlying familial relationship in the covenant remains consistent throughout. As Cross puts it: "The God of Israel adopts Israel as a 'son' and is called 'father,' enters a marriage contract with Israel and is designated 'husband,' swears fealty oaths together with Israel and enters into covenant, assuming the mutual obligations of kinship, taking vengeance on Israel's enemies, going to war at the head of Israel's militia."<sup>225</sup>

Next, we looked at the adoption language and the fatherhood of Yahweh. With regard to adoption, we discover that the paucity of unequivocal references to adoption only serves to highlight the fact that in instances where the adoption declaration formula

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<sup>223</sup> This will be further discussed in chapter 6.

<sup>224</sup> Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 482.

<sup>225</sup> Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 13.

is clearly used, it only refers to the nation of Israel and the Davidic dynasty. The first of these occurrences is found in Ex 4:22 where Moses was instructed by Yahweh to tell Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Israel is my son, my firstborn.’” This took place even before Sinai, which has been shown to be more than simply bearing the form of a treaty, but is also a kinship covenant, whereby a familial bond between Yahweh and Israel is established on the basis of a father-son relationship. We may infer from this that the concept of Israel as Yahweh’s adopted son first exists in the form of fictive kinship (i.e. kinship by covenant) before it is even considered as kinship terminology in a treaty-type covenant.

Having understood the two concepts involving covenant and adoption, we turned to look at 2 Samuel 7:1–17 in the context of the ancient Near East. The familial connotations underlying the Dynastic Oracle become obvious because it consists of both a covenant and an adoption in process. David, who had found rest from his enemies, desired to secure his relationship with Yahweh. David planned to do what kings in the ancient world commonly did: build a temple to domesticate his god. David was thinking as a king and in political terms. Yahweh thought otherwise. As in the past for Yahweh, covenants were not just about agreements on political terms. It was about a relationship—a familial one to be sure. With the wordplay on בְּיָתֵי and the underlying familial connotations, I submit that besides the concern for Yahweh’s temple and David’s dynasty, the oracle is also about Yahweh’s adoption of the Davidic dynasty which eventually became Yahweh’s adopted family. As Israel transits from a tribal league to a monarchical state, Yahweh updates his covenant with his people, but the undergirding

familial emphasis remains unchanged. In its immediate context, the dynastic oracle continues the use of family as a framework for Israel's history, the understanding of Yahweh as Israel's father, and provides us with a familial lens to look at the Succession Narrative that follows.

In the wider biblical narrative, 2 Samuel 7:1–17, when understood in its context, can be mined for many important themes. Some of these become significant for New Testament theologies such as messianism, the fatherhood of God, the church as a family, and temple ideology. Building on Gordon's metaphor of 2 Samuel 7 as the "ideological summit" for the Old Testament as a whole, Bill Arnold comments that "from this peak we are able to look back and reflect on great themes leading up to this height while at the same time turning to look forward to the culmination of these promises."<sup>226</sup> With the Davidic covenant, family, an important theme from the past, is carried into the future.

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<sup>226</sup> Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 487.



## CHAPTER 5

### DAVID'S DYNASTIC FAMILY (2 SAMUEL 9–20; 1 KINGS 1–2)

#### 5.1 Introduction

Leo Perdue rightly asserts, “Much of what the Old Testament says about the character and especially the activity of God is shaped by discourse concerning the family. And much of what the Old Testament says about human morality concerns behavior within the context of the household.”<sup>227</sup>

We have already seen how the centrality of family forms the framework for Israel in the recounting of history. From the first family in the Garden of Eden to the nation of Israel as a people of God, the Old Testament recounts Israel's history through familial stories in a way that is unparalleled among its contemporary literature.<sup>228</sup> Within the Books of Samuel, family stories similarly provide the raw materials for weaving together the history of Israel's early monarchy. Hence we find the history of Israel transiting from a tribal league to a monarchical state related through the family stories of Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David. These family stories are linked together through the description of the

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<sup>227</sup> Leo G. Perdue, “Household, Theology, and Contemporary Hermeneutics,” in *Families in Ancient Israel*, eds. Don S. Browning and Ian S. Evison (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 225.

<sup>228</sup> James Muilenburg, “Father and Son,” in *Hearing and Speaking the Word: Selections from the Works of James Muilenburg*, ed. Thomas F. Best (Chico, CA: Scholar Press, 1984), 283–284.

characters' problems with sons who would not walk after their ways. In a nutshell, the plot line is one of family and succession, be it priestly, prophetic, or regnal in nature.

We have also seen how the social reality of the family became a paradigm for theologizing Israel's relationship to Yahweh. Metaphorically, Israel pictures herself as Yahweh's child in a relationship where obedience is expected and discipline is in place. In particular, I have highlighted the portrayal of Yahweh as Israel's father in an adoption relationship. From the Yahweh who called his firstborn out of Egypt to the Yahweh who became the father to David's descendants, Yahweh's desire to be in a familial relationship with Israel did not waver. Whether it is Israel organized as a tribal league or in the form of a monarchy, she is Yahweh's family.

We are now ready to look at what is traditionally known as the Succession Narrative (i.e. 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2). According to Rost,<sup>229</sup> we would be required to read this text through the lens of identifying the successor to David's throne. However, in line with the narrational development which I have presented thus far, following the family stories of Eli, Samuel, and Saul, we should also expect to find the story of David's/Yahweh's family in this section. In fact, as in the stories of Eli, Samuel and Saul, we would expect that this story concerns not merely succession but family as well. I am not trying to demolish Rost's proposition of a succession theme so much as bolster the case for an additional angle to read what he regards as the Succession Narrative. Thus, I propose that 2 Sam 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 should be understood as a weaving together of the two themes of politics and family. Since much has already been

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<sup>229</sup> Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, trans. Michael D. Rutter and David M. Gunn (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982).

written on this narrative from a political angle, I shall highlight the familial aspects of the narrative which exist inseparably alongside the political ones in this chapter.

## 5.2 His Son My Son: Concern for Progenies in the Context of Covenantal Relationship

The narrative concerning David's dynastic house begins with the king's concern for the progenies of those in covenantal relationship with him. After having firmly established his kingdom (2 Sam 8),<sup>230</sup> David seeks out the descendants of those who have shown kindness (רַחֲמֵי) to him. Hence 2 Samuel 9:1 begins with David's question: "Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Scholars are divided in their opinion regarding David's real intention in seeking out a descendant from the house of Saul.<sup>231</sup> Those who see good intentions in David generally base their argument on the emphasis of the word רַחֲמֵי in 2 Samuel 9. For example, Robert Bergen claims:

In this chapter David fulfills the pledge of familial support he made to Saul as well as to Jonathan son of Saul, the one initially positioned in the Saulide dynasty as David's chief challenger for Israel's throne. Through this narrative the biblical writer portrays David as the supreme Israelite example of covenant faithfulness (Hb. *hesed*), the highest virtue in Hebrew society.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> McCarter regards the events of 2 Samuel 8 as a catalogue of David's victories (vv. 1–14) and a roster of David's cabinet (vv. 15–18). See P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 9, Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1984), 251 and 257.

<sup>231</sup> See Cephas T. A. Tushima, *The Fate of Saul's Progeny in the Reign of David* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 224–270 for a discussion on the different views.

<sup>232</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *I, 2 Samuel*, NAC vol. 7, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 354.

However, because David's attitude towards Mephibosheth is framed in David's direct speech, it allows for psychological speculation by other scholars. Cephas Tushima, for one, agrees with other scholars that "David, at best, was combining loyalty to a dead friend with *Realpolitik* by sequestering Mephibosheth under his watchful eyes in order to forestall any irritations to the stability of his kingdom."<sup>233</sup> Perhaps, as David Gunn points out, "characteristically...the narrator refuses to allow us the luxury of making simple judgements. We are left with a perception of the ambivalence of events."<sup>234</sup> More so, I would propose, that this so-called ambivalence is in fact the inseparable dual themes of politics and family.

David's question in 2 Samuel 9:1 consists of two components. The first half of the question—"Is there anyone left of the house of Saul...?" is suggestive of David's interest in Saul's house (also vv. 2, 3, and 9). As the kings of the ancient Near East were known to treat their former or potential rivals harshly even to the point of killing all the members of the royal family,<sup>235</sup> this question certainly has a sinister ring to it. Based on the first half of David's question, it is only reasonable to suspect David of planning a political move to the advantage of securing his new kingdom. However, the second half of David's question—"...that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"—indicates that his concern is really based on his previous covenant with Jonathan (also vv. 3 and 7).

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<sup>233</sup> Tushima, *The Fate of Saul's Progeny in the Reign of David*, 251.

<sup>234</sup> D. M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Philip R. Davies and David M. Gunn (*JSOTSup.* 6; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), 97.

<sup>235</sup> V. Philips Long, "2 Samuel," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, vol. 2, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 453 and 455.

We must remember that **בְּרִית** is the real essence of a covenant (**בְּרִית**).<sup>236</sup>

David's desire to show **חֶסֶד** to Mephibosheth goes back to his covenant with Jonathan (1 Sam 18:1–5), which later includes the descendants of Jonathan (1 Sam 20:8, 14–17). Eventually this relationship develops into a covenant between David's family and Jonathan's family (1 Sam 20:42). David emphasizes his desire to show **חֶסֶד** to Mephibosheth three times as he narrows his search from (presumably) his court (2 Sam 9:1) to Ziba, a servant of Saul (v. 3) to finally Mephibosheth himself (v. 7). David demonstrates this **חֶסֶד** by restoring to Mephibosheth his inheritance of his patrimonial land (v. 7). This act of David should not be understood as “giving away someone else's land”<sup>237</sup> or the “practice of making land grants” like other ancient Near Eastern monarchs.<sup>238</sup> In restoring to Mephibosheth his patrimonial land, David is observing the Levitical law regarding the inalienability of land tenure in an Israelite family (cf. Lev 25).<sup>239</sup> Katharine Sakenfeld rightly comments: “The use of *hesed* pushes the practical political considerations into the background...the easy solution would have been to kill

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<sup>236</sup> Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, trans. Alfred Gottschalk (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), 47. See also Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978).

<sup>237</sup> Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 97.

<sup>238</sup> Long, “2 Samuel,” 455.

<sup>239</sup> See Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land and Property in the Old Testament* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1997), pp. 55–65 on the inalienability of Israelite land tenure within the family, and pp. 119–141 for the actual outworking of a person's right to the security and integrity of his ancestral land.

Meribaal, but...David instead honored his obligation to Jonathan by saving Meribaal alive and making him a part of the court.”<sup>240</sup>

In addition, David also invites Mephibosheth to eat at his table regularly. Not only does this indicate “special royal favor,”<sup>241</sup> but in ancient Israel, “dining together created a bond among the participants to which a moral obligation was attached...[and] on the occasion of a common meal, friendships were often sealed.”<sup>242</sup> The invitation to eat at the king’s table is mentioned four times in the narrative. While the mention of **חֲסֵד** begins with the public and moves towards a single person, the invitation to eat at the king’s table is mentioned in reverse order: first to Mephibosheth (v. 7), then to Ziba (v. 10), and finally confirmed by the narrator (v. 11 and 13). The mirroring of the word **חֲסֵד** with the invitation seems to suggest David’s sincerity to honor his word with actual actions. The narrator’s confirmation that Mephibosheth ate continually (**תָּמִיד**) validates the fact that David eventually kept to his word. More importantly, we note that the narrator adds the remark that “Mephibosheth ate at David's table as one of the king's sons” (v. 11). Previously Mephibosheth’s ancestry is tied to his father Jonathan (v. 3 and 7) and, with even higher frequency and concentration prior to this verse, to his grandfather Saul (v. 7, 9, and 10 [twice]). While there is no actual mention of David adopting Mephibosheth as son, the narrator’s comment at least indicates a kind of quasi father-son

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<sup>240</sup> Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed*, 90.

<sup>241</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 261. Note the same benefit extended to Jehoiachin, the exiled king of Judah, by Evil-merodach, king of Babylon (2 Kgs 25:27).

<sup>242</sup> Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 62.

relationship between David and Jonathan's surviving son. In fact, it is known that "eating together of portions of the same food had a profound meaning for the ancient Semites. It was a symbol and confirmation of fellowship and mutual social obligations. By this very act the participants are tied to one another by a bond of friendship. Indeed they become kinsmen, since only kinsmen eat together."<sup>243</sup> Eating together with the king's son also makes Mephibosheth their brother because "for the Semite, tasting another's food meant entering into fellowship with him thereby making him a 'brother', one who is not to be harmed but to be protected."<sup>244</sup> Commenting on the making of covenant, Paul Kalluveettil observes that:

A member of the family or tribe could accept a stranger into his household or tribe by concluding with him a covenant... Thereafter he becomes a full member of the family or tribe. His life is held sacred by all its members and they are responsible for it. His enemy becomes the enemy of all the members and they accept his friend as their friend. Thus a covenant implies an adoption into the household, an extension of kinship, the making of a brother.<sup>245</sup>

Thus, the narrative seems to indicate that David could have possibly treated (if not adopted) Mephibosheth as one of his own sons. Not the least, David honors his covenant with Jonathan to treat his family with חֶסֶד. This is again evident by David sparing the life of Mephibosheth when the Gibeonites sought blood revenge (2 Sam 21:7).

To be sure, keeping Mephibosheth (a descendant of Saul) as one of David's own family members posed a threat to the stability of David's rule. The expedience of this

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<sup>243</sup> Paul Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, Analecta Biblica 88 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982), 11.

<sup>244</sup> Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 118.

<sup>245</sup> Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 205.

decision in light of the political situation is definitely a question in the audience's mind. The narrative addresses this concern by mentioning twice that Mephibosheth was crippled in both feet and hence not a threat to the throne (v. 3 and 13). However, this does not completely eliminate the threat to David's political stability as the narrator is careful to mention that Mephibosheth has a son named Mica (v. 12). Clearly, we have here a situation where David has to make a decision between political expedience and kinship bonds. In treating Mephibosheth as one of his sons, David chose in this incident, family over politics.

Besides Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, David's concern for the progenies of those in covenantal relationship with him also includes Hanun, the son of Nahash (2 Sam 10). Just as David has shown רֶחֶם to Mephibosheth for the sake of his father Jonathan, David desires to show רֶחֶם to Hanun on account of his father Nahash who had earlier shown רֶחֶם to David (v. 2). The text shows no record of previous covenantal relationship between David and Nahash. A former enemy of Saul (1 Sam 11), Nahash was likely an ally of David's during the period when David was himself Saul's enemy.<sup>246</sup> David's desire to show רֶחֶם to surviving progenies of those in covenantal relationship with him met with less resistance within the house of Israel than without. Upon the death of Nahash, David sends his servants to console Hanun concerning his loss (v. 2). The

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<sup>246</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 520.



word **נָחַם** indicates that David’s action is “clearly not military in nature”<sup>247</sup> but Hanun chooses to see them as emissaries sent to spy out his land. In return for covenantal kindness, Hanun humiliates David’s servants by shaving off half their beards and cutting off half their garments to the level of their hips, thus exposing their private parts (v. 4). According to McCarter, the combination of these two acts of humiliation is symbolic of castration.<sup>248</sup> This in turn implies the severing of one’s progeny, which ironically contrasts with David’s intention for sending his men—to show **חַסְדֵּי** to Nahash’s progeny. Thus we see again the intertwining of political and familial themes in this narrative concerning David and Hanun, the son of Nahash.

2 Samuel 10–12 is commonly viewed as a single unit.<sup>249</sup> The fallout between David and Hanun (2 Sam 10:1-5) is the catalyst of the Ammonite wars (2 Sam 10:6–11:1a; 12:26–31) which frames the story concerning David, Bathsheba, Uriah, Nathan, and Solomon. Sandwiched between public political affairs is a sequence of related familial events—David takes someone’s wife, murders that woman’s husband, experiences the loss of a son, and has another son. This section starts with the clause “But David stayed at Jerusalem” (11:1b) and ends with the sentence “Now the LORD loved him and sent word through Nathan the prophet, and he named him Jedidiah for the LORD’S sake” (12:24b–25). The interruptive use of disjunctive *waws* prefixed to proper

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<sup>247</sup> Arnold, *I & 2 Samuel*, 520. Note the two other occurrences of **נָחַם** in 2 Samuel which also have the sense of comforting someone in bereavement (12:24; 13:39).

<sup>248</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 270.

<sup>249</sup> See Ronald F. Youngblood, “I, 2 Samuel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* vol. 3, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 920 for a detailed argument on the unity of chapters 10–12.

nouns (“וּרְיָהוּ” and “וַיְהִי־וְהָיָה”) forms the bookends of this parenthetical section and supplies necessary information for the larger narrative.<sup>250</sup> It will become evident that the familial stories within the Ammonite wars form the basis for the wars within David’s family in the rest of the narrative from 2 Samuel 13–20.

I have already shown in chapter 3 that the juxtaposing of Uriah’s house with David’s palace in 2 Samuel 11 highlights the negative impact that monarchy has on the household. This further supports my argument that there is obvious intentionality here to weave the dual themes of family and politics together. Furthermore, this section continues the motif of concern for progeny in the context of covenantal relationship found in the events surrounding the two sons which Bathsheba bears. The first son, whose name is not mentioned, is conceived through David’s adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. In the cases of Mephibosheth and Nahash, David willingly observes his obligation to care for the sons of those in covenantal relationship with him. In 2 Samuel 11, however, David does the reverse and tries to manipulate Uriah into owning the son whom Bathsheba conceives through David outside of a covenanted marriage. With Mephibosheth, David shows concern for Jonathan’s son and treats him like his own. With his own son that is conceived out of adultery, David’s concern is to make him appear to belong to Uriah.

The second son that Bathsheba gives birth to is Solomon, also known as Jedidiah. In stark contrast to the first unnamed son, this second son is named twice (2 Sam 12:24–25). Prior to this, Solomon only appears once in 2 Samuel 5:14, listed in a summary

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<sup>250</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 651–652.

statement as one of David's many sons. Without the intentional mention of Solomon here, it would be difficult to follow the narrative when Solomon next appears in 1 Kings 1:10. The naming of this second son is necessary in the story for the presentation of the successor to David's throne. The double naming of Solomon/Jedidiah has a deeper significance than just the differentiation between a personal name given by the parents (i.e. Solomon) and a throne name given by the dynastic god (i.e. Jedidiah) as proposed by some scholars.<sup>251</sup> This must be understood in conjunction with the other two birth narratives in the Books of Samuel where the naming of a child is mentioned. The first incidence is the naming of Samuel in 1 Samuel 1:20 and the second is found in 1 Samuel 4:21 where Ichabod is named during the Philistine's capture of the Ark. Incidentally, all these three events are key turning points in Israel's history, particularly in relation to David's kingdom. Samuel will eventually anoint David as king. The housing of the Ark will become one of David's major concerns for establishing his kingdom. Solomon will become the successor to David's throne. In addition, Samuel, the Ark, and king Solomon are all mediators of Yahweh. Since the naming of Samuel and Ichabod gives meaning to their immediate circumstances, it thus leads us to think of a deeper significance in Yahweh's calling Solomon "Jedidiah." On other occasions, Yahweh changes a person's name; for example, Abram's name is changed to Abraham. Sometimes Yahweh tells a person what to name his child, such as in the case of Hosea's children. But here it is said that Yahweh specifically names the child Jedidiah. I have argued in chapter four that Yahweh has adopted the successor to David's throne as his son. In light of this, the act of

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<sup>251</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 303.

Yahweh's conferring the name Jedidiah on Solomon is in fact the act of a father naming his son. Furthermore, the name Jedidiah can thus be understood not only as theophoric in nature, but also patronymic. Thus David's son, the successor to the throne, is also Yahweh's son by covenant. We have here the emergence of the successor to David's throne set in a birth narrative. Once again, the political and familial themes are inseparable.

### 5.3 The Sword in the House: Family in Warfare

After describing David's acts of  $\text{רָצַח}$  to the progenies of his covenanted friends (2 Sam 9:1–10:5), the narrative continues to describe David's sins and their consequences (2 Sam 11:1b–12:25) framed by the Ammonite wars (2 Sam 10:6–11:1a; 12:26–31). 2 Samuel 11:1 hinges the door between David's public and private affairs: "kings go out ( $\text{יָצְאוּ}$ )...but David stayed ( $\text{יָשָׁב}$ )." Instead of going to war, David stays home, thus setting up for the reader the antagonism between politics and family. Next, David abuses his power as a king by sending for ( $\text{לְשַׁלֵּחַ}$ ) and taking ( $\text{לְקַח}$ ) Bathsheba, tearing apart two families as the narrative is careful to identify Bathsheba as the daughter of Eliam (11:3) and, more frequently, as the wife of Uriah (11:3, 11, 26; 12:9, 10). The antagonism between the house of David and the house of Uriah escalates as David discovers that Bathsheba is pregnant with his child and he is unable to cover up his sin (11:6–13).

Finally, David resorts to murdering Uriah who is both a soldier as well as a family man<sup>252</sup> by making use of the ongoing battle (11:14–25). From the presentation of the narrative in 2 Samuel 11 involving David, Bathsheba and Uriah, we see that the political situation merely forms the background for the sins of David. Being a king merely increases David’s power to abuse the people around him. The battle is merely a tool in David’s hand for him to manipulate the situation. But the point is that David has done something evil in the sight of Yahweh (11:27), which is the breaking up of a family by taking Uriah’s wife unlawfully and murdering the husband after.

The narrative is immediately followed by Nathan’s indictment of David. Nathan begins by telling David a parable (12:1–6). At first glance, the parable appears to employ agricultural imagery. Nathan’s story about men who own sheep would certainly strike a chord in the heart of the king who was a former shepherd. On closer look, the supposedly agricultural parable is colored with familial connotations. In the parable, the only ewe lamb of the poor man is said to be like a “daughter” (בַּת) to him (v. 3). While this is rightly a wordplay on the name of Bathsheba (בַּת־שֶׁבַע) and an allusion to her genealogy as “daughter of Eliam” (בַּת־אֱלִיעֶזֶר, 11:3),<sup>253</sup> note that more is described of this lamb in the verse. The lamb is literally like a family member to the poor man. It is said to have grown together with the poor man and his children. The lamb even shares the same utensils with the poor man in eating and drinking. The additional descriptions

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<sup>252</sup> The narrator is careful to observe the husband and wife relationship of Uriah and Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11:26.

<sup>253</sup> Robert Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: 2 Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 123.

attributed to the ewe lamb clearly show the deliberate intention in portraying familial relationships in the parable. The parable incited unsuspecting David to anger and, in response, David judges that the rich man should die. Incidentally, David uses familial language in pronouncing the rich man's death sentence, calling him a "son of death" (בֶּן-מוֹת, 12:5). Although this term may idiomatically refer simply to one deserving of death, it is found only in the Books of Samuel.<sup>254</sup> The term "son of death" is also closely associated with David as an eerie echo from the past and an ominous forecast of the future. Earlier, when Saul knew that his son Jonathan sided with David against him, he cursed his son using coarse familial language and called David a "son of death" (1 Sam 20:30–31). On another earlier incident, David found that Saul's bodyguards failed in watching over their king and he called them "sons of death" (1 Sam 26:16). Presently in his response to Nathan's parable, David unknowingly condemns himself as a "son of death." In the future David will see the deaths of four of his sons—the child of his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah—fulfilling his sentence of the rich man in the parable that he shall pay back four times for the lamb that is taken from the poor man.<sup>255</sup> Nathan's parable thus indicts David for breaking up Bathsheba's family with the result of David's own family being torn apart in the future.

It is important to note that while David sees the rich man in the parable as lacking compassion, Nathan sees what David did as evil:

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<sup>254</sup> David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham (*AOT* 8; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 228. The similar expression "man of death" is found in 2 Sam 19:29 and 1 Kgs 2:26.

<sup>255</sup> Jon D. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and as History," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 23.

Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife (2 Samuel 12:9–10).

More importantly, Nathan highlights the “sword” (חֶרֶב) as the means by which David takes Uriah’s wife. While חֶרֶב can refer to a sword or dagger, here it is used metaphorically to refer to warfare since it refers to the cause of Uriah’s death with specific reference to the Ammonites.<sup>256</sup> In the same context, the “sword” that will never depart from David’s house has to mean more than military weapons and refers, in fact, to military engagements. Hence the point of Nathan’s sentence is more than the fact that David’s sons (Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah) will die by the sword as put forth by McCarter.<sup>257</sup> In the larger context, David’s house will never be divorced from warfare as further indicated by the close association of the two nouns “sword” and “house” (חֶרֶב מִבֵּיתִי). The “sword” that took Uriah’s life will turn toward David’s house. Thus, as McCarter writes, “David’s own sanctimonious words of reassurance to Joab in 11:25 have come back to haunt him: ‘...sometimes the sword devours one way, sometimes another’.”<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> In fact, Peter Enns claims that in the OT, “the root *hrb* is used almost exclusively in the contexts of fighting and warfare.” See Peter Enns, “חֶרֶב,” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 2:259.

<sup>257</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 300.

<sup>258</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 300.

We can now see clearly the literary artistry of the pericope from 2 Samuel 10:6–12:31. By literary arrangement, the “house” is “within” the “sword” as the story of David-Bathsheba-Uriah is framed by the Ammonite war. We see that first in the tearing apart of Bathsheba’s family as related to Uriah her husband and Eliam her father. This theme is then repeated in a parable where the ewe lamb is described as a family member of the poor man, later taken from the poor man’s bosom by the rich man. In verse nine we see that the house is engulfed by the sword just as the act of breaking up a family (i.e. David’s taking of Uriah’s wife to be his wife) is sandwiched between the dual mention of the “sword” that took Uriah’s life. This is followed by another account of a family torn apart by the death of Bathsheba’s first son. The multilayered presentation of the intertwining relationship between “sword” and family breakdowns underscores the narrator’s emphasis that these two entities will become inseparable issues in David’s house. Nathan’s sentence concerning David’s sin foreshadows how David’s house will struggle constantly with war. We will see this struggle beginning internally within his family, then between his tribe and the other tribes of Israel, and eventually between Israel and foreign nations.

#### **5.4 David and His Sons of Death**

As mentioned above, David’s pronouncement of the rich man in the parable as the “son of death” and his sentencing him to a fourfold restitution becomes a premonition concerning the death of four of his sons. The reader would thus be interested to find out if there is any commonality among the four of them. If we think in terms of rivalry to



David's throne, each of the sons had varying degrees of success in terms of accession. The firstborn son of Bathsheba did not even have a chance since he only lived a short few days. Amnon showed no sign of fighting for the throne since, as the oldest son of David, he is naturally the crown prince. Adonijah's attempt to usurp the throne was not successful. Absalom is the only son who at least managed to secure the throne albeit not for very long. However, when we think in terms of David's relationship with these four sons, we find detailed descriptions of David's emotions in relation to them. The contrast is even greater when we think of the lack of mention of David's affection towards Solomon, the only other son that has been given more description in the narrative. It is ironic that, as far as the narrative is concerned, the true successor to David's throne only saw his father at his own birth and one more time at his father's death. On those two occasions, David's relationship with Solomon is described in matter-of-fact formalities. At the birth of Solomon (2 Sam 12:24), David gave him his name. Solomon's name, whether it means "peace" or "replacement," betrays David's concern for his own situation rather than for his son. On his deathbed, David merely charges Solomon with his death wishes that concern unsettled business of his kingdom (1 Kgs 2:1-10). When we look at David's dealings with his other four sons, it is very different.

#### **5.4.1 David and the firstborn son of Bathsheba**

When Yahweh struck the first son that Bathsheba bore to David, David responded with dramatic behavior. First David fasted and wept. The only other times we are told of David fasting and weeping was when he heard of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam

1:12) and Abner (2 Sam 3:31–35). Second, David spent the night lying on the ground and refused to get up. In fact, the whole section of 2 Samuel 12:15–23 is dedicated to describing and explaining David’s unusual behavior before and after the death of his son. These details add little to the plot of the story, but they certainly give the reader insight into David’s passion for the life of his son. David’s grief is so deep that his servants were even afraid to let him know of his son’s death. Even upon hearing of his son’s demise, David comforted himself with the fact that they will be reunited as a family when he dies (v. 23).<sup>259</sup>

#### **5.4.2 David and Amnon**

2 Samuel 13 records the events surrounding Amnon and accounts for his death. All the characters that are named in this account are intertwined in a web of kinship relationships, and the narrator is careful to provide the information we need to know them. From the outset of the story, we are introduced to David and three of his children—Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar (v. 1). Amnon and Absalom are described as David’s son and the account subsequently has both of them referring to each other as brother (v. 4 and 26). On the contrary, Tamar is not even once mentioned as David’s daughter in the story. At her first appearance in the story, Tamar is described as the sister of Absalom.<sup>260</sup> This poses a potential problem with two other details mentioned about her—that she is

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<sup>259</sup> See Stephen Cook’s explanation on the understanding of Israelite family burial site as a means for “the members of the kin-group who owned it to remain interconnected in death according to the very ties of family and lineage that bound them together in life,” in “Death, Kinship, and Community: Afterlife and the **בית** Ideal in Israel,” in *The Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel*, ed. Patricia Dutcher-Walls (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2009), 113.

<sup>260</sup> That Tamar is Absalom’s sister is mentioned also in verses 4, 20 [3x], 22, and 32.

beautiful and Amnon loves her. In the rest of the story which details Amnon's systematic execution of his plan to rape Tamar, the fact that Tamar is his sister (or half-sister) is deliberately emphasized.<sup>261</sup> Jonadab, who instigated Amnon to rape Tamar, is David's nephew, the son of David's brother Shimeah. His relationship with David is carefully detailed when he first appears as Amnon's advisor (v. 2) and later as the announcer of Amnon's death (v. 32). Finally we have Talmai, the person to whom Absalom flees after he kills Amnon. We are told earlier (3:3) that Talmai is Absalom's maternal grandfather.

Amnon's rape of his sister Tamar fulfills another aspect of Nathan's sentence concerning David's sin against Uriah and Bathsheba. Nathan told David that Yahweh will raise up evil (רָעָה) against him from within his own family (12:11). Tamar uses this same word to describe what Amnon has done to her (13:16). Absalom, on the other hand speaks neither any word of good nor evil (רָע) to Amnon, though he is scheming in his heart to do evil to Amnon (13:22). Although Absalom's present silence and subsequent revenge justifies a reading that suspects rivalry to the throne,<sup>262</sup> the story in 2 Samuel 13 also "probes the ambiguities in the network of obligation and taboo that defines Israelite

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<sup>261</sup> The frequency whereby the relationship between Amnon and Tamar as siblings is mentioned is remarkable. Four times Tamar is referred to as Amnon's sister (vv. 2, 5, 6, and 11); once as his half-sister in relation to Absalom (v. 4). Conversely, Tamar refers to Amnon as her brother six times (vv. 7, 8, 10, 12, 20 [2x]). Ironically, after the rape, Amnon's love for Tamar turns into hate and refers to her as "woman" (v. 17). Robert Polzin claims that 2 Samuel not only has "an unusually large number of references to sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters," but also that chapter 13 "refers to children and siblings more often than any other chapter in the book does." See Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 133.

<sup>262</sup> Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 145. Nevertheless, there is no specific mention of kingship in this narrative. The specifics all have to do with family.

kinship.”<sup>263</sup> In the story David is portrayed as both father<sup>264</sup> and king.<sup>265</sup> Oftentimes David’s role as both father and king is inseparable when his children are referred to as the king’s daughters (v. 18) or the king’s son(s) (vv. 4, 23, 25, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, and 36). Jonadab uses the fact of David’s dual role to his advantage in advising Amnon how to manipulate the situation. He refers to Amnon as the king’s son (v. 4) but uses David’s paternal affection to set up the trap (v. 5). It is also this dual role of David that raises in the reader’s mind questions regarding how David would respond to Amnon’s crime. As a king, David had always been decisive. As a father, David becomes irresolute. The MT records that David was very angry when he found out (2 Sam 13:21). However, the LXX and Qumran adds “But he did not grieve the spirit of Amnon his son, because he loved him, since he was his firstborn” as an explanation for David’s lack of disciplinary action against Amnon.<sup>266</sup>

Amnon might have escaped David’s punishment, but he certainly did not escape Absalom’s revenge. When David was told that Absalom murdered Amnon, his reactions to the news is again described in extensive details (2 Sam 13:30–39). David’s grief over the death of Amnon was also dramatic, expressed in tearing of clothes, laying on the ground, and much weeping. It is further said that David mourned for his son every day (v.

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<sup>263</sup> William H. Propp, “Kinship in 2 Samuel 13,” *CBQ* 55 (1993): 39–40.

<sup>264</sup> Verses 1, 5, 25, and 37.

<sup>265</sup> Verses 6 (2x), 13, 21, 24 (2x), 26, 31, 33, 35, and 36.

<sup>266</sup> The longer version which has the additional sentence (וְלֹא עָצַב אֶת רוּחַ אֲמֹנֹן בְּנֹו כִי) is probably original as agreed among most commentators, and the reason for the omission is likely due to scribal error resulting from the eye of the scribe skipping to the next וְלֹא in verse 22. So A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, WBC vol. 11, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 176.

37). Although the ambiguity as to whether David was mourning for Absalom or Amnon may be intentional to reflect the mixed emotions of the father who suffered the loss of both sons whether by death or banishment,<sup>267</sup> it nevertheless demonstrates the extent of David's emotional attachment to either or both of them. More likely David was mourning for Amnon's death since the word אָבֵל, when used in relation to a person, is usually associated with death.<sup>268</sup> This understanding is further supported by David's outward behavior (i.e. tearing of clothes, laying on the ground, and much weeping) associated with the rites of mourning for a deceased person. Again we see here that the narrator takes time to elaborate David's emotions for his son.

If 2 Samuel 13 is about the maneuver of a younger brother in removing his older brother, the crown prince, and advancing his position closer to the succession of the throne, it is only implicative, though undeniably possible considering Absalom's subsequent action in usurping the throne. But a simple reading of the account in chapter 13 reveals contents of "familial fratricide and fraternal rape within the royal family" and "familial war amongst the sons of the king."<sup>269</sup> As a king, David was shrewd in his dealings with battles against foreign enemies. As a father and with regard to war within the family, David becomes ambivalent in his decision. David knew how to deal with the enemy's sword, but he is incapacitated by the sword in his house.

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<sup>267</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation, ed. James Luther Mays (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 291.

<sup>268</sup> Arnulf Baumann, "אָבֵל," in *TDOT*, ed. Botterweck, Johannes and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 1:44–48.

<sup>269</sup> Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 136.

### 5.4.3 David and Absalom

It has been three years since Amnon's death (2 Sam 13:38). David has been comforted of his grief over Amnon and now longs for his son Absalom who sought asylum in his maternal grandfather's house (2 Sam 13:39). Perceiving David's longing for his son, Joab decides to expedite the reconciliation between David and Absalom. Joab's reason for bringing Absalom back is presumably political in nature, seeking to restore the next-in-line successor to the throne back to the royal house.<sup>270</sup> As before, David finds difficulty in making decisions concerning matters of the family, so Joab employs the help of a wise woman from Tekoa to persuade David into taking action.

#### 5.4.3.1 *The Tekoite Woman's role in the David-Absalom relationship*

Just as Nathan made up a parable to elicit a response from David (2 Sam 12:1–4), the wise woman of Tekoa also made up a story to evoke judgement from the king (2 Sam 13:2–20). As in Nathan's parable, the Tekoite woman's story involves familial relationships. However, unlike Nathan who speaks as a third party, this woman "speaks in the persuasive, pathos-filled (albeit pretending) voice of a mother."<sup>271</sup> To make her story believable, the Tekoite woman dresses up as a mourner. The Hebrew root for mourning (אבל) is used three times to describe her appearance (14:2), echoing David's mourning for the death of his two sons—Bathsheba's first son (11:27) and Amnon

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<sup>270</sup> Robert P. Gordon, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 266. However, as seen in 2 Sam 23:15–16 David's men seem always to have been eager to carry out whatever they perceived their chief to have wanted.

<sup>271</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 292.

(13:37). The special mention of **בְּגָדֵי־אֲבֵל** refers to distinctive mourning clothes that possibly indicates the woman's loss of her son.<sup>272</sup> Joab's specific instruction that she should not anoint herself with oil is meant to indicate that she has not stopped mourning for the deceased.<sup>273</sup> In addition the Tekoite woman is supposed to appear as if she has already been mourning for many days. Hence the whole setup is carefully designed to evoke David's memory of the fact that he has already lost two sons. Appearance alone, the Tekoite woman already successfully creates before David a powerful visual image that digs into his dark memories concerning family that David has long buried.

When we come to the Tekoite woman's speech, we see even more familial components in her story that touches the very core of human relationships in a kinship-based society. As an actress, the Tekoite woman's persona is deliberately emphasized by doubling her self-identification as a widow and as one whose husband is dead (14:5).<sup>274</sup> The case that the Tekoite woman brings before David begins with a familial problem. She has only two sons and one killed the other (14:6). As her story unfolds, it becomes apparent that the problem involves others in the clan (14:7). The family problem deepens as it turns out that the avengers of blood are not really after justice but, rather, the

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<sup>272</sup> Just as **אֵל־מְנוּחַת בְּגָדֵי** indicates mourning clothes for someone who is bereaved of her husband (Gen 38:14). See Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 48.

<sup>273</sup> Gary A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 45.

<sup>274</sup> George W. Coats, "Parable, Fable, and Anecdote: Storytelling in the Succession Narrative," *Int* 35 (1981): 378.

widow's inheritance.<sup>275</sup> The Tekoite even uses a familial idiom, the extinguishing of her remaining coal, as a punchline for iterating that her husband's line will be cut off forever.<sup>276</sup> The irony is that גֹּאֵל is a double edged sword. Without further qualification, this substantive refers to a kinsman that can either be a redeemer (Ruth 4:14) or an avenger (e.g. Num 35:12). In the Tekoite woman's story, the kinsman is specified as an "avenger of blood" (גֹּאֵל הַדָּם, 14:11). According to law, a kinsman has the right to find and kill the person who murdered someone in their family or clan.<sup>277</sup> While appearing to act in accordance with the responsibility of a kinsman to bring justice to the clan, the avenger of blood is really after the widow's inheritance, thus acting contrary to the responsibility of a kinsman to protect the property of the widow. The story of the Tekoite woman is ingenious because it also cuts both ways in relation to Absalom's situation. On surface, it seems to imply that Absalom is the surviving son that needs protection. But when read between the lines, the story may also hint at Absalom being the avenger of blood who practices self-serving deception, for while appearing to kill Amnon out of revenge for his sister Tamar, he may secretly be after Amnon's inheritance to the throne. Add on the fact that this event presents a mother acting on behalf of Joab's political scheme and intervening with David's family affair, we are faced again with the

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<sup>275</sup> J. Hoftijzer, "David and the Tekoite Woman," *VT* 20 (1970): 422.

<sup>276</sup> Babylonian proverb understood an "extinguished fireplace" (*kinūnu belū*) to be symbolic of the lack of future progeny in a family. See Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life*, ed. B. Halpern and M. H. E. Weippert (SHANE; Leiden, NY: Brill, 1996), 130.

<sup>277</sup> Helmer Ringgren, "גֹּאֵל," in *TDOT*, trans. John T. Willis, ed. Botterweck, Johannes and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 2:352.



inseparable twin issues of family and politics. After her lengthy persuasion, the Tekoite woman leaves the decision to David, to decide between good and evil, and ends with the words: “May Yahweh your God be with you” (14:17). There is a definite ominous sound to these words. Here we have the word **עַן** again, and if Yahweh has anything to do with David’s family, he has already said that he will raise up **רָעָה** from within (12:11). Hence it should not surprise the reader that David’s decision to bring Absalom back is going to result in more harm for the family. Although the Tekoite woman succeeds in persuading David to bring Absalom back physically, she has not helped much in healing the emotional distance between father and son. Before the Tekoite woman’s intervention, the physical distance between father and son is emphasized in the narrative by three times mentioning that Absalom has fled (13:34, 37, and 38). After Absalom’s return to Jerusalem, it is also mentioned three times that he did not see David’s face, signifying that the emotional restoration is still not complete (14:24 and 28).

#### *5.4.3.2 Joab’s role in the David-Absalom relationship*

While the story of the Tekoite woman successfully influenced David’s decision to bring Absalom back home, we must not forget that Joab was the one actually behind this plan. In fact, the reader is reminded both at the beginning and at the end of the Tekoite woman’s story that it was Joab who put words in her mouth (14:3 and 19). Rachele Gilmore points out three key moments in David’s life where Joab opposed the king’s opinion and created in David an internal conflict regarding his roles as father and as

king.<sup>278</sup> The first incident was Joab’s involvement in bringing Absalom back which we have just mentioned above. The second incident was Joab’s murder of Absalom. Joab is specifically named as one of the three commanders whom David carefully instructed to deal gently with Absalom (לֹא־תִּיָּדָה לְאַבְשָׁלוֹם; 18:5). The same verse lets the reader know that David also said this within the hearing of all the people. Later, when Absalom’s head was caught in the tree and one of Joab’s men found him in this vulnerable position, he hesitated to harm Absalom. When Joab reprimanded him for not killing Absalom, the man recalled David’s instruction to Joab and the rest, and specifically referred to Absalom as the king’s son (18:12), perhaps in the attempt to remind Joab of Absalom’s relationship to David. From Joab’s later rejection of Ahimaaz who requested to take David news of the outcome, we know that he was certainly well aware that Absalom was David’s son (18:20). Wasting no time, Joab speared the defenseless Absalom to death. It is clear from the story that Joab ignored David’s intention to protect Absalom and took matters into his own hands and interfered with David’s role as a father to Absalom. The third incident is Joab’s opposition to David’s grief over the death of Absalom. At the news of Absalom’s death, it is said that David mourned for his son (19:1). Here we have again the keyword אָבִל from the story of the Tekoite woman. Here we have David mourning for his third “son of death.” The narrator tells us that David’s personal grief affects the spirit of his men who, instead of rejoicing as those returning in victory, are mourning as well. David’s troops were well

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<sup>278</sup> Rachele Gilmour, *Representing the Past: A Literary Analysis of Narrative Historiography in the Book of Samuel* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 211–218.

aware that “the king is grieved for his son” (19:2). These very words from the soldiers’ mouth are an irony in themselves, since “the king” David and his troops should rejoice in the victory over their enemies. However, because the enemy is “his son,” David mourned and so did his men. Joab alone thought from the political standpoint.<sup>279</sup> His rebuking speech to David drove a wedge between David’s role as a father and a king. Joab first put David’s family at odds with his servants by stating: “Today you have covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who today have saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives, and the lives of your concubines” (19:5). The truth is that Joab and ten of these men had been responsible for putting Absalom, David’s son, to death (18:15). Second, Joab put David’s servants at odds with his son Absalom by saying that David hated his men but loved Absalom, and that David would rather have his men die in place of Absalom (19:6). For the third time, Joab interfered with David’s relationship with his son Absalom and put political interest first.

#### 5.4.3.3 *The sword (again)*

The civil war (2 Sam 15–18) between Absalom and his father David presents another incident of the “sword” in David’s family. After Absalom’s revolt, David called his men to run with him and said of Absalom, “He will overtake us quickly and bring down calamity on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword” (15:14). We will see

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<sup>279</sup> Joab’s accusation of David loving (אָהַב) his enemy instead of his own troops in 19:6 has political connotations. William Moran argues that אָהַב can be used to describe loyalty between kings and subjects. See William L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 78–80. If Joab’s purpose in restoring Absalom to Judah was to get the crown prince back “into the fold,” as it were, then that ploy had badly backfired, and Joab’s overarching loyalty to David took over.

in this section that the “sword”—the war between Absalom and David—had a rippling effect beginning with David’s family.

Just as David was on the run when his life was threatened by Saul, the civil war forced David to be on the run again, only this time he had a much bigger family to take care of. This time, David had his family fleeing together with him except his ten concubines whom he left behind at home (15:16). The result of David leaving his concubines behind gave Absalom the opportunity to lie with them as an open insult to his father the king. This obviously fulfilled Nathan’s earlier prophecy that David’s affair with Bathsheba would result in a “companion” (or “rival”) of his lying with his wife in broad daylight (12:11). In addition, this “companion” was not just a friend, but David’s own flesh and blood, thus further fulfilling Nathan’s pronouncement that evil would rise up from within David’s family. This audacious act of incest was not only a familial outrage, but also a political maneuver. Ahithophel’s council to Absalom to sleep with the royal harem was a common political practice in the ancient Near East as “a direct affront to the monarch and tantamount to usurpation.”<sup>280</sup> At the same time, Ahithophel was well aware that the king to whom these concubines belonged was none other than Absalom’s father (16:21–22).<sup>281</sup>

The effects of Absalom’s revolt not only affected David’s family, but also other families in the larger community. Not only was David’s family fleeing Jerusalem but those running away with him had families too. Ittai, though a foreigner, showed loyalty

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<sup>280</sup> Long, “2 Samuel,” 466.

<sup>281</sup> Just as Bathsheba was frequently noted as the wife of Uriah and Tamar as the sister of Absalom and Amnon, the concubines are twice referred to as belonging to Absalom’s father.

to David by going with David and it is said that his family went with him as well (15:19–22). The families of Zadok and Abiathar were also put at risk as they and their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, served as informants for David in Absalom’s court (15:24–37). This in turn put the lives of the family in Bahurim at risk for hiding Ahimaaz and Jonathan in their home (17:18–21).

Enmity among cousins is also highlighted in the narrative concerning Absalom’s rebellion. Although Joab was instrumental in helping to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem, he did not help Absalom gain presence before David until Absalom burnt his property (14:28–33). Joab had his revenge later by putting Absalom to death against David’s wish. This in turn led to David’s decision to replace Joab with Amasa (19:13). The narrator is careful to interrupt the story and provide the reader with background information concerning Amasa at his first appearance, sparing no words to make sure we understand that he was Joab’s cousin: “Now Amasa was the son of a man whose name was Ithra the Israelite, who went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruah, Joab’s mother” (17:25). David’s oath to replace Joab with Amasa is further emphasized by his familial ties with Amasa who he announced as his “bone and flesh.” In order to secure his own position as commander of David’s army, Joab sought to kill Amasa. As in the case of the murder of Uriah, Joab took the opportunity afforded by the battle against Sheba to murder his cousin. The narrator once again describes the incident by juxtaposing military with familial elements. Joab was dressed in military attire as he greeted Amasa with a gesture of affection and called him “brother” (20:9). The murder weapon, a sword, is hard to miss for the narrator takes time to describe it (20:8 and 10).

The account of Absalom's rebellion also hints at the effect of the "sword" in David's "house" extending to the other tribes of Israel. Even early in his preparation for revolt, Absalom had already put a wedge between the northern tribes and Judah (15:1–6). After Absalom's death, the tribes of Israel were thrown into a state of limbo (19:8b–10) with the northern tribes professing loyalty to David, while Judah which had supported Absalom was uncertain what to do. It was not until David had overcome his grief and addressed the elders of his tribe in familial language (19:12), reminding them of their kinship bonds that he was able to regain control. Absalom's revolt also gave occasion for dissension within Saul's house between Mephibosheth and Ziba concerning an ostensible rebellion (16:1–4) and retaliation from Shimei (also from Saul's house) whose senseless remarks hit the nail on the head. Shimei may have been wrong about David paying for the blood of Saul, but he was right that Absalom was the "evil" (רָעָה) due David (16:8). This catchword is perhaps what led David to lament that his own son from his own body (בְּנֵי אִשְׁרָר־יֹצֵא מִמֶּעִי) was trying to kill him and that Shimei was speaking on behalf of Yahweh (16:11). However, at David's eventual return, everything appeared to be resolved, at least superficially. The issue of Mephibosheth and Ziba came to a settled agreement (19:24–30), Shimei was spared for the time being (19:16–23), and all Israel became "brothers" again (19:42–43).

There was, however, one "worthless fellow" by the name of Sheba from Saul's house who made another attempt in turning the northern tribes against David. In the end he was besieged in a city and Joab was about to overthrow it. At this point, another wise woman appeared on the scene to intervene in a political situation. Incidentally, her

appeal to Joab employed familial elements (20:19). First, in reminding Joab that this city, Abel, was “a mother in Israel,” the wise woman was charging Joab with the intention to extinguish an entire family (i.e. clan).<sup>282</sup> Second, she invoked the kinsman’s responsibility to preserve the inheritance within a clan by accusing Joab that his intention might be just that. Like the other wise woman of Tekoa, this wise woman successfully intervened in a political situation by using familial analogy.

#### 5.4.3.4 “O Absalom, my son!”

As in David’s previous two “sons of death,” David mourned for the death of Absalom. The pattern of “messenger, death news, response” can be found several times in the Books of Samuel, but the David-Absalom account is particularly similar to the account of Eli’s grief over the death of his two sons and the loss of the Ark.<sup>283</sup> Incidentally, both Eli and David were fathers who failed to discipline their sons. Paul Borgman observes that both incidents happened at the town gate (1 Sam 4:18 and 2 Sam 18:24) and both Eli and David reacted in fearful trembling (רָדַד, 1 Sam 4:13; רָגַז, 2 Sam 18:33).<sup>284</sup> In addition, there was also running (רָוַץ)<sup>285</sup> and commotion (הִמְנוֹן, 1 Sam 4:14 and 2 Sam 18:29). All the running (12 occurrences) in 2 Samuel 18 contrasts ironically with the extended description of the news of Absalom’s death being delayed in

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<sup>282</sup> Long, “2 Samuel,” 473.

<sup>283</sup> Paul Borgman, *David, Saul, and God: Rediscovering an Ancient Story* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 169.

<sup>284</sup> Borgman, *David, Saul, and God*, 169.

<sup>285</sup> 1 Sam 4:12 and 2 Sam 18: 19, 21, 22 [2x], 23 [3x], 24, 26 [2x], 27 [2x].

reaching David's ears, thus creating anticipation in the reader as to David's response when he found out that his son, Absalom, was dead. As the runners approach David, the tension increases as anticipation of good news comes from the mouth of David three times (18:25, 26, and 27), showing "his rising hopes about the good news he wants to hear."<sup>286</sup>

At first glance, the news that the two runners brought to David was ambiguous about the state of Absalom's well-being. Ahimaaz feigned ignorance regarding Absalom's condition (18:29; cf. 18:19–20). The Cushite also did not state explicitly that Absalom is dead. However, what the Cushite did say was sufficient for David to perceive the truth and cry: "Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (18:33). A closer look at the Cushite's speech reveals an echo into the dark past of David's life: "Let the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you for evil (קָמוּ עֲלֶיךָ לְרָעָה), be as that young man!" (18:32). The Cushite's speech recalls Nathan's condemnation the Yahweh will raise up evil against David (מִמְקוֹם עֲלֶיךָ רָעָה; 12:11) from within his family. The mention of נֶעֱרַר possibly reminded David of the other two "sons of death" (12:16 and 13:32).

The events surrounding the death of Absalom allow the reader insight into David's paternal affection for his son. David's command to protect Absalom (18:5 and 12), his query into the well-being of his son (18:29 and 32), and his mourning over the

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<sup>286</sup> Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 188.



death of Absalom (18:33 and 19:4) are all recounted twice.<sup>287</sup> Prior to Absalom’s death, David referred to his son as “the young man” (נַעַר, 14:21; 18:5, 29, and 32), perhaps attempting “to play down his rebellion and make it out to be a foolish escapade of youth.”<sup>288</sup> With the death of Absalom, David came to terms with his rebellious son, calling him by name and referring to him as “my son” multiple times (18:33 and 19:4). Such display of emotions is rarely, if at all, found in kings’ annals of ancient times.<sup>289</sup> David’s inconsolable and unrestrained grief is well described in the words of Brueggemann: “This is David’s most distressed moment, and perhaps his greatest. We had watched David grieve over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (1:17–27), and even his unnamed son (12:16–17). We have heard David grieve with eloquence, but his grief now is not an eloquent performance. It is too elemental and too desperate to be eloquent.”<sup>290</sup> We see here a father’s raw feelings and emotions for the loss of his son.<sup>291</sup>

2 Samuel 18 obviously has little interest in the civil war between David’s and Absalom’s armies; it only accords three verses to the battle at Ephraim (vv. 6–8). Instead the chapter elaborates on David’s careful instructions to deal gently with his son (vv. 1–5), shows how Joab and his men ignore David’s instructions (vv. 9–16), digresses to a

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<sup>287</sup> Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 188.

<sup>288</sup> Würzburg H. F. Fuhs, “נַעַר,” in *TDOT*, trans. David E. Green, ed. Botterweck, Johannes, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 9:481.

<sup>289</sup> David M. Gunn, “Narrative Patterns and Oral Traditions in Judges and Samuel,” *VT* 24 (1974): 295-296.

<sup>290</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 323.

<sup>291</sup> Another instance in which David’s political decisiveness was contravened by his familial emotions. After all, if Absalom had survived, what could possibly have been done with him? As long as he lived David’s throne was in jeopardy. Joab knew this, but David was blind to it.

short eulogy for Absalom's death (vv. 17–18), and deals extensively with the death report of Absalom (vv. 19–32). The whole setup serves to build up to a point to show David's paternal affection for Absalom in verse 33 and his response to his son's death both as a father and as a king in the next chapter.

#### 5.4.3.5 *Portrait of Absalom*

Of all the sons of David that are mentioned in 2 Samuel, Absalom has been given the most attention in the narrative. Two instances in the narrative (14:25–27 and 18:18) appear to be digressions to tell the reader additional information about Absalom which obviously have important functions since the narrator finds it necessary to include them. Furthermore, the information presented in the separate instances appears to contradict each other. On one hand it is said that Absalom had three sons (14:27), but on the other hand Absalom claimed that he had no son (18:18). Various possible explanations have been offered by commentators to harmonize the discrepancy, but our main interest here is the function of these two apparently interruptive inclusions into the story. Randy McCracken therefore submits that 2 Samuel 14:27 and 18:18 form an *inclusio* around Absalom's rebellion.<sup>292</sup> However, I would argue that the *inclusio* should begin at 2 Samuel 14:25. First, 2 Samuel 14:25–27 should be taken together since they are connected in their description of Absalom. Second, 14:25 corresponds to 18:18 in that they both begin with disjunctive *waws* prefixed to Absalom's name, interrupting the flow

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<sup>292</sup> Randy L. McCracken, "How Many Sons Did Absalom Have? Intentional Ambiguity as Literary Literary Art," *Bib Sac* 172 (2015): 293.

of the narrative.<sup>293</sup> The two bookends that provide the reader additional information regarding Absalom thus serve to give us two snapshots of him—one before and one after his rebellion.

The first snapshot presents Absalom as perfect in appearance from head to toe, with particular emphasis on his hair. These qualities are evidence of power and virility.<sup>294</sup> In terms of family, he is said to have three sons and a daughter. McCracken suggests that “Absalom’s beautiful appearance, luxuriant hair, and ability to father children (especially sons) indicate his eligibility for kingship.”<sup>295</sup> While these verses present Absalom as a viable candidate and possible threat to the throne, it also reveals an unresolved family dispute. Nothing more is said of Absalom’s three sons, but special mention is made of his only daughter—her name is Tamar, and she was beautiful. Both her name and physical appearance resembled Absalom’s sister whom Amnon raped. Although Absalom spoke neither “evil (רַע) nor good” to Amnon for what he did to his sister (13:22), it is apparent that he had not gotten over what had happened. Thus the first snapshot gives us insight into Absalom’s thoughts which reveal political ambitions and the familial baggage of unforgiveness.

The second snapshot of Absalom comes after his death and burial. In Ugaritic society, it is known that a son will erect a stela in veneration of his dead father.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 651–652.

<sup>294</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 296.

<sup>295</sup> McCracken, “How Many Sons Did Absalom Have?,” 294.

<sup>296</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 408.

However, since Absalom claimed that he had no son to carry on his name, he had to erect a monument “for himself.” It stands in stark contrast with the preceding verse where he is said to be buried “away from the family tomb in a pit in the forest, with only a cairn marking his presence.”<sup>297</sup> On one hand, the hurried burial of Absalom’s body in the forest was perhaps another attempt of Joab to distance David from his son.<sup>298</sup> On the other hand, the way Joab handled Absalom’s death can be viewed politically as modelled after treatment of Israel’s previous enemies (cf. Achan, Josh 7:26; king of Ai, Josh 8:29; and five enemy kings, Josh 10:27).<sup>299</sup>

The two snapshots of Absalom before and after his rebellion picture him first as having sons and later as having none. Popular among the solutions that commentators have offered include one, that his sons had died and two, that Absalom spoke before he had any son. Whatever the case was, the literary function of the two snapshots contrast Absalom as someone whose beginning had great potential but whose end was devastating, or, as McCracken puts it, “he is pictured before the rebellion as someone important, but by the rebellion’s end he is portrayed as impotent.”<sup>300</sup> Most noteworthy is the fact that for the narrator, political prowess and familial progeny are closely related.

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<sup>297</sup> Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 477.

<sup>298</sup> Tony W. Cartledge, *1 and 2 Samuel*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine (*SHBC 7*; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2001), 600.

<sup>299</sup> Cartledge, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 600.

<sup>300</sup> McCracken, “How Many Sons Did Absalom Have?,” 286-287.

## **5.5 Succession to the Throne: Solomon vs. Adonijah**

David's premonition of a fourfold retribution comes to an end with the death of four sons—the firstborn of Bathsheba, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. The story also sees the demise of David at the end. However, Yahweh's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12 is yet to be realized: "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom." This is finally fulfilled in the person of Solomon, Yahweh's adopted "son," the one whom he named Jedidiah.

### **5.5.1 David and Adonijah**

The account that gives us a glimpse into David's relationship with Adonijah is found in First Kings chapter one. One can sense the narrator's intention to portray David as being no longer suitable to rule as king. The narrative begins with describing the king as "old" and further qualifies that with the phrase "advanced in age" (1:1). It is further said that no amount of blankets were sufficient to keep him warm hence indicating that besides seniority in age, David's ailing physical condition also made him unsuitable to govern. Next, an attractive young girl by the name of Abishag was brought to the king to keep him warm but it is specifically mentioned that David did not (perhaps could not) have any sexual relationship with Abishag (1 Kgs 1:4). Mordechai Cogan comments that "The present remark is meant to confirm the decrepit state of David's old age; the vigor

for which he was renowned had left him.”<sup>301</sup> David’s loss of virility further disqualifies him to continue his rule as king.<sup>302</sup> By contrast Adonijah is presented with qualities that make him most suitable to be king (1:6). Adonijah was endowed with good looks that characterized all previous kings and would-be kings.<sup>303</sup> In terms of birth order, he was born after Absalom, making him the next crown prince. The mention of Absalom (1:6) is intentional on the part of the narrator to draw comparisons between Adonijah and his older brother.<sup>304</sup> Besides good looks, Adonijah also resembled his brother Absalom in that he made himself king in disregard for David, who was still alive. His royal entourage of chariotry and fifty-men-strong runners (1:5) echoed the royal pretentions of his brother Absalom (2 Sam 15:1). Most importantly, the same parental indulgence on David’s part is especially highlighted in the account: וְלֹא-עָצְבוּ אָבִיו מִיָּמָיו לְאָמֹר: עֲשִׂיתָ מְדוּעַ כִּכָּה עֲשִׂיתָ (1:6).<sup>305</sup> The reader is led to wonder if history will repeat itself and how David would handle this situation with his son Adonijah.

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<sup>301</sup> Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 156.

<sup>302</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine (*SHBC* 8; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2000), 12.

<sup>303</sup> Saul, 1 Sam 9:2; David, 1 Sam 16:12; and Absalom, 2 Sam 14:25.

<sup>304</sup> Iain W. Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*, ed. Gasque, W. Ward, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston (*UBCS*; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 24.

<sup>305</sup> Holladay glosses עָצַב as “find fault with;” LXX translates as “restrain.” The basic idea is that David has never disciplined his son Adonijah.

In this instance of Adonijah assuming himself to be king, David makes a decision that for the first time would upset his son.<sup>306</sup> Scholars have attributed the outcome of David's decision to his senility<sup>307</sup> and therefore his gullibility to the manipulation of Bathsheba and Nathan.<sup>308</sup> It is difficult to sustain that David was mentally incapacitated from the context of the narrative. Whether David ever made a promise regarding Solomon as his successor cannot be proven and hence it is fruitless to base any arguments on the alleged oath. However, David's clear instruction on the elaborate procedure for the installation of Solomon (1:32–35) is a sure sign of mental sharpness.<sup>309</sup>

While dementia may not be David's problem, he is undeniably depicted as a passive character until after his encounter with Bathsheba and Nathan. Besides the fact of David's loss of virility as an indication of his decrepit state, his lack of competence to rule shown by his deficient knowledge concerning what had happened in his kingdom is further highlighted by the use of the verb יָרַע.<sup>310</sup> Just as David "did not know" Abishag in a sexual way (1:4), he allegedly did not know that Adonijah had made himself king

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<sup>306</sup> Borgman, *David, Saul, and God*, 141.

<sup>307</sup> E. Würthwein, *Die Erzählung von der Thronfolge Davids—theologische oder politische Geschichtsschreibung?* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974), 14; cited in Joy Willis, Andrew Pleffer, and Stephen Llewelyn, "Conversation in the Succession Narrative of Solomon," *VT* 61 (2011), 136. Also John Gray, *I & II Kings*, ed. Peter Ackroyd, et. al. (*OTL*, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970), 81.

<sup>308</sup> Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Anselm Hagedorn (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 18–20.

<sup>309</sup> Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (*NAC* 8; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 93.

<sup>310</sup> Lissa M. Wray Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham (*AOT* 9; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 68.

(1:11 and 18).<sup>311</sup> Furthermore, in spite of his waning physical conditions, David “had not made known” to his people who his successor would be (1:27). It is apparent that David was old and out of touch with political issues. Thus, the intervention by Nathan and Bathsheba becomes necessary to move David towards a decision to overrule Adonijah’s self-proclaimed kingship and set into motion the crowning of Solomon.

The need for intervention in David’s life is a familiar motif in the Succession Narrative. It is significant that both Nathan and Bathsheba play a major role by intervening and getting Solomon to be the successor to the throne rather than Adonijah. Last seen in 2 Samuel 12:24, Bathsheba returns to the story as a very different person. Compared to her previous appearance in 2 Samuel, Bathsheba is given significantly more words in 1 Kings 1. While the mention of Bathsheba’s name was previously tied to her father and husbands (2 Sam 11:3 and 12:24), she is now identified as Solomon’s mother (1 Kgs 1:11). We can also see that the maternal role of Bathsheba is being highlighted in 1 Kings 1–2.<sup>312</sup> Furthermore, it is written that Nathan led her into this intervention (1 Kgs 1:11–14). This is significant since Nathan could have just gone and spoken to the king directly as he had done in the past. I believe we have here another instance of a mother intervening in politics. The collaboration of Nathan and Bathsheba was successful in moving David to appoint Solomon as king, but was David necessarily

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<sup>311</sup> I say “allegedly” because while Nathan and Bathsheba claimed that David was ignorant of what Adonijah had done, it is possible that David knew but, being an indulgent father, did nothing about it. The structure of 1:5-10 seems to support this claim with the statement that David never reprimanded Adonijah all his life embedded in Adonijah’s acts of royal pretentions.

<sup>312</sup> There are ten verses that indicate the mother-son relationship of Bathsheba and Solomon: 1 Kgs 1:11, 12, 13, 17, 21, 30; 2:13, 19, 20, and 22. Even after Solomon has become king and had a throne set for Bathsheba, she is still referred to as “the king’s mother (אִמַּת הַמֶּלֶךְ)” (1 Kgs 2:19) rather than “the Queen Mother (אִמַּת הַמֶּלֶךְ)” (cf. 1 Kgs 15:13) as noted by Cogan (Cogan, *I Kings*, 176).



duped by Nathan and Bathsheba? Since it is impossible to prove if the alleged oath that promised Solomon as the successor ever existed, we also do not have a definite answer to this question. Suffice it to say that in his decrepit state, David needed intervention even more so than in the past.

David's decision spared his family a major blood battle in the kingdom (cf. 2 Sam 18:6-8 where the "sword" had devoured a great number of people) but it could not stop Adonijah from being the fourth "son of death." The only consolation for David is that unlike the previous three "sons of death," he does not live to witness or hear report of his demise. In this last son, we therefore do not hear of any mourning on David's part.

However we evaluate 1 Kings 1–2, whether with Borgman who posits that in his dealing with Adonijah, "David the king rises above David the father" and redeems himself of the indulgent father he once was,<sup>313</sup> or with Fritz who understands him to be senile and capable of being manipulated,<sup>314</sup> it seems clear that the narrator intends to portray David as geriatric and, apart from brief flashes of his former decisiveness, unsuitable to rule his kingdom. As with Amnon and Absalom, David also indulged his son Adonijah, resulting in Adonijah having the audacity to proclaim himself king. Without the intervention of Nathan and Bathsheba, David would certainly had remained indifferent to the state of affairs in the kingdom. Without intervention, the end of David's rule might have resembled that of the other failed fathers—Eli and Samuel. I

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<sup>313</sup> Borgman, *David, Saul, and God*, 149.

<sup>314</sup> Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 18–20.

will argue below that for whatever reasons, political or familial, the intervention by Nathan and Bathsheba falls within the sovereign will of Yahweh.

### **5.5.2 Solomon's Accession to the Throne**

The theme of succession is most evident in the culmination of Solomon's accession to the throne in 1 Kings 1–2, but the prominence of the familial theme, as we shall see, cannot be ignored. The narrative begins with the familiar motive of sexual politics (1:1–4). Besides highlighting the decrepit state of David as mentioned above, the role of Abishag in the narrative also serves to pose as a threat to Bathsheba. As indicated in 1 Kings 1:2, Abishag was apparently brought in to lie in the king's bosom. The phrase “to lie in one's bosom” recalls Nathan's parable where the ewe lamb of the poor man, symbolizing Bathsheba, was said to be lying in her master's bosom (2 Sam 12:3). The implication is obvious: Bathsheba is now replaced by Abishag, demonstrating that the sexual politics of the day trump marital union. Hence the climax of the succession story begins with the tension between family and politics.

Next we have the account of Adonijah's royal pretensions (1:5–10). As mentioned above, David's permissiveness towards Absalom is repeated in his dealing with Adonijah who coincidentally resembled his older brother both in terms of looks and behavior. However, in this case the narrator has carefully structured the account so that David's paternal indulgence of Adonijah's presumptuous behavior (1:6) is explicitly stated as a factor in Adonijah's royal pretensions. Furthermore, while the first two

chapters of 1 Kings frequently present David as “king,”<sup>315</sup> in 1:6 he is specifically referred to as a permissive “father.” Hence the issue of who will succeed David is one that will once again put David in a difficult position where he was both king and father. We already know that David, in his younger days, had difficulty handling situations where family and politics intertwine. Now in his old and frail condition, he again chose passivity in handling the situation until he was imposed upon by external intervention.

Next we have the intervention by Nathan and Bathsheba in the appointment of David’s successor (1:11–27). That this is another case of a mother’s intervention in politics can be seen in the resemblance between this account and the incident involving Joab and the Tekoite woman. Just as Joab sought the help of the Tekoite woman, Nathan approached Bathsheba for assistance. Just as Joab put words in the mouth of the Tekoite woman (2 Sam 14:3 and 19), Nathan also told Bathsheba what she was supposed to say to king David (1 Kgs 1:13). Nathan told Bathsheba (“Solomon’s mother”) what Adonijah (“the son of Haggith”) had done. The maternal references are intentional<sup>316</sup> to highlight that the issue of succession was not only a competition between Adonijah and Solomon for the position of king, but also between Haggith and Bathsheba for the position of Queen Mother. In quick succession, Bathsheba’s position was first threatened by Abishag and now by Haggith. The antagonism between Haggith and Bathsheba in

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<sup>315</sup> Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 68.

<sup>316</sup> For obvious reason, Amon, Absalom, and Adonijah are mentioned with reference to their mothers in the genealogy of David in 2 Sam 3:2–5. Elsewhere, Amnon and Absalom are referred to as sons of David. Incidentally in 1 Kgs 1–2, Adonijah is repeated referred to as “son of Haggith” (1:5, 11; 2:13).

light of their sons' rivalry for the throne is further seen in the pun on their names.<sup>317</sup> Haggith (חַגִּית) is derived from the root חגג and has the meaning of feasting. This is clearly associated with Adonijah's acts of feasting even though חגג is not specifically used in the text. Bathsheba's name (בַּת־שֶׁבַע) means "daughter of oath" and the pun is on the root שבע where David is said to have sworn (שָׁבַע; 1:13, 17, 29, and 30) to Bathsheba that Solomon will succeed his throne. Nathan's speech to persuade Bathsheba into collaboration with him was effective precisely because he spoke to Bathsheba's concern at the core. Nathan's speech is carefully structured such that what concerned Bathsheba personally (her life and her son's life; 1:12–13) is wrapped up by his concern for the future kingship (Adonijah has become king; 1:11 and 1:13d).<sup>318</sup> Bathsheba understood the precariousness of her situation and so her speech to David wrapped the issue of kingship (1:18–20) with her personal concerns regarding David's oath (1:17) and the imminent threat to her life and her son's life (1:21).<sup>319</sup> The collaboration of Nathan and Bathsheba was successful in moving David into setting up Solomon as the successor. Nathan's concern was mainly about kingship and Bathsheba's concern was mainly for her family. The speeches that persuaded David into action require considerations for both politics and family.

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<sup>317</sup> Moshe Garsiel, "Puns upon Names as a Literary Device in 1 Kings 1–2," *Biblica* 72 (1991): 380-381.

<sup>318</sup> Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 71.

<sup>319</sup> Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 72.

Under David's instructions, Solomon was crowned as king (1:32–40). In the matter of succession, 1 Kings 1 is set up to justify Solomon as the rightful successor over Adonijah. First we see this in the way the narrative portrays the characters of Adonijah and Solomon. Adonijah is associated with the usurper Absalom who grasped for the throne which did not belong to him. This is in stark contrast with Solomon who, up to the appointment of kingship is depicted as passive, much like his father David. Second, the pun on the names of Haggith and Bathsheba casts Solomon in the positive light. As Iain Provan rightly comments:

While the son of the feast-lady eats, the daughter-of-the-oath reminds the king of what he has sworn and so ensures that Adonijah is dependent for his life upon Solomon's own oath. The story is constructed quite deliberately so as to make these connections between mothers and their sons clear and to invest the characters with a sense of predestination.<sup>320</sup>

Third, there are indications in the narrative that Solomon is Yahweh's choice over Adonijah. Like Saul and David (the other kings previously appointed by Yahweh), Solomon received the actual anointing (1:39) and it is mentioned three times (the other two instances being references to his anointing; 1:34 and 45). The selective appearance of Nathan further provides support to the election of Solomon as king. As argued in chapter three, Nathan appears only four times in the story and plays the critical role from the announcing of the promise of a successor to David's throne to identifying and finally installing this successor as king after David. Most importantly, as I have argued above, the act of Yahweh's conferring the name Jedidiah on Solomon is in fact the act of a father naming his son. As the promise in 2 Samuel 12:12–16 speaks of David's successor not

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<sup>320</sup> Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*, 30.

only as one of his descendants, but particularly as one whom Yahweh will adopt as his son, it becomes clear that Solomon, whom Yahweh named Jedidiah, is the chosen successor. Finally, the promise of an “established kingdom” in 2 Samuel 7:12–13 is realized with Solomon’s accession to the throne. The confirmation that Solomon’s kingdom is firmly established is twice mentioned in the narrative (2:12 and 46).

### 5.5.3 David’s Charge to Solomon

1 Kings 2 begins with David at his deathbed giving his final instructions to Solomon. Commentators commonly notice the sudden switch from the Deuteronomic covenant language in 2:1–4 to the seemingly vindictive nature of the rest of David’s speech in 2:5–9.<sup>321</sup> Rather than seeing David’s final address as consisting of two incongruent parts, the entire speech is linked together by the Deuteronomic element. David’s charge to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:1–9 is a standard farewell address in ancient Israel during the time of Leadership transition.<sup>322</sup> The phraseology in David’s exhortation to his son in verses 2–3 are paralleled on only two other occasions in the Old Testament: the farewell speech of Moses to Joshua (Deut 31:7 and 23) and Yahweh’s exhortation to Joshua at the beginning of his leadership (Josh 1:6, 9, and 18).<sup>323</sup> This

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<sup>321</sup> Some consider the contrast a switch from religious requirements to political prudence (Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 27; Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*, 34). Others posit that David’s speech was edited in later to shift the blame for the bloodshed from Solomon to David (Gray, *I & II Kings*, 15; G. H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings*, vol. 1, ed. Ronald E. Clements [NCBC; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984], 106).

<sup>322</sup> John Monson, “1 Kings,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, vol. 3, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 17.

<sup>323</sup> Gray, *I & II Kings*, 99.

makes David's transition of leadership to Solomon the first proper handover since Moses' transition to Joshua. The next verse (2:4) is crucial to our understanding of the rest of David's instructions and Solomon's obedience to them. David's reference to Yahweh's promise (2 Sam 7:11b–16) brings the Davidic covenant under obligation to the observance of the Deuteronomic law.<sup>324</sup> Thus David's instructions to Solomon concerning Joab, the sons of Barzillai, and Shimei (2:5-9) should be understood in light of the observance of Deuteronomic laws rather than mere personal vengeance.<sup>325</sup> David was instructing Solomon to attend to the Deuteronomic requirements regarding "blood," "fidelity," and "curse."<sup>326</sup>

With regard to David's instruction to kill Joab, the issue here concerns bloodguilt. For the ancient Israelite, the spilling of innocent blood had dire consequences beyond just personal injury. The victim's blood defiled the land and could only be expiated by the blood of the murderer (Num 35:33–34; Deut 19:10–13). A member of the victim's family called "the avenger of blood" (גֹּאֵל הַדָּם) had the right and duty to put the murderer to death on behalf of the community.<sup>327</sup> According to John Pedersen, "This extermination... is not punishment in the sense that the perpetrator of the deed has 'deserved' it according to the law of retaliation... It is the manner in which the

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<sup>324</sup> Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 24.

<sup>325</sup> Though we cannot completely rule out the possibility of personal vengeance as a secondary reason.

<sup>326</sup> Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (*WBC 12*; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 42.

<sup>327</sup> Yitzhaq Feder, "The Mechanics of Retribution in Hittite, Mesopotamian and Ancient Israelite Sources," *JANER* 10 (2010): 142.

community liberates itself from the elements threatening its growth.”<sup>328</sup> The effect of the murder extends to the community because pollution of the land caused by the spilling of innocent blood will result in the alienation of Yahweh from the land and its inhabitants.<sup>329</sup> Therefore David’s advice to Solomon to put Joab to death can be understood at both the political and familial levels. In the interests of Solomon’s newly established kingdom, Joab needed to die so that the land would be purged of bloodguilt. David’s action should not surprise the reader as being excessively vindictive toward the end of his life since he is known to have executed the expiation of bloodguilt decisively in the past (cf. 2 Sam 1:6; 3:28–29; 4:11–12; and 21:1–6), except with his own son Absalom in regard to the murder of Amnon. At the familial level, David was concerned that the bloodguilt incurred by Joab may affect his house (and thus Solomon) since Joab was David’s nephew.<sup>330</sup> Furthermore, David can also be understood as performing the duty of the “avenger of blood” because he was also a kinsman of Amasa. David’s intentions were clearly understood by Solomon as the new king, in pursuit of Joab’s life, was clearly disassociating his house with the house of Joab where bloodguilt was concerned (2:31–33).

In the case of David’s instruction to show kindness (רַחֲמֵן) to the sons of Barzillai, the reader is reminded of David’s treatment with Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth (2 Sam

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<sup>328</sup> Johs Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture I–II* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 428.

<sup>329</sup> Pamela Barmash, *Homicide in the Biblical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 101.

<sup>330</sup> The Greek translation of 1 Kgs 2:5 supports this understanding by having David say that Joab put the blood of war: “on my loins...my sandals...my feet” (Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 538).



9). As with Mephibosheth, Barzillai's sons were to be invited to eat at the king's table, a gesture that symbolizes extension of kinship and brotherhood as mentioned above.

Barzillai's help in providing support for David and his men during their flight from Absalom is briefly mentioned in 2 Samuel 17:27–29, but sufficient to imply that he was a wealthy and influential person in Gilead. Thus showing kindness to Barzillai's family not only conformed to the practice of fidelity, but also served as a means of maintaining an influential ally for obvious political reasons.<sup>331</sup>

As for the case of Shimei, the issue is one regarding curse. It is well attested that ancient cultures believed in the destructive powers produced by a curse.<sup>332</sup> The Hebrew concept of curse is that of an illocutionary or performative utterance.<sup>333</sup> According to Christopher Mitchell, "when the speech act is performed properly and in the appropriate context, society accepts the illocutionary utterance as an accomplished act."<sup>334</sup> Thus when Shimei cursed David for the bloodshed in Saul's house (2 Sam 16:5–8) at the time when David was running away from Absalom, David's state of abjection back then was not helpful in acquitting him of Shimei's public accusation. This may explain the

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<sup>331</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 29.

<sup>332</sup> Josef Scharbert, "אָרַךְ," in *TDOT*, ed. Botterweck, Johannes and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 1:416.

<sup>333</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, "The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings," *JTS* 25 (1974): 283-299.

<sup>334</sup> Christopher W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK "To Bless" in the Old Testament*, ed. J. J. M. Roberts (*SBL Diss.* 95; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 174.

continuing threat that David encountered from the house of Saul (2 Sam 16:3; 20:1–2).<sup>335</sup> When the threat of Absalom was over, David had an opportunity to deal with Shimei (2 Sam 19:16–23), and rightly so, for the cursing of the king was a serious offense (Ex 22:28). David’s temporary leniency towards Shimei was probably acted out of political considerations of not wanting to enter into further enmity with Saul’s house. However, in order for Solomon’s kingdom to be firmly established, the duplicitous Shimei needed to be removed and David cleared of his accusations (2:44–45). For the same reason as David’s, Solomon had to be wise in his dealing with Shimei as his father had advised (2:9). Shimei was assigned to confinement in Jerusalem to cut him off from his Benjamite associations and as a pretext for execution should he violate the order.<sup>336</sup>

David’s parting advice to Solomon is not to be understood as the vindictive words of an unforgiving old man. David’s counsel to Solomon took into considerations kinship responsibilities, familial vindications, and political expediency. All these concerns were calculated for the purpose of establishing Solomon’s position as king.<sup>337</sup> Only then can David rest in peace as indicated by the narrator’s description of his burial (2:10). The fact that David “slept with his fathers” indicates that he was buried in his family tomb<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Tomoo Ishida, “Solomon’s Succession to the Throne of David—a Political Analysis,” in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays*, ed. Tomoo Ishida (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 186.

<sup>336</sup> DeVries, *1 Kings*, 40.

<sup>337</sup> While 1 Kings 1 is concerned with who will sit on the throne (1:13, 17, 20, 24, 27, 30, 35, 37, 46, 47, and 48), 1 Kings 2 is concerned with firmly establishing Solomon on the throne (2:4, 12, 24, 33, 45, and 46).

<sup>338</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 365.

and reunited with his family and kin-group.<sup>339</sup> In contrast, David hoped that after their death, both Joab and Shimei would go to Sheol, a place of exile from Yahweh.<sup>340</sup> Hence while David's parting advice to Solomon was basically motivated by politics, it required attention to the intricacies of familial and kinship issues that were inherent in a tribal-based society.

#### **5.5.4 Solomon's Kingdom Established**

If Absalom's murder of Amnon hinted at his rivalry for the throne, the question of succession becomes most explicit in 1 Kings 1–2. David, the old king, is gone. Solomon, the new king is on the throne. Concerning the story of David's dynastic house, the question remains whether Solomon's throne will be established as promised: "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom" (2 Sam 7:12). Hence the rest of the story will address this question.

While David was alive but very old, Adonijah made a failed attempt at seizing the throne. With Solomon as the newly appointed king, Adonijah feared for his life. The narrative casts a dark shadow over Adonijah's future through the use of words that ring an ominous tone. Adonijah begs Solomon not to kill him with the "sword" (יָרֵב; 1:51). Solomon's reply recalls Absalom's fate: "not one of his hairs will fall to the ground" (1:52; cf. 2 Sam 14:11). Solomon further adds that Adonijah will not escape death if

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<sup>339</sup> Cook, "Death, Kinship, and Community," 113.

<sup>340</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 375.

“evil” (רָעָה) is found in him. The words “sword” and “evil” echoes the judgement that Nathan pronounced on David in 2 Samuel 12:10–11. The resurfacing of these two words hints to the reader that the turmoil in David’s dynastic family is not about to end even with the coronation of the new king. Visibly the future unrest of David’s dynastic family is presented at the end of 1 Kings 1 where the scene “closes with Solomon on the throne and Adonijah dismissed to his house” (1:53).<sup>341</sup>

After David died, Adonijah enlisted the help of Bathsheba in requesting to have Abishag. We have two familiar plots here—intervention by a mother and sexual politics. In the previous interventions, first by the Tekoite woman and then Bathsheba, the mothers were successful in changing the king’s mind thus leading to a change in political situation, specifically the change in kingship. Solomon, in not being affected by his mother’s intervention, counteracts the previous archetype and subtly implies that his kingship remains firm. We are also presented with two sons of David—Adonijah and Solomon—one of whom would be the last of the four “sons of death.” All previous “sons of death” were associated with sexual politics: Bathsheba’s firstborn was the product of David taking Uriah’s wife, Amon abused his position as crown prince and violated his half-sister Tamar, and Absalom slept with David’s concubines after he usurped his father’s throne. Here Adonijah clearly still laid claim to the throne as expressed in his words to Bathsheba even though he acknowledged that it was Yahweh’s doing that turned the situation around (2:15). Whether Adonijah still thought he had a

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<sup>341</sup> Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*, 27.

claim to the throne, or he was seeking compensation for his loss,<sup>342</sup> or it was plain “stupidity” on his part,<sup>343</sup> Solomon understood the sexual politics of the day, and that the possession of the king’s harem “sends a public signal of virility and therefore royal legitimacy.”<sup>344</sup> Solomon’s response to the request for Abishag indicates that he understood the implication behind it (2:22). As a result, Solomon had no hesitation in having his brother, Adonijah, killed and removed for good.

Solomon’s episode with Adonijah occurred after the peaceful demise of David (1 Kgs 2:10) and the summary statement of his reign (2:11). Although Solomon is said to have taken over his father’s throne and that his kingdom was firmly established (2:12), three matters remained to be dealt with. Adonijah was the first of three persons who were to die by the hand of Benaiah, Solomon’s executioner. The story ends with the disturbing refrain “he fell upon...he fell upon...he fell upon” (2:25, 34, and 46; cf. 2:32) as Benaiah carried out systematic execution of Adonijah, Joab, and Shimei—all of whom posed threats to Solomon’s rule. Each execution is premised by Yahweh’s endorsement of David’s house (2:24, 33, and 45). The clear intention was to provide divine justification for the deaths of those executed.<sup>345</sup> With all of Solomon’s threats out of the way, the fact of Solomon’s kingdom being established requires repetition at the very end of 1 Kings 2. Thus the two statements of Solomon’s established kingdom form an

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<sup>342</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 31.

<sup>343</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 237.

<sup>344</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 31.

<sup>345</sup> Note also the same divine justification for the priest Abiathar, though he was not put to death (2:26–27).

inclusio around the events of Solomon's systematic eradication of his rivals (1 Kings 2:12 and 46b).<sup>346</sup> The narrator clearly intends to indicate to the reader that just as promised, Yahweh has established Solomon's kingdom. True to the promise as well, the sword will not depart from David's house, but we shall leave that to the sequel of the story. The succession theme is undoubtedly most forthcoming in 1 Kings 1–2; nevertheless, familial themes that involved parental, fraternal, and kinship relationships are intricately woven into the political events.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that the story that has been popularly called the “Succession Narrative” (2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2) depicts not only the political issues of David's kingdom but his family issues as well. Indeed, it is a story about the dynastic family of David, following the family stories of the other characters of major Old Testament offices—Eli the priest, Samuel the prophet/judge, and Saul the king. Common among the stories of these characters are their failed relationships with their sons. The sons of Eli were worthless men. The sons of Samuel did not walk in his ways. Jonathan refused to conspire with his father, Saul, to kill David. David was an indulgent father to his sons Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. Another similar motif is that of succession, or more correctly, failure of succession. All these sons mentioned here did not succeed their fathers in the leadership roles that their fathers represented. In the story concerning David's dynastic family, we find this dual theme of family and succession

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<sup>346</sup> Cogan, *I Kings*, 175.

evident and inseparable. Both themes of politics and kinship are found in David's dealings with Mephibosheth and Hanun. They are also found in David's dealings with his four "sons of death." In this narrative concerning David's dynastic family, we see on the one hand key roles played by the Tekoite woman and Bathsheba as mothers who intervened in politics. On the other hand, wives were also unfortunately the victims of the sexual politics. Stories that elicit political decisions are also framed in familial settings, such as Nathan's parable, the Tekoite woman's story, and the analogy of the wise woman in Abel. We also find in this narrative the frequent references to kinship terminologies (father, mother, brother, sister), interruptions to clarify familial relationships, and the use of familial language. Finally, we find the inseparable themes of politics and family hinted to the reader in the statement that the sword will never depart from David's house. Hence the narrative is laced with murders that are politically expedient and self-serving at the same time, murders that took place between a king and his subordinate in one instance, between a subordinate and the king's son in another, and between cousins a number of times. Thus it is clear that while the narrative that spans 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 is one of succession, it is in a much more complex sense one of David's dynastic family, weaving together the dual themes of family and politics.

CHAPTER 6  
THE HOUSE OF YAHWEH

**6.1 Introduction**

In chapter three we saw how the single word **בַּיִת** is used in the Books of Samuel to denote a range of meanings including “palace,” “temple,” “family,” and “dynasty.” It is this range of meanings that allows the narrator to employ a wordplay on **בַּיִת** in the dynastic oracle (2 Samuel 7:1–17) to contrast the “house” that David intended to build for Yahweh and the “house” that Yahweh had in mind to build for David. In the first seven verses, **בַּיִת** is clearly used to contrast between the palace (David’s “house;” vv. 1 and 2) and the temple (Yahweh’s “house” that David hoped to build; vv. 5, 6, and 7). In the remaining verses of the dynastic oracle, the “house” that Yahweh will build for David is a dynastic family (a succession of kings within David’s family) as indicated by the perpetuity of the Davidic kingdom (vv. 11, 13, and 16). As for the “house” that David’s descendent will build for Yahweh (v. 13), I have argued in chapter four how the “house” can be understood also as the dynastic family of Yahweh in view of his adoption of David’s descendent (2 Sam 7:14). Hence the dynastic oracle concerns not only the physical, familial, and dynastic house of David, but also the physical, familial, and dynastic house of Yahweh.



The dynastic oracle concerning David has an important place in biblical theology and it has been called the “theological summit” in the Old Testament.<sup>347</sup> It is also described as “the summit” where “we now are invited to pause and reflect on the significance of David and his dynasty in the Bible’s salvation story.”<sup>348</sup> The oracle apparently invites the reader to look backward into the distant past: “For I have not dwelt in a house *since the day* I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, *even to this day*; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle” (2 Sam 7:6; italics mine). And again, “even *from the day* that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel” (2 Sam 7:11; italics mine). The oracle also entreats the reader to look forward into the distant future in the promise of a perpetual kingdom (2 Sam 7:12–16). The question that naturally follows is one that wonders “Does Yahweh deal with man in a certain customary way?”<sup>349</sup> Since it is impossible to examine the entire mountain range of biblical text here, a more achievable project would be to look at the peaks of this range which begins with the pristine relationship between Yahweh and the first human couple through his covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, and finally the New Covenant. In particular, I will be highlighting the three motifs of the physical, familial, and dynastic house of Yahweh in these places.

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<sup>347</sup> Robert P. Gordon, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1988), 235.

<sup>348</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 471. Arnold further comments that “God’s promise to establish David’s dynasty in Jerusalem eternally takes its place alongside the Abrahamic covenant and the Sinaitic (or Mosaic) covenant as critical links in the Bible’s story line of salvation. In subsequent Israelite thinking, this chapter became a constitutional text” (p. 472).

<sup>349</sup> Although the phrase “תֹּזֶאת תִּוְרַת הַאֲדָמָה” in 2 Sam 7:19b is widely known to be enigmatic, most translations try to make sense of the MT by understanding the phrase to mean something of the way Yahweh deals with man.

## 6.2 Kingdom, Kinship, and Sacred Spaces

Recent studies have mined the Bible for the motifs regarding Yahweh's kingdom, fatherhood, and temple. Intrigued by the temple vision in the Book of Revelation, G. K. Beale published a book in 2004 that traces the temple motif through the Bible.<sup>350</sup> Some years later, Dan Liroy wrote a monograph on the same temple motif, though his inspiration came from the idea of Eden as a "temple-garden" which he attributed to Meredith Kline.<sup>351</sup> Although the points of entry for both Beale and Liroy came from opposite ends of the Bible, their conclusions were somewhat similar: Yahweh's desire to dwell with his people is seen in the different stages of development in the earthly dwelling places of Yahweh culminating in the eschatological celestial sanctuary. On the familial aspect, Scott W. Hahn has demonstrated that the father-son relationship is key to understanding the covenants between Yahweh and his people throughout the Bible.<sup>352</sup> A year later, two professors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary published a massive volume which traces the motif of God's kingdom as revealed through the biblical covenants.<sup>353</sup> The works cited above have explored separately the concepts of Yahweh's kingdom, family, and dwelling places. Building on their work, I will show that all three

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<sup>350</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004).

<sup>351</sup> Dan Liroy, *Axis of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Temple Motif in Scripture*, ed. Hemchand Gossai (*SBL* 138; New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2010).

<sup>352</sup> Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>353</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

motifs are simultaneously found in the creation account and the divine covenants that form the framework of redemptive history in the Bible.

### **6.2.1 The Creation Account<sup>354</sup>**

The first divine-human relationship is found in the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 1. It is said that Yahweh made Adam in his image and according to his likeness (Gen 1:26–27). Both motifs of kingdom and family can be found in Yahweh’s creation of Adam. According to the culture and language of the ancient Near East, being the “image” of Yahweh implied the role of a king, and being the “likeness” of Yahweh implied the special relationship of a son.<sup>355</sup> Adam’s kingly role is underscored by Yahweh’s mandate for him to “rule” and “subdue.” This comports with the practice of kings of the ancient world who ruled over distant lands by setting up images of themselves as representations of their sovereign presence.<sup>356</sup> Adam’s relationship to Yahweh as son is confirmed in Jesus’ genealogy according to Luke (Lk 3:38). The concept of Adam’s sonship derived from being the “likeness” of Yahweh is further hinted by the use of this same word in describing Adam’s relationship to his son Seth (Gen 5:1–

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<sup>354</sup> While some scholars and commentators consider that there was an implied covenant between Yahweh and Adam, the absence of the term **בְּרִית** (covenant) as well as any other technical covenant terminology makes that discussion suspect. However, as a foundation for those later, more formalized relationships, this account merits analysis.

<sup>355</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 195.

<sup>356</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 82.

3).<sup>357</sup> In addition to Adam being a progeny of Yahweh, Eve was created to be his consort (Gen 2:18–23). The union of Adam and Eve became the archetype of marriage and family (Gen 2:24). In terms of the temple motif, it has been proposed that the cosmos is understood as the portrayal of Yahweh’s temple complex.<sup>358</sup> This is affirmed in Isaiah 66:1 in which Yahweh declares heaven as his throne and the earth as his footstool in contrast with the earthly Temple. Furthermore, Adam’s role in caring for the garden of Eden is described using verbs that are more commonly associated with priestly functions (“עָבַד” and “שָׁמַר”) in Genesis 2:15.<sup>359</sup> Most importantly, the main function of a temple is to provide a place of rest for the deity, and this theme of divine rest is found on the seventh day of creation where Yahweh rested from the work he had done (Gen 2:2–3).<sup>360</sup> In addition, the parallels between the description of the garden of Eden and the designs of other sanctuaries in the Old Testament have led scholars to view the garden as a primordial temple or sacred space.<sup>361</sup> Therefore we can conclude that the Creation account in Genesis 1–2 contains all three motifs of kingdom, family, and temple.

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<sup>357</sup> The major difference is in the verbs. Adam was “created” and “made” while Seth was “begotten.” Jesus, on the other hand, was “begotten, not created.”

<sup>358</sup> John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 147–149.

<sup>359</sup> Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 172–174.

<sup>360</sup> Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 147.

<sup>361</sup> For detailed comparisons, see Lioy, *Axis of Glory*, 5–15; and Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 211–213.

## 6.2.2 Yahweh's Covenant with Noah

The word בְּרִית (berit) first appears in Genesis 6:18 where Yahweh promises to establish his covenant with Noah sometime in the future (Gen 9:8–17). When compared to the creation account in Genesis 1–2, similar themes can be found in both Adam's and Noah's narratives.<sup>362</sup> Most prominently, the mandate to populate the earth again (Gen 9:1), the reinstatement of dominion over creation (Gen 9:2–3), and the reaffirmation of man's possession of the image of God (Gen 9:6) are main ideas in the creation account that we find repeated in the covenant with Noah.<sup>363</sup> Thus the kingdom motif is inherent in the Noahic Covenant just as it was in the creation account. In terms of the familial motif, we find that while the first covenant was made with a couple, the covenant with Noah involved his family as well. This is seen in the narrators repeated mention of the other family members of Noah in the narrative. The depraved condition of the human race (Gen 6:5–7; 11–13) is interjected with a parenthetical note on Noah and his three sons (Gen 6:9–10), which was mentioned earlier in the narrative (Gen 5:32). Yahweh's order for Noah to enter the ark repeatedly included Noah's family (Gen 6:18; 7:1, 7, 13). Furthermore, Yahweh's covenant with Noah also included his descendants (Gen 9:9).

Hahn rightly comments:

“That the covenant is extended to Noah's descendants reveals more than just a domestic design for this covenant. It also indicates that the redemptive plan of God for humanity throughout salvation history will take a familial shape. In other

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<sup>362</sup> See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 116–165 for detailed discussion.

<sup>363</sup> Lioy, *Axis of Glory*, 19.

words, God's redemptive plan is permanently established by the Noahic covenant in terms of the *familia Dei*.<sup>364</sup>

As for the temple motif, it has been suggested that the ark which Noah built functions as a “floating shrine...on a sea of resurgent chaos”<sup>365</sup> Steven W. Holloway further argues that the ark narrative finds its source in ancient Near Eastern temple ideology.<sup>366</sup> In addition, Noah also built an altar to Yahweh after the Flood (Gen 8:20). Phraseologies such as “burnt offerings” and “soothing aroma” as well as the distinction of clean animals from the unclean (Gen 8:20–21) are found only in latter cultic activities involving the tabernacle and the temple.<sup>367</sup> It is therefore possible to see Noah's altar to Yahweh as an incipient form of the tabernacle/temple.<sup>368</sup> Thus we have seen all three motifs of kingdom, family, and temple surrounding the events of Yahweh's covenant with Noah.

### 6.2.3 Yahweh's Covenant with Abraham

After Yahweh called Abram, he promised to make him “a great nation” (Gen 12:2). The idea of *קָהָל* is “an *organised* community of people having *governmental*,

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<sup>364</sup> Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 100.

<sup>365</sup> John H. Walton, “Flood,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 322.

<sup>366</sup> Steven W. Holloway, “What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology,” *ZAW* 103 (1991): 328–355.

<sup>367</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 104.

<sup>368</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 104.

*political, and social structure.*”<sup>369</sup> The political understanding of “nation” is further substantiated by reading Genesis 12:2 in the context of chapters 10 and 11. In light of the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, Yahweh’s promise of making a nation out of Abram is an envisioning of the future political entity which the original reader undoubtedly understood as Israel.<sup>370</sup> In contrast to the event of Babel in Genesis 11 where Yahweh scattered the nations, Genesis 12 presents the beginning of a political structure that is brought into being as a result of Yahweh’s covenant with Abram.<sup>371</sup> Furthermore, Yahweh promised to make Abram’s name great (Gen 12:2), which indirectly indicted the nations who built Babel to make a name for themselves (Gen 11:4). According to Bill T. Arnold, “to have a great name given to one by God in the Hebrew Scriptures is to be viewed as a royal figure (2 Sam 7:9).”<sup>372</sup> By the time we reach Genesis 17, we find Yahweh changing the name of Abram to Abraham. The significance is that while Yahweh’s promise in Genesis 12 was to make Abram into a great nation, he now promises to make him a father of many nations (Gen 17:4, 5 and 6). It is further emphasized that kings will come from Abraham and his wife Sarah (Gen 17:6 and 16). Before this, all the *families* of the earth will be blessed through Abram (Gen 12:3). After this, all the *nations* of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (Gen 18:18). Thus through the covenant with Abraham, Yahweh reveals his intention to establish his kingdom throughout the earth.

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<sup>369</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 243.

<sup>370</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis (NCBC)*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 132.

<sup>371</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 244.

<sup>372</sup> Arnold, *Genesis*, 132.

The familial motif of the Abraham narrative is even more evident. From the time of Abraham leaving his family to the sacrifice of Isaac at Aqedah, the concern for Abraham's progeny pervades the story. As the narrative progresses, Abram (a biological father) became Abraham, a father of nations in the metaphorical sense. The portrayal of Abraham as father stands out most in the Aqedah event, as can be seen by the recurring use of the familial terms "father" and "son" (Gen 22:1–19). Birger Gerhardsson further argues that Yahweh's testing of Abraham is a form of father-son covenantal relationship.<sup>373</sup> Hahn sees Abraham's obedience as a "filial response which God confirms and rewards with a covenant oath."<sup>374</sup> More evidently, the act of Abraham offering Isaac as a sacrifice prefigures the sacrifice of the Son by the Father in the New Testament.<sup>375</sup>

The temple motif can be found also in the Aqedah event. Genesis 22:2 tells us that the site for sacrificing Isaac was located on one of the mountains in Moriah. Although the exact mountain was not specified, a three day journey (Gen 22:4) would roughly correspond to a journey required from Abraham's point of departure in Beersheba to Jerusalem.<sup>376</sup> According to 2 Chronicles 3:1, Solomon's temple was later built on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. The place where Isaac was to be sacrificed is further known as "the mountain of Yahweh" (Gen 22:14). This concurs with Zion which

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<sup>373</sup> Birger Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 26-27, 32.

<sup>374</sup> Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 124.

<sup>375</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (*WBC 2*; Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), 117.

<sup>376</sup> Lioy, *Axis of Glory*, 24.



Scripture also calls the mountain of Yahweh.<sup>377</sup> The identification of the sacrificial site in Genesis 22 with Solomon’s temple thus allows “the cultic ritual of the Jerusalem Temple...[to] be interpreted in light of the Aqedah and God’s covenant oath to Abraham.”<sup>378</sup> It is evident that all three motifs of kingdom, family, and temple are prominently featured in Yahweh’s covenant with Abraham.

#### **6.2.4 Yahweh’s Covenant with Moses/Israel (at Sinai)**

Yahweh’ covenant with Moses at Sinai is found in Exodus 19–24. The goal and purpose of the Mosaic Covenant for Israel are most clearly set forth in Exodus 19:5–6 as expressed in the terms “special possession” (מְסֻבָּה), “kingdom of priests,” and “holy nation.”<sup>379</sup> The kingdom motif is most explicitly expressed in all three terms. According to William Johnstone, the term “special possession” indicates “treasure that a king does not inherit but gains and accumulates by and for himself and is thus at his exclusive disposal.”<sup>380</sup> Israel is thus considered as the treasured possession of Yahweh who is King. The terms “kingdom” and “nation” suggests a political domain under Yahweh’s reign. Although the kingdom motif is most evident, the other two motifs of family and temple are indirectly hinted. All three terms underline a special relationship between Yahweh

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<sup>377</sup> Sinai is the only other location which was also known as the mountain of Yahweh, but it takes 11 days to get there. See Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 117–118. But contra Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 510.

<sup>378</sup> Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 128.

<sup>379</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 326.

<sup>380</sup> William Johnstone, *Exodus 1–19*, ed. R. Scott Nash (*SHBC*; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2014), 399.

and Israel. In Malachi 3:17, Yahweh's "special possession" is compared to a man's son—a familial analogy. In fact, it has been said of Exodus 19:5 that "this obsession with Israel being *special* is the most flagrant sign of Yahweh's parental narcissism."<sup>381</sup> Also, the terms "priests" and "holy" have close association with the temple motif.

I have already demonstrated in chapter four how the covenantal meal in Exodus 24:1–11 represents a ceremony of adoption whereby Yahweh became the father of Israel. This adoptive relationship had already been indicated earlier in Exodus 4:22 where Yahweh declared that "Israel is my son, my firstborn." Yahweh further indicated his desire for this relationship after Israel had been delivered from Egypt by declaring in kinship terms "then I will take you for my people, and I will be your God" (Ex 6:7). Even the covenant declaration of Exodus 19:5–6 is premised by parental imagery where Yahweh reminded Israel "how I carried you on eagles' wings" (Ex 19:4).<sup>382</sup> Yahweh's desire for Israel more than just getting out of Egypt, but also entering into a familial relationship with him.

It has been observed by Beale that Sinai exhibits features similar to that of Israel's later tabernacle or temple.<sup>383</sup> Known also as "the mountain of God," Sinai is not only associated with the Temple Mount of Zion but also mentioned synonymously with "the

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<sup>381</sup> Stuart Lasine, *Knowing Kings: Knowledge, Power, and Narcissism in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2001), 210.

<sup>382</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011). Cf. Deut 1:31 where Yahweh is depicted as a father who carries (אָנִישׁ) his son, and Deut 32:11 where the imagery is more fully developed.

<sup>383</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 105.

house of God” (cf. Isa 2:2–3 and Mic 4:2).<sup>384</sup> The distribution of the Israelites, the priests and seventy elders, and Moses in ascending order on Sinai mirrors the progressive sanctity found in the tripartite tabernacle and temple.<sup>385</sup> The thick cloud on the top of the mountain where Yahweh met Moses parallels the divine presence which subsequently resides in a cloud over the tabernacle (Ex 40:35; Num 9:17–18, 22; 10:12) and also fills Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 8:10–13).<sup>386</sup> With the cloud covering the mountain, the glory of Yahweh is said to have “tabernacled” (נִשְׁכַּן) on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:16) in anticipation of the instructions for constructing the tabernacle in the next chapter just a few verses later. Undoubtedly, Sinai is another incipient form of the tabernacle/temple. Thus we see that the Mosaic Covenant contains the motifs of kingdom, family, and temple. In fact, the story of Exodus concerns the birth of Israel as a nation (kingdom), sealed with a covenant of adoption (family), and into communion with Yahweh who dwelt among them in the tabernacle (temple).

### **6.2.5 Yahweh’s Covenant with David**

Since the Davidic Covenant has been dealt in detail in this study, we will only briefly recapitulate the main points here. The key feature of Yahweh’s covenant with David is the promise of an enduring kingdom (2 Sam 7:11b–16). At the same time, Yahweh adopted David’s family and dynasty as his own (2 Sam 7:14). David’s offer to

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<sup>384</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 105.

<sup>385</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 105.

<sup>386</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 106.

build Yahweh a temple in place of the tabernacle was rejected, but one of his sons will build the temple later on. All three motifs of dynasty (i.e. kingdom), family, and temple are neatly tied together with the word **בֵּית**.

### 6.2.6 The New Covenant

In the New Testament, the concept of covenant is centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant. One aspect of the person of Jesus is his fulfillment of the expectation for a Davidic Messiah, the anointed king.<sup>387</sup> The Gospel of Matthew took great care to present Jesus as a Davidic Messiah through his genealogy, bookended by his messianic title (Matt 1:1–16).<sup>388</sup> Paul’s acknowledgement of Jesus’ Davidic kingship can be seen in his juxtaposition of 2 Samuel 7:12–14 and Psalm 2:7 in the introduction of his letter to the Romans (Rom 1:3–4).<sup>389</sup> As God’s Messiah, Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God (God’s sovereign rule and saving reign) by his coming, life, death, and resurrection.<sup>390</sup> In the future, Jesus will usher in the eschatological kingdom and all of God’s saving promises will be fulfilled.<sup>391</sup> Jesus plays a critical role in this future kingdom. As Thomas Schreiner puts it, “Perhaps the most

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<sup>387</sup> Joel B. Green, “Kingdom of God/Heaven,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 472.

<sup>388</sup> Yigal Levin, “Jesus, ‘Son of God’ and ‘Son of David’: The ‘Adoption’ of Jesus into the Davidic Line,” *JSNT* 28 (2006): 415–416.

<sup>389</sup> Christopher G. Whitsett, “Son of God, Seed of David: Paul’s Messianic Exegesis in Romans 1:3–4,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 674.

<sup>390</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 595.

<sup>391</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 50–51.

remarkable feature in Jesus' teaching about the kingdom is the role that he envisions for himself. He is the king and judge, deciding both who enters the kingdom and who is excluded from it (Matt 25:31–46)...He invariably considers his own role as paramount in the eschatological kingdom."<sup>392</sup>

Another important aspect of the person of Jesus is his filial relationship with God the Father. The concept of God as "Father" is pervasive in the New Testament due to the role of Jesus as God's "Son."<sup>393</sup> It is also the identification of Jesus' unique status as God's "Son" that changes phenomenally how believers relate to God as "Father."<sup>394</sup> Hence believers can be instructed to pray to God as "Our Father who is in heaven" (Matt 6:9). By the same token, Paul was able to speak of the adoption of believers as children of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Rom 8:14–17). In sum, "for centuries God desired a familial relationship with his people, but it wasn't until Jesus that this door was thrust open...[and] established entrance into the family on the basis of faith and grace and not by works of the hands...and [for] all believers to call out 'abba, Father' to their God."<sup>395</sup>

Finally, Jesus is the temple in the New Testament. In John 2:19 Jesus refers to himself as the "temple" in reference to his death and resurrection. Although the people who heard him thought that Jesus was speaking about the physical temple in Jerusalem (Jn 2:20), Jesus was in fact talking about his own body (Jn 2:21). Beale argues that Jesus

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<sup>392</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 51.

<sup>393</sup> Ben Witherington III and Laura M. Ice, *The Shadow of the Almighty: Father, Son, and Spirit in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>394</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *God in New Testament Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 40.

<sup>395</sup> Witherington and Ice, *The Shadow of the Almighty*, 57.

might in fact be using a double entendre to refer to both the destruction of the physical temple as well as his own body, and that his resurrected body will be the replacement for Israel's old temple (cf. Mk 14:58).<sup>396</sup> Jesus is later claimed as the "corner stone" upon which believers as the "temple" are built (Eph 2:19–22). Indeed Paul has elsewhere referred to the church, which consists of the body of believers, as the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16).<sup>397</sup> Faith in Jesus the "corner stone" is thus the criterion for becoming part of this spiritual house of God which is being built (1 Pet 2:4–8). In the end, "the temple in Jerusalem is no longer the center of God's purposes; rather, the church of Jesus Christ, composed of believers from every ethnic background and social class, constitutes the temple of God."<sup>398</sup> That is why it is said that "God does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24), and at the end of times there will be no physical temple "for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev 21:22).

Thus in the New Covenant, the three motifs of kingdom, family, and temple are found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the covenant mediator.

### 6.3 Conclusion

From the discussion above we have seen that all three motifs of kingdom, family, and temple are simultaneously found in the creation account and the divine covenants that form the framework of redemptive history in the Bible. This work is only a brief

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<sup>396</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 193.

<sup>397</sup> Cf. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 245–268 for Paul's understanding of the church as the new temple.

<sup>398</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 744.

survey and certainly each of the major covenants can be dealt with in more detail regarding the themes of kingdom, family, and temple. Nevertheless, a few preliminary conclusions can be drawn. First, the coming together of the same three motifs in the creation account and the covenants suggests some form of continuity in them. Only further studies can perhaps shed more light on the relationship among them. Second, rather than a flat portrait, the three motifs give us a multidimensional view of Yahweh's relationship with humankind in the creation account and through the covenants. Through all three motifs of kingdom, family, and temple, we can understand Yahweh as king, father, and a God who desires to dwell with his people. As Yahweh's covenanted people, believers can fully be known as "a chosen race,<sup>399</sup> a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession" (1 Pet 2:9). In terms of missiology, God's purpose is spatial, relational, and intimate. Finally, the three motifs of kingdom, family, and temple are not unrelated motifs. All three can be subsumed under the single theme of the house of Yahweh.

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<sup>399</sup> "Race" (γένος) can also mean "descendant" or "family" (Acts 7:13).

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

At the outset, this study presented an overview of scholarship related to the theme of what is traditionally known as the Succession Narrative (i.e. 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2) according to Leonhard Rost. We discovered that, following Rost, a political reading of the narrative remains the dominant view among scholars today. This study has demonstrated that a familial theme exists in conjunction with the political theme in the narrative thus revealing the complexities of paternal, maternal, fraternal, and other kinship relationships as a result of rivalry for the succession to the throne. To better represent the dual themes of politics and family, I shall refer to the pericope consisting of 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 as “the narrative of David’s dynastic family” rather than what it is traditionally known as the Succession Narrative.

Chapter two has shown that the family is central to the social governance of ancient Israel and how that affected many aspects of Israel’s life. Israelite society was organized according to the constructs of household (בֵּית), clan (מִשְׁפָּחָה), and tribe (שֵׁבֶט). Solidarity at these different levels of the kinship structure (i.e. household, clan, and tribe) was expected and thus an individual’s action had the potential of affecting the entire community. The family was central to understanding one’s individual and corporate identity. Kinship ties had to be given very serious consideration when making decisions. The concept of family also formed the framework for Israel in the recounting



of history. Ancient Israel reflected upon their past through the retelling of familial stories. The centrality of the family permeated the language of the people in its common day use of kinship terminologies and metaphors. Familial language was used in the forging of fictive kinship relationships, reconciliation, negotiation, and even in cursing. Through the use of familial metaphors the social reality of the family became a paradigm for theologizing Israel's relationship to Yahweh and the rest of humanity. Humanity was understood as having originated in a family and all humans were viewed as one large family. The unique relationship between Yahweh and Israel was metaphorically presented in terms of husband-wife and parent-child (particularly father-son) relationships.

The centrality of the family in biblical Israel—and how that affected biblical Israel socially, organizationally, conceptually in terms of locating herself in history, and theologically in terms of how she expressed her relationship with Yahweh—is foundational to our analysis of the narrative of David's dynastic family. All these aspects of influence of the family on ancient Israelite society are demonstratively found in the narrative of David's dynastic family. The story of David's family follows the family stories of Eli, Samuel, and Saul. Situations in David's story that call for political decisions are complicated by kinship and familial solidarity. Familial language, terminologies, and metaphors are also common in the account. Hence the familial theme in the narrative of David's dynastic family was more than just an ad hoc literary device employed by the narrator. The description of David's dynastic family, following the

family stories of Eli, Samuel, and Saul, corresponds to ancient Israel's typical way of using family as a framework for recounting her history.

Since **בֵּית** is a keyword in First and Second Samuel, chapter three studied its function in the two books. Corresponding to the use of family as the framework for recounting history, we saw how **בֵּית**, as “family,” weaved together the history of Israel's early monarchy utilizing the major characters of Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David. In particular, the narrator told the family stories of these characters according to a pattern involving their family of origin, appointment to office, and problems with their sons. The repeated patterns and the association between the failure of one character to the rise of the next skillfully link the familial stories of these characters into a larger narrative.

The use of **בֵּית** also revealed a complicated web of kinship relationship in the Books of Samuel. Used as a word for physical houses, **בֵּית** uncovered instances in the narrative that were mostly associated with violence and estranged kinship relationships. Most importantly, **בֵּית** tied together Temple, dynasty, and family in Nathan's oracle (2 Sam 7:1–17) and allowed the narrator to move seamlessly from one issue to another.

The use of **בֵּית** in First and Second Samuel further underscores the centrality of family in the accounting of Israel's early monarchy. It anticipates the narrative of David's dynastic family as one involving David's problems with his sons. Not only does the word **בֵּית** continue to be a key motif in the narrative of David's dynastic family, its

meanings of “dynasty” and “family” become the overarching dual themes that govern the story.

Chapter four explored Yahweh’s relationship with David’s dynastic family with respect to the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7:1–17. First, we established that the kinship-based organization of the Semitic tribes provided the paradigm and language for covenant institution. In other words, all covenants are in some way a form of fictive kinship relationship. Second, our study of adoption language in the Old Testament showed that verbal declarations of adoption associated with Yahweh only occurred in relation to the nation of Israel and the dynastic family of David. This indicated to us that Yahweh’s desire was for Israel to be his “son” from the time he called his firstborn out of Egypt to the time he adopted David’s descendants. Whether Israel was organized as a tribal league or a monarchy, Yahweh had intended for her to be his family. Third, we understood that in Yahweh’s covenant with David, he adopted David’s descendant—and hence David’s dynasty—as his own family. The mention of a future successor of David in the dynastic oracle anticipates a resolution in the rest of the story. In this way, the Davidic covenant continues the use of family as a framework for Israel’s history with the understanding of Yahweh as Israel’s father and allows us to look at the narrative of David’s dynastic family that follows through familial lenses.

In chapter five we analyzed the narrative of David’s dynastic family (i.e. 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2) for the dual themes of politics and family. The narrative begins with David’s concern for showing סֶדֶק to Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9) and Hanun (2 Sam 10:1–5). Both Mephibosheth and Hanun were sons whose fathers (Jonathan and

Nahash respectively) were in covenant with David, but they were also threats to David's reign. Hence David's dealings with them required considerations for both kinship bonds and political expedience.

Next we have a longer unit (2 Sam 10:6–12:31) which records the story involving David, Bathsheba, Uriah, Nathan, and Solomon. First, the dual themes of politics and family can be seen in the structure of the unit. The familial themes involving marital fidelity, death of a child, and birth narrative are framed by the Ammonite wars (2 Sam 10:6–11:1a; 12:26–31). In the David-Bathsheba-Uriah account, the antagonism between monarchy and household is played out by juxtaposing Uriah's house with David's house (i.e. palace). In the end, David's taking of another man's wife was achieved through political means—by engineering Uriah's death in battle. Second, the dual themes of politics and family are encapsulated in the phrase “the sword shall never depart from your house” (2 Sam 12:10). In this unit as well as the rest of the narrative, we find that “sword” and “family” become two inseparable entities.

A large section of chapter five was given to the analysis of David's relationship with his four “sons of death,” that is, the unnamed firstborn of Bathsheba, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. The death of the unnamed child was the result of sexual politics. Amnon's death was the result of fratricide and rivalry for the throne. Although a son of David, Absalom was also a usurper of the throne which led to his death by Joab's hands. Adonijah brought death upon himself by vying for the throne that was given to his brother Solomon. Besides the death of these four sons, the dual themes of politics and family are also found in specific dealings of David with the misbehavior of Amnon,

Absalom, and Adonijah, and finally in David's role in the establishment of Solomon as his successor. In addition, familial themes are found in parables and stories that sought to illicit political decisions within the narrative, and mothers played important roles through their intervention in politics. It is thus evident that the entire section of 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 consists of the two inseparable themes of politics and family, and should be aptly termed as “the narrative of David's dynastic family.”

As an implication of the present study, chapter six reflected on the significance of the Davidic covenant and its similarities with the other major covenants in the Bible (i.e. Yahweh's covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the New Covenant). Preliminary investigation observed that all three motifs of kingdom, family, and temple are present in all these major divine covenants. Just as the word **בַּיִת** carries all these concepts of kingdom, family, and temple in the Davidic covenant, we can perhaps see Yahweh's work in and through the covenants as his programmatic plan to build his dynastic family—the house of Yahweh.

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