

CHAPTER 1: BIBLICAL FAMILY SYSTEMS

Introduction

No other single literary work has had more influence on Western civilization than the Bible. Whether one considers the Hebrew Scriptures or the Christian Old and New Testaments (either Protestant or Catholic), the Bible provides an undeniable influence in how people organize their worldview (Cranmer & Eck, 1994). The Bible has also been used to order societies, centralize power, encourage familial and other interpersonal relationships, as well as provide spiritual direction (Mayer, 1994). This divinely inspired “Word of God” is viewed by many as the ultimate truth, and for them, there is no other source of veracity. This is especially the case when addressing the religious and spiritual components of the Bible. The impact of Holy Scripture has left its mark on various other aspects of civilization, such as law, politics, and the arts (Rabin, 1998). In addition to being considered a tremendous literary work of prose and poetry, the Bible has also been viewed as ethnography, a descriptive cultural anthropology, as well as a religious text based on faith. It has also been seen as a psychological document in which important problems of ultimate concern are reflected. The Bible is “without parallel in Western Literature and probably without parallel in all literature” (Miles, 1995, p. 5).

While the Bible has been acknowledged as being much more than literature, it is a work of literature and can be appreciated as such without being blasphemous. Although myth, legend, and history also mix throughout the Bible, it initially served as the moral

code of the ancient Israelites, concerned with the principles of monotheism, and rules that govern interpersonal relationships (Rabin, 1998). If a biblical story is to be explored, it is essential to define, delve into, and critically examine the concepts of religion and spirituality. For centuries, the Bible has been subject to intense scrutiny and study, with biblical scholarship evolving into a highly developed branch of academic rigor through the discovery of ancient texts, archaeological finds, and computer re-generation of ancient sites. While these advances have increased knowledge about the Bible, they do not explain how to look at a family from this period in time. Adding the viewpoint of systems theory to this discipline may bring new ways of examining a biblical family, and may help to examine new ways of looking at families today.

Religion, Spirituality, and MFT Literature

Religion

Before 1990, there is a dearth of relevant scholarly literature concerning the intersection between religion and spirituality (which though similar, are quite distinct) and psychotherapy. Shafranske and Malony (1990) defined “religiousness” as “adherence to the beliefs and practices of an organized church or religious institution” (p. 72). Religion has also been viewed by others as a “value-laden stance inseparably tied to proselytizing” (Prest & Keller, 1993, p. 139), as extrinsic to the individual (Stander, Piercy, MacKinnon, & Helmeke, 1994), and as expressing a person’s “reality in ways such as rituals, beliefs, and practices that are developed in community with other

individuals who have similar spiritual experiences” (Hodge, 2000, p. 190).

My own view as a scholar is that all religions are man-made constructions. It stands to reason (and history has borne this out) that since human beings are fallible, then religions necessarily have flaws as well, even though each claims to have its own version of “Truth”. Religions have been experienced as rigid, excluding, and fundamentalist (Giblin, 1996), emphasizing dogma and doctrine over ideals of acceptance, interconnectedness, and openness toward experience.

However, religion can provide individuals, couples, and families with positive experiences that promote healthy functioning. Abbott, Berry, and Meredith (1990) discovered that religion “facilitates positive and healthy family interaction and enhances the life satisfaction of its members” (p. 443). These authors emphasized the importance of understanding how religious involvement is related to family satisfaction. Although their findings do not indicate a direct relationship between religious belief or activity *per se* and family satisfaction, they do note the importance of understanding “how religious beliefs, values, and practices (that) operate within (the family)” (p. 447).

These findings have been extended to therapists also. In a study examining religiosity among different types of psychotherapists, Bergin and Jensen (1990) found that marriage and family therapists demonstrate the highest levels of religiosity, followed by clinical social workers, psychiatrists, and clinical psychologists. Religiosity profiles revealed that MFTs are most similar to the public at large in terms of religious practice,

but as a field in general, therapists and counselors are still less religious than the clients they serve. This places MFTs in a unique position to address clients' concerns involving religious and/or spiritual matters.

Spirituality

More definitions abound, however, in attempts to conceptualize and operationalize what is meant by "spirituality", as opposed to "religion". Again, Shafranske and Malony (1990) see spirituality as "those more personal practices of a religious nature which may or may not emanate from a particular religious institution" (p. 72). Berenson (1990) defines spirituality as "a direct, personal experience of the sacred unmediated by particular belief systems prescribed by dogma or by hierarchical structures of priests, ministers, rabbis, or Gurus" (p. 59).

In nearly every article researched for this dissertation, authors cited Prest and Keller (1993) as a breakthrough in attempting to bridge the gap between spirituality and systemic family therapy. They define spirituality as "the multifaceted relationship or connection between human and metaphysical systems. Spiritual experiences (including those delineated within formalized religions) are manifested in the rituals involved in the development of this relationship. These include both verbal (e.g., myths, metaphors, *text* [italics added]), and nonverbal (e.g., behaviors, beliefs) communication. People develop patterns of spirituality within systems via a process of evolving intersubjective agreement" (p. 138). They also highlight the importance of understanding clients' beliefs

through language (i.e., how the client languages her life in the spiritual dimension) and how this system interacts with presenting clinical problems. They also view discussions about spirituality as “even more taboo than sex and death” (p. 138).

Since Prest and Keller’s landmark article, other authors have noted that equal importance needs to be given to spirituality, alongside issues such as gender, culture, family of origin, and current relationships. For example, Stander et. al. (1994) note similarities between religion and spirituality and family therapy, including (but not limited to) giving meaning to life, providing rituals that transform and connect, and giving identity and heritage to its members (p. 29). Since a postmodern point of view necessarily involved addressing the above issues, it is important to view spirituality as part and parcel of family life. Giblin (1996) found that definitions of spirituality are multidimensional and necessarily involve an awareness of a transcendent dimension, bringing new meaning to an individual’s existence and leading to growth.

Several authors, though, imply that spirituality is necessarily theistic. Butler and Harper (1994), for example, identify “God” as a member in marital relationships. In well-functioning marriages, God is viewed as “an operant being whose purposes are intimately involved in the course of marital history” (p. 278). Anderson and Worthen (1997) see three dimensions of human existence as encompassing time (defined as both linear and circular), space (human beings’ place in the universes), and story (the narrative woven to explain our place in that same universe). They also add a fourth dimension of

“spirituality”, which has three assumptions of its own: (1) God or a Divine Being exists; (2) humankind yearns innately for connection with this Being; and (3) this Being is interested in human beings and acts upon this relationship to promote beneficial change.

These examples of exclusivity beg the question of other marriages (or any other relationships for that matter) that function well, regardless whether the individuals involved define God or any type of theistic being. One example is Buddhism, which has existed much longer than Christianity or Judaism, the first known monotheistic religious system. Do the aforementioned authors realize they are excluding several billion people from having healthy relationships just because they do not believe in (and may not be able to conceive of) a God-figure?

Haug (1998a) views religion and spirituality as covering similar but not identical concepts and beliefs. For her, “spirituality connotes a personal, internalized set of beliefs and experiences while religions organize these beliefs and experiences into collective dogma and practices associated with organized memberships” (p. 182). In a subsequent article, Haug (1998b) views spirituality as containing dimensions that address cognitions, affect, behavior, and development. A further definition sees “spirituality as attributions of a personal nature, which give meaning to life events, help transcend difficult experiences, maintain hopefulness, and lead to behaviors which honor connectedness” (p. 471). It is clear from citing the abovementioned scholars that any attempt to define religion and/or spirituality raises complex issues which may not satisfy those who are

looking for a single, decisive definition of these concepts.

Systems Theory as Applied to Literature

Johnson (1991) noted only a few scholars that deconstructed works of art and literature from a family psychotherapy perspective, such as Bateman's (1985) and Lipton's (1984) submissions concerning Arthur Miller's classic play *Death of a Salesman*. Since then, there has been an increase in the application of systemic concepts in novels, such as those written by E. M. Forster (Womack, 1997), Toni Morrison (Storkoff, 1997), Henry Miller (Decker, 1997), and Anne Tyler (Spector, 1997). Systems thinking and general systems theory have influenced increasing thought and discussion of how works such as these can be viewed from a systemic point of view.

Kaufman (1995) described how she used a series of four interconnected novels to help marriage and family therapy graduate students begin to see how epistemological shifts can occur from a positivistic, linear, all-knowing perspective to a postmodern, constructivist perspective. Central to this latter perspective are the ideas that (1) a multiplicity of perspectives can co-exist simultaneously, providing equally valid observations and interpretations, and (2) there are many possible outcomes and alternatives that can happen, none of which can be predetermined or accurately predicted. Implicit in the above is an understanding that searching for a verifiable truth and precise knowledge of the world-as-it-is is an exercise in futility.

Systems Theory and Biblical Scholarship

The dominant view of biblical scholarship at the beginning of the 20th century was limited to either a strictly historical or exegetical (i.e., scriptural) interpretation of the people and events contained therein. Even Sigmund Freud took an exegetical/scriptural view of biblical personalities (Szaluta, 1994; Rice, 1990). In his penultimate work *Moses and Monotheism* (1939/1967), Freud demonstrated that psychoanalytic observations could provide meaningful and compelling insight into the psychodynamic factors at work in certain biblical personalities and how their character is constructed. What Rollins (1997) describes as “psychological criticism” (p. 165) has gained acceptance as a necessary addition to historical and exegetical criticisms, both of which have their own limitations.

Only a handful of authors were found to have explicitly attempted to discuss the intersection of the Bible and systems theory. Stevens (1994) investigated the congruency of systems theory and biblical theology as they relate to pastoral leadership. He examined how family therapy concepts such as interdependence, causation, and general transmission process (Kerr & Bowen, 1985) influence families vis-à-vis their chosen faith community. Rogers (1979) explored structural family therapy ideas such as boundaries, feedback loops, and subsystems (Minuchin, 1974) as a viable “basis for studying Bible family narratives as ‘background’ of the total ‘gestalt’ of Scripture, from which basic principles permitting healthy development can be derived” (p. 251). She examined both

Old Testament (Lot's family, Abraham and Sarah, Abigail and Nabal) and New Testament (Priscilla and Aquila) families, conceding that the Old Testament affords better candidates for such a study, since a narrative record is more complete than in the New Testament, where these family stories are substantially more fragmentary.

A Systemic View of a Biblical Family

The study that follows attempts to expand on the previous research cited by deconstructing one family as presented in the Bible. I have chosen to examine David, the second monarch of ancient Israel, as he is depicted in the first and second Books of Samuel and the beginning of the first Book of Kings as found in the Old Testament. In separate chapters, I will explore the following events in the Davidic narrative: the end of Israel's period of judges and the rise of a monarchy, focusing on Saul's reign as Israel's first ruler; David's selection as Saul's successor, as well as David's experience in both his family of origin and as a member of Saul's family, with emphasis on the relationship among David, Saul, and Jonathan, Saul's son; the David and Bathsheba episode; the rape of Tamar and how David's family is eventually torn asunder; and conclude with the final days of David's reign and ultimate death.

The main source text used to explore these family structures is the King James Version of the Bible. When Martin Luther proposed that the laity (as opposed to the Pope and church hierarchy) should have the right to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, this began a seismic shift throughout Western Europe. People did not want

to be told what the Bible said - especially in a dead language that only a select circle could read (McGrath, 2001). If the Bible was available in the vernacular, all could read it and judge its teaching for themselves. English itself grew from a “barbarous” language of peasants to a nationally accepted language in England, and the populace no longer looked to French and Latin as the languages of scholarly endeavors. When this change in the perception of English is combined with the rise of nationalism throughout Europe, along with Luther’s passionate arguments and the subsequent Protestant Reformation, it is small wonder that versions of certain biblical books (e.g., Genesis, the Gospels) were published in Dutch, German, and even Flemish (McGrath, 2001). In 1611, the King James Version (named for the English King James I, who gave the final authorization for its printing) became available to an increasingly literate common folk.

This translation remains the closest to the original Latin, which itself was a translation from the original Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew writings. The King James Version is the closest translation that remains true to these ancient manuscripts. Language has always been a battlefield between old and new ideas. This version of the Bible has been a bridge over this gap in language for almost 400 years. It has stood the test of time, and for these reasons has been selected as the text to be examined.

Since psychological analysis sheds light on the motives and behaviors of biblical characters (Gladson & Plott, 1991), systemic concepts can serve to expand on these by examining contexts, not just individualistic aspects of this story. Four specific models of

family therapy will be used to interpret the dynamics as they occur in the narrative. Specifically, structural, contextual, narrative, and Bowenian/intergenerational models will be the tools used to examine this fascinating story.

Structural

Structural family therapy (Minuchin, 1993; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981; Minuchin, 1974) postulates that families have an observable pattern of relating to one another and thus can be watched as different subsystems interact. Subsystems are identifiable subsets within the larger family system (e.g., parental subsystem, sibling subsystem), each having certain roles that need to be performed. There are definite boundaries between the subsystems that need to be respected. If these boundaries are crossed, pathology can ensue in the form of enmeshment (in which boundaries have become diffuse and family members are too emotionally close to one another) or family members being disengaged (rigid boundaries inhibiting emotional closeness or not allowing for appropriate developmental growth) from one another. An action-oriented therapy, the goal of structural family therapy is to realign the various subsystems to increase family functioning.

Contextual

Contextual family therapy (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1984) derives much of its theory from the work of Martin Buber (1956), who stated that when “true meeting” occurred between

individuals, that a special “I-Thou” relationship is created. Within the context of this relationship, specific ideas about how family members interact with one another have been incorporated into this theory. Two major concepts here are justice and loyalty. For the contextual therapist, there is a certain “justice of the human order”, and when this order is violated, there are consequences that need to be addressed by all parties involved in the relationship. Loyalty is a requirement of all family members, and individuals not only have an ethical responsibility to the family, but to the larger social order as well. The individual also has the expectation to receive from others that same amount of loyalty and justice he has given. This give-and-take can be mapped via an “invisible ethical ledger”, in which the person can address what they owe and to whom, as well as what they are owed and by whom.

Narrative

Narrative family therapy (White & Epston, 1990; White, 1989) looks at how problems have become so overwhelming that they appear to take on a life of their own. The family has created a problem-saturated story in which numerous attempts have been made to fix a presenting problem, but to no avail. Through the process of externalization, in which the problem is objectified and even given certain personality traits (e.g., being “sneaky”), clients are given the opportunity to take a new and different perspective on their problem. Instead of focusing on what has been wrong in the past, the narrative therapist assists the client family in looking for unique outcomes in which they (the

family) experienced success in uniting against the problem. By identifying and building on these unique outcomes, opportunities for increasing dialogue and creativity are opened to address the problem at hand.

Bowenian/Intergenerational

Bowenian theory (Kerr & Bowen, 1985) is generally defined through two concepts: differentiation and individuation. Bowen believed that despite these differences, families generally play out the same fundamental patterns in relationships. The process of differentiation occurs along a continuum, in which the individual is aware of their Self, of the emotional processes within his family of origin, and his ability not to be adversely influenced by anxiety and/or emotional reactivity to what is occurring between himself and other family members. The higher the level of differentiation, the more likely the person is able to individuate, i.e., develop a sense of Self that is solid and can withstand the pressures of family pathology, which is often strong and hidden from conscious awareness.

Systemic Lenses

It is my intention to look at David with multiple systemic lenses, experiencing the content of the story in several ways. I hope to show that these different lenses will shine on what may not have been seen before, recognizing that by doing so they will necessarily reflect on the old. I also intend to demonstrate linkages among the models under consideration. This interaction can serve to highlight similarities among various

models, and punctuate differences as well. In this process, I will consider what each model shows, or does not show.

In order to better integrate my examination of David, I will consider how these various systemic perspectives are different from other examinations of the biblical narrative. I will compare my own results with the work of scholars such as Zeligs (1974), who looks David with a psychoanalytic lens; Baruch (2001), who takes both a historical and exegetical stance with respect to David vis-à-vis his enemies; and Miles (1995), who takes a developmental approach in looking at how a deity is shaped throughout the centuries, and how that developmental perspective affects David as the main character of this narrative. In this way, my study will show not simply how a family systems perspective can be applied to the Bible, but also suggest what is unique about this systemic perspective.

Method

Methodology is important in any scholarly endeavor as it describes how a given study has been constructed and what the researcher is attempting to discover. In such a non-traditional dissertation as this, the character as well as the work in which the character is located have been examined from a multitude of perspectives, each perspective addressing specific aspects of the biblical narrative. No interpretation of scripture is independent from the values and concerns of the scholar (or group) from which it originates. In addition, these values and concerns also lead readers to select

which parts of the Bible to focus upon (Cranmer & Eck, 1994).

Triangulation

According to Patton (1990), triangulation is the “combination of methodologies in (studying) the same phenomena” (p. 187). Triangulation is seen as a powerful solution to the problem of relying too much on any single data source, thereby undermining the weaknesses of any single method. Patton affirms, “using triangulation is recognition that the researcher needs to be open to more than one way of looking at things” (p. 193). Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can provide a coherent and comprehensive perspective of the phenomena under consideration. What Patton describes as “theory triangulation” (p. 187) will be the mode employed in this work. In theory triangulation, a single data set (here, the events in David’s life from his opening appearance in 1 Samuel 16 through his death in 1 Kings 2) is interpreted through multiple perspectives, namely structural, contextual, narrative, and Bowenian/intergenerational family theories.

Documents themselves are subject to a variety of measurement errors. This is especially true of the Bible; where even at the very beginning there are not only two distinct creation accounts, but also two separate and distinct deities (“God” and the “Lord”) responsible for the universe’s coming into being (Miles, 1995). Initially, “God” is presented as only issuing a single command to man: to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1: 28). However, the “Lord God” appears in the next chapter, issuing a new

prohibition (the first of many): "... from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou must not eat" (Genesis 2: 17). Similarly, in the David narrative there are two parallel stories that have been interwoven at various points into the story as it has been handed down. (Halpern, 2001). Any document (or written or oral tradition) may be selective in that only certain aspects are discussed (e.g., positive aspects). The point of theory triangulation is to understand how different assumptions and fundamental premises affect findings. Central to this study undertaken is how different lenses of family therapy can explain the story of David.

Use of "Self" and Method

In qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to place himself within the context of the phenomenon under investigation. It is equally important for the researcher to acknowledge the values, assumptions, and presuppositions brought to the research, as well as the benefits and limitations of this reflexivity. It is not coincidence that I have chosen to examine a biblical text through a series of systemic lenses. I do not believe I would have chosen this particular story were it not for my religious outlook and spiritual progress to this point in my development - as a researcher, as a clinician, and as a person.

An additional chapter toward the end of my study focuses on this. As a product of a Judeo-Christian society and having been raised in a Roman Catholic family, I have a certain (though not in any way definitive) knowledge of the Bible and how it is

interpreted according to the faith tradition in my family of origin. I have since converted to the Episcopal faith, which has a different view of the text under consideration. Protestant faith traditions accept the Bible as written just as it has been handed down from the ancient Israelites to the Jews of the present day. The version of the Bible followed by Roman Catholics, however, not only reverses the order of several books, but omits some as well. My reading of the text is therefore colored by my own changed faith tradition as well.

CHAPTER 2: THE STORY SO FAR...

Introduction

The initial chapters of the first Book of Samuel chronicle Samuel's birth and the divine favor he carried as a young boy. Israel had experienced a period of intermittent military conflicts and subsequent land settlements in newly conquered areas. Leaders of the people rose up from time to time during this period in Israel's history to address specific challenges. The term *judges* was used to describe these figures. Judges were primarily military leaders, but they also served as arbiters in internal matters and led the Israelites in the communal performance of religious rites (Baruch, 2001; Zeligs, 1974).

Samuel is represented as not only an important character in the narrative of the David story, but also in the history of the Israelites as well. He is not only the last of the aforementioned judges, who provided Israel with stability as they experimented with various forms of government, but is also the first of Israel's prophets. Samuel is God's first human messenger, an intermediary between the Lord and man, particularly the leader of his (God's) chosen people. Samuel also functions as a transitional object in that he is the one who anoints both Saul and David as Israel's first rulers. It is important to begin this study with Samuel by taking particular note of his being promised to God by his mother, his relationship with his mentor Eli, his rise to power and role as power-broker and king-maker, because he serves as a key player between the old order of a theocracy and a new order for Israel, namely the beginning of a monarchy.

Samuel's Birth

The biblical account of Samuel's birth has an almost mythical quality to it. A man named Elkanah had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah had many children by Elkanah, but Hannah was barren. One year, on the clan's annual pilgrimage to the sanctuary at Shiloh, Hannah becomes particularly agitated and depressed. She enters the temple and prays to the Lord to "open her womb", and if she gives birth to a son, she would return him to be his servant. Sure enough, the Lord "remembers" his handmaid, and nine months after Elkanah "knows" Hannah, she gives birth to Samuel. Hannah then fulfills her end of the bargain, giving her only child to Eli, the priest at the sanctuary. Thus was Samuel consecrated to serve the Lord as Israel's final judge, and as a transitional figure, as Israel's first prophet.

There are several interesting aspects of the preceding narrative that deserve mention. There are two wives, one of whom is a "good" wife, providing her husband with offspring. However, Hannah, who is childless, is the more beloved by her husband. There is open jealousy on the part of the fruitful wife, Peninnah, who teases and berates Hannah for *not* providing Elkanah with children. When Hannah presents her case to the Lord and begs his intervention, she conceives and gives birth to Samuel. There is absolutely no mention whatsoever of Elkanah's polygamy, good, bad, or indifferent. Polygamy was part and parcel of the ancient Near East, a ubiquitous phenomenon throughout the region. It was understood that a man, particularly one that had

accumulated wealth, would naturally be able to afford more than one wife. In a polygamous society, such as Israel's, a barren wife can function as a mistress. Therefore, Elkanah has Peninnah for babies. There is no moral support for it, or any moral injunction against it. It appears that the Lord is moved, perhaps by pity, to grant Hannah's sorrowful request.

From a systemic perspective, this episode provides some intriguing possibilities. Since a family is a system that operates through transactional patterns, and these established patterns determine how, when, and to whom one relates (Minuchin, 1974), this family would appear to have boundary problems as well from the standpoint of structural family therapy. Some of these boundaries are proscribed by the society in which this family finds itself, such as a former wandering band of tribes now establishing a settled and functioning nation-state. But a polygamous group as well, which appears to be the norm. Structurally (as defined by Minuchin), there are two spousal subsystems mentioned: Elkanah and Peninnah, and Elkanah and Hannah. How does Elkanah make the decision, as the text indicates, to choose Hannah over Peninnah to be his more beloved spouse? Is it pity, or is that overly simplistic? Caught as he might be, does Elkanah choose a path that offers the least resistance? The text is silent on this issue.

Another equally important subsystem receives little mention: the sibling subsystem. The text is unambiguous in stating, "Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children" (1 Samuel 1:2). As siblings, children learn how to deal with the world by

first dealing with each other. How did his unnamed brothers and sisters receive Samuel's birth? How did his birth affect Peninnah, since both the Lord and Elkanah favored Hannah? When the time came for Hannah to fulfill her end of the bargain she made in the temple, was Samuel given a joyous (and possibly painful) send off by his half-siblings, or was his leaving the family barely noted, or even ignored?

The problem here is clearly stated: Hannah is infertile. Yet every year as the family fulfills its annual worship obligation, this story becomes more and more ingrained until it actually becomes this particular family's story. This is "a deadly serious issue" (White & Epston, 1990), because fertility is seen as having the Lord's love and approval. Hannah's story is thus problem-saturated (White & Epston, 1990, p. 16): she is unable to carry out God's first commandment, and her bitterness only compounds the problem. Talk about unique outcomes: by opening a dialogue through prayer for a child, the Lord grants Hannah's desire, for which she willingly (?) reciprocates by promising the infant to be his servant.

Called by Name

As is his custom (witness the patriarchs of Israel, Moses, Joshua, and the Judges), the Lord calls Samuel to pronounce his blessing on the boy who is to be his servant. Initially, Samuel thinks his teacher and mentor Eli, now frail and elderly, is the one calling him. After three incidents, it is the wise priest who realizes it is the Lord who is calling the child. Eli entreats his protégé to return to his room, and should the Lord call a

fourth time, Samuel is told to answer, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth” (1 Samuel 3:9). The Lord does indeed call Samuel, and Samuel responds, “Speak, for thy servant heareth” (1 Samuel 3:10).

The Lord informs Samuel that due to the “wickedness” of Eli’s sons, and Eli’s refusal to stop their evil ways, that he will kill them, thus ending the family’s dynasty as priests of Israel. The next morning, Eli implores Samuel to disclose what the Lord said. Although “Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision”, Samuel “hid nothing from” Eli. Eli then resigns himself to his family’s fate at the Lord’s hands.

The next four chapters record a war with Israel’s neighbor and archenemy, the Philistines. After the Philistines capture the Ark of the Covenant (the Lord’s residence with his chosen, formerly nomadic people), the Lord does indeed make good on his promise, as both of Eli’s sons are killed in battle. Eli, now 98 years old, waits for news from the battlefield. He learns from messengers that that both are sons are dead and that the enemy has captured the Ark. Eli is so overcome with grief that he falls off his seat, breaks his neck, and dies. Here ends his forty-year reign as priest and judge of Israel.

After Israel’s defeat, the Lord intervenes, afflicting the Philistines with emrods, or tumors. Realizing that they have made a grave mistake, the Philistines try unsuccessfully to give the Ark of the Covenant to the Ehronites. Finally, the Philistines return the Ark to Israel, along with additional gifts (i.e., bribes), so that the Israelites might be less inclined to wipe out their people. Instead, Samuel calls upon the nation to avenge their

devastating defeat and reclaim what is theirs. Samuel makes an offering to the Lord, and this appears to ensure Israel's eventual victory and subsequent vindication. Samuel is then installed as the last in Israel's long line of judges.

Samuel's rise from youthful neophyte to leader of a military power is in itself fascinating. From a psychodynamic standpoint, Zeligs (1974) notes with wonderful attention to detail that Eli tells the boy to invoke the Lord's name specifically, but Samuel omits the word "Lord" in his response. "Did the youth still unconsciously, and perhaps intuitively, feel that it was Eli who was communicating to him?" (p. 103). Eli's role as a surrogate parent also provides Samuel with an ego ideal, based largely on the image of an idealized father and the values the father represents (Szaluta, 1994).

Looking at this episode from an intergenerational point of view, this story can be described as beginning the process of differentiation on the part of Samuel, as he begins to move into adolescence and adulthood. As Samuel's relationship with Eli changes, it is important to note the "inter-relationship that exists between what is occurring *within* people and what is transpiring *between* them. People are responding to a *reality* in the relationship process" (Kerr & Bowen, 1985, p. 72). It is Eli who recognizes that it is the Lord who is now becoming primary in Samuel's life; Eli is no longer the father figure. How much of a blow is it to a father when he realizes he is no longer the ultimate male role model in his son's life? Adaptations are not only made to what is gained in a relationship (Samuel's favored relationship with the Lord and Israel), but also to what is

lost (Eli's place in Samuel's life). Something else that is lost is Eli's position of power as well, and that of his sons. Samuel acquiesces to Eli's imploring him to share his vision/conversation with the Lord. Although the text states that Eli said, "Let him (the Lord) do what seemeth him good", I find it difficult to believe there was not some type of emotional reactivity on Eli's part to this devastating news.

"Commitment, devotion, and loyalty are the most important determinants of family relationships" (Nagy & Spark, 1984, p. 8). This can clearly be observed in Samuel's initial unwillingness to share with Eli the revelation that Eli's familial dynasty is ending and that Samuel will replace it. Yet the text does not support the idea that Eli even contemplated a way to undo what the Lord had planned. Eli's ability to face his obligations and fulfill them over and above whatever personal feelings he may have had (every right to feel?), provides him with a strong ethical base from which to address justice issues, such as his length of service, and this is how the Lord chooses to repay Eli?

Contextual therapy is a forward-thrusting dynamic: How do my actions taken in the present not only affect what has happened in past generations, but what is their implication for future generations? Eli's willingness to accept the Lord's judgment solidifies an ontological order, not only between Eli and Samuel, but also between Eli and Israel. His unwavering acceptance does not draw Israel into a potentially divisive battle between his dynasty and Samuel's privileged ascension.

And yet the aforementioned critiques do not fully address the question that has been raised, namely, why does Eli passively (meekly?) accept this pronouncement? Why doesn't he vow, pray, offer sacrifice to the Lord as atonement for his sons' transgressions? Why doesn't he excoriate his sons in an attempt to see their "sinful" deeds and repent? When deconstructing a story, a consideration of power and its effects on the lives of those involved *and* their relationship to the problem must be accounted for. Foucault, as referenced by White and Epston (1990), suggests that power has the ability to shape people's lives. Power can bring about what is often accepted as "truth", and this "truth" which is objective (and objectifying) becomes a subjugating force in people's lives.

At times, this power can be so overwhelming that "the family members' cooperative but inadvertent responses to the problem's requirements, taken together, constitute the problem's life support system" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 3). For Eli's family, it comes with a terrible price: the deaths of his sons and the end of his judicial reign over the Lord's people. There are gaps in this episode, primarily because certain aspects are more privileged than others are. Just because these events are related in this particular sequence does not necessarily make them right or true; what it does is allow for the continuity of the overall story to remain intact: that story being how Israel progresses into a nation-state.

“Our Kingdom for a King”

Chapters eight through fifteen describe how Israel moves from a nation having no centralized government to a country that becomes embroiled in a bitter dynastic dispute that eventually erupts into several civil wars. The narrative of chapter eight describes how Samuel’s sons (in a story reminiscent of Eli and his sons’ demise) are unworthy and less than “judge-like” in their behavior, taking bribes and demonstrating poor judgment in conducting national affairs. The Israelites make their accusations to Samuel, while also pointing out that Samuel himself is aged. “Make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Samuel 8:5) they implore Samuel. Samuel presents Israel’s petition to the Lord, who states that his chosen people have rejected him, not Samuel. Through Samuel, the Lord informs Israel that although he will not deny their request, their desire to have a king reign over them will have dire consequences. Everything that they have, from their children to their land and livestock, to their very lives, will all be subjected to the king’s well being. Even if the people were to cry out and beg the Lord to save them from a tyrant, he will not hear their lamentations, since it was they who abandoned him. Despite all this, Israel continues to be desirous of a king, that he “may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles” (1 Samuel 8: 20). Samuel relents, resigning himself to do as the people wish.

A seismic shift occurs here, one that can be looked at from all four models under consideration in order to deconstruct what is happening on many different levels.

Structurally, the nation of Israel itself is a social unit facing a series of developmental tasks. How does this society grow and change? By asking for a monarch. Human experience of identity has two elements: a sense of belonging and a sense of being separate. Israel is aware that it occupies its own special place as chosen by the Lord. However, this degree of special-ness does indeed set them apart from their geographic neighbors: they have no monarchy. An individual's identity is also comprised of that person's inclusion in different groups. Israel's desire to a member of a group of nations that also had monarchies and to be known as a "kingdom" possibly fueled this desire. This accommodation to the larger system also may have ensured Israel's place in the history of the region.

Narratively, we witness an externalization of an internal problem. Although Samuel was ordained by the Lord to succeed Eli and thus provide a firmer moral compass for the people, things remained in place for this story to only increase in strength and survival, thus serving to increase its power. As noted in White and Epston (1990), when there is a specific arrangement of persons as well as particular relationships to oneself and others, and these can be identified through an exploration of the way that the problem appears to compel persons to treat themselves and others, then the requirements for the problem (in this case, a notable lack of leadership) to maintain its survival are met (p. 31). The text is clear: Samuel's sons are no better ethically than were Eli's, and Samuel himself has become too old to continue being an effective leader. The Israelites respond

to their problem with their own unique outcome: ask for a king, like everyone else. They even ascribe their own meaning here as well: our king can lead us militarily; another can lead us spiritually. By actively participating in political activity, they have externalized their problem and begin to make movements to fix it.

From an intergenerational standpoint, we again witness the pattern of a dynasty ending because of the “sins of the sons” being visited upon the fathers. Eli and Samuel, although chosen by the Lord to lead Israel, have their respective dynasties end rather abruptly, with no possible chance of redemption. One can begin to imagine how these two men felt, and how their anxiety increased when they realized their legacy ends with them. Each has to accept that the Lord has decided to anoint other men’s sons as leaders, not their progeny.

Although Eli’s equanimity in accepting the Lord’s judgment demonstrates a lower level of anxiety and hence a higher level of differentiation, Samuel shows a much higher level of anxiety when he admonishes the Israelites that a monarch will take everything the people have for him. But it is not *Samuel himself* who is speaking; it is the Lord who is *speaking through Samuel* who predicts these dire consequences. Is this also an indication of the Lord’s anxiety, that a temporal leader, who will win the hearts and minds of the people, too will soon replace him? At least to this point, the Lord has shown himself to be all-creative and all-destructive (Miles, 1995), as well as intensely and intimately involved in the lives of those he created. Now for the first time, his beloved

creations are demanding their own change in political leadership; the time has come for a change in the regime. The Lord appears to grant their request, but ominously foreshadows the costs of this radical change.

Can the Lord have an Anxiety Disorder?

The use of the phrase “the Lord’s anxiety” merits discussion. As with any work of literature, the Bible is comprised of actors who interact with one another. These characters love and work, live and die, move and have their being in relationship with one another. What makes these characters’ lives unique is their relationship with the “character” of the Lord. The Lord himself has numerous interactions with his most intimate creation, but God possesses the fundamental characteristic for any literary personality: the ability to engage in self-reflection and acknowledge unresolved conflict within oneself, as noted by Miles (1995).

According to Miles (1995), demonstrates this ability for self-awareness from the very beginning of the biblical story. In the Book of Genesis, God creates man because he desires a self-image. In the second of these creation accounts, man rejects all of the animals that have been created by “the Lord”, for they do not meet his need for companionship. Although everything created to this point, both animate and inanimate has been deemed “good”; they are not sufficient to meet his needs.

By clear implication, the Lord has goofed. He has miscalculated and misread what his creation needs. Soon after the Lord creates woman and they disobey his only

prohibition by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This seemingly innocuous act sets off a ruinous chain of events. His ruthless banishing of Adam and Eve from Eden is just the beginning of a vicious streak in the Lord, culminating in his pronouncement (to no other character in particular): “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them” (Genesis 6:7). Even though God (not the Lord) relents and makes a vow never to annihilate creation again, the potential, though not always verbalized, is present. As Miles states: “We realize what he is capable of, and we cannot forget it. He is not just unpredictable, but dangerously unpredictable” (p. 46).

From this ominous beginning, to the current situation described to this point, the Lord time and again threatens to break his word. Although he promises to make Abraham the father of a great nation, he comes dangerously close to requiring Abraham to sacrifice his son (Genesis 12-22). The Lord chases Moses through the desert in an effort to kill him (Exodus 4). These two giants of Hebrew tradition at times incurred the Lord’s wrath to the point of almost ending relationships before they can begin. The important implication for this story under study is that loyalty requires commitment by the parties involved to agree to what each is expected to contribute to the relationship. However, the Lord capriciously changes the rules of the game on a whim by expecting unwavering loyalty from his most beloved creation while threatening to destroy or

actually destroying everything he has created.

The Lord is openly challenging Israel's loyalty: "Since I have been just and fair toward you as my creation, I expect reciprocation in return from you." Nagy and Spark (1984) identify religion as "a typical area for deep devotion and fundamental loyalty ties" (p. 50). The whole story of God and mankind as written in the text can be viewed as a series of attempts in balancing an ethical ledger of justice. Loyalty ties, of course, can be both individually based or based in the group context. Israel is unique in that their group code is indeed written down, encompassing social regulations and social sanctions (e.g., books of Leviticus and Numbers, just to name two), which Nagy and Spark say is often unwritten in the group dynamic. Thus, in Israel's case, the ethical ledger is painfully clear as to how balance is maintained concerning fairness and justice. Israel sees itself as maintaining justice in the human order by wanting to renegotiate its contract with the Lord. But Israel is not dealing with the *human* order. It wants to depose its metaphysical monarch. It would appear that Israel is operating under one set of rules established for them by someone else, and the other party has a different ethical ledger, one that remains perpetually unbalanced in his favor.

"The Desire of All Israel"

Enter Saul, a "goodly" young man, and a farmer's son. Son of Kish, Saul is looking for his father's lost donkeys. Together with a servant, he scours the countryside to no avail. The nameless servant informs Saul that there is a "man of God" in the next

city, and entreats him to visit and inquire about his father's livestock. We learn that this "man of God" is indeed Samuel, who is offering a ritual sacrifice to the Lord. The Lord also spoke to Samuel a day earlier, telling him that, "Tomorrow about his time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hands of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me" (1 Samuel 9:16). Saul is taken aback when, upon his initial meeting with the prophet, Samuel not only tells Saul that his father's asses are safe, but that Saul himself is the "desire of all Israel" and "the Lord hath anointed thee captain over his inheritance". Samuel then anoints Saul privately as Israel's first king.

Upon Saul's return to his family, Saul's uncle asks about the lost asses. Saul replies that he and the servant visited Samuel, who told him where to find the missing beasts. He did not mention, however, that he and Samuel had spoken of the coming kingdom, nor of Saul's new position as king.

Next, Samuel calls the nation to meet him, scolding Israel for rejecting God and wanting a king. Samuel then asks all the tribes to of Israel to come forward, and through the casting of lots, the tribe of Benjamin is selected as the one from which the king will be chosen. When the public choice (as opposed to the *fait accompli* of the private choice and anointing) falls upon Saul, he is nowhere to be found. It is the Lord who tells Samuel that Saul is hiding among some baskets. Why would someone who has been chosen to be

worthy by the Lord himself to be king over the chosen people demonstrate his reluctance in accepting such a title? The first instance with his uncle can be interpreted as Saul displaying modesty and even circumspection in not fully disclosing his encounter with Samuel. This second incident, however, clearly shows Saul in an unflattering light. Despite his physically being “higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward” (1 Samuel 9:2), Saul himself does not rise to the occasion.

Structurally, why does Saul’s uncle address him about the lost donkeys? Clearly, the donkeys are Kish’s property, and Saul is initially defined as being “the son of Kish”. Saul’s identity is thus tightly bound into the clan. From other aspects of this story, it appears that Saul has limited access to his father. First, the reader is told that Saul has been commanded to look for some lost asses, a fairly menial task. A servant, possibly solidifying Saul’s place in the family structure, also accompanies him: cannot be trusted, less than faithful. Second, it is the uncle who comes out to greet the nephew upon his return. Was the uncle told to do so by his brother? If this can be described as a rigid and disengaged family system, one can imagine why Saul did not fully disclose such a momentous event as a secret coronation.

Another structural issue arises but remains unaddressed in the text. Minuchin (1974) states that families are subject to an inner pressure from developmental challenges of the various subsystems as well as outer pressure from significant social institutions impacting various family members as well. Responding to these demands requires

family members to shift their positions relative to one another so as to ensure individual growth while maintaining systemic continuity (p. 60). It is relatively easy to observe changes within a family system: children grow, parents age, new tasks are mastered and new responsibilities and age-appropriate expectations are encouraged. It is less easy to mark the effects when social structures buffet a family and the society itself drastically alters its form of government. Saul's family naturally would be the most affected as it is he who is anointed not once, but twice, thereby solidifying him as the Lord's choice. From this point forward, Saul's family of origin is never mentioned again. They just appear to fade into the background, ultimately disappearing from the narrative. It would be systemically consistent that a rigid and controlling system, altered forever by the removal and subsequent ascension of one of its members to a position of ultimate power, would turn itself inward, ostracizing a "traitor" to the family.

And yet, the central character of the moment displays incredible ambivalence, to the extent that one would not expect from a regal figure. Saul's lack of differentiation more than adequately explains this ambivalence. Initially it is the lowly, unnamed servant who makes the suggestion to inquire of Samuel where to find Kish's lost asses; it is not the son of the wealthy farmer. Next Saul feebly asks Samuel why is he is chosen, being from the smallest of Israel's tribes. After the private ceremony, Saul does not speak of the wondrous events to his uncle (nor, by implication, to any member of his immediate family), preferring to keep these things to himself. Finally, at the public

proclamation, Saul deliberately hides from the people, not wanting to be found.

Saul's anxiety is palpable, and it can be stated that his level of chronic anxiety is quite high. Given his above circumstances, and his level of differentiation being so low, Saul appears to be the most poorly differentiated person in his family. His emotional reactivity to being named king will have dire consequences, as will be seen in future chapters.

A Smooth Transition?

Saul appears to right himself in leading Israel in an initial battle over the Ammonites, who had taken over the town of Jabesh-gilead. It is after this battle that Saul is publicly installed as king. Amidst the celebration, Samuel stands in front of the jubilant gathering and delivers a scathing indictment against Israel. This time, it is not the Lord who is speaking through Samuel, but Samuel himself pleading his case to the people. Feeling the sting of rejection personally, he lists all that he has done for Israel since he was a child, how he has been a fair judge in both the Lord's and Israel's sight, but Israel still does not fully embrace Samuel now that Saul is their ruler. Samuel warns the people that if they should ever stray from the Lord's path, "ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king" (1 Samuel 12:25).

Another coupling of events confirms Samuel's dire prediction that even kings remain subject to the Lord's plan. In yet another battle with the Philistines, Saul and his son Jonathan lead Israel to victory over an enemy garrison. In the meantime, Samuel had

promised he would appear to the warriors in the next seven days to make a sacrifice that would ensure an Israelite victory. On the seventh day, Samuel still has not arrived, and the people scatter, fearful that they will lose the battle. In order to rally the troops, Saul takes it upon himself to initiate and then conduct the sacrificial rite. Just as the ceremony ends, Samuel appears and immediately confronts Saul. Saul attempts to defend his action, blaming Samuel for not coming at the appointed time. Samuel rebukes Saul sharply: "... thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commended thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue..." (1 Samuel 13: 13-14).

Unfortunately, Saul only compounds his own destruction by disobeying a directive from the Lord through Samuel. Saul is instructed to commit genocide against the Amalekites, as retribution for what they had done to Israel in a prior conflict. Although he is clearly instructed to "utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not" (1 Samuel 15:3), Saul *does* spare their king Agag, and takes the best spoils of war for himself and his army. The Lord sees what Saul has done, (or has not done, in this case), and sends Samuel once more to upbraid the anointed king of his chosen people. Saul greets Samuel by informing the prophet that he has indeed done as instructed by the Lord. Samuel asks, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" (1 Samuel 15:14). In an attempt to shift the blame, Saul claims that the people were the ones who took the best of the spoils, not him. When

Samuel does not believe him, Saul again lays blame at the feet of the people, this time stating that he was afraid of the wrath of the people, even though there is no mention in the biblical account of the Israelites threatening Saul in any manner.

After condemning Saul and telling him in effect that the Lord has bestowed his favor on another, Samuel does what Saul had been originally ordered to do, and hacks Agag to pieces. At this point, the text states, "... Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:35).

Although Saul's lack of differentiation can be attested to, it is Samuel who now demonstrates the same problem; namely, a profound inability to separate feelings from thoughts. Profound because one can safely assume that with age would come wisdom, and with biblical characters, this is the case. One would think that Samuel would not have been as reactive towards Israel as he is. A pathetic figure is painted here, as an old man tries to rally former supporters by reminding them what he has done, much like a professional boxer attempting a comeback after several years out of the ring. The people respond with a "so what?" attitude, only solidifying their position for wanting a king.

Kerr and Bowen also write: "When children are not accepting responsibility for their actions, this indicates that the parents are not accepting responsibility for their actions" (1985, p. 202). When Saul tries unsuccessfully to blame his subjects for not slaying all the Amalekites, Samuel, much like a parent asking a child a question when the

parent already knows the answer, asks why he hears animal noises if even the animals were to be killed as well. Saul, as a parent-figure to the Israelites, again does not take adult responsibility for his actions. This episode dovetails with the last one because Samuel himself was not taking responsibility to step aside and let the transition to the monarchy occur, at least in a relatively smooth fashion. To take this one step further: God/the Lord can be appropriately considered as the “ultimate” parent. If one accepts this assumption, then can’t the Lord also be held accountable, in relation to his chosen people? The Lord does not seem to be taking responsibility for *his* actions, namely his directive to Saul to commit genocide. The Lord has already committed mass destruction on his own: the great flood, the ten plagues inflicted upon Egypt, just to name two. The Lord is able to wreak terrible destruction and provide glorious victory, all on his own, with no assistance from mankind. Why does he need man’s help now (Miles, 1995)?

“Relational reality”, as explained by Nagy and Krasner (1986), “is based on an action sphere that incorporates the individual but also transcends him. Operating in the realm of the ‘between’, all parties in a significant relationship are presumed to be responsible for the consequences of how their individual actions affect each other” (p. 60). Saul and Samuel both act in ways that have consequences that indeed affect one another. For his part, Saul’s inability to be patient for Samuel and his unwillingness to carry out the Lord’s genocidal command serves to sever both his relationship with Samuel and his relationship with the Lord. Samuel has to carry out the Lord’s instruction

to slay Agag, which Saul, for whatever reason, cannot bring himself to do.

On the other side of the relational ledger, Samuel's stepping in to complete tasks that were originally Saul's serve three purposes. First, Samuel carries out a divine command, thus ensuring continuity of the Lord's power against Israel's enemies. Second, the killing of Agag serves to reinforce Saul's helplessness in facing his duty and responsibility as king. Third, these incidents serve to foreshadow the end of Saul's reign, opening the way for David to take over. This also ensures continuity at a macro-level, that of a continuing monarchy for Israel.

Summary

When dealing with families that are at the point of readiness for change, there are two things that affect the process: how difficult it is to change established and entrenched patterns of behavior, and fear of what the anticipated change might be about. We have witnessed change in three families. In Samuel's family of origin, Hannah has given her firstborn to serve the Lord. Eli has lost his place as arbiter over Israel due to his sons' corruption and his own inability to correct their behavior. Saul is thrust from his existence as a donkey-seeking son to being Israel's first king, but through his own unreadiness to handle the responsibilities he loses his position to another. Israel herself can be conceived in terms of a macrosystemic family, going through a transition from exclusively a theocracy to a monarchy approved of by their deity. And yet like most families, though the individuals change throughout the generations, processes remain the

same.

CHAPTER 3: FAMILIES OF ORIGIN AND FAMILIES OF CHOICE

Introduction

Israel is at a crossroads: they have asked the Lord for a king, so they would have a form of government like the nations surrounding them. Saul has been chosen as captain over the “chosen people”. Although he appeared to be a first-rate choice initially according to the text (“[Saul was] a choice young man... and there was none among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he” [1 Samuel 9:2]), his weak and indecisive character ultimately proved to be what causes Samuel the prophet to pronounce the Saulide dynasty ended before it could really begin. The search is now on for a suitable, as well as improved, replacement.

The New King

The Lord sends Samuel to the hamlet of Bethlehem, calling on a farmer named Jesse. Jesse has been identified as the father of Israel’s next anointed king. After a ritual sacrifice, Jesse’s firstborn son Eliab is presented to Samuel for inspection and approval. However, Eliab is not the one chosen. Jesse’s second son Abinadab is next in line, but he too is deemed not worthy to be king. Shammah, the third son, is brought forth, and also denied kingship. All seven of Jesse’s sons, present during Samuel’s sacrifice, come forward and are subsequently dismissed as unworthy.

Samuel is baffled. He had been promised that Israel’s second monarch would be among these young men. Samuel implores of Jesse: “Are these all thy children?” Jesse’s

response is telling, if not altogether predictable: “There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither” (1 Samuel 16:11). David is summoned from the fields and brought before the prophet. The Lord speaks (presumably only to Samuel), announcing that this child is the next king of Israel.

Sibling Rivalry

The only other mention of David interacting with his brothers is immediately before his famous battle with Goliath. David’s eldest three brothers (the aforementioned Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah) are conscripted into the army and follow Saul into battle with the Philistines. As the youngest, David is expected to stay with his father, still tending the flocks. Jesse sends David to the battlefield, but only to drop off food and other provisions for his brothers and to return with a report as to how they are faring. As David is speaking with his brothers, Goliath openly challenges any and all comers, guaranteeing that he would be victorious over the best warrior Israel can offer.

David is incensed when he hears this “uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26). Upon hearing David’s swear, Eliab rebukes his youngest brother, saying: “Why camest down hither? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle” (1 Samuel 17:28). These two distinct episodes are the only mention in the Books of Samuel of David interacting with his biological family of origin. Though brief in

comparison to the rest of his illustrious career, both deserve further exploration.

Even though Samuel clearly requests *all* of Jesse's sons present themselves, David appears to be an afterthought. Samuel has to specifically ask if Jesse has any other sons. One could make the case that the level of differentiation in Jesse's family is rather low. Kerr and Bowen (1985) state that "... the lower a person's level of differentiation, the more likely he will be isolated and anxious if central relationships are disturbed" (p. 175). If David has been relegated to the fields ostensibly to tend sheep, he would naturally be isolated from his father and brothers.

Families have certain characteristics that govern how members adapt to the emotional intensity in relationships. Each family member has a role in creating and reinforcing these relationships. It would only be natural for Eliab to be the prophet's first choice to be king. Eliab is unfortunately not the one chosen, so it follows that Abinadab would be next in the line of succession, and so on. A question needs to be asked at this juncture: Once it is realized that David is the Lord's choice, what is the emotional reaction of Jesse and the older brothers to the divine plan? The text is silent on this point, but in the next chapter, an answer can be discerned.

As the youngest, it falls to David to bring supplies to his eldest three brothers at the battlefield as Goliath and the ubiquitous Philistines threaten Israel once again. David is doing as his father ordered, thus fulfilling a filial obligation. However, it is clear that Eliab sees a vastly different reason for his youngest brother's appearance. He openly

castigates David for his “presumptuousness” and “naughtiness”, not bothering to temper his feelings about the boy. It would appear that Eliab wants to reduce David back to a subservient position. If he were to be successful, then family roles would be realigned and harmonious once again. However, his reactivity is displayed by feelings of jealousy, rage, and even ambivalence, combining in a natural, possibly phylogenetic emotional reaction on the part of the oldest male child that the youngest would be selected king. How dare this whelp usurp Eliab’s position that is naturally and rightfully his!

Eliab appears to be the character chosen by the author of Samuel to be the spokesman for David’s brothers. Perhaps he is voicing what they all feel towards their kid brother. However, in terms of Bowenian theory, Eliab’s level of differentiation would be considered quite low, given his emotional reactivity to his youngest brother’s boasting. Rather than using his age and top sibling position as a platform to observe David’s behavior objectively, Eliab instead responds to his own internal anxieties by focusing on changing David’s behavior (shaping David, trying to make him go back to Jesse’s sheep). Eliab should instead be focusing on his own behavior, girding himself for battle, rather than attending to David.

David and His Parents

In her treatment of David from a psychoanalytical framework, Zeligs (1974) notes the lack of warmth or affection between Jesse and David. Specifically, she states: “... the tendency of the biblical narrative is to emphasize loving relationships between father and

son, where such exists, ... and to treat ambivalence by repression or indirection. The text provides more basis for assuming neglect or indifference on Jesse's part than an affectionate attitude toward his youngest son" (p. 164). A lack of mention of tender feelings does not preclude their presence, though. Jesse, much like Eliab after him, combines this with the additional characteristic of being a nuisance as well.

The youngest child in a family also occupies a special position of being spoiled both as a result of sibling placement and family dynamics. By this point in the family life cycle, parents are generally older and wearier from raising the older siblings (Minuchin, 1985), so the youngest is not as consistently watched and disciplined as the other children. With David occupying the eighth sibling position, Jesse must have been considerably older than when Eliab was born. Remember, too, that Israel is an agrarian society, so children were necessarily thrust into the role of farmhands at an early age. It logically follows that David, as the youngest, cares for a fairly docile animal, namely the sheep.

One family member's absence is glaring, that of David's mother. The warmth and affection that might have existed between mother and son may be nothing more than conjecture, but what *did* happen? It was customary for the mother to name her babies in ancient Israel (Baruch, 2001; Zeligs, 1974). Each son must have held their own unique, special place in their mother's heart. The naming coincided with the bris, or ritual circumcision, so a son's name was not a lightly regarded event.

It is also not much of a leap to believe that David's mother did not survive childbirth. That would be a valid explanation for Jesse's ambivalence towards David. This can be taken one step further. Polygamy was something that was neither encouraged nor condoned in Mosaic Law. Even the founder of God's chosen people Abraham had both a wife (Sarah) and a concubine (Hagar), both of whom played roles important enough to be explicitly chronicled in the Bible. Although not explicitly stated here, *if* David and his brothers (especially the eldest Eliab) were all offspring of the same woman, then their silence at David's anointing speaks volumes. "If David had not been born, maybe our mother might still be alive." Eliab's dressing down his youngest brother can also be interpreted as loyalty to a mother long gone, but not forgotten. "... the deeper (phylogenetically older) emotional attachment between mother and child is the most basic component of the multigenerational process. ...the less emotional separation between a mother and child, the more a child's image of his mother is colored by his own emotional need and fears" (Kerr & Bowen, 1985, p. 201). David's braggadocio about wanting to do battle with Goliath may be linked back to his emotional separation from his "absent" mother, his relationship with Jesse, and/or his relationships with his brothers.

Structural

The boundaries between David and other members of the family are fairly rigid. The inference can be made that since David is not thought of enough by his father to be present for Samuel's selection process, he is also disengaged or shut out from most other

family processes. However, David seems unfazed by even Eliab's stern rebuke at the Philistine battlefield, responding to his brother: "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" (1 Samuel 17:29).

Minuchin (1985) asks a cogent question of families in therapy: Can patterns that help a family function effectively, which are now inappropriate and maladaptive, be modified and become more adaptive? This particular episode serves to demonstrate how David is going to be launched from his family of origin and become his own person. Serving as the family spokesman, Eliab is the voice of the family of origin, as the system tries to maintain its equilibrium as David attempts to individuate. "Parents (Eliab here assumes Jesse's role) cannot protect and guide without at the same time controlling and restricting. Children cannot become individuals without rejecting and attacking. The process of socialization is inherently conflicted" (Minuchin, 1974, p. 58).

Two other structural issues deserve mention. It would appear that a coalition exists among the elder brothers and Jesse. Second, and more in line with a macrosystemic perspective, this coalition is against Samuel for anointing David. But remember who instructed Samuel to do so: the Lord! It is not that far of a cognitive leap then, to realize that David's brothers are detouring their conflict with the Lord through their youngest sibling. They are livid with the Lord for passing them over for kingship. A question remains, but may not have an answer: How does a person resolve these kinds of feelings toward the Lord, especially living in a religiously based society?

A New Family

For purposes of this dissertation, I will not go into any great detail about David's famous battle with the Philistine warrior Goliath. David appears to be bound to fulfill the heroic myth of the underdog defeating an overwhelming opponent (Baruch, 2001; Miles, 1995). One could not but predict victory for the Lord's anointed, especially as the narrative describes the Philistine champion relative to his size (Goliath being "six cubits and a span"), armaments (Goliath's spear head "weighed six hundred shekels"), and even the commentary of others (soldiers are heard to say "... the man who killeth [Goliath], the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel" [1 Samuel 17:25]).

On the heels of David's miraculous victory over the Philistine champion, Saul takes David and makes him an intimate member of the royal court. David already gained favor by playing the harp (1 Samuel 16:14-23), which soothed Saul to the point that "the evil spirit departed from him". So this military conquest only serves to solidify David's position in Saul's eyes. Not only this, but Saul's son Jonathan becomes so close "that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:11).

As time passes, it becomes clear to Saul that the Lord does now indeed favor another, yet Saul has made David a military leader. David himself plays the role of a good soldier, gaining the confidence, popularity, and support of the Israelites. To

demonstrate one example of this, Saul becomes incensed when Israel's women appear to spontaneously break into song, saying how David has slain a thousand-fold more of Israel's enemies than the current king. Saul then begins a series of actions, all designed to ultimately cause David's downfall, even his death. The best way to describe these is to use the concepts of triangles as defined by both Bowen (1985) and Minuchin (1985, 1974).

Bowenian Triangles

For Bowen (1985) triangles describe "the dynamic equilibrium of a three-person system. The major influence on the activity of the triangle is anxiety. When it is low, the relationship between two persons is calm. ...When anxiety increases, a third person becomes involved in the tension of the twosome, creating a triangle. The formation is of three *interconnected* relationships because pathways are in place that allow the shifting of anxiety around the system" (p. 135, italics original). In this part of the narrative, key triangles are Saul, David, and Saul's servants; Saul, David, and Michal; Saul, David, and Jonathan; and most notably, Saul, David, and the Lord.

Saul, David, Saul's Servants

A second evil spirit is noted to descend on Saul while David is once more plying his lyre to soothe his king. After hearing the aforementioned song from Israel's women, as well as of David's military conquests besting his own, Saul begins to see the writing on the wall, as it were: "... what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed

David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 18:8-9). While David is playing, Saul grabs a javelin, hurtling it toward David, threatening to pin him against the wall. David wisely avoids Saul, and Saul demotes David militarily to lead just a small, thousand-man garrison.

As David continues to comport himself well, Saul tries a new tack: he offers David the hand of his eldest daughter Merab, with the proviso that David only leads the military against Israel’s enemies, with no political role for his future son-in-law. Saul’s reasoning: this way, David dies in battle, nobly, but the threat to the throne will be gone. One thing Saul forgets to mention: Merab is already betrothed to another man.

But fate appears to intervene. Michal, another of Saul’s daughters and David approach Saul, declaring their love for one another. Saul instructs his servants to tell David that not just any bridal dowry will do for his daughter: deliver one thousand Philistine foreskins, and Michal will be his. The servants tell him, thinking David will not return from this mission. The worst-case scenario unfortunately for Saul and his servants comes true: not only does David make a triumphant return, but also he delivers twice the original bridal price. Saul has no choice but to concede that David is entitled to marry Michal.

It would be perhaps simplistic to blindly assign motives for Saul’s behavior: jealousy, rage, intimidation, fear, and despair being some likely answers. However, the writer of the Books of Samuel demonstrates a good knowledge of Bowenian

triangulation. Rather than stepping down willingly from the throne or killing David outright, Saul gets others to do his bidding. Saul feels that an appeal to David's ego (mirroring Eliab's accusation of David's being a glory-hog) will embolden him to attempt a seemingly impossible task, made only more difficult because it is an order from the king. One who reads this episode can take sides either for or against, but one thing comes sharply into focus: Saul is extreme in his dealings with David. He either cares for him as he does his own children, or engages in murderous acts towards the man who will eventually surpass him as king.

Going back to Saul's family of origin provides an indication of how Saul may have been unable to declare a true sense of self. As noted in the previous chapter, Saul was secretly anointed Israel's first monarch by Samuel. One can safely make the assumption that such a momentous event would warrant Saul's wanting, even needing, to tell his family this glorious news. However, an uncle, who asks him point blank about his conversation with Samuel, greets Saul. Saul only relates that the lost asses were found, saying absolutely nothing about his being king. A question: was the anxiety between Saul and Kish, his father, so high that Saul's uncle (Kish's brother) had to run out to meet him, before Saul could give Kish the news about the donkeys? Remember that it was on Kish's orders that Saul originally was summoned to scour the countryside for the lost animals.

Saul, David, and Michal

Saul is pleased to learn that Michal and David want to be married, but his plot of the foreskin dowry fails. Saul then experiences another “evil spirit” visiting him, and hurls another javelin at David’s head, just missing him. David escapes to his new wife Michal, who is keenly aware of her father’s intent towards her husband: “If thou save not thy life to night, to morrow thou shalt be slain” (1 Samuel 9: 11). David climbs out a window and runs into the night. For her part, Michal makes it look as though David is in bed, sending word back to Saul (when he inquires of his son-in-law’s whereabouts) that David has fallen ill. Saul then demands David be brought before him in the sick bed. When he learns of Michal’s complicity in the ruse, Saul castigates his daughter for her disloyalty.

It is interesting to note that a child of Saul’s has developed a sure sense of self that is able to see past her father’s irrational behavior and murderous intent, assisting David in staying alive. Michal’s level of differentiation is sufficiently developed that she can stand in the face of her father’s fury and do what she considers is the right thing to do. As Kerr and Bowen (1985) point out, “Regardless of family structure, the common denominator in the development of symptoms is *a disturbance (actual or threatened) in a person’s most emotionally significant relationships*” (p. 175, italics original). As far as Saul is concerned, this *is* his most significant emotional relationship, for he took David into the palace and made him as much of a son as Jonathan.

Saul, David, and Jonathan

“When anxiety cannot be contained within one triangle, and that same anxiety flows over into other triangles, this process is known as *interlocking triangles*” (Kerr & Bowen, 1985, p. 140). Ideally, these interlocking triangles are designed to significantly reduce anxiety in the central triangle under consideration. In the case of Saul and David, however, the anxiety is so palpable that Saul employs others in futile attempts to lessen his own anxiety. After his failure to exact a murderous price for Michal’s bridal dowry, Saul tries to enlist Jonathan’s aid in slaying David. Jonathan, like his sister before him, displays a higher level of differentiation than his father, choosing the fraternal bond with David over Saul’s plotting to destroy his rival. Jonathan then boldly tells his father that David has done him no wrong, and everything David has done has been in loyal service to the king. Swayed by his son’s impassioned plea for David’s life, Saul relents, swearing by the Lord that David will not be slain.

A basic tenet of Bowenian triangulation is that an unstable pair can be stabilized by the addition of a third person. “... Triangles are a product undifferentiation in the human process. The lower the level of differentiation in a family, the more important the role of triangling for preserving emotional stability” (Kerr & Bowen, 1985, p. 135). Looking at these episodes between Saul and David, the level of differentiation in David’s new family is rather low, which would mean that it was already low in Saul’s family to begin with. Were it not for Jonathan and Michal, Saul may have been successful in his

attempts on David's life.

Jonathan is portrayed as having the highest level of differentiation from his family of origin. In the previous chapter, it was mentioned how Jonathan led a daring guerilla raid against the Philistines (this is before David makes his appearance in 1 Samuel). This attack emboldens the Israelites to victory, while Saul appears to be immobilized by indecision. What was not mentioned was the bizarre edict of Saul, saying that no warrior could eat until evening (1 Samuel 14:24-46). Since Jonathan had been leading the raid, he was unaware of his father's proclamation. After the battle he was hungry, so the text relates that Jonathan ate some honey and immediately felt nourished and refreshed. He also tells the people that he does not agree with Saul's command: "How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely to day of the spoil of their enemies which they had found? for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?" (1 Samuel 14:30).

Saul learns of Jonathan's violation of his edict, and after a brief battlefield trial, condemns his son and pronounces a death sentence. Jonathan not only displays a high level of courage in the face of his father's bizarre statement, but also a high level of differentiation by owning his behavior. Upon hearing Jonathan's concise confession, the people themselves appear emboldened by saying, in effect, that it is Jonathan who led us to a great, and even unexpected victory; don't kill him just because he was hungry after leading us.

Fast-forward now to the current situation: Saul's increasingly irrational behavior and violent behavior has proven dangerous for David to remain within the confines of the palace. The systemic nature of their relationship belies Saul's feelings towards David: "The severity of the symptom... tends to parallel the intensity of the relationship process that helps create the symptom" (Kerr & Bowen, 1985, p. 177). What more negatively intense feeling is there than wanting to kill another?

The negatively intense relationship between Saul and David is counterbalanced by the positively intense feelings that David and Jonathan have for one another. After Michal assists her husband's narrow escape from Saul, David flees to Ramah, Samuel the prophet's hometown. Together, David and Samuel run to another town, Naioth, where Saul pursues them and are eventually trapped. With nowhere else to hide, David clandestinely meets with Jonathan and implores his friend: "What have I done? what is my iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father that he seeketh my life? (1 Samuel 20:1). Jonathan attempts to soothe David, assuring him that he (Jonathan) will learn of Saul's intentions, since he is the king's son. Together they concoct a strategy: At the next great feast scheduled for the following day, David will obviously not be present. If Saul becomes angry, Jonathan is to return to the field where David is hiding and execute their plan. If Saul is not upset by David's absence, then Jonathan will carry out an alternative, thereby alerting David that it is safe for him to return to court.

Initially, Saul assumes that David has not purified himself for the celebration. As the second day passes with no sign of David, Saul asks Jonathan of David's whereabouts. Jonathan tells him that David has returned to Bethlehem to be with Jesse and his brothers. Saul sees through the ruse and attacks Jonathan for aligning himself with David. After missing Jonathan this time with the errant javelin toss, Jonathan himself escapes to the field where David has been hiding. Jonathan shoots three arrows in the air (this was the initial plan mentioned above), asking a servant accompanying him if the arrows have gone past their mark. After gathering the arrows, Jonathan orders his servant back to the city. David emerges from his hiding place, and he and Jonathan bid each other an emotional farewell, knowing they will never see one another alive again. David is now an outlaw, literally running for his life.

Narrative

It has been noted that the victors write history. Although primarily unknown, it can be safely surmised that the author(s) of the Books of Samuel had a vested interest in portraying David as hero, aggrieved victim, and ultimately victorious ruler of Israel. In the same vein, Saul is portrayed as weak, indecisive, emotionally unstable, and ultimately sinful, going against the Lord's will and explicit commands. In order for David to be shown in as positive a light as possible, there had to be an equally villainous, polar opposite character (Halpern, 2001; Miles, 1995). As Saul's reign begins to decline into utter chaos and despair, how could David not ascend in the eyes of the people and the

Lord? If one were to look at the preceding events from a narrative stance, a different story emerges, one full of unrealized possibilities and alternatives not possible if one accepts the official, i.e., biblical version of events.

Although Samuel anoints Saul as Israel's first king, it is the Lord not Samuel, nor the clamoring mob of Israelites who chose Saul. Since he was chosen as ruler by the Lord himself, consecrated by the Lord's appointed spokesman, why would there be any doubt, any claim, any reason for there to be another choice? There should not be any reason for the Lord to change his mind. There is literary foreshadowing of Saul's downfall: the people murmuring among themselves that Saul is not terribly impressive, hiding before his public coronation, making rash decisions, taking impulsive actions - all of which appear to lead to the Lord's abandonment of Saul and casting his favor on David.

However, an alternative is offered by Miles (1995). Citing examples that date biblically back to the creation story, Miles reaches an inescapable conclusion regarding the biographical narrative that is God's life: "It is clear that God has regrets" (p. 40). Even if one exception to a problem-saturated story is unearthed, that opens up possibilities for change in one's life. If God/the Lord himself has been experiencing regret over his noblest creation, and possibly some shame as well from the beginning of time, it makes sense that his would extend centuries later to the current study undertaken here.

Outlaw and Victor

The final ten chapters of the first Book of Samuel describe David's existence as an outlaw; Saul's continued obsessive pursuit of David, and Saul's ultimate downfall and death. For purposes of the present chapter, I will highlight certain aspects that delineate how the relationship between Saul and David deteriorates to the obliteration of the former and the ascension of the latter.

The Chase Is On

After David and Jonathan's parting scene, David embarks on a long but not-so-lonely journey as an outlaw. David flees to the small town of Nob, where he encounters the priests of the town. Asking what business he has, David lies to them, saying he is on a mission from the king. The priests give him food as well as Goliath's sword. Upon learning that David has been given aid and comfort, Saul orders Nob be completely sacked: every man, woman, child, and animal is slaughtered. Before Saul's death sentence is carried out, Ahimelech, the chief priest, counters the king's allegations: "... And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is the king's son-in-law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house?" (1 Samuel 22:14). The implication falls on deaf ears, and the city's population of eighty-five is wiped out.

Saul continues his relentless pursuit of his son-in-law throughout the southern land of Judah. Leading a force of three thousand into a rugged area, the weary monarch seeks respite in a cave. Unknown to Saul, David and his men are in the same cave,

further in its interior. David surreptitiously comes upon Saul and cuts off a piece of the royal robe with his sword. Immediately, David is overcome with guilt over his act, and orders his followers not to lay a hand on Saul.

However, David boldly calls out to Saul, showing him the fragment of cut cloth. He points out that Saul's life was in his hands, the very man Saul sought to kill. David movingly implores Saul to stop pursuing him. Filled with guilt and remorse, he emotionally responds to David: "Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil" (1 Samuel 24:17). Saul also asks David not to kill any of his descendants, since it is now crystal clear to him that David will shortly assume the throne. Saul returns to Jerusalem, and David stays in the mountains.

Narrative

A unique outcome can be plotted in the above exchange between Saul and David. Although David has the perfect opportunity to kill his pursuer and assume the Israelite throne, he makes a conscious decision not to. Although White and Epston (1990) note that only one unique outcome can be identified to facilitate new meanings, a chain of events begins that allows for possible new performances of meaning. By showing the cut cloth to Saul, David definitively externalizes the problem and thus creates the platform to work on new meanings. Asking Saul to end his pursuit opens a dialogue and offers an opportunity to open new possibilities to take action, thereby retrieving their lives and

relationships from this problem (namely Saul's obsession with killing David). This dialogue also offers Saul himself a new way of approaching the problem, which David takes him up on.

Contextual

Speaking of dialogue, this also opens up the potential of multilateral partiality (Nagy & Krasner, 1986). David asks a valid question: Why am I the object of such hatred by the king, when I have been such a loyal servant? Saul realizes that David is right, and although he does not directly say so, he indirectly agrees with David. Here comes the other end of a multilateral stance. Since Saul "agrees" to end his chase (for now at least), he requests that once David is made king he not kill any of Saul's descendants. David acquiesces to Saul's request. Each party has, in their own way, contributed to a rejunction, or a reworking of the impasse. This not only solves the current predicament, but is also forward thrusting in that Saul's progeny have been given a voice, and potential future consequences have been addressed in the current generation.

The Chase Is On, Part II

But the fragile truce does not last long. Saul learns from some informants that David is hiding out in their home territory. Saul leads another battalion of soldiers into the wilderness, but this time David witnesses their approach. David sends a reconnaissance party out, to send back information on Saul's position. Together with Abishai, one of his captains, David sneaks into Saul's encampment under cover of

darkness and comes upon the king, asleep. David then steals Saul's swords and the cruse (small canteen) of water at his side. Retreating to a nearby hill, David calls out to Abner, Saul's aide-de-camp, taunting him for not keeping better watch over the king. As a sign of this, David displays the sword and canteen, once again demonstrating how he Provisionally allowed Saul to remain alive.

Again, David pleads with Saul to cease his relentless pursuit. Upon hearing David's second impassioned plea, the king admits to being wrong yet again, crying out: "I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly" (1 Samuel 26:21). In exchange for his life, David proposes that Saul let him go his own way. Saul at last relents, foreshadowing David's long and glorious reign: "Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt do great things, and also shalt still prevail" (1 Samuel 26:25). However, these two episodes only support what David has already surmised: in order to successfully save his life, he must leave Israel for the neighboring city of Gath and the land of Canaan.

Earlier in the narrative, David had gone to Gath to seek asylum under Achish, Gath's monarch. As David approached the palace, the king's servants, who immediately assume that David has already supplanted Saul as Israel's ruler, recognize him. David's identity has now become public knowledge in Gath, and for some undisclosed reason he becomes "sore afraid of Achish, king of Gath". His anxiety and terror are so heightened

that David changes his behavior to that of a madman, exhibiting symptom such as uncleanliness, drooling all over himself, and climbing on the palace doors. David is brought before Achish, who summarily dismisses him, while denouncing his soldiers for bringing David into his presence initially.

In this penultimate scene with Saul, David displays a remarkable sense of differentiation by once again allowing Saul to live, especially after being close enough to steal his sword. His ability to act from a highly developed “solid self” (Kerr & Bowen, 1985) is so strong that he is able to bring Saul around once more to realize his (Saul’s) own part in what is transpiring between them. In both of these episodes David reduces Saul’s level of chronic anxiety with appeals to Saul’s (poorly developed) level of differentiation. David’s *thinking* directly affects how Saul *feels*, and subsequently moves Saul into more of a thinking mode himself.

After his final encounter with Saul, David again returns to Gath for respite. Although Achish speaks to David in glowing terms (“Surely as the Lord liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host is good in my sight: for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day” [1 Samuel 29:6]), he orders David to return from whence he came, under political pressure exerted by influential Canaanite court members.

David though does not leave the area, but instead leads a series of guerilla attacks (ostensibly on behalf of Achish) against his fellow Israelites where the southern tribes of

Judah reside. In actuality, David is leading these raids against the enemies of Israel (e.g., Philistines, Ziphites, Amalekites). He needs to make his case convincing to Achish, so he systematically annihilates whole towns and provinces, so there is no evidence traceable back to David that he is a double agent.

Contextual

Although an apparent *agent provocateur*, David displays fierce loyalty to Israel. Initially it would appear to be a serious dilemma of split loyalty, a “simultaneous rejection of one person and devotion to another” (Nagy & Spark, 1984, p. 132). Achish fully expects David, as a mercenary fleeing for his life, to lead incursions against Gath’s enemy, David’s countrymen. But David’s ultimate loyalty is to the Lord his supreme patron. Since the keeping of ledgers is based on a quantitative merit accounting system, it follows that “*a comparison of the extent of devotion received is a more important relational dynamic than the absolute amount of devotion enjoyed*” (Nagy & Spark, 1984, p. 132, italics original). David has received tremendous devotion from the Lord, having been anointed the next king. He has also received devotion from his fellow Israelites on numerous occasions. David once more attempts to rebalance the ledgers of debit and credit through action. For the most part, he is successful. However, he cannot change one incredibly strong system, that of Saul’s family.

Saul’s Demise and David’s Ascension

I would be remiss if I failed to remark on Saul’s departure from the biblical

narrative and how his death (and Jonathan's) affects the various systems in which David is involved. David and Saul never see one another again after David steals Saul's sword and cruse of water. Saul ends up heading back to the palace. The Philistines are gearing up for yet another all-out assault against Israel. Even Achish, the Philistine king mentioned earlier asks David to join him in battle. Achish's generals counsel their monarch to not allow David to be part of their battle plans. In a well-turned phrase, David asks: "... and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been with thee unto this day, that I may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" (1 Samuel 29:8). The king David is referring to is Saul, not Achish. Achish is unaware of David's double meaning, but still refuses to allow him to be part of the Philistine invading force.

"And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams ... nor by prophets" (1 Samuel 28:5-6). Saul has been abandoned, or so he feels. He seizes upon a drastic course of action. Disguising himself as a peasant and at night, he seeks a spiritualist to conjure a ghost. Saul encourages this same woman to call forth the spirit of Samuel. Samuel's ghost does indeed appear, angry with Saul for "waking" him. Saul claims to be all alone and frightened. Rather than appeasing Saul's troubled heart, the ghosts lists Saul's sins, assuring him that not only will he lose the coming battle, both he and his sons will die. And indeed this does come to pass, as the Philistines take Saul's head as a trophy.

David learns of his mortal enemy's death in the first chapter of the second Book of Samuel. Although he was in mortal danger when Saul was hunting him down, David is overcome with grief and anguish upon hearing the news. His lament for Saul and Jonathan is both painful and glorious. Three distinct times (2 Samuel 1:20, 25, 27) David cries out "How the mighty have fallen!" The depth of his loss is palpable for he has lost both a father and a brother. Even in death we witness David's ability to choose over and above for the *relationship* he had with Saul, willing to overlook Saul's murderous designs against him. David's sorrow over Saul's and Jonathan's deaths demonstrates another choice over and above and personal/individual feeling he may have had.

In order to achieve the highest level of appropriate functioning, different subsystems need to be able to accommodate to one another. At some point David has to finally assume kingship. In order for him to do so and maintain his position of not harming Saul, the Philistines serve as an external subsystem (part of the macrosystem) assisting in deposing Saul. An axiom of structural family theory (Minuchin, 1985, 1974) is that change in behavior (David's coming ascension to the throne) and the inner psychic processes in members of the system (David's actions as king of Israel in subsequent chapters) leads to a change in the larger family system.

Summary

Family therapists are taught to look for patterns, as they indicate how people relate to one another over time. Throughout this lengthy narrative, David moves from a

position of relatively minimal power as the youngest sibling in his family of origin to a category of being favored as if he were one of the king's own sons. David also experiences a loving and intimate relationship with Saul's son Jonathan. These experiences are sharply contrasted with his family of origin. There is no indication of emotional depth between David and Jesse, and the narrative does briefly address some level of animosity between David and his brothers. As is the case with individuals who make the developmental transition from their family of origin to a family of choice, David no doubt felt he was in a much better place emotionally. To his dismay and despair, David unfortunately also experiences what many people go through when they realize that the family of choice may not necessarily be an improvement over their family of origin. Through his relationship with his surrogate father Saul, David acts out his conflict with the non-responsive Jesse and receives comfort from his fraternal relationship with Jonathan.

From a macrosystemic standpoint, Israel is enduring change as well. Although the people implored the Lord for a king, he appears to have not made the best choice possible, at least initially. It has been stated earlier that the Lord may be capable of making a mistake, or at least miscalculating. It would be consistent, therefore, for the Lord, as a major part of the system, to attempt to "get it right" one more time. As the narrative continues, it is debatable if David is indeed an improvement on Saul as monarch.

CHAPTER 4: AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER? DAVID AND BATHSHEBA

Introduction

David's ongoing troubles with Saul are no longer an issue: although David is devastated that his father-in-law and best friend have lost their lives on the battlefield, he now has a clearer path to the throne. In the beginning of the second Book of Samuel, David is finally anointed king of Judah, the southern half of Saul's former kingdom. David's coronation occurs in the city of Hebron. He is also pleased to learn that Saul's headless body has received a proper burial.

But the nation of Israel remains divided. One of Saul's surviving sons, Ishbosheth, is crowned king of Israel (both the nation and the Northern Kingdom bear the same name). "Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker" (2 Samuel 3:1). For two years, civil war rages between Ishbosheth's followers and David's supporters. As the text indicates, David begins to gain the upper hand in his attempts to fulfill his destiny.

In a stunning turn of events, Ishbosheth himself becomes the victim of a palace coup, and is beheaded. His head is brought before David, who in turn has the coup leaders executed. Remember David's promise to Saul in the previous chapter, that David would not slay any of Saul's descendants. David keeps the promise, but Ishbosheth's murder proves providential for David, as he now assumes total control of both halves of

the kingdom. It took David seven years to gain control of both Judah and Israel, and his reign will endure for an additional forty years over the nation of Israel.

Marital Discord between David and Michal

David wins a decisive battle for the city of Jerusalem. He then brings the Ark of the Covenant to the city as well, offering sacrifices and praising the Lord for both his ascension to king and bringing the Lord “to rest” after dwelling in tents and the wilderness. David is so filled with rapture and joy that he loses himself in an ecstatic dance before the Ark. “And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal Saul’s daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart” (2 Samuel 6:16). This should be a moment of triumph for David: he has finally united the kingdom after a bitter and bloody civil war. He leads Jerusalem in a great public festival; his heart is full of rejoicing. He has completed sacrifices to the Lord and blessed his subjects, giving bread and cake to all. David is just about to bless his own household, when Michal issues a scathing indictment against her husband: “How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!” (2 Samuel 6:20).

In the ecstasy of being in the Lord’s presence and offering thanks and praise, David is only giving credit where he felt it was due. Michal’s accusation causes David to offer a chilling, if not damning, response: “And I will be yet more vile than thus, and will

be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honor. Therefore Michal ... had no child unto the day of her death" (2 Samuel 6:22-23).

David's cold anger and hatred is evident in his answer to his wife's bitter accusation and reproach. It would be fair to surmise that this marriage, which had been initially characterized by tremendous devotion and loyalty on the part of both partners, has degenerated to bickering, biting sarcasm, and backbiting. Neither spouse in this relationship has the ability (anymore?) to bind their individual anxiety and remain differentiated. Michal's reactivity to David's dancing can be explained as her jealousy (Halpern, 2001) toward the Lord, and she feels incredibly rejected. People attach emotional significance to a relationship when they are affected by not only what happens in the relationship but also by what is imagined about the relationship (Kerr & Bowen, 1985). If Michal feels threatened by David's relationship with the Lord, it would be a logical move for her to lash out. Reciprocally, David could only respond to match his wife's bitterness with his own equally contemptible retort. Neither spouse is able to observe their own behavior, hence the scene between them.

"The deepest relational determinants of marriage are based on a conflict between each spouse's unresolved loyalty to the family of origin and his loyalty to the nuclear family" (Nagy & Spark, 1984, p. 103). The current king, her husband, has replaced Michal's father, the former king. For his part, David has superceded all his family of

origin's expectations, from being the youngest son of a farmer to the monarchy of Israel. The biblical narrative is silent on this issue, but one has to wonder what price Michal paid to throw her allegiance behind David when Saul was intent on killing her husband because he was to be her father's successor. Michal's intrinsic loyalty to Saul is activated here, and she no doubt remembers that her family of origin will not inherit the kingdom. Her visceral response again demonstrates her inability to acknowledge the inner processes she is experiencing.

Bathsheba's Entrance

Although the text states David had other wives and concubines, and have many children by them, none of these sons are alluded to as possible successors to the throne. Only Michal is given enough "stage time" to be seen as a potential "donor" to the continuation of the Davidic dynasty. However, David's rejection of her as a sexual partner precludes her from this.

Enter Bathsheba. The story is well known: While walking along a palace parapet one night, the king spies a beautiful woman bathing below. David asks his servants to find out who she is. Completely disregarding that Bathsheba is the wife of Uriah, one of David's greatest and most decorated warriors, David beds this woman. After their only recorded tryst, Bathsheba sends a brief but devastating message to her king and lover that she is pregnant with his child.

Realizing he has committed several sins, David seizes on a course of action that only compounds his dilemma of impregnating another man's wife. He has Joab, his trusted advisor, bring Uriah before him. David congratulates Uriah on his battlefield successes, and orders the soldier to go to his own house. However, Uriah stays with the king's servants. When the king asks Uriah why he did not go home (and have intercourse with Bathsheba so David's transgression can be swept under the rug), Uriah responds that as a good soldier, he could not possibly enjoy all the benefits of being home, including having sex with his wife, knowing that his compatriots are sacrificing themselves for David's benefit. David goes to the extreme measure of getting Uriah drunk, but he still does not return to Bathsheba.

Left with no other recourse, David orders Joab to put Uriah in the middle of the heaviest fighting, and then pull the rest of the advancing force back. The effect of this tactical move is self-evident: Uriah is killed, and it looks like just another unfortunate casualty of war. When David receives the news of Uriah's death, he informs Joab via messenger not to have second thoughts about their devious plan: "Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another..." (2 Samuel 11:25).

Bathsheba observes the proper mourning period for Uriah, but when this period is over, David sends for her to come join him at the palace. David does indeed marry her and she gives birth to their first child. But circumstances are about to drastically change.

Nathan's Rebuke

Through the prophet Nathan, the Lord has already foreshadowed the Davidic dynasty. Nathan tells the king that one of his children would build an appropriate dwelling for the Lord, since there has been no freestanding structure in which the chosen people can worship. But Nathan's appearance this time is anything but cordial.

Once more, the story is well known: There are two men, one rich, and one poor. The poor man had a small lamb, but he loved it, fed and nurtured it, for it was his only possession in the world. However, the rich man, who had his choice of the many fine sheep in his own flocks, steals the poor man's lone ewe lamb and serves it as a meal to a wandering traveler. David's wrath is kindled, and orders that this rich man be executed, and vows to restore the poor man's loss fourfold. Nathan then delivers the stinging accusation: "Thou art the man" (2 Samuel 12:7). David has been given so much, and if that were not enough, the Lord would have given David anything else he might have wanted; all he had to do was ask.

Nathan is not done with David just yet. "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and has taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will rise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thine wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with these wives in the sight of the sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun" (2 Samuel 12:10-

12). The Lord spares David, but strikes down the child, who dies seven days after this confrontation. All is not lost, however. Bathsheba conceives again, and gives birth to Solomon, the fulfillment of the Lord's initial promise to David that one of his line would build the Lord a temple.

This somewhat lengthy narrative needs to be told in its entirety before it can be deconstructed. Using the four models under consideration, now would be the time to examine how different systemic theories might shed some different lights (refracted, perhaps) on the above events.

Structural

“Structural family therapy deals with the process of feedback between circumstances and the person involved... A shift in the position of the person vis-à-vis his circumstances constitutes a shift in his experience... By changing the relationship between a person and the familiar context in which he functions, one changes his subjective experience” (Minuchin, 1974, p. 13). David receives incredible feedback from the Lord about his adulterous behavior, and even though his and Bathsheba's son is taken away from them, the Lord gives David a second chance through the birth of Solomon. The foreshadowing of the sword never departing from his family is ominous, and is addressed in the following chapter. David's “subjective experience” will be one of betrayal, loss, and despondency.

David also experiences a shift in his earlier experience with Michal. It cannot be an accident (in terms of its placement in the storyline) that Michal's verbal assault and David's stinging rebuttal immediately precede the Bathsheba saga. David moves from an unfulfilling marriage with one of his wives to a relationship characterized primarily by physical passion.

David detours his relationship with Michal through Bathsheba. Their marriage has clearly deteriorated, and one can imagine other instances when they have argued with each other. Michal's claim that David's behavior was undignified for a monarch appears to be a detour as well from other conflicts she may have been experiencing (e.g., conflict between family of origin and family of choice). David responds to Michal's detouring by (1) trying to justify his behavior, then (2) completely rejects Michal; he thus detours their conflict as well. Earlier David and Michal *were* able to accommodate to one another, even to the point of Michal actively helping David escape Saul. It is clear from this exchange, however, that neither spouse has any interest in supporting or nurturing one another.

Boundaries are extremely diffuse, especially as David tries to cover up what happened between him and Bathsheba. In previous chapters of Samuel 2 (and Samuel 1) there are stories and lists of wives, but the text itself makes no ethical judgment on the issue of polygamy and other non-marital sexual partners such as concubines. It is as if this is an accepted practice, so commentary is moot. But David crosses the adultery

boundary, as well as the murder boundary. The Lord does not stand for this, and is extreme in his response. Boundaries are set once more by the Lord, this time with extreme prejudice.

Triangles play a part here as well. Conflict between David and Michal leads to David bringing Bathsheba as an “heir producer”, since Michal will be barren. Since Bathsheba is already married, David uses Joab to eliminate Uriah as a rival for Bathsheba’s affection.

Bowenian

Unstable dyads can be realigned with the addition of a third party (Kerr & Bowen, 1985). In an attempt to restore some order and possibly realign the dyad of David and Michal, the situation is only worsened with Bathsheba’s conceiving. Next, a pair of interlocking triangles are created among David, Bathsheba, and Uriah, and then David, Uriah, and Joab. David demonstrates an incredibly low level of differentiation in his attempts to pull others into situations *he* initially created. If the titular monarch has such a pronounced level of anxiety, manifesting itself as cowardice, adultery, treachery, and gluttony (Miles, 1995), can it bode well of Israel as a whole?

In most conventional portrayals of David, he is held out as an example of what one can expect to gain if the Divine favors a person. David is often portrayed as a mighty warrior and great leader of God’s people. Instead of displaying a solid self, as one would expect of a king, David displays more of a pseudo-self due to his vulnerability in

emotionally intense relationships. He cannot address serious problems in these relationships from a differentiated position. Rather, he responds from an emotional stance: his anxiety over marital problems with Michal, his felt need to dispatch Uriah to cover up his fornication, and his inability to recognize the difference between right and wrong are manifestations of his pseudo-self. Kerr and Bowen note that anxiety can “rub off” (p. 116) on people. Perhaps some of Saul’s anxiety (as a member of the previous generation) has rubbed off onto David.

The Lord drastically intervenes when he announces that David’s house will be torn apart from within. This foreshadowing (with its actual consequences detailed in the next chapter) is an attempt by the Lord to bring the boundaries back into some kind of order. This curse can be viewed as an example of the multigenerational process (p. 224). Since this process is anchored in the emotional system, with certain attitudes and beliefs being transmitted from one generation to the next, the Lord is telling David that he (and his descendants) will have to deal with tremendous adversity. This is not limited to David’s progeny, either: Israel’s future may be doomed as well.

Contextual

The condemnation of David’s behavior is an attempt to rebalance a component of the macrosystem. It is a forward-thrusting initiative as well. The actions taken by the current generation have a lasting impact on future generations. There is a profound responsibility to one’s posterity, and the Lord reminds David of this fact via Nathan’s

rebuke.

Incredible injustices have been perpetrated throughout this part of the narrative, with the seeds of mistrust now growing and strangling possibilities for hope and change. However, residual resources and trust-building options are evident. What David has done with Bathsheba and to Uriah has the cumulative effect of meriting a death sentence. The Lord not only spares David, but also remembers and honors his earlier promise to have an heir of his build the temple. This promise will be fulfilled through Solomon.

It would appear that David built up a substantial amount of earned credit on that side of the invisible relational ledger, because Nathan assures David he will not be struck down. However, in order to rebalance the ledger and restore a sense of justice to the human order, the Lord takes the newborn son as a retributive payment for David's taking Uriah's life. This goes back to the Mosaic dictum of "eye for eye".

Despite the gravity of the current situation, the Lord shows incredible loyalty to David in sparing his life. This is a debit that David will never be able to repay, but it is analogous to the initial debit newborns have just by virtue of their birth. In contextual theory, an infant is placed in a unique position of beginning life in a deficit, or debit, situation. As an individual grows up, she spends her life attempting to earn enough credit to rebalance her personal ethical ledger. Birth is an ethical dilemma in that it can never be fully repaid, similar to David's situation since the Lord has spared his life. David himself spared Saul's life not once, but twice. Perhaps this is a unique way that David

has earned merit in the Lord's view.

Narrative

“Aspects of lived experience that fall outside the dominant story are ‘unique outcomes’” (White & Epston, 1990, p. 15). Two unique outcomes are presented here. It has been firmly established throughout the biblical narrative that if a person deliberately goes against the Lord's will, the consequences are usually extreme, and can lead to death. A death sentence can also be divinely imposed for lesser transgressions (Halpern, 2001; Miles, 1995). Here, though, the Lord permits David to live, but he will have to pay a twofold price: the loss of his son and continued upheaval in his family, including having to experience the deaths of several children (“The sword shall never depart from thine house...”).

David himself has contributed substantially to maintaining several problems. A unique outcome of marital discord can be the instigation of an affair, as with David and Bathsheba. However, this effort at “restorying” only makes the situation worse. As king, David not only exercises power and distributes knowledge, he *defines* both for his people. So when he blatantly exercises his royal power and murders Uriah, he *can* get away with murder. Bathsheba and Uriah are thus both objectified: Bathsheba is a prize to be won, and Uriah is a nuisance to be disposed of. Even Joab is an object, as the instrument David uses to execute Uriah.

Summary

As couples come together to form a new family unit, they often have to learn how to accommodate to one another. Each spouse has to decide what qualities to bring to the new relationship from his or her respective families of origin. In the union between David and Michal, one can make the case that each comes from the same family of origin: Michal is Saul's biological daughter, and though never formalized, David is Saul's adopted son. Both experienced Saul's wrath firsthand, and this way of expressing feelings in such a visceral manner has been passed on to the current marital generation.

David's subsequent affair with Bathsheba is a detour of his conflict with Michal. Rather than facing and addressing his wife, David chooses to take a mistress, and compounds his transgression by orchestrating Uriah's murder with a subsequent cover-up. Much like his predecessor Saul, David is threatened with the loss of divine favor. Even though his life is spared, David learns in no uncertain terms that he will have to face the penalties he has incurred (the "sword" never departing from his house) through his less than exemplary behavior. Systemically, we witness how attempts to individuate and define oneself, without taking into account the various system of which an individual is a part, can have disastrous consequences.

As king of Israel, David wields considerable power. Since power and knowledge are inseparable from a narrative perspective, certain elements of this part of the story are highlighted while others are necessarily forced into the background. Uriah's story is one

that has been subjugated, as has Bathsheba's, but unfortunately is not considered worthy to be explored. It is those people to whom special effort needs to be expended in order for them to at least have a chance of being heard, if not given an opportunity to change their lives.

When people can see both sides of a relationship process and view that process in terms of the larger context, they can get beyond the blaming cycle and, consequently, become less angry. Michal is unable to see the forest for the trees, and is stuck in this cycle. David, by virtue of his being married to Michal, is drawn into this emotional system, and this can be traced back to when he was a "member" of Saul's family. The pull and power of a system can oftentimes be stronger than anyone can imagine. David appears to still be emotionally connected to Saul's family, and thus continues to experience difficulty separating himself from their emotional processes.

From a contextual view, a multilateral outlook that takes everyone's concerns into consideration can provide the context for healing. This does not mean choosing one person's side over another. It involves a fair hearing of each side, with the understanding that an "aggrieved" party still has a responsibility to those with whom they are in relationship. David has responsibility towards Michal, in that he "owed" it to her to make an attempt to work on what was problematic in their marriage. Instead, he chose to cut her off (and out), and began having an affair. After impregnating his mistress, David destroys his rival (and Bathsheba's rightful husband). If contextual theory is concerned

with posterity and the actions that do indeed affect one's descendants, then David's dealings will be felt by the subsequent generation.

CHAPTER 5: THE RAPE OF TAMAR: BOUNDARIES ERASED & CIVIL WAR

Introduction

As the story of David's reign progresses, the episode of Tamar's rape by her half-brother Amnon, David's eldest son, and long-awaited revenge by Absalom, another of David's sons, seems strangely out of place. It is inserted directly in the middle of what should be a recounting of the glorious beginning of Israel's place among the world's nations. The Davidic dynasty can be viewed as a triumphant commentary of Israel's surviving civil war, palace and political intrigue, love and betrayal, culminating in the ascension of a king the people expected. What happens instead is not only more of the same as mentioned above, but an event that sets the stage for an already problem-saturated system becoming only more dysfunctional.

The Rape of Tamar

As the story unfolds, we learn that Amnon is "sick" because he wants to bed his half-sister Tamar. A cousin of Amnon's, Jonadab, notices Amnon is not himself lately, and asks the prince what the problem might be. Amnon describes his secret lustful feelings, and Jonadab convinces Amnon to hatch an insidious ruse to be alone with Tamar. Feigning illness, Amnon asks David to have Tamar minister to him, as if to say that only she can properly nurse him back to health. Being the dutiful daughter and sister, Tamar complies and meets Amnon in his palace quarters. As she prepares him food, Amnon orders his servants away, so it is now just he and his sister alone. Amnon

bids her to serve him in bed literally, and once more Tamar complies.

It is here that Amnon begins to force himself on Tamar. For her part, Tamar tries valiantly to save herself, pleading with her brother: “Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: Do not thou this folly. And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee, speak unto the king; for he would not withhold me from thee” (2 Samuel 13: 12-13). Tamar’s pleas go unheeded, and Amnon rapes his sister. After this horrifying incident, Amnon is filled with such disgust that he throws her out of his bedchamber, shutting and bolting the door after her.

Tamar’s own self-loathing and shame are apparent as she tears off a “garment of divers colors” that identified her as a daughter of the king. She then covers her head in ashes, a common sign of one who has sinned. It is at this point that Absalom comes upon his distraught sister. The text indicates that he initially knows that Amnon has violated his sister. Absalom instructs Tamar not to say anything, but does take her to his home. Absalom also keeps his own counsel, speaking neither positively nor in the negative, but his rage begins to build to an ultimately murderous climax.

David somehow learns of Amnon’s transgression, and becomes “very wroth” himself. Yet there is no indication that he even considers meting out any punishment or consequences for such a heinous act. Zeligs (1974) compares two conflictual aspects of David’s personality. Whereas he is more than able to establish military leadership, unify

a split nation, and be quite competent as a monarch, David fails miserably as a father. “(David’s) relationship to his sons is marked by indulgence to their wishes, a lack of restraining discipline, and a surprising unawareness of their real character qualities” (p. 183).

Boundaries function as a means of differentiation within the family system. Each subsystem “has specific functions and makes specific demands on its members, and the development of interpersonal skills achieved in... subsystems is predicated on the subsystem’s freedom from interference by other subsystems” (Minuchin, 1974, p. 53). The horrifying nature of so calculated an attack contemplated and executed by Amnon shows not so much the diffusion of personal boundaries *within* the sibling subsystem as their *non-existence!*

Not only is Amnon successful in raping his sister, but also he experiences no consequences from anyone: family, the judicial system, the king, being ostracized by society. Even divine wrath is not incurred. Tamar’s pitiful plea to Amnon to ask their father for Amnon to have her in marriage in an attempt to get other subsystems involved. Other subsystems *need* to be involved! David’s less than active reaction to incest between a son and a daughter is indicative of his lack of involvement in providing his children with clear, definite boundaries. If David had been actively involved in his children’s formative development, Amnon may well have not tried raping his sister.

In cases of incest, boundaries are often diffuse to the point of being completely erased. If this family had been functioning properly, the boundaries of various subsystems would have been much clearer. According to Minuchin (1983), boundaries must demonstrate enough flexibility that an appropriate level of contact is allowed between members of a given subsystem and other people. As noted above, Tamar does indeed attempt to bring in other subsystems, namely David who has multiple subsystem roles, such as father (parental subsystem), and king (political, societal, and religious subsystems). Zeligs (1974) is correct to identify David's lack of parental authority and guidance as a major precipitant for the horrible event to occur. It is also correct, however, and more inclusive, to hold the system accountable for what happened to Tamar.

Contextual

Amnon's violation of his sister has ripple effects that also violate a larger system: the basic human order (Buber, 1956). Even the aggrieved Tamar recognizes this when she tells Amnon that (1) rape is a crime in Israel, and (2) the shame brought upon the family would be too much to bear. The invisible ledger has been irreparably damaged, given the sequence of events that occur in the next several years.

The nature of the intergenerational relationships in David's family is fatally flawed. Even after Tamar is raped, she does not go to her father the king to seek redress. She is not able to muster enough courage to fight and demand the restitution she

deserves. Amnon just takes what he wants, with Tamar's pleas falling on deaf ears. His inability and/or unwillingness to try and rebalance the ethical ledger only compound his lack of discipline and yielding to temptation (with Jonadab's assistance). Amnon even becomes so hateful and ashamed of himself that in his despair he feels he has no other recourse than to cast Tamar aside.

And yet we come back to David, who as king has the ability as well as the *ethical responsibility*, to rebalance the ethical ledger, but remains paralyzed by inaction.

Curiously, neither Tamar nor Absalom go to David demanding justice. It is Absalom who feels he must take the matter into his own hands in order to bring order back to the royal family. But Absalom is also someone who can wait out a situation, both tempering his anger and nursing a grudge until he seizes the right moment to act.

Revenge and Exile

Two years after Tamar's rape, Absalom seeks David's permission to hold a feast at an annual sheep shearing. Absalom also wants his brothers to attend this event, which is to be held some distance from Jerusalem. David initially declines the invitation, citing that he as well as the other brothers would be burdensome to Absalom. But Absalom presses further: "If (you, my father, will) not (go with us), I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us. And the king said unto him, why should he go with thee? But Absalom pressed him, that he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him" (2 Samuel 13: 26-27).

It is not altogether clear whether Absalom helps Amnon get drunk, or if Amnon got himself intoxicated, but Absalom instructs his servants to attack Amnon when he least expects it, and they indeed kill him. As a side note, it is interesting that Jonadab makes a return appearance after Amnon's death. A wild set of rumors reach the palace, which said all the king's sons had been murdered by Absalom. It is Jonadab who reassures a distraught David: "Let not my lord suppose that they have killed all the young men, the king's sons; for only Amnon is dead: for by the appointment of Absalom this hath been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar. Now therefore let not my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead: for only Amnon is dead" (2 Samuel 13:32-33). It was Jonadab, David's nephew, and cousin to both Amnon and Absalom, who initially contrived the plot to feign Amnon's illness to ensnare and violate Tamar.

More Contextual Implications

Although Tamar is only mentioned in this chapter of the Second Book of Samuel (and she is not heard from again), it is fascinating to consider the contextual implications of the story. Absalom would appear to have little to no confidence in David's ability to bring about a satisfactory resolution to Tamar's rape, and David's lack of instituting consequences *two years* after the fact speaks volumes of his parental shortcomings. Wouldn't a father respond on an emotional level, at least initially, and want to avenge his daughter's virtue? As Nagy and Spark (1984) write: "The concept of justice of the

human order is a common denominator for individual, familial, and societal dynamics. Justice can be regarded as a web of invisible fibers running through the length and width of the history of family relationships, holding the system in social equilibrium” (p. 54).

Justice also involves a principle of mutual give-and-take, which guides each individual member of any social group in facing the ultimate consequences of his relationship with others. “The sum total of the subjective evaluations of the justice of each member’s relational experience makes up the climate of trust that characterizes a social group” (Nagy & Spark, 1984. p. 61). Is incest not a fundamental violation of the human order? Even when one wrong is addressed (or avenged) by another wrong, what happens? A spiral has begun in which a destructive revolving slate pretty much destroys David’s family (at least those family members deemed worthy enough to be mentioned in the biblical narrative).

Absalom’s Exile

So after a two-year wait, Absalom murders his half-brother. Even David “was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead” (2 Samuel 13:39). But Absalom, rather than returning to Jerusalem as a great avenger, flees to the land of Geshur, where his maternal grandfather is king. At this point, it is important to examine what has happened in terms of a contextual frame. “Destructive entitlement invariably destroys an individual’s capacity to validate himself... People may have a well-founded, undeniable basis for their retributive behavior” (Nagy & Krasner, 1986, p. 114). On its face, who

could blame Absalom for wanting to restore the good name of his sister so brutally victimized? The bastard Amnon even had her thrown out of the palace once he was done with her.

When looking at people and events in their lives, justice is an existential given. In this story, “the criteria for violating the order of the human world would reside in what the individual feels he is committed to as the (inwardly) recognized foundations of all common human existence, including his own” (Nagy & Spark, 1984, p. 65). Somehow, somewhere, Absalom learned that it is wrong to (1) have intercourse with a blood relative; (2) treat women as sub-human; and (3) do nothing about the above two other than becoming “very wroth”.

A “revolving slate” is said to occur when an unsettled account stands between two people and a third person is brought in the by the initially injured party to rebalance things. “What then generally occurs is a *chain of displaced retribution* in a family and becomes the source of repetitious cyclic feedback (Nagy & Spark, 1984, p. 67, italics original). If it were not for David’s initial lusting after Bathsheba, setting an example and stage for future sexual improprieties, maybe none of this would have happened. Of course, then there would be no story. Zeligs (1974) notes that although there are similarities between David’s sinning with Bathsheba and what Amnon did to Tamar, there are significant differences between the sexual appetites of father and son. David did not need to resort to violence to have his way with Bathsheba, and she herself went

through a ritual purification after having intercourse. Zeligs states that Bathsheba was not coerced in any way, once she was brought into David's presence. The fates of Bathsheba and Tamar are also vastly different. Bathsheba ultimately bears David's heir Solomon, whereas Tamar becomes relegated to literary oblivion.

Getting back to the revolving slate: David provides less than exemplary behavior and Amnon follows it. Absalom wreaks his revenge on his half-brother because he is aware that their father will ultimately do nothing: partly because of previous indecision in family matters, and partly because David has no moral authority from which to stand and pronounce sentence.

Absalom is now in a state of self-imposed exile for three years. The text describes David's devastation for he "mourned for his son every day... and the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon seeing he was dead" (2 Samuel 14:37-39). However, David is powerless to have his son return, even though his heart is breaking. As Zeligs (1974) points out with wonderful poignancy: "What greater trauma can a father endure than the murder of one son by another? It is like having part of one's self destroyed by another part" (p. 189).

Absalom's (Triumphant?) Return

Joab, who functions as David's chief-of-staff, devises a plan to have Absalom return to Jerusalem. He finds a woman and gives her the following contrived story to tell David: one of *her* sons struck his brother, killing him. Although her family is demanding

she return the murderous son over to be executed, this mother is reluctant to do so, because losing her remaining son would only exacerbate her grief, since there would be no one left to continue the family name and history.

David is so moved by this woman's plea that he declare he will save her son. The woman then turns the tables on her king and urges him to do the same, namely allowing Absalom to return from exile. Once David grasps that it is Joab behind this plan to reunite father and son, he finally allows his favored son to come home. However, David is still of a certain mind, and decrees Absalom "turn to his own house, and let him not see my face... So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face" (2 Samuel 14:24, 28).

Once more, Joab is called upon to facilitate reconciliation between David and Absalom, this time by the latter. Twice Absalom requests Joab's aid to gain an audience with his father, but Joab does not reply. Absalom again takes matters into his own hands, ordering his servants to set fire to Joab's field of barley, right next to his own. When an incensed Joab demands an explanation for Absalom's behavior, it is Absalom who claims to be wronged. "Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had not been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me" (2 Samuel 14:32). Absalom is finally received in the royal court, prostrating himself in front of his father. David then kisses his son as a sign of redemption, reconciliation, and healing.

When examining the relationship of David and Absalom to this point, it is clear that Joab is used as an intermediary twice, once on his own volition and once at Absalom's request. The contextual approach to families looks actively for "any potential resource in close relationships *regardless of their state of disrepair*" (Nagy & Krasner, 1986, p. 13, italics mine). If true meeting occurs in what Buber (1956) described as an "I-Thou" event, then perhaps both David's main paternal relationships could have been saved. David's two distinct roles in this are that of surrogate son to Saul, and that of father to Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom. How these relationships ultimately end is indicative of an inability to either (1) search for possible resources or (2) if found, explore them in order to find those residual resources (Nagy, 1987).

From a narrative standpoint, one story is subjugated in favor of others. Tamar's story is driven underground to the point of oblivion, since after being placed *by* Absalom in *his* house, her voice is not heard again. This is done at *Tamar's* expense, so that Absalom can exact *his* revenge against Amnon. If her story had been told by Tamar herself, *on her own terms*, then she might have turned and addressed her attacker, confronting him and declaring her own story. Then perhaps Amnon might have also been able to voice *his* truth, discussing how David provided no parameters or boundaries on how to behave within the family, or how he was only following his father's example of how to take what you want, and the consequences be damned, because they are non-existent. One main difference does stand out, though: David's punishment comes from

the Lord in the form of the death of his and Bathsheba's first child, whereas Amnon's punishment comes at the hand of man.

What Goes Around Comes Around: David's Second Civil War

Now that Absalom has been accepted back into the bosom of his father's family, he begins to plot David's overthrow. Absalom does two things to begin winning the hearts and minds of the Israelites. First, he rides through the streets of Jerusalem with fifty men and chariots before him. Second, he stands near the palace gates, asking people the nature of their business before the royal court. Absalom promises that if he were a judge, he would rule in their favor. When the populace bows in front of him, Absalom would beat them to the bow, and acting "humbler than thou", kiss his newfound supporters. "And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (2 Samuel 15:6).

As Absalom's movement gains support, he asks David permission to enter Hebron, "For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord. And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron" (2 Samuel 15:8-9). As Absalom leaves, he has already instructed his supporters that upon a predetermined signal, they are to announce that he (Absalom) has been anointed king at Hebron. Simultaneously, large groups of people leave Jerusalem with Absalom, although they are not informed of Absalom's true motives. The rebellion is now on. Upon hearing the

news of the *coup d'etat*, David responds unequivocally: “Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not escape Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the swords” (2 Samuel 15:14). With the exception of ten concubines, the entire royal entourage escapes Jerusalem for the hinterlands.

Absalom’s coup can be seen as a way of declaring independence from one’s family of origin. In families, adolescents often say they are “independent” of their parents, that they no longer need them for either material or emotional support. Oftentimes this declaration is confused with differentiation of one’s self. It does not necessarily resolve one’s emotional fusion from the past. More often, these family members have “broken away” from their families of origin rather than having “grown away” from them (Kerr & Bowen 1985, p. 272-73). They have not obtained the objectivity necessary to see the part they play in the system. In this instance, David does not see the ways he affects the emotional functioning of others, and the ways others affect his emotional functioning. If David had addressed Tamar’s attack in some way, then Absalom may not have felt the need to rectify the problem as severely as he did. In addition, Absalom must have perceived his father’s weakness of character, as well as his rage at David for not doing anything about Amnon’s behavior. David misses a golden opportunity here. If he had seen himself as part of the system, he would have had the option of remaining in contact with all of his children, and thus had the opportunity to

change himself. By “changing himself”, I mean changing his behavior to one of dynamic action.

Destructive entitlement also seems to be a mode of action throughout this entire part of the story. Amnon’s behavior demonstrates this most clearly, but so does Absalom’s. Destructively entitled people evoke resentment and rage from those who are closest to them. However, in a self-contradictory manner, the perpetrator is entitled to be destructive as well. In this scenario, Absalom sees it as his right, or entitlement, to not only kill his half-brother, but also drive his father out of Jerusalem because his sister’s virtue was stolen. On an emotional level, Absalom’s behavior is justifiable, even honorable. Unfortunately, it is incredibly limiting in terms of options, and reworking the impasse is almost, if not completely, impossible. David has no choice but to strike back, brutally, in order to reclaim the throne.

David does so, but initially through stealth and deception. David learns that Ahithophel, one of his former advisors, is now Absalom’s chief counsel. Praying for an intervention that would turn this advice useless, a man named Hushai presents himself to the king. David sends Hushai to Absalom as a double agent. A plan is hatched: Hushai is to ensure that Absalom rejects Ahithophel’s advice in favor of Hushai, who will send word of Absalom’s intentions to David.

Hushai enters Jerusalem pretending to be another of Absalom’s supporters. His speech is full of double meanings. When he initially presents himself before Absalom,

Hushai proclaims: “God save the king, God save the king” (2 Samuel 16:16). Thinking Hushai is referring to him, Absalom asks why Hushai did not accompany David when he fled. Hushai’s reply is equivocal: “Nay, but whom the Lord, and this people, and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be, and with him I will abide” (2 Samuel 16:18). The reader can draw the obvious implication: Hushai is referring to the rightful monarch, David.

Absalom is in the process of consolidating his power and conquer his only rival, his father. He asks the advice of both Ahithophel and Hushai. The former advises Absalom to take a large force and pursue David, and when everyone else in the royal entourage flees in terror, Ahithophel himself will kill the king. Then Absalom will become head of the royal household as David’s former supporters return. Absalom, for some unknown reason, does not think this is a good plan. Hushai is summoned to give his counsel. Hushai tells Absalom that he is no doubt aware of David’s military genius, and that the king is probably lying in wait in a secure area. Hushai suggests that Absalom gather all Israel to himself and launch an all-out assault against his father, slaughtering everyone. Appealing to Absalom’s vengeful part, Hushai’s suggestion is accepted and plans are made to execute it.

Hushai manages to get word back to David to retreat away from the open area where he has encamped and cross the Jordan River. He then makes plans for a three-pronged attack when Absalom makes his ill-fated move. David tells his three generals

Joab, Abishai, and Ittai to “Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom” (2 Samuel 18:5). Twenty thousand are slain on both sides during the penultimate battle, conducted in a dense forest.

There is so much conflict between the parental and child subsystems that it has spilled over into another civil war. Instead of being clear on where boundaries are and which ones can and cannot be crossed, David has allowed this situation to escalate. Absalom has his coalition, as does David. These coalitions are bound to explode, and indeed David, although he gains in the end, he also loses terribly.

Absalom's Death

Now Absalom comes upon the carnage, astride a mule. Seeing his devastating military defeat and the end of his pursuit of the Israelite throne, Absalom flees. As he attempts to escape Absalom's mule travels under the thick branches of an oak tree, and his luxuriant hair becomes caught. Word reaches Joab that Absalom is dangling helpless in a tree branch. Joab demands to know why Absalom was not killed, for he would have paid this unnamed soldier a reward for doing so. Joab is sternly reminded by this soldier of David's charge not to hurt his son should he become a casualty of war. Disregarding the king's direct order, Joab pumps three darts into Absalom, “...while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak” (2 Samuel 18:14). To finish the job, ten of Joab's men put the sword to Absalom.

David is waiting to hear news of the pitched battle. A runner comes upon the anxious king, who asks: “Is the young man Absalom safe?” The reply is devastating to David: “The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is” (2 Samuel 18:32). If David mourned long and hard for Saul and Jonathan after they were killed, and for the first child he and Bathsheba conceived, then he becomes inconsolable upon learning of Absalom’s death. The king cries out to *God* to substitute himself for his son.

Israel as a nation falls in line with David in his grief and mourning. As David continues his lamentations, his ever-pragmatic advisor and friend Joab comes upon his grieving lord, confronting him rather harshly. Joab tells David that his mourning is disproportionate to the potential of what almost happened with Absalom’s attempted coup: “...if Absalom had lived, and we all died, then it had pleased thee well” (2 Samuel 19:6). Joab instructs David to stop being so public in his mourning, show himself to his supporters, demonstrating his strength and effectiveness as Israel’s leader. If David continues to be bereft, Joab warns, he will lose their confidence and support. David heeds this advice, and begins to reconsolidate his power.

A Story of Loss

Not much commentary is necessary here, for the narrative is straightforward. And yet the narrative form of family therapy helps to explicate what has occurred up to this point in the story. Identification of the problem is somewhat difficult, given the breadth

and depth of everything that has happened: deception, rape, murder, political intrigue and violent coups, and fratricide just to name a few. There is one constant throughout this chapter, though: loss.

Although losses are generally thought of as discrete events that can be traced from a specific beginning and end with a particular ritual that attempts to promote healing and closure, loss is ubiquitous in the present chapter. Tamar's virtue is lost to her incestuous brother, as is her honor and dignity as a woman and human being. Amnon is lost to himself, for he is unable to exhibit any self-restraint or curb his instincts to not violate societal taboos. Full of self-loathing and self-contempt, he casts his sister aside when she no longer serves any purpose. Absalom's faith is lost in several different areas. He has no faith in family members, since they do not display any type of concern for one another, with boundaries being inappropriately crossed and even erased, as if they never existed in the first place. He loses all respect for Amnon, to the point of orchestrating his murder. He loses respect and faith in David, who demonstrates weakness and indecisiveness in both familial and national affairs. It's as if Absalom says to himself, "If my father is unable to maintain order in our family, how can I expect him to maintain order throughout Israel?" Albeit extreme and violent, Absalom is able to map unique outcomes and change the nature of the problem.

However, loss also entails exile and separation. Absalom separates himself from David to execute Amnon, and then loses both family and country for a total of five years.

Absalom then forces his father out of Israel, losing *his* throne and power. Yet one loss is conspicuous by its notable absence: Where is the Lord (or at least his voice through a prophet such as Nathan) while all this turmoil is going on? The Lord spoke to Samuel directly about how he would assume the role of Israel's last judge and first prophet; and it was the Lord who told Samuel where to find the first two kings and anoint them. The Lord is initially with Saul, but leaves him when Saul deliberately disobeys both the Lord and his prophetic representative. Divine favor is cast upon David, but the Lord only speaks to him directly on certain military occasions. Only in the scene with Nathan does the Lord deign to speak with David when no battle is raging or war is imminent. Throughout this chapter, it is the actors themselves who are the focus of the narrative. There is no interaction with the deity who has put these particular desert nomads (according to their faith tradition) ahead of other nations, in terms of his favor. The loss of the Lord here is almost inexplicable.

Turning to the head of this family, David is the one who appears to be the most devastated and incapacitated by loss. In previous chapters, it has been described how David lost contact with his family of origin when he entered Saul's palace. He then lost Saul's favor as a soothing harp-player and military leader when the latter realized the former would shortly supplant him as king. David then loses both Saul and his soul brother Jonathan to war. He loses a child with Bathsheba, then witnesses the crumbling of his family and his nation. At times, David is propelled to action, and at times

paralyzed by inaction and fear. Yet he seems to find an inner resilience to overcome obstacles as deadly as attempted murder, coups, and warfare and still come out on top.

“Stories are full of gaps which persons must fill in order for that story to be performed. These gaps recruit the lived experience and imagination of persons. With every performance, persons are reauthoring their lives” (White & Epston, 1990, p. 13). It would be the height of hubris to state that the problem of loss (how loss has seeped its way throughout David’s life, the message loss sent, and how it did not allow for exploration of unique outcomes) is the only theme to be found within the narrative framework. It does explain, though, how one aspect of this part of David’s story can be examined.

Summary

Numerous events transpire that threaten to tear David’s family apart. A daughter is brutally raped by her own brother, yet David provides no resolution to either restore Tamar’s honor nor impose any punishment on Amnon. This lack of boundaries and inability to enforce consequences leads to a vacuum of leadership in the family. Absalom takes it upon himself to try and restore order. Absalom takes his role of family avenger to include larger systems, up to and including an attempted overthrow of David as king. Absalom no doubt saw his father as ineffectual, so it makes “systemic sense” that he extends this metaphor of “leader” from a relatively small system of family to that of nation.

One theory that was not explored in this chapter was a Bowenian/intergenerational examination of what transpired. There appears to be enough anxiety diffused throughout this entire family system to render any response to events either ineffective (as in David's muted reaction) or overboard (Absalom's vengeful murder of Amnon). Perhaps an intergenerational exploration of David's family at this point in the story might yield further insight into this episode.

Throughout this section there appears to be "collusive denial of invisible loyalties, intrinsic responsibilities and their underlying ethical meaning" (Nagy & Spark, 1984, p. 111). Amnon offers no evidence of remorse for what he has done, nor does his father do anything extrinsic to rebalance the ethical ledger. Absalom offers himself as an example of what happens when one family member takes a definite position and faces the consequences of his actions. The concept of justice of the human order can also be a common denominator for social dynamics, such as allowing for an orderly rite of succession. Absalom's coup attempt is the first of several which test David's ability to maintain his grasp on leadership, both in his family and Israel as a whole.

CHAPTER 6: THE END OF DAVID'S REIGN

Introduction

David's family has been decimated, and he is in such a profound state of mourning that he is unable to heal and lead a fractured kingdom. It takes a stern lecture from Joab, his general and friend, to make David realize he still has duties and responsibilities to the people of Israel. Ever the political wheeler-dealer, David hammers out agreements with several of Absalom's former supporters. He even strikes a deal with one of Saul's sons, promising some land in exchange for his allegiance to the king. Against, these backdrops of natural reconstruction, three major incidents color the latter part of David's monarchy: yet another rebellion, a famine, and an ill-fated census of Israel.

Sheba's Rebellion

The first appearance of Sheba is dramatic. Astride a large hill and blowing a *shofar* (ram's horn), Sheba calls out to the men of the Northern Kingdom of Israel: "We have no part in David, Neither have we inheritance in this son of Jesse: Every man to his tents, O Israel" (2 Samuel 20:1). Once more there is division between Israel and Judah, as Sheba leads the ten northern tribes away from Jerusalem.

Perhaps because he has just put down Absalom's revolt and does not feel on firmer ground regarding taking charge over the kingdom once again, David confides to Joab: "Now shall Sheba the son of Birchi do us more harm than did Absalom: take thou

thy lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us" (2 Samuel 20:6).

David has already sent Amasa, a former general under Absalom now a trusted military leader under David, to assemble the army in Jerusalem. But it takes him longer than the three days ordered by the king. Just as he is about to lead Judah's army into battle, Joab comes upon Amasa, greeting him warmly. Amasa is unaware that Joab has an unsheathed dagger in his free hand. As Joab pulls Amasa close, Joab delivers a single thrust, and Amasa dies instantly, with his internal organs falling out. One of Joab's junior officers calls out to Amasa's men, that if any of them support Joab and David, they need to follow Joab into battle. Initially Amasa's men are dumbstruck by the sight of their eviscerated general. Amasa's corpse is covered and removed from the main road and out of sight. This done, Amasa's forces join Joab in pursuing Sheba.

Meanwhile, Sheba has traveled across Israel to mobilize his own clan of Birchi at the town of Abel-bethmaccah. When Joab's forces arrive, they attack the town and build a ramp against the city wall, attempting to breach it. Just as he is about to lay siege to the town and its inhabitants, a "wise" woman entreats Joab not to sack the city: "I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy a city and mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the Lord?" (2 Samuel 20:19). Joab vehemently denies any desire to destroy the city; it is Sheba he is after. A deal is subsequently struck: if Sheba is delivered into his hands, the army will leave. The "wise"

woman goes Joab one better. She returns to her people within the walled city, and the severed head of Sheba is cast over the city wall. Joab honors his end of the bargain and leaves the town intact.

It would appear from the text that David is fortunate to have an advisor and friend like Joab to help firmly realign his priorities. Joab may also have helped David increase his level of differentiation. When Absalom executed his plan to take over the kingdom, David seemed to have reacted on a purely feeling level when he abandoned Jerusalem and left it wide open for Absalom to take over. David also feared that Absalom would slaughter David's supporters (and probably David himself). David's emotional proximity to a beloved son prevented him from taking the necessary actions to preserve the kingdom.

Fast-forwarding to the current rebellion, David is able to be more aware of what is happening. He has a better understanding of his role and what he must do as king to put down Sheba. Kerr and Bowen (1985) describe this as "neutrality". David, although anxious about this uprising, is able to firmly order military tactics, realizing from a more differentiated stance that the current threat is more dire than Absalom's. He knows he must remain calm (or at least project a sense of calmness) and consider all possible outcomes. "Neutrality becomes differentiation when it is operationalized through one's actions in a relationship system" (p. 111). David's orders are followed to the letter, and another coup is avoided.

Structurally, the hierarchy is threatened to be inverted once more. Looking at Israel as a family unit, the system is moving back towards stasis, with David trying to provide leadership. He is also trying to reset boundaries that have been crossed and even mutilated, both in his family as well as the nation. "... parenting always requires the use of authority" (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981, p. 47). David's enmeshment with Absalom prevented him from maintaining control, as well as distance, which led to his son's tragic death. In this instance, David is able to maintain his position with no reported loss of life (save Amasa).

For the first time in this entire narrative, a subjugated voice is heard. The citizens of Abel-bethmaccah are able to voice their fear of being destroyed by David's army. Through the wise woman, they detail their loyalty and unwavering support of the king: a tiny, perhaps insignificant town that no one would miss if it were wiped out. Joab is so moved when he hears this plea that he vociferously says that is the last thing he wants to do. Together, a most unique, if not gruesome outcome is plotted. The problem here is personified when the wise woman uses the metaphor of "mother". Israel is feminized as the Lord's bride, and women (though clearly subjugated) are identified as the ones who get things done. This emotional appeal entices Joab to be open to an alternative that satisfies all concerned.

Three Years of Famine

David next inquires of the Lord why Israel has been subjected to a devastating

famine that has lasted for three years. The Lord's unexpected and bizarre reply: "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites" (2 Samuel 21:1). David summons the Gibeonites before him. The text indicates that these people are not part of Israel but were all that is left of the Amorite nation. Israel has earlier sworn to be their ally, but Saul, in a zealous rage, had tried to exterminate them.

David asks the Gibeonites what he must do to avenge their honor, so that the Lord will lift the famine. The Gibeonites decline any monetary remuneration, nor do they want any random Israelites executed in revenge. David pleads with them: "What ye shall say, that I will do for you. And they answered the king, ... Let seven of his (Saul's) sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord" (2 Samuel 21:4-6). David strangely acquiesces, and seven of Saul's descendants are executed. The only one mentioned being spared is Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son and Saul's grandson, because of the promise David and Jonathan made before the Lord.

There appears to be an incredible imbalance in the invisible ledger because on the one hand, David is handing over Saul's descendants to be slaughtered, even though he promised to not harm any of Saul's progeny, and yet the direct offspring of Jonathan are spared. Moreover, these seven men are not given any kind of hearing, public nor private, to hear what they have to say about all this. In a sneaky way, David keeps his promise, because it is the Gibeonites, not David himself, who murder Saul's sons and grandsons. "Certain relationship systems are implications of invisible loyalties or... from having to

face and balance multigenerational accounts of merit and obligation” (Nagy & Krasner, 1986, p. 126). In this exchange, David “kills” three birds with one stone: he eliminates possible contenders for the crown and hangs on to his power; he does not have to pay a price for not honoring his promise to Saul (the Gibeonites do his dirty work); and he maintains peace with his geographic neighbors.

But why are these particular male descendants of Saul singled out for execution? They may not have even been alive when Saul (allegedly) went against God’s specific injunction to not wage war against the Amorites. Other than the curt adage of “the sins of the father being visited on the sons”, there would appear to be no systemic explanation for this tragedy. David’s lack of parenting skills from a contextual lens may provide an alternative. We have already witnessed how his inability to set limits and enforce consequences tore his family apart. He also promised to provide for Saul’s progeny, or at the very least, protect them from harm. David had an ethical duty and obligation based on the claims from both preceding (Saul and Jonathan) and future (these seven men and Mephibosheth) generations. Unfortunately, he failed both.

Disaster Follows a Census

Next follows a bizarre event: for some unfathomable reason, the Lord becomes angry with Israel once more. David is moved (presumably by the Lord) to take a census of the people. Now taking a census of the people was considered an ominous taboo. First, it was offensive for religious reasons (the Lord will not necessarily keep his

promise to “be fruitful and multiply”). Second, a census foreshadowed increasing demands to be made by the king, such as increasing taxes or conscripting army recruits for an impending war (Halpern, 2001; Miles, 1995). The king tells Joab to count everyone in Israel, but even Joab asks David why he wants to do this now. David persists, and after close to ten months, all of Israel is accounted for.

After the census is complete, David’s conscience begins to bother him. “I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant: for I have done very foolishly” (2 Samuel 24:10). Another prophet, Gad, calls upon the king the following morning. David can choose from one of three punishments: another three years of famine; three months fleeing from his enemies; or three days of a severe plague throughout Israel; and his sin will be expiated. David pleads with the Lord (via Gad the prophet) not to be delivered into his enemies’ hands. So the Lord sends a brutal plague to the country, which kills 70,000 Israelites.

The angel of the Lord (his “death angel”) is just about to lay waste to Jerusalem, when the Lord commands him to stop. David witnesses the carnage and the near destruction of his (and the Lord’s) beloved city, crying out: “Lo, I have sinned and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father’s house” (2 Samuel 24:17).

Gad then instructs David to build an altar upon the threshing floor of a man known as Araunah. When the king announces he wants to buy the threshing floor as the

base of an altar to stop the plague, Araunah not only defers to David, but offers animals to be sacrificed as well as tools and other implements to be used during the ritual. David declines these gifts, saying to Araunah: “Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24). David pays fifty pieces of silver, builds the altar, and the plague is miraculously lifted.

Following on the heels of the slaughter of Saul’s descendants, the final scene in 2 Samuel ends with a bizarre twist. It is the Lord who is initially angry with Israel, and the Lord who pushes David to conduct the census. This is a matter of “poisoning the well” - how can the Lord have David be his instrument and then blame David for what the Lord ordered him to do? Once again, the Lord’s incredible inconsistency causes tremendous upheaval and pain, this time resulting in the deaths of multitudes of the chosen people.

But the strangeness of this episode is not germane here. This no-win choice of David’s can be seen as another attempt by the Lord to bring the macrosystem into some type of realignment. The Lord has a different relational ledger, but it still involves a semblance of relating to the justice of the human order. Nathan the prophet assured David that the sword would never leave his house. The metaphor of “house” or “home” can be extended to include whole countries or people, as in “homeland”. David’s census taking can then be viewed as a way that he pays for his sin regarding Bathsheba and Uriah, much like the Tamar-Amnon-Absalom fiasco. Once more, David chooses others

to be the recipients of the Lord's wrath, rather than himself. He again fails to turn, face, and address what he has done.

David again demonstrates how an individual can move along a continuum of differentiation. Rather than asking the Lord the obvious question of "why" a census, he blindly obeys the order. Even Joab questions this. Only after it is completed does David feel remorse. Next comes the penalty phase for David: rather than clearly stating what he wants, he equivocates by stating what he doesn't want; namely, to be delivered into enemy hands. So now Israel must suffer due to their monarch's inaction. Before he can claim some sense of self and beg the Lord to unleash his wrath on the king alone, David loses 70,000 subjects. It is difficult to ultimately determine if David is fatally flawed, or just human.

David's Last Days

A frail and sickly king David is presented in the first Book of Kings. This is a far cry from the strong, vibrant warrior-king presented earlier in 1 and 2 Samuel. Despite being covered with blankets, he is unable to keep warm. A young girl is summoned by David's servants to "stand before the king, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat... And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not" (1 Kings 1:2,4).

Sensing the elderly David could not withstand another assault on the throne, Adonijah, Absalom's biological brother, sets his sights on succeeding his father as the

next king of Israel. Adonijah pronounces himself king and surrounds himself with a royal entourage. Although lacking in detail when compared to previous coups, one can surmise from the text that Adonijah had exhibited much forethought in his plans, because he is able to convince Joab to defect from David. There are once more two distinct sides: one with David, and one with a son of David, and David appears to do nothing to stop it. With his friend and best military advisor on the opposite side, where can the king turn?

As Adonijah rampages through the countryside, indiscriminately killing farmers' livestock, Nathan and Bathsheba become unlikely allies. It was Nathan who railed as the voice of the Lord when David took Bathsheba away from Uriah, and had Uriah murdered to cover this sin. Remember too, that Bathsheba was no less a willing participant in this illicit tryst. Nathan expresses his fear that Bathsheba and Solomon will not survive Adonijah's wrath. He advises Bathsheba to plead Solomon's case to David, that if the king has already promised Solomon would be his successor, why is Adonijah proclaiming himself as ruler of Israel to anyone who will listen? Or is David completely unaware of the current events due to his advanced age?

Together they hit David with a one-two punch. Bathsheba goes in first to plead her case as wife and mother, asking her husband to remember his promise to their son. Nathan then enters the king's presence and lists the remaining faithful servants who have not been recruited by another usurping son. Presented with such an impassioned and calculated case, David anoints Solomon as his successor. But David does not wait until

he has passed on to carry out this decree; he has Solomon proclaimed king that very day.

Adonijah has already proclaimed himself king and has taken up residence just outside Jerusalem. But he and his supporters hear an enormous uproar coming from inside the city gates. When Adonijah asks the reason for the joyous noise, he learns that his father has made Solomon king. When this disastrous news makes its way throughout the camp, Adonijah's followers immediately abandon him. Adonijah then prostrates himself on an altar, and sends word to his half-brother, begging to be spared his life. Solomon himself remains uncommitted to a specific course of action regarding his traitorous brother.

David himself, however, knows he will not live to see the final outcome of this particular insurrection. With his final breath, he urges Solomon to follow God's instructions, so that the Lord will continue to bestow favor on him and the future kings of the Davidic line. The dying king then turns his attention to some of the more worldly aspects of a monarchy, such as how Solomon is to avenge his father against those who had betrayed him, notably Joab and Shimei: the former for joining Adonijah against David, the latter for cursing David and accusing him of murdering Saul.

At this point, the text quietly lets go of him: "So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (1 Kings 2:10). The energy with which David bursts on the scene, his domination of the story and the force of his personality, as well as the more tragic aspects of his life, is sharply contrasted with the quiet death through which he

departs the biblical narrative.

Structural

It is at this point this particular story concludes. With David's death, the parental subsystem of him and Bathsheba is no more. Minuchin (1974) describes *family structure* as "the invisible set of functional demands that organizes the ways in which family members interact" (p. 51). Sensing her husband's health is failing, and knowing that when David dies there will not only be a change in the family but also in Israel (from a macrosystemic stance). Bathsheba more than likely felt she had no choice but to act. Any family must respond to change, whether internal (such as the death of a parent) or external (how to continue the monarchy).

A family must also be able to transform itself to meet these new circumstances without losing the continuity that provides a frame of reference for its members (Minuchin, 1974, p. 52). Birth necessarily changes the functions performed by and within the family. Death serves the same function: different subsystems must reorganize in order to accommodate to a new situation. If Solomon is to succeed his father, and do so with much less problems than those David experienced, he will need help. His parents, each in their own way, play the role of a structural family therapist by both initiating and coordinating what occurs here. Bathsheba (along with Nathan) instigates action by advocating for Solomon to be David's successor instead of Adonijah. David directs further action by instructing his son to avenge the father by eliminating Joab and

Shimei.

Contextual

David's final request and command to Solomon raises some questions that may reveal some troublesome answers. What is every man due his family? What does a child deserve? What do his parents owe him? How do parent and child evaluate the justice of their *quid pro quo*? How much gratitude does any child owe his parents? (Nagy & Spark, 1984). Although problems of loyalty, fairness, and justice can never be fully resolved, they can be examined and explored.

Of David's many wives and children, the text shows that Bathsheba and Solomon have a special place in David's heart, since they are the ones who are mentioned as the rightful heirs to the kingdom. In addition, Solomon has probably witnessed the attempts made on David's kingship by both Absalom and Sheba, and saw his father struggle to work out the anarchy of civil war, as well as the falling out that occurred during Absalom's self-imposed exile, and Absalom's return to David and Jerusalem. David's grief over Absalom's death, despite his treachery, is an incredible gift David imparts to Solomon. Even though there is no direct evidence David and Solomon ever discussed what happened between David and Absalom, this absence does not necessarily preclude its presence. David's sharing the depth of his despair with Solomon is an incredible growth opportunity, one that can be easily imagined. Since Solomon is designated (with the intervention of his mother and a prophet) to be king, David owes it to his son to

impart, or at least have at the ready, the skills necessary to adequately govern Israel.

Two main relationships help rebalance the ethical ledger in the family. For her part, Bathsheba rebalances the transgenerational ledger of merit by promoting Solomon. Remember that Solomon is the replacement child for the infant that was taken from her and David as a consequence for their adultery and David's execution of Bathsheba's first husband Uriah. David agrees to Bathsheba's desire, thus bringing some closure to a painful episode in the beginning of their marriage. The other rebalancing relationship is between the Lord and David. Once more, the Lord keeps his promise that David's line will continue, and this will occur in the person of Solomon.

"The parent-child relationship itself is an important instance of a loyalty system with its bookkeeping of merits. Both parent and child are expected to invest in the obligation system in order to make it function optimally" (Nagy & Krasner, 1986, p. 163). This also implies an aspect of reciprocal indebtedness. Since David is agreeing to accede power to Solomon, David charges his son to murder Joab for being a traitor to his father, and eliminate Shimei so as to ensure none of Saul's descendants can lay claim to the throne. Solomon's first charge is to consolidate his power, with extreme prejudice. For the family under consideration, the justice of *their* human order is brought into alignment. However, there is a sense of foreboding that "more of the same", at least initially, will color the infancy of Solomon's reign.

Bowenian

Anxiety reigns supreme during this final recorded takeover attempt. Tension must be extremely high as the now elderly David, who cannot even be “kept warm” by a nubile virgin, must try to stave off yet another attack on his reign by another son. David has even been betrayed by his heretofore most trusted military advisor. A most unexpected triangle occurs, as Bathsheba and Nathan approach David with their request: ordain Solomon your successor, and this unstable dyad (David and Adonijah) can be stabilized with this addition. For one last time we witness how low the level of differentiation is in David’s family, as another party needs to be brought in to lessen anxiety and reestablish emotional stability.

A glimpse is evident of the relationship between Bathsheba and Solomon in this episode. There would seem to be a heightened level of attachment between mother and son if Bathsheba is bold enough to ask David to make Solomon his heir, according to a promise made long ago. With the circumstances of Adonijah gaining support from many of *David’s* former supporters and advisors, coupled with David’s advanced age, one can guess that Bathsheba and Solomon took stock of their situation, identified it as desperate, and chose to act in their own best interests.

In describing the “family projection process”, Kerr and Bowen (1985, p. 201) acknowledge that it is the emotional attachment between mother and child that comprises the most basic component of this process. If this attachment remains unresolved (i.e., the

child does not begin to differentiate) and strong, the more the child's development will be adversely affected by the emotional needs of the family. Bathsheba voices the emotional need to her husband that "it shall come to pass that when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders" (1 Kings 1:21). Her anxiety about who will succeed David has grown to the point that Bathsheba fears being labeled a traitor should Adonijah assume power and possible consequences for her and Solomon.

"Individual differences in functioning (as well as) multigenerational trends in functioning reflect an orderly and predictable relationship process that connects the functioning of family members across generations (Kerr & Bowen, 1985, p. 224). This is the *multigenerational emotional process*, and is assumed to occur through relationships. Bathsheba is able to decrease her anxiety and increase her son's individuation while at the same time ensuring an orderly process for generations to come. For once it appears that there is enough differentiation among the characters in this part of the narrative that they can relate to one another with a minimal amount of systemic problems.

Narrative

Once again, the problem facing David is someone emotionally close to him wants to take away his kingdom. Unlike the other coup attempts previously mentioned, David is in no position to fend off Adonijah. The king's days are numbered, and everyone is aware of it. Members of the royal court even have a concubine attempt to keep David

warm, to no avail. The future looks bleak, with another civil war looming on the horizon.

Even though David is persuaded by Bathsheba's and Nathan's arguments to have Solomon succeed him, a group of people who might have an equally valid claim are not heard from: Solomon's brothers. Their names are at least listed in the second Book of Samuel, but that's all it is: a list of children sired by David. Bathsheba is an active advocate for her son (and implicitly for herself as well). She also voices her concerns about possible future consequences for her and Solomon. However, who is advocating for David's other possible heirs? Who raises their voice, both as individuals and as a collective? The author of 1 Kings does not even acknowledge their presence, let alone their thoughts and feelings upon Solomon's ascension.

David does think about Solomon's immediate future as king. In urging him to inflict the punishment of death on Joab and Shimei, David is attempting to ensure a measure of social control through a blatant appeal to Solomon's ego. The unfortunate thing is that as David expires, the situation remains unresolved. For the first time in his life, David is unable to effect the change he is used to. It is now up to Solomon (and by extension, his descendants) to create meaning and make his father's story (and all the stories of previous generations that came before him) his own.

Summary

As David's existence comes to a close, one can ask if anything has really changed since he first burst on the scene in 1 Samuel 15. David displays an increased level of

differentiation in his awareness of his context during Sheba's revolt, but shows a much lower level of differentiation when following God's instructions blindly during the census taking episode, with its disastrous results. As threats against his throne are made with David frail and dying, he is able to maintain the hierarchy's integrity, both in the kingdom and in his family, with outside assistance. In naming Solomon his successor, David is able to restore a semblance of balance to the invisible ethical ledger. Yet he is still trying to manipulate the current situation by telling his son to exact revenge on those who wronged David. As much as he is portrayed as a virtuous and exemplary individual, a closer reading of the narrative through a systemic lens reveals a literary character that may have a most basic flaw - the flaw of being human.

CHAPTER 7: THE DAVID STORY: A REFLEXIVE DISCUSSION

David as Character

David is often presented as an archetype of virtue. He is spoken of in glowing terms: the unassuming shepherd boy who, an afterthought in his own family, is singled out by the Lord to not only be the greatest king of Israel, and from whose lineage will come the long-awaited Messiah, saving the chosen people. What greater gift can be bestowed that the knowledge that the Lord will deliver his people through one of my (David's) descendants?

However, David's virtue was much more celebrated (and discussed and taught) than his vices. The Bathsheba scenario and Uriah's subsequent murder are often glossed over because of Nathan's parable and his rebuke of David. The only positive consequence that I was taught in catechism was how the Lord made good on his promise and allowed Bathsheba to conceive again and give birth to Solomon. Other less than savory aspects of the story, such as David's family being torn apart by incest, fratricide, and civil war pitting father against son were never mentioned. David's reign could be described as being "Teflon-coated" during my formative years of religious education.

In terms of dysfunction, David's family gives any individual, couple, and/or family I have treated as a therapist a run for the money. Several questions arise that have systemic implications: What were Jesse's feelings as he saw his youngest son leave the family to go live with Saul? The text gives no indication as to how he might have felt

about this. Also, were there any brothers to whom David felt close, or had a bond? I have only one brother, and like most brothers we have had our moments of intimacy and distance. What were those moments of closeness like for David? For his brothers? The only verbal exchange the text describes is when Eliab harshly speaks to David about being less than forthright about the reasons for being at the battlefield when Goliath makes his appearance.

In looking at Saul, it seems as if he longs to have a close father-son relationship with David, which begs the question if he experienced (or did not experience) such a relationship with any of his other children, particularly Jonathan. Saul is ready to kill Jonathan for a silly reason, and he even tries to have one of his daughters marry David, even though she already has a husband! Ambivalence rides high in Saul - a characteristic I would not think any biblical character is capable of possessing *after* they have had an experience with God/the Lord. But for Saul, he continues to demonstrate the “human” condition: weakness, fear, anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, uncertainty. He does this to the last, and that is what makes him so tragic - even at the end, he is unable to fundamentally change who he is.

David himself is full of contradictions. He is a ruthless individual. Foreskins as a bridal dowry? Executing his own messengers for just relating news of Saul’s death? Systematically wiping out entire towns to cover his tracks as a double agent/mercenary? These are not (on their face at least) the behaviors of someone who is supposed to be an

embodiment of grace and compassion. And yet he is himself ambivalent when it comes to his own children. The only emotion we are told he displays when Tamar is raped is anger. David takes no *action* to rectify the situation. He also does not comfort his own daughter who was brutalized. How can any father look upon his child and not be moved to at least contemplate some form of retaliation and revenge?

Theoretical Implications of this Study

The four theories that have been used to shed light on the David story have both strengths and limitations, as mentioned earlier. Attention needs to be turned now to these theories, and how each has offered confirmation of certain tenets of the theory, as well as how each theory may need some refinement, particularly as it pertains to the narrative of David. Put another way, what does family therapy have to say to us about David, and what does David have to say regarding family therapy? good- clear, concise

Bowenian

Bowen's concept of absolute differentiation (Kerr & Bowen, 1985, p. 98) and its utility deserve closer inspection. David offers a prime example of the process of differentiation. In fact, his experience throughout the entire narrative is a classic example of how differentiation occurs along a continuum. According to Bowenian theory, the health of each family member is a function of his or her degree of differentiation. On at least two occasions, David displays increased levels of differentiation (and consequent decreased levels of anxiety), the most obvious when he slips into Saul's tent and cuts

Saul's cloak without harming him, even though Saul is sending men to kill him. By not responding in kind, David shows he is not, as a Bowenian therapist might say, "emotionally fused" with Saul - that Saul's behavior will not define his own. These confrontations in turn help to increase Saul's level of differentiation with the realization that David really does deserve to be treated better than Saul has demonstrated in the recent past. This is an example of a major goal in Bowenian theory, namely helping family members differentiate from the family's togetherness.

But David exhibits rather low levels of differentiation at other points in the narrative as well. For example, as Absalom is making his attempt to unseat his father, David chooses not to assert his rightful place as king of Israel, instead responding on an emotional level. David's emotional response here is to implore members of the royal court to flee along with him before Absalom has the opportunity to overrun the city and destroy it. The family projection process comes into play here, as David (in his role as parent) projects his anxiety onto not only Absalom, but onto others as well. David is convinced that the need is urgent to escape Jerusalem before Absalom can take over, without giving any thought to staying and claiming his authority, and, fused to his advisors, sees his own leaving the throne as requiring their flight as well.

Bowenians might see these examples of David's sometimes higher and lower levels of differentiation as embodying functional differentiation - a person's ability to function at differing levels of emotional distinction from others, depending on one's

context (Kerr & Bowen, 1985, p. 81). They would typically ask, however, what absolute level of differentiation David appears to have - the level of differentiation that is “inherently” his (Kerr & Bowen, 1985, p. 98).

One of the significant findings of this study is that there does not appear to be a genuine absolute level of differentiation in David’s character. If anything, David is all-too-human throughout the story, displaying neither perfect differentiation and individuation, nor being completely at the mercy of his feelings. Thus the Davidic narrative forces us to wonder if this concept of Bowenian theory - the notion of an absolute level of differentiation possessed by everyone - really holds up under close inspection. Alternatively one might conclude that his basic level of differentiation is relatively low, and that only when propped up (fused with) other, stronger or more well differentiated people (or God) is he able to take on a higher, functional level of individuation.

Contextual

In terms of contextual family therapy, with its strong emphasis on moral order and relational justice, it can be clearly demonstrated that there is a certain justice to the human order within the framework of this story. Moreover, when injustices are inflicted and go unchallenged, the consequences can prove deadly. It is important to understand that destructive entitlement is not a straightforward, linear process, the classic “eye for an eye” formula, but can be mitigated by the personal insight and integrity of the

destructively entitled person.

The bitter story of Tamar is but one example of this. David's refusal to avenge her rape leads Absalom to exact revenge and engage in an example of what contextual family therapy calls destructive entitlement when he kills Amnon. This verifies Nagy's dictum that inaction by those who can (and should) take action will eventually have to address potentially disastrous consequences in future generations (Nagy & Krasner, 1986, p. 121). The cycle of destructive entitlement continues not only with Absalom's coup, but other attempted hostile takeovers by other family members (e.g., Adonijah) and others with a false claim to the throne (e.g., Sheba).

On the other hand, destructive entitlement is not necessarily a guaranteed outcome when the justice of the human order is violated, as Nagy would have us believe. Turning again to Saul's pursuit of David discussed above, David has more than ample opportunity to kill the man trying to kill him. Remember, he has already been anointed by Samuel to be the next king. In fact, it would be a perfect example of Nagy's theory if David indeed beheaded Saul when he had the chance, not once, but twice! In both instances, David lets Saul off the hook, as it were. However, David exercises his free will and chooses to not engage in a destructive pattern. The predicted (and predictable?) consequence implied by contextual theory - a killing to stop a killing - does not occur here. David appears to employ the concept of exoneration, the act of forgiving one's parents for real or perceived past injustices. In this way, David displays an increasing sense of self and is

able to receive what is rightly his, namely acknowledgement from Saul that he end this pursuit.

Nagy claims that commitment, loyalty, and devotion are determinants of family relationships. To this claim needs to be added that when a person exercises free will, as David does with Saul, this also adds credits to the relational ledger in terms of equitable give-and-take discourse, which opens up even more opportunities for a dialogue and justice for all concerned.

It is arguable, of course, that by not killing Saul when he is both destructively entitled to and also has the opportunity, David is simply increasing the relational “debt” that Saul owes him, in the hope that - as eventually happens - Saul will see the wrong he has done David.

Structural

The impact of social context in structural theory may need greater emphasis. Throughout the story, it has become abundantly clear that boundaries, a classic ingredient of structural theory, are essential in promoting healthy family functioning. When boundaries are crossed and even obliterated, as in the rape of Tamar, this functioning deteriorates and roles become diffuse and unclear. In terms of structural thought, subsystems have certain tasks as the family experiences growth and development. Each subsystem goes through its own development as individuals negotiate which subsystem is responsible for what task as children grow and parents begin their task of preparing the

children for adult responsibilities. Responsibilities that, in structural terms, would presumably be carried out by the parental subsystem, such as avenging Tamar's rape, instead become the property of the sibling subsystem. This then, structurally, is what propels Absalom to fill the executive void left by his father David's inaction and even extends beyond the immediate family itself to the larger system of Israel with Absalom's attempted coup.

In addition, the structural idea of triangulation is bolstered (by this study) as incredibly problematic for family relationships. Triangles can be observed as occurring in several generations throughout 1 and 2 Samuel. In David's "adoptive" family, Jonathan chooses to cultivate his relationship with David rather than obey his father, especially when Saul sets murderous designs on David. Regarding David's children, the triangle among Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom becomes problematic as Absalom himself is successful (whereas Saul was not) in murdering another member of the triangle in an attempt to bring relationships back into alignment.

On the other hand, while these examples clearly support the validity of much of structural thought, Minuchin (1983, 1974) does mention that family members are influenced by the social context that surrounds them, but he does not explain how the macrosystem impacts the family. In this sense, while mentioning the importance of social context, Minuchin does not adequately explore outer influences that may affect the family. For example, part of the larger context of the Davidic narrative is the change

from theocracy to monarchy, which not only affects not only Israel's social structure but the structure of families as well. Jesse's family, for instance, is permanently altered by this change. Specifically, after David's victory over Goliath, Saul, under the authority of his new mantle as king, has David come live with him, without even consulting Jesse, David's biological father, something that could not have occurred under the old theocracy. Just as had been predicted in 1 Samuel 8:11-18, the king (in this case Saul) has taken what he wants for himself, including another man's son. It is only after David's initial military victory that this occurs. Israel clamored for a large social change, moving from a theocracy to a monarchy. Thus family structures are impacted as much by external forces as they are by internal emotional pressures.

Narrative

Narrative theory may underestimate the ripple effect of the changing of one person's story, and its influence on the stories of others with whom that person is involved. With the examples we have seen of how the concepts of power and knowledge have the ability to subjugate certain stories in favor of other, more preferred stories, this study of David's family confirms how narrative theory can offer a different way to examine a biblical story, or at least part of it. As king, for example, David indeed has a tremendous amount of temporal power available at his disposal. To that end, he is more than able to exercise that power for both positive (leading Israel to key military victories) and negative (such as the murder of Uriah) ends. Thus, in a narrative sense, David can

control the “stories” of his life and few are able to challenge him. Even Bathsheba’s story is driven underground: we do not read in the text how she felt about being David’s mistress, for example, or if she found out that David orchestrated her first husband’s murder, or how she felt when her first child was struck down by God, when it was David whom the Lord was punishing for his transgressions. All these examples validate the basic narrative theoretical premises that important stories can be minimized while others can be emphasized at the expense of particular individuals, and that this process often follows along lines of temporal power (White & Epston, 1990, p. 44).

However, when narrative theory discusses how reauthoring one’s story has an impact on the family’s experience of the presenting problem, it does not take the next step systemically and address how the stories of others can also be modified and changed as a result of the initial reauthoring done by particular persons. Through David’s heart-wrenching plea to Saul on two occasions to cease his pursuit of him, for example, Saul does reauthor his own story when he ultimately ends his homicidal intentions towards David. This has a ripple effect, which is not accounted for by narrative theory, of also changing David’s story as well. David is thus able to honor his order to his troops and solemn pledge to not harm Saul. He is also able to regroup and ready himself to take over the monarchy upon Saul’s death in battle. Although civil war ensues between the factions formerly led by Saul and those under David’s command, it is arguably a much shorter conflict than had David chosen to eradicate Saul when he had the chance.

Biblical Interpretations

The King James Version of the Bible was a deliberate choice as the text on which this study is based. McGrath's (2001) exhaustive history of the King James Version, detailing the social, political, and religious conflicts that ultimately led to "one of the finest literary works in the English language" (p. 3), helped make this a commonsense choice. Many of history's most famous works (Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, Handel's *Messiah*, Negro spirituals, and Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*) owe their origins to this work.

And that is a major problem: interpretation. Although I have attempted to examine *a* particular story from *a* particular viewpoint using *distinct* subheadings, one cannot, I don't believe, be ambivalent when it comes to the Bible - or any literary work. And that is a major problem with the Bible. The text itself has not changed since 1611. No new translations have emerged to clarify problems with the text. There haven't been any new manuscripts excavated or revelations by biblical scholars to change the basic nature of the Bible itself. "What has changed, however, is the climate of interpretation and the lenses with which we read the texts and tell the tales" (Gomes, 1996, p. 99). McGuire (1973) boldly describes the process I have embraced: "What the student should realize is that the uniqueness of his responses and insights is *precisely* (italics mine) that which makes them valuable" (p. 5).

However, the Bible presents a unique challenge to any who would study it. The

original texts are lost to history. Also, the human authors have been gone for millennia. What becomes important is to establish the most reliable edition, realizing that irregularities and discrepancies need to be accounted for, working toward a version that seems to be closest to what the original author(s) intended. The King James Version, although authorized by England's Charles II in 1611, is still a translation of an earlier version known as the Geneva Bible, which too is a translation, with all previous translations going back to the original Latin and Greek translations of ancient Hebrew.

Another criticism that can be applied to a literary work is *mimetic*, which asks how the work is important to any of the worlds to which it is related. McGuire (1973) notes that a problem particular to this type of criticism is determining a relationship between the work itself and the audience. More often than not, there are multiple, unintended audiences that may find something in the work under consideration important to them, that was unintentional from the author's original goal. Johnson (personal communication, 2001) notes that when his submission concerning how families of apes could be studied from family system theory, he received approximately 10% of reprint requests from family therapists. The remaining 90% of requests came from primatologists and other scientists and researchers who were fascinated by the implications of his piece.

At the dawn of a new century, what relevance is there of a story that was written almost 3000 years ago (c. 800 BCE)? Can a narrative that has not changed have some

application today? “The value of literature, in fact the value of language itself, is based on the faith in a common human experience which can be communicated or evoked through literature” (McGuire, 1973, p. 30). Anyone who has had the experience of reading *Hamlet* cannot help but be moved by his tortuous anguish as he realizes the vast conspiracy surrounding his father’s death and his attempts to avenge his father. The same can be said for most of Shakespeare’s other plays, which has shaped the history of literature, culture, and language. It is even more so in the Bible, with its individual characters and overall history combination in a single volume.

The Bible, like all literature, is a work of art, which provokes an affective response in the reader. For myself, I am moved to tears when reading about Tamar’s rape, and filled with frustration and anger as I watch David’s inaction as a father to deal with it. I then have feelings of pity about how Absalom feels he has to physically separate himself because he killed Amnon.

Although writing about different types of literature, and almost a generation apart, both Gomes (1996) and McGuire (1973) stress the concept that any literary work has a life of its own, and the work must convey some condition of the human experience that can only be evoked through language. McGuire affirms: “... the essential relation of literature to people (is that) it is founded on human values whose certainty lies only in the faith that language can somehow allow individuals to share their private experiences” (p. 36). Gomes concurs that “language is not an end but a means, and the end is

communication with meaning and significance” (p. 46). As with all literature, the Bible’s language points toward a truth that extends far beyond the printed text. Whatever that truth may be, its meaning extends the original context of the writers as well as that of the modern reader who reads its words.

David's Story and My Own

In my introduction, I briefly discussed aspects of who I am, personally and professionally, that necessarily affect how I view David and how I approached the task at hand. My family of origin was defined by a strong Catholic upbringing, but with rather different emphases on what it meant to be Catholic. My Irish-Catholic father is quite conscious of the external rites and rituals that go into the “practice” of Catholicism. I remember discussions (that sometimes would lead to heated arguments) about the more esoteric aspects of theology and religion, but not much about faith, or the interior part of what it meant (to him at least) to be a faithful, spiritual Catholic.

My mother was first-generation American, her parents having emigrated from Poland before the turn of the twentieth century. Perhaps this “old world” view of life colored her faith tradition. I remember my mother’s inward piety, the small devotional prayer books on her nightstand, the rosary beads in her hands during Sunday Mass, all these contributing to her “simple faith”, yet this faith was not as simple as it may have appeared on the surface. As I defend this dissertation, I also celebrate the first year of her passing. I can only hope (and pray) that her faith sustained her through a painful death,

and that she received the reward she worked so hard for in this life.

As an undergraduate, I followed all the rules and regulations set forth by the Society of Jesus, because I was confident (at that time, anyway) that I had a religious calling to be a Jesuit priest. I attended meetings, went on directed and silent retreats, spent a summer working in a religious community, doing what was asked of me in “humility”. When I was told to “take some time” and “reconsider my options”, I petulantly left the order and enrolled in the archdiocesan seminary, convinced I had a vocation, no matter what anyone else saw or thought. A year later, I was disillusioned, angry, and frustrated: disillusioned because I had done everything “right”, and had not received my “reward”; angry because *God* had failed *me*; and frustrated because I had spent several years searching for an identity and was no closer to discovering who I was or what I was about. If possible, I felt disconnected not only from my own “self”, but also from the whole of existence.

In his own way, David did all the “right” things as well. He dutifully kept watch over Jesse’s sheep, heeded the Lord’s call to lead Israel, fought off all claims to his kingship, and was promised a messiah from his lineage. Yet David’s rise was fraught with danger, especially as Saul pursued him. I can only be moved as I read and contemplate David’s twice pleading with Saul to stop his pursuit.

The Mirror of the Subject

All of us tend to see ourselves in what we examine, and I am no exception. As

my first marriage was ending, I engaged in one of the greatest self-serving pity parties ever thrown. I blamed myself for failing my parents and my son. I never thought of comparing David to various points in my life, but this relationship can be equated with David and Michal. Their relationship began with so much promise, but ended with each ripping the other apart - Michal castrating (verbally) David for acting foolishly and David telling his wife that he would rather have his concubines bear his children than engage in any sexual activity with her ever again. The vitriol in this brief exchange is a powerful example of the passion David and Michal still feel for one another, although it has morphed into hatred.

The three years I spent at Tech and at McFarland were filled with joy, excitement, and stimulation. There were times when I felt on top of the world, much like David's dance of ecstasy in front of the Ark of the Covenant as it is returned to Jerusalem. And when personal troubles threatened my sanity at times, I felt as if *I* was being beset by my own personal coups, as if God were punishing me (somewhat arbitrarily) for a long-forgotten or trivial transgression. There were times when I felt I was paying for sins committed (like divorce), and these issues were my particular penance.

Moving through the different writing stages of this dissertation, I remember back to the time of my second proposal defense. In the initial defense of the four biblical personalities (Joseph, Moses, David, and Jesus), I am drawn to various times when David fled from persecutors, notably Saul and Absalom. Although my committee has given me

nothing short of their unqualified support, I felt (at that particular moment) that I was under siege. Contrast that time with three months later: same committee, same venue, different “me”. Instead of feeling betrayed and beset by some villainous plot, I felt among friends, as David felt with Jonathan. Their relationship is one of the most moving friendships in the entire Bible. I would want to continue such a relationship with my committee after I defend as David and Jonathan cultivated through the biblical narrative.

As I come to the end, I am reminded of David as he awaits news of the battle between Absalom’s and David’s forces. Nothing less than the fate of Israel hung in the balance, but David kept his son Absalom’s wellbeing in the forefront of his mind. As I present this work, I am not concerned about whether or not it is approved or how those who may read it some day receive it. I have poured my very being into this work and, like David, hope it to be worthy, just as David, though Absalom tried to take over, felt Absalom worthy to continue to be his son.

Goals and Limitations

My original goal in this endeavor was to present a biblical figure and describe this character using four major family therapy theories. Given the work of Halpern, Mills, Rogers, Stevens, and Zelig, this goal is only partly original. It would be more accurate to state that this dissertation is an attempt to demonstrate the use of family therapy to explore a particular biblical character not explored by previous authors.

Upon reflection, I believe I have achieved these goals, but not in their entirety. In discussing the relationship between David and Bathsheba, for example, I did not explore in any great depth implications their affair may have had vis-à-vis David's other wives. Nor did I discuss possible implications of marriage therapy in David's and Michal's relationship. This would have been interesting to examine.

Although I explored in some depth about Eli's and Samuel's respective families of origin, I did not develop ideas about the relationships each man had with his sons. I was unable to fully examine the concept of fatherhood for both of them, certainly not as well as I did with David. Speaking of fatherhood, I was able to describe David's effectiveness as well as his lack thereof, as a father in Tamar's rape. I was able to describe using systemic concepts, the implications as well as the consequences that befell David's family.

I was also partially successful in discussing family of origin and family of choice models in describing David's move from Jesse's to Saul's family. There is another account of David in the first Book of Chronicles. This last book of the Hebrew Bible evaluates David's achievements and his religious guidance of Israel as he seeks the Lord's leadership. David's trials, transgressions, and failures are de-emphasized in Chronicles since the covenant relationship between the Lord and the people is the focus here, whereas in the current discussion David's foibles are part and parcel of his relationships.

Lastly, I believe I had moderate success in maintaining a systemic perspective throughout this work. It is important to lay out the narrative in order to (1) set the scene and (2) lay a foundation from which to expound upon the four theories as they impacted different parts of the story.

Methodological Questions

My main methodological focus was to examine one particular phenomenon (here, the David story) through triangulation theory as described by Patton. On the whole, I believe that I was able to effectively use “theory triangulation” in describing the events in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings through the lenses of structural, contextual, Bowenian/intergenerational, and narrative family theories.

It can be questioned, naturally, about the use of a primarily religious text, with the dogmatic and doctrinal implications therein, to explicate such a postmodern idea as family therapy. Tremendous disputes about the authority and morality of the Bible itself have existed throughout recorded history, including how it ought to be read, interpreted, and applied. McGuire (1973) notes: “... the great power of a literary work (can) work to shape the history of literature and even culture at large” (p. 43). This is no less true of Shakespeare than it is of the King James Bible.

But no less a historical figure than the founder of psychoanalysis himself laid the groundwork for making a study such as this possible. Sigmund Freud (Strachey, 1967) was not only a proponent of combining the “interpretive triangle” of artist, work, and

audience with the psyche, but also of religion and spirituality as well. He too examined texts that led to some of his best known works, one of them an exploration of the great lawgiver in the Bible, Moses. I am not presuming to put myself in the same intellectual community as Freud, nor do I share his views on religion and spirituality as being illusory. However, I am indebted to Freud for beginning a process of scholarly inquiry of which I can be a part.

“Any character who ‘comes to life’ in a work of literary art may have some degree of influence over real people who encounter the work” (Miles, 1995, p. 5). Although writing about his biographical study of God as a literary character, Miles could be discussing any personality, biblical or secular. I believe I have been able to engage in a self-reflexive exercise with some success, critically examining how I have been affected by my exploration of David.

Larger Implications

In such a non-traditional work as this, one cannot state with certainty what larger implications there are or may be. However, one can speculate that the application of systemic ideas to works such as the Bible does present many possibilities.

In the beginning of this study, it was noted that the Bible is unique to literature. As the protagonist under consideration, David has been deconstructed in a way never attempted before. For all of our training and our espoused view that we take new and fresh approaches to our clinical work, family therapists become just as reductionistic as

other mental health professionals when we compress our clients to words on a printed page, whether it be an elaborate case consultation or a brief progress note in their chart. We have taken three-dimensional human beings and taken away a vital part of their uniqueness. I have attempted here to provide an opportunity to view a character and define him in a different way. Although I have only seen photographs, Michaelangelo's sculpture of David (just before his battle with the giant Goliath) is full of rich and wonderful detail. In the preceding pages I have attempted to provide different detail, much like a therapist who is searching for new and creative interventions with this client. Systems theory itself thus allows us to bring new perspectives to biblical and other literary figures. And even though this has been demonstrated previously through the work of Lipton, or Blake or Kaufman, the application to systemic thought is not so exhaustive that the present exploration does not add confirmation to the value of its use to that end.

An Example of Further Implications: Pastoral Counseling

Pastoral counseling offers a unique therapeutic milieu in which to explore client issues and offers opportunities for healing and growth. Therapy from this theoretical stance especially considers a person's faith tradition and utilizes these experiences as additional resources to help clients address issues that may bring them to therapy. This theologically informed and spiritually sensitive avenue represents the spiritual commitments and religious traditions of those who seek assistance without imposing the

therapist's belief system onto the client. This freedom allows the client to explore psychological, theological, and faith implications of their situation in an atmosphere that is conducive to providing a different lens to view both problems and possible solutions.

Within religious communities, most religious leaders do not have the training in psychotherapy to do extensive, in-depth work. Pastoral counseling moves beyond the support or encouragement a religious community can offer by providing psychologically sound therapy that weaves in the religious and/or spiritual dimension. Since many clients seek spiritually-based counseling when they are faced with such issues, this can often provide a safe and familiar environment from which to begin a journey that can be as exciting and simultaneously perilous as therapy.

Viewed through such a lens, this study's confirmation of significant aspects of the systemic models employed in examining David and his relationships suggests that the Davidic narrative may also be a useful tool in the therapeutic process. For example, one might use the story of David sparing Saul's life as a pedagogic example of differentiation from another's emotional field. From a pastoral lens, this could be viewed as a way to live out the biblical teaching of "loving one's enemies". The story of Tamar's assault and Absalom's killing of her assailant (who is also their brother), after her father's failure to avenge her, could likewise be a helpful illustration of Nagy's transgenerational ledger and the concept of destructive entitlement previously mentioned. Again, from a pastoral stance, this can be an example of things being done on God's timetable (which is

believed to be timeless), rather than on man's timetable. Such an approach could be especially powerful for pastoral based therapeutic programs, in which close familiarity with the story of David and his family could be assumed.

It is important to remember, though, that the Bible as a whole is a widely read work, and the life of David is one of its best-known tales. Outside of pastoral settings, it is easy to envisage how the David account could be employed to illustrate a variety of aspects of family function and dysfunction using the models engaged here. For example, this saga could provide a tremendous boost in training students from other disciplines (e.g., social work, substance abuse, and other traditionally "linearly" modalities of psychotherapy such as cognitive-behavioral and transactional analysis) in these modes of systemic thought. The Davidic narrative could also serve as but one of several examples of exploring relational concepts employing other works in literature, such as Kaufman's (1995) previously noted deconstruction of *The Alexandria Quartet*, and Bateman's (1985) and Lipton's (1984) examination of Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*. Johnson (1991) not only used Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* to explicate systemic issues, but also works as diverse as Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and *The Laccoon*, a sculpture from antiquity.

So outside a pastoral setting in particular, it would be more important to ensure that what was being taught was not an illustration of the "Truth" of Christianity or Judaism per se, but simply the validity of these models of family systems thinking. Still,

such an approach, whether in a pastoral setting or not, might be a helpful way to introduce concepts from the four models used in this study to students just beginning to learn systemic thought.

The most general application would be in educating therapists to examine the Bible as (1) a work that can be deconstructed systemically and (2) possible uses of the Bible as a tool in their clinical practice. Also, as suggested above, most people have a passing knowledge of the Bible; some awareness of major characters in the Bible, what some of the more famous stories are, and may even live their lives according to its principles (however they may interpret these). Combining these elements provides a powerful resource that may not have been thought of before. In this manner, therapists can expound family systems thinking to the public as a whole, not just to other therapists or trainees, and readers of the Bible can encounter (maybe for the first time) systemic concepts.

Taking this the next logical step, other biblical personalities can be examined using the process described herein. My original intent had been to look at three other major biblical personalities through a systemic lens. Both major and minor characters could no doubt be explored, perhaps more effectively and in depth, than I have done with David. If authors are able to write about biblical characters from a psychoanalytic lens (Zeligs, 1974), then a systemic lens can be brought to bear on these personalities just as fruitfully. Even God as a main protagonist (Miles, 1995) can be the subject of a

biographical study. Why not God as part of a system, or a system unto himself?

Religious of most faith traditions, have some knowledge of the Bible stories. And religious congregations sometimes are even seen in systemic terms. Bowenian family theory has even been applied to faith communities as a way of describing their development and processes such as differentiation (Friedman, 1985). The further application of systemic thought to biblical narratives can only extend these inroads, to say nothing of the fact that many congregates are as likely to approach their religious leaders for help with life problems as they are to consult a family therapist. Perhaps these religious figures, of familiar with studies such as this, can borrow systemic concepts that their followers might find more palatable if they come from familiar narratives.

Entire volumes of journal articles have devoted special editions to the study of fictional characters from a systemic viewpoint (*Styler*, 1997). Edited (Walsh, 1999), and single (Pargament, 1997) volumes have addressed how religion and spirituality can be viewed as aids in helping therapists help clients and families who come seeking relief from their problems. Perhaps works such as this dissertation can represent a starting point for people (clients or not) who may identify with characters and personalities like David who have a unique connection with God and theology. Even for those who make take no special theological view at all, stories of this kind offer another way to view problems, and another way to better understand themselves and their circumstances.

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