

## David Chapter 2 David the Warrior Hero

For reading: 1 Samuel chapters 18 and 19.

After the defeat of Goliath, David is taken into Saul's service as a warrior. We are familiar with the deep friendship that developed between Jonathan (who was the oldest of Saul's three sons and the one most likely to succeed him as king) and David. Jonathan was so taken with David that he gave him his robe, tunic and belt as well as his sword and bow (1 Sam 18:4). These garments identified Jonathan as a member of the ruling house and transferring these to David could be a prophetic move by Jonathan.

What is even more significant is the gift of the sword. At the start of Saul's reign, only he and Jonathan had iron swords (1 Sam 13:22). Any iron or even bronze weapons among the Israelites by the time David fought Goliath came from Israelites plundering the dead on the battlefields. Iron weapons remained in short supply in Israel and must have been extremely valuable/expensive. There were still no smiths in Israel – the Philistines guarded the manufacture and trade in iron weapons and tools jealously (1 Sam 13:19-21). By making David a gift of an iron sword David is lifted among the privileged warriors of the time.

***For pause and reflection: Jonathan honoured David by giving him that which was most important to him as the (presumed) future king – his cloak, belt, sword and bow. Jonathan was an experienced warrior himself (1 Sam 14) and he realised that David, if he was to become a true warrior, would need such equipment. In a sense, he became a mentor as well as a friend to David.***

***What "equipment" could you, would you or have you passed on to another person starting out on his or her walk with God?***

David turned out to be an extremely popular leader. His bravery (remember the lion and the bear?) and his skill in leadership quickly made him popular. In those days there were no ranks among the warrior clans – men were respected for their abilities and rose and fell based on the way they looked after their men and on their success on the battlefield. David excelled in both areas. He accomplished the tasks set before him (1 Sam 18:5) efficiently and Saul confirmed his leadership position in the army by appointing him as leader over 1,000 men.

*Just a side note on the numbers: The books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles were written after the death of David. In the case of 1 Samuel, the most likely date according to scholars is around 930 B.C., that is shortly after the death of Solomon. The two books of Kings are dated later – possibly 300 to 400 years after David's time, while Chronicles are generally accepted as being of the post-exilic period (fifth century B.C.). In all these records, the numbers that are referred to are neat, round numbers – 100 men, 1,000 men, 10,000 men and so on. In some cases, we need to treat the magnitude of these numbers cautiously – archeological evidence indicates that the total population of the southern Levant at the time might have been around 50,000 people. That would include Israel, Judah and all the other tribes ("kingdoms") in the area. It is thus unlikely that any one tribe would have been able to field more than 2,000 or at the most 3,000 warriors if all able-bodied males were mobilized.*

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A part of the reward for killing Goliath (1 Sam 17:25) was Saul's daughter as wife. Saul followed through with this promise and offered David the hand of Merab, the oldest daughter, in marriage. David politely declined – stressing his humble background and the relative obscurity of his family (18:18).

Saul's younger daughter, Michal, was in love with David. David again was not immediately keen on the idea of accepting her as wife, probably because of the high bride price Saul could have demanded for his daughter. Saul devised a scheme whereby he put David in grave danger – the bride price was stated as being the killing 100 Philistines. (Again – be cautious of the magnitude of the number). As evidence of the deed, Saul demanded to see the foreskins. Josephus, the Judean-Roman historian records this episode slightly differently: Saul supposedly demanded 600 Philistines<sup>1</sup> to be killed and the evidence of the deed was to be their heads.

According to 18:26 David not only accepted the challenge to kill 100 Philistines – he doubled the number.

***For pause and reflection: Is David getting over-confident and proud (“cocky”) of his new skills and powers? Why would he double down on a dangerous assignment? Was it to impress Saul? Was it to prove that he was capable of doing everything better than demanded?***

***Do we (you) sometimes, like David in this instance, do something laudable not because it is the right thing to do but on order to be noticed by others?***

David's success on the battlefield resulted in a hero status among the people. David was being hailed a greater warrior than Saul (1 Sam 18:7). In a culture where the king's status (or any leader's status, for that matter) was inextricably linked to his prowess as a warrior, this did not go down well with Saul. We see here for the first hint that Saul started to identify David as the one who would be king after him (1 Sam 15:26-28 and 18:8:26-28). During this time, we also find the first record of Saul trying to kill David (1 Sam 18:10, 11).

The relationship between Saul and David went into decline and Saul became more and more paranoid about David. David was not only his son-in-law, but he was also his oldest son's best friend and on top of it all – the most famous of all the warriors in the Israelite army. (1 Sam 18:29, 30).

Dropping all subterfuge, Saul set out to kill David.

Jonathan foiled the first attempt (19:1-7). Saul reconciled with David, and David could resume his role as leader of men, husband to Michal and musical therapist to the king.

During the next series of battles with the Philistines, David was even more successful than before (1 Sam 19:8). When the battles were over David resumed his role as music therapist to the troubled king. Here we find the second record of Saul trying to kill David while David was playing the harp for him (19:10). David went into hiding, realising that this was not just another anger outburst but the latest in a serious campaign to get rid of him.

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<sup>1</sup> Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, chapter X (translation by William Whiston, Attic Books)

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Michal must have had some inside knowledge of the plotting in the royal halls because she assisted David to escape by letting him down through a window. Then she placed an idol in his bed, disguising it – even to the point of putting goat’s hair at the head. Saul sent men to David’s house to arrest him there and bring him for execution. Michal refused them entry, claiming that David was ill. Saul would have none of it and instructed his men to bring David on his bed if necessary, so he could be executed (1 Sam 19:15-16). When confronted by her father as to why she helped David escape, Michal pretended that David had threatened to kill her if she did not help him (v 17).

***For pause and reflection: Michal used “a household idol” (1 Sam20:13) to deceive the men sent to capture David. Having an idol in the house went directly against the second commandment Ex 20:4). Many in Israel, even the king’s daughter, had apparently not fully rejected the idolatrous practices of the original inhabitants of the land.***

***What “household idols” hide in your cupboard, ones you turn to when things get tough?***

The last 6 verses of chapter 19 record an interesting episode. David had made his way to Samuel at Ramah. Samuel had retired there, as it was his birthplace. From Ramah the two of them went to Naioth, a small village nearby, where a group of prophets lived (maybe students of Samuel?). Saul sent men to capture David and these men encountered this group of prophets, with Samuel leading them. The men fell under the influence of the Spirit and started prophesying themselves. This happened to a second group of men as well – and eventually Saul went himself to Naioth. Even he started to prophesy when he encountered Samuel and the other prophets.

The break between Saul and David was now complete. All that remained was for Jonathan to obtain the final, irrevocable evidence from Saul – which we find in chapter 20. But that is the stuff for the next chapter in this series.

***For pause and reflection: David had been anointed as king over Israel. For him to develop the skills that would make him a successful, just and true king he had to go through a lot of training and learning experiences. Some of these would be pleasant, some disappointing in the extreme, and all of it necessary, even if David (should one have had the opportunity to ask him) probably did not always agree.***

***In your own walk with God, you have been/are being prepared for the role God has for you by exposing you to circumstances and events (pleasant and not so pleasant) that shape and mould you. Reflect on those in the light of the first stage of David’s public life.***

End of this chapter

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