

David's Rise, Saul's Demise, III

It is time to finish 1 Samuel. We have arrived at chapter 31. This is a chapter that I have simply entitled "The End of a Man without God." This is a chapter that focuses on Saul. It is the one in which Saul takes his own life. It is interesting to hear what commentators will say about Saul in this particular event in his life. Some will say that Saul proves himself to be courageous and heroic because when he knew that he could do nothing to save his life he had the courage to take it. That is great thinking for Greek tragedy, but it is not biblical thinking. We do not want to import that kind of mindset to our assessment of Saul's taking his own life in this chapter.

Notice in 1 Samuel 31:4 Saul says to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me." It is an interesting phrase that he uses here. It is one that is used several times in the Book of Samuel, "these uncircumcised fellows." That was a way of referring to a non-Israelite pagan, one of the Canaanites. In this instance it was the Philistines. Where this phrase occurs elsewhere, however, it is instructive. If you look back to 1 Samuel 14:6, this is the first time it is used. In 1 Samuel 14:1 Jonathan says to his armor bearer, "'Come, let us go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side.' But he did not tell his father." Then we get the little digression telling us where Saul is. In verse 6 Jonathan says to his young armor bearer, bringing us back to where we left off, "Come, let us go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few." We see that in the mouth of Jonathan, the uncircumcised fellows are not to be feared. Jonathan has confidence that God is not limited to save, whether by many or by few. In a similar way in the mouth of David in 1 Samuel 17:26, "David asked the men standing near him, 'What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?'" Again, in verse 36, "Your servant has killed both the lion and bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God." In the mouths of Jonathan and David, the term is a term of disparagement and disdain because of their confidence in God. Who is this guy? Who is this Canaanite, this non-Israelite, this unbeliever, these uncircumcised fellows? But to Saul, they are a threat. To Saul they are individuals, entities to be feared. So he says, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me"

John Bright says that Saul was never lacking in courage. I would suggest that he was often lacking in courage not only here, but in 1 Samuel 17 when faced by the Philistine giant. Remember the Israelite giant was cringing and trembling and drawing back in fear like all the rest of the Israelites until David arrived.

In the mouth of David and Jonathan they recognized that the uncircumcised fellows were outside the covenant of the Lord. David and Jonathan had the perspective that God would give victory over these individuals, whereas Saul looked at them as unscrupulous enemies. He may have thought, "They may do whatever they want because they are not under the covenant of the Lord." You might push that a little bit farther and say that perhaps Saul had a sense that he too was outside the covenant of the Lord. I think that would tend to confirm what we have been saying all along that Saul did not know the Lord. He was not in touch with Him and had not been answered even when he had gone looking. He was outside the covenant himself, so he was, in a sense, on equal footing and over-matched, thus he feared them as well.

What about the account in 2 Samuel 1 of the Amalekite who claims to have killed Saul? Certainly the Amalekite would have been one of those uncircumcised fellows, not a Philistine, but nevertheless someone outside the covenant. He claims to have taken Saul's life. We will get to that in just a second.

The other question I think we need to ask ourselves as we look at Saul's self-inflicted death, his suicide, is the belief held by some that a Christian would never commit suicide. What do you think of that? What is the unpardonable sin? It is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the sense of rejecting the overtures of God and His claims upon our life. I think obstinately turning a deaf ear to those throughout our lifetime is the unpardonable sin. Taking one's life is certainly not something that one would aspire to, that would be approved, or that would be necessarily good. But I see it as no different from any other sin that in our weakness and infirmity and sometimes on our medication we could sink to. I would want to argue strongly that it is possible, though not advisable and certainly not commendable, that a real Christian could sink so low in depression that he or she might take his or her own life. I would never want to stand up and say, "Christians could never do that, and to do that is to prove that you are not a Christian." We know that God is sufficient for all our needs. We are not slaves to sin, and in that regard there is no excuse for ever sinning. We always have the power of the Holy Spirit; there is never an excusable sin. Certainly taking one's own life is not an excusable sin. We are not yet glorified; we are not in a fully sanctified glorified state, so we do sin in various ways. Suicide could be one sin that a Christian could commit in the extremity of depression. There is a time, however, when taking your own life is permissible. If you are a soldier, or if you are laying down your life for someone else, it would be not only permissible, but commendable to lay down one's life.

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one work. The division of the two books comes at the end of Saul's life. In 2 Samuel 1, to which we now come, David is lamenting the death of Saul and Jonathan, so there is an interconnection between the two books. When you do a literary analysis or when you are studying the two books, you look at them as one work. I would look at them as the one flowing into the other while recognizing that there is a significant stopping point in the life of Saul in 1 Samuel 31. It is true, in general, of a canonical approach to the Scripture to see the parts in the light of the larger whole.

I have titled 2 Samuel 1-5, "God's King Reigns." They are about the enthronement of David over Judah first and then over Israel. In God's good time David assumed the throne. Some accused him of doing whatever is possible to get onto the throne of Israel and Judah, but that is certainly not what the text tells us. He had opportunities to speed his way to the throne by killing Saul and did not do so. In fact, unless you take a cynical approach and say that the narrator is meaning to dupe us, 2 Samuel 1 makes it very clear that David was innocent in Saul's death. This is attested in several different ways. As was mentioned earlier, an Amalekite comes and claims to have polished Saul off. In 2 Samuel 1:6 the Amalekite says,

"I happened to be on Mount Gilboa," the young man said, "and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, with the chariots and riders almost upon him. When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me and I said, 'What can I do?' He asked, 'Who are you?' 'An Amalekite,' I answered. Then he said to me, 'Stand over me and kill me! I am in the throes of death, but I am still alive.' So I stood over him and killed him because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive. And I took the crown that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought them here to my lord." Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

We should not necessarily take the Amalekite's claim at face value as what actually happened. In those days there would have been great reward expected if you showed up with the insignia of royalty and claimed to have killed by request the person to whom it belonged. It is quite possible that the Amalekite simply discovered the body of Saul on Mount Gilboa. He may have gotten there first, robbed him of his insignia, brought it to David, and cooked up this story in the hopes of receiving a reward. Instead he received a death sentence. David condemned him by his own words. David did not contest it but decided the Amalekite would pay with his life and had him executed. David was not anxious to have Saul eliminated. He was under pressure from Saul, but perhaps in the same way that he saw God deal with Nabal, he was seeing God deal with Saul. David himself was not complicitous in this affair if we take the text at face value, which I think we should. Many commentators do not and you need to be aware of that, but I think we should.

In the end of 2 Samuel 1 we get into the lament of David over Saul and Jonathan. This is remarkable in its graciousness. Often we see this at funerals: people who perhaps were at great odds with an individual in life tend only at the time of the funeral to remember those good things that can be said and say those. That is what I think David is doing here. He was not unaware of what Saul had attempted to do to him. By putting Saul and Jonathan together, David was dealing with mixed feelings because Jonathan was someone whom he loved very deeply and who had been very committed to him. Let me guard you against one other misinterpretation. Verse 26 is sometimes cited as an indication that David was homosexual because he says, "I grieve for you Jonathan my brother; / you were very dear to me. / Your love for me was wonderful, / more wonderful than that of women." Love is an ambiguous term. You can try to read it in a homosexual sense, but to do so would be to fly in the face of all that the Bible teaches elsewhere about this particular orientation. I think David is simply saying, "Jonathan, your love, in the sense of your commitment and self-giving quality to me, the way in which you stood by me, the way in which you were willing to give of yourself for my betterment, the way in which you were willing to defer to me, is something that I have not even experienced from my wives." He had not experienced it from Michal, who was Jonathan's sister. He is simply extolling not the love of friendship as superior to marital love, but he is saying what he experienced from Jonathan was true agape, self-giving love. To read this as evidence of homosexuality on David and Jonathan's part is going way beyond what the text would warrant. Be aware of that; you will probably hear more and more of it as people search the Scriptures seeking to find ways of justifying a particular behavior and lifestyle. If we are clear-eyed and honest with ourselves, it is not approved. It is regarded as a sin, not a sin that is the unpardonable sin or worse than other sins, but it is sin that is sufficient to send us to hell apart from the grace of Christ. It is not something to be rationalized.

Let us talk for a moment about David's experience with Michal. The text says that Michal loved David. When Saul discovered that, he probably thought, here is a second chance to get at David and bring about his downfall. Maybe Saul knew Michal too well. It is true that when David was forced to flee, Saul gave Michal to another man. Michal is not necessarily thereby indicted. She was under her father's authority in that case. We do not know what recourse she would have had. We do not want to be overly critical of her. Jonathan's commitment to David is an astonishing example of what real love is. He was self-giving toward him in the way that he deferred when David was crowned prince. He recognized that David was God's choice, and he willingly gave way to David, paving the way for him to become King. Jonathan was wishing the good of the other person and considering the other person's interest as more important than his own. That is all David is talking about. I think to read it otherwise is to go too far.

A recent book that I read and reviewed, written by feminist writers, drew attention to what Saul said to Jonathan one time about his being the son of a perverse woman. In 1 Samuel 20:30, "Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Do I not know that you

have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you?" These writers were trying to argue that by indicting Jonathan's mother, Saul was saying there is something wrong with you. They said Saul was saying there is something wrong with your sexuality, gender, and orientation. But I would call that reading into the text. I think it is simply an expression that Saul was using at that point.

Let us move on to 2 Samuel 2 and 3. In chapter 1, which we just finished, we see that David appears to be innocent of Saul's death. I think that is an appearance that we should believe. In chapters 2 and 3 we go on to read about the war that continued between the house of David and the house of Saul. With the death of Saul, the supporters of Saul did not immediately realign or disband. There were those who continued to be Saulites so the war, or at least the animosity, continued for a while. It is actually described as a war in 2 Samuel 3:1, "The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time," but notice at the end of verse 1, "David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker." This is another reflection that God is blessing the house of David and bringing David into prominence. We also learn in chapter 3 that David was innocent in the death of Abner, who had been Saul's general. Abner does eventually die. He is killed, and it is important that it be clear that David was not the one who brought this about. In fact, chapter 3 sort of belabors the point. In 2 Samuel 3 Abner has come over to David because of a falling out with Ish-Bosheth, who was the sole surviving son of Saul. He came over to David and made an overture of friendship. He offered to bring Israel under David's authority. Verse 21 says,

Abner said to David, "Let me go at once and assemble all Israel for my lord the king, so that they may make a compact with you, and that you may rule over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace. Just then David's men and Joab returned from a raid and brought with them a great deal of plunder. But Abner was no longer with David in Hebron, because David had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. When Joab and all of the soldiers with him arrived, he was told that Abner son of Ner had come to the king and that the king had sent him away and that he had gone in peace. So Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he has gone!"

The phrase, "he went in peace," is repeated three times in this passage. In the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, we read in verse 24, "Now he has gone in peace!" We do not know for sure that it is original and has been left out or whether it was inserted into the Greek translation. So at least three times, possibly four times, it is clear that David let Abner go in peace. The fact that Abner is now dead is someone else's fault. It is not David's. Cynical people could say that is the way the story is told to assure us that David is innocent. In fact, because he protests so much, he must actually be guilty. But we must not take that line of thinking when we are reading the biblical text and not trust the inspired narrator to be leading us in the right pathway. He may lead us very subtly at times, but if we do not trust him to be leading us in the right direction, then we are in big trouble. We are going to be counter reading and back reading and reverse reading everything we come upon. Take it as you will. I prefer to believe that it is true that David allowed Abner to depart in peace and, as we are told, it was Joab who actually ended up taking his life through nefarious means.

When we come to 2 Samuel 4 the same kind of point is made. In chapter 4 we have recorded the death of Ish-Bosheth, who was the sole surviving son of Saul. He was not killed on Mount Gilboa, and this has raised some discussion about where he was. Was he a little weakling who was not fit to go into battle? We know that he was old enough to fight because he was 40 when he became king. So he certainly was of age and could have gone into battle. The text talks about the entire house of Saul dying with him on Mount Gilboa. Now, again be careful when you read about "all of Saul's house." When you hear the

word “all” in the Bible, it does not necessarily mean every last living individual. It just means for all intents and purposes, Saul’s house was over and done with. There was no further hope even if little Ish-Bosheth, or weakling Ish-Bosheth continued to live. So we need to be careful to read the Bible in its own terms and not impose an overly rigorous standard that would find it in conflict with itself.

Ish-Bosheth is still alive, but he loses his life in 2 Samuel 4. He does not die at the hands of Joab this time, but at the hands of two other individuals. They then come and report their proud deed to David, but he has them promptly executed. Again this demonstrates that David does not take delight in the death of his enemies even if it opens the door to his throne being established over Israel. His throne is eventually over the Northern Kingdom as the next chapter shows.

By 2 Samuel 5 David is finally firmly established over Israel and Judah. It is interesting to read in verse 12 how David understood his position. In 2 Samuel 5:12 it says, “And David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.” That is a very good verse for any who ever finds themselves in position of leadership. There are two very good points there. First is that the Lord had established David as king. It was not that David had earned that right or was so clever or so good or had somehow qualified to be king. He had not won a competition and thus was on the throne. Rather this was God’s doing. Leaders, whether in corporations, families, churches, or communities, should recognize it is God who raises up leaders and brings them down. So if you find yourself in a position of leadership it is nothing to be proud of. It is God’s doing, not yours. Nor is it a position to be exploited. Notice that David understood that the Lord had exalted his kingdom, not for David’s sake, but for the sake of God’s people, Israel. Again, this is a very salutary encouragement to leaders. God puts you in leadership, and it is not to be self-serving. It is not for your sake; it is for the sake of those whom you are to serve in leadership.

David is off to a good start. He has arrived on the throne. It is God who has put him there, and at the end of this chapter we read of David definitively defeating the Philistines. In 2 Samuel 5:17 and following, we have the account. I will only read verse 25, “So David did as the LORD commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.” It was a resounding victory over the Philistines, who have continued to plague Israel since the days of Saul. It is interesting to look back one more time to 1 Samuel 14 at the summary of Saul’s reign. Right after that is complete in 1 Samuel 14:52 we read, “All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service.” All the days of Saul, there was bitter war. Now, God’s king reigns, and God’s king begins to succeed. He does so by defeating that arch enemy of Israel, whom Saul had been anointed to deal with. In 1 Samuel 9:16, Saul’s assignment was to defeat the Philistines. Saul had failed, but God, in His grace, raised up another leader. David has now succeeded, and the people are delivered from the hand of the Philistines. God’s king is on the throne. God’s king reigns.

In the next section, 2 Samuel 6 to 10, we see how David’s reign is blessed by God. We have an account of how David obtained and occupied his capital city. We also have what I like to call the cardinal promise, the all-important Davidic promise. This dynastic promise is given to David in 2 Samuel 7.

As we look at these chapter by chapter, 2 Samuel 6 is a very interesting one. It is the chapter that recounts David bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. I have given two titles to this particular chapter. One is “The Hazards of Success.” David had been very successful to this point and now he experienced some of the hazards of that success. This leads me to my second title, which is “Well-Meaning Carelessness.” This is what we find in this chapter as we read about them bringing the ark to Jerusalem. We read in 2 Samuel 6:3, “They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart

with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals. When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore, God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God. Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day the place is called Perez Uzzah." This is translated "outbreak against Uzzah" in Hebrew. The name Nacon sounds a little bit like the word for "stability," which is strange since that is where the oxen stumbled.

Let us talk about what is happening here. Something went wrong in this particular instance. Using a cart was not the prescribed way to move the ark. They were supposed to use poles and the rings in the side of the ark. The rings were there for a reason. Put the poles in them and have the people carry the ark at the ends of the poles. Unless all stumble at once, the ark is not going to fall. This is far different from a cart tipping over. Maybe the Israelites got the idea of a cart from the Philistines, who had last returned the ark to them. That is how they had last seen it. It was not the same cart because they destroyed that, chopped up the wood, and burned it as a sacrifice. Maybe that is the last way they had seen it transported and thought, let us do it this modern way.

Do you think that David meant to be irreverent? Was he insincere in what he was doing? I do not think so, but I do think he was careless. There is a lesson to be learned that sincerity does not necessarily eliminate presumption on our part. Sometimes we can be sincerely wanting to do the right thing and wanting to obey God, but we do not go to the trouble to see how God has told us to obey. He has given us lots of instructions and a lot of commands. He even gave commands that we would not obey, causing us to need His grace and His favor. Because He is our Father, and out of gratitude, we should want to do what He tells us to do. He has told us how to live, so it is not good enough to claim a sincere heart toward God if we neglect what He is specifically instructing us. David appeared to be sincere. He was rejoicing and dancing, and they were all having a wonderful time. Then this tragedy struck. I think the point needed to be made that this is a holy God. When He gives instruction, when He speaks, He is to be heard. He is to be obeyed. Do not think that it does not matter. Do not think, as long as my heart is right, no big deal.

That does not mean that God is a legalist who has no understanding for the exigencies of a certain situation. One of the later kings of Israel wants to celebrate a certain feast, but it is out of time with the calendar. He wants it to get it reinstated, so he prays to God and asks that they could do it out of order, and God allows that. It is not like it is a legalistic thing. That king was not being presumptuous. He was both sincere and not presumptuous. Whereas, in this case, I think the celebrants were sincere, but were being presumptuous in their behavior. They were not reading, listening, and doing it the way God said. It is important that we know God's Word and that we live by it. These are the hazards of success. Things were going so well that they forgot to consult the Lord and do it exactly right. In the book of Joshua God said, "Be strong and very courageous, do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth." That is where it is going to take the greatest courage: when you are on top. Be careful that you do not think, now I can play a little fast and loose with God's instructions. We need to hear them there as well.

Some have asked how much Scripture David would have had at his disposal. What would he have been able to read, and what would he have known? There are many open questions and a great diversity of opinion as to when certain books were finalized and Scripture was rated. I will betray my conservatism by simply saying that when we speak of the Pentateuch as the books of Moses, I take that seriously. I would see Moses as the primary individual responsible for those books. I believe he is the primary instrument by which we received the first five books of the Bible. That does not mean that he anticipated

and described in advance his death, for instance, which is recorded at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. That does not mean that everything in those books is necessarily from the pen of Moses or his scribe. But the bulk of those books is from Moses, thus it would have been existent in the time of David. This is an opinion; it is not something that I can prove, but I also think that the former prophets wrote these historical books that we are reading. I think that the prophets were those who spoke God's Word into their societies, saying, "thus saith the Lord." They were also those who commented on history and recorded God's perspective on the events of their day or of days shortly elapsed. That became a building tradition, which ultimately led to a finalized version of the history of Israel as we have it in what is now called the Deuteronomistic History. I better not get into the complexities of how rightly to view the Deuteronomistic History, but I would say that David would have had access to those instructions. He would have had those under his charge who could have alerted him to that and looked it up for him.

The Book of the Law was still available, though not necessarily the Book of the Law that is discovered in the days of Josiah, the book of Deuteronomy. It seems that there are some unanswered questions as to when that Book of the Law may have gone missing and remained unconsulted in Israel's history. We also need to be very careful not to assume modern standards of cross-referencing, direct allusion, and footnoting. If ancient text does not explicitly mention another ancient text, it is easy for us to assume they did not know them. If they knew them, they would have mentioned them. They would have put it in a footnote, or at least there would have been a reading list at the end of the book. That is the way we do academic work today. That is not the way they did it. In fact, often their intertextual allusions are far more subtle and sophisticated than ours are where we simply cite the author, date, and book. Then you can look it up in books in print. The fact that something is not explicitly mentioned in ancient text does not mean that it was unknown. In the history of scholarship, there have been various orderings of the material that we have in the Bible and when it must have come into play by virtue of a lack of mention of it. For instance, the classical writing prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and such, do not constantly cite the Book of Moses. That led some early critics to assume that since they do not cite the Book of the Law, the Book of Moses must not be from Moses. It must have come much later. They concluded that the prophets came first and the Book of the Law came later. Then wisdom came later than that, and they got this relative order of the books. Since that time, however, continuing study has begun to find rather sophisticated allusions to legal material and the assumption of the legal material, even if it is not directly cited.

It may appear that the Lord's anger burned against Uzzah for improperly touching the ark, but not against David for improperly carting it into Jerusalem. Who is to say that the Lord was not also upset with David? We talked earlier about intrusion ethics and how sometimes God overtly intrudes into the context of common grace with a visible expression of how He feels about sin. We could cross reference Ananias and Sapphira in the book of Acts. God may have been and probably was upset with David that he had not overseen the proper carting of the ark. I do not think the point was just Uzzah, but Uzzah's life was forfeited to make a point to the rest of Israel as to what kind of God they were dealing with. God is a good God and a gracious God, so Uzzah may have been escorted into a far better place than ancient Israel at that point. We need not fear that somehow he was done a gross injustice and that it was unfair to him. The loss of our human life is not necessarily the worst thing that could happen to us.

We are to read 2 Samuel 6:13 as implying that the ark was carried properly. "When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf." Some have interpreted that to mean they did that every six steps, which would have been a rather slow process. It is not impossible; they did have a lot of time. They did not watch as much television back then. Life was slower. It is more likely, however, that they took six steps, got into the journey, and then offered

sacrifices. Maybe they were sacrifices of thanksgiving, an appeal for it to continue to go well. They made six paces and then carried it on in. The parallel passage in the book of Chronicles makes it even clearer that the problem was they were carting the ark, and then they began to carry it.

In 2 Samuel 6:14 David is described as wearing a linen ephod and dancing before the Lord with all his might. A linen ephod is typically a priestly garment. Samuel is described as wearing a linen ephod when he was in the household of Eli, who was a priest. Interestingly, David does combine as king some priestly functions. He does not have a Levitical genealogy, but as king there was something special about his relationship with God that seemed to combine some priestly functions. Here he was acting in a priestly capacity dancing before the ark and wearing this linen garment. In a way, there is a typological aspect to the way in which that looks toward Christ, who would be King, Priest, and Prophet. David is described in the New Testament as being a prophet. In a way David does typify the coming Messiah, the coming anointed One who would be a son of David, who would be Prophet, Priest, and King in a far grander way than David ever was. The following kings did not so much serve in that capacity, but then again, they did not typically display the quality of faith that David did either. We will have further looks at those if we ever get to the book of Kings as we move on to the second half of 2 Samuel 6.

Let me say one thing about this episode with Michal. If I were to entitle this, I might entitle this section, "The Price of Being a Fanatic." David was regarded by Michal as a fanatic because of his exuberant behavior. In fact, when he came back from dancing before the ark, she rather sarcastically says in 2 Samuel 6:20, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!" He was down to a priestly garment. In other words, he had divested himself of his royalty in order to humble himself and to celebrate before God. You should not think of David as, pardon the expression, a flasher. He had not disrobed himself in an inappropriate way, I do not think. But Michal did not like the fact that his dignity had in some way been impaired, so she says, "how he has distinguished himself." The word "distinguished" is the word *kabad*, which means to be honored or to be weighty. We do not know whether David's response was a godly response or not. It sort of depends on the inflection with which you read it. He says in verse 21, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel—I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes [in a positive sense]. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor." I will be *kabad*; he uses the same word as Michal used. David says, you are right—I will be honored by them. It is interesting that in 2 Samuel 6:20 we have an explicit epithet, "Michal daughter of Saul." We know she is the daughter of Saul; we have been told that over and over again. Those who read biblical narratives have observed that often when an explicit epithet, or description of the individual, is given even when we already know, it is often to make a point. I think here it is saying Michal, daughter of Saul, is acting just like her father. Michal is acting as her father would have acted. She has the same sense of values.

It is hard to know what might have prompted Michal to adopt this kind of attitude toward David. Maybe it was her bitter experience of having been taken from David and given to Paltiel, who really loved and expressed his love for her, and then was taken back by David. He possibly took her back for nothing more than political reasons; we are not sure. But she was taken back, and Paltiel went along behind her weeping. We cannot push too far into that because the text does not really give us enough evidence to be able to draw conclusions along those lines. It is great stuff if you want to write an historical novel to think about that. We are dealing with real people. Real things like that did happen. It is hard to know for sure, as it is hard to know here whether David's response to Michal was right or wrong. The narrator ends by saying in 2 Samuel 6:23, "And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death." The narrator leaves us uncertain whether this is a judgment of God, who opens and closes the womb as

He closed Hannah's womb and then opened it again. It could be the judgment of David after his comment that "by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor." He may have meant he would have nothing further to do with her. We do not know. It is hard to assess David's behavior here. We do know that he was acting joyfully before the Lord. He should not have been criticized for being humbled and humiliated. That is the right attitude to have. Whether he responded to his wife in the right way, we are not sure.