Katrina Millan

May 2016

Destined to Fail:

A Study of the Biased Characterization of Saul in the Hebrew Bible

Many scholars have found cause to question elements of the King David story, particularly his portrayal as a messiah figure. How is it that all of those who obstruct his claim to the throne end up dead, and why is it that we are reminded so often of his innocence? Much of David's characterization as the hero of the tale is achieved through contrast with the villainous Saul. By calling into question the motives of certain influential characters within the text and those individuals who compiled this piece of literature, we might begin to view Saul as a sympathetic, albeit tragic figure. I intend to argue, by looking very carefully at the influencing factors in Saul's decline, considering the often binary characterization of David and Saul, and by questioning the political inclinations of the text, that Saul was not chosen by God to be king, but was in fact chosen to fail. If one is to read the books of Samuel as does Robert Alter - as a mob tale – there can be seen a clear trajectory of Saul as a patsy, one chosen for defeat for two essential reasons.

Firstly, God wishes to illustrate to his people the serious mistake they have made in insisting upon being ruled by a king. Known for being a jealous and possessive deity, it is not in the least outside of God's character to seek vengeance against those who have forsaken him. Whether for political reasons or otherwise, by demanding that a man rule over them, the people of Israel have diminished the role of God in their lives. In choosing a person of little intelligence

and experience, God has ensured that the king experiment will fail in the eyes of the people. By oppressing this king and doling out punishment unbefitting of his honest errors, God is creating a bitter and vengeful figure for his people to despise, therefore showing them the dangers of kingship.

Having illustrated that their choice to have a man rule them is not beneficial, he then appoints a new ruler, one who is given messiah status, both to correct the error of Saul and to restore his people's faith in him. This leads us to the second essential incentive to villainize Saul: God must engender faith in king David in order to garner trust in himself. By anointing Saul king and then instilling him with "an evil spirit," God has demonstrated to his people the real pitfalls in what they have requested. By anointing David as king, he then restores their faith in him both because he has shown them that he was correct in his admonishment, and because he has delivered them a new and competent savior. The people have faith in David because he is now viewed as their salvation, chosen by God to right the wrong that they have committed for insisting upon having a king.

God does not punish David with the same severity with which he punishes Saul, even when he has committed sins arguably more egregious than those committed by the latter before his hosting of "evil spirits." God, Samuel, and the text itself all seek to comport David as a morally righteous savior figure who can do no wrong, and a large part of that picture is painted via contrast with the evil king Saul. In fact, many of the immoral actions that benefit David are, according to the text, committed by Saul personally or somehow made possible or excusable by his actions.

Although David has no lawful claim to kingship, his and Saul's respective characterizations may cause most readers of the text to find themselves glad that David becomes

king, and even believe that his morally righteous demeanor provides justification for his usurpation of the throne. Of course, a key element in this justification is God's backing of David and rejection of Saul, but if we look at the key facts in the case of Saul vs. David without supernatural interpretation, it can be argued that the individuals who composed and edited the text were, as both Joel Baden and Baruch Halpern put it, "apologizing," or in other words, creating a political spin "to demonstrate the greatness of the protagonist and even his God-given right to the throne despite what we would expect to happen in the normal course of events" (Baden 45). After all, a shepherd boy with no relation to the royal line becoming king is an event that must be explained and justified to the people, and what better way to do so than by giving him a divine right and demonizing the king whose throne he took? By looking at their individual actions and how they are treated by the text, I hope to demonstrate that there is an unmistakable bias towards David, achieved through the denouncement of Saul, for both political and religious reasons, both within the world of the text and outside of it.

I. Saul within the Text

Although many individuals may view David favorably and Saul as a villain, Marti J. Steussy points out that "...if we were to compare Saul and David over the course of their entire careers (rather than the moment of Saul's downfall and David's rise), the contrasts and comparisons might work out rather differently" (Steussy 52-53). When the text first introduces Saul, he is a "fine and goodly young fellow, and no man of the Israelites was goodlier than he" (Alter 46). This does not quite seem like the description of an individual who is constitutionally evil, nor is it the description of somebody who would necessarily be a great leader. God tells Samuel that Saul will "…deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines," and indeed Saul is

an adept military man, but God does not mention his love for the man, nor does he make assurances regarding his rule; God makes no covenant with Saul. One must begin at this point to question the motives of the Lord in the text. If he is to be understood as infallible, then it must be understood that he has specific intentions for Saul, for it cannot be denied that Saul rises to power by God's command. As Steussy writes,

> ...although most readers understand Samuel and especially God to be contrasting God's choice of David with somebody else's choice of Saul, 1 S 9-11 states clearly that God – not Samuel and not the people, however much they may concur – selects Saul…This God is not merely informed about the state of Saul's heart, but specifically controls it (Steussy 50).

The passage in which God clearly controls Saul's heart is 1 Samuel 10:9, which states, "And it happened as [Saul] turned his back to go off from Samuel, that God gave him another heart…" Of what nature is this new heart?

Throughout the narrative it is made clear that God is pulling all the strings. It is he who chooses Saul, who gives Saul a new heart, who plagues Saul with evil spirits, who instructs Samuel to anoint David in secret, and who decides upon and administers punishment. Thus Saul, whether inexperienced and afraid or raving mad, is under the influence of divine will. As Steussy points out, although Saul is rejected by God, the former never turns away from his deity:

> Bereft of divine support - indeed beset by an evil spirit - he must still govern and protect the people. If it was ever true that God's rejection was caused by Saul's sins, it is true no longer. From 1 S 16 forward, it is the other way around: God's rejection seems to *cause* Saul's sins. Although we hear repeatedly that God has turned from Saul, we are never told that Saul turns from God (Steussy 86).

In fact, we are told that Saul has "cast aside the word of the Lord" (1 Samuel 15:26), but the source of this information is Samuel, who, by the influence of God, tells Saul that he will fail. If the argument is to be made that God never intended for Saul to succeed as a ruler, then it must be taken into account that Samuel, who is a prophet and servant of God, is helping to carry out this involved plot. It must also be noted that Samuel had appointed his own unworthy sons as judges, and they had been rejected by the people in favor of king Saul; Samuel has his own reasons for wanting Saul to fail.

Therefore, Samuel might be understood to be both painting an unsavory public image of Saul, as well as playing on the latter's insecurities in order to ensure his failure. "Though you may be small in your own eyes," Samuel says to Saul, "you are the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD has anointed you king over Israel." Here we have a rare characterization of Saul as a person of little self-esteem, as well as yet another confirmation that God chose him to be king. At this point in the narrative, we have seen Saul wandering haplessly looking for his father's donkeys (which he did not find himself) we have seen him hiding in order to avoid being made king, we have seen him make honest mistakes for which he immediately tries to repent, and we have heard that he does not think very highly of himself. If one were to gather this information and attempt to describe Saul's character before it is contrasted with David's, one might say that he is an unintelligent man doing his best to perform a job he did not want and knew he would not be able to do well, all the while being told that he is not doing well by the man who forced it upon him.

Furthermore, as Steussy puts it, "God's rejection seems to *cause* Saul's sins" (Steussy 86). The most concrete evidence to this end can be found in 1 Samuel 16: "And the spirit of the LORD had turned away from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD had struck terror in him" (1

Samuel 16:14-15). Thus far, God has given Saul a new heart, turned away from him, and filled him with an evil spirit. In the greater narrative of Saul, it seems as though God performs more of the action than he does, and in this case one can argue that the blame readers place on Saul is a direct consequence of the denial of God's manipulation. Of this matter, Steussy states, "Uncomfortable as it may be, especially for those schooled in the dogmatic interpretive tradition, it seems that the narrator of the Samuel books - and more largely the narrative voice of the primary history - offers us reason to question divine consistency and justice" (Steussy 89). She goes on to argue that God does not necessarily punish the wicked and reward the good, and that all textual evidence to the contrary is provided by mortals and not by God himself.

If we are to understand that God's motivations in his treatment of Saul might lie outside of the stringent morality-based system of punishment and reward most readers have come to expect, the evil spirits that plague Saul take on new meaning. He is moved by God to madness, and then rejected and punished for his actions in that madness. What purpose must this serve, aside from teaching the people of Israel a lesson and setting the stage for David, who in direct opposition is "gripped" by the "spirit of the LORD" at the time of his anointing (1 Samuel 16:13)?

Saul's and David's respective anointments and public debuts provide excellent evidence of God and Samuel's favoritism. Both of them are anointed out of public view, but David is anointed in the presence of his family, after he has been deemed the best out of all of his brothers. Saul's anointment takes place in the span of one sentence, without his prior knowledge or consent: "And Samuel took the cruse of oil and poured it over his head and kissed him, and he said, 'Has not the LORD anointed you over His inheritance as prince?'" (1 Samuel 10:1-2). Here Samuel uses the same language that was given to him by God, referring to Saul as "prince"

rather than “king,” despite the fact that the position that he is to hold is a kingship. In opposition, God sends Samuel to anoint David, saying “I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have seen Me among his sons a king” (1 Samuel 16:1-2). David is given precedence as soon as he arrives on the scene, and at several points prior. Immediately preceding David’s anointment, Samuel says to Saul, “The LORD has torn away the kingship of Israel from you this day and given it to your fellowman, who is better than you” (1 Samuel 15:28). Earlier in the narrative, before David is even mentioned by God or Samuel, Saul commits an honest mistake and Samuel says to him “The LORD has already sought out for Himself a man after His own heart and the LORD has appointed him prince to his people, for you have not kept what the LORD commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:14). This is not exactly inspiring language, and these moments can be viewed as Samuel’s attempts to break Saul’s confidence.

Furthermore, in the same breath with which Samuel informs Saul that he is now “prince,” he begins a long-winded explanation of where exactly Saul is to go and how exactly he is to behave when he gets there. Noting the reasoning of scholar Robert Polzin, Robert Alter argues that “This elaborate set of instructions and predictions is…a strategy for asserting continued control over the man Samuel has just anointed. Every predictive step manifests Samuel’s superior knowledge as prophet, and all the instructions reduce the new king to Samuel’s puppet” (Alter 53). Indeed, Saul is Samuel’s puppet; he follows his every word, and when he mistakenly acts outside of Samuel’s orders, he is admonished and rejected by God through Samuel. Even when he has reached utter defeat, he seeks the council of the deceased prophet.

Juxtaposed to this episode of commandment and control is the anointment of David, toward which end Samuel must seek out the new king under the guise of sacrificing with Jesse and his sons. He must look each one over before David is sent for and God tells him that it is he

who shall rule. In other words, Samuel must *work* to find David and anoint him king; he is no longer the puppet master, but rather a meek prophet, afraid of execution at the hands of king Saul, and who at God's will must risk his life to seek out the new king. Thus at the advent of their respective narratives, Saul is deemed an unwitting follower and David is crowned as the people's deliverance from the former's hands.

David is favored before he even says his first words in the text, and this favoritism is blatant and damaging. When he is publicly made king, all the tribes of Israel gather and say to him, "'Here we are, your bone and flesh are we. Time and again in the past when Saul was king over us you were the one who led Israel into the fray, and the LORD said to you, 'It is you who will shepherd My people Israel and it is you who will be prince over Israel'" (2 Samuel 5:1-2). His greatness is expressed by contrast with Saul, furthering the argument that both the compilers of the narrative and the God within the narrative construct Saul as a villain as a means to glorify David.

This public exaltation stands in direct contrast to Saul's public inauguration. Samuel begins this ceremony with an admonishment: "And you on your part have cast aside your God Who delivers you from all your ills and troubles, and you have said 'No! A king you shall put over us!' And so, stand forth before the LORD by your tribes and your clans" (1 Samuel 10:19-20). He is not celebrating Saul's goodness or his appointment by God – in fact, he does not tell the people that Saul has already been anointed – rather, he is describing what sounds like a punishment. Saul is retrieved from among the gear where he hides like a child afraid of being disciplined, and his height is the only quality mentioned that sets him apart from the rest.

The chapter ends on a low note, as some of the Israelites say to one another "'How will this one deliver us?' And they spurned him and brought him no tribute, but he pretended to keep

his piece" (1 Samuel 10:27). One could pose the argument that this seeming non-sequitur is actually quite a vital moment in terms of Saul's development. Here we have a character who knows that he is not prepared to be king, who hides to avoid the responsibility, seeing the doubt of his people first hand and knowing that he must pretend not to take it to heart. If the mortal people of Israel know that Saul will fail, how is it possible that God does not?

Saul does not begin as a villain. He is a man who is forced to accept a responsibility that everyone around him – the people, Samuel, and even God – knows he cannot handle, and then he is pushed aside for a better alternative. Feelings of worthlessness, jealousy, regret and anger are inescapable human phenomena, and both God and Samuel seem to exacerbate these in Saul intentionally. The truth of the matter is that Saul is an extremely gifted military man, both in terms of strategy and force. This does not necessarily indicate that he is fit for political leadership, but in terms of his acts of delivering Israel from its enemies, if not for his kingship, it may have placed him among the judges. Baden notes that

> Israel under Saul was more a permanent military alliance than a proper political state, and Saul was more commander in chief than king: the Bible ascribes to Saul no role on the national stage other than as leader of the army. Indeed, his only recorded acts before David's arrival on the scene are set in a military context, just as was the case with the judges who preceded him (Baden 49).

Robert Alter also draws a comparison between Saul and the judges, commenting on the fact that "the spirit of God seized Saul" when he goes up against the Ammonites by suggesting that "the story here explicitly follows the model of the inception of the charismatic leader's career in Judges, when a kind of berserker spirit enters him and ignites him with eagerness to do battle"

(Alter 61). Perhaps this obvious correlation is one explanation of Samuel's dislike and distrust of Saul, as his own sons' failures as judges factor into Israel's need for a king.

Furthermore, Saul's military prowess is the one skill that he is praised for by the people and by Samuel. This praise, however, is mitigated by negativity in every instance, thereby keeping his confidence in check, and in the case of Saul's victory over the Ammonites, Samuel's bias becomes apparent. After his victory, the people rejoice in Saul's kingship, and in a show of confidence and loyalty demand that all those who doubted him should be put to death. Saul, showing humility and mercy and attributing his victory to God, refuses, and enjoys a rare celebration at Gilgal where his kingship is renewed. This is the only point in Saul's narrative where it is explicitly mentioned that he is happy, and it is because of his faith, because of his victory, and because of the new confidence he has inspired in his people. This happiness is short-lived, however, as Samuel uses the opportunity to air his grievances with the people in their support of Saul.

In direct contrast to the end of 1 Samuel 11, and possibly in order to counteract the celebration of Saul, 1 Samuel 12 begins with an angry Samuel seeming to express to the people that in their love of Saul, they have forsaken him and God, even though it was God who chose Saul and Samuel who presented him to the people. He says to all of Israel:

> "Look, I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me and have set a king over you. And so now the king walks before you and I have grown old and gray, and my sons, they are here with you, and I have walked before you from me youth till this day. Here I am! Witness against me before the LORD and before His anointed. Whose ox have I taken and whose donkey have I taken, whom have I wronged and whom have I abused, and

from whose hand have I taken a bribe to avert my eyes from him? I shall return it to you" (1 Samuel 12:1-3).

This tirade seems to be an accusation of sorts, in which Samuel is condemning the people of Israel for choosing Saul over him and his sons, driving home the point that Israel should not have insisted upon a kingship while also revealing his own personal motivations for the villainizing of Saul. "It does seem in character for Samuel" writes Robert Alter, "that he would end up converting the coronation assembly into still another diatribe against the monarchy and an apologia for his own authority as prophet-judge" (Alter 65). Thus Samuel mitigates the celebration of Saul with a reminder that the people have wronged him and have wronged God, perhaps as a two-fold attempt to both air his own grievances and keep Saul in his place.

The language used in this passage is very telling of Samuel's true motivation, especially his use of particular prepositions and locators. At first his mention of his sons seems entirely aimless, but when viewed in conjunction with the manner in which he addresses the respective locations of the king, himself, and the people, his cleverly veiled intentions become clear. He states that he has set a king "over" the people, which can be interpreted easily enough to mean that the king has power over them. He repeats this idea with the phrase "the king walks before you," which may at first seem expectedly redundant, until viewed in light of the fact that he goes on to say that he has "walked before [the people] from my youth until this day." With one adept use of rhetoric he has equated his own previous position of power with that of the king, and the fact that he is "old and gray" can be seen as his assent that he must pass on the mantle. He does not wish to pass that mantle on to Saul however, and this can be gleaned from the fact that immediately after he states that he is "old and gray," he mentions, "my sons, they are here with you." Linguistically speaking, he has now placed his sons among the people, and has presented a

coded lament that they so not walk before the people as he himself did. When he states “Here I am,” he is not only invoking his own answer to God’s calling in perhaps a forlorn light, he is also placing himself among the people with his sons, devoid of any real power and jealous for it. Samuel does not want Saul to be in a position of power, and perhaps this is why he admonishes him so harshly when he errs.

The sins that Saul commits that cause God to turn away from him are so obviously brought about by honest human error that one certainly has cause to question whether they are merely used as an excuse for Samuel and for the text to denounce him. Steussy justifiably asks, “Where did Saul sin? Even casual readers sense the lack of proportion in 1 S 13’s condemnation” (Steussy 85). His first offense is that of offering a sacrifice without waiting for the proper time, but the text clearly states that “he waited seven days for the fixed time Samuel had set, and Samuel did not come” (1 Samuel 13:8). Either Samuel did not specify in definite terms what time he would arrive, or he arrived late, leaving Saul to fend for himself. Understanding that Samuel does not want Saul to succeed also raises the question of whether or not this was direct sabotage. In whatever case, the blame falls on Samuel, and yet even after Saul has explained himself, Samuel warns that because of this error, “your kingdom shall not stand” (1 Samuel 13:14). Steussy is quite right in calling attention to the disproportion of Saul’s punishment for this action.

Again, in 1 Samuel 15, Saul makes a grave mistake in not following the word of God precisely. He is told to slaughter an entire people and put all of the booty under the ban, but he spares a man who did a service for the people of Israel and saved the best of the banned items to sacrifice to God. While it is true that Samuel gives him explicit instructions, it could be argued, as Steussy puts it, that

> the issue is again one of interpretation rather than egregious disobedience. God has commanded that the spoil be *hrm* (15:3). This clearly requires that none of it be kept by human parties – thus NRSV's 'utterly destroy.' But must destruction take place immediately, at the battle site? Samuel and God apparently consider this to be the case. Saul, on the other hand, has brought captured livestock and his prisoner to an official sanctuary, Gilgal – quite in line with his explanation that he means to sacrifice them there and hardly…where one would stash personal booty taken against God's command (Steussy 86).

It bears mentioning, also, that in each case Saul's mistake had to do with sacrifice. God does not speak directly to Saul, and so he must get his information second-hand form Samuel, who does not like him and begrudges his position as king. It could be argued that in both cases, Saul is making honest attempts to get closer to God, but through a lack of understanding, has missed the mark. "Saul appears to be acting in good faith," writes Steussy, "but neither Samuel nor God shows any interest in hearing Saul's side of the case or ameliorating the verdict" (Steussy 86). If Saul's downfall is a planned event, the severity of his punishment would serve not only to diminish his status in the eyes of his people and in his own perception of himself, but would also provide reason to begin dismantling his claim to kingship to make way for David.

II. The Text as Political Spin

To argue that God and Samuel are setting Saul up to fail in order to make David look good is to argue that the text itself attempts to show David in a good light. Considering that Saul

was anointed king and did his duty in protecting his people quite well, and that David was a shepherd who, for all intents and purposes, usurped the throne, any text that might attempt to present the latter favorably would necessarily have to denounce the former to provide justification. As Baden puts it,

> In virtually every part of the text….the program is identical to that of the first two chapters: to demonstrate that David is righteous, innocent of any wrongdoing, and fit to be the king who inaugurates a glorious dynasty - despite the fact that he, born to a shepherd in Bethlehem, had no obvious right to the throne. In this, the David narrative belongs to a well-established ancient literary genre: the apology (Baden 44).

As previously mentioned, a large part of the characterization of David as a righteous man is dependent on contrast with Saul. If the aim of the text is to simultaneously denigrate Saul and commend David, the question must be asked: what is the text apologizing for, and why is it so necessary to cast Saul in a bad light?

The most apparent answer to this question is that the text is presented in such a way as to legitimize David's rule in the eyes of his people. Both Baden and Halpern argue that the story of David was written during his rule. "…recognizing the text as an apology allows us to date it to a period roughly contemporary with the times it describes." writes Baden. "An apology needs to explain events that its audience knows happened…" (Baden 46). If the people were aware that a simple shepherd had taken over, not even allowing the royal lineage to continue for one generation, an explanation had to be provided and David's claim had to be legitimized. The text takes every opportunity to do this, even going so far has creating a great love between David and Saul's son Jonathan, who truly had a claim to the kingship. Halpern states that "…Jonathan (and later, Saul) actually recognizes the legitimacy of David's claim on the succession - a sure sign

that the literature stems from the Jerusalem court" (Halpern 280). Perhaps part of the reason that we are reminded so often that David loves Jonathan and that the latter supported the former's claim is that the text is seeking to make it perfectly explicit that David did not kill Jonathan, or any of Saul's lineage for that matter.

In regard to the question of David's extermination of Saul and his family, Halpern states that "The concern to assert David's credentials arises from several concerns. First, David was known to have eradicated almost the entire House of Saul, and perhaps even the majority of Saul's extended family and its relations, his clan section. One of the accusations made against him was that he colluded with the Philistines in their conflict with Saul" (Halpern 281). Interestingly, it is Halpern's belief that David "not only started out as a Philistine agent, he remained their ally throughout his reign" (Halpern 281). Evidence of this can be found in the apologetic nature of the text, which once again uses Saul as its ready-made scapegoat.

If Saul, who was adept at military matters, had delivered the people of Israel from the Philistines time and again, and David was in fact in alliance with them, then in order to legitimize David the text must not only make him a more voracious warrior than Saul, but also must illustrate fully his hatred of the Philistines. Thus we have the famous underdog tale of David and Goliath, wherein David rejects sword and armor and defeats the giant with only a slingshot and a rock, by which the text seeks to paint David as a valiant hero who is able to beat unbelievable odds with God at his side. It also diminishes Saul in his inability to do the same, and because, as Alter points out, "Thematically, heroic fitness will be seen to reside in something other than being head and shoulders taller than all the people, or six cubits tall, like Goliath" (Alter 108). This is bad news for the hulking Saul, whose only qualification for kingship in the eyes of the people, according to the text, is his height.

David's gathering of two hundred Philistine foreskins is also meant to display his hatred for the enemies of his people. Again, his greatness is shown by contrast with Saul. In what is perhaps a clever reversal, the text states that by asking for the bride price of one hundred Philistine foreskins, "Saul had devised to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 18:25-26). The text succeeds not only in making Saul out to be a villainous figure, but in asserting that David has collected twice the amount of foreskins that Saul assumed would get him killed, it reaffirms the fact that David is a more intrepid warrior than he.

This is a concept touched upon quite often in the text, its most obvious manifestation in the ditty "Saul has struck down thousands and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). Baden argues that "The people's love for David, as the Bible presents it, is both comparative and political. It is not just that he is a great military leader; he is a greater military leader than even Saul…Saul's reputation was built on his military prowess. Yet in a matter of mere moments, at least narratively, David exceeded Saul by a factor of ten" (Baden 53). Is it not suspect that David is so often portrayed as disproportionally "better" than Saul in the eyes of the people, the prophets, and God? Baden goes on to point out that each of David's victories in battle is immediately followed by an attempt on his life by Saul, a tactic meant to highlight both David's prowess and Saul's envy.

Furthermore, Baden questions whether or not many of these battles actually took place. He writes, "David wins battle after battle against Israel's great enemy, yet he never seems to make any progress in the broader war…For one thing, the reports of David's victories lack any details: not a single town or territory is named. We are only told that David was successful" (Baden 54-55). If we are to view the text as an apology, this might be viewed as further evidence

of David's collaboration with the Philistines, or at the very least it should give readers reason to question the motives of the text in its portrayal of David.

Whether or not readers choose to acknowledge the fact that the historical Saul and David may not have been the people that they are presented as in the Hebrew Bible, it cannot be denied that their respective characterizations are very deliberate and often quite binary. It is not in the least unreasonable to assert that the story of David is a kind of propaganda intended to justify his kingship, and that the perfect scapegoat for his misdeeds might have been the king whose throne he usurped. This is not to say that this story is not timeless and beautiful, only that through careful consideration one might begin to ask questions that trouble the legitimacy of the characters presented. Was David truly a great warrior? Did he kill Saul and his family? Was Saul truly a bad man, or just a king destined by divine will to fail? We may never know the answers to these questions, but the nature of the Hebrew Bible is such that asking them provides a rich and complex reading that rewards as it complicates.

Works Cited

Alter, Robert. *The David Story : A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. Print.

Baden, Joel S. *The Historical David : The Real Life of an Invented Hero.*First edition. New York, NY: HarperOne an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2013. Print.

Halpern, Baruch. *David's Secret Demons : Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King.*Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001. Print.

Steussy, Marti J. *David : Biblical Portraits of Power.* Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1999. Print.