







From the Window: Liberating Michal Through a Prophetic Reading of 1-2 Samuel Harley Burgers

- ▶ 1 Samuel 14:49, 18:17-28
- ▶ 1 Samuel 19:11-17
- ▶ 1 Samuel 25:44
- 2 Samuel 3:13-16

- ▶ 1 Samuel 14:49, 18:17-28
- ▶ 1 Samuel 19:11-17
- ▶ 1 Samuel 25:44
- 2 Samuel 3:13-16

Daughter?

- ▶ 1 Samuel 14:49, 18:17-28
- ▶ 1 Samuel 19:11-17
- ▶ 1 Samuel 25:44
- 2 Samuel 3:13-16

Daughter?

Wife?

- ▶ 1 Samuel 14:49, 18:17-28
- ▶ 1 Samuel 19:11-17
- ▶ 1 Samuel 25:44
- 2 Samuel 3:13-16

Daughter?

Wise?

Wife?

- ▶ 1 Samuel 14:49, 18:17-28
- ▶ 1 Samuel 19:11-17
- ▶ 1 Samuel 25:44
- 2 Samuel 3:13-16

Daughter?

Wise?

Wife?

Foolish?

- ▶ 1 Samuel 14:49, 18:17-28
- ▶ 1 Samuel 19:11-17
- ▶ 1 Samuel 25:44
- ▶ 2 Samuel 3:13-16

Subject?

Daughter?

Wise?

Wife?

Foolish?

- ▶ 1 Samuel 14:49, 18:17-28
- ▶ 1 Samuel 19:11-17
- ▶ 1 Samuel 25:44
- ▶ 2 Samuel 3:13-16

Subject?

Object?

Daughter?

Wise?

Wife?

Foolish?

As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart. (2 Sam. 6:16 NRSV)

David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!" David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD, that I have danced before the LORD. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death. (2 Sam. 6:20-23)

Who do we think Michal is?

"To Michal, Saul's daughter and David's wife, the public exposure and frenzied actions of a religious ecstatic seemed beneath the dignity of a king... How tragically, but typically, she failed to understand the obligations of high office. David understood more clearly, however, that his responsibilities were first to God and then to his people."

Ben Philbeck, Broadman Bible Commentary

(unfortunately feminist scholarship is not much better)

What if Michal was right?

- We are left to assume Michal's feelings from one encounter to another. > Her change of heart is probably mentioned here for a reason.
- Michal and David understand the situation in vastly different ways, as evidenced by their language:

גָלָה [galah]

ריק [reyk]

to uncover oneself empty, vain usually in terms of sometimes empty nudity, denoting vessels, lacking shame (Moses) substance

<u>VS</u>

שַׁבְל [shaphal]

low, humble
when referring to
people, often in priestly
or holy positions

What if Michal was right?

- Michal's refrain is an intentional critique of kingship and power structures devoid of justice (Morse).
- Celebrating crowds of women are a known mark of David's conflict with Saul (1 Sam. 18:7-8, 21:11, 29:5) > this makes David's dance seem more self-indulgent than devout.
- Human kings were never going to work out anyway (1 Sam. 8).
- David is reprimanded for similar behavior by YHWH in 2 Sam.
 7:4-11.

What about the curse?

- Michal may have refused David (though this, culturally, is unlikely).
- The end of Saul's line may be the intention (most likely an end brought about by David's choice).
- A divine curse is very unlikely.
 - YHWH is not mentioned in connection.
 - Usually YHWH corrects barrenness, rather than causing it.
 - A divine curse would be contradictory.

Conclusions

- Interpreting Michal as a passive allegorical device, an example of a "bad woman," or a damsel in distress does the text a grave disservice.
- If 2 Samuel 6 reflects the sentiments of the prophet Samuel, Michal's perspective is most likely the perspective that we are supposed to identify as correct.
- Michal, by calling out David's vapidness and projecting his failures, acts prophetically.
- At the very least, Michal is a powerful, vocal character.



David and Michal, engraving by Calzi from a painting by Francesco Podesti