

The Secret Chord Study Guide

The Secret Chord by Geraldine Brooks

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Plot Summary

The following version of *The Secret Chord* was used to create this guide: Brooks, Geraldine. *The Secret Chord*. New York: Viking, 2015.

The Secret Chord by Geraldine Brooks is a historical fiction novel that follows the life of King David of Israel. The place and character names used throughout the book use the transliteration from the Hebrew of the Tanakh. The more familiar English spellings are listed in the Characters section of this guide for reference.

The story begins with Natan the prophet setting out to chronicle the life of King David - the good and the bad. The history is to include not simply the records of battle, judgments and shifts of political change, but also to serve as evidence to the character and choices of the man himself. Natan knows much about the king's history and rise to power since he has served him for most of his own life. He does however interview three people who shed light on additional aspects of his life.

From David's mother, Nizevet, Natan learns about David's early days as a shepherd on the hillside outside of Beit Lehem and how he came to be anointed as the next king by Shmuel, the prophet before him. Shammah, his brother, tells about David's famous win over the Philistine champion Goliath and how he became a favored member of King Shaul's court. David's love relationships with Yonatan and Mikhal, Shaul's son and daughter are given a place in the story as David falls from Shaul's graces and is forced to run for his life. Fleeing to a fortress town in the Philistine territories, David and his men raid Amalekite villages, sharing the plunder with loyal supporters in Judah. When Saul and Yonatan are both killed in a battle with the Philistines, David returns to Hebron where he is officially anointed by the people to be the King of Judah.

David then orchestrates the reunification of the nation. He bargains with Avner the former general of Shaul's forces to bring the northern tribe of Israel under his rule. Included in the bargaining is the return of his first wife Mikhal, who had been sent away from him by Shaul. Once anointed king of all Israel, David sets his eyes on establishing a more centralized capital. Through careful planning and cunning, he and his men take the well-fortified city of Gethse and transform it into Jerusalem. The King expands the city and doubles its size. David brings the Ark of the Covenant into the city in order to centralize worship for his people.

However, David's life hits a turning point. One night his sensual desires master him and he takes Bathsheba, another man's wife to bed. Her resulting pregnancy cannot be covered up easily, so he has the man, a captain in his army, murdered. Natan confronts David with his sin whereupon he immediately repents before the Name. However, there are consequences to the sin and Natan delivers the message of a fourfold repayment – four lives among the family of David will be touched by violence or death. The deaths of David's newborn son, the murders of his two older sons Amnon and Avshalom and the rape of his daughter Tamar all occur during the next several years of David's reign.



The one bright light that remains in David's life is the birth of another son through Batsheva. Shmolo is a bright and sensitive young boy who seeks after knowledge and wisdom. He is guided in his education by Natan who teaches him all that he can and seeks out other teachers for the boy as well. As Shmolo nears manhood and David is failing in his old age, two of his brothers attempt to overthrow their father's throne at various times. The first time, Avshalom's rebellion is put down and he is murdered. During the second attempt by Adoniyah, Natan and Batsheva move to get Shmolo placed on the throne instead, telling David to declare his son Shmolo as his successor. As Shmolo is anointed, David hears the horns and the cries of his people celebrating a new King who he knows will lead his people with wisdom and honor.



Introduction - Chapter 5

Summary

The novel begins in the home of Natan, the prophet of King David of Israel, as he wakes near the construction site of the temple in Jerusalem. He hears the laborers hard at work but knows that he will not live to see its completion. He feels this is best, because he would not like to see it anyway without King David present, since it was he who conceived the plan to build the house of The Lord. He states that he is glad that at least he was able to complete his own life's work, the task of serving the Lord and His anointed King as well as write down the story of the King's life. In this way, the fullness of the King's life will be known - the light and the dark. Here, Natan tells the story of how this chronicle was written.

The story of David opens as Natan was summoned to the King's chamber while it was still dark outside. He waited in the antechamber and heard men arguing inside. Soon, Yoav, the King's nephew and general, stormed out and warned him of the King's foul mood. Natan entered to find that David was angry that his generals were heading off to war without him, believing that they no longer felt confident of his leadership in battle. Natan recalls a recent moment during a battle when a spearman nearly killed David. One of the young nephews, jumped in front of the spear and deflected it, saving the King's life. David was angry that he led his army through many great battles and now they seemed to not need him out in front any longer.

David asked Natan if he agreed with Yoav's idea to work with Natan to chronicle his life. Natan told him that he did not feel that there should be an accounting of his battles and decisions made concerning his rule over Israel. He felt that such information was easily done by anyone and would be a part of any history of a nation. He did believe, however, that it was important for people to know of the true nature of a great man's life - to know the man, not merely the deeds. The king considered Natan's words as he soothed his agitated spirit by playing his harp. He agreed to consider the matter further and sent Natan away. The following day, David sent a message to Natan to begin the work by interviewing three people whose names he had inscribed on a tablet. One was Mikhal, David's first wife, another, Shammah, one of David's older brothers and finally, Nizevet, a woman in Shammah's household. Natan set out to speak with Nizevet and Shammah the next day.

As he travels, Natan recalls how the roads used to be dangerous places for a single traveler. However, since David had become King he had subjugated the bandits that dwelt in the hills having been one himself. Natan remembers when he first met David. As a young boy watching his father's goats on the mountainside, Natan had fallen asleep. He was woken by the young David, then roaming the land as an outlaw and being chased by the then-King, Saul. David asked Natan to take a message to his father and his village, requesting the provision of food for his men and their families. While gathering his goats, Natan met Avigail, one of David's wives. She warned Natan



to heed David's request and make sure that it is taken seriously, knowing that trouble will come to the village if they do not provide the food. Natan, told his father the request. The townsmen met and argued about supporting an outlaw. After two days, another request was sent. When no food was delivered, David came in the night and killed Natan's father and uncle. As Natan approached David, walking through his father's blood, he suddenly spoke words of prophesy, words unknown to him. He then collapsed in David's arm and awoke in his tent, attended by Avigail. From that moment on, Natan became David's prophet and he kept him close, in his household. Natan later learned that he had promised David a throne and an empire and line that would not fail. Natan no longer associated with his own family, but became David's man and grew to live the life of a prophet of God.

Natan travelled to Beit Lehem (Bethlehem) to the household of Shammah where he was coarsely greeted. He was surprised that Shammah was aware that he was coming, but learned that David had sent word ahead of him, ordering Shammah and Nizevet to speak with Natan and tell all. From Shammah, Natan learned that Nizevet was David's mother. Although shaken and frail, Nizevet came down to the courtyard and sat with Natan to be interviewed. She was willing to tell her story of David's early years because she was ordered to do so.

Nizevet revealed that David was spurned by his father from the very beginning. His brothers also treated him poorly, spitting in his drinks and putting gall in his food. At age six, David's father sent him away to live on his own in the hills tending the sheep, with only a small hut for shelter. David was allowed home only to gather new supplies. He fashioned a rough harp and learned to play and sing out on the mountains. He learned to listen to what was happening around him in the silence. Nizevet tried to give him as much love as she could when he returned home, feeding him well and bathing him, cutting his hair and providing him with new clothes.

Nizevet told Natan that her husband Yishai (Jesse), David's father, was a good and upright man, despite the content of the revelation. He had promised Nizevet that he would not take another wife, but only love her. Yet, as the years went on his eyes wandered to another young girl, Nizevet's maid, who looked much like Nizevet, especially when she was younger. He no longer slept with his wife, had declared their marriage as unlawful and she had returned to her father's house. In his lust, he desired to sleep with the maid. Unwilling to be a party to this sin which would make her in turn unable to lawfully wed another and have children, the maid turned to Nizevet. The two women conspired to switch places in the night. Yishai then lay with his wife unknowingly and she became pregnant with David that very night. Because of his guilt over his sin, he begged Nizevet to return to their home. But because he had not been living with her, he assumed that the child she carried was conceived in adultery. He did not speak of it to the congregation in the synagogue. Years later, Nizevet finally told Yishai that David was his very own son, but it made no difference since it reminded him of his own moment of weakness and sin.

Nizevet then recounted how King Shaul (Saul) became king and fought for Israel as well as how the kingdom was torn from him. She told how the prophet Shmuel came to their



house on the Lord's instruction to anoint one of their sons as the next King of Israel. She recalled the disbelief and disappointment as each son was passed over and dismissed. Finally, David was fetched from the fields and anointed by Shmuel. He spent the night at home and then returned to the sheep. Nizevet finished her story and bade Natan farewell.

Natan remained at the compound overnight waiting to speak with Shammah. Finally waking after a night of drunkenness, Shammah sat to tell his part of the story. His disdain for David was great as well as his disbelief that Natan was a true prophet of God. He stated his clear view that Natan was playacting his prophecy the first time he spoke to David merely to save his own life. He proceeded to tell about how David came on the scene in the Wadi Elah as the Israelites fought the Plishtim army. He portrayed David as a scheming braggart who tried to make a better place for himself by attempting to kill Goliath, the giant of a man who was the Plishtim's champion. Shammah spoke of David's yelling to Goliath that God was with the Israelites and that He would win the battle for them. David hit Goliath in the head with a stone from his slingshot. Goliath fell to his knees and David rushed forward, grabbed Goliath's sword and decapitated him. The Plishtim army fled as the Israelites pursued. David was welcomed into Shaul's court and was especially greeted by his son Yonatan. Shammah spoke of a sexual relationship that then began between the two young men. Shammah also talked of not being included in the court, but later joining David once he was on the run from Shaul. Sick of talking about his brother, Shammah dismissed Natan and sent him home.

Natan rode back to the palace in the evening. When he arrived his servant told him that David was not himself. For the entire day he had not eaten, did no work and received no reports from the battlefield. Natan decided to go and see the king and try to speak with him; however, David was not in his chamber. Natan left word with the attendant that he wished to speak with the king. As he waited through the night, Natan had stomach pains and a headache which usually came before he had a vision. But that night, no vision came. Years later he understood why. He then recounts where he typically went when he himself needed counsel and advice. Since his early days in David's camp, Natan learned from Avigail. This wife of David's had insight and wisdom that David highly valued and he instructed Natan to learn from her. Natan also learned to write from Seraiah, a former scribe in Shaul's service. He also mentioned David's other wives, Ahinoam and Mikhal. He learned from Avigail that she was not jealous of these other women, but of one of Saul's other children.

Analysis

As the novel begins, Brooks quickly paints a picture of the contrasts of character that exist within David, a theme that not only runs throughout the story, but is in fact the primary purpose of why David agrees to have his life story chronicled. As Natan approaches a King who is angry that he is not going off to war. Natan recalls the battle in which David's life is saved by a younger soldier. As a result, the generals decide that perhaps it is time for David to remain at home and allow the younger men to continue into the fray.



Recalling the battle, the language that is used is very graphic highlighting the brutality of war. Screaming men thrusting swords and spears fill the pages. Yet the language Brooks uses is somehow beautiful as well. She describes David stabbing an enemy in the gut and pushing him off a ledge. The man plummets to the ground with "his entrails unfurling after him like a glossy ribband" (9). Brooks uses a simile of a beautiful ribbon dancing in the air to create a picture of the man's intestines falling out of him, a beautiful image that is not typically associated with such a gruesome situation. And again, to describe how Natan himself kills one man, she writes, "I felt the warm wetness of his insides closing about my fist. It was intimate as a rape" (9). The juxtaposition of the words intimate and rape contrast between something beautiful and something horrific.

This type of language exemplifies the contrast that exists in David, the warrior who is also a sensitive, creative musician. As he and Natan are having this discussion about writing the history, David begins to play on his harp, allowing the music to help him think. Brooks demonstrates vividly the stark contrast between the brutality of the warrior King and the sensitivity of the musician who creates from the depths of his soul. It is these contrasts that David will allow to be exposed and written about in his chronicle.

David instructs Natan to interview three people prior to writing his chronicle. Natan has been present for much of David's rise to power, but he is unaware of the early years of David's life. The King knows that the story must contain everything. He is also aware that there is much to be said that will not be positive and may open up old wounds within his family. The part of the story is important however because they form the foundation of David's life. Brooks uses the metaphor of a vine to illustrate the importance of going back to the beginning. When a vine grows healthy and strong it places a firm grip on those around it, taking life from them for its survival. The roots may wither and die and it may be difficult to tell where the vine began. This is the case for David's beginning. Very few were aware of his early history or the secrets that lay hidden concerning his childhood. David was pointing Natan back to the roots and the seedbed so that he could learn more about David's formative years.

It is important to learn that David was unloved and spurned by his father and older brothers. That information lays the foundation for later evaluating David's effectiveness as a parent. It also informs his views of what it means to love someone. He has not had much in the way of a good role model concerning loving a wife. Again, this lays a foundation for evaluating his later marriages. The second interview with Shammah confirms the hatred that David's brothers have for him. The angry, foul-mouthed older brother has little positive to say about him. The brothers are jealous of young David's victory in defeating the Plishtim champion, Goliath. They are jealous of the favor he finds with Shaul. Shammah is angry that they, the older brothers, are in no way exulted along with David. He even speaks crudely concerning David's relationship with Yonatan. This anger and jealousy however is also a foreshadowing of what is to come for the King. Jealousy and in-fighting will continue throughout his life among his sons. His early years were a foretaste of what is to come.

Brooks uses several techniques to craft the novel and pull readers into the story. First, she uses vocabulary that is not typically used in contemporary language. Word choices



such as ribband, greaves, pyres, goad, brigand and gainsaid are not part of our everyday speech. Incorporating these words into the text adds to the authenticity to the story and pulls the reader into the scenes and the world of David. She also uses foreshadowing to hint at what is yet to be revealed in the story. The evening that Natan sits up waiting to speak with the King, he is aware that a vision is about to come to him. Yet the vision is delayed, and as time passes Natan discovers why. Through veiled language, Brooks hints at the coming of David's great sin and the consequences of his actions that night. No clear pronouncements are made, but the text speaks of what destinies may have been changed. In another instance, when talking with Avigail, a young Natan asks her if she was jealous that David misses his first wife who is no longer with him, but sent away by Shaul to another man. She remarks that " If there is a child's of Shaul's who excites jealousy in me...it is not Mikhal" (73). This hints that the relationship between Yonatan and David is the one that causes her to be jealous. Even though it has not been discussed in detail yet, there are implications that it is important enough to be dealt with later in the story.

Another choice Brooks makes is to use the transliteration from the Hebrew of the Tanakh or the Hebrew scriptures for the names and places in the novel. Rather than Saul, as many people may refer to the first king, she uses Shaul. This distinguishes the novel and its story line from the original text in in the scriptures. The Secret Chord is a fictionalized worked, based on the historical facts as recorded in the scriptures. However, the details of conversations, emotions and unrecorded events are created by the author to breath life into the characters. Many people who are familiar with these stories, such as the children's Bible story of David and Goliath or the story of David's lust for Bathsheba as immortalized in the song "Hallelujah" by Leonard Cohen are familiar with the English spellings used in modern translations of the Bible. By using the original Hebrew spellings, the author creates a space between the Biblical text and her fictionalized embellishment of the story. They almost become new characters who can be seen in a new and different light.

Discussion Question 1

Why does David agree to a written account of his life story including all the "dirty little secrets" that are unknown to the nation of Israel as a whole?

Discussion Question 2

The author chose to use the Hebrew form of the many names in the story as opposed to the more familiar translated forms found in the Bible. What affect does this have on the story, if any? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

The descriptions of battle in the text are quite intense at times. Why do you think the author chose to depicted these scenes so graphically?



Vocabulary

conscripted, rutted, sycophants, embrasure, greaves, platitude, pyres, goad, ribband, carrion, gall, merkavot, brigand, pithos, gainsaid, addled, tilth, kine, phial, prodigious, taciturn, viscous, frank, rheum, cressets, roil, continence, guttered, reneged, abetted



Chapters 6-9

Summary

As this section begins, Natan recalls more about his time in the camps with David. One morning he woke early and heard someone passing by the cave where he was sleeping. He assumed it was an enemy soldier sent from Saul and snuck out of the cave to follow him. However, he observed instead Yonatan greeting David with a kiss. Embarrassed by what he did not understand he returned to his bed. Later, he tried to warn Yoav that David was not alone, but Yoav was already aware that Yonatan was there. In another instance, when Yonatan had come to warn David of Saul's approach, Natan was suddenly overcome with a prophecy and spoke of royal blood being spilt by Saul. He passed out on the floor and was carried out of camp as the band went on the run again. David later asked Natan to clarify his words and tell him whose blood would be spilled by Saul, but Natan did not understand the words that he spoke from the Name, so he only delivered them.

That night, David, Avishai and Natan went out "hunting." They crept into the camp of Saul and his army and worked their way into Saul's tent. Avishai wanted to kill Saul but David said that no one could lay hands on the anointed. Instead they took Saul's spear and water jug. At dawn, they called out to Saul and showed him that his life could have been taken, but that David was honorable and meant no harm. Saul called to David, expressing his regret for attempting to kill him and asked him to come back to him. Natan, however spoke from the Name again and told David to flee.

David and his men fled to the Plishtim lands and Gath where they became mercenaries, living in the town of Ziklag and making forays into nearby Amalekite villages to plunder. The Plishtim ruler, Achish, thought that David was raiding his own people as retribution for chasing him from his homeland, but it was part of David's plan to lead Achish into thinking he had David's loyalty. In each village they attacked, every person was slaughtered so that no one remained to speak of what happened. Achish's generals were not convinced however and refused to fight with David's men in an attack on Saul's forces. David returned to Ziklag and found it burning. All the women and children had been taken captive. On advice from Natan, David and his men pursued and slaughtered the offending Amalekites. David broke down in relief when he found his wives, Avigail and Ahinoam alive and unharmed. He then learned that Ahinoam was carrying what would be his first-born child.

The story shifts in time as Natan ends his reflecting on the "outlaw years" and continues his vigil of waiting to speak with David concerning his withdrawn behavior. As morning dawned, he hurried off to speak with the King, but was stopped by his servant, Muwat, who had overheard the gossip of the servants at court. He told Natan that David had spent the night with a woman who was the wife of one of his army captains. Natan confronted David about his adulterous behavior and questioned how he would cover things up. David, however, was not at all concerned and did not even believe that the



Name would in any way punish him. He was also convinced that the girl would not speak of it.

Meanwhile, Natan decided to conduct his last interview and speak with Mikhal, daughter of Shaul and David's third wife. Mikhal spoke to Natan of the early days of their marriage. Despite her love for David, he was more interested in Yonatan and made it very clear to her. She spoke also of her father's madness and how difficult it was to live in his household. When David first came to court and began to play on his harp, the music soothed Shaul in a way that nothing else did, and so Mikhal fell in love with him. When she was promised to David in marriage, he went beyond the request of 100 Plishtim foreskins and killed an additional 100 men to prove his worthiness to marry the daughter of Shaul. Yet, Yonatan remained the object of David's affection and Mikhal was happy to at least have a bond between them.

As Shaul's madness increased, so did his hatred of David because of his success as a military leader. Shaul tried to have David murdered, but Mikhal and Yonatan conspired together to help David escape and publicly defended him during a festival meal. As punishment for defying her father, Mikhal was married off to another man, Palti. David was forced to go on the run as an outlaw and gathered weapons and supplies as he went. The entire town of Nov was slaughtered in fact, because it was believed that they helped David in his escape.

Mikhal was most heartbroken as she learned that David took other wives in Ahinoam and Avigail. Eventually, she softened her heart to Palti and fell in love with him. They had several children. In her heart she had moved on. Natan ended the interview as Mikhal was broken down in sadness and tears. He knew the story from this point on and did not need her to recount the final events that drove her and the King irreparably apart.

In the last chapter of this section, Natan is once again reflecting on his days in the battlefield and on the run with David. Following the incident at Ziklag, David and his men joined forces again with Achish and the army of Gath to meet with the other Plishtim forces. They planned an all out attack on Saul and his army. David seemed to be united with Achish, but once again his generals did not trust David's loyalty and did not want him fighting along side them.

David and his men were ordered back to Ziklag where they began the work of rebuilding their fortress. Here, they received the news several days later that both Yonatan and Shaul were killed in battle. The messenger recounted what he had seen and told David that Shaul had been barely alive and asked the messenger to finish him off. The messenger agreed and slit Shaul's throat. David was enraged that someone would kill the anointed of the Lord and immediately had the messenger run through with a sword. He then wept deeply for Yonatan and Shaul and fasted and grieved. David also composed a lament, "The Song of the Bow" which remembered the greatness of the two men. Natan then had another vision and he told David that it was time to go the capital of Hebron and be officially anointed as King of Judah.



Analysis

Natan recalls once again some of the history of his life on the run with David. As a young boy, Natan observed a stranger sneak into the camp early one morning. He learns that it is Yonatan come to see David. He greets him with a passionate kiss and Yoav later tells Natan, that yes the two men love each other in that manner. Here Brooks addresses the debate concerning the nature of the relationship between the two men. The Bible describes their friendship of the deepest and most loyal kind. Others throughout history, have maintained that the relationship was of a deeper, more intimate sexual nature. Here the author clearly falls on the side of the latter and allows the two men to embrace one another, kiss and pledge their love, loyalty and protection to each other. When Natan suddenly delivers a prophecy concerning the spilling of royal blood both are deeply concerned. However, Shaul is coming for them and Yonatan and David must flee their separate ways. Later, Natan is unable to explain the prophecy to David. He does not know who will die and given that David has also been anointed by Shmuel to be the king's successor, the royal blood could refer to anyone. The prophecy is deeply disturbing, yet is a true foreshadowing of the events to come.

Also in this section, David is depicted as being a man of extreme cunning. He bravely sneaks into Shaul's camp and shows the King that he means him no harm. While he stood inches away, he could have easily taken the King's life, but he knows that the Name has placed Shaul on the throne and that it is in His timing that a new King will take the throne. David also is crafty in using his time in exile. He leads Achish to believe that he is willing to raid the communities in Shaul's kingdom, but instead he raids Amalekite villages. He is able to take plunder from his enemies and secretly give it to those who support him in Judah while maintaining the favor of Achish. His men are given as base from which to operate and relative safety away from Shaul. In order to keep the ruse going, the raiding parties murder every person in the villages, woman and children included. But the plan backfires on David, when one day the men return to Ziklag to find it burning and their wives and children taken. David is distraught and unable to make a move in retaliation. He realizes that his excessive and deceptive actions have brought about this revenge from the Amalekites. He is spent and cannot think to move forward.

Natan, realizing that David's men are about turn against him suddenly speaks, as if from the Name. The words are his own, but he speaks forcefully enough to be believed. David leads his men forward to take the Amalekite forces and free their families. David is once again overcome - this time with gratitude. Avigail places David's hand on Ahinoam's swollen belly and he learns that she is carrying his firstborn child. A moment later, Natan notices the bloody handprint left on her robe and knows it for what it is, "an ominous anointing" (88). Here, the author again uses foreshadowing to point to the child's future and the blood that will be spilt. The use of the word "anointing" is significant as well. While this child would be expected to be anointed as the next king and successor to his father, the mode of anointing here is not oil, but blood, suggesting that perhaps not all will go well.



As Natan remembers all these events, morning dawns and prepares to go and see the King. His servant, Muwat, informs him that the gossip among the servants is that David has spent the night with a woman who is another man's wife. In his role as counselor, Natan rushes to the King to question him about his actions. David, however, is still overcome by the beauty of the girl and what he has considered to be a fulfilling night of pleasure. He is blind to the fact that he has committed adultery and forced the same upon an innocent young woman. In his arrogance, he is not worried that anyone will question him or speak of it at all. He has given the girl a large gem, almost as if in "payment" for her services for the evening and her continued silence. And he also does not truly expect God to punish him. He knows that hundreds of other men commit adultery and they are not caught or punished, so he expects that the same will be true for him. He has forgotten that the Law of the Name applies to him as King as well as to his people. But as Natan reminds him, "You are not a hundred other men" (94). Once again, there is foreshadowing. David's unique position will not allow him to go unpunished.

Since he is already in a bad mood, Natan decides to interview his third subject, Mikhal, David's first wife. He does not expect the interview to be pleasant, as she is shut away at this point in a lonely and dismal section of the palace. Mikhal tells her story of her love for David and her acceptance of being second place to her brother Yonatan. Perhaps she was willing to do this as she loved her brother very much as well. She tells Natan about the difficulty of growing up with a father who was half mad and how Yonatan played with her and showed her attention. Here Brooks uses beautiful metaphoric language to describe these few moments of happiness in her life. "Poor girl, I thought, to have so few and such brief moments of joy -- slender planks to cling to in her shipwreck of a life" (105). And Mikhal's love for David was perhaps somewhat blind, so she was willing to take this position and accept whatever attention she got from him.

Mikhal risks a great deal for him in fact. When Shaul sends soldiers to kill David she deceives them and helps David escape from the palace. Even as she is sent away in punishment and given to another man as his wife, she maintains her love and allegiance to David. Only after many years does she allow her heart to soften to her new husband. Natan does not recount here how it is that Mikhal is living once again in the palace or why she has fallen out of the king's favor. He does not ask her to recount as he knows the reasons and can write them down himself. However, despite what has passed between them, Mikhal asks Natan to tell David that she did as he asked and to remember her to him, suggesting that after all that happened, she still held some love in her heart for him.

The final chapter of the section brings the end to the conflict with Shaul. In a massive battle with the Plishtim armies, Shaul and Yonatan are both killed. Shaul does not die immediately, however, and asks his armor bearer to finish him off, but the boy cannot do it. So Shaul falls on his sword, fulfilling part of Natan's earlier prophecy. Still breathing, he asks a passing escaped slave to end his suffering, The man complies and runs to Ziklag where David and his men are rebuilding their fortress. Once he delivers his news, expecting a reward, he is killed. David is angry that anyone would dare to murder the anointed of the Name. Here he shows his respect for the Name's order of



things. Despite his madness and his hatred of David, Shaul was still the King and it was not the slave's place to kill him. David and the others then mourn the loss of the King, showing again respect for his position. Although an enemy, he was their King. David laments too the loss of his beloved Yonatan and composes a soulful song to remember him by which he sings for his men. His grief and love are forever captured in the words of the song.

Discussion Question 1

Why does David take Shaul's spear and water jug out of the camp at night? What do they represent?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think David is convinced that the Name will not punish him for committing adultery?

Discussion Question 3

After everything that happened to her, do you think Mikhal still has some love for David in her heart? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

avidity, unctuous, sibilant, fricative, vassal, billeted, castigated, ignominious, asymmetric, ferocity, ashlar, incontinent, cuckold, sanctimonious, declivities, estranging, wanton



Chapters 10-14

Summary

In the aftermath of the death of Shaul and Yonatan, David and his men went to the town of Yavesh where the men of the village had taken the remains and buried them. They then went on to Hebron where David was quietly anointed as the King of Judah. Several weeks later, his first son, Amnon was born. David's first real task was to figure out how to handle Avner, Shaul's former general. Avner had gathered the remains of Shaul's army and set Ish Boshet, Shaul's only remaining son, on the throne as a puppet king. Yoav was concerned that once the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel were united under David that his position as general in David's army would be in jeopardy should Avner cut a deal with David. Natan tried to assure him that his services were invaluable to David.

Meanwhile, the two armies had been engaging in set-piece contests, small encounters of feigned fighting where men were expected to be only injured, not killed. However, one warrior was killed and Asahel, Yoav's brother, used the incident to make a move on Avner. Avner tried to get him to stop, but Asahel continued after him. Avner placed his spear in the ground, pointing just in front of Asahel, who ran straight into it and impaled himself. Yoav was understandably angry but went and buried his brother.

The incident brought about movement toward unification. Avner offered to bring Israel over to David's side if the fighting ceased. David agreed to negotiate on the condition that Avner return David's first wife Mikhal to him. Avner agreed and Natan was sent along with him to get Mikhal from Palti's house. Mikhal reluctantly left her family to return to David. Palti trailed behind the caravan for many miles, before Mikhal told him to return to their children and that she would ask David to allow her to return to their home. David did not greet her when she arrived at the palace. Later, Natan and Avigail conferred about how to care for Mikhal who days later was still not eating or drinking. David finally visited her and was oblivious to her heartache over losing Palti and her children.

David and Avner feasted that night and secured a deal in which Avner would bring all Israel to David's side. Avner left to return to his lands. By a night messenger, Yoav got Avner to return to the city, accosted him at the gate and murdered him in retribution for his brother's death. David, needing to publicly punish Yoav forced him to lie in the dirt, cursed him and kicked him. Ish Boshet was then murdered by two soldiers who thought they were helping David's cause. They were then executed by David for laying hand to a king. Negotiations with the tribes in Israel continued and agreements were reached so that one week later, David was anointed the King of all Israel and Judah.

The coming years were spent fighting off the neighboring enemies who tried to break apart the newly founded kingdom. During this time David's family grew as children were born to him through his various wives. However, he was not able to engage with Mikhal who continued to remain cold and aloof. David offered to bring her children to live with



her near the palace, but she refused, not wanting to take them away from Palti and cause him additional suffering.

Then Avigail succumbed to a long illness followed by the death of her young son. David dealt with his grief by pouring himself into the task of finding a new capital for the kingdom. He researched and interviewed many servants and merchants concerning the city of Yeba which was strongly fortified. Natan had a vision of how to breach the walls using the irrigation system. The men engaged the plan, and the city was easily taken. The city became known as Ir David, the City of David. For 10 more years, David's armies marched out from the city to encounter and subdue outlying enemies.

As the wars lessened, David spent time building and expanding his city. He then arranged for the Ark of the Covenant to be brought to the city so that the Name's people could worship in a centralized place. David danced with joy before the Name as the Ark was carried in. Mikhal scoffed at his naked joy and in return for her dishonor, David sent her to live in the farther-est corner of the palace with the command that she was never to see him again. The last remnants of potential threat to the throne are also dispatched as Shaul's grandsons are killed.

A turning point arrived in David's life as he learned that Batsheva was pregnant by him. He attempted to cover up his guilt by bringing Uriah her husband home from battle and encouraged him to lie with his wife, but Uriah refused the offer. David then dispatched a message to Yoav to put Uriah on the front line, where he was mostly likely to be killed. David mourned Uriah's death publicly and after an appropriate period of days, brought Batsheva into his home as his new wife.

Natan doubted his own service to David and in despair over David's actions walked into the desert where he lay for one month visited by constant dreams and visions of David's future. Upon returning to the palace, David was excited to show Natan the plans he was developing for building a Temple for the Ark and to talk about his new wife. Natan then confronted David concerning his sin and David repented before the Name. Natan told him that he would never build the Temple and issued a four-fold punishment telling him that death and violence would strike his family. The first punishment came a short time later when Batsheva's infant child died. David sought comfort in his other children. Natan could not bear to look at them however since he knows the fate that will befall many of them. He moved to a small private house across the valley away from the palace and offered his services as they were needed.

Analysis

In these chapters the author takes a deep look into the behind the scenes conversations of what is going on in David's kingdom and household, further developing the theme that people are so much more than simply what the historical record may say about them. On the military side there is still much unrest in the land. The kingdom must be solidified and the two parts united. Shaul's former general, Avner, maintains control over Israel despite the presence of the puppet King Ish Boshet. David and Yoav know that



they must deal with the old military man in order to bring the tribes in line. Yoav is also worried personally because he fears that he will be replaced by Avner as the lead general. He knows that David needs to be savy and political in order to gain Israel's confidence and offering the leadership position to Avner may be what is needed in order to secure the deal. He frets over this and confers with his brothers and Natan asking for opinions and guidance. Yoav is also threatened and distrustful of Avner because during a feint between the two factions, his younger brother Asahel was killed by Avner. Yoav sees the older man as a dangerous man to allow into power. When the opportunity arises, he takes matters into his own hands and murders Avner, partly to avenge Asahel's death and partly to simply get Avner out of the way.

David is angry when he hears of the murder, not so much because he cared for Avner, but because of the political mess he is left with. Since the murder happened in the early morning hours, David is still dressing when Natan arrives to discuss what to do. David pushes away the servant who is helping him dress and says that he will do it himself. In the process, his tunic tears slightly. "Never mind. I will have to rend it anyway" (151) he states as if to say, 'I'll be required to show grief and rip the tunic anyway, so we might as well not mess up another one.' David has grieved for many, many people in his rise to power. Some of the deaths truly impacted him, but for others, David play acted so that the people would see an appropriate response from their King. Natan agrees that he must make a public display of grief and make it clear that the murder was done by Asahel's brother as a blood-debt. Because he needs to keep Yoav as his top military leader he cannot execute him. He does humiliate him publicly, however, by making him lie in the dirt while he curses his family and kicks him. While his pride is damaged, Yoav is grateful that his life is spared and that his position over the army remains.

There is also much to learn here about David concerning his personal life, in particular how very oblivious he is to the feelings and concerns of the women in his household. At this point he uses Mikhal as a bargaining tool to stop the warring between the tribes. He commands Natan to go collect Mikhal from Palti and restore her to the palace. Natan asks David if he is concerned that her affections for him may no longer remain or that she may have turned her heart to her other husband. Does she have any children who will be affected by her sudden departure? David does not care about any of this. In fact, he is rather arrogant and self-confident saying, "That girl risked her life for me. You think she loved another, after?" (141). Even once Mikhal arrives, David does not go to see her immediately, but waits several days. He is somewhat confused that she does not warm up to him and instead remains cold and unyielding especially in the bedroom. Subsequently, he tries to soften her by offering to bring her children to live nearby, but he is blinded to the fact that Mikhal no longer loves him and in fact hates him for ripping her away from her family.

Mikhal is disgusted with David as he dances before the Ark when he brings it into the city. She chastises and insults him. As the author uses a metaphor to describe it, "she had nursed that serpent of anger, coiled tight inside her, eating everything else away. Now at last she had unleashed it" (182). David finally has enough. He orders Natan to stick Mikhal in a remote section of the palace and states that he never wants to see her again. When Natan asks if he should instead send her back to Palti, David angrily



responds, "Never! She remains my wife. Mine" (182). The relationship does not matter to him, but rather the obedience of a wife and the possible royal heir a union could have produced. David's heart is like that of a King, calculating and cold; the marriage is about politics and correctness, not love.

The author continues delving into David's character as she describes the crisis that overtakes him next. Using a metaphor of music, she describes how the beautiful music emanating from the palace chambers suddenly becomes discordant as Batsheva's pregnancy becomes known. Natan is sitting outdoors in the courtyard listening to David play in his chamber above. Beautiful harp music is drifting out the window and Natan closes his eyes and relaxes in the sun, "I was in some vague, happy dream or reverie. But into that dream crept a note of unease...David was working with strange intervals...Uncanny sounds that robbed the music of its power to delight...I raised my hands to my ears, trying to shut out the dissonance (187)." Through the music and his dream, Natan becomes aware that Batsheva is pregnant and he immediately goes to see the King. At this point Natan tries to help David "put out the fire" and get Uriah home to see his wife and lie with her so that perhaps the adultery can be covered up. Natan is supportive of this plan. However, when plan A does not work, David becomes ruthless and slickly gives Yoav an order to put Uriah on the front line, an order that will surely seal his death. Brooks highlights the coldheartedness of this move as David has written the order himself, sealed it and pressed it into Uriah's own hand. Following an embrace, he exults Uriah in the presence of the court and sends him on his way (190). The detailed scene description is powerful in that once again David has done what he believes is necessary in order to keep himself in power and build his kingdom. In contrast, Natan is angered when he discovers what David has done, because this ruthless act has nothing to do with his kingdom. The business of Batsheva and Uriah was to cover over his lack of restraint and was nothing short of an abuse of his power (192). David then marries Batsheva and thinks the matter is over. But the Name has other plans for him and calls him to repentance. The subsequent consequences are laid out for him by Natan. David has lived arrogantly, thinking that he is nearly untouchable as the King, but he learns that he cannot escape the judgement of the Name.

The section ends with a touching vision that Natan has the day that he first walks into his small private home away from the palace. In the window he sees for an instant a young boy with dark hair. He knows that he is part of the Name's promise of David's line. He knows that he will have a part in raising the boy and that they would be united in heart and soul. "I would serve him, as I served his father, until he grew so great in wisdom that he would not need my counsel" (204). The moment of peace and joy comes for Natan amidst all the heartache that he has foreseen for David and his children. But this scene is a foreshadowing of another child to be born who offers hope for David's line.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Yoav concerned that he will be replaced as David's top general?



Discussion Question 2

What is David's motivation for bringing Mikhal back to the palace as his wife?

Discussion Question 3

Why is David confident that he has fixed everything by marrying Batsheva?

Vocabulary

noisome, set-piece, feints, cowed, charlatan, churl, penitent, requited, ingratiate, crenulations, alabaster, coalesce, insinuate, dalliance, dissonance, cuckold, conspicuous, ungirt, insolent, execrating, lamentation



Chapter 15 - 22

Summary

As this section opens, Natan tells of a secret visit by Batsheva. She told him that she was pregnant with a second child and was worried that the child might die like the first. She told Natan about her fear and hatred for David because of how he raped her. Natan seemed to think that Batsheva had invited the affair by being indiscreet on her rooftop, but she opened his eyes to the reality of her plight. Natan began to feel sympathy for her and suddenly had a vision of the child's future and he stated to her that the boy would be King. He is unable to give her details about how it would take place, but assured her that it was a true prophecy. Batsheva then realized that she would need to change her attitude toward David in order to position herself and her son in the most favorable light possible with the King. Natan also realized his need to become an influence in the child's life in order to best serve the kingdom at large. He approached David and requested that he be allowed to teach and guide the child when he is born. He does not mention the prophecy of kingship, but simply expressed his desire to have the opportunity to guide a young man in his studies. David agreed, knowing that Natan longed for the opportunity.

Years pass and Shlomo grew into a young boy. One day he burst into Natan's home holding an eagle's egg that had fallen from its nest. He knew that one day he was to be taught by Natan, but as he was out on the mountain and discovered the egg, he rushed to the wise man, almost certain that he would know what to do with the egg. Natan then began his teaching relationship with Shlomo, David and Batsheva's son. They raised the eaglet and trained it to hunt and dive. Natan started him on his path to learning, discussing leadership and how best to handle a nation.

Natan also describes that poor character and complete failings of the other sons of David. As young boys they would treat their slaves poorly or mistreat their horses, but David would laugh off the incidents as childish pranks. They boys were never corrected or taught to respect others. They also grew up during the years when the kingdom was being secured from outside threats and there was much bloodshed to be witnessed. Murder seemed natural to them. They also indulged heavily in sexual encounters, Amnon being the worst. Turning a blind eye, David moved them out of the palace into separate homes, so that he did not have to directly witness their behavior. Amnon's unfulfilled desire for his half-sister Tamar reached a peak. With the help of his cousin, Yonadav, he plotted to bring her into his house alone, under the pretext that he was ill and that he needed her to cook some food for him. There, he brutally attacked and raped her and then threw her out into the street, disgraced. Tamar fled to her brother, Avshalom. He took her in and told her to keep quiet about the incident. He himself did not act, fearing that Amnon would be expecting retaliation and would use it to instead kill Avshalom. His hatred seethed below the surface, but he did not act. David likewise did not respond to the attack in any way. Maccah demanded to see David and pressed him to execute Amnon as punishment. Not willing to kill his firstborn, he decided to keep



quiet about the incident and send Tamar off to the country to Avshalom's farm, where he promised to provide for her.

Macaah proceeded to approach Batsheva and asked her to set up a meeting with Natan. She knew that the two spoke often, meeting over the education of Shmolo. When Macaah and Natan met together she asked him to approach David and once again try to get David to punish Amnon for his sin against Tamar. She told him that she expects this of him as the "conscience of the King." She cannot understand how even the Name was silent on this issue. Natan then suddenly spoke words from the Name. Macaah should not have dared to question Him. Justice would come for Amnon in the Name's timing. Natan tried to comfort Macaah with the foreknowledge that she would have justice, but that she would have to wait for it. Amnon's punishment was linked to David's and it would come in time.

Two years later, Avshalom invited his family, David and his brothers to a great feast in celebration of the shearing of his large flock. David was tired and busy with state matters and said he would not attend. However, he encouraged all his sons to travel to the feast and was delighted that the Avshalom seemed to have forgiven his older brother. However, Avshalom had crafted a plan. After several days, when Amnon was feeling confident and relaxed, Avshalom's men surprised him and murdered him, making it clear that the death was in retribution for Tamar's rape. She herself was present to witness the murder. Shmolo likewise was present. While the other brothers and their servants and followers all ran in a panic, thinking their own lives in danger, Shlomo acted calmly. He comforted Tamar. He had the body of Amnon wrapped and carried back to David. He grieved for his brother, but there were no tears. Avshalom was forced to flee the land or risk punishment. He went to live in the neighboring kingdom with his grandfather, in Macaah's homeland. Macaah pleads with Yoav and Natan to speak to David to allow him to return home without punishment. Yoav and Natan conferred concerning the future of the kingdom. Natan did not feel Avshalom would make a good king anyway, and Yoav did not believe that the next in line, Adoniyah, was a man of substance or up to the task.

Analysis

At this point in the novel new light begins to dawn for the kingdom amidst much darkness in David's household. Natan has a vision of Batsheva's second son and knows that he will be the one to succeed David on the throne. The prophecy has a sudden and transformative impact on Batsheva. She arrives at Natan's house in secret, coming to see him without David's knowledge. She is fearful of what may happen. She has lost her firstborn child as a part of David's four-fold punishment from the Name, so she is worried about the future of the child she now carries. Natan's vision of the boy becoming king not only comforts her but causes her to have a sudden change of heart toward David. Despite her nearly continual presence in his bed as a favored wife, she has no love or goodwill toward him. She had been brought to the palace, used like a receptacle, tossed a jewel as if a whore receiving payment and spent her days in fear waiting to be found out by Uriah (208-209). Her husband was then murdered and her



child suffered illness and death. She feels as if her whole life was taken from her. But suddenly, with Natan's prophecy before her, she has hope for not only her child's future, but her own. She sees that her attitude toward David must change and that she needs to maintain her favored position. She says, "it will have to be different between me and the king" (212). This is another occurrence of a strong theme within the novel that despite a woman's apparent lack of control over her destiny, that she can turn the course of her life.

Because of this shift and this secret knowledge, Batsheva is able to guide Shlomo with hope and expectancy. She has been telling him that Natan the prophet will become his teacher when he is older. She has built Natan up as being wise and "knowing almost everything" (217). Shlomo is ready and eager to learn. Natan has also placed himself in a position to guide the boy. He has requested that David allow him to be the one to teach his son. As the voice of the Name, he has insight into the ways and heart of God and directs Shlomo to consider and seek after these things as well.

By contrast, David's oldest three sons are brought up in the ways of warfare, alongside Yoav as his armor bearers. They learn aggressiveness, strategy, cunning, how to kill, even how to slaughter. Amnon is with the army when following a battle with the Moavites, they measure out a line of defeated men. Those who fall within the measured span are spared, but the others are slaughtered. Amnon eagerly seeks the death of one man saying, "That one!...Don't miss him - - he's within the measure" (221). Yoav thinks to chastise the young boy for his cold-heartedness, but does not, realizing that no one is really able to correct David's sons.

The lack of discipline and restraint in the older sons seems to be no concern for David. Here is where the theme of the negligent parenting has its root. The princes are naturally spoiled with the richness of court life and the many indulgences that accompany it. However, Natan seems to blame David's childhood for the lack of effort or care when it comes to discipline. He says, "But because he received no love from his own father, he was determined to lavish it upon his sons. He poured it out with a wastrel's abandon, unwilling to exact any price or place and conditions" (214). Whenever anyone mentioned any infraction by the boys, David dismissed it as child's play and then usually found a way to slight the person who called his son to task. So even the court and those in the city learned that the boys could do as they pleased. They are later allowed to live in separate homes from the palace where they can continue in the decadence unbridled. Perhaps, because he himself had been sent away by his father, David thought it best to allow his sons to live elsewhere, away from his sight; it is easier to not have to look at what is uncomfortable.

Perhaps the ultimate poor choice David makes is to ignore punishment for Amnon after he rapes his half-sister, Tamar. Maacah demands that he punish Amnon by execution. She goes so far as to call David an unfit father to allow his beautiful daughter to have suffered so and not receive justice (233). But David chooses to act like a King, not a father. He knows that punishing Amnon will not restore Tamar's honor or fix her disfigured face. It will not make it so that she can be the wife of another king as they had planned. He does not want to lose his heir to death. He thinks that Amnon still has time



to grow up and change, to stop making poor decisions. His answer is instead to send Tamar away and try to move on and forget the matter. There is not even a reprimand for Amnon. However, this gross negligence will come back to haunt David later as his son will reap the consequences of his poor choices.

Discussion Question 1

It appears that Shlomo is by very nature different from his older brothers. Why do you think that is so? How is his upbringing different from that of the others?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think David dismisses his sons' poor behavior and turns a blind eye to their excesses?

Discussion Question 3

Was David right or wrong in his decision to not punish Amnon for Tamar's rape? Did he have any other options?

Vocabulary

duplicitous, castigating, addled, swain, begat, malevolence, precocious, insatiable, dissolute, ingratiating, abettor, pander, oblige, pedagogue, pragmatic, precedence, lacerating, taciturn, trysting, rictus, undulant, fratricide, whelp



Chapters 23 - 28

Summary

The opening of this last section finds David wasting away with grief. As Natan recounts, he mourned the loss of Amnon, his first born and heir and at the same time deeply missed his other son, Avshalom. He lamented that he had not taken care to honorably raise his sons. Yoav was concerned about some political unrest in Hebron and he very much wanted Avshalom back, ready to take over as king if something happened to David. He asked Natan to convince David to bend the law and bring his son home. When Natan refused, Yoav set about his own plan. He hired a woman to come to court and plead a trumped up case, one between her sons. She delivered a parable of sorts, such that the story was similar to that of David's sons. She then questioned why he had not brought back his own son. At this David caught on to the ruse. To everyone's surprise however he ended Avshalom's exile. He did not offer pardon or invite him into the court, but he allowed him to return to the city.

Once back, Avshalom gathered supporters and created a bodyguard. He traveled to the city gate and greeted villagers coming into the city to have their cases heard by the king. He shook their hands, listened to their woes and started to win their hearts. Both Natan and Yoav became concerned about this realizing that this meant possible trouble for David. Avshalom asked Yoav to speak with David and get him readmitted into court where they could keep a closer eye on him. David agreed and allowed Avshalom back into the palace. At this, Shlomo was displaced from his position of daily favor with David and Adoniyah became jealous of being kicked back down a rung in the ladder of succession.

Avshalom then set off for Hebron under the pretext of going to offer sacrifices for the new moon festival. He left with a following of 200 men. While in the midst of the feast, Avshalom declared himself king and had the shofar blown. Miles away, Natan became aware of declaration, as the Name loosened his tongue and allowed him to speak. He told David what had happened and of his son's treason. David acted quickly and gathered Yoav, Avishai and his bodyguard, Benaiah to make plans. David decided to leave the city despite its strong defenses. He did not want the city destroyed or the people harmed. As they left, the army of Plishtim mercenaries who were hired by David willingly joined him. The priests began to follow the exodus as well with the ark, but David sent them back, wanting Avshalom to believe that David left as a broken and fearful man, not as a fighter who was taking his inspiration with him. The band marched on to safety. Meanwhile, Avshalom entered the city and ordered that Batsheva be brought to him, intending to sleep with her and thereby solidify his overthrow by taking everything that belonged to David. But all the wives had left with David or sought refuge elsewhere, so Avshalom instead slept with all the concubines throughout the night.

One of David's former counselors found him and offered his services to David once again. Returning to the city under orders from David, Hushai went to Avshalom and



pledged his service to him. He advised him to wait and not pursue David immediately, but first build up a force, otherwise he would likely march into a trap set by the vengeful Yoav and Avishai. The advice and delay allowed time for David to muster his forces in Mahanaim. They were rested and well-fed by the time Avshalom began his pursuit. David's men set out to meet the opposing forces. Shmolo was allowed to go along despite David's initial hesitation. David instructed his generals to deal gently with Avshalom and not kill him, but take him alive. The order was disobeyed, however. Yoav deliberately killed Avshalom. Shmolo witnessed the death and proceeded to build a cairn around his brother's body.

David was devastated by the news of his son's death and did not greet the troops when they returned. Yoav berated David for this and threatened to leave him if David did not get up, greet the warriors and show them appreciation for winning the battle and saving his throne. David got up, relieved Yoav of his position as punishment for killing Avshalom and greeted the men. David planned to set Amasa, the general who had stood by Avshalom, as the head of his army. Yoav was angry, but Natan convinced him that it was just a political ploy to get the renegade factions to fall back in line and that he would have his position returned to him later. Learning from his mistakes, David was now quick to squash any sign of revolt. When news of an uprising reached the King he had Amasa tend to it. When he failed, he sent Yoav after him and had him killed. Thus Yoav was restored to a leadership position, although lesser than before. David also drew Adoniyah to him to see how he would govern although he did not see much promise in his son. Yoav, however did become a supporter.

As David aged, he grew weak and spent much time in bed. Batsheva was often by his side caring for him. She sought out special remedies and treatments to make him better. Adoniyah, however, looked like he could not wait for the King to die so that he could have the throne. Tired of waiting, he made plans for a huge feast and invited the tribes of Judah, Yoav and the priest Aviathar to perform the sacrifices. When he heard the news, Natan knew what was about to take place. He hurried with Shmolo to the King's side. He instructed Batsheva to remind the king that he had promised her that he would set Shmolo on the throne. Natan came in shortly and confirmed her words although no such promise had ever been made. He told David that Adoniyah was that very day proclaiming himself king and that he needed to declare Shmolo as the successor instead. David got out of bed, called for the priests and his bodyguard and gave instruction for the anointing. Shmolo was taken down into the city and anointed before the people. The shofar was blown, the people cheered and sang and the crown was passed on. Adoniyah and Yoav heard the horns and realized that their plan had failed.

Analysis

The novel deals boldly with two of its main themes in these concluding chapters in the story of David's life. In retrospect David is able to see the outcome of his cavalier attitude in raising his sons and it is easy to see the character qualities that uphold the true substance of David's sons. As the section begins, David is mourning the loss of Amnon, his firstborn and expected heir to the throne. He regrets now that he did not see



that his brother's anger was still so great. He is also upset that he did not understand that Avshalom's anger toward him was great as well. By refusing to punish Amnon in any way, he lost the affection and respect his second son may have had for him. David is terribly torn about what to do next. He knows that Avshalom must now be dealt with in some way, but he also misses having him near. In one stroke, he has in effect lost two sons. David is also distraught over his own foolishness. He finally seems to realize that he has failed at perhaps what should have been his most important task - raising honorable sons. He is almost in disbelief that these young men, who committed these acts of rape and murder could be his children. "What kind of a man begets such sons?" (258) he asks. Here, not only his lack of decisive parenting and correction but his poor role-modeling provide the answer. A man who willingly takes another man's wife and then murders her husband does not set a good example.

Natan extends hope to the King. He does have one son in whom there is promise and power. He shows him Shmolo training and mastering his eagle and encourages David to believe that he can be proud of this one son. He says, "Your sins have consequences, but the Name has not forsaken you, King" (259). And after this Shlomo becomes a salve for his father's heart and a comfort to him even in his old age.

Another theme that bursts all over the pages of this section is that of the details that form the character and legacy of a man. Avshalom and Adoniyah are boys that seek after gratification, power and approval. They will apply whatever means are necessary to achieve their desired end. Upon Avshalom's return to the city, he gathers soldiers around him and creates the illusion of power. He greets the people at the gate and seeks to win their hearts, But his motivations are deceptive. While the people may believe that the congenial, handsome prince is concerned for their welfare, Avshalom only seeks to gain their support so that he can rise to power.

When David first hears of Avshalom's movement among the people he is pleased that he is winning their hearts. Yoav thinks David is blind to his son's deceit. Natan also is reminded that many years earlier David was winning the hearts of the people while Shaul was yet King. But the difference lies in the motivation. David was loved by the people because of his actions in battle, defeating the Plishtims and fighting for the nation. David did not seek glory for himself and he knew that Shaul was the anointed of the Name. While he was aware that someday the throne would be his, he did not push for it. It was not his place to remove Shaul from the throne. He left that to the Name. Brooks uses an analogy here to drive home the point of the threat Avshalom poses. Natan comments that bringing Avshalom back into the city is dangerous. "Might as well have brought the king an asp" (265). Like a venomous snake, Avshalom is waiting for his time to strike and seize power.

Adoniyah can also barely wait for the opportunity to become king. Once Avshalom is dead and everyone returns to the city in victory, he takes on the role of spoiled, excessive prince. He gathers around him people of dubious character. He became increasingly jealous of Batsheva as she continues to be favored by the King, unlike his own mother who is rarely called before him. He unsuccessfully tries to limit her exposure to David. In time he makes an alliance with Yoav and draws him into his



confidence. Yoav is disloyal in this, and it is surprising to Natan. He had expected more of Yoav considering his long years of faithful service to David. But several factors likely contribute to this change of heart. The sting of losing his head position over the military, his desire to remain in power and his knowledge of David's failing health all make Yoav aware that the time is coming to make a choice about who to support as the next king. He does not care for Shlomo partially because of his connection to Natan. So, his next logical choice is to abandon David's ship and side with Adoniyah (289).

In contrast, David and Shlomo are men that seek to rule, but for the most part do so within the confines of the will of the Name. David will often act quickly in response to certain situations, but he keeps Natan by his side and wants to hear the voice of God, trusting in His guidance. He communicates to the Name through prayer and song. He does not tolerate those who do not show Him respect. This contrast is clear also in how the men each sought to rise to power. Just as David waited until the Name removed Shaul from power by his death in battle, likewise, Shlomo does not attempt to take the throne. For one, he does not think that he could even be in line since he has so many older brothers. But, Natan counsels him that birth order is not always followed. While there is definitely planning and preparation by both Natan and Batsheva in order to be in the right place at the right time with a prepared heir, none of them try to take the throne from David. Only when the time is ripe, when Adoniyah attempts to steal it away from his father, do they act. Yet even in this it is because they know that it is the will of the Name.

As Shlomo is anointed King, David is finally able to rest knowing that he is leaving behind a legacy and a worthy and upright heir. The celebratory music that he hears outside is like a balm to his soul. It is difficult to say what the secret chord of the novel's title represents. Perhaps it is the soulful music that David shared with the Name. Or perhaps it is a metaphor for the beautiful legacy of music that he leaves behind for his people. The many psalms he wrote, the elevated appreciation for music in worship - "He had made of his city an accidental choir, an unintended orchestra" (300).

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think David does not give any clear indication as to which son he thinks should be his successor?

Discussion Question 2

Natan states that Avshalom, like the young David, won the hearts of the people. In what ways was this the same and in what ways is it different?

Discussion Question 3

After being so loyal to David for almost all of his life, why do you think Yoav switches sides and joins with Adoniyah in the betrayal of David?

Vocabulary

balustrade, intransigence, suppliant, obfuscation, polyglot, extricated, whoreson, cairn, foment, incurious, feckless, tacit, ague



Characters

David

David is the King of Israel and the main character of the novel. He began his life as a shepherd boy who was unloved by his father and grew to become a warrior, shepherd of his people and eventually King over the nation. He is passionate about everything he does; he loves deeply, fights voraciously, governs wisely, acts recklessly, honors The Name, sins brazenly, shows compassion and yet is clueless to the plight of others. He plays his harp and sings in a manner that touches everyone who hears. David conquers towns, murders and plunders in the name of "whatever is necessary" to secure his kingdom. Yet, he reunites Israel and Judah and builds a great and peaceable kingdom. He introduces music into the worship and festivals of the people and leaves a legacy of poetry and song. He represents a man comprised of many contrasts. His great-yet-flawed life is filled with contrasts that are fully laid out in the recounting of his life's story.

Natan (Nathan)

Natan becomes the prophet of King David when he unexpectedly blurts out a prophecy immediately after witnessing his father's murder. He is taken from his home and is raised by David and his band of outlaws. He is taught to fight, read and write and evaluate people and their motives. He never marries, as his life is devoted in service to God and the King. He is highly trusted by David and is often by his side, both in battle and in court proceedings. He speaks prophecies that come to him as messages from God and advises David on actions he should take. Natan is tasked by King David to write his life history - but not merely the accounting of his deeds, but of who David is as a man.

Yoav (Joab)

A fierce warrior and leader of David's outlaw band and general of his army, Yoav serves David from the time he is a youth until David's old age. Yoav is the son of David's sister Zeruah. He loves to fight and when David no longer leads the troops, Yoav takes his place of leadership. He is very loyal to David and he enjoys his position of power and influence. Both he and Natan serve as advisors to David although in different capacities. The two men have different viewpoints however, as Natan speaks for The Name and Yoav sees things usually from a military or political standpoint.

Because of his passionate nature and in his quest for maintaining power, Yoav commits two murders which get him into trouble with David. When he murders Avner, the man who had served as general of Shaul's army, David spares his life, but makes him repent publicly. Again, despite orders, he kills David's son Avshalom. He does not believe that David should let him live because he has tried to usurp the throne. As a result, David dismisses him from his duties, although in time he is eventually restored.



Shaul (Saul)

Shaul is anointed as the first King of God's people, Israel. Following young David's defeat of the Philistine champion Goliath, Shaul brings David into his court and honors him. He is pleased with David's growing skill as a fighter for the nation and enjoys listening to the music he plays on his harp. As madness overtakes his mind, Shaul becomes jealous toward David, knowing that God has torn His favor from him and given it instead to David. He had given one of his daughters in marriage to David, but later gives her away to another man as punishment for helping David escape a murder attempt. Shaul dies in battle alongside his son Yonatan.

Yonatan (Jonathon)

Yonatan is the son of King Shaul and natural heir to the throne. He shares a deep and intimate relationship with young David. The two pledge their love for one another and promise to protect one another from harm. When David's life is in danger from the murderous threats of Shaul, Yonatan warns him and keeps him informed of the King's whereabouts. He also believes in the anointing that David has received from the Lord and supports him to be the man to assume the throne, rather than lay claim to it himself. When Yonatan and Shaul are killed in battle, David grieves deeply and composes a song of lament immortalizing his love for his friend.

Mikhal (Michal)

David's first wife is Mikhal. She is a daughter of Shaul and promised to David in exchange for the bridal price of 100 Philistine foreskins. David pursues the enemy army aggressively and acquires 200 to honor the daughter of the king. Mikhal loves David, but his affections are more for her brother, Yonatan. Despite the competition for David's attention, Mikhal is willing to sacrifice anything for him and risks her own life in helping David to escape a murder plot by her father. As punishment she is given away in marriage to another man. Years later, David tears her away from her new family and brings her back to live as his wife in a political move to reunite the two kingdoms of Israel. She is filled with hatred toward David at this point. She severely criticizes him for dancing unabashedly before the ark of the Lord as David brings it back into the capital city. For these words, she is banished to a remote part of the palace where she lives out her days in loneliness.

Ahinoam

Ahinoam is the second wife of David. He marries her after he has fled the palace and is on the run from Shaul. Not knowing when he might be able to return and reunite with Mikhal, it is important for him to have a wife and a child to be an heir. She is a wife of necessity, not love. She does, however, produce for David his firstborn son, Amnon.



Avigail of Carmel (Abigail)

Avigail is David's third wife and came to him following the death of her husband. She is somewhat older than David and, therefore, is in some ways more like a big sister and at times provides the nurture and comfort that he missed growing up without the continual care of his mother. She is also very observant and wise. When David and his men were still outlaws and on the run from King Shaul, they would send messengers into the villages and request provisions to be sent to their camp. Avigail's husband refused. Avigail knew that it would be unwise to refuse David so she gathered the provision herself and met David on the road, avoiding the calamity that would have befallen her household. Days later, her husband dies and David asks her to become his wife. Avigail gladly joins with David and serves him well. As one who "knows how to read men's hearts"(62) she makes careful observations and is closest to him as an adviser in judging the motives of others. Although she suffers from a debilitating disease, she bears David a son and lives long enough to see her son through the early years of his life.

Bathsheva (Bathsheba)

The beautiful young girl bathing on a rooftop is Bathsheva, and she is married to Uriah, a captain in the king's army. Unknown to her, King David has seen her taking her bath and is overcome by her beauty. She is summoned to the palace and escorted to the king's chamber where by her account, he rapes her throughout the night. She is a married woman and has now been forced to commit adultery. Unable to say anything against the king she is forced to go home and carry on. When she discovers she is pregnant, she knows it is by David since her husband has been away at war. Following Uriah's death, David marries Bathsheva. She is grief stricken when Nathan tells her the child will die, a punishment for the sin David committed against her and Uriah. However, Bathsheva becomes a strong woman and is able to move past her hatred of David and move closer to him emotionally when she learns from Nathan that their second son, Solomon, will become the next King. She becomes a loving wife and support to David in his old age and cares for him throughout the illness that leads to his death.

Maacah of Geshur

In a political marriage to secure an ally, Maacah becomes another of David's wives. Although beautiful, she does not hold a candle to Bathsheva and, like the others, she exists mostly to give David a child. She is of royal blood and as such her daughter, Tamar, will be expected to be married also in a political arrangement. When Tamar is raped by her half-brother Amnon, Maacah is naturally devastated. She demands of David that he punish his son since the act of rape calls for death of the offender. She is angry that he instead sends Tamar off to the country to live on her brother's farm. Maacah goes to Nathan to try to entice him to speak to David about punishing the crime. She is counseled however to not seek revenge, but to let the matter to the Name, for Nathan has seen the future and knows that she will have her justice.



Muwat

Natan's faithful servant is Muwat. Muwat cares for all of Natan's personal needs. He knows when the prophet is about to have visions and is a constant support to him. Muwat is also a great source of inside information for Natan as he has access to the many areas of the palace and can talk with all the servants. He is privy to their gossip and provides lots of useful and timely news to Natan.

Amnon

Amnon is the firstborn son of David and Ahinoam. As David is not really involved in parenting or guiding him in a way, the boy is spoiled and unrestrained in his upbringing. In particular, he is consumed with indulging his appetites, both physical and sexual. He is known in the city as a bully and many are frightened of him. He takes his excesses too far one night when he tricks David into allowing his half-sister Tamar to come unchaperoned out of her apartments and into his home under the pretense of cooking some food for him when he is ill. However, he brutally beats and rapes her and throws her out on the street. His sin goes unpunished by David. However, two years later, Tamar's brother, Avshalom, delivers justice when he murders his half-brother.

Avshalom (Absalom)

Avshalom is the second in line to throne, son of Maacah and brother to Tamar. He is very well loved by his father David, but like the other children he is not guided clearly by him and allowed to indulge himself. Following his sister's rape by Amnon, he is furious, but bides his time. He is smart enough to know that if he were to retaliate immediately, Amnon would be expecting it and perhaps he himself would be in danger. Two years later, he invites all his brothers to attend a feast to celebrate the shearing of his sheep on his lands. Amnon attends believing his brother no longer holds any grudge against him and is consequently murdered.

Although he has gained justice for his sister Tamar, Avshalom must now flee his home and go into exile in the neighboring kingdom of his grandfather. He is later allowed to return home to the city, but it not fully reconciled to his father. He gathers support and in David's later years he tries to take his father's throne and declares himself King. David's army fights Avshalom's forces and kills him. Although he is restored to his throne, David is grief-stricken over the loss of his son. Avshalom is the fourth and final loss that David suffers in payment for his sin against Uriah.

Shlomo (Solomon)

Shlomo, or Solomon as he is known in contemporary literature, is David's second son through Batsheva. Destined to become the heir to David's throne, Shlomo is a gentle, intelligent and wise young boy. He is brought up and taught by Natan, the prophet and



exposed to a vast array of knowledge. He is brought into the council hall and allowed to observe the proceedings at a much younger age than his brothers were brought in. He is skilled in combat, but not given to warring.

When his brother, Adoniyah proclaims himself king by throwing a feast and acquiring the favor and support of the some of the priests and Yoav, David's longstanding general, Natan and Batsheva step in to beseech David to make an official declaration that Shlomo is to be the next king. He is anointed before the people and then marched to the throne where he takes his place as leader of all Israel. He becomes one of the wealthiest and wisest men ever, and it is he who completes David's dream of building the Temple to house the ark of the covenant and be the center of worship for the people.

Avner (Abner)

Avner was the leading general in Shaul's army. He had fought alongside David at first and then chased him all through the land as Shaul sought to kill David. Avner survived the battle in which Shaul and Yonatan both died. He gathered the remaining troops and tried to hold onto his position of power. He set Ish Boshet on the throne, but controlled the dealings of the people. He bargains for a position of leadership in the army in return for delivering to David the remaining kingdom and lands of Israel. He is murdered by Yoav in a surprise attack.

Ish Boshet

Ish Boshet is the remaining male child of King Shaul. Following the deaths of Shaul and Yonatan he is placed on the throne by Avner, but he is little more than a puppet. He fears for his life once he hears that David is anointed King of Judah and is likely to unite the land. Two over zealous soldiers take matters into their own hands and murder Ish Boshet in his sleep.

Avishai

Avishai is the younger brother of Yoav. Along with their third brother Asahel, he serves first in David's outlaw band and then in his army. The brothers are the son's of David's sister, Zeruiah.

Nizevet

To find out more about his early life, David instructs Natan to interview his mother, Nizevet. For many long years Nizevet has kept the secrets about David's beginnings. Until this point only she and Yishai, David's father, knew the story behind the emotional turmoil and heartache of David's first decade of life. In a move to keep her husband from committing adultery, Nizevet changed places with the maidservant he had planned



on sleeping with and lies with him instead. Yishai assumes however that her resulting pregnancy is the result of an act of adultery on her part. As a result, he treats the child, David, with contempt, refusing to show him any love and affection. Nizevet tells Yishai the truth of what happened, hoping that he will treat David differently. When David is sent away to tend the flocks, Nizevet lavishes love on him every time he returns home to gather supplies. She gives him fresh clothes she sewed for him, bathes him and cuts his hair. Part of her aches that she cannot raise her son, but part of her is glad that he is away from the taunts and abuse of her other sons and husband and that he can find his own way out on the hillsides. When Shmuel comes to their home, Nizevet is standing closeby in the shadows, as David is anointed as the prophesied next king and is one of the first to kneel before him.

Yishai (Jesse)

Yishai is more commonly known in English Bible translations as Jesse. He is the father of David, although in the novel, for a time he did not think so. He believes his wife conceived David through adultery, despite the fact that it was his own adulterous behavior that got her pregnant. For this reason, he hates David and withholds love from him, sending him away from the home as soon as the boy is old enough to survive on his own. In so doing, he teaches his older sons to behave the same way. Only when David is anointed by Shmuel does Yishai bow his knee in respect to David since he is aware of the power and authority of the prophet.

Shammah

Shammah is one of David's older brothers. He houses their mother, Nizevet in his compound. When he is ordered by David he reluctantly talks to Natan about their growing up years and the battle with the Plishtim champion Goliath. Shammah is a foul-mouthed, crude, angry man. He has always hated David, most likely taught by the example of their father, and his opinion seems to have not changed over the years. He is jealous of David's success. Yet, he does recognize that David has amply supplied his family with more than everything they could ever need to repay them for any trouble his outlaw years may have caused them. His son, Yonadav is the sidekick to David's wicked son Amnon.

Merav

Merav is the oldest daughter of Shaul. She is initially promised to David in marriage, but she does not like David at all and begs her father not to make her marry him. Shaul relents and gives her to another man. Years later, when David is negotiating treaties with the Givonites, they bring up that they have an outstanding blood-debt left over from Shaul's days. David casually mentions where Merav's sons, Shaul's grandsons, are living. The men in turn go and kill all the boys. In this way David is able to rid himself of any possible threat to the throne from Shaul's line.

Yonadav

Yonadav is the son of Shammah and nephew of King David. He serves under David's son, Amnon and helps him along in all his indulgent behaviors. He is a reprobate young man and conceives the plan and makes the arrangements so that Amnon is able to rape Tamar. When it seems in his own best interest to switch sides, he encourages Amnon to go to the feast held by his brother Avshalom. As a result Amnon is murdered and Yonadav is spared.



Symbols and Symbolism

A chord

The idea of a musical chord is a symbol or, arguably, a metaphor, for David's family and kingdom. A chord is made up of three notes, usually played in harmony to make music. Sometimes there is a dissonance or discord as some of the notes are literally up against each other. The same is true in David's family and kingdom. At times everything works together as he is building a kingdom and operating in harmony and peace. But David's sin brings in discord. The resulting consequences of death, rape, murder and treason bring division to David's household and for a period of time disloyalty in the kingdom. Among the male heirs Natan comments, "But like a harp string whose tuning key if forced a turn or two past proper pitch, tempers were pulled to their limits" (235).

Anointing with oil

Anointing with oil is a symbolic act of favor being placed on a person. When Shmuel breaks the ram's horn and anoints young David's head with oil he is indicating to everyone that the young boy will one day become the King of Israel, God's choice for leading the kingdom. At that point, His favor is removed from Shmuel and is given to David. Even though the actual transfer of power will not take place for many years, the reality of it is presented through the symbolic act by the prophet of God.

Rending of clothes

The rending or tearing of garments signifies grief over the death of someone. It symbolically represents the tearing or breaking of one's heart for the loss of another person. David rends his clothes many times throughout his life. He grieves deeply for the losses of Yonatan, Saul, and Batsheva's first born son. Despite the difficulties and betrayals he faces in his relationships with Avner, Amnon, and Avshalom, he laments for them. David even tears his garment in mourning for the deaths of Natan's father and uncle as a show of sorrow for having to punish the lack of provisions which he had requested.

Ashes on the head

Putting ashes on one's head is a sign of sorrow and repentance or humility. It is an outward sign of the inward state. When Tamar is raped and thrown outside she rips her royal robes and throws dirt on her head. In this instance she is not repenting of any sin on her part, but she is outwardly depicting what has been done to her. Her virginity has been stolen from her and she is now a dishonored and defiled woman. She has been humiliated. Her outward action signifies the inner destruction that has taken place.



Sackcloth

Sackcloth is a rough woven fabric resembling a grain sack. It is worn as a sign of repentance for sin. Yoav is told by Natan to put on "penitent dress" (154) and report to David at the gate after he murders Avner. Because the cloth is so rough and uncomfortable, it serves as a reminder of sin and keeps in the sinner's mind that they need to humble themselves.

The color purple

Purple is a deep rich color that signifies royalty. The colored dyes are expensive during ancient times and so only the wealthy can afford them. As such, garments colored purple are most often worn by Kings and their family. When David makes his pronouncement that Shlomo should be taken and anointed King, Batsheva and Natan take care to set him in his chair and put a cloak of purple on him. For weeks, David has been lying ill in bed and his appearance is rather haggard, but when the priest Zadok and Benaiah, his bodyguard, come to hear the order they look upon a King dressed in his royal robes, not an invalid, weak and frail.

Fine linen

Fine linen is a fabric often worn during religious ceremonies and to signify purity or righteousness. When David moves the Ark of the Covenant, he dresses in fine linen. When Shlomo is anointed king, he also is dressed in a robe of fine linen.

A Shofar

In ancient Jewish history it is used in warfare to signal the start of the battle as God instructed His people to sound the horn and then He would be with them. Likewise, when the battle comes to an end the horn is sounded to announce the victory.

The shofar is an instrument fashioned from a ram's horn. Narrow at one end and opening wider at the other, the instrument's sound is only altered as the player varies his embouchure and breath patterns.

Following the death of Avshalom, Yoav has the horn sounded to declare that the uprising has ended. The horn is also blown in ceremonies and festivals at the Temple, in worship and for coronations of the Kings. The ram horn symbolized God's provision of a ram as a sacrifice in lieu of Abraham's son Isaac. Sacrificing the ram is a victory over death and sinfulness. Likewise, as Solomon is anointed by the priest, the shofar is blown, declaring that he is the next king. The blasts are loud and heard far away. At the sound, Adoniyah knows that his attempt at the throne has been thwarted and he has been defeated.



The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant represents God's presence among his people. It is a physical chest made of acacia wood and covered with pure gold. It contains the Tablets of the Law, a jar of manna and Aaron's rod.

At the time of the story, the Ark has been kept in a tent, but David wants to build a glorious temple to house the Ark, feeling that he should not have a more beautiful home. David dances before the Ark in worship as it is brought into Jerusalem because he is filled with joy that the symbol of God's presence is in the capital city of the newly unified nation.



Settings

Natan's home

The novel begins in Natan's home in the almond groves located near where the Temple is being built during the reign of Shlomo. The house is plain and simple, just as Natan prefers it. As he advanced in years, David gave him this home as a retreat to get away from the bustle of palace life. It is in this house, where Natan has his first vision of Shlomo and gains the knowledge that he will be crowned king. As a young boy, Shlomo comes here daily for lessons and to talk with his teacher.

The battlefield

As David seeks to establish his kingdom there are many battles to be fought. The fighting traverses many mountainsides, valleys and cities. No matter where David and his men find themselves however, the fighting is always fierce and brutal.

Hevron (Hebron)

Hevron is the city where David first establishes his reign as the king of Judah. Following the news of Shaul's death, Natan delivers a message from the Name. David is told to go up to Hevron where the people are waiting to anoint him officially as their King. From here he begins to deal with the politics of uniting the nation. He must deal with the remaining factions of Shaul's followers and reconcile with his general Avner. Avner comes to meet with David at the palace, and meets his end just inside the gates where Yoav murders him in retribution for his brother's death. From this place, David begins to consider a more neutral city politically from which to rule his people.

Beit Lehem (Bethlehem)

Beit Lehem is the home town of David and a half day's ride from Hevron. Natan visits the town as David has instructed him to speak with Nizevet, his mother, and Shammah his brother. The two live with their extended family in a small compound within the city. While David himself does not return to the town once he leaves, it is still his birthplace. The city is perhaps best known as it is mentioned in the Biblical Christmas story of Jesus' birth. His parents, Mary and Joseph go to the town of Bethlehem to be counted in the census, because they were of the house and lineage of David. David's connection to the city established his roots and the history remained important through the ages.



Yebus/Ir David (Jerusalem)

David selects the city of Yebus to be the site of his new capital. He is impressed with its fortresses and its defenses. Through careful study and crafty information gathering, he discovers a way to penetrate the city and take it with little bloodshed. By sneaking in through the water system, David's army is able to secure the city and take it over. David has great plans for the city and expands its walls to double its size. The city is located further to the north, thereby including the northern tribes of Israel and giving them easier access to worshipping in the Temple. David loves his city. When Avshalom betrays his father and declares himself king, he starts to march to the city to overtake the throne. David does not want the city destroyed or the people killed, so he flees with his supporters and family to protect Jerusalem. When Avshalom is defeated, David returns to his beloved city to live out the remainder of his days.



Themes and Motifs

A Person's Life Story

The Secret Chord demonstrates that the story of a man's life must be all encompassing and include not only their great deeds but their great failings. Natan convinces David to chronicle his life story not only so the people can remember his great deeds and the work he accomplished in establishing his kingdom, but so that they will know and remember fully the essence of the man that was their leader. Natan says, "When all who knew you in life are but bleached bone and dust, your descendants, your people, will crave to understand what manner of man you were when you did these deeds, first and last. Not just the deeds. The man" (14). David is convinced that the proposition is a good one, that he should be remembered fully. He knows that this means that some secrets and some sin must be exposed and so he chooses to "be brave" (16) in commissioning the work.

Throughout the novel, the history of David's life is revealed. He is a brave warrior and leader, pushing the enemy out of the land for his people, uniting the tribes into one kingdom, establishing a central capital and building the city of Jerusalem and centralizing the worship of the Name. But he is also at times ruthless in his warring, a distant husband, a neglectful father, an adulterer and murderer. It is both the light and the dark, the good and the bad that make up the man. As Avigail tells Natan when speaking of David, "We may love him and yet not be blind to what he is. I've come to understand that he is what he is because of his faults" (164). She understands that often the bad things about a person are what work into their lives to turn around into good and useful outcomes.

Destiny of Women

Throughout the novel the plight of women is depicted as pre-determined, yet their destinies as lying in their own hands. Given the culture of ancient Israel and the surrounding lands, women had very little to say generally concerning their futures. They were expected to be given in marriage, often for political or financial gain and they were expected to produce children for the continuance of the family business and name.

Following his interview with Mikhal, Natan is filled with pity for the woman who has been thrown around by the powerful men in her life. Her father tore her away from David whom she loved and gave her to another man in marriage. Once she had finally reconciled to staying with and loving Palti, David pulls her back into his circle of wives, tearing her away from the man she had come to love and the children she was raising. Natan tells himself, "All women's lives are like that....Which of them ever is mistress of her own destiny?" (120).



For Mikhal and several of David's other wives this statement is true. And sadly it is also the case for Tamar, who through no fault of her own has her life destroyed by the wickedness of her half-brother Amnon. Destined to become a Queen through marriage to some monarch in a neighboring land, Tamar's path is laid out for her. But once Amnon rapes her, she is defiled and disfigured and no man will accept her in marriage. She is forced to live a solitary life, hidden on her brother's farm.

However, several other women in the novel, rise above their circumstances and take hold of their futures or the lives of their children. At the start of it all, Nizevet, despite being married to a man who no longer desires to be with his wife sexually, intervenes and prevents her husband from committing adultery. She protects the honor of her maidservant as well, allowing her to remain a pure virgin and, therefore, have a future with a husband of her own. She bears the shame of allowing her husband to think that she committed adultery, again to protect the servant. Finally, despite Yishai poor treatment of David, Nizevet loves her son deeply and does everything she can to provide for him.

Avigail also acts proactively despite the ill behavior of her drunkard husband. In order to save her home from ruin at the hands of David's outlaw band, she rides out to meet them on the road with the provisions they had requested. She is wise to see that giving the small amount of provision is of necessity to her survival. Upon her husband's death, she is eager to marry David and join his entourage. Through her wisdom, she earned a lasting and cherished place by David's side as one of his most trusted and loved advisers.

Similarly, both Maacha and Batsheva seek to change their situations in life despite the rough hand they have been dealt. Maacha is grieved over Tamar's rape. Her daughter has been defiled and will no longer be able to enjoy the benefits of being a wife and queen. She nearly demands that David do something to punish his other son for the crime. Instead she is further saddened that Tamar is sent away as she misses her daughter and is unable to comfort her. She also misses her son, Avshalom when he is forced into exile following the murder he commits as he seeks justice for Tamar. Maacha finally calls on Natan and Yoav, the two men who she knows have the king's ear, and begs them to convince David to allow Avshalom to return home to the city. She is not happy with her situation, especially as it is unjust, and moves to do what she can to change things for the better.

Likewise, Bathsheva has lost so much in her life. Her fidelity, her husband and her firstborn child were all taken from her because of David's lack of self-control and sinfulness. She hates this man who can do whatever he wishes, leaving a swath of destruction. Yet, when she hears from Natan that her second child is destined to sit on the throne rather than his older brothers, she realizes that she must change her attitude and heart toward the King. She must position herself well so that her child will have every advantage. "...it will have to be different, between me and the King. If my son is to sit on the throne, I will need to --" (212). As Batsheva softens her heart, she becomes closer to David and is by his side as he becomes ill in his old age. She cares for him and seeks out every method of assistance. When the time comes, she is positioned to



request of David that he name Shlomo to the throne. She has worked to raise her son to complete the work of building a strong kingdom and become the Name's next anointed King.

God's Justice and Mercy

David's story carries the theme of punishment for evil, but also mercy from a God who allows it to serve a purpose and turns difficulty into a positive end result. Whenever there is sin, the Law demands that there be punishment. In the time of the novel, the payment for a life is typically a life. And as David judges in his case concerning the pet lamb, his personal payment is to be fourfold. Of the many rapes and murders that occur throughout the novel all of them resolve under the watchful eye of the Name.

When David commits his greatest sin with Batsheva and subsequently murders Uriah, the Name does not allow the sin to stand unchallenged. Even though David initially thinks nothing will come of the incident, God proves him wrong. Following a vision that is purposefully delayed in its arrival, Natan has seen all that the King has done and so he is able to confront the King concerning his sin. Because the Name has his hand on David and has him on the throne as His anointed servant, He will bring him to repentance. As David confesses his sin, he is ready to accept his fourfold punishment and atone for his actions. As King, there is little anyone else could do to chastise him, but the Name shows him mercy and is able to bring David back to a right path.

Similarly, the Name's hand is on the meting out of punishment for Amnon. Maacah asks Natan to speak to David on her behalf to demand the punishment of Amnon for the rape of Tamar. She wants justice for her daughter but David will do nothing. But the Name has His own plans for Amnon. The Name speaks to Maacah through Natan, "Who are you to question the Name's anointed? Justice comes when I ordain it..." (240). Although Natan is unable to speak to her about the details, he knows from his desert visions that Amnon will be punished and how it will happen. He tells Maacah, "you will have your justice. Just not yet. Take comfort in that, if you can" (240). The Name is clearly in charge of the punishment of this heinous sin. He will bring it about in His time and in His way. But even in the waiting for Maacah, the Name shows compassion to her, by allowing Natan to assure her that justice is coming and that He will take of it. Again, with the passage of time, Avshalom takes retribution into his own hands and murders Amnon. But it is also part of God's plan and a portion of the judgement given to David that four lives must be lost as part of his payment for sin.

Perhaps the clearest example of the Name's mercy in the midst of sin is to Batsheva. She is raped and her husband is murdered. Her firstborn child dies. Yet, in time her heart is turned to see the good that comes from supporting David in his leadership and seeing their second son raised to the throne. In her distress of being pregnant a second time, Batsheva fears for the child's life. But Natan reassures her that the Name has a plan for boy and that he will one day sit on the throne. She realizes then the importance of changing her heart from bitterness to expectancy. She works on changing her relationship with David so that she and their son Shlomo will remain in favor in his heart.



The Name takes what was rotten and blesses the couple to raise the next anointed King of Israel. Shlomo eventually ascends to the throne and leads the kingdom in a period of peace and prosperity as well as completes the work of building a glorious house of worship for the Name.

God's Plan for His People

The novel mirrors the Biblical pattern of God's providence in directing the course of events so that His plan for his people is fulfilled. Near the beginning of the novel, Natan tells of his own entrance into the story. One day he is merely a young boy tending his father's flock and the next day he is uttering a message from the Name to the anointed king. David recognizes the utterances as from God, spares Natan's life and brings him into his household, training him and providing for his needs. Just as God has provided Shmuel to anoint Saul and give him guidance, so God is providing a prophet to speak into the life of his newly favored king. Whenever there is a moment of crisis or decision to be made, God speaks through Natan and directs David. Particularly, in battle, David relies on hearing from the Name. As he creeps into Shaul's camp, Natan speaks from the Name, and David knows to not take Shaul's life. He also knows that when Shaul speaks of reconciliation, that instead it is time to run.

God's blessing and guidance to David continues despite his sin. When he takes Batsheva in adultery and subsequently murders Uriah, he is headed down a dark path. But the name still loves him and wants to work through him, so He sends Natan to call for his repentance. Natan declares God's judgement on him, that he will repay with four lives for the one he took. Each violent act is seen by Natan in his desert visions, but God stoppers his mouth so that he cannot speak of them to David. The events must play out as God has ordained, and Natan is not to intervene in any way. And though David has envisioned that a great Temple should be built to house the ark of the Lord, the Name does not allow David to complete the work, but instead destines that task for his son.

Even though David is very flawed as a spiritual leader at times and as a father to his children, God still has his hand and favor on him. Throughout his reign, God allows everything to take place as he directs. Sin is punished, enemies are defeated and a united kingdom is established for His people. When the time comes, he directs David through Natan to pass on the throne to Shlomo, whom the Name blesses in even greater measure.

Nurturing of Children

The author highlights throughout the novel that a man reaps what he sows in parenting and that one cannot expect a good outcome with a child if they have not been given a positive upbringing and strong guidance. David seems both clearly aware of this and also oblivious. When he first sets Natan to the task of recording his life history, he



instructs him to speak first to Nizevet, his mother. The instruction clearly stated, "This one, before all others" (17).

Natan had not known of her previous to the interview, but it is easy to see why David wants her part of the story included at the very beginning. Nizevet reveals how David did not receive love from his father or brothers as a child. She explains how he was treated as an illegitimate son and how he was sent away from the family at the age of six. The lack of oversight and love in his life lays a poor foundation for David's later role as a parent himself. Perhaps he sees this, but if so, he does not learn from it and allows it to impact his own parenting.

As his own sons develop into handsome but unrestrained young men, they are left to their own devices. David's response to their excessive sexual exploits for example is to ignore it and give them homes outside the palace where he does not need to see them engage in their improper activities. But in so doing, he does not reign in their behavior; he allows it to continue. And unfortunately, the excesses continue and lead to more sin and heartbreak. As Amnon rapes his sister, Tamar, and Avshalom murders him in retribution, David is spent with grief over the state of his family. As Natan tries to comfort him, David says, "Is not one of a man's most basic duties to raise his children, keep them safe, bring them to an honorable manhood? What good to forge a kingdom, to win wars, to build this city, and then to fail at this most basic task... And what have I raised? What kind of a man must I be judged, who has brought forth rapists and murderers? What kind of a man begets such sons?" (258). The short answer is - a rapist and murderer. David did not set a good example for his sons as he took Batsheva in adultery and then murdered her husband to cover it up. He did little to instruct or guide them to leading an honorable life. As his punishments from the Name begin to manifest themselves in the lives of his sons, David sees them also as a pronouncement on his lack of parenting.

However, this is a beautiful example of good parenting in the novel as well. Natan, desiring to have a son of his own to raise and influence, asks David if he may have his son Shlomo to instruct and guide. Along with Batsheva, Shmolo is taught to think and reason and is exposed to many learned men. He excels in learning and wisdom and is allowed to attend the proceedings in the hall at an early age in order to listen to the judgments of the king. He brings delight to his father's soul. He is raised to think through issues and to respect others. His heart is good and the Name has His hand on him. When the time comes for David to name a successor, it is Batsheva and Natan who step forward and convince David that the time is right to place Shlomo on the throne. They have poured everything into raising the young man to be king and do what is necessary to get him to his rightful place.



Styles

Point of View

The story of David's life is told primarily from the point of view of Natan, the prophet of the Name. Since Natan has been in David's service for a long time he has lived along side David through much of his life as anointed King. He is in David's service, but set apart from others in the King's service because his authority to speak into David's life and to provide counsel come from the Name, the God of Israel. David himself knows that Natan is the only one among his men that dares to speak the truth to him and he respects Natan for it. Ultimately, he knows that the voice and the wisdom come from his God. Because of this, David trusts Natan to give an accurate accounting of his life.

There is much that is dark and unflattering in his past, but David trusts that Natan will handle it with care. Natan knows this and approaches the task warily. "It is one thing to transmit the divine through a blasting storm of holy noise, another thing entirely to write a history forged from human voices, imperfect memories, self-interested accounts" (2).

The novel consists of real-time accounts of events described by Natan. For parts of David's life where Natan is not yet on the scene, such as his childhood and his rise to favor in Shaul's court, the Interviews he has with others provide the necessary history. As Natan is aware, those to whom he speaks may color their accounts; Shammah is bitter, jealous and hateful and never has anything good to say and Mikhal has been so hurt and damaged that her heart can only spew bitterness. But all these accounts and perspectives give substance to the picture of the man that is David - "the first and last, the light and the dark" (2).

Language and Meaning

Geraldine Brooks uses beautiful language throughout the novel to create a sense of being in the moment in ancient Israel. Words associated with war and weaponry of the time are used throughout the battle scenes giving an authenticity to the work. She also uses metaphors to add beautiful language to her scenes and includes imagery of commonplace objects or motifs. For example, weaving or stitching are basic activities of daily life among the people and are clearly understood. Phrases like "The cloth of that story is threadbare with the telling" (55), and "I have lived long enough to see the pattern whose first stitch was placed in those late hours" (67) create images of woven fabric and the many threads that comprise it. Each story is made up of small threads to comprise the complete piece. Brooks also uses imagery of the vines and wine making, also a subject commonplace in the culture. She uses the metaphor of doubt as being like rot on the grapes which produces a richly flavored, heavy juice. "Maybe doubt is like that sometimes. Maybe it too could yield rich fruit" (122).

At times Brooks uses beautiful imagery to describe often horrific things. Natan kills a man on the battlefield and remarks, "I felt the warm wetness of his insides closing about



my fist. It was intimate as rape" (9). And again, as Natan remembers his father's skill in the vineyard, "All that skill, lost with the plunge of metal" (121). In both these cases, gentle words such as warm and intimate and the lessening of cold blooded murder to "plunge of metal" are all euphemisms, lessening the impact of the horror of the incidents.

Other tools that Brooks uses frequently throughout the novel are foreshadowing and cliffhangers. The end of nearly every chapter leads into the next, either suggesting what is about to happen without getting into the details, or leaving the reader wondering about the outcome of a situation (cliffhanger). Without giving the details, Natan hints at several future events: the crisis that is David's sin with Batsheva, the bloody hand print left on Maacah's stomach, the coming success of Shlomo. It is only fitting that Brooks should use this device because it adds to the authenticity of Natan's gift. If he is a prophet then it is natural that he should have a sense of what is to come. Since the story line occasionally jumps back and forth, the cliffhangers form place holders so that an individual character's story line is not forgotten if the focus moves somewhere else. Readers know that a character will be heard from again.

Structure

Overall, the story is a look back at the past, just as one would look back over the lifetime of a great man. The narrator, Natan, recounts David's life from his memory and what he has experienced living with and serving the King. As the history is outlined, the places where events take place are described, but they are not lengthy or rich with details. Readers can visualize the surroundings, but are not drawn closely to the places and pulled into scene in that manner. Instead, the emphasis is on character development. The story is filled with details on the attitudes, concerns, reactions, motivations and words of David and those in his circle. This is what gives the story its life. As Natan himself said to the king, anyone can write a dry history of someone's accomplishments, but it is far more interesting to write about the substance of the man (15).

As such, the author uses a great deal of dialogue. Not only through the words, but also through body language, emotions and responses are presented. The words of the Name are clearly presented as well. Whenever He speaks through Natan, the words are italicized so that it is very clear that the message being delivered is from God. Additionally, just as Natan has warning that he is about to receive a vision, the reader is told that a headache and stomach pains are present - a sign that the Name is about to speak.

The story does jump around at times which may cause confusion if not careful. The novel starts somewhere in the mid to latter years of David's life as he is beginning to stay home from battles. Natan must go back to the beginning to account for his coming into the King's service and explaining David's childhood and his early life in Shaul's court. At times the story dips back and forth between the present and the past, depending on if he is interviewing someone or if he himself is remembering incidents

from the past. Once the history is caught up, the story moves quickly forward to the end of David's reign and the ascension of Shmolo to the throne.



Quotes

But it is one thing to transmit the divine through a blasting storm of holy noise, another thing entirely to write a history forged from human voices, imperfect memories, self-interested accounts.

-- Natan (Introduction paragraph 8)

Importance: Natan speaks about his task of writing down the life story of King David. For most of his life he has been set apart to be a prophet of God and to communicate God's words and voice to the King. But now he must take imperfect human voices and memories and put them down for all to read and hear. He could always trust the words that were spoken to him from the holy God, but he is unsure about hearing this history of his King from men whose memories might be failing or who might not have a reason to speak the truth about David.

A man will silence the voice of his conscience when it suits him to commit sin. But if your 'conscience' walks and breathes as a living man in your service, you might have to go to additional lengths.

-- Natan (chapter 1 paragraph 54)

Importance: Natan is speaking of David setting him on the writing task to get him out of the way. Natan and Yoav meant to distract David from his disappointment of not going into battle. However, with Natan, his living conscience, out of the way David is free to pursue whatever he chooses. It is a bit of foreshadowing because in a few short days David will commit one of his greatest sins.

...and so I sealed my mouth and kept the secret. That is how the baby - my last child - was, in the eyes of his father, a mamzer."

-- Nizevet (chapter 3 paragraph 44)

Importance: Nizevet initially chooses to keep the secret that her son David was not a mamzer or illegitimate child. Although she had been living apart from her husband for a time, she remained chaste, unlike her husband Yishai who was almost commits adultery with Nizevet's own servant girl. Nizevet switches places with the girl and secretly lay with her own husband. The resulting pregnancy was seen by Yishai as the result of an adulterous act that he assumes his wife took part in during her time away from him. In fact, the child was his own, conceived the night that he himself was willing to engage in a lustful moment. Because of his rage and for fear of what he might do to the maid, Nizevet keeps the truth secret. As a result, David is shunned by his father and treated poorly by his brothers. He is sent away to tend the flocks at a very young age and as a result he grows up without the love and guidance of a father, which ultimately shapes his own lack of parenting.

He showed me that marks etched in stone or inked upon a roll of hide could make a man live again, long after he had died.

-- Natan (chapter 5 paragraph 33)



Importance: Once Natan becomes a part of David's "family" of outlaws on the run from Shaul, he is taught the skills necessary to survive and to be a part of David's entourage. He is not only taught to fight, but to read and write. David assigns Seraiah, one of Shaul's former scribes, to teach Natan. It is in this that Natan learns the value of the written word - that a man might live again for others even years after he is dead. With this skill, Natan is able to record the deeds and personal history of David in the fullness of his life.

Natan, do you think Yah will punish me more than he will punish the hundred other men who committed adultery last night within a cock's crow of these walls?

-- David (chapter 7 paragraph 25)

Importance: Upon hearing of David's sexual encounter with Uriah's wife, Natan goes early in the morning to confront the King. He inquires how he expects to keep the incident a secret and how it will be kept from Uriah. While David admits that the act was sinful and against God's law, he does not truly believe that he will be judged for it. He knows that many men commit adultery and are not found out. He was feeling out of sorts because he was no longer marching into battle and felt like less of a man. When he saw the beautiful young woman bathing on the rooftop, he was aroused and overcome, and chose to act on his manly desires, regardless of the consequences. He feels that the moment was inconsequential, and it will not make any difference from that point forward and that God will see the matter in the same way. He fears no punishment from God. However, Natan counters with the statement, that David is not like a hundred other men and that God will hold him to His standard.

You think she loved another, after?...In any case what is that to me? I care not for Palti, nor for what may or may not stand between them. The match was a grievous insult. It should never have been made, and now I have the power to unmake it.

-- David (chapter 10 paragraph 46)

Importance: At this point, David is very powerful and pretty much can demand whatever he wants. He had his wife taken from him when he had to flee Shaul's court and he now wants her back. He is very arrogant in his opinion of Mikhal's devotion toward him and cannot imagine that she would not be eager to return to him. At any rate, her feelings, or those of her new husband, do not matter to him. She was taken from him unlawfully and he does not care about anything else. He wants the wrong made right.

You are not the only one, Natan, who is allowed to sometimes speak the truth. We may love him and yet not be blind to what he is. I've come to understand that he is what he is because of his faults.

-- Avigail (chapter 11 paragraph 20)

Importance: Avigail is speaking to Natan concerning the problem of how to handle Mikhal's refusal to adjust to life in the palace with David. Avigail is aware the Mikhal loves her second husband, Palti, and is devastated to have been torn from him and their



children. Mikhal is angry with David and does not wish to be used as a political tool for uniting the kingdom. She has also refused to have her children brought to her because she does not wish to cause Palti further pain. Avigail knows that David is too vain to understand and sympathize with Mikhal - he simply wants to play the part of being a King and do what is politically expedient for the kingdom and satisfies his own ego. Yet, despite his lack of compassion in this situation, his strength as a ruler is shown in that he claims his right to his wife and plans ahead to suppress any possible claim to the throne from any of Shaul's family line.

When I began to write this chronicle at that time, I knew it for a turning point in David's life. But I did not then know that we stood on the very brink of a crisis that would rend his soul and alter his destiny.

-- Natan (chapter 11 paragraph 109)

Importance: Here the author uses foreshadowing to point to an event that will lead David on a downward spiral and affect the outcome of his life. David is about to commit two sins which alter his future dramatically. Natan knows that writing the history is an important piece of work to immortalize David, but he did not know at the time the degree to which things would change for David and of the "darkness" of which he would have to write.

I had seen him tear his garment so many times it was a sudden wonder to me that he had an intact tunic to lay upon his back.

-- Natan (chapter 12 paragraph 30)

Importance: Natan is watching David react to the news that Uriah has been killed on the front lines of battle. He falls back into his chair and covers his face in grief. He makes a show of it. Yet, Natan realizes through a vision that David is responsible for Uriah's death. He has watched David mourn the loss of so many men over the years and he knows that many of those deaths were necessary for the building of the kingdom. But this death had nothing to do with securing the kingdom. This death was merely to cover David's sin.

He loved to play the judge.

-- Natan (chapter 13 paragraph 10)

Importance: David loved to listen to the pleas and arguments of his people as they presented their civil cases before him. He enjoyed evaluating people's motives and actions and deciding the proper course of action. Here Natan is setting David up as he presents a mock case concerning a rich man who slaughters the one pet lamb of a poor neighbor. The case he presents is in fact an allegory of the situation between Uriah, his wife and David. Natan knows that he can interest David in the case and where he will cast judgement. Because David likes to play the judge with others, Natan knows that he can unwittingly cause David to cast judgement on himself for sinning against Uriah.

That man deserves to die! Tell me his name! I'll see to it that he pays for that lamb four times over, because he was greedy and had no pity.



-- David (chapter 13 paragraph 14)

Importance: David is livid in response to Natan's story about the rich man who kills the poor man's single lamb. He pronounces a judgement that requires a four fold repayment of what has been taken. But the story is a metaphor for David's own sin against Batsheva and Uriah and so he will be required to repay. Natan prophesies that "the sword will never depart from your house," and David will lose four of those whom he loves.

My heart, Natan, is as hollow as a gourd....What kind of a man must I be judged, who has brought forth rapists and murderers? What kind of a man begets such sons?

-- David (chapter 23 paragraph 7)

Importance: David has been fasting and grieving over the murder of Amnon and the exile of Avshalom. He is also deeply remorseful for not raising his sons to be good men who follow after the ways of the Name. He knows that his own sin has brought much of this about and his soul is hollowed out by it. He is emotionally and physically wasting away in remorse.

Unlike Yoav, the common soldiers did not blame him for his excessive grief. They knew him. They knew his flaws. Indeed, I think they loved him all the more because he was flawed, as they were, and did not hide his passionate, blemished nature.

-- Natan (chapter 26 paragraph 19)

Importance: Natan is speaking of David as he is greeting the soldiers upon their victorious return from battle. They have suppressed the uprising and attempted overthrow of the throne by David's son Avshalom. Yoav has killed Avshalom and despite the fact that his son was a traitor, David is still deeply grieved. He only stands to meet the troops at Yoav's insistence. The men, however, do not mind that David is worn and grief-stricken. He has made mistakes, he has publicly confessed his errors and he has lost those he loved. The people know him well and know that he has lived as one of them and experienced many of the same disappointments in life. Because he is not a distant king, but a "real" person, their love and allegiance is solidified.