



KING DAVID'S ABDICATION OF POLITICAL DUTY IN 2 SAMUEL (11:1-17): A RHETORICAL AND ANALYTICAL STUDY IN NIGERIA

Michael Paul Pilani, PhD

Department of Theology, Veritas University Abuja

pilanim@veritas.edu.ng; +2348036141525

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6549-6201>

&

Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, PhD

Department of Philosophy, Veritas University Abuja Abuja

ikee_mario@yahoo.com; +2348036345466

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1977-202X>

Abstract

This study examines King David's moral failings as depicted in 2 Samuel 11:1-17, employing historical-critical, rhetorical, and analytical methods to explore the text's implications for contemporary Nigerian leadership. The research analyses David's abdication of royal duties, abuse of power, and violation of divine commandments, drawing parallels to modern governance challenges in Nigeria. Using historical-critical exegesis, the paper contextualizes the narrative within ancient Near Eastern kingship ideologies and Israelite theological frameworks. Rhetorical analysis unpacks the literary structure and theological motifs of the pericope, revealing how the author portrays David's descent from neglect of duty to adultery and murder. The analytical approach then applies these insights to critique leadership failures in Nigeria, including absenteeism during crises, misuse of state resources, and undermining of democratic institutions. The study argues that David's story provides a timeless lens for examining the correlation between negligence of responsibilities and corruption in positions of power. It concludes by emphasizing the imperative of diligence and ethical leadership in navigating the complexities of modern governance, offering valuable lessons for Nigerian leaders in upholding their duties and resisting the allure of corruption. This interdisciplinary approach bridges biblical scholarship with contemporary political analysis, contributing to discussions on ethical leadership and national development in Nigeria.

Keywords: King David, 2 Samuel, Royal Duties, Divine Command

Introduction

The narrative of King David's moral failings in 2 Samuel 11:1-17 presents a compelling case study of leadership failure and its ripple-effect consequences. This account, deeply embedded in the historical and theological context of ancient Israel, provides profound insights into the nature of power, responsibility, and ethical governance that echoes across millennia. The story of David's descent from neglect of duty to adultery and murder serves as a reminder of the vulnerabilities inherent in leadership positions and the cascading effects of moral compromise. In the contemporary Nigerian context, where leadership challenges continue to shape the nation's



trajectory, the relevance of this biblical narrative takes on renewed significance.¹ Nigeria, a nation grappling with issues of corruption, abuse of power, and governance inefficiencies, provides a fertile ground for examining the echoes of David's transgressions in modern political scenes. This study aims to bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and current realities, using the story of David as a lens through which to analyse and critique leadership failures in Nigeria.

By employing the three methodological approach – combining historical-critical exegesis, rhetorical analysis, and analytical study – this research seeks to unpack the layers of meaning within the biblical text and draw meaningful parallels to contemporary governance issues. The historical-critical method allows us to situate the narrative within its original context, understanding the expectations and norms of kingship in ancient Israel. Rhetorical analysis helps uncover the literary craftsmanship of the text, revealing how the author constructs a powerful narrative of moral decline. Finally, the analytical approach enables us to apply these insights to the Nigerian context, critically examining how the themes of duty, power, and corruption manifest in modern leadership scenarios.

This study posits that the progression from negligence of duty to outright corruption, as exemplified in David's story, offers valuable lessons for contemporary Nigerian leaders. By exploring the theological import of David's actions and their modern parallels, we aim to contribute to ongoing discussions about ethical leadership, accountability, and the imperative of diligence in governance. By and large then, this research seeks not only to illuminate the timeless nature of leadership challenges but also to provide a framework for reflecting on and addressing these issues in the complex setting of Nigerian politics and governance.

Exegesis of 2 Sam 11:1-17

The Literary Context of the 2 Sam 11:1-17

The literary context of any given Biblical text refers to the function of the text within the larger and immediate context of its literary environment.² Thus, like most literary pieces, 2 Sam 11:1-17, has both remote and immediate contexts. On the one hand, the remote context includes all the narratives about the events that led to the transition of Israel from tribal confederacy into monarchy including the rise of David to power in 1 Sam 8-2 Sam 5.³ In these pericopes, the people asked for a king to lead them to battle like other nations 1 Sam 8:5, 19-20, which eventually brought about the election of Saul as Israelite first king. But as events unfolded, Saul's kingship was rejected. This occasioned the emergence of David as king "from humble beginnings as a shepherd boy"⁴ in Jerusalem, and eventually as king over the whole of Israel (North and South).

¹Ikechukwu, Anthony Kanu, Pilani, Michael Paul, and P. C. Omenkwa, "Philosophy of Emotional Intelligence in the Light of 1 Kings (12:1-19): The Intersection of Philosophy, Psychology and Scripture," *Tuijin Jishu/Journal of Propulsion Technology* 45, no. 3 (2024), 3045-3057. 3054.

²Luke Emehiele I. "A Compassionate God who Punishes the Guilty: Exodus 34:6-7 in the Contemporary Setting". In Bernard Ukwuegbu et al (Eds.). *Mercy and Justice in the Bible: Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria* Vol 9. (2017): 1-12. 4 Port Harcourt: CABAN,.

³David M. Howard. "David". In David N. Freedman et al. (Eds). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol 2. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008): 41-49, 47.

⁴ Ibid



On the other hand, the immediate context of 2 Sam 11:1-17, includes what is referred to as the “Succession or Accession Narrative” (2 Sam 9-20 and 1 Kgs 1-2).⁵ These pericopes contain series of episodes that involve David’s sin of adultery with Bathsheba, murder of Uriah and the eventual espousal of Bathsheba, the woman who eventually would be King Solomon’s (David’s successor) mother. Between these two events (adultery with Bathsheba and Solomon’s kingship) however, series of events, mostly tempestuous ones had to happen following Nathan’s curse on David’s house.⁶

Literary Structure of 2 Sam 11:1-17

For the purpose of this study, which centres on the dynamics of Negligence of responsibilities and how it correlates with corruption and abuse of power, the structure 1 Kings 11:1-17 would be presented in three major sections of A, B, and C. Section A, being the smallest (1 Kings 11:1) is about David’s failure to honour his duty. The second section includes vv. 2-5 designated as first consequence of the failure, while the third, (vv. 6-17) is presented as the second consequence, each coming with subunits as shown below:

- A. 2 Sam 11:1 – - David Abdicates Duty
- B. 2 Sam 11: 2-5 - First Consequence: The Unholy Affair
 - i. vv. 2-3 - An Inactive Mind: A Breeding Ground for Mischief
 - ii. vv. 4-5 - Adultery and Conception
- C. 2 Sam 11:6-17 - Second Consequence: Cover Up and the Death of Uriah
 - i. vv. 6-12 - First attempt at cover-up: A Recall of Uriah from Warfront
 - ii. vv. 13 - Second attempt at cover-up: Getting Uriah Drunk
 - iii. vv. 14-17 - Final attempt at cover-up: David contrives and Kills Uriah

Content Analysis of 2 Sam 11:1-17

A. 2 Sam 11:1 – David Abdicates Duty

The narrative as a whole open thus: “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go forth to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel” (2 Sam 11:1a, RSV). The Hebrew text *litšûbat haššânâ* here translated as “In the spring of the year,” has a complex syntactical composition. This complexity can even be seen in the diverse rendering among scholars. For instance, Everett would render it “the year was expired.”⁷ Alter translates it as “at the turn of the year.”⁸ Meanwhile, “Within the context of this passage, this word means, ‘completion of a year, return of a year.’”⁹ In Anderson’s opinion therefore, the expression can better be described as “springtime;”¹⁰ and this is how this present study renders and admits its use. In this regard, “the

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Robert Alter, *Ancient Israel – The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 225.

⁷ Gary H. Everett, *The Books of 1 & 2 Samuel: Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures Using a Theme-Based Approach to Identify Literary Structures*, 2013, 148. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/ghe/1-kings.html>.

⁸ Robert Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 479.

⁹ Gary H. Everett, *The Books of 1 & 2 Samuel*, 148.

¹⁰ A. A. Anderson, “2 Samuel,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 11 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, Publishers, 1989), 152.



most plausible meaning is the beginning of the spring, when the end of the heavy winter rains makes military action feasible.”¹¹

From the narrative then, one gets to learn that this is a favourite time kings, whose primary duties was leading to war, go to battle. Everett explains further why such period was suitable for war. For him, kings initiated conflicts in the spring, taking advantage of the favourable outdoor conditions. Harsh weather during colder seasons would have posed challenges such as travel difficulties and increased susceptibility to illness among the troops, putting them in a disadvantageous position when laying siege to cities.¹² From the narrative, it becomes clear that David not only recognizes the appropriateness of the timing but also grasps the necessity of initiating and leading the warfare. Thus, war is decided against the Ammonites and Rabbah, the latter being a residential city of the Ammonite king (2 Sam 12:26). The choice of the Ammonites as target for attack is given in the previous chapter (10:1-19), where David’s kind gestures to their king, on the occasion of his father’s death, is treated with suspicion and disgust.

Meanwhile, there seems to be an ambiguity with intended cunningness where the text reads “kings go forth to battle” (*cē’ t hammal kîm*) in the Hebrew Text. While the received text, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (HBS), reads *mal kîm* which means “messengers,” (as in v. 4), many other manuscripts among which are the LXX, Targum, and Vulgate, have it as *melakîm*, “kings.” The dilemma whether it should be “messengers” or “kings” however, has been subject of discussion among scholars. Alter, for example, suggests that the key to the dilemma lies in the word to go forth (*yc*), which is usually attributed to kings and never messengers. Accordingly, “kings” should be the most probable reading, “though the ghost of ‘messengers’ shows through in the letters of the text.”¹³ Alter further explains the intention behind the double take thus:

The verse clearly doubles back on itself in a marvellous display of narrative virtuosity: at a time when kings go forth, David did not, making it a time, therefore, when messengers must go forth; at a time when messengers go forth, David, remaining in Jerusalem, sent Joab, his servants and all Israel to ravage Ammon.”¹⁴

He concludes his thoughts to the effect that it is really a deliberate orthographic pun and not a scribal error as some see it.

By and large then, it was customary for kings to engage in battle campaign during the springtime. But, in this verse, no matter the need for war, David, whose one key job description is to lead the battle campaign, stays back and only sends Joab his military general and all the army. The last part of the verse, adequately underlines this irresponsible action. It states in the Hebrew text that, *wüdäwîd yôšëb Bîrûšälä’im* (But David remained at Jerusalem. (2 Sam 11:1bβ). The assumption here is that wars were led by kings and ordinarily fought in spring time. However, the use of the disjunctive clause contrasts David’s inactivity with the army’s activity and it helps to accentuate

¹¹ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 479.

¹² Gary H. Everett. *The Books of 1 & 2 Samuel*, 148.

¹³ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 479.

¹⁴ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 479.



his failure to carry out his “manifesto” of kingship, the very reason why kingship was enthroned in Israel, *ab initio*. McKenzie avers that:

This failure and the consequences it produced are seen to be signalled for the reader in the explicit notice of David’s remaining behind in Jerusalem. David’s motive for staying behind is accounted for in various ways. It is perceived as laziness (“idleness is the Devil’s playground”), boredom, fear, cowardice, affluence, conceit, or a combination of these.¹⁵

B. 2 Sam 11: 2-5 First Consequence: The Unholy Affair

The narrative moves on to show that there are consequences for abdication of duties by the king as the verses that follow show.

i. vv. 2-3 An Inactive Mind: A Breeding Ground for Mischief

So it is that David, now a sedentary king and used to the life of leisure, is exposed to the temptation of lust and eventual adultery, engendered by the vantage point from where he stood, as the “*mē`al haGGäg*” (from the roof) implies in v. 2. Fired by lust, he desires the beautiful Bathsheba and enquires about her identity. The response he gets is: “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” (v. 3). This response comes in an unusual Hebrew syntax being that it was not usual to identify a woman using her father and husband at the same time. Alter speculates that it is presented like this here because perhaps “both men are members of David’s elite corps of warriors.”¹⁶ Her husband’s name (Uriah), borne by up to six persons in the OT has Hebrew background meaning “YHWH is my light/fire.”¹⁷ David Firth has described Uriah as a character who is morally upright and a dedicated Yahwist.¹⁸ However, the designation “Hittite” has led many to speculate he was a foreign mercenary. Alter argues that if this is so, “there is an obvious irony in the fact that the man of foreign origins is the perfect Good Soldier of Israel, whereas the Israelite king betrays and murders him.”¹⁹ Althann writes, however, that his being referred to as Hittite “does not necessarily make him a foreigner. It may merely mean that an ancestor came from one of the Neo-Hittite states in northern Syria, where Hittite civilization survived the collapse of the empire.”²⁰ Again, whatever the case, this serves to accentuate the reality that David, who is to lead to war, abdicates his responsibility. As a result, he finds himself idle to the extent that he has the leisure to gaze upon an alluring, unclothed woman. This aligns with the notion that an unoccupied mind often becomes a fertile ground for mischievous thoughts or actions.

ii. vv. 4-5 Adultery and Conception

¹⁵Steven L. McKenzie, “Why Did David Stay Home? An Exegetical Study of 2 Samuel 11:1,” in *Why Did David Stay Home? An Exegetical Study of 2 Samuel 11:1* (Penn State University Press, 2021), 149, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781575066264-016/pdf>.

¹⁶ Robert Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 480.

¹⁷Robert Althann. “Uriah”. In David N. Freedman et al. (eds). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 767-769. 768.

¹⁸David G. Firth. “David and Uriah (With an Occasional Appearance by Uriah’s Wife) – Reading and Re-Reading 2 Samuel 11”. *Old Testament Essays*, Vol. 20. No. 2 (2008): 310-328, 313.

¹⁹ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 480.

²⁰ Althann. “Uriah,” 768.



In vv. 4-6, David succumbs to the force of lust and commits adultery with Bathsheba which leads to conception. Scholars have debated how much freedom Bathsheba has in the whole affair: is the sexual intercourse a rape of traditional Israelite woman who was seen bathing or is it a product of mutual consent by two adults?²¹ In this connection, there are scholars who see Bathsheba as a scheming seducer.²² Klein for instance considers her as one venturing into sexual adventure and who eventually seduced David into “seducing” her.²³ She is also seen as “a clever woman, sufficiently calculating to see every political opportunity and resourceful enough to bring each opportunity to fruition.”²⁴

Against this opinion, J. L. Andruska, Moshe Garsiel, Jan Fokkelman and Walter Brueggemann all argue that Bathsheba in this unholy episode is a victim of rape. Thus, in the words of Andruska,

The character of Bathsheba is the subject of wide and varying interpretation. She has been understood as everything from an innocent victim, to a surviving opportunist, or mastermind schemer. Many convincing arguments have been put forward in support of her innocence. Yet, what no one has observed, and what I hope to contribute, is that the syntax of 2 Samuel 11:4 actually signals that this was a non-consensual sexual violation, what we call ‘rape.’²⁵

In the same vein, Garsiel asserts that “the series: ‘he saw...sent...inquired...sent...took her...lay with her...’ indicates that the main initiative was David’s and believes that the ‘taking’ implies coercion.”²⁶ As for Fokkelman, the brusqueness that is obvious in the phrase *wayyiqqāHe^ohā* (and [he]took her) in v. 4, indicates a “sudden, moral brutality...which reduces the other partner to a mere object of desire.”²⁷ All these may be the reason why Brueggemann advances an argument in favour of rape: “There is no conversation. There is no hint of caring, of affection, of love—only lust. David does not call her by name, does not even speak to her. At the end of the encounter she is only ‘the woman.’”²⁸

Of itself, the text does not really say to what degree Bathsheba cooperated or not. “The author gives no clues to the emotions of a woman who commits adultery, becomes pregnant, loses her

²¹D’Ror Chankin-Gould J. et al. “The Sanctified ‘Adulteress’ and her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba’s Bath and Self-Consecration in 2 Samuel 11”. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* Vol 32. 3. (2008): 339-352, 340. <http://jot.sagepub.com/content/32/3/339>

²²Lisa Hui. “Bathsheba: A Seductress? A Faithful Reading of 2 Sam 11–12”. *Theology Annual* Vol. 32, 2011, 1. https://www.academia.edu/40365206/Bathsheba_A_Seductress_A_Faithful_Reading_of_2_Sam_11_12

²³Lillian R. Kein, “Bathsheba Revealed”. In Athalya Brenner (Ed.). *The Feminist Companion to the Bible, Second Series*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 302-32253.

²⁴George G. Nicol, “Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?” *The Expository Times*. Vol. 99. (1988): 360-363, 363.

²⁵Andruska J. L. “‘Rape’ in the Syntax of 2 Samuel 11:4”. *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (ZAW)* Vol. 129. No. 1. (2017): 103-109, 103. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/83939754.pdf>

²⁶Moshe Garsiel, “The Story of David and Bathsheba: A Different Approach”. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 55 no. 2. (1993): 244–262, 255

²⁷Fokkelman, J. P. *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume 1: King David (11 Sam 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2)*. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 52.

²⁸Walter Brueggemann. *First and Second Samuel, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 273.



husband, and marries her royal over.”²⁹ Thus, the debate concerning her participation in the affair remains open. But ultimately, David has intercourse with her. Afterwards, events move speedily up so fast and the outcome of that brief liaison was unplanned pregnancy. With Bathsheba pregnant, there are limited choices at the king’s disposal.³⁰ This is obviously a crisis situation, the resolution of which is a matter of urgency. Campbell and O’Brien have wondered if David would have sought advice in order to adopt one of few options as an approach to the quagmire:

Perhaps denial, since presumably only Bathsheba and we, the audience, know she was purifying herself after her period so that she was ready to conceive and the child was certainly David’s; perhaps he might brazen it out with supercilious royal disdain, unless the moral climate in Jerusalem made that impossible. Other possibilities, such as a stay in the country for Bathsheba or a permanent posting in the city for Uriah, dependent on their cooperation, which may have been most uncertain. A fatal accident for Bathsheba would have left a grieving Uriah – and perhaps too many people too many people knew too much.³¹

As it stands however, the text does not say if anyone advised him or he ever thought of these options. However, he came up with a few that would not end well with Uriah.

C. 2 Sam 11:6-17 Second Consequence: Cover Up and the Death of Uriah

i. vv. 6-12 First attempt at cover up: A Recall from Warfront

To resolve the problem, David arranges for Uriah to be sent back to Jerusalem. This is a hatched plan to “plant” the responsibility of the pregnancy on the latter (vv. 6-11). “What he wanted was that Uriah should sleep with his wife once so that he would consider that Bathsheba was made pregnant by him”³² and thus cover his shame and disgrace. Although not stated clearly, the speculation that David intends Uriah to sleep with his wife is stimulated by the word “*rüHac raglÊ^okä*” (wash your feet) in v. 8, which sometimes is used as a euphemism in Hebrew to refer to sexual intercourse.³³ This is so because, the Hebrew word for foot (*rgl*) is used to mean the male genitals in several passages (Ruth 3:7, 8, 14; Isa 6:2; 7:20; Ezek 16:25).³⁴ But Uriah, unlike his unpatriotic king (David), feels it a mark of irresponsibility to go to his wife and have sexual intercourse with her (v. 9). This may be connected to a law that prescribes sexual abstinence for soldiers at war fronts (1 Sam 21:6).³⁵ When asked by the king why he did not go to see his wife, Uriah excuses himself using his patriotism and “his commitment to the cause of war that he was fighting,”³⁶ (vv. 10-11).

²⁹Gale A. Yee “Bathsheba”. In David N. Freedman et al. (eds). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 1. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008): 627-628, 627.

³⁰Antony Campbell and Mark O’Brien. “1-2 Samuel”. In William R. Farmer et al (Eds.). *The International Bible Commentary*. (Bangalore: The Theological Publications in India, 1998): 641-655, 651.

³¹ Campbell and O’Brien. “1-2 Samuel,” 651.

³² Sebastian Kizhakkeyil. *Historical Books of the Bible*. (Mumbai: St. Paul Press, 2010), 166.

³³ David Firth. “David and Uriah,” 317.

³⁴ Kizhakkeyil. *Historical Books of the Bible*, 166.

³⁵ Althann. “Uriah,” 768.

³⁶ Kizhakkeyil. *Historical Books of the Bible*, 166.



Some scholars have mused on whether Uriah's refusal to go to his wife is because he got wind of the amorous relationship between his wife and the king. In this connection, some maintain that he is merely an innocent perfect soldier who is oblivious of the manipulation of his treacherous king. Others however, argue that he is not that naïve. He is rather a shrewd character who may know of the adultery and plays a dangerous game of hints in which he wittingly pricks the conscience of the king, while intentionally excluding the deferential "my lord the king" as he dramatically swears by David's life in v. 11.³⁷ Summing up this scholarly thoughts on the position of Uriah, Alter writes on a possible reconciled position thus: "When Uriah first arrives from the war front, he is unaware of what has occurred; after the first night with his comrades at the palace gate, he has been duly informed of the sexual betrayal, so that in his second dialogue with the king, he cultivates a rhetoric of implicit accusation."³⁸

ii. vv. 13 Second attempt at cover-up: Getting Uriah Drunk

Following an unsuccessful initial, comparatively mild effort, David turned to a more deceitful approach, endeavouring to make Uriah intoxicated during a meal. It has been suggested that the preposition used in the construction, *yō'kal lūpānāyw wayyēšT* (he ate in his presence and drank) in v. 13, implies a hierarchical distance between a king and a subject. Alter argues that "Plying Uriah with wine is a last desperate attempt, and a rather crude one, to get him to have sex with his wife."³⁹ While the intention is to make him drunk in order to be in high spirit leading to the possibility of desiring his wife, it may also be intended to make Uriah indebted to a "benevolent" king. However, Uriah, the loyal and patriotic soldier who does not lose sight of his civic and military duties, even when drunk, still did not go home. Thus, the king's second attempt at cover up failed. One may want to imagine how agonizing it was for the king that even a drunk Uriah is still more patriotic, responsible and dutiful than himself.

iii. vv. 14-17 Final attempt at cover-up: David contrives and Kills Uriah

Having failed the second time to shift the responsibility of Bathsheba's pregnancy to Uriah, the king employs a more extreme measure and compounds the sin of adultery as he contrives to get Uriah killed, through the crude but ready instrumentality of Joab. The latter is to receive a letter, most probably a small scroll sealed by a seal or bound by a threads, through the hands of the victim, Uriah. (v.14). One wonders what gives David the confidence that Uriah would not read the letter. Perhaps, counting on the loyalty this soldier has thus far demonstrated, David is convinced that he will not conceive the idea of reading the missive.⁴⁰ Alter reasons that if Uriah "does not know of the adultery, he has in any case no personal motive to look at the letter. If he does know, he is accepting his fate with grim resignation, bitterly conscious that his wife has betrayed him and that the king is too powerful for him to contend with."⁴¹

³⁷ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 482.

³⁸ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 483.

³⁹ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 483.

⁴⁰ Everett. *1 & 2 Samuel*, 150.

⁴¹ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 483.



David himself provides the details of how Uriah's death is to come about in the letter. It is to be arranged to appear like a regular casualty in war (v. 15), by placing him "in the thick of the battle and allow him to be isolated so that the enemy will kill him"⁴². But as the story unfolds, one sees that Joab carries out a different death plan for Uriah. Does he notice that the Machiavellian David has suddenly lost his manipulative coolness? Perhaps, he reasons that it would be noticed that Uriah's death is deliberate if the men around Uriah are to draw back all at once based on David's orders. Thus, a better but more disastrous option of sending a whole contingent to their early death was chosen by Joab: loyal soldiers are killed but Uriah is finally dead.⁴³ "In this fashion, the circle of lethal consequences of David's initial act spreads wider and wider."⁴⁴ At the end, Uriah dies for no crime of his, but for simply being a husband of a beautiful woman and for being a dutiful soldier while "David is revealed as coldly callous."⁴⁵

Indeed, what started as an art of shirking from responsibility has spiralled into series of moral as well as disastrous consequences. These consequences as clearly seen range from uneasy idleness, lustful eavesdropping, adultery, unpatriotic manipulation and murder of a loyal soldier and ardent Yahwist. All these can summed up as abuse of office, which the verses that follow reveal that it displeased YHWH.

The Theological Import of 2 Sam 11:1-17

By the theological import of 2 Sam 11:1-17 we mean the function the text represents in the theological scheme of OT as and in its immediate context. In this regard, three theological motifs can be identified here, namely the theme of failure as YHWH's deputy; abuse of royal powers; flouting of commandment against coveting of another's wife and adultery and theme of Murder.

i. The Theological Motif of Abdication of Duty as YHWH's Deputy in War

In the OT, war is considered YHWH's prerogative,⁴⁶ namely that it is YHWH that fights battle for his people. It is in this connection that, referring to Joshua's activity in Josh 10:14, Gordon Oeste states that "when Joshua requested that the sun and moon stand still, he intruded upon Yahweh's prerogative as divine warrior."⁴⁷ The theme of Yahweh as warrior "is mentioned twice in the *opening* section of Deuteronomy (1:30 and 3:22) and in the defeat of numerous kings of Joshua 10 (verses 10 [sun stood still] and 42 [summary statement]). In Joshua 23:10 the fighting Yahweh becomes the 'Multiplier' (one Israelite with Yahweh can handle 1000 of any others). Isaiah 30:31-32 promises the destruction of Assyria, for '[Yahweh] fights them in battle with the blows of his

⁴² Althann. "Uriah," 768.

⁴³ Campbell and O'Brien. "1-2 Samuel," 652.

⁴⁴ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 484.

⁴⁵ Campbell and O'Brien. "1-2 Samuel," 652.

⁴⁶ Ben. C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult*. (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 101. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/zion-the-city-of-the-great-king-9780567311412/>.

⁴⁷ Gordon Oeste. "A Day Like No Other In the Context of Yahweh War: Joshua 10:14 and the Characterization of Joshua". *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. Vol. 57. No. 4 (2014): 689–702, 691.



arm.”⁴⁸ However, since the emergence of kinship in Israel, the king is considered as the YHWH’s vassal or deputy in all things and this includes war. If this is so for all the other kings, it is so much so for David, the man after God’s heart. For example, the subject matter of Psalm 89 is a beautiful symmetrical image of YHWH as king in heaven while David as king on earth.⁴⁹ In this text of the Psalms, “YHWH guarantees victory and honour to David and his descendants. Here David seems to be the tool YHWH uses to rule on earth, his deputy or viceroy.”⁵⁰ If this is so, then David’s failure to go to war while idling in Jerusalem, is a failure to carry out his divine mandate as God’s deputy. This failure at moral obligation gets more serious when 1 Sam 8:19-20 is put into consideration, namely that the Israelites asked for a king solely for the purpose of leading them into war. In this, David has indeed failed both YHWH and the people.

ii. Abuse of Royal Powers

When David used his power to summon Bathsheba for adultery purpose, recalled Uriah from warfront and subsequently ordered to arrange Uriah’s murder, he abused his power as king. Yet Royal power in the OT is considered as a privilege and seen as confidence reposed on the individual. In fact, kinship is also seen as an extension of YHWH’s kingship. In other words, the king is only a king because YHWH is king so that as Chris Pierson would say, “the ultimate moral and political authority is God.”⁵¹ At the end of the day, “Earthly kings and the symbol of their power, their thrones, visible to men are divinely appointed extensions of God’s kingship.”⁵²

This divine promotion to kingship necessarily requires the king to respect his position and act like YHWH himself for whom righteousness and justice towards the poor and vulnerable is of paramount importance (Prov 22:22-23; Psalm 140:12). Indeed, as the king waits on God to protect him from his enemies (2 Sam 7, Psalm 2), so also the king is expected to rule his people in justice and righteousness (Psalm 72; Isaiah 32:1-2). From this point of view, it is clear that David, rather than honour his royal office, abused it when he took advantage of the vulnerable family of Uriah.

iii. Coveting and Taking another’s Wife through Adultery

David’s moral recklessness, demonstrated in his lustful eavesdropping on Bathsheba and subsequent adultery, constituted a blatant violation of two fundamental commandments of God. The Decalogue, outlined in Exodus 20:14 and 17, unequivocally prohibits adultery and coveting another’s wife, extending these commandments to everyone, including kings. The commandments state, “You shall not commit adultery” and “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife...” (RSV).

⁴⁸Richard Nysse. “Yahweh Is a Warrior”. *Word & World* Vol. 7, No. 2 (1987): 192-201. 192. https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/7-2_Search_for_God/7-2_Nysse.pdf.

⁴⁹Cian Power “Kingship in the Hebrew Bible”. *Society of Biblical Literature*. (2011): 4. https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/TBv3i3_PowerKingship.pdf.

⁵⁰Power “Kingship in the Hebrew Bible,” 4.

⁵¹Chris Pierson “‘Naboth is Stoned’: A Bible Story”. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 12 (2010): 72-87, 85. https://www.academia.edu/3423328/Naboth_is_Stoned_A_Bible_Story

⁵²Michael E. Cafferky. “Biblical Kingship: A Model for Contemporary Leaders.” *Faith in Business Quarterly*. Vol. 15. No. 2 (2023): 25-29. https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=facworks_bus.



Notably, these transgressions were explicitly highlighted by YHWH when addressing David: “I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if this were too little, I would add to you as much more” (2 Sam 12:8, RSV). YHWH’s argument against David revolves around the abundance of blessings bestowed upon him. Taking another man’s only wife, in light of the bestowed blessings, was deemed beyond reasonable expectation and, more significantly, a breach of moral integrity.

In this context, David’s actions are portrayed as a grievous offense not only against God but also against his neighbor, Uriah. The betrayal of trust and moral boundaries underscores the gravity of David’s transgressions, contributing to a broader discussion on the intersection of power, morality, and divine expectations in biblical narratives.

iv. The Theological Motif of Murder

In a bid to conceal his initial transgression of adultery, prompted by Bathsheba’s revelation of her pregnancy, David orchestrated a plan to have Uriah killed. This action flagrantly contradicts a predominant theme in the Old Testament (OT) that emphasizes the sanctity of life as a divine gift. Throughout the OT, a resounding motif asserts that the exclusive right to ownership of life belongs to YHWH alone. Numerous texts underscore the prohibition against taking another’s life, emphasizing the sacred nature of human life (Gen 9:6; Exod 20:13; 21:12; Lev 5:17; Num 35:30; Deut 5:17; Prov 28:17).

The moral gravity of murder is accentuated when it involves the killing of a just and innocent victim (Exod 23:7; 27:25). In the case of King David, culpability arises on two fronts. Firstly, he murdered an innocent and just victim – Uriah, a loyal soldier and devout worshipper of YHWH who held deep respect for the king and reverence for the ark of God. Secondly, as king, David held a position of responsibility within God’s agenda for the preservation of life. That Uriah’s murder is a transgression of the laws of sacredness of life, is clearly expressed in the condemnation of YHWH through the prophet, Nathan. 2 Sam 12:9-10 states:

Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife (RSV).

Thus, David’s actions stand in stark contrast to the divine mandate for kings to be stewards of life, reinforcing the serious moral implications of his choices. The narrative involving David thus becomes a poignant exploration of the ethical complexities surrounding power, responsibility, and the divine framework for the sanctity of life in the Old Testament.

Echoes of David’s Leadership Failures in Contemporary Nigeria

The biblical account of King David’s moral failings provides a timeless framework for examining leadership failures, particularly those stemming from abuse of power. This narrative offers striking



parallels to contemporary leadership challenges in Nigeria, revealing how the misuse of authority and neglect of responsibilities can profoundly impact a nation.

In the story of David, we see a leader who abdicated his duty by remaining in Jerusalem when he should have been leading his army into battle (2 Samuel 11:1). This dereliction of duty finds echoes in Nigerian leadership, where leaders have been criticized for their frequent absence during critical times. Nigerian presidents and governors have faced public backlash for spending excessive time abroad, often under the pretext of “medical tourism” or seeking foreign investments, while pressing domestic issues remain unaddressed.⁵³ For instance, Okorie et al. aver that in 2017, President Buhari’s health concerns led him to spend a cumulative 154 days in London across two medical trips. Over a broader period spanning from mid-February 2016 to early August 2018, the President engaged in more than 43 international journeys, visiting 23 different nations. These frequent overseas travels stirred discontent among many Nigerian citizens who viewed them with concern.⁵⁴ Later in 2022, writing in Punch Newspaper, Stephen Angbulu expressed this concern more vividly. “The President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), has spent at least 225 days away from the country on medical trips since assuming office in 2015, Sunday PUNCH investigation has uncovered.”⁵⁵ As if this was to establish a pattern, *just few days* after Ahmed Tinubu’s election in 2023, it was report that he went on a medical trip⁵⁶ This absence becomes particularly glaring during national emergencies, such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters, where leadership presence and swift response are crucial.⁵⁷ The slow or inadequate response of Nigerian leaders during such crises has often exacerbated the suffering of affected populations and undermined public trust in government institutions.⁵⁸

Additionally, David’s affair with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2-5) characterises a clear abuse of power for personal gratification, a phenomenon that is unfortunately not uncommon in leadership.⁵⁹ Even Nigeria, there have been numerous allegations of sexual harassment and abuse by those in positions of power, including in educational institutions and government offices.⁶⁰ These incidents not only violate individual rights but also create a culture of fear and mistrust within institutions

⁵³Adebayo, B. (2019). “Nigerian president’s frequent trips abroad spark criticism.” CNN

⁵⁴Albert, Okorie, Celestine Udeogu, and Chikwado Ezugworie. “Presidential Abuse of Foreign Trips and Crisis of Governance in Nigeria: A Reflection on Muhamadu Buhari’s Regime, 2015–2019.” *International Journal of Political Science* 6, no. 3 (2020): 10–20. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2454-9452.0603002>.

⁵⁵Stephen, Angbulu “Buhari spends 225 days on medical trips, visits 40 countries.” *The PUNCH*, 4th December 2022

⁵⁶Jeune Afrique, Eniola Akinkuotu “Nigeria: Tinubu receives medical checkup at Paris hospital.” *The African Report*, March 24, 2023.

⁵⁷E. Gokum Richard, Michael Paul Pilani, and Azuwike Anthony, “Religio-political situation in Northern Nigeria: The Limits of the Law and Fault Lines in Christian Response to Islam,” *Journal of Religion and Society (JORAS)* 13 (2024): 1-17, 15.

⁵⁸Ofeibea Quist-Arcton, “Nigerian President’s Long Absence Comes Amid Major Economic Crisis” *NPR: Parallels*, February 24, 2017.

⁵⁹James Doubek “Of Power, Predators And Innocent Mistakes: The Complex Problems Of Sexual Harassment.” *NPR: National*, November 5, 2017

⁶⁰Enobong Mbang Akpambang “Sexual Harassment of Female Employees in The Workplace: Imperative For Stringent Legal And Policy Frameworks In Nigeria.” *Pancasila and Law Review*, Volume 3 Issue 1, 2022. 69-94. 75.



that should be bastions of safety and opportunity.⁶¹ Moreover, the misuse of state resources for personal benefit is a persistent issue in Nigerian governance. Leaders have been accused of using government vehicles, funds, and other resources for private events or family affairs, blurring the lines between public office and personal interest.⁶²

The attempts by David to cover up his affair by manipulating Uriah (2 Samuel 11:6-13) find modern parallels in the actions of some Nigerian leaders. There have been instances where Nigerian governments have attempted to suppress media coverage of scandals or unfavourable news, infringing on press freedom and the public's right to information.⁶³ This suppression often extends to the manipulation of investigative processes, particularly in high-profile corruption cases. Political interference in the judicial process has hindered the pursuit of justice and accountability, undermining the integrity of Nigeria's democratic institutions.⁶⁴ Perhaps most disturbing is the escalation from minor infractions to more serious crimes, mirroring David's progression from adultery to murder (2 Samuel 11:14-17). Nigeria has a troubling history of unsolved political assassinations, where it's suspected that those in power have eliminated perceived threats or whistle-blowers to maintain their grip on authority.⁶⁵ This culture of violence extends to the electoral process, where the use of intimidation and force during elections represents an extreme abuse of power. Such actions not only threaten individual lives but also undermine the very foundations of democratic governance.⁶⁶

While not explicitly mentioned in the David story, the broader context of his reign includes instances of favouritism, a significant issue in Nigerian leadership. There have been numerous cases of government appointments based on personal or ethnic connections rather than merit, leading to a decline in the quality of governance and public service delivery.⁶⁷ Similarly, the awarding of government contracts to friends, family members, or political allies without due process has become a persistent problem, fostering a culture of corruption and inefficiency in public resource management.⁶⁸ The parallels between David's moral failings and leadership failures in Nigeria highlight the timeless nature of power's corrupting influence. However, it's important to note that Nigeria also has examples of ethical and effective leaders who strive to serve their constituents with integrity. The challenge lies in strengthening institutions and fostering a

⁶¹Joseph Oluyemi Adesoji, Joseph Adejoke Adijat, Osho Olanrewaju Patrick, Bello Ayodeji Aliu, Fagbamila Olumide David, Atolagbe Emmanuel & Fagbamila Olawande "Sex for Grades: Untold Stories of Sexual Harassment in Institutions of Higher Learning in Nigeria." *Papers in Education and Development* Volume 41 Number 2, 2023, 23-38. 24. <https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ped.v41i2.2>

⁶²Transparency International. "Corruption Perceptions Index 2021: Nigeria," 2022. See also, Femi L. Gold & Kehinde Abdusalam "CPC, Gender Mobile: Partnering to Eradicate Sexual Harassment in Academic Institutions" Independent Corrupt Practices & Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) September, 2022

⁶³ *Reporters Without Borders*. "World Press Freedom Index: Nigeria," 2022.

⁶⁴ *Human Rights Watch*. "Nigeria: Corruption and Abuse in the Criminal Justice System," 2021.

⁶⁵E. O. Ojo "Political Assassinations and Nigeria's Democratic Consolidation." *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2018): 42-53.

⁶⁶ *European Union Election Observation Mission*. "Nigeria 2019 Final Election Observation Report," 2019.

⁶⁷M., Ochonu, "Nepotism and the Decline of Meritocracy in Nigeria." *African Arguments*, 2020.

⁶⁸Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). "Annual Report on Corruption in Nigeria," 2021.



political culture that holds leaders accountable, much as the prophet Nathan held David accountable in the biblical narrative. By learning from these historical and contemporary examples, Nigeria can work towards a leadership model that prioritizes public service over personal gain, ultimately leading to more effective governance and national development.

The Imperative of Diligence in Leadership Responsibilities in a Complex World

At this juncture this study posits that it is crucial for leaders to prioritize diligence as a necessity when dealing with their responsibilities in today's complex global landscape. It strongly urges present-day leaders to uphold their duties diligently, while recognizing the profound impact their actions can have on the well-being of their nations.

Firstly therefore, they must endeavour to recognize the imperative of diligence in carrying out leadership responsibilities. The prevailing reality is that contemporary leaders bear the weighty responsibility of steering their nations through unprecedented challenges, including global crises, economic uncertainties, and social upheavals.⁶⁹ In the face of such complexities, diligence becomes a cornerstone of effective leadership. Diligence demands a proactive commitment to fulfilling duties, ensuring transparency, and safeguarding the interests of the populace. In this connection, leaders must recognize that negligence not only compromises the integrity of their leadership but also creates an environment conducive to corruption.⁷⁰ By upholding their duties diligently, leaders can fortify the ethical foundations of governance, building a resilient bulwark against the corrosive forces of corruption.

Secondly, leaders must also recognize the indispensable role of ethical leadership. Indeed, ethical leadership serves as the linchpin in preventing the slide from negligence to corruption.⁷¹ Leaders must adhere to principles of integrity, accountability, and transparency. Ethical conduct not only fosters public trust but also sets a standard for ethical behaviour across institutions.⁷² Contemporary leaders should prioritize ethical leadership as a strategic imperative. They must cultivate a culture of accountability, implement robust mechanisms for oversight, and champion transparency in their decision-making processes.⁷³ By doing so, leaders can actively perform the responsibilities and thus contribute to the prevention of corruption and the promotion of a just and equitable society.

⁶⁹Joel, Haruna Usman and Pilani, Michael Paul, "Conflict Resolution Beyond Identity: Insights on Peacebuilding from Acts 6:1-7," *Journal of Religion and Society (JORAS)* 13 (2024): 58-73, 70.

⁷⁰Leadercast, *12 Principles of Great Leadership: Quotes and Tips About Leadership Styles*, 2019. <https://ou.edu/content/dam/leadvolunteer/documents/9612532343-233706117-tickets.pdf>.

⁷¹Artan Fejzullahu and Mirlinda Batalli, "The role of ethics in public administration." *Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2019): 267-278. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27096120>.

⁷²Howard Whitton "Implementing Effective Ethics Standards in Government and the Civil Service" Transparency International, 2001. <https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/35521740.pdf>

⁷³Ikechuku Anthony Kanu and Michael Paul Pilani "Semiotic hermeneutic of 'new wine, new wineskins': Symbols, philosophy of development, and Africa." *Dialogue and Universalism*, 35(2) (2024). 151-164. 160. <https://doi.org/10.5840/du202434225>



Indeed, the path from negligence to corruption is a treacherous journey that contemporary leaders must vigilantly avoid. Upholding duties diligently is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for effective governance. By embracing ethical leadership and fulfilling their responsibilities with unwavering commitment, leaders can safeguard the welfare of their nations, fortify institutions, and build a legacy of integrity for future generations. The call to contemporary leaders is clear: in the face of challenges, let diligence be the beacon that guides us away from the precipice of corruption.⁷⁴

Conclusion

The narrative of King David's moral failings in 2 Samuel 11:1-17 serves as a timeless reflection on the complexities and challenges of leadership across generations. This study highlights the relevance of biblical wisdom in addressing modern political and ethical dilemmas. The progression from neglect of duty to egregious abuse of power is evident, illustrating how seemingly minor derelictions can snowball into catastrophic moral failures. David's journey from abdicating his responsibility to lead in battle to orchestrating murder for personal gain parallels disturbingly similar patterns observed in Nigeria's political landscape. The historical-critical analysis employed in this study illuminates the gravity of David's actions within the theological and social context of ancient Israel, emphasizing how his behaviour violated divine commandments and betrayed the sacred trust placed in him as YHWH's appointed leader. This perspective provides a crucial framework for evaluating modern leadership, reminding us that governance is not merely a secular affair but one imbued with moral and ethical responsibilities.

Applied to the Nigerian context, these insights reveal disturbing parallels in the abuse of power, neglect of duty, and erosion of ethical standards among some leaders. From absenteeism during national crises to misuse of state resources and suppression of accountability mechanisms, the echoes of David's failings reverberate through Nigeria's corridors of power. This research contributes to the broader discourse on leadership ethics and governance in Nigeria by providing a unique perspective that bridges ancient wisdom with contemporary challenges. It calls for a renewed commitment to ethical leadership, robust accountability mechanisms, and a culture that values diligence and integrity in public service.

⁷⁴Michael, Paul Pilani, "Socio-Political Neophobia: The Bane of Advancement in Nigeria As A Nation," in *The Economy of Leadership and Social Transformation in Contemporary Africa: Essays in Honour of Professor Ichoku Hyacinth Ementa*, ed. Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu et al. (2023), 227-250, <https://www.acjol.org/index.php/proceedings/article/view/4155>.