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Ellen White

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# Michal the Misinterpreted

ELLEN WHITE

Biblical Department, Faculty of Theology, University of St Michael's College,  
81 St Mary Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1J4, Canada

## Abstract

Interpretation is always done within one's own context. It is impossible to interpret a text without the impact of one's worldview and ideological positions seeping into the interpretive process. Due to this contextual approach to interpretation, one must analyze the history of interpretation from a critical viewpoint, rather than blindly accepting a historical understanding. The character of Michal in the books of Samuel is a good example of how the history of interpretation can be guided by the interpreter's ideology and also why the historical understandings need to be re-evaluated. This article contains one example of how such interpretations can be challenged and reassigned in relation to Michal.

**Keywords:** Michal, David, royalty, interpretation, marriage, barrenness, Saul, 1 and 2 Samuel

## Introduction

Interpreters have unjustly criticized Queen Michal for a whole array of sins. Edith Deen, who calls Michal 'not at all religious',<sup>1</sup> claims she has the unbridled tongue of James and then states 'Michal's sharp tongue set

1. Edith Deen, *Wisdom from Women in the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 61.

in motion the sudden end of what had been a good marriage. Michal was the real loser. She lost a good home, a husband, who became Israel's greatest king, and the love of the people over whom her husband ruled.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as Eskenazi demonstrates, in the Rabbinic tradition Michal is praised more than rebuked.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this essay is not to explore the life and character of Michal, but to examine the ways in which biblical misinterpretation can happen by using the Michal story as an example. Therefore, many aspects of the Michal story will be examined because they relate to the issue of misinterpretation, while others will not receive as much focus because they do not relate to the larger interpretive issue. This study does not address whether Michal was a good woman or bad, whether she should be emulated or despised, but whether the depictions of her are actually reflected in the biblical text.

### The Marriage

Michal is said to have loved David (1 Sam. 18.20, 28), but the text does not give any indication as to David's motivation for marrying Michal. Schearing suggests that, 'since David's power base was in the south, he needed Michal to attract the pro-Saulide population and establish a claim to Saul's throne'.<sup>4</sup> It seems the majority of scholars attribute some political or social motivation to his decision.<sup>5</sup> The improbability of the task to win Michal, the acquisition of a bride price of 100 Philistine foreskins (1 Sam. 18.25), appears to have more to do with the relationship between Saul and David than between David and Michal. David seems more interested in proving his virility to Saul than in proving his love to Michal. In fact, throughout the narrative she seems to be little more than a pawn. David manipulates her, which he is able to do not because of political power or his position within ancient Israelite society, but because, as the narrator states, she loves him.

2. Deen, *Wisdom*, p. 62.

3. Tamara C. Eskenazi, 'Michal in Hebrew Sources', in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenazi (eds.), *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (JSOTSup, 119; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), pp. 157-74.

4. Linda S. Schearing, 'Michal', in *ABD*, IV, p. 813.

5. Examples include Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 120; and David J.A. Clines, 'Michal Observed: An Introduction'; N.J.D. White, 'Michal'; Adele Berlin, 'Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives', pp. 24-63, 285-86, and 92-93, respectively, in Clines and Eskenazi (eds.), *Telling Queen Michal's Story*.

Some would argue that David and Saul were able to use Michal because of their position as men, and while this may be accurate based on the ancient Israelite patriarchy, the original idea for the marriage is developed because of Michal's love for David (1 Sam. 18.20). Politics was the basis for the offer of Merab, but the marriage between Michal and David starts with the narrator's claim that she loved him. Alter says, 'This love, twice stated here, is bound to have special salience because it is the only instance in all biblical narrative in which we are explicitly told that a woman loves a man'.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it seems that the narrator is emphasizing that all parties in this marriage entered the union of their own volition. This only serves to highlight the disparity between the couple and their motivation for marriage. Aschkenasy summarizes this, saying, 'In the conversations between David and the king's servants, both parties refer to the proposed marriage as marrying (into) the king. It is clear that all concerned, except for the bride Michal, consider the union as a matter of a political contract, not love.'<sup>7</sup> Yet, despite the narrator's claim of love, some attribute political motivations to Michal as well as David.

Kuyper transforms Michal from the passive woman who loves, to the mastermind behind the marriage plot. He says, 'Her most characteristic trait was her desire for prestige. She was always busily plotting for it, and for that she dared do things.'<sup>8</sup> Yet his claim is foreign to the text. In fact, the narrator seems to take measures specifically to avoid allowing such interpretations. Not only does the narrator specifically state that Michal's motivation was love, it is also clear that Michal did not play an active role in the marriage contract.

Another claim for a political motivation for Michal's action takes the word 'love' (אהבה) to be political. This theory is based on the study by Moran, who looks at covenantal love and compares it to that of a vassal.<sup>9</sup> In essence, his theory would eliminate the affective elements usually associated with the word אהבה. Vanderhoof has noted that Saul and Jonathan are also said to have loved David and thus suggests that this reflects the political reality of the house of Saul turning over to the house

6. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 118.

7. Nehama Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p. 37.

8. Abraham Kuyper, *Women of the Old Testament* (trans. Henry Zylstra; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1933), p. 109.

9. William L. Moran, 'Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy', *CBQ* 25 (1963), pp. 77-87.

of David.<sup>10</sup> While this may be true, the issue is not that simplistic. First of all, Moran claims that this use accounts for only a small number of the occurrences of אהב and that it is still used to refer to familial love. Second, even Moran's category is not without an affective element, regardless of his claim to the contrary, for deep loyalty often involves an affective element. Finally, recent studies by Lapsley and Ackerman demonstrate that there is an affective element in the use of אהב.<sup>11</sup> These studies are convincing and do not negate the claims of Moran, but rather expand them to include both a political and affective element.

Other interpreters attribute misogynistic overtones to the narration. For example, Exum says, 'The situation is one in which the men's political considerations are paramount, while, regarding the woman, we hear only that she loves. Already the text perpetuates a familiar stereotype: men are motivated by ambition, whereas women respond on a personal level.'<sup>12</sup> This suggests that there is a dichotomy between men and women, where men have the ability to assess a situation from a politically savvy position, whereas women are only able to respond emotionally. This is in conflict with another part of the text, where Michal is shown to be able to analyze the political situation well enough to deduce the truth, act upon that assessment, and save the life of David, who was sleeping through the danger.

### The First Window Scene (1 Samuel 19.11-17)

In this scene Michal discovers her father's plot to have David killed and acts to save him by waking him, lowering him out of the window, and covering up his escape. Here Michal has clearly shown herself to be of the house of David and no longer loyal to the house of Saul, and yet, when this scene comes to its completion, she will be deserted by David and left to the house of Saul. Aschkenasy says,

10. Personal communication. Similar theories can be seen in J.A. Thompson, 'The Significance of the Verb Love in the David-Jonathan Narratives', *VT* 25 (1974), pp. 334-38; Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love: The Language of Human Interconnections in the Hebrew Bible', *MQR* 22 (1983), pp. 190-204.

11. Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 'Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy', *CBQ* 65 (2003), pp. 350-69; Susan Ackerman, 'The Personal is Political: Covenantal and Affectionate Love (אהב, אהב) in the Hebrew Bible', *VT* (2002), pp. 437-58.

12. J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993), p. 2.

Michal's allegiances are clear and unequivocal, and the reader is now waiting for the young couple's next move and their eventual reunion. Nevertheless, the biblical text abandons Michal as soon as she makes sure that David is safe... The reader's curiosity with regard to the charismatic Michal is not answered; she becomes a blank point, a non-person, occupying no place in David's thoughts.<sup>13</sup>

Some might argue that it was simply too dangerous for Michal and David to be reunited. However, Aschkenasy points out that Jonathan, Michal's brother, was able to have a secret rendezvous with David on several occasions. While Michal was a woman and perhaps more prone to danger, she has proven herself to be brave when she crossed her father to protect the life of her husband. Also, her near non-status might have allowed her more freedom than Jonathan, the heir to Saul's throne.

Alter describes Michal as wily in her use of the teraphim to make it appear that David is still in bed sleeping and compares her to Rachel.<sup>14</sup> He does not, however, develop his comparison further and it seems tentative at best. It is true that both involve narratives with a woman and teraphim and even that the pursuer in both narratives is the woman's father. Yet, there are vital differences between the two women. Rachel is hiding the idols, which she feels entitled to, and therefore puts her husband in danger from her father's wrath. Michal, on the other hand, is involved with the idols in this account in an attempt to protect her spouse from her father. If the two texts are related, they are related in a polar way, where one text is the opposite of the other.

Much has been made of the teraphim that Michal places into the marriage bed in place of David. A typical interpretation is presented by Payne when he says, 'the *image* of verse 13 rather suggests that she worshipped other gods besides Yahweh'.<sup>15</sup> At first glance, interpretations such as Payne's may not cause further inquiry, but when examined closer the claims all but dissipate. There are two important factors to consider regarding the teraphim. The first is the location where they are found. They are already present in the bedchamber. It is true that the teraphim may have belonged to Michal, but it is also true that it is David's bedroom as well. Therefore, to whom the teraphim belonged is not the main issue, the main issue is that had David not wanted them to be present,

13. Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window*, p. 38.

14. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 120.

15. David F. Payne, *I & II Samuel* (Daily Study Bible; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), p. 101.

they would not have been. The gender roles at play during this period of history would not have allowed Michal to defy David and bring something into his bedroom which he condemned. The second issue that must be considered is that the narrator makes no moral comment regarding the teraphim. This is not an issue of condemnation or concern in the narrative. For all the concern that the narrator shows regarding the teraphim, it could have been rolled up bed linens she used in David's place. What is highlighted is Michal's resourcefulness, not that there were idols present in David's room.

Michal is often characterized by the way in which she responds to Saul after helping David escape. Alter says she acted 'coolly' and that she 'pretends' that David threatened her.<sup>16</sup> The text is clear that she deceived Saul in order to protect David. However, it does not state that she was lying about David's threat on her life. This is not to say that she was not lying, but this is not what the text itself highlights, even though it is often what commentators focus on. If she is lying, the contrast between her two lies is more important than the actual act of lying. In her first lie, she is actively protecting David whose life she has already tried to save by helping him escape. In the second, if it is a lie, she is doing what David was unable to do for her—protect herself. She was successful in protecting David, yet nowhere in the text does it appear that David even attempted to protect Michal from the danger he knew was present.

Furthermore, the discussion in modern interpretations surrounding the lies that Michal tells may be a case of projecting current morality into the text, which is foreign to the textual world. Robinson says, 'In early Israel hiding truth for the sake of saving life was seen more as an act of expediency and cleverness than as a morally wrong activity'.<sup>17</sup> This characterization seems to fit the narrator's portrayal of Michal better, for at no point in the narrative so far has the narrator been critical of Michal—if anything she has been placed in a positive light.<sup>18</sup>

16. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 120.

17. Ghana Robinson, *1 & 2 Samuel: Let Us be Like the Nations* (International Theological Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 108.

18. This does not mean that Michal would not benefit from her actions, but rather that there is nothing inherently wrong in her actions. It is possible to act in one's own self-interest and yet not be doing anything wrong, or in fact be doing the right thing. For example, in this scene Michal helps David, the future king and God's anointed, to escape the wrath of the current king, which is a good action. However, despite the immediate danger she faces from the anger of Saul (which is highly volatile, as seen in his interactions with David), if she is successful in saving David and remaining his wife, she could

## References to Paltiel

Even when Michal has only a brief mention in the narrative, there are those who ascribe sinister motivations to her. The text states that Michal has been given to Paltiel as his wife (1 Sam. 25.44). Yet, even though the text implies that Michal did not have a choice in the matter as seen by the use of the verb נתן ('to give'), Kuyper says, 'Soon after that incident, however, her ardor for David waned. Phalti, she thought, was making a better bid for royalty than he, and she would do anything to secure and hold the glamour of royalty.'<sup>19</sup> Such statements are unsupported by the text and yet this sentiment has been largely shared by the Christian community for ages. Nowhere in the text is Michal seen as having a voice as the powerful men of her day trade husbands for her the way children trade baseball cards. She is acted upon. She is a pawn in the ancient political wheel, which continues to roll over her.

Much has been made of the relational attributions which are connected to Michal throughout the narrative. She is often mentioned along with her relationship to one of the other characters. The focus of these arguments is usually between the 'daughter of Saul' label and the 'wife of David' label. However, the relationship which is largely ignored in terms of relational labels, may for the purpose of this study be the most important, that of 'wife of David' versus 'wife of Paltiel'. Alter highlights part of the issue when he says,

He [Paltiel] is called twice in close sequence Michal's man or husband (ʿish), a title to which at least his feelings give him legitimate claim, and which echoes ironically against David's use in the preceding verse of ʿishti, my wife or woman, to describe a relationship with Michal that is legal and political but perhaps not at all emotional on his side.<sup>20</sup>

Alter's assessment is good, but it also does not go far enough. The narrative is not neutral between these two men. Kessler says, 'The narrator appears to be creating a deliberate contrast between two perspectives, betraying sympathy for one of them'.<sup>21</sup> What Kessler is highlighting is the origin of each relational clause. It is David who claims that Michal is his

achieve the absolute highest status of a woman in Israel, queen mother, which would be in her own self-interest. Therefore, self-interest and right action are not mutually exclusive. (Thanks to David Vanderhoof for drawing my attention to the role of the queen mother.)

19. Kuyper, *Women of the Old Testament*, p. 110.

20. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 122.

21. John Kessler, 'Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel', *CBQ* 62 (2000), pp. 409-23 (416).



wife, but the narrator follows this comment by claiming that Michal is the wife of Paltiel. This demonstrates that in the mind of the narrator, David's claim to Michal is illegitimate. Kessler believes this assessment is heightened because the removal narrative is placed after the reference to David's addition of four more wives. Based on these textual clues, it seems that the reader is supposed to disapprove of David's actions at this point.<sup>22</sup>

There are other elements that lend support to Kessler's argument. David's actions are not those of a husband who has been torn from the one he loves, but those of a man making the check mate move against his enemy. Aschkenasy explains,

His claim is couched in legal, not emotional language: he wants his wife back not because he loves or misses her, or because they were brutally torn apart from each other, but because he paid an immense bride price for her. At this sensitive point in David's political life, the return of Michal marks the final surrender of the former royal family, and serves as a symbol of the consolidation of power in David's hands.<sup>23</sup>

At this point Michal is no longer the woman who loves David and has acted to save his life from Saul, thus declaring herself to be of the house of David, but rather she is the symbol of Saulide power being surrendered into the hands of David. The image seems better suited to the end of a battle narrative than a description of lovers who are to be reunited.

Through most of the narrative Michal is a character who is acted upon by the men in her life. The two men who are supposed to love her the most, her father and her husband, regularly trade her as a pawn. Yet, the final humiliation may not be in the confrontation at the end of the Michal narrative (2 Sam. 6.16-22), but in David's demand that she be returned to him when he was made king. In the confrontation Michal is at least granted a voice, but when she is taken away from a husband who loves her and returned to David she is allowed nothing, not even the emotional insight granted upon her original marriage to David. Michal in herself is meaningless at this stage; she stands merely as the final signal that David has triumphed over Saul.

22. Also, David's insistence that Michal be returned to him is in violation of Deut. 24.1-4, which states that a man cannot reclaim his wife if she has been given to another man in the interim. Zafira Ben-Barak, 'The Legal Background to the Restoration of Michal to David', in Clines and Eskenazi (eds.), *Telling Queen Michal's Story*, pp. 74-90 (77-78). However, it should be noted that Ben-Barak does conclude that David was entitled to Michal by Mesopotamian law and therefore does nothing wrong (p. 89).

23. Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window*, p. 39.

**The Second Window Scene and Narrative Climax (2 Samuel 6.11-22)**

This scene opens with the ark entering Jerusalem. Michal is watching its arrival from her window and David is dancing around the ark with the rest of Jerusalem. When David arrives at his house Michal comes out to meet him and the two engage in a verbal dispute about his behavior. It is for this scene that Michal receives the greatest criticism. Baldwin's analysis is typical of the way in which Michal has been interpreted in this scene. She says,

At the moment of David's triumph, when the ark had successfully entered Jerusalem, his wife Michal took exception to all this religious excitement and display. Her idea seems to have been that the king should avoid mixing with the people, and be aloof and inaccessible.<sup>24</sup>

This issue is not really present in the text. While royal behavior is a focus, her objection is not one of association, but of the type of mingling in which he has engaged: mingling with a sexual nature.

Once again, even interpreters with a more positive view of Michal in the passage are reluctant to insinuate that David has done anything for which he should be ashamed. Aschkenasy writes, 'Michal's wrath is further kindled by David's dancing among the women and *inadvertently* exposing himself'.<sup>25</sup> Even authors who attempt to defend the character of Michal refrain from full criticism of David. There is nothing in the text to suggest that David's exposure was inadvertent and there certainly is no hint in his dialogue with Michal that such exposure was unintentional. There is no sense of apology or shame at his indecent exposure and, therefore, no evidence to suggest that it was an accident. Yet, in what appears to be an attempt to spare the character of David shame, Aschkenasy added the adjective 'inadvertently' to the action of David in her quotation.

When one examines the confrontation between Michal and David in 2 Samuel without any previous background, it would be logical to conclude that Michal was right. David has been dancing around exposing himself in a religious style that seems inappropriate. Robinson says,

Israelite law forbids priests to expose their nakedness in holy places (Exod. 20.26). Exposing one's nakedness openly was taboo in Israel (cf. Gen 9.22ff;

24. Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel: An Introduction & Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), p. 209.

25. Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window*, p. 40 (italics mine).

Lev. 18.6ff). David's ecstatic behavior was typical of Canaanite practice, and that could have been one reason why Michal could not appreciate it.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, according to Israelite law and practice, Michal's critique of David's behavior was correct. As his wife, Michal is understandably upset at his wanton display.

Now some might argue that this is a misinterpretation that reads the modern Western cultural assumptions about nudity, sex, and marriage into the ancient Israel society. These same critics might say that Michal would have been used to sharing the person of her husband—after all, he was a polygamist. Yet, the way in which she phrases her complaint goes to the issue in her heart. That she mentions the slave girls at all shows that what is at stake is her role as wife. A woman's status in the home is the only type of status an Israelite woman could gain and Michal held the highest level of status that a woman could get—wife of the king—and yet, her husband has behaved in such a way that has taken what is rightfully hers and given it to any who would look. Not only has David exposed himself, he has also stripped Michal of any status which she had managed to maintain. It appears the final insult in what appears to be a marriage of humiliation. Alter says,

When Michal addresses David in the third person as king of Israel, it is not in deference to royalty but in insolent anger at this impossible man who does not know how to behave like a king. She makes David an exhibitionist in the technical, sexual sense, stressing that the hungry eyes of the slavegirls have taken it all in—an emphasis which leads one to suspect there is a good deal of sexual jealousy behind what is ostensibly an objection to his lack of regal dignity.<sup>27</sup>

However, the two issues do not need to be mutually exclusive. A woman can hold her husband, be he king or meeker man, to a certain standard of conduct because of propriety's sake. Yet, these same standards may also be in place to protect the marital covenant and the sexual rights of a spouse. Michal's indignity over David's behavior would be justified not only by societal norms, but also by her spousal right. While she may be subjected to sharing her husband sexually with his other wives, she should not have to put up with him demonstrating his wares to all the women, including lowly slave girls, of the town.

There is no compassion shown to his wife, whose anger is clearly a mask for her pain. David taunts her with his talk of slave girls and being

26. Robinson, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 184.

27. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 124.

'honored' by them.<sup>28</sup> At no point does he attempt to demonstrate love for this woman, who has put her life in jeopardy to save his. Alter says,

He [the narrator] does not question the historically crucial fact of David's divine election, so prominently stressed by the king himself at the beginning of his speech; but theological rights do not necessarily justify domestic wrongs, and the anointed monarch of Israel may still be a harsh and unfeeling husband to the woman who has loved him and saved his life.<sup>29</sup>

Here, Alter has summarized the interpretive issue at stake in this narrative. Historically, David has been viewed as the hero, and, as an extension of that, Michal has taken the blame for all wrongs, tensions, or difficulties in the text. However, this is a concept that is foreign to the text. Michal is not the idol-worshipping shrew, as she is often portrayed, nor is David the ideal man. Both are human and both suffer human failings and inadequacies. The text presents a far more balanced view of the two characters. As Alter points out, David's claim to the throne is never challenged and it is God-ordained, but his behavior to this woman who loves him has turned her love into hate.

### Barrenness

After this final confrontation between Michal and David, the narrator tells the audience that Michal remained childless for the rest of her days (2 Sam. 6.23). Because of the location of this statement, most commentators have attributed a causal relationship between the preceding narration and the statement regarding Michal's lack of children. There is, however, a good argument to be made that there is no relationship between the narration and the statement at all. Alter explains,

Verse 23, the last one in which Michal will be accorded any mention, is a kind of epilogue to the confrontation, fastened to it with a special kind of ambiguity to which biblical parataxis lends itself. (Modern translators generally destroy the fineness of the effect of rendering the initial 'and' as 'so'.) The narrator states the objective fact of Michal's barrenness—in the Ancient Near East, a

28. Some might wonder what other option David have had since Michal had voiced her displeasure in a public forum; in order to avoid shame, David had to respond in the way that he did (personal communication with Christina de Groot). While the threat to his authority in a public place by a woman might require a response, the need to answer Michal's accusation does not excuse the way in which he chooses to do so. In fact, de Groot's observation only serves to demonstrate that both parties are flawed in this narrative.

29. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 125.

woman's greatest misfortune—but carefully avoids any subordinate conjunction or syntactical signal that would indicate a clear causal connection between the fact stated and the dialogue that precedes it.<sup>30</sup>

One can also account for the placement of this verse at the end of this narrative because it is the last time in which Michal is mentioned. If Michal appeared later in the text and her childlessness was mentioned here, then a causal relationship would be clear. However, because this is the last scene in which Michal plays a role, it is logical to have the final statement about her at this point in the narrative.

While Alter is grammatically correct, there are many others who feel that the placement of this statement demonstrates a causal relationship even without the subordinate conjunction. Exum says, 'The juxtaposition of David's rebuke and the narrator's statement that Michal had no children invites us to posit a causal connection. Significantly, however, the text carefully avoids this connection... The very ambiguity hints at the text's unease about locating responsibility.'<sup>31</sup> Interpreters have attributed the cause to David's refusal to procreate with this woman who tried to humiliate him in public; to Michal who, now that she despised David, refused to come to his bed; and to God, either because he was punishing her for false religious practices or because he was ensuring that there would be no Saulide heir for the throne. The ambiguity of fault may be because no fault should be assigned. It may be the narrator's way of demonstrating that the promise of Yahweh that no descendant of Saul would sit on the throne would come to pass. Even though this closing of the womb has been often viewed as Michal's punishment for confronting David, this conclusion is only one way of filling the gap left by the juxtaposition, and, given the larger scope of the narrative, it is probably not the best way.

In spite of the common 'woman at the window' motif, which clearly parallels the account of Michal's salvation of David previously, many commentators have taken Michal's position at the window to express religious disapproval. Payne says, 'she had some kind of religious objection to the ark's move to Jerusalem... Michal's loss was equally due to her own unwillingness to co-operate in the new religious structure.'<sup>32</sup> Klein also expresses this opinion, saying, 'Michal is childless because she is depicted not as a God-fearing woman but as a woman who values her

30. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 125.

31. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 26.

32. Payne, *I & II Samuel*, p. 185.

household gods and her royal status, a woman who presumes to think and act for herself'.<sup>33</sup> This is a strange conclusion since religion does not come into Michal's discussion with David. It is also strange considering the ambiguous phrase of the narrator regarding her barrenness. It is more likely that the theory regarding the progeny of Saul is correct rather than some divine punishment—after all, Yahweh has been seen to close wombs before, even within the book of Samuel. Also, that Michal had no children in the time that she was married to Paltiel suggests that her barrenness may not have been caused by this incident at all.

## Conclusion

Even when interpreters recognize that the biblical narrative often portrays Michal in a positive light and David in a negative one, they seem reluctant to criticize David. Evans says,

David continues to be portrayed as an attractive personality. It may be that his apparent disregard of the needs and feelings of others stems not so much from an uncaring nature as from a whole hearted involvement with the needs of the present that resulted in his overlooking other issues.<sup>34</sup>

The refusal to view David as anything less than good is a myth. The text clearly shows times when David's behavior is less than stellar. But it is not in spite of those things that he has been included in the text, it is because of them. If the interest of the narrator was really to make David look like the flawless hero, many of the narrations would simply have been left out. David is an example, but he is not the example of perfection. He is, however, an example of a flawed human being whom God could use to fulfill his purposes, while the human strives for righteousness.<sup>35</sup>

While it may seem unusual to focus on David in the conclusion to an essay about Michal, it serves to highlight the main interpretive issue. David is the focus, not only of the narrative, but also of the interpretation. If David is good and Michal is portrayed in opposition to David, she must be bad. Or, if there are elements in the text that cannot be attributed to

33. Lillian R. Klein, 'Michal, the Barren Wife', in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Samuel and Kings: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Feminist Companion to the Bible, 7; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 37-46 (45).

34. Mary J. Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), p. 90.

35. For a more detailed look at David and his flaws, see Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

David because he is righteous, then they must be attributed to Michal because she is present. The interpretations of Michal have been guided by these principles and not by the text. It seems that Michal has to be relegated to negatives in order to protect David, which is ironic, since that is how she is continually presented in the text. She has been David's protector on more than one occasion. In the first window scene she protects David from physical harm and in the second she tries to protect his reputation. The evidence shows that Michal is a woman who has been misinterpreted due to concerns that are located outside of the text.