

**Kingship and Comradery:
Wilderness in the Davidic Narratives**

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Introduction

When one thinks of wilderness in Biblical literature, the Exodus from Egypt comes first to mind, followed by the adventures of prophets such as Elijah. Wilderness motifs appear, however, from Genesis through the New Testament, and wilderness sojourns absorb such unlikely participants as the serving maid Hagar (Genesis) and the inspired evangelist Philip (Acts). Contemporary understanding of Biblical wilderness themes tends to concentrate on a few well known events, such as the wandering of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Sin or the temptation of Christ in the desert and does not investigate the patterns of wilderness experience as expressed by entire Biblical books or continuing series of narratives. The purpose of this paper is to locate examples of wilderness experience in the Davidic narratives of 1 and 2 Samuel, and to examine their role in the original Biblical context. The paper will then relate these texts, drawn from "histories" of war, conquest and kingship, to our contemporary attitudes about the role of wilderness in developing qualities of leadership. Since some elements of King David of Judah's rise to power are still important sources of western "cultural mythology," this discussion will also compare the probable intent of the ancient Hebrew authors or redactors of 1 and 2 Samuel to the impressions of wilderness conveyed by English language "retellings" of the story of David found in Bible story books and other literature intended for children or the lay public. The paper will not only analyze events in regions called "wilderness" (which are primarily deserts or arid grasslands in 1 and 2 Samuel), but will also investigate texts concerning other wild locales, such as cliffs and caves, and interactions with wild animals, such as lions. The treatment of the wilderness landscape as a repeated literary motif is primarily my own, although I used several commentaries (particularly Hertzberg 1964, Brueggemann 1985, Klein 1983, and Miscall, 1986) and have been greatly influenced by the work of W.D. Davies (1974, 1982) on the role of the land in the history of Israel.

The slippery crag

The primary historic purpose of 1 and 2 Samuel is to discuss the transition from the era of judges to that of the monarchy in Israel. In relating the anointing of Saul as king, and then Saul's displacement by David, 1 Samuel describes the qualities and personal characteristics desirable for a ruler over Israel and suggests the success of the king arises from the relationship between the king and Yaweh, the God of the Hebrew people. Early in 1 Samuel, the twelve tribes demand a king to replace the judges, and the prophet Samuel chooses Saul through visionary means. Saul, tall and athletic, initially seems like the perfect leader for a people harassed by neighboring nations. Although successful in his first military excursions, Saul displeases Yaweh by misunderstanding the divine will for the nation and by ignoring conventions of the religious cult. Samuel secretly goes out to Bethlehem to anoint a successor, while leaving Saul on the throne. Although still a boy, David, son of Jesse, becomes king by prophetic mandate. As most of us know, David spent his youth as a shepherd in the hills of Judah, and thus grew to adulthood in the wilderness. The wilderness adventures in 1 Samuel do not, however, begin with David's anointing. Jonathan, the son of King Saul, precedes David in a wilderness military exploit, and this action begins a motif that continues through David's struggles with Saul, and finally concludes when David, as deposed king, defeats his own son Absalom in the forests of Ephraim.

At the time the prophet Samuel selected Saul as king, the Philistines had military control over Israel. After defeating Nahash the Ammonite, who had besieged the Hebrew town of Jabeshgilead, Saul mustered forces to engage the Philistines. Jonathan initiated the conflict by defeating a Philistine garrison at Geba. In reaction, the Philistines gathered a large force. The people of Israel, fearing reprisal, hid themselves or fled. Saul did not retreat, but waited for Samuel to come and renew the kingdom at Gilgal, a holy site. When Samuel did not appear as expected, Saul grew impatient and offered the burnt offering himself. As Saul was neither priest nor prophet, this sacrifice was profane. Samuel, arriving too late to prevent Saul's mistake, prophesied the reign of

Saul would not continue. (1 Samuel 12-13) Three Philistine companies invaded Israel. Saul's troops, badly outnumbered and armed primarily with sharpened farming implements, such as axes and sickles, prepared to face the superior force.

At this desperate juncture, the book of 1 Samuel recounts the first of the "kingly" wilderness exploits. Jonathan, accompanied only by his armor bearer, approached a Philistine garrison camped on a high shoulder overlooking *wadi es-swenit*, a canyon extending down through the wilderness into the Jordan valley. 1 Samuel 14: 4-5 describes the formidable terrain (all Biblical quotes from the Revised Standard Version, May and Metzger 1973):

In the pass by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on one side and a rocky crag on the other side; the name of one was Bozez, and the name of the other was Senah. The one crag rose in the north in front of Michmash, and other on the south in front of Geba.

The names of the rocks - Bozez, "the slippery one," and Senah, "the thorny one" (Hertzberg 1964) - emphasize the impassable nature of the landscape. Any approach to the camp, other than from the well watched road to Michmash, would be extremely difficult. Even if Jonathan and his armor bearer did reach the camp, the chances of surviving the engagement with the larger force were next to none.

On approaching the pass, Jonathan said:

Behold we will cross over to the men, and we will show ourselves to them. If they say to us, 'Wait until we come to you,' then we will stand still in our place, and we will not go up to them. But if they say, 'Come up to us,' then we will go; for the Lord has given them into our hand. And this shall be the sign to us. (1 Samuel 14: 8-10)

The men of the Philistines hailed Jonathan and said, "Come up and we will show you a thing." (1 Samuel 14: 12) Jonathan took this as an indication of God's will. Instead of attacking the enemy directly, the king's son and his armor bearer made their way down into the wadi, and thus crept out of sight of the Philistines (Hertzberg 1964). Jonathan chose a difficult route over a rocky crag and then "climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor bearer after him." (1 Samuel 14:13) The two

Israelites took the garrison by surprise, killed twenty men and routed the remainder.

The theme in 1 Samuel is of dual strengths. Jonathan was courageous, strong and agile - a man able to ascend over precipitous terrain and accomplish something unexpected. At the same time, Jonathan inquired of Yaweh. He waited for a sign, and on pulling himself over the top of the cliff, sent the "fear of God" sweeping through the Philistine camp. Even with superior rock climbing abilities, two men should not have been able to put the Philistines to flight. The text of 1 Samuel implies otherworldly intervention. Unlike his father, Jonathan waited for divine consent to his intended action. The story of the crags clearly indicates Jonathan's wilderness skills were not based solely on personal strength or on self-confidence. Jonathan was also in a proper dependent relationship with the God of the Israelites, and thus accomplished an extremely difficult tactical maneuver .

Jonathan's victory over the Philistines was followed by a curious case of "wilderness provision." Saul, seeing the fleeing Philistines, consulted the priest, then rallied the people and pursued the confused enemy force. He, perhaps trying to court the favor of God, laid an oath on the people, saying "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." (1 Samuel 14:24) Jonathan, having been separated from the main force and not hearing the oath, was passing through the forest and came upon some wild honey. A good soldier, he did not stop, but dipped his staff into the honey comb and ate some of the honey. According to the text, "his eyes became bright", indicating the honey had a positive effect, and helped relieve his weariness. One of Jonathan's companions who had heard the oath told him of his father's curse. Jonathan replied:

My father has troubled the land; see how my eyes have become bright, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found; for now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great. (1 Samuel 14: 29-30)

The people of Israel pursued the Philistines, and faint from hunger, fell upon the spoil. The army was so famished, they ate the sheep and oxen with the blood, which was, to the ancient

Israelites, a deep sin. Saul, distressed, built an altar to slay the sheep and oxen properly, and then inquired of God as to whether he should further pursue the Philistines. The Lord gave no answer, indicating further fault among the people. Through the mystical means of the Urim and Thummim, the lot fell to Jonathan, who confessed he had eaten honey while under his father's oath. Saul would have been willing to kill his own son, but the people, recognizing Jonathan's role in the victory, ransomed Jonathan. (1 Samuel 14: 31-46)

The tale is a strange one. Saul's motive for forcing his army to abstain is obscure. Although Saul's curse was probably spiritually motivated, he inhibited military action. The text implies Saul did not bring as a complete a victory as might have been possible. Jonathan, a hero throughout, was not informed of his father's decision. The text gives the impression, Saul had not only fallen from Samuel's and God's favor, the land itself was willing to "disobey" Saul. The forest provided Jonathan with strength for further pursuit of the Philistines when Saul had denied his army the blessing of sustenance. Wild nature was on the side of courageous Jonathan.

Paw of the bear, paw of the lion

It was after Jonathan's victory and conflict with his father that Yahweh sent Samuel to seek another king for Israel. Traveling to Bethlehem, Samuel passed over Jesse's seven eldest sons, and asked if any had been missed. Jesse replied "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." (1 Samuel 14: 32) When David finally arrived, "he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome." God told Samuel, "Arise, annoint him; for this is he." (1 Samuel 14: 46) The text introduces David in humility - he was almost forgotten - and in virility - he is ruddy and handsome. His wilderness vocation of herding kept him away from a potentially important meeting, but the God of Israel ensured David was considered. 1 Samuel also implies David was physically blessed, and his appearance was enhanced by his outdoor life.

In 1 Samuel 17, David's wilderness background comes to the fore in the confrontation with

Goliath. Jesse sent David to the scene of the battle to resupply his brothers rather than to fight. David was, at this point in his life, still tending the sheep. He had left them with a keeper while he traveled to the encampment in the Elah valley. Goliath had already come out to challenge the men of Israel. David, standing by, inquired: "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17: 26)

Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption, and the evil of your heart; for you have come down to see the battle." And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not but a word?" (1 Samuel 17: 28-29)

Eliab mistook David's intention and mocked him for his wilderness vocation, which shortly would prove to be David's strength.

David went to Saul and proposed to fight Goliath. Saul protested that David was still a youth and no match for the skilled man of war. In one of the most frequently repeated passages from the Davidic narratives:

David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and delivered it out of his mouth; and if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him and killed him. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David: "Go and the Lord be with you! (1 Samuel 17:34-37)

This passage claims the killing of two wild predators which were, by Iron Age standards, very risky to subdue. The text does not state that David used a bow or a sling to accomplish this and suggests close combat without mentioning the use of a metal sword or spear. A brown bear or a lion would be difficult to kill with a club or a shepherd's staff. The lack of detail in this text thus accentuates the element of divine dependence.

David turned down the offer of Saul's armor and chose instead five smooth stones for his

sling. He confronted the giant and proclaimed:

You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down, and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know there is a God in Israel, and that all the assembly may know that the Lord saves not by the sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand.(1 Samuel 17: 45-47)

David did as he promised, first striking Goliath with a stone and then cutting off his head.

The exploit parallel's Jonathan's attack on the Philistines in several ways. First, both David and Jonathan were able to move against the superior force when Saul was not. Second, both David and Jonathan displayed wilderness skills. In Jonathan's case, past training was a probable element in climbing the crags. In David's case, the youth's own statements credited his wilderness experiences with preparing him for the engagement with Goliath. Third, both warriors relied on Yahweh and gave the Lord of Israel credit for the victory. It is also worth noting, David committed the Philistine host to the earth, and stated that through his victory "all the earth" would know of the God of Israel. David placed Yaweh in control, not just in the land of the Israelites, but on a universal level.

Wildgoats' rocks at En-gedi

The lives of Jonathan and David converge after the slaying of Goliath. 1 Samuel 18 reports "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Jonathan gave David his robe, his armor, his belt and his bow and made a covenant with him. Ironically, David was already annointed to take the kingship from Jonathan, Saul's heir. From a literary perspective, the exploits of Jonathan and David in defeating the Philistines provide adequate explanation for the mutual attraction between the two young men. Initially, 1 Samuel presents them separately in two very similar military exploits, both with wilderness elements and claims of divine

assistance. 1 Samuel then draws their fates together. The climber of crags and the slayer of lions become a natural match, unfortunately careening towards tragedy.

As the story progresses, Saul begins to see David as a threat to his kingdom. Possessed by an evil spirit, Saul tried to strike David with his spear. "Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul." (1 Samuel 18: 12) The end of 1 Samuel is a long chase, David fleeing Saul, and Saul unable to catch him. Jonathan disobeyed his father, when asked to kill David, and instead assisted David, first by warning him of Saul's intent, and then by speaking of David's worth before Saul. Jonathan's petitions did little good, however, and Saul's dislike for David changed from political concern to obsessive hatred. Jonathan's love did not waver. On meeting David in a field, to warn him of impending danger, Jonathan declared:

"The Lord, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded my father, about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if he is well disposed toward David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you? But should it please my father to do you harm, the Lord do so to Jonathan, and more also, if I do not disclose it to you, and send you away, that you may go in safety. May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. If I am still alive, show me the loyal love of the Lord, that I may not die; and do not cut off your loyalty from my house for ever. When the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth, let not the name of Jonathan be cut off from the house of David. And may the Lord take vengeance on David's enemies." And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him as he loved his own soul. (1 Samuel 20; 12-16)

When Jonathan returned to David with the bad news - Saul wished David dead - "David rose from beside the stone heap (where he was hiding) and fell on his face to the ground and bowed three times; and they kissed one another, and wept with one another, until David recovered himself." (1 Samuel 20: 41) This is perhaps the most intense expression of friendship found anywhere in the Bible (aside from the relationship between Jesus and his disciples), and it takes place in an outdoor setting.

Throughout a long series of cross country treks, both to avoid Saul and to continue to battle the external enemies of Israel, David moved from region to region, always falling back to the desert, caves or the forest. David fled from the field where he met Jonathan to Nob, and thence to Gath.

He then returned to Judah and hid in the caves of Adullam, where he gathered four hundred men to him. The prophet Gad warned David that his stronghold was not safe, so David withdrew into the forest of Hereth. Saul continued to pursue his young adversary and David, after defeating the Philistines at Keilah, "remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the Wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand." (1 Samuel 23: 14) In these texts, the God of the Land, the priests and prophets of the Land and the Land itself all continue to protect and preserve David.

Appropriately, Jonathan's last meeting with David was at the stronghold in the wilderness:

And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose, and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, "Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you; you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you; Saul my father also knows this." And the two of them made a covenant at Horesh, and Jonathan went home. (1 Samuel 23: 16-18)

Jonathan, in an ultimate act of friendship, assured David he would be king over Israel. The son of Saul also proved his faith in God by throwing his support to David, God's anointed. Jonathan's fate was, from this point, tied with Saul's, despite Jonathan's submission to divine will. The wilderness covenant between the two friends did not prevent Saul from bringing his entire house to ruin. David did not see Jonathan alive again after this meeting.

When the Ziphites betrayed David to Saul, he moved on to the wilderness of Maon:

And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told; therefore he went down to the rock which is in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men went on the other side of the mountain; and David was making haste to get away from Saul, as Saul and his men were closing in upon David and his men to capture them, when a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Make haste and come; for the Philistines have made a raid upon the land." So Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines; therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. And David went up from there and dwelt in the strongholds of Engedi. (1 Samuel 23:25-26)

The wilderness of these passages was not completely desolate, but incorporated the open pastureland on the slopes of the hills above the Dead Sea. The text mentions wilderness, mountain,

rock and hill country again and again to show how difficult David's position was (Hertzberg 1964) and also to show how able David was to handle strenuous circumstances. The teller of the story invariably depicts the wilderness as "siding with" David. Even the covering of the rocks must occasionally fail, however, in which case, God intervened to protect David by having Saul called home. The dual strengths were again present: David's stamina and familiarity with the country, which in the end, was covered by Yaweh's grace and providence.

While David was in En-gedi, Saul fell into his hands, but David did not take complete advantage of the circumstances. The text mentions a specific location - "the Wildgoats' Rocks" - again emphasizing the wild nature of the territory. Saul walked into the cave where David and his men were hiding and proceeded to relieve himself. David, rather than killing Saul, cut the skirt off Saul's robe, an embarrassment to any warrior. He walked out of the cave after Saul and called to the king to show him he had had the chance to kill him, but did not take it. Saul in his comments back to David acknowledged David would be ruler over Israel. (1 Samuel 24) The wilderness, again, was to David's advantage, the place where David was always the overcomer and Saul was never able to win a decisive victory.

David went on to the wilderness of Paran (probably actually a return to Moan) where he met Abigail and took her for his wife, and then returned to the wilderness of Ziph for another confrontation with Saul. David, accompanied by his nephew Abishai, managed to sneak into Saul's camp at night, and after refusing to kill Saul, absconded with the spear and water jar sitting by the head of the sleeping king. In this example of "wilderness skill", David must have negotiated his way into the camp in low light and then, in almost complete silence, moved among Saul's men until he came to their leader. Divine providence also played a role in David's success, as "a deep sleep from the Lord" had fallen on all Saul's men. David finished the incident by going to stand "afar off on top of the mountain", but in view of the camp. He called to Abner, Saul's commander, and to Saul to come get the spear. (1 Samuel 26) The act was not just a demonstration

of valor, it also served a prophetic function. David had refused to kill Saul on the grounds the Lord would eventually take Saul's life. This would indeed soon come pass.

In his last adventures before the death of Saul, David went to reside with the Philistines, and successfully not only secretly killed Philistines, but raided the other hostile neighboring peoples. Excluded by the Philistine king from going to battle against Saul and Israel, David went home to Ziklag, a temporary residence, to find the Amalekites had burned the town and captured the families of all his followers. David conducted a campaign in the Negeb desert and regained his own two wives, all the families and all the herds that had been lost. Meanwhile, the Philistines fought against Israel and Saul and three of his sons, including Jonathan were killed. (1 Samuel 27-31)

When the news of the Israelite king's death reached David, rather than celebrate his release from persecution, David used the imagery of wild nature to eulogize the passing of his friends:

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
In life and in death they were not divided;
they were swifter than eagles,
they were stronger than lions.....

Jonathan lies slain upon thy high places,
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
very pleasant have you been to me;
your love to me was wonderful,
passing the love of women. (2 samuel 1: 23,25-26)

David compared the fallen to the swiftest and strongest untamed creatures. Jonathan, who won his most important victory on "the heights" above the crags, had fallen on Mount Gilboa. David's love for his deceased comrade took precedent over the impending political victory, and he lamented rather than rejoicing.

The thick branches of a great oak

After the passing of Saul, David went to Hebron, where the men of Judah made him king. With the land still fraught by war, David's fortunes turned and he was able to defeat both Saul's

heirs and Israel's neighboring foes. David became king over all Israel and expanded the boundaries of his empire to include much of the surrounding country. He moved to the king's house and turned his concerns toward moving the ark of the covenant and centering both spiritual and political power in Jerusalem. Through most of his reign, there is little mention of wilderness. 2 Samuel, instead recounts the internal turmoil in David's household, as David covets Uriah's wife Bathsheba, and his son Ammon forces his sister Tamar to lie with him. The core of 2 Samuel concerns sexual sin, revenge, prophetic reproof and political intrigues in Jerusalem.

When David's rule is threatened, however, wilderness again becomes important. Absalom, his son, grew impatient and wished to become king in his father's stead. He gathered the men of Israel to him in Hebron, and David, on hearing of the impending coup, fled Jerusalem and took his followers into the wilderness. Absalom, receiving some bad advice from a counselor secretly loyal to his father, did not pursue immediately, but allowed his father time to safely cross the Jordan and organize his faithful troops. The counselor who discouraged Absalom suggested: "your father and his men are mighty men, and... they are enraged, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field." (2 Samuel 17: 8) He also suggested David was already making ready to fight his son, and when the first of Absalom's followers fell: "Then even the valiant man, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will utterly melt with fear; for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man..." (2 Samuel 17: 10) The images of the lion and the bear return, this time not to convince a doubting king to let David fight, but to discourage the pretender to the throne from immediately engaging the well proven David.

Men of the neighboring peoples, the Ammonites and the Gileadites, brought supplies and food to David's followers, saying "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness." (2 Samuel 17) The rations were well chosen for a fighting force, lacking both perishables and delicacies, and including "honey and curds" (perhaps symbolic of the milk and honey of the land). (Hertzberg 1964) His troops refreshed, David mustered his army and sent them out against

Absalom. The battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. According to the Biblical text:

And the men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest devoured more people than the sword.(2 Samuel 18: 7-8)

The area was covered not only by thick forest but also by heavy undergrowth and rocks. The dense cover put Absalom's troops at a disadvantage and caused many casualties. (Hertzberg 1964)

The forest was yet of further help to David's cause. Just as Absalom chanced to meet some of David's followers, he rode his mule "under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth..." (2 Samuel 18:9) One of David's commanders and his armor bearers killed the king's son against David's orders. Again, the wilderness favored David; the land itself supported God's anointed king. Especially important in this case is the location of the battle - outside David's home territory of Judah. There is the subtle implication in these passages of David's right, not only to the leadership of Judah, but to the leadership of all twelve tribes.

Vision and conquest

The exploits recounted in 1 and 2 Samuel report neither sin nor failure in the wilderness, at least on the part of conquering David. Throughout the life of the greatest king ever to rule over Israel, rough terrain and isolation were on the side of God's anointed. The landscape of the accounts is more than an historic backdrop. During David's reign, considerable territory was added to Israel's sphere of influence. The author(s) and editors of 1 and 2 Samuel mention David's victories in areas such as the Negeb desert, and in so doing, present an outline of the expanded kingdom that was to come to full glory under Solomon's rule. David's "divine right to win" in the wilderness of Judea is extended to the southern deserts and the Transjordan lands. The combination of the inheritances of the twelve tribes under one king was always fragile. Barely united at the time of David's death, the coalition shattered into two kingdoms after the reign of

Solomon. The Biblical "historian(s)" who wrote 2 Samuel depict the nation as properly united under David - the forest of Ephraim helping to keep it that way.

The treatment of wilderness in 1 and 2 Samuel is similar to the motifs found in other Biblical books in its expectation that the land, including the wilderness, will support the righteous people of Yaweh. In the book of Exodus, for example, the Reed Sea assists the children of Israel by bogging the wheels of Pharaoh's chariots, and the wind holds back the waters. Divine providence during the wanderings often is mediated through the environment, such as the sweetening of the waters of Marah through the branches of a tree, and the falling of the manna. The environment is always portrayed as stressful, yet always in the hands of Yaweh. No one dies, due to environmental causes, until the people sin. When the people crave meat for example and are dissatisfied with the manna, they eat quails from the sea and die. (Numbers 11) When the Korah and his sons doubt the legitimacy of the Levitical priesthood, the earth opens and swallows them up (Number 17). For a people who thought their Land belonged to God and God was letting them live there as long as they bent to the divine will (Davies 1982), these sorts of attitudes towards the environment should not be surprising.

The role of the environment in 1 and 2 Samuel does differ from presentations in some other books of the Bible in the way the divine interacts with the wilderness. In Genesis, the wilderness and the mountain serve primarily as platforms for divine action. One sees God protecting Hagar in the wilderness and providing water - the wilderness itself does not protect or provide. In the Exodus, the role of the environment becomes more complex. God worked a series of mighty acts, and the environment itself also seemed to protect the people, as in the miring of Pharaoh's chariot wheels. After Sinai, however, the environment worked increasingly against the people and became a means of divine disciplinary action. For David and Jonathan, arid lands, cliffs, caves, and forests offered protection and routes to victory or to safety. The interactions with nature were framed much less in terms of the miraculous, and much more in terms of the actual physical

characteristics and geographic locations of the sites. The modern reader, recognizing the historic nature of the writings, may overlook the subtle implications about the role of the land. David and Jonathan rambled about primarily on the property the Lord intended to give to the children of Israel. Further, David was the Lord's anointed king. The land itself, wild and cultivated, was always on his side and helped him win victories over the Philistines, Saul and his own son. In the Exodus, the people are initially protected by wild nature, but as they refuse to bend to the will of Yaweh, the environment becomes both a great obstacle and an executioner. In 1 and 2 Samuel, Jonathan and David begin by overcoming environmental difficulties (ie. the crags). David, however, is ultimately protected by the caves, mountains and forests. David's relationship with the landscape parallels his rise to power and his growing relationship with the God of Israel.

Wilderness experience in 1 and 2 Samuel differs greatly from that in the books of the Pentateuch and from other Biblical writings, such as the four Gospels, in its lack of visionary experience and direct contact with the divine. In Genesis, Hagar and others who wander alone to wild sites see angels or have divine dreams. The same pattern continues in Exodus, where Moses encounters a burning bush in the desert and eventually leads the people to view a spectacular theophany on a holy mountain. The lack of these occurrences in the Davidic narratives does not appear to be due to the construction of the temple (and the containment of God therein) or to a more theologically advanced vision of God as omnipresent and unseen. Elijah encounters wilderness theophanies in 1 Kings, and the tradition of wilderness vision continues through the New Testament, where it reappears in such events as Christ's temptation in the desert and the transfiguration on the mount. (Bratton 1985)

In 1 and 2 Samuel and related materials in Kings, the role of the national leader partially separates from the role of the prophet. During the time of the judges, the prophet was also the civil ruler and in the case of a judge such as Deborah, led the people into battle. Moses wrote down the law, spoke to God, and directed the peoples' day to day activities. In 1 Samuel, these roles

diverge. Saul spends a brief period among the prophets (and proves himself ill adapted to the vocation). Much of Saul's failure as king was, in fact, a result of his poor understanding of God's will and priorities. Biblical critics often call David a prophet, but his role in society is quite different from that of Gad (who advises him to flee Saul) or Nathan (who comes to rebuke him for his behavior concerning Bathsheba). David's heart knowledge of God is, by implication, nurtured in the wilderness, just as Elijah's understanding of Yaweh is deepened by his trip to the desert mount of Horeb. Yet while Elijah literally hears God, David relies on heart knowledge. In the lives of David and Jonathan, the verification of God's presence or God's purposes is found in the young warrior's statements acknowledging the role of Yahweh in their actions.

The Davidic narratives also differ with both Genesis and Exodus in the way the protagonists experience the stresses of the wilderness. David and Jonathan were much better able to cope with the wilderness environment than Hagar or the children of Israel. The Biblical texts imply the young men had learned basic survival skills and could move easily across difficult terrain. Both David's and Jonathan's problems centered around military and political adversities, not around difficulties with finding food or water. In the story of David, there were no miraculous appearances of springs or manna, only God's repeated deliverance, usually mediated through human action. David's ascension to the throne through the turmoil of Saul's rule was itself a mighty act of God.

The theme of military prowess developing in the wilderness is found in a limited form in Genesis, where Ishmael grows up in the desert to become an unmatched archer and the father of a great nation. The tales of David and Jonathan, however, are much better developed, repeatedly demonstrating the relationship of wilderness knowledge and skills to the production of great leaders. David, on confronting Goliath, credits his boyhood experience as a shepherd with developing his expertise. It is quite clear, as he flees from Saul, his youth in the wilderness has helped to save his life. Even when past his physical prime, David defeats Absalom in the regions he knows best. David and Jonathan, the model leaders of the narratives, are men who learned to

survive and to understand God on the steep, arid slopes above the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea.

Inner spirit, outward bound

The Davidic model of wilderness experience is similar to many types of contemporary wilderness leadership training. One of the best examples of these modern programs is Outward Bound, which began as a wartime survival school, whose original purpose was to put the will and the skill to survive in young British sailors torpedoed during World War II. Through the years, Outward Bound has grown to include schools in a variety of geographic locations and environmental settings. The programs use wilderness to not only teach technical skills, such as rock climbing and white water canoeing, but to help participants "develop their inner strengths and resources, to recognize and dispel self-imposed limitations, and to learn to work cooperatively within a group for the benefit and service of others." (Rosen and Gooden 1986) The participants find the programs valuable in improving personal conditioning, developing wilderness skills, learning to overcome challenges or hazards, learning to work as a team member, and developing an increased sense of the needs of others. Sociological studies have found the programs increase self esteem, self concept, self empowerment and physical fitness (Koepke 1973, Mathias 1977, Parkhurst 1983, Wright 1982).

The Davidic model of wilderness experience is also based partially on learning or using wilderness skills under stress. As a shepherd David spent long hours by himself. He had to account for his livestock. He climbed over rocks looking for his lost charges, and improved his hand and eye coordination when using his sling. He developed courage as he took a sheep from the jaws of a lion. He learned to navigate in rough country and to supply himself with food and water. The major difference between the Davidic model and the Outward Bound model, is Outward Bound attempts to develop strength, skill and self confidence - in the case of David, these are always supplemented by God-confidence. Both David and Jonathan give credit to Yahweh for all their

victories. They live somewhere between the physical and the spiritual. David had a relationship to his family and to his nation which was mediated by religious ties. 1 and 2 Samuel always place the victories of David and Jonathan, not in the realm of individual skill, but in the context of holy history, of the Hebrew people and of the whole earth. The modern Outward Bound model does not deal with these sorts of basic spiritual, family and social ties, although it may, in some wilderness therapy programs for troubled youth, attempt to compensate for the lack of them. The major difference between most types of contemporary wilderness training and the Davidic example is the former localizes both the empowerment and the perception of action to the individual or to the inter-acting group, the latter has a much more sweeping concept of cause and effect - the empowerment is divine and the action of universal significance.

At last comparison with the Outward Bound model lies in the development of comradeship. Despite the association of wilderness with isolation, programs like Outward Bound try to both change self perception and foster better relationships between people. The challenges of the wilderness are supposed to teach people to expect more of themselves, and expand their concept of their personal limits. Working in groups "helps to develop bonds of mutual trust and an understanding that accomplishment requires cooperation." Through the courses, the participants not only gain strength and insight, but "lasting friendships". (Rosen and Gooden 1986) In the stories of David and Jonathan we find numerous cases of this type of active interdependence. It begins when Jonathan's armor bearer follows him on to the crags and continues as Jonathan gives David his armor and seeks David out at the risk of his own life. We see in David, a leader conscious of the needs of his troops, while in the case of Saul we see less concern for his soldiers, and less willingness to care for them. The ultimate expression of this mutual identification and comradeship is the dedicated friendship of Jonathan and David. Set in a landscape of wilderness and war, the divine element in their common fate, lifts them above political concerns, and allows Jonathan to submit completely to God's will and declare David's ascension to the throne.

In summary, 1 and 2 Samuel suggest wilderness experience builds strength, stamina and leadership and survival skills. Unlike most contemporary approaches to wilderness adventure, David's and Jonathan's success was established on God-confidence, rather than self confidence. 1 Samuel suggests wilderness experience could, in the right social setting, help to develop this God confidence. Wilderness experience could produce heart knowledge of God, by means other than direct encounter with a divine being. In the case of a civil leader, a theophany or hearing a literal voice of God were not necessary to wilderness spiritual experience. Wild nature favored and protected the leader who was in right relationship with God. The land itself would aid the righteous warrior or Yaweh's anointed king. And lastly, wilderness experience could produce comradery and group interdependence, which at its best was mediated by God.

Davidic wilderness in contemporary retelling

The story of David is not only a very important part of the ancient Hebrew canon of holy writings, it is also a continuing element in western mythology, told and retold for generations by faithful Jews and Christians. Until recent decades, selections from the Davidic narratives were used in graded readers for students in public schools in the United States (McGuffey 1838). Today, material from 1 and 2 Samuel is still widely employed in Sunday and Sabbath schools and private educational institutions offering religious training. The story of David has largely become an adventure tale for children, and most of us first encountered it, not in the original Biblical form, but in an edited version for young readers.

Since modern English "retellings" have influenced our perceptions of the story of David, the question becomes: how faithful are these versions to the spirit of the original in presentation of wilderness imagery? To determine this, I searched the University of Georgia libraries and Christian bookstores in the Athens and Decatur, Georgia, for materials prepared for children and adults

(without formal training in Biblical studies) and located 55 versions of some part of the Davidic narratives in forms ranging from coloring books, to childrens readers, to anthologies of Bible stories, to study materials for adult Sunday school classes. This sample did not include professional commentaries on 1 and 2 Samuel or theological studies written for clergy or college level teachers. The sample did locate a geographic variety of publishers including such well known presses as Eerdmanns, Concordia, Thomas Nelson, Tyndale House, Alfred A. Knopf, Zondervan, Macmillan, and Doubleday. The publishers were not primarily from the southern United States, although most, if not all, the authors were of western European heritage. The oldest materials were written in the 1830s, the most recent were produced in the 1980s. Not surprisingly, a majority of the authors were women. Several of the editors or writers were well known for other literary efforts. These included Walter de la Mare (1961), Eugenia Price (1961) and Pearl Buck (1971). I looked for trends based on the level of the intended readership, fidelity to Biblical texts, extent of the narratives covered and the age of the materials (19th and early 20th century versus late 20th century). I looked for the use of specific texts: Jonathan climbing the crags, David tending sheep in the wilderness, David slaying the lion and the bear, David and Jonathan having a last meeting in the wilderness, David hiding in wilderness caves and forests (particularly Adullam and En-gedi), and the forest of Ephraim devouring Absalom's army.

The first conspicuous trend is that very basic materials, for young children and beginning readers, tended to drop environmental and geographic motifs found in the Biblical texts. Some "beginners" books say little other than that David was a good king and God loved him. Elementary texts sometimes skip the passages about David killing the lion and the bear even when retelling David's victory over Goliath. A second major trend is the repeated inclusion of certain parts of the narratives, particularly the story of David and Goliath, without related passages. The use of the story of Goliath, coincidentally makes the death of the lion and the bear, the single most repeated "wilderness" incident. In many of the more elementary books, the only use of wilderness imagery

is David attacking large predators.

The amount and type of violence David meets out to the predators in the retellings is variable. Murdock (1985) says David "fought lions and bears" (and has a drawing of an embarrassed bear embracing a sheep), and Benagh (1986), a version of a Hanna-Barbera movie cartoon, has David drive away a lion by hitting the big cat "sharply on the flank" with his sling. At the other end of the gradient are claims of exceptional prowess, such as Loveet (no date), "I've fought wild bears who threatened my sheep, And many's the kill I've made....," or Muir (1988) "Why I've killed a lion and a bear with my bare hands!" Walter de la Mare (1961) writes of the lion: "So I [David] went out after him...and chased him, and snatched prey from out of his mouth. And when raging with fury, he sprang upon me, his paws upon my shoulders, I caught him, like this, by the beard upon his chin, and with my club smote and slew him a blow." Many of the retellings do not make value judgements on the lion and the bear. Some do so strongly, if accidentally, in simplifying vocabulary or in making David appear noble and loving. Palmer (1983), for example, in a basic reader, refers to David as a "good boy" twice, says David "took good care of his sheep" and has David sing to God "You are good," in pages 1-4, and then refers to a bear or lion as "bad" four times in pages 6-10.

A third major trend is the word wilderness or desert is sometimes dropped where it would be found in a typical English translation of the Bible. Most of the retellings do not credit David with herding sheep in the wilderness (or doing anything happy or useful in the wilds), but place David in "the fields" with his sheep. Very few of the retellings, elementary or otherwise, repeat Eliab's cynical remark: "And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?" The wilderness flavor of the Psalms is also neglected, even in cases when David's artistry is mentioned. Examples of versions deleting wilderness imagery in the context of shepherding include Egermeir (1922): "As a shepherd boy David loved the out-of-doors."; Schoolland (1947): "David liked to be out in the fields and in the hills with the sheep. He loved to watch the clouds and the birds and the trees. He

loved the little lambs, too."; and Driskill (1961): "He spent most of his time in the beautiful outdoors, and he loved the hills and valleys, the golden sunshine, and the lovely flowers that grew about him." These texts also tend to lose the rougher side of wilderness experience, which is, however, an important theme of 1 Samuel. Similarly, feeding the Philistines "to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth will know there is a God in Israel" is rarely included in its entirety. The feeding of the carrion eaters is more frequently incorporated than the statement about the entire earth, (and Goliath's statement on the matter is included as often as David's). The theological meaning is thus lost and replaced by a nasty interchange between warriors.

A fourth major trend is the irregular reporting of the actual physical circumstances of some of the events. The tale of Jonathan climbing the crags is sporadically used. Interestingly, it is not always retold prior to introducing the matter of Jonathan's love for David. Sutton (1983) in a children's book called *David and Jonathan*, never mentions Jonathan's exploits prior to David's victory over Goliath, and suggests Jonathan "was kind" and therefore he "was a good friend to David." Several other renditions of David escaping from Saul with Jonathan's help or David meeting Jonathan in the field ignore Jonathan's initial valour, and in some cases imply Jonathan became David's friend because he admired David for slaying Goliath, rather than presenting the physical and spiritual similarities in the two young men. The bitter irony of worthy Jonathan's death and loss of the crown (and most of the literary value of the story) is thus also edited out of the contemporary retellings. Jonathan's last meeting with David in the wilderness is almost never related, so the subtle wilderness background of the series of encounters is further weakened.

Several versions of Jonathan climbing the crags were similar to 1 Samuel in their discussion of the terrain, but several did not discuss the rock climbing or even make the attack appear to be difficult. Hulbut (1932), for example, says Jonathan and his armour bearer "crossed the valley," Allen, Easterly, Rich and Towns (1973) says Jonathan "climbed up to the top of a rocky hill," and

Egermeier (1922) describes the attack with no rocks at all. The parallels to David are thus further undermined.

Many of the longer versions of the narratives included some version of David's escapes from Saul, and many mention either "wilderness" or rugged terrain. The incident in the cave at En-gedi is frequently used. Some of these retellings are muted, such as Evans (1923) where Saul pursues "from city to city, into the woods, and even into the desert...", or Lindvall (1985) showing David's escaping men "hurrying down the big hill." Most versions are neither negative nor positive about the wilderness environment - the more graphic descriptions generally use a few adjectives, such as Vos (1985): "they hid in caves in rough mountain country...He went over to a very wild and rough country near the Dead Sea. This place was called En-gedi, which means 'the rocks of the wild goats'." Most, however, are not as openly negative as Turner (1968) on Adullam: "It was a good fortress, secret and well defended. But it was a harsh and rocky place, a place of fierce sun and little water. Often David longed for the green hills of his boyhood home around Bethlehem." (This retelling also neglects the actual geography of the locations. The pastures where David herded as a boy were not much richer in forage than Adullam and both were wilderness areas.)

In some versions, David's lament for Saul and Jonathan is included with the accounts of their deaths. In general, versions which are partially based on Biblical quotes are more likely to use imagery from wild nature, from these and other passages, than versions which are more completely rewritten.

The retellings frequently mention the battle in the forests of Ephraim when the story of Absalom is included. The story of Absalom hanging in the oak is sometimes told, however, without the battle in the forest. Usually, the forest is portrayed as a geographic location - nothing more. Only one source was found which caught the probable intent of 2 Samuel. Hoeksma (1983) writes: "Twenty thousand of Absalom's soldiers were killed that day, but the woods killed more than the swords of the soldiers. Absalom's soldiers were caught in the vines that hung from the trees, or

they ran into low branches, and were killed. The Lord made even the trees of the woods fight for David."

A fifth major trend or lack of one concerns the era of the retellings. There was no evidence more recent versions are more environmentally or geographically aware than earlier ones. One of the most accurate presentations is, in fact, in a volume by John Kitto, an Englishman who had traveled in the Middle East. The edition inspected was published in 1870 at Social Circle, Georgia, but an earlier edition had been published in 1868 at Bangor, Maine. Kitto (1870) not only mentions all the key wilderness incidents, but includes geographically believable site descriptions. The book discusses Jonathan, for example, ascending "upon the summit of a cliff, deemed inaccessible, and therefore not very strongly guarded." Kitto (1870) also catches the protective function of wilderness when he reports David "found shelter in the forest of Hareth" or "removed to the district of Engedi, toward the south-western extremity of the Dead Sea, the caverns and rocky fastness of which offered many secure retreats." Kitto (1870) also reports:

David now sought shelter in the eastern part of Judea, toward the Dead Sea. There were strong posts and obscure retreats in that quarter, among the mountains and the woods, to which he successively removed, as the motions of Saul dictated, for the king was now openly bent on his destruction,...[David] was for some time in different parts of the wilderness of Ziph. He was sheltered by a wood in that wilderness, when Jonathan, becoming acquainted with his place of retreat, went to him, "to encourage him to trust in God."

Kitto (1870) understood that the grassland wilderness was hardly barren and suggested, in reference to the wilderness of Paran, "the southern country offers, in proper season, excellent pastures."

Older sources do follow the pattern of dropping geographic information from more basic or simplified accounts (Kitto's work is very detailed and intended for adult readers). Some short older retellings, however, such as the description of Absalom's defeat in McGuffey's *The Eclectic Fourth Reader* (1838), do incorporate information about the landscape if only because they tend to follow

the Authorized Version (King James version) of the Biblical text very closely.

Wilderness Lost

Among the Bible story books and other works reviewed, there is no evidence the authors as a group are particularly negative or positive about wilderness or wild nature. For every writer who has David killing "bad" lions, there is one who mitigates the destruction of wildlife (sometimes diverting from the original Biblical text) or one who gives a positive report about a cave or a forest. Most of the writers, however, have very little feel for the landscape or the geography of the Levant. In many cases, the literary qualities or the more subtle theological messages of the original Biblical narratives have been lost in editing. Most of the retellings center on heroic individuals, not relationships. The retellings therefore do as much damage to the love between David and Jonathan and to the history of the transition from judges to kings, as they do to the environmental imagery. The subtleties of David's friendships, his relationship to the land, his place in holy history and even his love for Yaweh are over-shadowed by the brave shepherd boy with the sling.

Since the story about Goliath is considered one of the most worthy of retelling (and one of the most suitable for children?), the slaying of the lion and bear becomes the most commonly retold piece of wilderness lore. For the reader unfamiliar with the remainder of the narratives, the prominence of this portion may give the incorrect impression the treatment of wilderness in the Davidic narratives is primarily negative or antagonistic to the wilds. The deletion of the word "wilderness" when describing where David herded sheep suggests David spent his time sitting in rather tame fenced pastures. This avoids presenting the wilderness as a positive setting where David learned about nature or practiced playing the lyre. The reduction of the crags to a sloping valley similarly breaks the connection between the stressful aspects of wilderness and Jonathan's valor.

The ancient Hebrew hearing or reading the story would have known the locations and would

have had some idea what they were like. Modern redactors (for the general public) tend to ignore the problem of explaining the landscape or treat the Biblical locations as random sites, unimportant to the contemporary reader. Ironically, much of what the texts have to say about spiritual and civil leadership and its trials and responsibilities is tied to both the setting and to political circumstances. The loss of wilderness material is therefore coupled to a loss of other insights.

In summary we should be careful not to credit either David or the Hebrews with attitudes that are actually artifacts of editing. We should also not assume that modern environmental awareness will improve interpretation of texts which are remote from our world in space and time, at least without a conscious effort. In general, the very reduced texts for younger readers, and the more heavily edited or rewritten were the most likely to delete or distort environmental imagery. The more complete the account, and the more closely it follows the Biblical originals the more likely it is to mention wilderness or to portray wilderness settings in a positive light. The general literary sequence of 1 and 2 Samuel - from Jonathan and David overcoming the wild, to the wild offering protection, to the wild "fighting" for the annointed king - is almost always lost in modern editing. The removal of environmental and social data also gives the impression leadership materializes solely from individual strong character and dismisses its relationship to the land, to interpersonal and family ties, and to Hebrew culture.

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