

Laidlaw Scholars Research Essay

The Ruthless David: Examining Intertextual Allusion within 2 Samuel 11-12

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Introduction

2 Samuel 11-12 and Ruth

The narrative of David and Bathsheba is often considered the turning point of the Davidic reign.¹ Set after the disastrous stories of communal depravity found in Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel (found in the Hebrew Bible—otherwise known as the Old Testament or the Jewish Bible) tells the story of the first kings of Israel.² Most of 1 Samuel follows Saul, the king chosen by the Israelites, hunting for David, a young shepherd turned warrior anointed by God for kingship. Following the death of Saul (1, 31), David's kingship leads to the unification of Israel and Judah (2, 5:1-5), the movement of the Ark of the covenant—seen by many as “the throne of God”—into Jerusalem (2, 6:16), and God's covenant promising that David's line will never end (2, 7).³

However, this time of communal flourishing and divine blessing soon ends with the narrative in 2 Samuel 11-12.⁴ David has sex with his soldier Uriah's wife Bathsheba, attempts to cover up her pregnancy by calling Uriah home from war, and eventually gets him killed once his plan fails. Once a man “after God's own heart” (1, 13:14), David has turned to carnal desires and rash violence. Confronted with a parable by the prophet Nathan about a rich man who takes a poor man's lamb, David condemns the “rich man” (2, 12:5-6) and unknowingly condemns himself, leading ultimately to the death of his son (12:14) and the promise that “evil” will rise up over him (12:11). A story that begins with hope in a King that can finally redeem Israel ends in tragedy, without a clear pathway to redemption.

¹ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 249.

² The Book of Judges ends with a brutal civil war between Israelite tribes following the rape and dismemberment of a Levite's Concubine. The final verse reads, “In those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did whatever was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 21:25).

³ Stephen Geller, “The Religion of the Bible,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin, Marc Brettler, and Michael Fishbane (Oxford University Press, 2004), 2023.

⁴ Paul Borgman, “The Ark, Communal Well-being, and Women: Pattern 7,” in *David, Saul, and God: Rediscovering an Ancient Story* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 111.

However, through hidden details woven throughout the narrative, 2 Samuel points to another biblical book: Ruth. Set in the time of the Judges (Ruth 1:1), which precedes the monarchy, Ruth tells the story of David's ancestors: a poor, widowed gentile woman, Ruth, and the wealthy Israelite man, Boaz, who "redeems" her. Unique and shared Hebrew words (or lexemes), parallel and inverted plot points, and shared themes demonstrate a deep connection between the two stories and compel the careful reader to read them together. The connection of these stories reveals the main difference: while David abuses a gentile (or non-Israelite) woman and leads his household into death, Boaz *protects* one, producing life and the generations leading to the Davidic monarchy. This allusion is further revealed by Boaz's close correlation to the "poor" man of Nathan's parable, as well as lexically intertwined scenes. This ultimately sets up a multi-generational story of decisions that lead to life and death, where David is contrasted with the virtue of his ancestors, revealing *why* David's monarchy fails. However, the allusion of David to the character of Ruth without any inversion or contrast at the end of the 2 Samuel 11-12 narrative begs the question: will there be hope for the Davidic line after all?

Methodology

It cannot be assumed that the Hebrew Bible works the same way as modern, western literature. A prevalent scholarly attitude towards the biblical text is the assumption that the standards of reading and writing do not change across time due to "how human rationality and logic are supposed to function."⁵ Therefore, it is thus presumed that these standards are "naturally available to scholarly intuition and judgement."⁶ However, one cannot assume that, for example, the aspects of the biblical text that seem 'incoherent' to modern readers (such as "blatant contradictions" within narratives, which Baden argues makes the Pentateuch "unreadable") would have seemed that way to their ancient readers.⁷ Rather, we must establish

⁵ Andrew Teeter and William Tooman, "Standards of (In)coherence in Ancient Jewish Literature," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2020): 107-111.

⁶ Teeter and Tooman, "Standards of (In)coherence," 107-111.

⁷ Joel Baden, "Why is the Pentateuch Unreadable?—Or, Why Are We Doing This Anyway?" in *The Formulation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz Bernard M. Levinson, Dalit Rom-Shiloni, and Konrad Schmid (Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 251.

that stand. As Alexander Samely argues, rather than relying on our own literary standards, because we do not share the cultural intuitions of the biblical text, the text must “become the primary evidence for its ways and its methods of coherence.”⁸ For this reason, my research began with a critical reading of the (Masoretic) Hebrew texts of 2 Samuel 11-12 and Ruth without relying on modern scholarship’s intuitions on what the literary conventions of the Hebrew Bible entail.⁹

One way the Hebrew Bible differs from much of modern literature is the phenomenon of similarity between its texts. Although whether this phenomenon indicates literary dependence or intentionality is often debated, scholars such as Michael Fishbane, Michael Lyons, Andrew Teeter, and William Tooman (among many others) have established ways of describing it, ultimately arguing that (some) “shared lexical and syntactic constructions” within the Hebrew Bible indicate “the deliberate use of one text in another as part of a communicational strategy.”¹⁰ This is often described as intertextuality or allusion.

According to Gérard Genette, intertextuality is a “relationship of copresence between two texts or several texts...the actual presence of one text within another.”¹¹ To Genette, this includes quotation, plagiarism, and allusion. Allusion, according to Miner, is “a poet’s deliberate incorporation of identifiable elements from other sources, preceding or contemporaneous, textual or extratextual.”¹² Allusion requires the readers’ knowledge of the original text, but the reference cannot be overly stated or shown to the reader—it must be a phenomenon that some readers fail to see. This poetic allusion can be through both verbal connections, such as the “picking up of a specific verbal string, typically a phrase, from an antecedent text of some canonical authority”

⁸ Samely, “Profiling Jewish Literature,” 25.

⁹ All Hebrew translations will be my own.

¹⁰ Michael Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel’s Use of the Holiness Code* (T&T Clark, 2019), 50.

¹¹ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 1-2.

¹² Earl Miner, “Allusion,” Pages 13-15 in *The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, ed. Terry Brogan (Princeton University Press, 1994), 13.

and conceptual connections, such as “allusions to events, facts about the poet’s life, or the structural features of another artistic work.”¹³

Further, according to Ziva Ben-Porat, literary allusion is “a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts” which is achieved through “the manipulation of a special signal: a sign (simple or complex) in a given text characterized by an additional larger ‘referent.’”¹⁴ The activation of two texts leads to the formation of intertextual patterns, influencing the reader’s understanding of both texts. Therefore, as Tooman summarizes, literary allusion is “between written texts, and it is intentional,” requiring the author to provide signals for the reader betraying the allusion.¹⁵ The study of biblical intertextuality, then, “focuses on how biblical texts echo, allude to, quote, reapply, or even reconfigure other canonical passages for various rhetorical and theological purposes.”¹⁶ Thus, my examination of intertextuality between Ruth and 2 Samuel 11-12 included searching for shared locutions, themes, plot points, and structures.

While some scholars include directionality in their examination of allusions between texts, I will not establish which text came first. First, the development of texts did not occur linearly, so both texts may have read each other and redacted themselves accordingly *over time* to better reflect allusions between the texts (or perhaps, there was a final redactor of both texts at the same time).¹⁷ Additionally, because 2 Samuel comes first in the canon, a first-time reader

¹³ Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy*, 52.

¹⁴ Ziva Ben-Poret, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” *PTL: A Journal of Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976): 107-8.

¹⁵ William Tooman, *Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38-39* (Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 6.

¹⁶ Gary Yates, “The ‘Weeping Prophet’ and ‘Pouting Prophet’ in Dialogue: Intertextual Connections between Jeremiah and Jonah,” *JETS* 59, no. 2 (2016): 223.

¹⁷ For instance, Yates, speaking about intertextuality between Jonah and Jeremiah, argues that the “composition and editing of both books likely extended into the postexilic period, and it is possible that cross-pollination occurred between the two books as they reached their final form.” (Yates, “The ‘Weeping Prophet’ and ‘Pouting Prophet’ in Dialogue,” 224).

would have read Ruth into 2 Samuel.¹⁸ However, because Ruth is chronologically first (set in the time of Judges), the author seems to want Ruth to be read first *as well*. Thus, we must examine the intertextual allusion in both directions.

Part 1: 2 Samuel 11-12

Structure

The narrative is framed by “sending” (שלח).¹⁹ David *sends* soldiers to fight the Ammonites as he remains in Jerusalem; then, he *sends* someone to inquire about Bathsheba. He *sends* messengers to bring Bathsheba to him, where he then has sex with her. Bathsheba *sends* word that she is pregnant, leading to David’s *sending* of messages to cover up his sin—first, through attempting to have Uriah lie with his wife, and then by having him killed in battle. Throughout chapter 11, “sending” is used 11 times. Likewise, following the death of Uriah, God *sends* Nathan to David to share his parable. This immediately indicates that aspects of the eleventh chapter will mirror the twelfth.

Further, the narrative of 2 Samuel 11-12 can be split into three panels: the actions of David (11:1-27), Nathan’s parable and divine judgement (12:1-14) and the consequences (12:15-25). These three panels are placed between the beginning and end of the Ammonite War (10:1-19; 12:26-31). This is the second and only other time that an Israelite king battles the Ammonites in the Books of Samuel, mirroring Saul’s battle in 1 Samuel 11 and subsequently warning the reader that David may act as badly as Saul. This framing creates a structure that marks off this narrative from the rest of the Davidic story and places the parable of Nathan in the center.

¹⁸ William Tooman with Marian Kelsey, (Re)reading Ruth (Cascade Books) 2022, 114. Tooman says, “In the Jewish Bible, the Book of Ruth typically follows Proverbs rather than Judges,” I will be following this order in this article, given Ruth’s reliance on Proverbs 31 (see also Yair Zakovitch, “A Woman of Valor (Prov. 31:10-31): A Conservative’s Response to the Song of Songs” in *The Song of Songs: Riddle of Riddles* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 112 and Tooman with Kelsey, (Re)reading Ruth, 109-16. This placement in the Masoretic canon is sometimes used as evidence for placing Ruth in the post-exilic time (See Braulik, “The Book of Ruth as Intra-Biblical Critique,” 2).

¹⁹ Alter, *The David Story*, 249.

Table 1: Structure of 2 Samuel 10-12, according to Prieto

Battle of Ammon Begins	Actions: David and Bathsheba and the death of Uriah		Consequences: the death of the child and the birth of Solomon	Battle of Ammon Ends
10: 1-19	11: 1-27		12:15b-25	12:26-31
		Nathan's Parable 12: 1-15a		

The second panel, portraying the taking of Bathsheba, the “sex plan” of David, and Uriah’s murder, already paints a picture of the King’s loss of piety.²⁰ David, alone in Jerusalem while his army is away fighting,²¹ lounges upon his roof before he “sees” (ראה) that Bathsheba is “beautiful” (literally, “good” Heb: טוב) and sends messengers to “take” (לקח) her. This combination of words in 11:2-5 clearly allude David’s actions to Eve in the garden, where she “sees” (ראה) that the fruit is “good,” (טוב) and “takes” (לקח) it, warning the reader that similar consequences may follow. Further, the use of a chain of verbs indicates rapid, single-minded action, creating “an impression of frenzied activity,” thus portraying the brisk and unfeeling nature of his behavior.²² This is further illuminated by the extended dialogue between various characters following this short section (almost the entire chapter).

Uriah’s response to David’s “sex plan” ironically alludes to David’s past piety. In the famous Davidic covenant scene, David wishes to build God a temple, saying:

²⁰ A sex plan, in our use, refers to the attempt of one character to get another character to have sex with a partner for the purpose of procreation.

²¹ Scholars such as Moshe Garseil argue that David’s choice to remain in Jerusalem “does not imply a failure in his royal duty,” (Moshe Garsiel, “The Story of David and Bathsheba: A Different Approach,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (1993): 246). Regardless, the fact that David *was* alone in Jerusalem is the thing which “sets the entire narrative in motion,” (Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, “Was It Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-Examined,” *Vetus Testamentum* 61, no. 1 (2011): 7.)

²² George Nicol, “The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba: Some Observations on Ambiguity in Biblical Narrative,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 22, no. 73 (1997): 49.

“Please, see that I am *dwelling* (שֹׁכֵן) in a *house* (בֵּית) of cedar and the *Ark* (אֲדֹנִי) of God is *dwelling* (שֹׁכֵן) in a *tent*.”²³ (2, 7:2).

As David tells Uriah to go home, Uriah responds by saying:

“The *Ark* (אֲדֹנִי) and Israel and Judah are *dwelling* (שֹׁכֵן) in *tents*,²⁴ and my Lord Joab and the servants of my Lord... and I will go to my *house* (בֵּית) to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?” (11:12).

Within only a few chapters, the pious David has abandoned his concern for God and His people, while the gentile Uriah shows respect for the Ark and his fellow soldiers. This negative portrayal of David continues within the parable.

Nathan’s Parable

The parable of Nathan in 2 Samuel 12 interprets the actions of David in a unique way, creating allusions within the story world just as entire texts allude to other texts. It follows two men—one rich and one poor. The rich man has plentiful flocks and herds, while the poor man has nothing except a little lamb whom he cares for, raising her alongside his sons and keeping her alive.²⁵ However, when a traveler comes to stay with the rich man, the rich man pities to take from his own flock, so he takes the poor man’s lamb and prepares it for the traveler.

The story is so terrible to David that he pronounces capital punishment onto the rich man, saying:

“As the Lord lives, this man must die.²⁶ And the lamb will be repaid four times, because he did this thing and did not show pity,” (12:5-6).

²³ This is not the precise word used in 7:2—however, it is a synonym.

²⁴ Once again, the word here for “tents” differs from 2, 7:2.

²⁵ Literally, *to cause her to live*.

²⁶ Literally, *the son of death this man is*.

David's reaction is surprising—the punishment he gives is beyond what is expected for the stealing of animal property.²⁷ However, his strict punishment allows David to ironically pronounce heavy judgement upon himself. Truly, David is blind to the truth of the story, for the parable is purposefully mapped onto the David's actions. The lamb, who is like a “daughter” (בת, *bat*) to the poor man, represents first Bathsheba (literally, *bat-sheva*, ‘daughter’ of the oath). Poor compared to the riches of the King, Uriah (who, presumably, only has one wife) is clearly mapped onto the poor man. Further, the description of Uriah's refusal to “eat” (אכל, *akhal*) and “drink” (שתה, *shata*) and “lie” (שכב, *shakab*) with his wife (11:11)—things he normally would do prior to the war, when he was living with Bathsheba—are mirrored by the description of the poor man with his lamb, who “eats” (אכל, *akhal*) and “drinks” (שתה, *shata*) and “lies” (שכב, *shakab*) with him (12:3). The root “to live” (חיה, *chayah*), situated at the end of Uriah's dialogue and the beginning of the description of the poor man, further triggers this allusion.

However, the rich man kills the lamb, which happens not to Bathsheba but to Uriah. Further, Nathan interprets the parable as including both Uriah and Bathsheba as victims, saying:

“Uriah the Hittite you smote with the sword, and his wife you took for yourself for a wife, and he you killed with the sword of the Ammonites.” (12:9)

This order (Uriah—Bathsheba—Uriah) mirrors the introduction and identity of the characters in the parable: First, the poor man, then the lamb as Bathsheba, and then the lamb, killed, as Uriah. This is an example of dynamic analogies, which, according to Grossmann, is when “the analogy between narratives encourages the presentation of a certain character from one narrative as paralleling more than one character in the other, such that the reader has difficulty tracing a continuous and consistent analogy.”²⁸ When this is used multiple times in one narrative (as it is in 2 Samuel 11-12, as we will see), Grossmann argues that it should be regarded as an

²⁷ Interestingly, Exodus 22:1 demands a fourfold restitution for a lamb that has been slaughtered or sold. In this way, David is half right. However, never is there a capital punishment for this crime—the worst punishment would be indentured servitude to work off the debt.

²⁸ Jonathan Grossman, “‘Dynamic Analogies’ in the Book of Esther,” *Vetus Testamentum* 59, no. 3 (2009):

“intentional literary phenomenon.”²⁹ This technique will be evident particularly in the allusion to Ruth.

David’s position as king aligns him to the rich man—both in abundant wealth and in his numerous wives, who are represented by sheep/herds. Like the rich man, unsatisfied with what he has, David takes the “lamb” for his own use. Unlike the poor man, whose care for the lamb takes place over years (12:3), the terse and quick description of his “taking” (לקה) of Bathsheba (11:4) reveals the frenzied and single-minded nature of his actions—mirrored in the quick “taking” (לקה) of the lamb by the rich man (12:4). This juxtaposes the true relationship of Bathsheba/the lamb and Uriah/the poor man to the purely selfish motives of David/the rich man. Further, the use of the euphemistic words “take,” “go,” and “lie” (לקה, בוא, and שכב) within the parable’s description of the rich man (12:3-4) alludes to the initial sexual interaction of David and Bathsheba.

However, why does David react so strongly? In the parable, it is likely that Nathan is alluding to David’s childhood and prior identity. Once a lowly shepherd (1, 16:11-13), David was chosen by God to “shepherd [God’s] people Israel” (2, 5:2). David may then be aligning himself instead with the *poor* man, treated unjustly by those stronger, leading to his harsh judgement of the rich man. Thus, Nathan’s announcement that “you are the man!” (12:7) surprises David through his realization that he has acted as the “rich man,” instead of the “poor man” he once was. This is only confirmed for David by the elaborate allusion within the parable that clearly links his actions to the rich man.

Finally, the use of “rich” and “poor” alludes to Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2.³⁰

“The Lord makes *poor* and makes *rich*; he brings low, he also exalts.³¹ He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour...” (1, 2:7-8).

²⁹ Grossman, “Dynamic Analogies in the Book of Esther,” 394.

³⁰ Hannah’s prayer prophesizes about the future of Israel as a monarchy.

³¹ It is worth noting that the word for “poor” differs in these two texts. However, this does not change the meaning.

Once the poor man, David had been “raised” up, inheriting the seat of honor as the King. Now, as the rich man, David will be brought “low.” This grim reality is actualized through the pronouncement of divine justice following Nathan’s parable, justified both through David’s own pronouncement of capital punishment and a clever use of poetic justice.

Divine Judgement

The inner change realized by David through the parable is expanded upon with Nathan’s words.

“That man is you! Thus said the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘It was I who *anointed* (מִשָּׁח) you king over Israel and it was I who rescued you from the *hand* (יָד) of Saul. I *gave* (נָתַן) your *master’s* (אֲדֹנִי) house and the wives of your *master* (אֲדֹנִי) into your bosom... You struck Uriah the Hittite in the sword. You took his wife and made her your wife and had him *killed* (הָרַג) by the sword of the Ammonites.” (2, 12: 8-10)

Particularly, the text seems to be alluding to the previous mercy shown by David to Saul in 1 Samuel 24:8. There, David, on the run from his father-in-law, King Saul, finds him alone in a cave but refuses to kill him. He tells Saul:

“Behold, see in your eyes this day that the LORD *gave* you (נָתַן) today into my *hand* (יָד) in the cave, and I was told to *kill* you (הָרַג) and I showed *pity*³² over you. And I said, “I will not stretch my *hand* (יָד) against my *lord* (אֲדֹנִי), for he is God’s *anointed* (מִשָּׁח).” (1, 24:12)

Against his mortal enemy, who seeks his life at every turn, David shows pity. However, in this passage, consumed by selfish desire, David takes his own soldier’s wife and has him killed, perverting the responsibility he has as King for both people. The differences between the two Davids couldn’t be any starker.

In response to David’s sin, Nathan cleverly communicates the divine justice that will be dealt to him. This, too, is deeply poetic, drawing upon the details of the David—Bathsheba—Uriah story in order to establish the logic for the four punishments. First, God, through Nathan,

³² While the rich man does not show pity (according even to David), David once did. This is another instance of a synonym that provides the same meaning in the allusion.

admonishes David for his lack of recognition and contentment for what he has been given: namely, his master's (Saul's) house and his wives, and the house of Israel and Judah; as the rich man pitied to take from his own flock, David was not content with his own wives. God continues, "if that were not enough, I would have given you twice as much more" (12:8). However, instead of asking God for more, David has taken things for himself, doing "what is evil in [His] eyes" (11:27). Therefore, because he "put Uriah the Hittite to the sword" (repeated twice in 12:9), the sword shall never depart from David's house (12:10). Further, because he took Uriah's wife and made her his wife (repeated twice, 12:9-10) in *secret* (12:12), other men will take David's wives (12:11) and sleep with them in *public* (12:12).³³ Because he has acted as the rich man of Hannah's prayer, he will be brought low—literally, as "bad/evil" will rise up *from* his own house (12:11). David's house, which began with abundant hope, is in ruin.

David, realizing his sin, simply admits: "I have sinned before the LORD" (12:13). However, his punishment is not yet complete. Because he pronounced the punishment of death upon the rich man, David deserves death. But God is not finished with David—so, the punishment falls upon Bathsheba's son, and the "child about to be born to [David] shall die" (12:14).

The Death of the Son

The narrative of the death of David's child is paneled on Uriah's death. Just as Uriah is told by David to "go down" (יֵרֵד) to his house to "wash" (רָחַץ) his feet, David, following the death of his son, "rises" (קָוַם) from the ground to "wash" (רָחַץ). Uriah lies at the entrance of the house of the king, while David prostrates himself in the house of the Lord. As David questions Uriah about why he has not gone to his house, David servants question him about why he eats after his son has died. Finally, as David sends the scroll instructing Joab to kill Uriah "*in the hand* (וּשְׁלַח בַּיָּד) of Uriah," so too does God send "*in the hand* (וּשְׁלַח בַּיָּד) of Nathan" a message naming Solomon "Jedidiah" at the end of 12. Finally, the death of Uriah mirrors the final consequence of David's actions—namely, the death of David's son and Bathsheba's first born.

³³ Literally, *under the face of the sun*. Ironically, this will happen on the very rooftop where David first saw Bathsheba. See 2 Samuel 16:22.

David's actions have led to utter ruin—instead of peace, flourishing, and safety, the house of David has fallen to secrecy, sin, and death. This theme will continue through the following chapters as David's household begins to corrupt from the inside, into Solomon's rein and the eventual destruction of Jerusalem and exile into Babylon.³⁴ How could this have happened to the King “after God's own heart?”

Part 2: Ruth and Samuel

However, read together with Ruth, the logic of the downfall of David's house is transformed into a multi-generational story of life and death. The intertextual connection of this passage and Ruth has previously been noticed by Yitzak Berger,³⁵ who argued that Ruth alludes to the David-Bathsheba story through distinctive literary motifs—including thwarted reader expectations and the isolation and nocturnal deception motifs.³⁶ However, Berger isolates the allusion to Ruth to 2 Samuel 11, without acknowledging Nathan's parable and the punishment of the son. Further, he does not draw upon lexical allusions, nor does he develop additional plot-elements or themes between the two stories. Finally, he does not adequately expand upon the consequences of this allusion.

Plot Parallels

The depth of the allusion between the two texts is deeply complex. To start simply, we will look first at the simple plot connections between the two stories. First, both stories feature life and death. In 2 Samuel 11-12, David's men are at war, which is already a setting of life-or-death. Further, he solves his ‘problem’ through the killing of Uriah, leading to the death of his son. In Ruth, Naomi and her daughter in law Ruth are left behind in Moab when Naomi's

³⁴ As Borgman puts it, “The King could hardly have been presented in more negative terms, from the Bathsheba-Uriah debacle through his disciplinary failure with son Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah...the latter failure of David the father culminates in the king's flight from the son Absalom, a would-be king,” (Borgman, “The Ark,” 112).

³⁵ This work was found at the end of my research—I came to my conclusion about Ruth's connection to 2 Samuel 11-12 independently.

³⁶ Yitzak Berger, “Ruth and the David-Bathsheba Story: Allusions and Contrasts,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 33, no. 4 (2009): 433-52.

husband and two sons die, leading to a life-or-death problem of finding food and safety in Judah (1:3-22). Both stories feature “children of Lot:” Ammonites (with whom David’s army are at war) and Moabites.³⁷

Additionally, both share a basic, inverted plot structure that emphasizes the differing consequences of the actions of David versus those of Boaz and Ruth.

Table 2: Basic Plot Comparison, according to Prieto

2 Samuel 11-12	Ruth
(A) David exploits Bathsheba and gets her pregnant	(c) Death (of Elimelek and his two sons)
(B) Sex Plan	(b) Sex Plan
(C) Death (of Uriah/unnamed baby)	(a) Boaz protects Ruth and gets her pregnant

Character Parallels

On the character level, Ruth is strikingly similar to Bathsheba. Both are gentile women who are widowed, marry wealthy Bethlehemites, and conceive sons that lead to the birth or continuance of the Davidic monarchy. Both are described as “good” (Bathsheba’s beauty and Ruth’s deeds are טובה)³⁸ and are called “daughter.”³⁹ They are two of the three gentile women who are described as proactively bathing (the other being Pharoah’s daughter).⁴⁰

³⁷ See Genesis 19:30-38. Lot’s daughters, believing that there were no men in which to have children with, got their father drunk to conceive children by him. The Moabites and Ammonites are their descendants.

³⁸ Ruth 3:10; 2 Samuel 11:2.

³⁹ Bathsheba through her name, Ruth throughout (1:3, 11, 13; 2:2, 8, 22; 3:1, 10, 11, 16, 18).

⁴⁰ Chankin-Gould, et al, “The Sanctified ‘Adulteress’ and her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba’s Bath and Self-Consecration in 2 Samuel 11,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 3 (2008): 346-7, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089208090805>.

However, some of their descriptions are also inverted; Bathsheba is passive while Ruth is often active.⁴¹ Bathsheba is sought after by David, while Ruth seeks out Boaz.⁴² While Bathsheba *returns* (שׁוּב) to her house (11:4), Ruth refuses to *return* (שׁוּב) to hers (1:15-16)—though both instances indicate loyalty, for Bathsheba wishes to be in the house of her husband and Ruth wishes to stay with Naomi, her mother-in-law.⁴³ Finally, while Bathsheba’s unnamed son dies, Ruth’s named son *lives* (4:13).

Likewise, David is similar to Boaz. Both are described as Bethlehemites and mighty men of strength (גִּבּוֹר חַיִּל) (1 Sam 16:18; Ruth 2:1).⁴⁴ David inquires about Bathsheba (11:3) and Boaz inquires about Ruth (1:5-7). Both solve a problem of marriage/children—though their problems are inverted, as David’s ‘plight’ is Bathsheba’s pregnancy and Boaz’s is the lack of progeny/protection for Ruth and Naomi. While David stays behind on a journey, Boaz returns. While David has sex with a vulnerable Bathsheba, Boaz does not while Ruth is vulnerable on the threshing floor.⁴⁵ Both use the vow “As the LORD Lives” (Ruth 3:13; 2 Samuel 12:5), but David’s leads to his own condemnation while Boaz’s leads to his protection of Ruth through marriage. Most importantly, David *harms* the people he is responsible for as King, while Boaz chooses to be responsible for someone has no legal or familial obligation to support.⁴⁶

David and Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law, also have strong similarities. Both characters do not appreciate what they have—David, with his wives and place as king, and Naomi, with her

⁴¹ This is prevalent throughout Ruth 1-3 in her vow to Naomi, her instance of finding food in the fields, and her behavior with Boaz.

⁴² This is particularly shown in Ruth 3, as Ruth approaches Boaz on the threshing floor.

⁴³ This could, arguably, be considered the same—staying with her mother-in-law could be seen as staying in the house of her (deceased) husband.

⁴⁴ The meaning of this phrase is ambiguous. Tooman says, “Hayil is yet another polysemic word. It can mean ‘strength,’ ‘power,’ ‘ability,’ or ‘wealth.’ The phrase ‘mighty man of hayil’ is mostly used for warriors (Josh 1:14; Judg 6:12 [ironic]; 2 Kgs 24:14; 1 Chr 12:9) but, every once in a while, for the wealthy (2 Kgs 15:20) or for persons who are uniquely competent (1 Kgs 11:28).” (Willaim Tooman with Marian Kesley, *(Re)reading Ruth*, 57).

⁴⁵ Willaim Tooman with Marian Kesley, *(Re)reading Ruth*, ?.

⁴⁶ Tooman with Kelsey, *(Re)reading Ruth*, 36.

understanding of Ruth's vow.⁴⁷ Both characters orchestrate a sex plan—David with Uriah and Naomi with Ruth and Boaz. However, while Naomi's sex plan is ultimately successful (as, despite the lack of sexual activity and conception on the threshing floor, the two *do* get married), David's is not.

Allusions to Nathan's Parable

The key to unlocking the Ruth allusion within 2 Samuel 11-12 is Nathan's parable. Boaz, the wealthy landowner, is rich in his material possessions and servants, aligning him to David/the rich man. However, unlike David/the rich man—who clamber for what is not theirs—Boaz is content and generous with what he has. Following Deuteronomy's law that "specifies that a part of each harvest must be left for the most disadvantaged,"⁴⁸ Boaz allows people to glean in his field (Ruth 2:8).⁴⁹ However, he goes *further*, instructing his servants to leave Ruth barley (2:16). In his redemption of Ruth (a legal process), he does not acquire Naomi's property (4:5-6), indicating that he is not greedy and simply wishes to help Ruth and Naomi. Unlike David/the rich man, Boaz shows *pity* to those over whom he has power.

Despite his material overlap with the "rich" man, Boaz aligns to the poor man through lexical and thematic overlaps. First, everything that the "poor man" does for his lamb, Boaz does for Ruth. She "eats" (אכל) from his "morsel" (פת), "drinks" (שתה) from his jars/cups, is called a "daughter" (בת), and "lies" (שכב) with him. Both characters keep their dependent alive. Second, Ruth is protected by Boaz for a long time—the entirety of the harvest season—just as the lamb is with the poor man for years. This is, again, completely different from the brief and rushed encounter between David and Bathsheba. When Ruth goes to the threshing floor to meet Boaz (which is an inherently dangerous situation for her, given she is following Naomi's "high

⁴⁷ Tooman argues that Naomi's assertion that she has been returned to Judah "empty," is not about Naomi's grief or God's actions but about "Naomi's self-centeredness...nothing could be further from the truth. Ruth has given everything that she owns to fill Naomi's emptiness; she has given herself...She neither acknowledges the gift nor reciprocates it. She is not empty; she is blind." (Tooman with Kelsey, *(Re)reading Ruth*, 55).

⁴⁸ Tooman with Kelsey, *(Re)reading Ruth*, 58.

⁴⁹ Deuteronomy 24:19-22. Also found in Leviticus 19:9-10 (23:22).

compromising”⁵⁰ plan to “approach the intoxicated Boaz in the dark, expose him, lie down with him, and do ‘whatever he tells you to do’”⁵¹), Boaz does not take advantage of her. Instead, he “spreads [his] cloak” (3:9) over Ruth, a sign of marriage only repeated in the Hebrew Bible by God himself.⁵² Once again, this is in complete opposition to David/the rich man, who use their authority for their own gain. Finally, the product of this union—the baby—is held to Naomi’s “bosom” (חיק) just as the lamb lies on the poor man’s “bosom” (חיק).

Table 3, Lexical Allusions to Ruth in Nathan’s Parable

2 Samuel	Ruth
“But the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb...she used to eat (אכל) of his morsel (פת) and drink (שתה) from his cup and lie (שכב) in his bosom (חיק), and she was like a daughter (בת) to him.” (12:3)	At mealtime, Boaz said to her, “Come over here and partake of the meal, and dip your morsel (פת) in the vinegar...and she ate (אכל) her fill... (2:14) “And when you are thirsty, go to the jars and drink (שתה) some of the water that the men have drawn.” (2:9) “And now, daughter (בת), have no fear. So, she lay (שכב) at his feet until dawn.” (3:13) Naomi took the child and held it to her bosom (חיק) (4:18)

Throughout, despite his position of power, Boaz acts exactly like the poor man. This lexical overlap of Boaz with the poor man is no coincidence—instead, it is an intentional allusion that emphasizes how a torah-pious Israelite should act. As David’s ancestor, Boaz is showing the *ideal* for how a king should act: making decisions that lead to life, not death. The genealogy at the end of Ruth that leads up to David seems, then, to inspire hope that there will be a king who will act like his ancestors, redeeming the communal ill that runs rampant in Israel. However, once the reader gets to Samuel, this hope seems to be lost—the king does *not* act how he should.

⁵⁰ Tooman with Kelsey, *(Re)reading Ruth*, 92.

⁵¹ Tooman with Kelsey, *(Re)reading Ruth*, 94.

⁵² Tooman with Kelsey, *(Re)reading Ruth*, 96. This is, as Tooman argues, another way that Boaz acts like *God* towards Ruth.

With both stories in mind, the careful reader can then ask: is it possible to return to such ideals? And is there any hope for the Davidic line?

Mirrored Scenes: Case Study

These questions are partially answered by one of the strongest lexical links in this allusion: the allusion between various sections of 2 Samuel 11:7-15, 2 Samuel 12:18-25, and Ruth 3:3-4:14.⁵³ Throughout all three passages, the words “washed,” “eat,” “lie,” “did,” “know,” and “house” are used, and all take place immediately before or after a ‘sex plan.’ Further, all three passages allude to each other.

Further, as we have seen in Part 1, 2 Samuel 11:7-15 alludes to 2 Samuel 12:18-25 by using opposite directionality, lying in a house, and “sending” something in the hand of a person. Further, words such as “return” (שוב) (11:12, 15; 12:23) and “die” (מת) (11:15; 12:18, 19, 21, 23) signal the allusion. However, most closely aligned are 11:8-11 and 12:20-21. In 11:8-11, Uriah is told to “go down (ירד) to your house (בית) and bathe (רחץ) your feet,” but refuses, swearing on David’s “life” (חי) that he will not “do” (עשה) “this thing” (הזה הדבר). After the death of his son, David “washes” (רחץ) to go to his “house” (בית) to “eat” (אכל), leading his servants to say, “what is *this thing* (הזה הדבר) that you have *done* (עשה), for when the child was *alive* (חי), you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you are *eating* (אכל) bread.” (12:21). These two sections connect the precursor *and* the punishment for the murder of Uriah, where both characters either refuse to eat and wash or eat and wash out of a pious response.

Ruth 3 connects David’s sex plan to Naomi’s sex plan. Just as David commands Uriah to “go down,” (ירד) to his house to “bathe” (רחץ) his “feet” (רגל) (11:8), Naomi tells Ruth to “bathe” (רחץ), “go down” (ירד) to the threshing floor and uncover Boaz’s “feet” (רגל) (3:3-4). Both David and Naomi attempt to manipulate the men through “eating,” (אכל) “drinking,” (שתה) and drunkenness (11:13; Ruth 7). Both characters instruct someone to go “to the place which” (את־המקום אשר) they “knew” (ירד) something was “there,” (שם) (11:16; Ruth 3:4). Both sex plans fail, with both men refusing to have sex with their woman. In this way, this intertextual connection, again, condemns David’s behavior as manipulative and nefarious.

⁵³ There are other lexical overlaps in similar fashions, but due to the limited time frame of this project and word count, I will only provide one case study.

However, at the moment of despair, after David's son has died (despite his pleading), David is mapped onto the character of Ruth *without* an inversion in Ruth 3:3-4. As David ceases mourning, he does precisely what Ruth does⁵⁴ before her interaction with Boaz on the threshing floor: "bathing" (רחץ), "anointing" (סחך) himself, and changing his "clothes," (שמלת) before a time of "eating"⁵⁵ (אכל) and "lying" (שכב). This combination of words (רחץ, סחך, and שמלת) is only ever found in 2 Samuel 12: 20-21 and Ruth 3:4. Even the word "set" (שום) is used within both passages (12:20; Ruth 3:3), and the words "tell" (נגל) and "do" (עשה), which are placed the end the Ruth section (3:4), are placed at the beginning of the 2 Samuel 12 passage (12:18). David's action of going to his "house" (בית) to eat "bread" (לחם), combined lexically, creates Bethlehem (בית לחם)—the house of bread and the setting of this passage in Ruth.

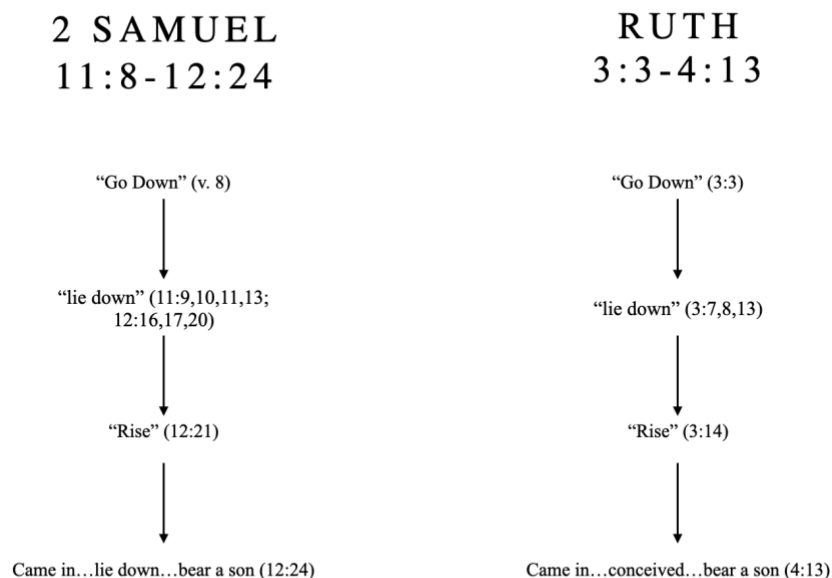
Most crucially, these actions take place before the births of future kings. Boaz protects Ruth and produces progeny that leads to the genealogy of David, while David marries Bathsheba and produces Solomon, a future king who also leads to further generations of the Davidic line. While this lexical connection does not necessarily indicate the redemption of the character of David himself, it *does* invoke hope in the Davidic line. David, now repentant, understands his role as the rich man—and in response, he changes accordingly, mirroring the behaviors of his ancestor Ruth before her interaction with Boaz at the threshing floor.

Finally, the use of the words "go down," "lie down," "rise," and "came in...bear a son" connects 2 Samuel 11:8-12:24 to Ruth 3:3-4:13, creating a basic plot line that is now *no longer* inverted. "Go down" and "lie down" are the instructions given for the sex plans. "Rise" happens directly before a marriage, which is followed by "came in...bear a son." This, again, connects both stories as ending in the birth of future kings.

⁵⁴ Ruth is instructed by Naomi to do these things, and then it is said that she does "all that her mother-in-law commanded her," (Ruth 3:6) indicating that these actions *were* done.

⁵⁵ It is worth noting that David goes to his "house" to eat "bread," which combined, creates Bethlehem (the house of bread), the setting of Ruth.

Table 3: Sequence of Actions, according to Prieto



Thus, this intertextual allusion of Ruth to 2 Samuel panels serves to both condemn David's actions *and* (at least partially) redeem the Davidic line, in the hope that the progeny created will make decisions that lead to life. Life, then, will come when the king returns to acting as Boaz and Ruth — the true example of pious Israelites.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to first examine the logic of 2 Samuel 11-12 as a multi-part narrative that works independently within the larger Davidic narrative. Then, I examined how Ruth and 2 Samuel 11-12 connect to each other in a variety of ways before establishing how this allusion was used. Due to the short time frame of this project, I did not investigate intertextual allusions to other biblical narratives (though there are many), nor did I provide every lexical allusion within Ruth that I found. Further, I did not search for allusions to Ruth in other parts of 1 and 2 Samuel (though I suspect there are many).

This study has shown that 2 Samuel 11 and 12 are intrinsically interconnected. All three panels of 11-12 connect to each other through clever lexical, thematic, and plotline parallels. This is particularly clear in Nathan's parable, as it condemns David's actions using allusion to

another narrative. Given this clear example of intertextual allusion employed by the author(s) of 2 Samuel 11-12, it can be confidently asserted that similar connections found within 2 Samuel 11-12 and Ruth—such as the lexical and plot-point connection of Boaz to the poor man—also create a complex intertextual allusion that makes a theological or ideological point.

Therefore, this study shows that there is ample evidence to suggest that there is an intertextual relationship between Ruth and 2 Samuel 11-12. Regardless of the direction these two stories are read, Ruth and 2 Samuel 11-12 combine to create a multi-generational story about decisions that lead to life and decisions that lead to death. The conclusion of the use of this allusion is that, if the Davidic king can return to the ideals of his ancestors, *then* the Davidic kingdom can be redeemed.

This study will lead to extensive further research. For instance, the logic for the hope that the prophets of the Hebrew Bible have in the Davidic line has not ever, to my knowledge, been fully explained. I plan to continue my work by examining *why* the prophets hope in a Davidic king as the redeemer of Israel, focusing on 1) whether David as a character is redeemed by the end of his life (particularly in his assertion that “I, the shepherd, have done wrong” in 24:17), the “shepherd” prophecy of Ezekiel 34, and 3) the Messianic prophecies found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and the Psalms. There is also significant work to be done in the New Testament, examining how the authors of the gospels might be using this allusion—particularly in the parable of the lost sheep and the “good shepherd” passage, as well as any allusions to the book of Ruth.

In conclusion, this work has opened the door for a new understanding of why David’s monarchy fails: despite his hopeful origins, David was *ruthless*.

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