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King David's Fatherhood – the Bright and Dark Sides

Ojcostwo Dawida – blaski i cienie

Abstract. Being a father is an important task in a man's life. This does not refer only to physical participation in the conception and birth of offspring, but also to the question of upbringing. That's why, in many cultures there are texts giving advice on how to do it. In the Bible, we cannot find any instructions on how to be a good father, but there are characters who try to fulfill this role. One of them was King David who had many children and loved them very much, although his attitude toward them was not always fully responsible. Thanks to the biblical texts, it is possible to observe how David fulfilled his role as a father.

Streszczenie. Ważnym zadaniem w życiu mężczyzny jest bycie ojcem. Nie oznacza to jedynie fizycznego udziału w poczęciu i zrodzeniu potomstwa, ale również kwestię wychowania go. Właśnie dlatego w wielu kulturach można odnaleźć teksty zawierające wskazówki, jak tego dokonać. W Biblii nie znajdziemy żadnej instrukcji, jak być dobrym ojcem, ale możemy odnaleźć postacie, które starają się to zrealizować. Jedną z nich był król Dawid. Miał on wiele dzieci i bardzo je kochał, chociaż nie zawsze jego postawa względem nich była w pełni odpowiedzialna. Dzięki tekstom biblijnym można zobaczyć, w jaki sposób Dawid realizował się jako ojciec.

Keywords: King David; children of King David; father; fatherhood.

Słowa kluczowe: Król Dawid; dzieci króla Dawida; ojciec; ojcostwo.

Introduction

Being a father is a task which almost every man faces. It can be divided into two stages: giving life in a physical sense, and the proper upbringing and education which allows the offspring to find their place in society and fully live their lives. We might say that the first stage is fairly simple although there are

also difficulties in this respect as many couples are struggling with the problem of infertility now. In antiquity, this concern did not seem to be so serious; however, it does not mean that it did not exist. This is reflected, among others, by § 191 of the Code of Hammurabi regulating the situation of an adopted person in the event of the appearance of natural offspring.¹ On the pages of the Bible, we can also see couples who do not have children for a long time. The reason is mostly female infertility (e.g. Sara, Rachel, Anna), but there are also married couples who do not have children and the causes are not clearly stated (e.g. Samson's parents or Zachary and Elizabeth) – although in these cases the biblical author indicates that the problem of infertility lies with the woman.

However, the question of the proper upbringing of children is far more complex. In ancient Greece this topic is discussed by Aristotle in *Politics*, where he indicates that it is a task for the legislator as one of the manifestations of concern about the state.² Emphasizing the role of the state, the philosopher criticizes the existing custom that “each and every citizen takes cares of his children and, according to his preference, grants private teachings to them.”³ According to Aristotle, and before him also Plato and other authors, the role of the state in raising children to be good citizens was very important, although there were also voices emphasizing the special role of father in this matter.⁴ In contrast, “the upbringing of children in ancient Rome was considered one of the father's most sacred duties.”⁵ As the children grew up, elementary schools, and then orators,⁶ also assisted in their education. In Israel's neighboring countries issues regarding upbringing have been raised, too. In Egypt, in the third millennium BC, works such as the *Maxims of Ptahhotep*, and *The Teaching for King Merykara* were created, and in the second millennium BC *The Instruction of Any* or *The Wisdom of Amenemopet*. The addressees of these works are sons coming from various social classes (from the Pharaoh to a low-ranking official), whose

¹ J. Klima, *Prawa Hammurabiego*, p. 102. pp. 176–178.

² Aristotle, *Politics* VIII,1,1–2.

³ Aristotle, *Politics* VIII,1,2, trans. L. Piotrowicz, w: Arystoteles, *Polityka*, p. 347.

⁴ L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje, obyczaje starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu*, pp. 271–275. Henri-Irénée Marrou describing upbringing in various city-states of ancient Greece shows that there were periods in their history when parenting was considered an eccentricity or even a crime against the community. Cf. H.-I. Marrou, *Historia wychowania w starożytności*, pp. 31–145.

⁵ P. Grimal, *Życie rodzinne*, p. 48. However, according to Henri-Irénée Marrou, it was so until the strong influence of Greek culture began to show. Cf. H.-I. Marrou, *Historia wychowania w starożytności*, pp. 329–330.

⁶ P. Grimal, *Życie rodzinne*, pp. 48–50. Cf. L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje, obyczaje starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu*, pp. 292–297.

fathers give advice on how to behave properly in life.⁷ In Mesopotamia, works of a similar character are *The Instructions of Shuruppak* from c. 2500 BC and *The Words of Ahikar*, a text which was created in the first millennium BC.⁸ Israeli sages have also paid attention to raising children; for example the author of *The Wisdom of Sirach* gives guidance on the upbringing of both sons (for example Eccles. 7:23; 30:1–13) and daughters (for example Eccles 7:24; 26:10; 42:11). On the pages of the Bible, it is not only the wise men who raise the issue of parent-child relationships but also the prophets, who stress the task of upbringing which is the duty of fathers. These instructions and admonitions have a twofold form. First of all, these are admonitions that condemn the negligence of fathers or indicate actions that should be taken. However, another form of recalling the content of the father-son relationship is the reference to the relationship between God and the chosen people. God's fatherhood and His attitude are presented as a model. In the historical books of the Old Testament, we do not find any set of instructions on how to bring up children in the right way, but the matter is essential there as well. Because of Samuel's inadequate upbringing of his sons, the people demanded the establishment of a king (see 1 Sm. 8:5). Even earlier, parental mistakes had led to a conflict between Jacob and Esau, and then between the sons of Jacob. Even Abraham, who is often treated as a model of behavior, had to learn how to be a good father.⁹

In this article, we will look at how David fulfilled his role as a father.¹⁰ The analysis of his attitude will take place in two stages. First, we will examine David as a son and brother; then we will analyze his relationship with his own offspring. Such a procedure will allow us to investigate whether David repeats the mistakes of his ancestors, or perhaps creatively reflects on any negative events that he has experienced in his childhood and youth.

⁷ J.S. Synowiec, *Mędrcy Izraela, ich pisma i nauka*, pp. 14–22.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 35–37.

⁹ M. Basiuk, *Abraham wzorem ojca*, in: *Więcej szczęścia jest w dawaniu aniżeli w braniu. Księga pamiątkowa dla Księdza Profesora Waldemara Chrostowskiego w 60. rocznicę urodzin*, ed. B. Strzałkowska, vol. 2, pp. 619–633.

¹⁰ David's fatherhood is the theme of the article by Dariusz Dziadosz: *Dawid i jego synowie. Wychowawczy i polityczny dramat na dworze królewskim*, pp. 39–63. However, despite the related subject matter, the author investigates the king's relationship with his sons from a different perspective, as the conclusion in his article points out: "The main thematic lines of the cycle of succession to the throne have indicated that David did not manage to fulfill his father's function well and failed as the royal court leader. The monarch did not leave behind sons who would show solidarity and support for each other, and there was no worthy successor who, in peaceful conditions, could take over and continue the political mission that David initiated." (p. 61).

1. The experience of being a son

Becoming a father is a process that begins in a boy's life as early as childhood. Relationships with parents (especially with the father) and siblings teach how to create bonds with those close to him. They form certain matrices of behavior that are most often duplicated in adult life when his time to perform a parental role comes. In David's life, the source of experiences is the relationship in his family home, but also the time spent at the court of King Saul, who (at least in the first period) treated him as his son.

1.1. David's relationship with his father and siblings

We do not have much information about David's family relationships. The most comprehensive reference appears in the context of Samuel's visit to Bethlehem, where he was sent by God to anoint the successor of King Saul (see 1 Sm. 16: 1–13). To this end, he went to the house of Jesse, because according to God's judgments, one of his sons was to be elected. Asked about the purpose of the visit through the head of the family, Samuel replied that he had come to offer a sacrifice. He invited Jesse and his sons to participate in the sacrificial feast. It was, in a sense, a distinction, and so it may come as a surprise that the father did not immediately call the youngest son from the pasture and did so only when the prophet ordered him to bring David to the house (see 1 Sm. 16:11). So, if David had not been the chosen one, he would probably have missed the sacrificial feast. It is interesting whether Jesse forgot about his youngest son or whether there were other reasons for that. According to the narrator, David was "red-haired, had beautiful eyes and an appealing look" (1 Sm. 16:12). The archaeological findings indicate that in the paintings Hebrews were depicted as black haired,¹¹ so David would, in a sense, be a "freak". It is true that according to the commentators, the red hair color is supposed to indicate courage and strength,¹² but in everyday life it could be a nuisance. In this text David is described as little, which means that he was the youngest of Jesse's sons, but this expression does not say anything about his age, because it was used independently without stating the age of a person. The shepherd's function, in turn, which he fulfilled, was naturally assigned to the youngest members of the family. This was also the case with Joseph, who, together with his siblings, tended Jacob's flock until he began to be treated as superior to his brothers (see Gen.

¹¹ J. Łach, *Księgi Samuela. Wstęp – przekład z oryginału – komentarz – ekskursy*, p. 206.

¹² D.T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT, p. 423.

37:2n). In the present article, the gesture of Samuel, who anointed David "in the midst of his brothers" (1 Sm. 16:13) is significant. Apart from the prophet himself, nobody knew exactly what this deed meant, but it was obvious to everyone that in this way David was entrusted with a very important mission. We do not know, however, how this event influenced the relations in Jesse's house or whether David was treated differently, or if he began to demand a special position for himself.

We can learn a little about the relationships between the brothers at a later time from the passage about the visit of David in the military camp in which his relatives were staying (see 1 Sm. 17:17n). David, who arrives there on behalf of his father, is not welcome by his brothers and especially Eliab is very critical of him. Of course, it can be argued that it is a defensive reaction to David's behavior on the part of his older siblings, who fear that David's questions about Goliath insulting the Israeli army could put his brothers in danger and force them to fight with the Philistine. Jan Łach, on the other hand, maintains that the reason for Eliab's behavior may be jealousy.¹³ The anointing of David among the brothers was the greatest blow for the firstborn, who could take the event as a harbinger of his removal from leading the family in the future. Eliab's attitude may also confirm the accusation against his brother: "I know the pride and anger of your heart: you have come here to look only at the battle" (1 Sm. 17:28). These words put the youngest son of Jesse in a very bad light as he appears to be an egoistic and inquisitive young man. Furthermore, this statement seems to suggest that it was a permanent feature of David's personality. However, we know from his own words that he was certainly a brave man. When he tried to persuade Saul to entrust him with the fight against Goliath, he boasted: "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it" (1 Sm. 17:34–35). Perhaps he boasted in this way earlier in his family home, but nobody believed him. His words were treated as the bragging of a young man endowed with an exuberant imagination. Looking at the reaction of David, whose answer cannot be considered as the most polite (see 1 Sm. 17:29), and the fact that he does not cease to inquire about Goliath, it must be admit-

¹³ J. Łach, *Księgi Samuela. Wstęp – przekład z oryginału – komentarz – ekskursy*, p. 214. Cf. R.W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, p. 178. On the other hand, David Toshio Tsumura believes that attributing the feeling of jealousy to Eliab and comparing this event to the relationship between Joseph and his brothers is an abuse. See, D.T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, p. 455.

ted that he was not easy to deal with and certainly was not easily influenced by others.

The relationships in Jesse's family cannot be considered as the most constructive. However, they do not turn out to be particularly destructive either, as evidenced by the fact that when David is an influential person in the state, he does not forget about his loved ones. We learn about it in dramatic circumstances; in other words, when David has to flee from King Saul, who wants to kill him. It is then that he goes to the King of Moab to ask for shelter for his relatives (see 1 Sm. 22:1–4).

1.2. Saul – the king as a father

The relationship between David and King Saul is difficult to assess. It is influenced by, among others, a difference in the position they occupy in the society. It is true that in the case of Saul, it is difficult to speak of some aristocratic origin, but the possession of power quickly becomes addictive. It is illustrated by the example of his daughter Michal, who as a wife of David criticizes her husband for dancing in an undignified manner for the ruler when he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (see 2 Sm. 6:20). The king's authority predestined Saul to a paternalistic attitude towards his subjects; however, in reference to David he used the term "my son".

Let us, however, analyze their relationship in chronological terms. There are two traditions describing the way in which David found himself at the royal court. According to the first of them, the reason was the attacks of a disease suffered by Saul, the only medicine being music and singing, which soothed the king. While searching for the right candidate for a court musician, David was found and in this way he began his service for Saul, who "loved him very much" (1 Sm. 16:21) and made him his squire. The biblical author suggests that the relationship between the king and David is not only based on servitude, but there is also a certain element of emotional bond in it.¹⁴

The second tradition associates David's inclusion to the royal court with his victory over Goliath. There is no mention of Saul's feelings in this respect. The relationship between them was that of ruler-subject, in contrast to the very emotional relationship with Saul's son, Jonathan, who loved David "as much as himself" (1 Sm. 18:1) and made a covenant with him (see 1 Sm. 18:3).

The peaceful life at the royal court was destroyed by Saul's jealousy prompted by folk chants which attributed greater victories to David than to the king (see 1 Sm. 18:7–9). From that moment, David's relationship with the king changed

¹⁴ D.T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, p. 432.

dramatically. The young man had to leave the country because Saul wanted to kill him. It is worth noting, however, that Jonathan, despite his father's instigations, remained faithful to David till the end. Even at the risk of disobeying his father, he helped David to escape (see 1 Sm. 19:1–7, 20:1–42). Jonathan was consistent in his attitude, whereas Saul's behavior was ambivalent. On the one hand, he wanted to destroy David and did everything he could to do so. On the other hand, when the opportunity came, more than once, for David to kill the king, he spared his life, while the king addressed David as "my son" (see 1 Sm. 24:17, 26:17, 21:25). It is difficult to view it only as a paternalistic expression, in particular if we pay attention to the pronoun "my", which suggests a deeper relationship than just the relationship between the ruler and the subject.¹⁵

The fraternal relationship with Jonathan and his attachment to Saul certainly exerted a great influence on David's life, as testified by his arrangement of a funeral elegy after their death, in which he praises their deeds and mentions his attachment and love for them (see 2 Sm. 1:17–27).

2. David as a father

The experience of being a son and a brother in David's life was very varied. It is probable that such a situation did not constitute a good departure point for undertaking paternal duties towards his own children, but also it did not rule out the right fulfillment of this mission. On the basis of biblical texts, we will now try to analyze what kind of father David was. The order of the texts examined is determined by the seniority of the royal children. The only exception is Tamar, because there is no information to determine her age, so she will be discussed between Amnon and Absalom, with whom her story is related. In our analysis, we will try to determine how David built a relationship with his children, how much he understood their world and whether he was an authority for them. The departure point for considerations devoted to individual descendants of David will be a holistic view of the number of the king's children and their mothers.

2.1. David's offspring

On the pages of the Old Testament, there are two traditions which refer to David's offspring. The first one is presented in the Second Book of Samuel (see 2 Sm. 3:2–5, 5:13–16), which belongs to the Deuteronomistic tradition. The other approach comes from the First Book of Chronicles (see 1 Chr. 3:1–9,

¹⁵ R.W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, p. 241.

14:3–7). They differ slightly in the number of David's children mentioned in the text and in the names of some of them. However, both of them clearly show that David had many descendants from different wives. However, not all the women married to him gave birth: David's first wife, Saul's daughter, Michal remained barren – it was the punishment of God for her critical remarks when David danced in honor of God during the introduction of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (see 2 Sm. 6: 20–23). The other one who certainly did not give David a child was his last wife, Abishag, with whom the king did not have sexual relations (see 1 Kings 1:3–4).

The aforementioned information shows that David had numerous offspring, a fact which probably hindered a closer relationship with them and could also be the cause of his unequal treatment of some children, creating the danger of favoring the chosen ones. Another reason was that they were born of different mothers, a fact which did not have a positive effect on forming a proper relationship with the children. David's wives represented different social classes and frequently competed with each other, which certainly had an impact on their husband.

2.2. Amnon

The oldest of David's sons was probably most loved by him. On the pages of the Old Testament, he appears only in connection with the events of the rape of Tamar, his half-sister (see 2 Sm. 13:1–21). The relationship between the father and son viewed from the perspective of this event is complex. One can certainly see the great love of David for Amnon, which made him want to resolve all his problems. This attitude must have been known to Jonadab, a nephew of David, and a friend of Amnon, who devised the whole plan of luring Tamar to the chambers of her half-brother relying on David's weakness for his son. Jonadab advised Amnon to pretend to be sick whereupon the king, concerned about his son's condition, came to find out how he could help him. Amnon requested for Tamar to prepare a meal for him, which seems to be a whim, but apparently David's love for his son was so great that he was willing to indulge his son and fulfill even such a wish if only it could improve his health. We can see here the commitment to and concern for the firstborn, but at the same time the question arises about his upbringing. Amnon appears to be a spoiled prince with different whims and demands their unconditional fulfillment. Perhaps Amnon's disordered desires and the lack of proper discipline were the cause of the tragic events that ensue.

The biblical author describes the King's reaction to the rape of Tamar as follows: "Having heard about this incident King David fell into great anger.

But he did not want to do any harm to Amnon, his son, because he loved him. After all, he was his firstborn" (2 Sm. 13:21). The question arises why the ruler who was so praised by the biblical author at the beginning of his reign ("David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people." 2 Sm. 8:15) could not take adequate steps to punish his son. Mark Gray points out that, according to many commentators, the reason for David's passivity was his earlier sin with Bathsheba, which is compared to Amnon's behavior towards Tamar.¹⁶ The analysis conducted by Mark Gray indicates that such an approach seems to be a simplification because it is not possible to equate the sin of David and Bathsheba with the rape of Tamar.¹⁷ Why, then, did the king act in this manner? The analyzed text suggests that David's motivation was love for his firstborn, which can also be proved by the fact that Amnon was not punished in the manner prescribed by the law. According to the law from the Book of Deuteronomy 22:28–29, he should marry Tamar; however, according to Lev. 18:11; 20:17, the consequence of his deed should be death. David spared his heir and his affection for Amnon is further testified by David's reaction to the news of his son's death. Therefore it can be concluded that despite the wrath experienced by David when he learnt about Amnon's wicked deed, his attitude towards him did not change.

2.3. Tamar

Tamar is the only daughter of David mentioned in the biblical text. Her relationship with her father is defined as obedience. When David calls her to prepare a meal for a sick brother, she comes and does everything that she is asked to do without hesitation. We do not know her reaction to her father's treatment of her. Trying to defend herself against Amnon's attack, she only invokes his father's love for him (see 2 Sm. 13:13). So even if she felt some kind of bond and care from David, she obviously felt that her older brother was loved more by his father. The fact that David did not punish Amnon for his action in any way may prove that she was right. A certain manifestation of her distrust of David

¹⁶ M. Gray, *Amnon: A Chip Off the Old Block? Rhetorical Strategy in 2 Samuel 13.7–15*, pp. 39–40. Dariusz Dziadosz also views the situation in this way, see *Dawid i jego synowie. Wychowawczy i polityczny dramat na dworze królewskim*, pp. 45–48.

¹⁷ M. Gray, *Amnon: A Chip Off the Old Block? Rhetorical Strategy in 2 Samuel 13.7–15*, p. 48.

is her decision to seek shelter from her own brother when she was driven away by Amnon and did not turn to David for help and justice.¹⁸

Looking at Tamar, it is worth noting that she had received a good upbringing. We can see that she is obedient, but it must be emphasized that it was not blind obedience but obedience based on reason. When the king ordered her to go and prepare a meal for Amnon she obeyed without hesitation, but when Amnon gave her the order in the same way, she resisted. Her good upbringing is further demonstrated by the fact that she was able to prepare the meal that Amnon asked for without the help of a maid (see 2 Sm. 13:8). She also knew the law, but it is unknown to what extent Tamar's attitude was David's merit; nevertheless her behavior certainly brought him glory.

2.4. Absalom

David's attitude towards Absalom was the most ambivalent. On the one hand, he certainly loved his son, as was the case with all his children, but not in the same way as he loved Amnon. This attitude is visible when Absalom wanted to invite his father with the whole court to a feast on the occasion of sheep shearing. The king clearly refused him motivating his decision with the wish not to burden his son (see 2 Sm. 13:25). However, as Jan Łach observes, this refusal may also include the desire not to favor Absalom.¹⁹ The preparation of such a feast was certainly an organizational and financial effort, but the presence of the ruler would clearly raise its rank and exalt the host.

After the revenge on his brother, Absalom has to leave the country to escape his father's anger (see 2 Sm. 13:37). This is not only a violent emotion, but also the intention to undertake specific actions aimed at punishing a son for committing a crime. The escape saved Absalom from death and it took at least three years until David's anger subsided (see 2 Sm. 13: 37–39), but even that did not make David take any steps to meet his son, and if it had not been for the intrigue of Joab, Absalom would never have returned to Jerusalem (see 2 Sm. 14:1–22). David's resentment towards his child was manifested by the fact that despite agreeing to his return, David did not abandon the intention to impose a punishment, thus his refusal to meet Absalom in person (see 2 Sm. 14:24). This state of affairs lasted for two years and it was certainly

¹⁸ In polygamous marriages, it was a common practice that children from the same mother supported each other, and the brothers felt responsible for their sisters more than their fathers. Cf. J. Łach, *Księgi Samuela. Wstęp – przekład z oryginału – komentarz – ekskursy*, p. 417.

¹⁹ J. Łach, *Księgi Samuela. Wstęp – przekład z oryginału – komentarz – ekskursy*, p. 419.

a burden for Absalom (see 2 Sm. 14:28–29). Therefore, he undertook efforts to meet his father and the meeting had a very official character: “Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom” (2 Sm. 14:33). Thus David showed his forgiveness for Absalom, although there were no words, only a gesture of reconciliation expressed by kissing his son. From then on, the relationship between father and son seems satisfactory, but there is no closer relationship, although Absalom is allowed to meet David again. Everything, however, was destroyed by the desire for power and rebellion of the son who proclaimed himself king (see 2 Sm. 15:10–12). David accepted this situation as an act of God and at the time of the last battle he was more interested in the fate of Absalom than in the victory of the troops gathered around him. The ruler even issued a very clear order to save his son (see 2 Sm. 18:5). However, at the news of his death: “The King shuddered. He went to the upper room of the gate and cried. As he walked, he said: ‘My son, Absalom! Absalom, my son, my son! Who would let me die instead of you? Absalom, my son, my son!’ ” (2 Sm. 19:1). What a great change of feelings towards Absalom David must have undergone because after the murder of Amnon, he wanted to kill him, then he did not want to see him, and finally he was grieving for his loss. As time passed, love for the child won. The behavior of the king was met with violent criticism from Joab, who rightly pointed out that the king should not have acted in this way, but should praise and reward soldiers fighting for him (see 2 Sm. 19:6–8). Dariusz Dziadosz also indicates that David's attitude is a manifestation of his weakness and educational failure.²⁰ However, one may wonder whether, despite this, it is not an example of the power of forgiving the wrong done by the son and the victory of parental love over the desire for justice or revenge.

2.5. Adonias

We learn about the life of the next son of David in the context of his attempts to take over the power of his father when he has grown old. It seems that due to the privilege of seniority he could expect that power would be entrusted to him, but he did not want to wait, and therefore formed a conspiracy which eventually was thwarted by the prophet Nathan and Bathsheba, who acted to make Solomon the heir to the throne.

²⁰ D. Dziadosz, *Dawid i jego synowie. Wychowawczy i polityczny dramat na dworze królewskim*, pp. 48–49.

The description of the relationship between David and Adonias is expressed in one sentence: "His father had never rebuked him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?' He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom" (1 Kings 1:6). Again David's attitude might be regarded as the lack of readiness to take any action against the wrongdoing of his son. It was a clear abandonment of the educational role, because, as one of the biblical proverbs says: "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them" (Prov 13:24). David's attitude towards Adonias is very similar to the relationship with Amnon, although in this case, as has been previously noted, his behavior does not bring tragic results thanks to the intervention of other people.

2.6. The son of "sin"

The first son of David from his relationship with Bathsheba, when she was still the wife of Uriah the Hittite is distinctly mentioned in the Bible, though not by name.²¹ The events associated with this boy are shown as punishment, which the king had to suffer for his sin of adultery and murder. During the illness of the child foretold by the prophet Nathan, David fasted wanting in this way to propitiate God and beg for the life of his son. Thus his love for the baby was strongly emphasized. The words he spoke to the servants after his death also testify to the existing bond between them: "I will go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Sm. 12:23). Thus, for David, the bond with the child was not only about the temporal reality, but he also hoped that after death he would be united with him.

2.7. Solomon

The relation between David and Solomon is rudimentarily described. The first mention appears in the context of his birth, where we learn that he was the second child coming from the king's relationship with Bathsheba and, as the biblical author informs us, he was beloved by God (see 2 Sm. 12:24). This is followed by some vague information which is translated differently in various sources. Józef Łach favors the interpretation indicating that Solomon was entrusted into the care of Nathan.²² This would mean that David took

²¹ If he was treated as the first son coming from Bathsheba according to 1 Chronicles, he would be called Shimea (see 1 Chr. 3:5).

²² J. Łach, *Księgi 1–2 Królów. Wstęp – przekład z oryginału – komentarz – ekskursy*, p. 142. Other translations suggest that only a message was sent through Nathan about the

care of the proper upbringing of his future successor. It would also prove the truth of Bathsheba's claim that David promised her son that he would reign (see 1 Kings 1:17). The Prophet was certainly the right person to prepare Solomon well for the responsible function.

Solomon is mentioned again in the context of handing over royal power to him. David decided to make him his successor without his knowledge or presence. The reason for undertaking such a sudden action was the conspiracy of Adonias, which was reported to the King by Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan (see 1 Kings 1:15–27).

The only meeting between Solomon and his father described in the Book of Deuteronomy took place before the death of David and had the character of a farewell speech. The king first summoned his successor to do the right thing according to God's law, which was to ensure his success and fulfill God's promise in his life (see 1 Kings 2:2–4). Then, the dying ruler ordered his successor to repay people with whom he had not managed to settle his bills himself. Solomon's wisdom and prudence in this passage is worth emphasizing. We can, therefore, conclude that David knew his son well, followed his progress, and was convinced that he was able to handle the duties imposed on him.

The relationship between father and son is described in a slightly different way in the Book of Chronicles. We also learn about it in the context of the transfer of power over Israel to Solomon, which in this case is very much related to the issue of the construction of the temple and the preparations made for this purpose by David (see 1 Chr. 22:1–29, 19). The king appreciates and accentuates his son's wisdom, but at the same time Solomon appears "frail" (young and inexperienced) in his eyes (see 1 Chr. 22:5; 29,1); the king does everything he can so that the task left to his son would not exceed his ability. On the other hand, as in the Book of Deuteronomy the father clearly encourages his son to obey God (see 1 Chr. 28:9–10).

Conclusion

David's conduct towards his children did not go beyond what he had experienced in his family home. He loved all his children, but he was not able to treat them equally. He did not fight for any special relations with his offspring, which may be the result of the treatment he had experienced from his siblings. We have seen that he favored his first-born son, Amnon, but it seems that he paid

special attention to Solomon because the Lord loved him (2 Sm. 12:24). The feelings that David had for his children were permanent and it was very difficult to change them. We have seen this in the example of Amnon and Adonias, whose wrong behavior did not diminish paternal love. The stability of feelings, to some extent, also appeared in the relationship between David and Absalom. It took time and intrigue from Joab to convince David to spare his son's life. In turn, when the king changed his attitude and accepted Absalom again, his rebellion did not change his feelings. David's profound affection was also manifested in his "struggle" with God for the baby's life, when he fasted for several days and prayed for salvation for his and Bathsheba's child.

The matter of raising children seems much worse and it appears that David suffered a failure in this respect. His children could not cooperate with each other, they wanted to fulfill their whims, and this included striving to take over the power of their father. There were, however, brighter sides of David's fatherhood, the example being Tamar who received a proper upbringing. In the case of Solomon, we can also assume that the educational process bore the right fruit, which was clearly testified by his prayer at the beginning of his reign, in which he asked God for prudence and the ability to judge human matters (see 1 Kings 3:6–9).

The question remains, however, to what extent David was a model and authority for his children. Analyzing the behavior of Absalom and Adonias, it should be noted that they did not respect either the position of the father or his feelings. However, Tamar considered her father as a person who could do a lot, especially for his children. Solomon, on the other hand, faithfully fulfilled his father's last will and confirmed his respect for him.

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