

יואב בן צרויה: Devoted Hero or Cunning Politician?

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יואב בן צרויה, שר עבא דוד's famous דוד, played an integral, albeit ambiguous, role in the establishment of מלכות דוד. In addition to his brothers, אבישי and עשהאל, יואב was an active, if not the most active, character throughout דוד's reign. However, the character of יואב and his brothers is foggy and puzzling. Although many of us have been taught to classify figures in Tanach into the roles of either "צדיק" or "רשע" to further our understanding of the manifest context (פשט) and latent meaning (דרש) of the text, יואב and his brothers are exceedingly difficult to categorize; a simplification of their character would be trivializing and damaging rather than beneficial. This analysis attempts to discover the complexity of יואב's true character and uncover the dynamics of בני צרויה's relationship with דוד.¹

Possibilities

There are two basic approaches that one can take regarding יואב:

One possibility is to suggest that יואב was immoral and power hungry, nevertheless a great soldier upon whom דוד was dependent. This suggestion is supported chiefly by the fact that יואב killed אבנר, אבשלום, and עמשא. As we will later see, אבנר and עמשא were both שרי עבא who were killed by יואב through means of shrewd trickery and cunning deceit. אבנר was the שר עבא of בית שאול, and עמשא was שר עבא of both אבשלום and דוד. It is logical that יואב, considering his unsteady relationship with דוד, would consider both men threats to his esteemed position, and would do anything to maintain his job — even kill them. Indeed, דוד removed יואב from his post after יואב killed אבשלום, and replaced him with עמשא as שר עבא. Although this theory may not be the only possible incentive for יואב's acts, it is consistent with דוד's reactions to the death of these men, all of whom were his political enemies. In fact, it is evident throughout the story of בני צרויה that not only were they not tolerated, but they were perhaps detested by a very forgiving

king. This is also powerfully indicative that יואב led an immoral and irreligious existence.

However, a deeper look into יואב's actions and character reveal a challenge to this theory. Not only did יואב ostensibly accomplish positive things for בית דוד, as we have seen in the list of בני צרויה's appearances in תנ"ך, but he also made three statements that are inconsistent with he who kills in vain:

1) אבנר led יואב - ש"ב ב:כו in a war against דוד in a war against שואל, בית שואל, led by אבנר.² יואב's brother, עשהאל killed אבנר and surrounded him, at which point אבנר cried his famous declaration, "הלנצה תאכל חרב?" יואב unquestioningly accepted this offer of peace without questioning, and instead of killing אבנר, responded, "חיי האלהים כי לולא דברתי!" (ש"ב ב:כו). יואב swore by God that if אבנר would have expressed his desire to stop fighting earlier, he would have agreed then to stop immediately as well. יואב's use of God's Name and his immediate willingness to forgive אבנר for initiating the fight display a significant degree of spiritual greatness.

2) יואב and אבישי led בניי into battle against עמון. After separating their army into two camps, one led by אבישי and the other by יואב, they devised a strategy that whichever camp became overpowered by עמון would be rescued by the other camp. It is then that יואב delivered a powerful speech to the army: "חזק ונתחזק בעד עמנו ובעד ערי אלוֹקינו והי יעשה הטוב בעיניו" (ש"ב י:יב). Rarely in Tanach do we see such a passionate and moving declaration spoken by a Jewish leader or general before war. Perhaps יואב's character is delineated in this statement through his mentioning that although בניי must put forth physical effort, they are fighting for the Glory of God rather than their own, and their fate lies in God's Hands, regardless of their physical strength.

3) שבע בן בכרי and יואב - ש"ב כ:כא chased after בכרי, who had rebelled against דוד. שבע escaped into מעכה, בית מעכה, and יואב and his men surrounded the city to prevent שבע's escape. A woman called out to יואב from inside the city, "אנכי שלמי אמוני ישראל אתה מבקש להמית עיר ואם בישראל! למה תבלע נחלת היי?" (ש"ב כ:יט). The woman, thinking יואב was about to destroy the city, begged יואב to spare her life because she was a righteous Jewish mother. The woman also pleaded with him not to destroy a city that lies in Israel.³ יואב responded, "חלילה חלילה אם אבליע ואם אשחית" (ש"ב כ:כא). יואב asserted he only wished to kill שבע בן בכרי, who was מורד במלכות and therefore deserved death. His intent was not to kill freely and unnecessarily.

It is clearly problematic to suggest and impossible to prove that יואב was wholly and thoroughly "bad".

We therefore present the second possibility: that יואב was a great person who was tragically unappreciated by דוד.

This theory is of course supported by יואב's three statements listed above, in addition to the fact that יואב was extremely loyal to דוד.⁴ For instance, when יואב fought עמון and led בניי into a sweeping victory, he sent דוד a message at the last moment, saying, "ועתה אסף את יתר העם וחנוה על העיר ולכדה פן, יוסף ה' א-להיך אל, אלכד אני את העיר ונקרא שמי עליה" (ש"ב י"ב:כח) יואב told דוד to fight the final battle against עמון and capture the city himself, so that יואב would not be given credit for the victory. This story expresses the loyalty and faith with which יואב subjugated his prestigious position and the honor it naturally warrants to his king. Similarly, when דוד wanted to count the nation, a terrible sin, יואב did his utmost to discourage דוד, saying, "העם כהם וכחה מאה פעמים...ואדני המלך למה חפץ בדבר הזה?" (ש"ב כ"ד:ג) Although דוד did not heed his advice and it would therefore seem extraneous for the פסוק to recount יואב's plea, perhaps it is stated to infer יואב's desire to abstain from sin and prevent his master and king from sinning.

Of course, it is no surprise that this second possibility concerning יואב's character must be countered by the fact that he murdered three people for no obvious reason, and was, along with אבישי, despised by דוד despite his intense loyalty towards the latter.

Upon examining both theories, it is obvious that neither apply to יואב; he is a much more complicated figure than one that can be called "good" or "bad." In order to successfully discover who יואב was and understand his relationship with דוד, the opinions of חז"ל regarding specific stories concerning יואב must be examined. The four major events in יואב's life that can be analyzed to best uncover his cryptic character are:

- 1) The murder of אבנר (ש"ב ב:ג)
- 2) The murder of אבשלום (ש"ב י"ח:טו)
- 3) The murder of עמשא (ש"ב כ"י)
- 4) יואב's death at the hands of שלמה (מ"א ב:לד)

Each of these stories will be analyzed in depth with the help of the ראשונים, גמרא, and contemporary scholars in attempt to discover whether or not יואב sinned and why דוד hated him. Finally, I will suggest a theory regarding יואב and his relationship with דוד.

אבנר

The ראשונים all maintain that אבנר deserved to die, although there is much debate concerning why he deserved death, and whether it was for this reason that יואב killed him. Also, the question of whether יואב sinned bothers the ראשונים a great deal. The commentaries of רד"ק, רש"י, and רלב"ג are particularly intriguing.

רד"ק attempts to prove that אבנר deserved to die by quoting the fa-

mous exchange between רב יהודה and רב יוחנן.⁵ רב יהודה asks why יואב killed עשהאל for his brother גואל הדם to be אבנר replies that רב יוחנן. אבנר עשהאל then inquires whether אבנר may have been justified in killing עשהאל because it was an act of defense in wartime. The response to רב יהודה is that אבנר could have defended himself by stabbing עשהאל in one of his limbs, thereby injuring rather than killing him. רב יהודה responds that maybe אבנר had no control over where he attacked עשהאל. רב יוחנן rebuts with a rhetorical question: Could אבנר have managed to injure עשהאל in the חמט, a rib that if punctured one surely dies, but not hit עשהאל in one of his limbs, none of which are fatal?!

The implications of this גמרא are twofold: First, יואב killed אבנר to avenge עשהאל's blood, as opposed to other reasons for which אבנר deserved to die. Second, יואב's reason for killing אבנר is completely justifiable, because עשהאל died an unnecessary death. רב רד"ק then quotes רב יהודה quoting רב, also in סנהדרין מ"ט, who states that all of the curses with which דוד condemned יואב after he killed אבנר, fulfilled themselves in דוד's descendents. רב רד"ק comments that this occurred because דוד did not utilize the characteristic of דין (justice) to curse יואב, and was therefore incorrect to have cursed him. In fact, דוד knew that אבנר deserved to die and was going to command יואב to kill אבנר anyway.

רב רד"ק does not explain whether דוד felt that אבנר deserved to die for killing עשהאל or for another reason, the most obvious being that he was מורד במלכות. Regardless, it is very perplexing why he was angry at יואב if he wanted אבנר killed. דוד's belief that אבנר deserved to die and fury for יואב's act implies that he felt that יואב's motivation to kill אבנר was impure. This could be either the fact that יואב killed אבנר for personal reasons in avenging his brother's blood, or perhaps דוד suspected that יואב felt threatened by a man whose peace treaty had been accepted by דוד and whom דוד might appoint as his new chief general.

In any case, רב רד"ק elucidates clearly that אבנר deserved to die and יואב's act was justified. He does not, however, explain דוד's anger towards יואב satisfactorily.

רב רש"י suggests that יואב killed אבנר to avenge עשהאל's death but אבנר was justified in killing him and is not deserving of death for this act. דוד only wanted אבנר killed if he would be killed for the right reason; consequently, דוד was angry at יואב. רב רש"י quotes a גמרא also from סנהדרין מ"ט that brings another reason why אבנר deserved to die, but this reason, unlike the first, does not justify יואב's act. When יואב sent for אבנר, the latter was taken from the "בור הסירה" (ש"ב ב:כו) which ר' אבא בר כהנא interprets as being the two incidents in אבנר's service to שאול which made אבנר deserve death. These events were the two confrontations between דוד and שאול in פרקים כ"ד

and כ"ו, when דוד had an opportunity to kill שאול. In both instances, אבנר did not sufficiently protect and prevent שאול from being vulnerable to דוד. The אבנר cites this as an act of being מורד במלכות that deemed אבנר deserving of death.

However, אבנר killed אבנר because the latter killed עשהאל, as the פסוק recounts, "וימת בדם עשהאל אחיו" (ש"ב ג:כז). רש"י maintains that יואב could not avenge his brother's blood because he was killed in war, during which the halacha does not apply. Therefore, דוד was angry at יואב because אבנר should not have been killed for killing עשהאל but rather for being מורד במלכות.

רלב"ג also comments on יואב's and דוד's relationship, with the assertions that דוד cursed יואב to be "זב מערע ומחזיק בפלך ונפל בחרב וחסר לחם" (ש"ב ג:כח) because the bearers of these ailments are considered halachically dead. רלב"ג implies that דוד could not kill יואב, and the best that he could do is curse him with afflictions that made him "almost dead." Although it is not clear why דוד could not kill יואב according to רלב"ג, it can only be for one of two reasons: a) דוד needed יואב; or b) דוד knew "deep down" that יואב had acted correctly. However, he detested bloodshed too much to admit that אבנר's death was justified. Again, רלב"ג is not clear concerning דוד's feelings towards יואב.

In fact, there is a general conflict among the פרשנים in terms of reconciling יואב killing a man who deserved death and דוד's negative reaction. Most agree that אבנר deserved death, and also that דוד was correct to be angry. Thus, the source of דוד's anger must stem from the nature of the act, rather than the act itself.

Two contemporary scholars, Prof. David Seri and Rabbi E. M. Goitein, author of דמויות בתנ"ך, suggest that דוד actually supported and appreciated יואב, but could not publicly display his alliance with him for political reasons. Specifically, Prof. Seri maintains that although יואב's motivations for killing אבנר were unclear, he undoubtedly had a justifiable reason.⁶ Moreover, had דוד genuinely felt that יואב was wrong to kill אבנר, he would have put יואב to death immediately. Rather, on his deathbed he told שלמה, "ועשית כחכמתך" (מ"א ב:ו), not specifying to kill יואב. Ultimately, however, שלמה killed יואב for political reasons, to help establish a peaceful and just reputation for his kingdom.

Regarding אבנר's death and יואב's guilt, Rabbi Goitein adds that not only did אבנר deserve death because he failed to defend שאול from דוד and killed עשהאל unnecessarily, but also because he sinned in two other areas: a) אבנר suggested that twelve of his men and twelve of יואב's men fight for pure entertainment: "יקומו נא הנערים וישחקו לפנינו" (ש"ב ב:ד) and it led to a bloody war, and b) he put his name before דוד's when he proposed a peace treaty to דוד: "וישלח אבנר מלאכים אל דוד תחתיו" (ש"ב ג:יב).⁷ For these reasons, יואב

felt that אבנר displayed too much loyalty towards בית שאול. Furthermore, as אבנר's cousin, it is highly unlikely that אבנר would have abandoned his royal lineage. Furthermore, another proof that אבנר was not truly seeking peace with דוד is that after אבנר dined with דוד and officially "signed the contract," he returned peacefully to his house (ש"ב ג:כא). If אבנר had truly considered himself a member of בית דוד rather than one of בית שאול, he would not have returned home (certainly not peacefully!) (ש"ב ג:כא) for fear of his life. Rabbi Goitein concludes that although דוד privately sanctioned אבנר's death, he publicly distanced himself from יואב and his aggressive killings to maintain his image of a benevolent and kind leader. However, Rabbi Goitein suggests, יואב committed one fatal error which culminated in his being killed without a trial. This mistake shall be explained when we investigate the story of יואב and his death at the hands of יואב.

In conclusion, if יואב was indeed justified in killing אבנר, דוד's consequent fury towards him is extremely perplexing. Although it can be suggested that יואב was completely wrong and דוד was right to be angry at him, most פרשנים instead go out of their way to justify יואב. Clearly, יואב was a more complex figure than we originally proposed. To further investigate this matter and the general nature of יואב's character, we turn to the second major event in יואב's life, the story of אבשלום.

אבשלום

אבשלום, after being returned from exile by his father דוד for killing his half-brother אמנון, won the hearts of the Jewish people and led a large group of Jews into rebellion against דוד. דוד put אבישי in charge of the army, and sent them to pursue אבשלום and his men after giving them the warning, "לעט לי לער לאבשלום" (ש"ב יח:ה), which is generally understood as a command to spare אבשלום's life. Nevertheless, יואב unhesitatingly killed אבשלום immediately upon reaching him in the forest, despite his awareness that דוד would be less than thrilled. יואב's knowledge of this is evident in his speech to אחימעץ בן צדוק, who asked יואב if he could run to דוד and tell him that the war was over: "ויאמר לו יואב לא איש בשרה אתה...כי על בן המלך מת" (ש"ב יח:כ). When דוד heard from another messenger that although the rebellion had been put down, אבשלום was dead, he lamented bitterly: "בני אבשלום בני בני" יואב heard that דוד was in mourning rather than rejoicing that he was still king and the Jewish kingdom was saved and he confronted David with a powerful admonition: "הבשת היום את כל עבדיך...לאהבה את שניאך ולשנא את אהביך...כי לא אבשלום חי וכולנו היום מתים" (ש"ב יט:ה). Although דוד did not respond (perhaps because he recognized the truth of יואב's words and was stunned and embarrassed) he

clearly never forgave יואב for killing his son, to the point where after the rebellion he replaced יואב with עמשא, עמשא's former צבא, as his own. Replacing an extremely loyal and successful general with a man who wanted דוד's life may seem illogical; simultaneously the act elucidates just how angry דוד was at יואב. Furthermore, when דוד instructed שלמה to kill יואב, one of his reasons seems to have been because יואב had killed אבשלום את: "וגם אתה ידעת את: אבשלום יואב".⁸ It is difficult to understand whether יואב was justified for killing אבשלום, and again, why דוד was so angry. The פרשנים, particularly רלב"ג, מלבי"ם, and Rabbi Goitein, have fascinating and helpful insights into this story.

מלבי"ם suggests that יואב was aware of the emotional impact that אבשלום's death would have on דוד; nevertheless he willingly killed him to save דוד's kingdom from the destructive hands of the royal prince himself. From the words "ויתקעם בלב אבשלום..ויכו את אבשלום וימתהו" (ש"ב יח:טו-טז) מלבי"ם extrapolates that יואב struck אבשלום first so that it would be he who would ultimately be held responsible for אבשלום's death, although his soldiers were the ones who actually killed אבשלום. This interpretation implies that יואב was willing to sacrifice his reputation and personal relationship with דוד in order to save the kingdom, in contrast to previous textual implications that יואב acted to gratify his uncontrollable anger, which directly conflicted with the kingdom's welfare.⁹ Although יואב did expect דוד to be deeply saddened at the loss of his son, מלבי"ם adds, he was nevertheless stunned to hear that דוד felt that his son's death was a result of an unjust act. In fact, דוד was enraged not only because he felt that אבשלום did not deserve to die, but because he maintained that אבשלום was actually a זדיק! דוד claimed that his son wanted to rule under him rather than kill him, and he took full responsibility for אבשלום's death because he considered the tragedy his own punishment for taking בת-שבע and killing her husband אוריה אני: "מי יתן מותי אני: אוריה". תחת"ך" (ש"ב יט:א).

Furthermore, דוד's eulogy (ibid.) "בני אבשלום בני בני אבשלום.." highlights דוד's despair that his son, who simply wanted to rule as a son under his father's rule, had been mistaken for a traitor and had been ruthlessly killed. When יואב heard that דוד was mourning his son's death and considered it an unnecessary act of bloodshed, he was shocked, angry, and hurt that דוד was so blind and naive. In his most aggressive and passionate confrontation with דוד, יואב shed his subservient persona towards him by coming uninvited, and expressing how wrong דוד was to have turned the nation's victory into a tragic day of mourning. מלבי"ם divides יואב's speech to דוד into four separate admonitions:

1) אבשלום *did* want to kill דוד and the rest of the royal family. He wanted to be king *right then* (as proof he took דוד's concubines, a defiant act of de-

claring himself king) and if he had succeeded, the rest of בית דוד would be dead, so mourning was highly inappropriate. אבשלום's death was justified not only because he rebelled, but also because he was a רודף, and דוד, as the נרדף, had a halachic right to kill him. This is expressed in יואב's statement, "הבשת" (ש"ב יט:ז):

2) Even if it is assumed that אבשלום did not want to kill דוד, he employed the help and support of דוד's enemies to rebel against the kingdom, and that alone rendered him deserving of death. מלבי"ם interprets the phrase "לאהבה את שנאיך ולשנא את אוהביך" (ש"ב יט:ז) as referring not to דוד but to אבשלום, who considered דוד's friends his enemies, and דוד's enemies, his friends.

3) Even if דוד let his love for אבשלום get the better of him and chose to forgive his son for rebelling, he should have been killed only for the good of the nation and not for the good of דוד himself. As king, דוד was more responsible to his subjects than he was to himself: "כי הגדת היום כי אין לך שרים" (ש"ב יט:ז). ועבדים כי ידעת כי לא אבשלום חיי" (ש"ב יט:ז).

4) אבשלום's final argument was a personal defense for his killing אבשלום. אבשלום maintained that if אבשלום would not have been killed, the war would have continued until אבשלום and his army won and inevitably killed all of בית דוד. This is highlighted in the statement, "כי לא אבשלום חי וכולנו היום מתים כי" (ש"ב יט:ז). אז ישר בעיניך". It can be inferred that דוד did not answer יואב because the latter was clearly correct. אבשלום was מורד במלכות and he and his army threatened the welfare of the entire nation. Exceptions, יואב felt, cannot be made whether or not a rebel was heir to the throne.

Moreover, both רלב"ג and Rabbi Goitein support יואב's killing of אבשלום. In fact, they cite the instance of יואב blowing the shofar after he killed אבשלום as proof that he sought only justice and not unnecessary bloodshed, contrary to דוד's perception of him. Immediately after אבשלום died, the פסוק explains, "ויתקע יואב בשופר וישב העם מרדף אחרי ישראל כי חשך יואב את העם" (ש"ב יח:טז). יואב ordered his men to stop chasing אבשלום's army, because all that was needed to stop the rebellion was the death of their charismatic leader. The juxtaposition of אבשלום's death and יואב's blowing the shofar amplifies his focus on executing only the acts that were absolutely necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of peace while sparing as many lives as possible. Again, it is ironic and tragic that דוד hated יואב because he felt that יואב was the cause of sin and death amongst the nation.

Finally, יואב's innocence concerning אבשלום can also be proven from discussion in the גמרא,¹⁰ or rather, the lack of discussion in the גמרא. After אבנר asks why יואב kills אבנר and it is proven that אבנר deserved to die, instead of asking about אבשלום (whose story comes chronologically after אבנר), he addresses the death of עמשא, שר צבא אבשלום, עמשא, whose death at the hands of יואב is of a stranger and less justifiable nature. הרב יהודה's silence regarding

אבשלום implies the explicit cause of his death: אבשלום was a מורד במלכות who threatened both דוד and the nation that he was destined to protect.

עמשא

Far more than אבנר and אבשלום, it is extremely difficult to understand יואב's motivations for killing עמשא. In fact, throughout the whole אבשלום-story, no one succeeded in acting in his own self-interest despite their intentions to do so. Nobody acted in his self-interest, that is, except for עמשא himself, who was strangely passive. The story is as follows: אבשלום was killed and יואב rebuked דוד for mourning him. דוד in turn replaced יואב with עמשא as his new general and helped execute the entire rebellion that led to a civil war and אבשלום's death, but עמשא did not even officially beg דוד's pardon or seek peace with him!¹¹ However, it is clear that דוד's replacing the most excellent and loyal שר צבא in the history of the Jews and hiring instead a potential "shady character" has no relevance to עמשא's credentials; rather, the פרשנים, specifically רלב"ג and מלבי"ם, comment that it was a retaliation against יואב, unforgiven by דוד for the murder of אבשלום. After שבע בן בכרי and יהודה revolted against דוד, the latter instructed עמשא to pursue and apprehend יהודה and return in three days. עמשא obeyed, but returned late. When יואב met עמשא while chasing שבע, he greeted עמשא and took hold of his beard as if to kiss him. As עמשא lost his guard, יואב stabbed him to death with his sword and removed עמשא's bowels from his body. The two most prevalent issues in this troubling tale are whether עמשא deserved to die, and whether יואב killed עמשא for this very reason. Again, it is far more difficult to justify the death of עמשא than the deaths of אבנר and אבשלום, partially because, as opposed to the latter two, עמשא simply didn't do anything. There is nothing in the text that makes it apparent that עמשא deserved death, and what is more, the manner in which יואב killed עמשא is shocking and horrific. In this story, the פרשנים do not jump to יואב's defense. Although most agree that עמשא deserved death because he was מורד במלכות by returning to דוד later than he commanded, the question remains regarding יואב's motivations. Most troubling, however, is the פרשנים's silence regarding יואב's guilt. אברבנאל and רד"ק, one of the few who address this issue, both maintain that יואב killed עמשא because he feared losing his position to the latter. Conversely, the גמרא,¹² in its tendency to defend יואב, states that יואב killed עמשא only because he was מורד במלכות by returning late to דוד. Supposing that this is true and יואב was right to kill him, the cruel manner in which עמשא died must be addressed. סנהדרין מ"ט in תוספות imply that יואב's killing עמשא cannot be justified because he gave him no warning.

The issues of יואב's incentives and questionable innocence is addressed the least regarding עמשא, and certainly not answered satisfactorily. Moreover, of all the other stories in which יואב appears, it is here that he is defended the least, which perhaps sheds light on why יואב was condemned and killed by דוד. Although we know from the פרשנים that it is possible to prove that אבנר, אבשלום, and עמשא deserved to die, יואב killed them through unnecessary means of trickery, and for this reason he deserved punishment. We now arrive at our last stop in our journey through the primary events in יואב's life: his death.

יואב's Death

The story, although not surprising, is a tragic and troubling tale. On his deathbed, דוד told שלמה to remember what יואב did to him, אבנר and עשאל, and to act according to his own wisdom. יואב heard that he was a wanted man, and, seeing that it had worked for אדוניו,¹³ ran to the אהל משכן and grabbed onto the קרנות המזבח. שלמה sent יהוידע, commanding him to leave the מזבח and give up his life, but יואב refused. בניהו relayed יואב's refusal to שלמה, and the latter gave בניהו permission to kill יואב at the altar. יואב was thereupon killed and buried in the desert. The two primary issues that present themselves in this story are: a) whether or not יואב deserved to die, and why, and b) whether דוד told שלמה to kill יואב for this reason. Furthermore, the actual content of the story must be examined; namely, יואב's reasoning in running to the מזבח for salvation, the significance in the verbal exchange between בניהו and יואב, and שלמה's speech in which he permitted בניהו to kill יואב at the מזבח. In order to shed light on these issues, it is necessary to analyze a broad range of commentaries. After doing so, we will examine the גמרא regarding the overall character of יואב, and ultimately develop an educated hypothesis as to whether יואב was a devoted hero or a cunning politician.

The Rishonim agree that יואב died because he killed בערמה, with trickery. Their opinions diverge, however, regarding the defense of יואב's character. רלב"ג suggests that the reason why יואב deserved to die and the reason why דוד commanded שלמה to kill him are one and the same: יואב had killed with cunning and trickery. This theory, while acknowledging יואב's sin, does imply that, had אבנר, אבשלום, and עמשא been killed in honest manners, יואב's actions would be justified because these men deserved to die. Although the commentaries do not generally come to the defense of יואב's character at large, they leave room for speculation: If יואב had not killed בערמה, would he have then been considered a spiritual role model and overall hero in Jewish history?

Among others, אברבנאל and רד"ק maintain that although דוד was right to condemn יואב because he killed בערמה, יואב possessed a superior character, even spiritually. אברבנאל proposes that from the words, "ויקבר בביתו במדבר" (מ"א ב:לד), it can be derived that יואב opened a house for the poor and was buried there so that these people could pray that his soul be admitted to the next world. Moreover, רד"ק elaborates by quoting three מאמרי חז"ל on the words, "ויקבר בביתו במדבר", that illuminate יואב's excellent character:

1) "מה מדבר? זה מופקר לכל, אף ביתו של יואב מופקר לכל, כי נדיב היה מאד" (סנהדרין מ"ט)

2) "מה מדבר? זה מנוקה מגול, אף ביתו של יואב מנוקה מגול" (סנהדרין מ"ט)

3) "וכי מדבר היה? אלא כיון שנהרג, נעשו ישראל כמדבר" (ירושלמי, מס' ברכות, פרק ב', הלכה ו')

These statements display יואב's powerful and pervasive role as a political and spiritual leader of the Jews. Overall, it can be safely assumed after examining the commentaries of the Rishonim that although יואב deserved to die because he committed a terrible sin, killing בערמה, he lived an outstanding spiritual existence besides being the physical power behind דוד's throne.

Contemporary scholars also contribute significantly to this chapter in יואב's life. Prof. Seri suggests that because דוד did not specify to שלמה to kill יואב, as he was not necessarily deserving of death. Rather, יואב killed שלמה as a political maneuver to disconnect בית דוד from the deaths of אנור, אנשלום, and עמשא, in an effort to create a reputation of being a just, "people-friendly" king. Seri continues to explain why יואב ran to the מזבח. In שמות כא:יד, God commanded: "וכי יז אש על רעהו להרגו בערמה מעם מזבחי תקחו למות". If a murderer runs to the altar to be saved, he should be taken away from it and killed. If יואב ran to the מזבח hoping to be saved, it can be inferred that he did not consider himself a murderer, but recognized that his life was sought for political reasons. Seri suggests that not only was יואב not deserving of death for murder, but he was also not a מורד במלכות for following אדוניוהו, for four reasons:

1) אדוניוהו was the next in line to be the king, because his older brothers אנשלום and אמנון were dead, and the next in line, כלבא,¹⁴ did not wish to be king. (דעת מקרא, מ"א א:ו). This is one reason why יואב believed that אדוניוהו was rightfully deserving of the kingship.

2) אדוניוהו said that he was going to be king and דוד did not protest (מ"א א:ה-ו), which insinuates consent (שתיקה כהודאה).

3) יואב did not necessarily know that שלמה had been appointed king, due to its clandestine nature.

4) אדוניוהו himself was never punished for rebelling against דוד; he was punished only for taking the king's concubine, אבישג השונמית.

Thus, although he does not go so far as to suggest that יואב committed no sin, Seri concludes that, had יואב been given a fair trial, he would have been found completely undeserving of death.

In contrast, Rabbi Goitein assumes that יואב did deserve to die, and suggests two possibilities why:

1) The answer given in the פשט is: פשט: "והשמועה באה עד יואב כי יואב נטע אחרי: פשט מורד deserved to die because he was מורד by following אדוניהו and killing אבשלום, whose life דוד commanded him to spare.

2) יואב died because he killed using trickery. As opposed to Prof. Seri, Rabbi Goitein quotes the נצי"ב in interpreting שמות כא:יד to be referring specifically to one who kills בערמה,¹⁵ as it says, "וכי יז אש..להרגו בערמה".¹⁶ The נצי"ב proposes that יואב ran to the מזבח because he thought that שלמה wanted to kill him for political reasons, including the fact that יואב's loyalty to שלמה was cast into heavy doubt due to his having supported אדוניהו. Knowing the halacha that one who kills with trickery or cunning will not be saved from the altar,¹⁷ it must be inferred that יואב did not put himself in that category; rather, he considered himself a victim of political strategy and assumed that escaping to the מזבח would save his life.

In truth, however, שלמה wanted to kill יואב to punish him for his criminal rather than political acts. Rabbi Goitein quotes the נצי"ב who maintains that יואב was killed solely because he murdered אבנר and עמשא cunningly and without warning. Regardless of these two possibilities for the cause of יואב's death, one political and one criminal, Rabbi Goitein maintains that יואב's character is of outstanding caliber. He quotes the חז"ל, who are quoted by רד"ק and come to יואב's defense, and adds two textual proofs concerning his superior nature:

1) In מ"א יא:כא: ה'דד rebelled against שלמה after he saw that דוד as well as יואב were dead: "כי שכב דוד עם אבותיו וכי מת יואב שר עבא".

2) In י'אדם שכל is described as an "אדם שכל" יואב, מכות פרק ב' הלכה ז', תלמוד ירושלמי "ישראל צריכים לוי", someone who was needed by everyone in the nation.

These statements are clearly powerful implications of יואב's personal greatness and public influence. They are used by Rabbi Goitein to highlight the fact that יואב was basically good, despite his killing through trickery and deceit; a sin that determined his untimely death.

There are two crucial statements in the גמרא that have not yet been examined; one concerns יואב's death, and one, his overall character and role within דוד's kingdom. Although their implications contradict, it is unnecessary to reconcile them because the statements are made by different people. The first is a statement made by רב יהודה in the name of רב, who extrapolates

יוהשיב ה' על דמו ועל ראשו אשר פגע בשני אנשים, מ"א ב:לב from שלמה's statement in that יואב died because, unlike אבנר and עמשא, he did not seek out every fact and halacha in the Torah, and he obeyed a sinful command that was received through a letter while they disobeyed a sinful command that was verbally related to them. According to the גמרא, this refers to שאול's instructions to kill the priests of Nov because they hid דוד from שאול.

Responding to this גמרא, Rabbi Goitein proposes three proofs regarding why it was easier for אבנר and עמשא to refuse שאול's command to kill the נוב כהני than for יואב to refuse דוד's command to kill אוריה:

1) Everyone, including שאול's servants, knew that כהני נוב were innocent. Conversely, יואב did not know whether or not אוריה deserved to die. It is logical to assume that אוריה did deserve death when taking into account that the message to kill him was from דוד, the last person who would ever consider killing someone if he was even slightly unsure of his being guilty.

2) אבנר and עמשא knew that שאול was acting irrationally and even madly concerning דוד; therefore they did not feel compelled to obey him.

3) אבנר and עמשא knew that שאול wanted to kill דוד because he feared that דוד would overthrow his kingdom, and they recognized that this is an insufficient and blatantly wrong reason to have someone killed.

Even if one does not accept these arguments against the condemning tones of the גמרא, it is crucial to keep in mind that it is contrasted by many other previously explored commentaries on the very same page (סנהדרין מ"ט), that come to יואב's full defense concerning both his acts and his character.

The second statement in סנהדרין מ"ט is made by רב אבא בר כהנא, who derives from the words, "ויהי דוד עושה משפט וצדקה לכל עמו ויואב בן צרויה על העבא" (ש"ב ה: טו-טז), that without דוד יואב would not have been successful in war, and without דוד יואב would not have been able to immerse himself in Torah. Although there are numerous other statements in סנהדרין that we have already discussed concerning יואב's spiritual excellence and outstanding persona, רב אבא בר כהנא's statement is exceedingly significant in that it stresses the powerful function and symbiotic dynamics that are at the core of דוד's and יואב's relationship.

In conclusion, the פרשנים that we have examined prove that the men that יואב killed deserved to die. He erred not in the act of killing them but in the nature of his killing them, namely, his use of ערמה, deceit and trickery. However, יואב's sin and the reason for דוד's anger towards יואב are inconsistent. Because the פרשנים do not reconcile this inconsistency or explain יואב's tumultuous and ambiguous confrontations with דוד, I would like to propose a theory concerning their relationship.

Two Antithetical Typologies

דוד and יואב are dichotomous characters who, through their actions and personalities, elucidated each other's tragic flaws, and to a lesser degree, greatness. דוד's ultimate goal as king was to establish a spiritually and physically perfect reign to pave the way for שלמה to build the Temple, a symbol of maximal connection with God through physical means. דוד interacted with man and God primarily on a spiritual level. He was not an ordinary warrior; his greatest fear was bloodshed. However, a physically perfect kingdom had to be established and all enemies had to be eliminated in order to maximize the kingdom's spiritual potential. דוד, therefore, needed someone who could take care of the physical aspect of leadership. This is why יואב was not only an integral member in the group of people who established בית דוד, but a necessary one as well. יואב and דוד each recognized that the other was needed to establish the kingdom, but דוד did not believe that יואב acted in the interest of the nation's welfare. Rather, דוד regarded יואב as a hasty and bloodthirsty warrior while יואב felt that he acted only in the interest of the king and his nation. The result of this friction was a strong mutual distrust and an urge to survive and lead independently of the other, while pretending that the other's contribution was not necessary to establish a perfect kingdom.

There is one inconsistency in the otherwise identical dynamics with which the two related to each other: יואב was in conflict regarding the way he felt about דוד; דוד was clearly not in conflict regarding the way he felt about יואב and his brothers. יואב had a problem: On the one hand, he was a subject and employee of the king, and felt strong loyalty to דוד and his nation. Furthermore, he possessed a deep desire to have the king's approval. On the other hand, he thought that דוד's leadership tactics were harmful to the nation and could barely resist the urge to take the law into his own hands and make all of the major political decisions in דוד's stead. Also, despite his loyalty to דוד and desire for approval, he was regarded with suspicion and contempt instead of gratitude and respect. יואב never resolved this conflict. Ultimately, however, יואב found himself incompatible with דוד and rebelled with אדוניו in the hopes of establishing a more "normal" political system in which he would receive appreciation.

Moreover, דוד's and יואב's major sins lie in contrast to one another and, despite their effort to correct each other's, they not only failed, but plummeted more deeply into the depths of their personal weaknesses. דוד's greatest sin, an event that shadowed over him all of his life, is taking בת-שבט and killing her husband, אוריה. דוד saw בת-שבט bathing, sent for her, and slept with her. He saw her because he was wandering the palace roof at

night, rather than going out to war with the rest of the army, as the king was required to do. דוד's passivity directly led to his greatest sin, for which he and his children were severely punished. In fact, דוד's unwillingness to act regarding what he feared was unnecessary bloodshed, came into conflict with יאב's tendency to act upon his every passionate whim.¹⁸ Both דוד and יאב reprimanded each other for their extreme behavior, but neither of them succeeded in finding a functional medium to integrate a healthy balance of action and passivity, of physicality and spirituality. Nevertheless, דוד and יאב shared the ultimate goal of establishing a kingdom most conducive to serving God.

Finally, there is one other subtle, yet truly striking point that is worthy of notice here. Consistently, throughout the ספר דוד, דוד used the four-letter Name of ה', while יאב in general referred to Him as א-להים.

In order to succinctly enumerate דוד and יאב's similarities, parallels and differences, a chart is very helpful:

דוד	יאב
Passivity led to his downfall	Action led to his downfall
Forgave his enemies	Did not forgive his enemies
Ruled with mercy	Ruled with justice
Considered יאב destructive for the nation's survival — but was dependent on him	Considered דוד destructive for the nation's survival — but was dependent on him
Blinded by love	Blinded by anger
Relied on spiritual strength	Relied on physical strength
Considered himself maintainer of the kingdom	Considered himself maintainer of the kingdom
Tried to survive independently of יאב	Tried to survive independently of דוד
Relates to "ה'"	Relates to "א-להים"

To better understand how יאב and דוד each envisioned a perfect kingdom and ideal servitude to God, it is crucial to examine the different Godly aspects that they each related to:

א-להים vs ה

There are two popular approaches regarding the antithetical nature of the Names ה and א-להים: One is that ה"י denotes the Divine attribute of mercy while א-להים denotes the Divine attribute of justice. The second is that ה"י is mentioned regarding the interpersonally relating God of the Jews, and א-להים is mentioned regarding an omnipotent Creator of nature. To best grasp this dialectic, one must turn to the two cases in the Torah in which the relationship between ה"י and א-להים most blatantly manifest themselves: the creation of the world and God's presentation of His מידות הדין and מידות הרחמים. The Torah begins with, "בראשית ברא א-להים את השמים ואת הארץ" (בראשית א:א); God, the Mighty Source, created nature. Throughout the entire account of creation, God is quite reasonably referred to as א-להים. In fact, the first time we see the use of ה"י is still in conjunction with א-להים: "וייצר ה' א-להים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים": א-להים (בראשית ב:ז).¹⁹ As soon as God created and breathed His own breath into man, the latent Name of Hashem, the Connecting Relater, presents itself. However, ה"י is still juxtaposed with א-להים, the Creator. Furthermore, the first time that we see ה"י exclusively is in בראשית ד:א, when אדם and חוה had a child, and חוה named him קין because, "קניתי איש את ה'". רש"י comments that "את ה'" means "עם ה'"; God created and participated in the union between man and woman, and through having children they connected and participated in the act of creation with the ultimate Creator. In other words, ה"י is first used when man discovered his connection and likeness to God through his ability to create.

The second case in which the natures of ה"י and א-להים play a prominent role is the מידות הדין stated in the עשרת הדיברות (שמות כ) and the מידות הרחמים, when God "showed" Himself to Moshe (שמות לד).²⁰ Predictably, א-להים is used in conjunction with מידות הדין (אני ה' אלוך) (שמות כב: is one example) and ה"י is used in conjunction with מידות הרחמים (among others, שמות לד: in ה' ה' א-ל רחום וחנון). Moreover, despite the fact that in the עשרת הדיברות, א-להים is mentioned seven times, it is completely absent when God relates the מידות הרחמים to Moshe. Clearly, these Names present a very powerful dichotomy throughout the Torah that represents the two polar ways in which man discovers God. Finally, among a vast number of commentators and scholars that further pursue this topic,²¹ Prof. U. Cassuto²² succinctly enumerates seven primary differences between ה"י and א-להים that can be beautifully integrated into the characters of יואב and דוד:

1) ה"י conveys the Jewish conception of God, in particular His ethical Character, and א-להים conveys an abstract conception of a Supreme Deity that is the Creator and Ruler over nature.

- 2) "ה" is employed when He is depicted as a lucid and clear Being, while "א-להים" is employed when God is depicted as a hazy and obscure Being.
- 3) "ה" implies a majestic and glorious God; "א-להים" implies an ordinary God.
- 4) "ה" appears in direct relationship with a personal character, and "א-להים" appears as an outside Force above and beyond the physical universe.
- 5) "ה" is found in relation to the Jews; "א-להים" is found in relation to mankind.
- 6) "ה" is mentioned concerning the Jews' tradition and "א-להים" is mentioned concerning humanity's tradition.
- 7) "ה" portrays man's simple and intuitive concept of God, while "א-להים" portrays the philosophical concept of thinkers who ponder the world and humanity.

In short, Prof. Cassuto suggests that the Tetragrammaton (the Name of Hashem), refers to God's relationship with man, His personal connection with the Jews, and consequently, the ethical manner with which He relates to His creatures. In contrast, "א-להים" insinuates God's rule over the general mass of mankind and His role as unattainable Creator, who, because of a lack of connection between Him and His creations, has no compassionate ethical code and acts with objective justice alone.²³

This notion is completely consistent with the characters of יואב and דוד. דוד referred to God as "ה" because דוד personifies love, brotherhood, and mercy. יואב refers to God as "א-להים" because יואב personifies justice, while דוד referred to God as "ה" because דוד personifies love, brotherhood, and mercy. The misunderstanding between these two men that results from the tension of this dialectic does not reflect a "right and wrong" situation, in which either יואב or דוד related to God "the correct way." Rather, it reflects a fundamental personality clash. This clash resulted in tragic misunderstanding which led both יואב and דוד to feel that they could not lead the nation together as an integrated duo, but were doomed to exist as opposing forces.²⁴ There are four major instances in which the use of the names of "ה" and "א-להים" best reflect the opposite characters of דוד and יואב, אבישי, and ערוביה בן ערויה:²⁵

1) דוד fled from שאול and came across his sleeping regime in the middle of the night. אבישי felt that it may be דוד's last opportunity to defend himself against שאול and offered to kill the latter, knowing that although דוד is a נרדף and had a right to kill שאול, he would never do so on his own. אבישי urged דוד (ש"א כו:ח), דוד אבישי. Clearly, אבישי used not only the Name of God that he identified with, but also the One that, due to its objective nature, would justify and approve of דוד's killing שאול. דוד, however, assured אבישי that although technically he could kill שאול, he identified not with "א-להים" but with Hashem, the personal,

loving, and ethical God of the Jews. דוד expressed this by mentioning God's Name Hashem five times in his refusal to אבישי: "כי מי שלח ידו במשיח ה' ונקמה...חיליה לי מה' לשלח ידי במשיח ה'" (ש"ב כו: ט-יא) דוד dissociated himself from בני צרויה's formal conception of God, manifest in אבישי's use of the Name "א-להים" emphasizing his own passionate relationship with God, manifest in his manipulation of the Name Hashem. This is further highlighted in the second example:

2) יואב and אבנר led the Jews in war against each other. After killing עשאל, אבנר offered a cease-fire to יואב, and the latter responded in emphatic assent, "חיי הא-להים כי לולא דברת כי אז מהבקר נעלה העם איש מאחרי אחיו" (ש"ב ב:כז). It is fascinating that this is the only place in תנ"ך where someone swore by the life of "א-להים". Perhaps יואב was trying to justify his belief in the greatness of God as "א-להים", the just and mighty Creator, while refuting דוד's notion that God could only be related to as the "demeaning" image of a "Father-Figure," implied by Hashem.

3) יואב sent an "אשה חכמה" to convince דוד to allow אבשלום to return to Yerushalayim²⁶ by using a parable in which she described a parallel story that she claimed had happened to her family. In her speech, the woman referred to God as "א-להים", although דוד responded by referring to God with the Name of Hashem. The woman's words can be equated with יואב's, since she functions in the story only to deliver his message, as the פסוק clearly states: "וישם יואב את הדברים בפיה" (ש"ב יד:ג). Although the woman referred to specific entities in a possessive form regarding "א-להים" (i.e., "עם א-להים..."), (נחלת א-להים...מלאך א-להים... פסוקים יג, טז, יז) it is most significant that concerning דוד, she said "יהי אלוקיך" (פסוקים יא, יז). In fact, it is quite possible that דוד suspected that this woman was sent by יואב for the sole reason that the two utilized the Divine Names identically.

4) Despite דוד's express instructions to spare his son's life, יואב killed אבשלום, thereby ending the war and eliminating a national crisis. Instead of allowing his people to rejoice, דוד turned the day into one of mourning and grief, and of course was furious at יואב. The latter in turn severely rebuked דוד for what יואב deemed are backward values, and urged him to reach out to his people: "כי נהי" (פסוקים יז, יח). יואב pleaded with דוד to stop mourning his son and resume his role as intermediary between God and His people. To stress how strongly he felt, יואב went so far as to swear in the Name of Hashem, expressing his attempt to identify himself with דוד, as if saying, "I am with you, דוד, not against you. Listen to me so I can help you reestablish order and your role as charismatic and optimistic king, which you have temporarily lost. My loyalty to you even brings me to be willing to subjugate my personality to yours, so as not to oppose your will."

Clearly, the Divine Names "א-להים" and "יה" are utilized to elucidate יואב's just nature and דוד's merciful character. יואב related to an abstract omnipotent Creator of humanity, a world in which everyone shares the same code of ethics, while דוד related to a personal Savior, a world in which the Jews have the privilege of having God's love and mercy bestowed upon them. This fundamental difference is portrayed throughout דוד's reign in that he and יואב forever remained opposing forces that could not, or would not, be integrated.

Conclusion

Now that it has been established that יואב's presence was necessary to establish the kingdom because he was an extraordinary military leader, an actor, and a just ruler, and that דוד's presence was equally necessary because he was a spiritual leader and a loving and merciful king, we must now return to the stories in which בני צרויה²⁷ appear and explain them in light of this necessary but ultimately tragic dialectic:

שיב ב-ג

These פרקים recount the war between בית שאול and בית דוד, in which אבנר killed עשהאל and was in turn later killed by יואב. The latter did not kill אבנר immediately for killing עשהאל but instead killed him when the war was over and peace reigned, an act for which דוד criticized him and which is possibly a motivation for condemning יואב to death. However, the text implies that יואב accepted אבנר's gesture of peace because he was not aware that his brother was killed. אבנר probably offered peace to יואב only because he knew that once יואב discovered that אבנר killed his brother עשהאל, יואב would refuse to stop fighting until he defeated בית שאול and killed אבנר. However, the latter's speech to יואב insinuated that the war was יואב's fault:²⁸ "הלוא ידעת כי מרה תהיה באחרונה ועד מתי תאמר לעם לשוב מאחרי אחיהם" (שיב ב:כו). Surprised at אבנר's words, יואב immediately assented that he did not want more bloodshed and agreed to a cease-fire. The irony was further highlighted when יואב himself blew the shofar and called an end to the war. On their return home, יואב gathered his army and counted them to determine the number of war casualties. He then discovered that עשהאל was missing: "ויפקדו...תשעה עשר איש: ועשהאל" (שיב ב:ל). ויבין יואב upon the horrific realization that אבנר killed עשהאל and called for peace before יואב could discover what had happened. יואב probably felt that אבנר was a sly murderer and a selfish liar; meanwhile, אבנר's blood was not avenged and ironically יואב himself was the man who had innocently called off the war.

In פרק ג, when אבנר offered a peace treaty to דוד and it was accepted, יואב of course assumed that it was another plot in which אבנר was pretending

to come peacefully while secretly plotting to manipulate דוד into innocently accepting him just before turning against דוד. Perhaps because אבנר was a מורד במלכות, as well as the fact that יואב had a halachic right to be גואל הדם and avenge his brother's blood, so אבנר killed יואב.

However, דוד typically misunderstood יואב and assumed that אבנר was killed because יואב was angry and lost self-control. This may explain why אבנר's story opens with the story of why אבנר abandoned דוד; we are told that his peace-treaty to דוד was genuine. Furthermore, it is possible that אבנר brought twenty people with him as a symbolic gesture to express his regret for the bloodshed of the twenty men from בית דוד that were killed. This misunderstanding between יואב and דוד laid the groundwork for the rest of their relationship, in which דוד's mistrust of יואב disabled them from working together.

Finally, it is significant that although the Name "א-להים" appears in פרק ה', the Name "ה'" is completely absent. This implies that during this war, דוד (represented by the use of the Name "ה'") was powerless regarding the Jews' fate, and יואב, as physical leader, was in control. The military aspect of establishing the kingdom is, for better or for worse, not in דוד's complete control.

ש"ב י, יב

In עמון, before דוד led the Jews into a stunning victory over עמון, יואב delivered his famous "חזק ונתחזק" proclamation. As the war came to a close and victory was inevitable, דוד arrived to fight the last battle and יואב silently faded out of the picture. This seems to be יואב's ideal function: to fight wars for דוד and give the glory that he earned over דוד and the kingdom. This concept also manifests itself in פרק יב, when יואב fought עמון and sent a message to דוד to come finish the war: "פן אלכד אני את העיר ונקרא" שמי עליה" (ש"ב יב: כח). Again, this reflects what the relationship between יואב and דוד was supposed to be; יואב achieved and utilized material greatness to glorify דוד's spiritually perfect reign.

ש"ב יד

This is the story of אבשלום's rebellion, an event that permanently destroyed any hopes of reconciliation and integration between יואב and דוד. An important factor in אבשלום's rebellion is that it was imminent, and this was probably recognized by both יואב and דוד. The harbinger of the rebellion in which this is most apparent is that, in his father's absence, the manner in which אבשלום spoke to his servants was that in which a king speaks to his subjects: "אל תראו הלוא כי אנכי צוית אתכם" (ש"ב יג: כח).²⁹ Furthermore, the fact

that אבשלום escaped to his gentile grandfather גשור מלך rather than going to a distant city or עיר מקלט in Israel is sufficient evidence alone to assume that אבשלום dissociated himself from דוד. Perhaps the reason why דוד did not want אבשלום to return to him is because he knew that אבשלום would rebel and cause a national state of emergency; even worse, דוד feared that he would be forced to have him killed. Conversely, יואב had no qualms about killing אבשלום, even if he was דוד's son. Consumed with the incentive of getting אבשלום pardoned for being a גואל הדם so that דוד would be compelled to forgive יואב for being גואל דם, יואב plotted to return אבשלום home. When he did, of course, אבשלום slowly began the process of rebellion. Lighting יואב's fields on fire because יואב could not convince דוד to consent to seeing his son, and winning the hearts of the Jews, אבשלום masterfully set the groundwork for his plan. When he finally rebelled, דוד is told, "יהיה לב איש ישראל אחרי אבשלום" (ש"ב טו:ג). From this statement that does not necessarily convey an act of rebellion, דוד knew immediately to evacuate the palace. Due to the imminence of his rebellion, דוד blamed אבשלום's death on יואב for two reasons:

1) יואב knew of אבשלום's plan and still wanted him returned home so that he could be pardoned for killing אבנר, regardless of whether or not אבשלום died.

2) דוד specified to יואב to spare אבשלום's life but יואב killed him nevertheless.

יואב was perfectly aware of דוד's sentiments towards him, and in ט-ט confronted him with his famous "לאהבה את שנאיך" speech that we mentioned previously. יואב said "היום" five times to דוד, emphasizing that דוד had to stop mourning immediately and go out to the people that very day, or he would lose the loyalty of the people.³¹ The urgency in יואב's message is further displayed in that he said "כ"י" seven times, reflecting his fragmented stream of consciousness and frantic tone. Although he knew that his killing אבשלום completely severed any remaining bonds between them, יואב remained devoted to דוד and willing to sacrifice his own good graces with the king to save the nation from crisis and help דוד reestablish his kingdom.

ש"ב כ

After killing עמשא, יואב chased the מורד במלכות, שבט בן בכרי, When he arrived at the city wall inside which שבע was hiding, a woman called out to יואב, asking him to spare her life. He responded, "חלילה חלילה לי אם אבליע ואם" יואב was defending himself from those with the impression that he killed freely and thoughtlessly. Furthermore, the term חלילה is used in conjunction with the Name "יה"י.³² Perhaps יואב was utilizing this phrase to

identify with דוד, to indicate that he truly did not want unnecessary bloodshed.

שיב כ

דוד wanted to count the people, a grievous sin, and יואב tried to dissuade him. In contrast to the last time that יואב spoke to דוד, in which he harshly reprimanded him for mourning אבשלום, here יואב spoke humbly and formally to דוד, expressing their cold and hostile relationship: "ויספח ה' אלקיך אל העם...ועיני דוד rejected יואב's plea and אדני המלך ראות ואדני המלך למה חפץ בדבר הזה" (ש"ב כד:ג) יואב himself was sent to count the nation; loyalty compelled him to obey the king even though he clearly did not want to sin. In this story we see יואב's basically good character typically conflicting with דוד's will.

מ"א: א

דוד rebelled, partially due to the fact that דוד never rebuked him.³³ Again, דוד allowed his love to blind him from reality. Perhaps this tendency influenced יואב to rebel,³⁴ as if stating, "I have had enough of being on דוד's side where my family and I are not appreciated because דוד loves his enemies and hates his friends, and therefore resents my view on how to run the kingdom. Also, maybe joining אדוניהו will force דוד to take opposition seriously and he will learn from whom he must truly defend himself and act upon it."

מ"א ב

יואב discovered that he was a wanted criminal and ran to the מוכח for refuge, after seeing that אדוניהו, after doing so, was saved. This story is parallel with עשהאל's death to highlight the traits that the brothers shared, and is in contrast with, בית דוד to delineate that, as is typical of בית דוד, the true enemy was forgiven and יואב never received gratitude or even forgiveness.

Regarding the parallels with עשהאל, both he and יואב rejected opportunities to escape or leave, and stubbornly refused to yield, dismissing the tragedy of losing their lives because they felt justified in their actions. Both עשהאל and יואב are portrayed as zealous and stubborn, manifest in the similarity of the words in each of the stories. "נטה" is used in conjunction with a refusal to yield (כח: מ"א ב: כח), and both were given objects to grab onto as opportunities to be saved. עמשא אבנר told יואב, "אחז לך אחד מהנערים", and concerning יואב, פסוק recounts, "ויחזק קרנות המזבח" (ש"ב ב:כא), and concerning יואב, פסוק recounts, "ויחזק קרנות המזבח" (מ"א ב:כח). These parallels elucidate the common traits of בני צרויה that are in stark contrast with דוד, and ultimately were the causes of their deaths.³⁵

Furthermore, regarding the contrast between יואב and אדוניהו, they both ran to the מזבח for refuge, "ויחזקו קרנות המזבח" (מ"א א:ז, ב:כח), but אדוניהו was saved while יואב was not. In light of דוד's tendency to forgive their enemies and hate ערויה בני, it seems that both יואב and אדוניהו knew that this would occur. This is apparent in that אדוניהו calmly walked to the altar, "ויקם וינס יואב אל: יואב, in hopeless desperation, fled there: "מ"א א:ז) "מ"א א:ז) while יואב, in hopeless desperation, fled there: "מ"א א:ז) "מ"א א:ז) אהל ה'" (מ"א ב:כח). The predictability of יואב's fate is nonetheless tragic; due to the unwillingness of בית דוד to pardon יואב, particularly regarding אבשלום's death, he was not in control of his fate.

We return to our original question concerning whether יואב was a "צדיק" or a "רשע". I believe that the answer is that יואב was a "צדיק," but not a perfect one. יואב did not fulfill his potential to be a great leader and an ideal second in command to דוד for two reasons: He sinned by killing with trickery, and consequently, in addition to him not sparing אבשלום's life, דוד could not reconcile the differences that he had with יואב. Moreover, although they possessed antithetical personalities, יואב and דוד's strengths were both necessary to establish the Jewish kingdom but neither recognized the other as a crucial component in creating an ideal reign. Had they accepted and integrated each other's strengths, יואב and דוד would probably not have sinned in their leadership and would have succeeded in building the ultimate spiritual kingdom.

¹ The stories in which בני ערויה appear and their implications regarding their character must be analyzed:

משיח ה' שאול wanted to kill פרק כז - שי"א פרק כז = *negative*

אבנר, pleaded with him to run away, he refused, אבנר chased עשהאל - שי"ב פרק ב killed him = *negative*

אבנר suggested that his and יואב's soldiers "sport" and יואב agreed = *negative*

אבנר proposed peace, יואב gladly accepted = *positive*

אבנר tricked יואב into speaking to him in private, then killed יואב = *negative*

עמון executed a stunning victory over יואב ואבישי - שי"ב פרק י = *positive*

דוד received a letter from דוד to kill אוריה and he obeyed = *negative*

דוד fought before he was about to win, sent message to עמון and right before he was about to win, sent message to דוד to come and fight the last battle so he could take the credit for the victory rather than יואב = *positive*

דוד was upset over אבשלום's absence, plotted to get him sent back = *positive*

דוד was furious after he cursed דוד, and גרא wanted to kill שי"ב פרק טז = *negative*

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= *negative*

killed אבשלום after דוד told him not to = *negative*

wanted to kill גרא after he apologized to דוד, דוד was furious

= *negative*

rebuked דוד for mourning אבשלום and turning כניי's victory into a tragedy = *positive*

of דוד = שר עבא killed אבשלום, עמשא = ש"ב פרק כ = *negative*

assured the woman he would not kill her or the other inhabitants of the city = *positive*

he saved דוד's life in war against the פלישתים - ש"ב פרק כ"א - פלישתים's last appearance = *positive*

דוד told דוד that he may not fight with them anymore = *positive*

discouraged דוד from counting thenation, דוד did not listen = *positive*

joined אדניהו's rebellion against דוד = *negative*

was condemned to death by דוד on his deathbed = *negative*

wanted to kill him, ran to מובח for refuge, was killed by בניהו בן יהוידע = *negative*

² This war stemmed from the horrific tragedy that occurred at גבעון. בריכת אבנר suggested to יואב, "יקומו נא הנערים וישחקו לפנינו" (ש"ב ב:יד), יואב and completely unnecessary war erupted.

³ This statement alone suggests יואב's just character; the woman assumed that if she could convince יואב that she is undeserving of death, he would unhesitatingly spare her life and the lives of the other inhabitants of the city.

⁴ Loyal, that is, until he rebelled and joined דוד's son אדניהו in his rebellion. This will be examined further on.

⁵ מסי סנהדרין מ"ט

⁶ עשהאל גואל דם יואב or מורד במלכות אבנר was being דם גואל.

⁷ This is in stark contrast to יואב's fierce loyalty to דוד, especially in war. For instance, in י"ב ש"ב י"ב sent a message to דוד to fight the last battle against אמון, when כניי's victory was clearly imminent. The purpose of this, יואב explained, is so that דוד would get the credit for winning the battle and not יואב: "...פן אלכד אני את העיר ונקרא שמי עליה" (ש"ב יב:כט).

⁸ Mrs. Yael Ziegler

⁹ At first glance at the story of אבנר, it seems that יואב willingly destroyed any possibilities of peace between דוד and אבנר when he killed the latter to avenge the death of his brother עשהאל.

¹⁰ סנהדרין מ"ט

¹¹ As opposed to אבנר in פרק ב

¹² סנהדרין מ"ט

¹³ שלמה's half-brother who rebelled against דוד and whom שלמה saved after he ran to the מובח for salvation, as the halacha prohibits murderers from being killed at God's altar.

- ¹⁴ Whom many say is אביגיל בן דניאל, as he is listed as דוד's second son in א דברי הימים א ג:א.
- ¹⁵ See Rambam's Hilchot Malachim, פרק ג הלכה י.
- ¹⁶ Rav Yaakov Medan also makes this distinction.
- ¹⁷ ראש סנהדרין יואב was חז"ל say that.
- ¹⁸ The story of אבשלום is a primary example.
- ¹⁹ For those who have read Rav Soloveitchik's essay, "The Lonely Man of Faith" it is interesting to note that God creates Adam I with "א-להים" and Adam II with Hashem.
- ²⁰ For detailed elaboration, see Rabbi Menachem Leibtag's article on this subject.
- ²¹ In particular, see Rav Breuer's introduction to פרקי בראשית, as well as his discussion in פרקי מועדות.
- ²² See his compilation of lectures entitled "The Documentary Hypothesis" in which he refutes the theory that the Torah has multiple authors.
- ²³ Mrs. Aliza Segal
- ²⁴ Moreover, the relationship that יואב had with דוד mirrors the relationship that the other בני צרויה had with דוד. This is because all three brothers shared the same basic traits and religious philosophies.
- ²⁵ For a more in-depth study, compare ש"ב with גילה ש"ב, and ש"ב with טו:ט. Also, examine the contexts in which Hashem's Name is mentioned five times in מ"א ב:כב-לג.
- ²⁶ From exile for killing his half-brother Amnon after the latter rapes Tamar, also his half-sibling.
- ²⁷ As listed in footnote 1.
- ²⁸ Although we know that אבנר initiates the war - see ש"ב ב:יד.
- ²⁹ Mrs. Mali Brofsky.
- ³⁰ ibid.
- ³¹ ibid.
- ³² See דוד's declaration in ב:כא ש"ב for an example.
- ³³ מ:א א:ו
- ³⁴ In addition to what we have said before, that a) אדוניוהו was next in line to be king so this was not a true rebellion, b) אדוניוהו proclaimed himself king and דוד did not protest, and c) יואב might not have known that שלמה had already been appointed king.
- ³⁵ Note also that בני צרויה are almost always mentioned in relation to each other - "אבישוי אה יואב", "יואב אה אבישוי", etc. This further highlights the point that they shared common fundamental personality traits.