

**From Holey to Wholly:
Imaginative Construction of the Disability's
Roles through Rizpah's Exemplary Shifting
Role for Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 21:1-14,
19:24-30)**

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Abstract

This writing discusses the significance of Mephibosheth's presence in 2 Samuel 21:1-14 as a counter-testimony to David's policy regarding the execution of the seven descendants of Saul. To achieve this goal, I employ the shifting participant theory of Oliver Glanz and sharpens it with the exemplary shifting role from Rizpah in 2 Samuel 21:1-14 to Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 19:24-30. The result is a transformation of Mephibosheth in three aspects. The first aspect is personal by transforming despair into hope in God. The second aspect is social, primarily Mephibosheth's breakthrough with his disability in influencing David's policies under truth and justice. The third aspect is the relationship aspect. Without physical perfection, a sense of security and completeness becomes an essential modality in establishing a relationship in an imperfect world. The result is an imaginative construction of the transformative role of a disability in a future policy of the community.

Keywords: Exemplary shifting role, transformative role, imaginative construction, disability, future policy.

Introduction

Mephibosheth's name for two different people—Mephibosheth son of Jonathan and Mephibosheth son of Saul—raises questions about its significance. It becomes intent after considering Cephas T. A. Tushima's account of the appearance of a character from Saul's lineage, which most of the time casts a dark shadow on David's career and character.¹ There are indications of its contribution to the overall story in 2 Samuel 21:1-14. In general, the contributions preserved in the text relate to the judicial decisions taken by David. Specifically, I will examine the contribution of Mephibosheth bin Jonathan's presence in the text, which is parallel to Rizpah's critical silence, as a counter-testimony that provides correction and evaluation to the core testimony about David's policy in the light of the Torah.

Core testimony and counter-testimony are reflections of Walter Brueggemann's understanding of the polyphonic character of a text, especially a text that has not just one voice but many voices. This understanding is crucial in this pluralist interpretation era because of the awareness of the secondary listeners' existence besides the primary listeners. This second community comes with a solid and transformative alternative interpretation because it continuously refers to what is available in the text itself.² The consequence is the end of the hegemony of specific interpretive models and the beginning of openness to a process of interaction. It never really ends because the results of compromise, accommodation, or

¹ Cephas T. A. Tushima, *The Fate of Saul's Progeny in the Reign of David* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012), 224-225.

² Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 87-89.

recognition, with all their phenomena and differences, are temporal and invite a further examination.³

Jeremy Schipper's writing showed the application of the polyphonic character concept from a text.⁴ He points out two significant interpretations regarding Mephibosheth's behavior. One group views Mephibosheth's argument to David (see 2 Sm. 19:26) as a form of sincerity. In contrast, the other group views it as a lie. Interestingly, both groups based their interpretations on the textual evidence they found in the exact text.⁵ In his other writings, Schipper points out the presence of another "voice" that shows David's weakness and the need for a better successor than him, by juxtaposing Mephibosheth's disability with some notes about David's weakening (2 Sm. 16:2, 14; 17:2, 29; 21:15; 1 Kgs 1:1-4).⁶ Although Schipper's analysis is quite convincing, I believe that another "voice" from the "other voices" proposed by Schipper is needed because his analysis only assumes that Mephibosheth's disability was stagnant and not transformative. Therefore, I argue that the alignment between Mephibosheth's and Rizpah's characters will explore the transformative potency on a broader spectrum, far beyond the problems they experienced.

The three years of famine faced by the Israelites framed the narrative of Rizpah's heroic actions. J. Cheryl Exum summarizes the opinions of interpreters into two broad groups.⁷ The first group believes that God stopped hunger and answered prayers for the land of Israel after David handed over seven of Saul's descendants as propitiation sacrifices for the blood debt

³ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 710-720.

⁴ Jeremy Schipper, "Why Do You Still Speak of Your Affairs?': Polyphony in Mephibosheth's Exchanges with David in 2 Samuel," *Vetus Testamentum* 54, no. 3 (2004): 344-351.

⁵ Schipper, "Why": 344-346.

⁶ Jeremy Schipper, "Reconsidering the Imagery of Disability in 2 Samuel 5:8b," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2005): 422-434.

⁷ J. Cheryl Exum, "Rizpah," *Word and World* XVII, no. 3 (1997): 267.

of King Saul.⁸ The second group, with their counter-testimonies, asserts that the divine appeasement happened after David commanded the proper burial of the bones of Saul, Jonathan, and seven of Saul's descendants.⁹ Simeon Chavel argued that initially, there were two independent compositions of stories: the two stories of the Gibeonites' revenge and the proper burial of Saul and his descendants, where the later editor combined those two stories. Based on this assumption, two mistakes or sins, not one, caused the famine: the violation of oaths against the Gibeonites and the improper treatment of Saul's descendants.¹⁰ Chavel's opinion confirms the presence of other "voices" in the text that later editors construct the text as it is in its present form. For example, the reasoning behind the canonical placement of 2 Samuel 21:1-14 within the unitary framework of 2 Samuel 21-24, although chronologically, the text occurs before 2 Samuel 19:24-30.

Lennard J. Davis also presents the other "voice" from the standard concept of disability by conveying the basic assumption that the phenomenon of attenuation of certain functions—physical, mental, fiscal, legal, and so on—is a common phenomenon that can happen to anyone, including a

⁸ See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Rizpah's Torment: When God Punishes the Children for the Sin of the Father," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 175 (2018): 50–66; Carrie S. Rhodes, "Theodicy and Execution for Expiation in 2 Samuel 21:1-14" (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 2009); Brian Neil Peterson, "The Gibeonite Revenge of 2 Sam 21:1-14: Another Example of David's Darker Side or a Picture of a Shrewd Monarch?," *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 1, no. 2 (2012): 217-218.

⁹ See Exum, "Rizpah," 267; R. G. Branch, "Rizpah: Activist in Nation-Building. An Analysis of 2 Samuel 21: 1-14," *Journal for Semitics* 14, no. 1 (2005): 78; Samantha Joo, "Counter-Narratives: Rizpah and the 'Comfort Women' Statue," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44, no. 1 (2019): 97; Mariecke van den Berg, "Bones Talking Back. Theology and Public Mourning after the Crash of Flight MH17," *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 27 (2019): 175–195.

¹⁰ Simeon Chavel, "Compositry and Creativity in 2 Samuel 21:1-14," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 1 (2003): 23–52.

"normal" person.¹¹ Based on the background of the hearing loss he experienced, Davis compared conversational language with symbol language. He emphasized that sign language is closer to the written world when compared to spoken language.¹² This concept is the basis of his argument in fighting for and upholding normality for disabilities, not by reducing or eliminating their role, but by instituting alternative ways of thinking about abnormal conditions or unusual circumstances.¹³

Based on the fact that there are other "voices" inside and outside the text, I will build an argument based on Oliver Glanz's shifting participants' approach¹⁴ but modify and sharpen it. Therefore, it becomes the exemplary shifting role of Rizpah (2 Sm. 21:1-14) for Mephibosheth (2 Sm. 19:24-30) to construct Mephibosheth's positive and transformative role as a disability towards King David's policy as leader of Israel. I believe that the analysis of Rizpah's shifting exemplary role (2 Sm. 21:1-14) for Mephibosheth (2 Sm. 19:24-30) can produce an imaginative construction of the transformative role of a disability to present a future policy that is complete and balanced in a community. I will organize this analytical article into three main parts. The first part is "from shifting participants to shifting exemplary roles," which analyzes text data about the presence of shifting participants that have the potency to be sharpened into the exemplary shifting roles. The second one is "from Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, to Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan," specifically the analysis of Rizpah's function as a mirror for Mephibosheth's in 2 Samuel

¹¹ Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995), xiii–xv, 3–9.

¹² Davis, *Enforcing*, 19–20.

¹³ Davis, *Enforcing*, 23–49.

¹⁴ Glanz understood the incompatibility of person, number, gender (PNG), or changes in discourse as a marker of certain functions and meanings in the text. Look at Oliver Glanz, *Understanding Participant-Reference Shifts in the Book of Jeremiah: A Study of Exegetical Method and Its Consequences for the Interpretation of Referential Incoherence* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 275, 351-352.

19:24-30. Finally is "from holey to wholly," chiefly the imaginative construction of Mephibosheth's positive and transformative role in influencing leaders to present a more complete and balanced policy by prioritizing truth and justice.

From shifting participants to shifting exemplary roles

The first significant shifting participant in the text of 2 Samuel 21:1-14 appears in the third verse of the LXX. In that verse, the double presence of the first person singular ("What can I do to you" and "with what will I redeem") became the second person masculine plural ("and you will bless the inheritance of the LORD"). According to Glanz, the movement of participants—from singular to plural—shows an extension of identity,¹⁵ particularly the merging of the king's identity with the identity of the Gibeonites. Thus, the decision-maker is no longer David but the Gibeonites. The problem is, "As a king, did David consider other aspects and not just obey the will¹⁶ of a group of people?" This phenomenon contrasts with Jonathan's release from the curse, even after his death sentence from King Saul. Consideration of his heroic acts released him from execution (1 Sm. 14:24-46). In other words, there are always considerations and exceptions to specific regulations.¹⁷ The excellent consideration does not happen here because there has been an exemplary shifting role from David to the Gibeonites based on the shifting participants above. Therefore, the Gibeonites, not David, are used as the standard of behavior and act as decision-

¹⁵ Glanz, *Understanding*, 351.

¹⁶ Alternatively, "David agrees without reservation," like the expression of J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. III: Throne and City* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990), 277.

¹⁷ Contra Chisholm Jr., "Rizpah's": 50-66. In particular, I criticize his analysis of Joshua 7 without considering the occurrence of corporate sin as shown in the article of Gumulya Djuharto, "Kebuntuan Relasi atau Legitimasi Kekerasan: Jaringan Interaksi antara Perilaku Korup Akhan dan Potensi Corporate Sin dalam Yosua 7," *Sola Gratia: Jurnal Teologi Biblika dan Praktika* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–24. In conclusion, corporate punishment only occurs because there is a potential for corporate sin, which is not mentioned in this text entirely.

makers, even executioners (see 2 Sm. 21:6, 9). It is contrary to Israel's law, where decisions and executions are never left directly to the avenging party (see, e.g., Nm. 35:11-12).

The second crucial shifting participant appears in verse 10. The verse describes the transfer of Rizpah's independent action of spreading sackcloth for herself (in the third-person feminine singular) to another party's action for them (third-person plural masculine) in the form of pouring water from the sky after Rizpah looked at the Rock.¹⁸ Her actions are unselfish and are not ending in grief and sorrow. Her action was a form of transformative action, which turned her sadness and limitations into a breakthrough to see new possibilities, which are positive and helpful for herself and for the good of others. It is essential to answer the question of those mentioned in this section. Considering that the next section talks about Rizpah's protection, her actions represented the present hopes, especially the relatives of Saul's descendants, including Mephibosheth, to bury the seven bodies adequately. Furthermore, given that the rains—a sign of soil fertility—occurred within a few weeks to six months¹⁹ after the execution, her actions represent the hope of ending the famine²⁰ when someone like Rizpah set her sights on God, the Owner and Determiner of Life. Through the shifting participants above, I see the possibility of the exemplary shifting role of hope from Rizpah to Mephibosheth, even to everyone who has hope in God.

The third important shifting exemplary role appears as a logical consequence of shifting participants in verse 11, from passive sentences by a masculine third-person (an anonymous person

¹⁸ I agree with Walters' explanation that the phrase "to the rock" here refers to GOD. See Stanley D. Walters, "'To the Rock' (2 Samuel 21:10)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2008): 453–464.

¹⁹ As Brian Britt's calculation quoted by Joo, "Counter-Narratives": 95. Or, the possibility of spatter that occurs sporadically in May or June (during the summer) as analysis of Fokkelman, *Narrative*, 288.

²⁰ Like but beyond Fokkelman, *Narrative*, 287.

reported the incident to Daud) to active sentences by a feminine third-person (Rizpah protected seven bodies). The change of gender, from masculine to feminine, signifies a shift in focus²¹ from anonymous personal behavior—which is passive and not intensive—to Rizpah's active and intensive actions. As a result, she became an exemplary role for the anonymous person, from passive and not intensive to active and intensive, thus reporting her bold actions to the king. Moreover, a domino effect occurred where the king, who was initially passive and not intensive towards her actions, became active and intensive. Finally, he showed a concern for the corpses of Saul and his descendants. The text continues with the presence of shifting participants in verse 13, which is the shift from the third-person masculine singular ("he has taken") to the third-person masculine plural ("they have gathered"). Again, it demonstrates the concept of expansion, mainly the "infectious change" in David's attitude to his subordinates, which is the proper burial of Saul and his descendants. Now David becomes an exemplary role for his subordinates. After all that was carried out properly according to the command of King David, God granted the request of the Israelites so that hunger would not occur again. Even though there are no shifting participants in verse 14, it is clear that there are shifting exemplary roles, chiefly about God's command, where David finally understood and commanded his subordinates. Uniquely, the narrator described God's acceptance of the people's requests in passive form ("Requests have moved God for land"), the exact expression used in 2 Samuel 24:25. This phenomenon emphasizes the chiasmus structure in 2 Samuel 21-24, which parallels 2 Samuel 21:1-14 with 2 Samuel 24 and emphasizes the role of God, who is passive and tends to be behind the scenes.²² Furthermore, it allows humans to actively and intensively arrange the pieces of

²¹ Glanz, *Understanding*, 351.

²² It is in line with the observation of Gerald West, "Reading on the Boundaries: Reading 2 Samuel 21 : 1-14 with Rizpah," *Scriptura* 63 (1997): 531. West observes that after verse 1, God does not speak at all until the end of the story, where the narrator describes that God answered the people's prayers.

the puzzle of chaos in life and put them in the right place according to the guidance of divine wisdom.

From Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, to Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan

This section exists because of three assumptions as of the foundational thoughts. The first is that the world of Old Testament interpretation has gone beyond historical criticism and canonical interpretation. It leads to the importance of reading and detailed research on the "world of texts" with its various rhetorical functions, which Brueggemann believes "is indeed capable of construing, generating, and evoking alternate realities."²³ The second assumption is that the rhetoric interpretation does not entirely ignore the text's historicity²⁴ because the text unit of 2 Samuel 21-24, of which 2 Samuel 21 is part of it, is composite or a unitary text consisting of different parts or elements. According to W. Richter, quoted by Johannes P. Floss, an investigation or critical analysis of the literature on such a text must include a diachronic or historical approach to determine which text elements are presuppositions for other text elements.²⁵ Based on this assumption, I recognize the function of the text of 2 Samuel 21:1-14 towards 2 Samuel 19:24-30 after I concluded that 2 Samuel 21:1-14 chronologically occurs after 2 Samuel 9.²⁶ The third assumption is about Mephibosheth's presence in this event, either aurally or visually. With other members of Saul's descendants, he

²³ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 45–59.

²⁴ I followed the understanding of Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 7. Walsh argues that the narrative world (or secondary world), ranging from the actual historical writing category to the historical fiction category, operates like the primary world (or the real world). On the other hand, the narrative world has different laws or regulations from the primary world.

²⁵ Johannes P. Floss, "Form, Source, and Redaction Criticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 606.

²⁶ Contra Joo, "Counter-Narratives": 89.

supports Rizpah²⁷ even though it is clear that Rizpah has pioneered her heroic actions. These three assumptions emphasize the exemplary shifting roles of Rizpah to the remaining family members of Saul's descendants, especially Mephibosheth, as reflected in 2 Samuel 19:24-30.

I am attracted to the description of Mephibosheth in the LXX version that he is not healing his feet and not even reducing his nails, growing his beard, or washing his clothes (v. 24 [LXX: v. 25]). Semantically, a double entendre or semantic ambiguity appeared in this sentence.²⁸ On the one hand, this sentence describes a sad and even hopeless person because others take advantage of their weakness, as Mephibosheth said: "...for your servant is lame" (2 Sm. 19:26). Mephibosheth did not immediately go after Ziba with the help of others to approach the king, as is assumed to have happened later—coming with the help of someone else and not Ziba—that is, when he welcomed the king home after Absalom's death. On the other hand, this sentence describes a person who is in mourning (compare with Is. 15:2) whose expressions are often combined as "not anointed or not anointed" (2 Sm. 14:2; Dn. 10:3) where the main activity is "hearing the voice of the Lord" (Dt 26:14). In my opinion, these two ambiguous images are critical because they show the dynamics of change experienced by Mephibosheth as a result of Rizpah's strong potential shifting exemplary role. The memory of Rizpah's phenomenal action, consistent with looking at the Rock—a metaphor for God—has inspired Mephibosheth to do the same. Mephibosheth's mourning was not merely a lamentation over David's misfortune but a hope that God would act according to truth and justice. At the same time, Mephibosheth's mourning also helped him shift his focus from the limitations of self to the infinite power of God. Mephibosheth applies to Rizpah's exemplary role creatively because Mephibosheth listens to God's voice through the mourning ritual, while Rizpah's action

²⁷ West, "Reading": 531.

²⁸ See reviews of Walsh, *Old*, 71–74.

is more metaphorical (compare with Ps. 121:1). At first glance, the description of Mephibosheth may seem ordinary, but in fact, this is the first expression of Mephibosheth's self-initiated action! He became lame because of the negligence of his caretaker (2 Sm. 4:4). David pitied him because of the covenant bond with Jonathan, his father (2 Sm. 9). Therefore, his self-description as a "dead dog" is an expression of "self-death" due to the obscurity of his future. It is not an affirmation of his opposition to the king.²⁹ All the obscurity of his future changed completely with Mephibosheth's self-transformation through his act of mourning, proof that he is on David's side but also evidence of self-renewal and his hope in God.

Furthermore, the exemplary shifting role from Rizpah to Mephibosheth appears in the parallel between the two as the losing side but does not mourn the defeat for the defeat itself. Rizpah was defeated and powerless to save her two children from execution—something beyond her authority and influence—but she did not budge and let the beasts tear the seven corpses apart. The same thing happened to Mephibosheth. He was defeated and helpless when Ziba deceived him—something beyond his means—but he did not budge and boldly explained to David why he could not welcome or support David when he was in trouble. I analyzed Mephibosheth's rhetorical sentence in the last phrase in verse 28 and found that almost all the English translation does not translate *šēdāqā* as "truth/righteousness" but as "right"³⁰ and ignores the double use of the word *ʿōd* in that verse. As a result, the average English translation combines the two phrases into one sentence, thus becoming: "And what right do I have to shout/demand further to the king?" The correct translation of the word *ʿōd* in that verse is "besides"³¹ in the sense of "except."

²⁹ Contra Schipper, "Why" 347–348.

³⁰ See ESV, NRSV, JPS, KJV, NASB, NIB, NIV.

³¹ Look at William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 267 dan Francis Brown, S.R.

The function is a separator of two phrases that confirms what two only things Mephibosheth had, mainly the truth and the figure of a wise king in the person of David. The phrase "having nothing but the truth" becomes Mephibosheth's affirmation of what is important to him at this time. He fought his problem with the king not because he wanted to get back the land that David had given to Ziba but to fight for the truth due to Ziba's slander. Based on the analysis above, the exemplary shifting role from Rizpah to Mephibosheth occurs creatively. Rizpah's wordless criticism is not the antithesis of Mephibosheth's verbal critique, with his strong message covered with gentle words.³² Rizpah's wordless criticism is practical only when accompanied by consistent action. Both Rizpah's wordless criticism and Mephibosheth's verbal criticism can go hand in hand or according to the right time and situation.

Finally, the use of the expression peace (*šālôm*) used by Mephibosheth confirms that Mephibosheth has completely changed his focus, from himself with all his limitations, which are summarized in the expression of a dead dog, to focusing on concern for others, in this case, peace or safety of the king. There is another exemplary shifting role of Rizpah in considering the parallel position between them both as persons with disabilities in the public eye,³³ which is Mephibosheth with his lameness and Rizpah with the loss of her two children. The influence of their actions is also parallel because of its nature that goes beyond self-interest.³⁴ Rizpah's action led to the

Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1962), 729.

³² Compared with the woman of Tekoa's word of persuasion in 2 Samuel 14, especially the phrase "like an angel of God" that also appears in this section.

³³ The public generally sees disabled persons as limited and incapable, so they marginalize them. See Davis, *Enforcing*, 13.

³⁴ The narration was closed with the presence of shifting participants in verse 31. There is a shift from a direct into an indirect conversation. The direct conversation between Mephibosheth and the king becomes someone's conversation about the king because of the expression "into his house" and not "into my lord's house." This phenomenon indicates that others have retold the unselfish image of Mephibosheth.

collection of the corpses of Saul and his descendants as a symbol of the reconciliation between Saul and David dynasty.³⁵ In contrast, Mephibosheth's positive response to the king's less friendly reaction is a sign of the future fate of Israel after the fall of Northern and Southern Israel, which is pitied but still limited.³⁶

From Holey to Wholly

As a person with a disability, Mephibosheth is often overlooked or not considered by readers. Exum, for example, mentions his investigations into more essential members of Saul's family while mentioning Michal, Jonathan, Ishbosheth, Rizpah, and even the seven descendants of Saul but does not mention Mephibosheth at all.³⁷ When finally mentioned, Exum described Mephibosheth as "a pathetic figure hardly capable of staging a glorious renewal of the Saulide dynasty."³⁸ These images show him as a holey person as a combination of a wrong self-perception with other people's wrong perception of the wholeness because they are too focused on weakening his legs. They interpreted that as the inability to do something independently for himself, including the potential to serve others. However, such a reading is a limited and cursory reading of 2 Samuel 21:1-14, without considering Mephibosheth's transformation in 2 Samuel 19:24-30 as an effect of Rizpah's heroic actions. Even I believe that the effect of

³⁵ Martin Buber, as quoted by Exum, "Rizpah": 267.

³⁶ Alternatively, as Schipper put it, "not glorious but tolerable future" after he juxtaposed the phrase "eat at the table" and applied both to Mephibosheth and Jehoiachin. Look at Jeremy Schipper, "'Significant Resonances' with Mephibosheth in 2 King 25:27-30: A Response to Donald F. Murray," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 3 (2005): 529.

³⁷ See Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006) 2. He especially observed the phrase "more important" which was mentioned by J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (New York: Cambridge University, 1992), 70.

³⁸ Exum, *Tragedy*, 109.

Rizpah's heroic actions on Mephibosheth's transformation is the basis for the canonical placement of 2 Samuel 21:1-14 in its present place, in the framework of 2 Samuel 21-24. It shows the parallels of Rizpah's heroic actions with the effect of Arauna's attitudes and actions in 2 Samuel 24 toward David's policy.

At first glance, the initial description of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 19:24 does look sad because the description of Mephibosheth as not washing his feet, not keeping his beard, and not washing his clothes since the king went into wanderings due to Absalom's coup. However, an in-depth reading using Rizpah's shifting exemplary role shows it is only half of the whole picture. By understanding the verse as a double entendre, I believe that Mephibosheth experienced a personal transformation, from despair to hope in God, after reflecting on what Rizpah had done by looking at the Rock. The dynamics of the narrative about him assert Mephibosheth's transformation, from being unable to do anything without Ziba's help—who instead deceived him and left him—to being able to do something, possibly with the help of someone other than Ziba. This fact confirms that a precondition for transformation is not the elimination of the disability. However, the person must ensure that mentality transformation occurs—from feeling unable and without a way out to becoming capable—perhaps with some outside help. All the transformation processes begin and focus on hope in the Creator and Maker of Life, God Himself.

Mephibosheth also experienced a transformation related to his success in separating himself from the social stigma against him as a person with a disability. He realized his limitations, so he firmly said, "...because your servant is lame" (2 Sm. 19:26). However, he is not a person lacking any abilities because he is differently abled³⁹; he can do things differently in terms of the framework (theory, perspective, analysis) or its application

³⁹ Davis, *Enforcing*, xiii.

(method, implementation, speed). One of the essential keywords reflecting Mephibosheth's distinction is his emphasis on truth (*šēdāqā*) as his only possession (v. 28b), like a precious treasure, and in contrast with the common assumption about the correlation between ability and physical perfection. The emphasis on truth is not abstract and hyperbolic but something "infectious" in nature. The truth is not only passed down to his subordinates but also the people in general (see Dt. 33:21). The tiered administration structure or execution of policies exercised truth and justice before the monarchy. It consists of family or clan laws carried out by the head of the family, local or municipal elders, sacred law by priests, and judicial authority by the ruler (or king in monarchy). In his book, *The King as Exemplar*, Jamie A. Grant maintains the role of the king as an exemplary actor of truth and justice, in the form of absolute dependence on God's power and piety to the Torah. To the same degree as the ordinary people, the Deuteronomist historians mentioned the limitation of the king's power according to the central nature of the Torah to everyone, including the king himself.⁴⁰ These facts show the vital signs of Mephibosheth's words to the king. As an actor of truth and justice, he should be an example for his people. However, a disabled person is coming forward as an example, not the king. Thus, just as Rizpah's actions—as an exemplary shifting role for Mephibosheth—influenced David's actions, so Mephibosheth's actions influenced David's decisions, from ordering the acquisition of all of Mephibosheth's possessions (2 Sm. 16:4) to an equal distribution of land between Ziba and Mephibosheth (2 Sm. 19:29).

The expression of *šālôm* to the king reflects Mephibosheth's final transformation in the text because it reflects the *šālôm* that Mephibosheth himself experienced. David A. Leiter explained three categories regarding the Hebrew word *šālôm*,

⁴⁰ Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 192–213.

and the category of interpersonal relationships is missing in either Mephibosheth's or David's relationship.⁴¹ The text does not tell the prospect relationship between Mephibosheth and Ziba, while Absalom's death signifies the termination of a relationship with David. However, this condition is crucial because it describes the condition of *šālôm* not in its ideal form but in a form that humans can embrace in all their limitations. Harmony between humans does not always occur, but harmony between God and oneself is. It contains a safe and complete state though no financial or physical completeness. It signs that Mephibosheth is no longer a holey person but a wholly who is ready to continue his adventure in an imperfect world, with his imperfections, to re-knit relationships with humans in different situations and conditions. Just as he was safe and complete, so was Mephibosheth's hope for David. This condition is a reaffirmation of the role of God, who tends to be passive and works behind the scenes. He allows humans to actively and intensively assemble the chaotic puzzle pieces in life and put them in their proper place in the future where absolute perfection (or wholeness) occurs both individually and in communities.

Conclusion

The presence of Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, in 2 Samuel 21:1-14 complements the story. It is a counter-testimony to the core testimony about David's policy regarding the execution of the seven descendants of Saul. Through the presence of shifting participants in 2 Samuel 21:1-14, which allows for an exemplary shifting role from Rizpah to Mephibosheth, I analyzed the transformation of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 19:24-30. The transformation includes three aspects. The first is the personal aspect where Mephibosheth experiences a transformation from despair due to the disability labeled on him into the hope towards God. The second is the social aspect of

⁴¹ David A. Leiter, *Neglected Voices: Peace in the Old Testament* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2007), 28–29.

his role as differently-abled and different from the general opinion about the correlation between ability and physical perfection. Despite his weakened physical condition, especially his legs, Mephibosheth made a breakthrough with his ability to influence David in producing policies based on truth and justice. Through this breakthrough, Mephibosheth indirectly redirected David to act in righteousness and justice under the demands of the law.

Furthermore, the third aspect is relational, where a sense of personal security and completeness becomes an essential capital in establishing relationships in the imperfect world. It covered the imperfections of oneself or others and unpredictable situations and conditions, precisely the wholly person within their imperfections. The result is an imaginative construction of the transformative role of disabilities for a future policy in hopes of the ultimate wholeness in an entirely ideal period—without defects and wrinkles—where there are no more tears and sorrows, as the writer of the sacred text hopes, in the centrality of God's presence.

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