
“The King Who Failed...and the One Who Never Will”

1 SAMUEL 25:39B-44

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AT A GLANCE

What happens when leaders disappoint us? What happens when those we follow fail? We're reminded that what we've always needed was not a better king, but a perfect one...one who will never fail us.

Last week in our study of the life of David, we were on a high note. David listened to Abigail's wisdom and turned from his sinful, impulsive path. Abigail went home, told Nabal what she had done, and the Lord struck him down. David stood as the example; Nabal, the warning. David looked like the kind of king you'd want to follow—grateful, self-controlled, reasonable.

But as is so often the case, on the heels of spiritual victory, disappointment was just around the corner. David was already a married man. But he saw in Abigail what he wanted—and he took her to be his wife.

Now, the story we're about to read presents this moment without commentary. The narrator doesn't step in and say, “This was wrong.” There's no neat moral conclusion. And that can trip people up.

But if we'll get the rest of the story—as Paul Harvey used to say—we'll see that this moment wasn't just a footnote in David's life. It was a turning point in the wrong direction.

It's a warning for us to be careful with the decisions we make. But even more than that, it reminds us that what we ultimately need is not a better king...but a King who will never fail us. Let's stand and read our passage.

1 SAMUEL 25:39b-44

Then David sent and spoke to Abigail, to take her as his wife. ⁴⁰ When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, “David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife.” ⁴¹ And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, “Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.” ⁴² And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David and became his wife. ⁴³ David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives. ⁴⁴ Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim.

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Verses 39b-40 At first glance, this looks like a beautiful resolution. But if we slow down and pay attention, there's more going on here than meets the eye. David saw in Abigail wife-material when she intervened to keep him from carrying out his murderous intent.

How could he not be attracted to her? She is described as beautiful and discerning. Add to that now, very wealthy. And he owes her a debt of gratitude for preventing him from acting like a fool. So he sends to **take** her as his wife.

Notably, **take** was something Samuel warned God's people kings would do a lot. (1 Samuel 8:16-17)

A HUMBLE SERVANT

Verses 41-42 And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, "Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." ⁴² And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David and became his wife.

Without hesitation, Abigail once again humbled herself. Based on her response, she was not only willing to become David's wife, but eager. David demonstrated he was a godly, reasonable man in his interaction with Abigail. What woman married to a knuckle-headed husband wouldn't see something admirable in a reasonable man? You guys need to take note of that.

Although David asked her to become his wife, Abigail responded by offering to become a servant, even willing to wash their feet, a sign of deep contrition. Of course, she fully anticipated David would honor his offer rather than her own. It was a purely symbolic gesture.

Abigail's consent to marry David may have been more pragmatic than romantic, though. Nabal was wealthy, but Abigail remained childless. Childless widows, wealthy or not, were susceptible to danger in many ways.

And for his part, David not only saw in Abigail a beautiful, discerning woman, he also saw an opportunity to secure power and influence in the region by marrying her, gaining Nabal's significant wealth. (cf. 2 Samuel 12:8; 16:21-22)

MORAL COMPLEXITIES

Verses 43-44 David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives. ⁴⁴ Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim.

Now let me step back for a moment and be honest about the tension this creates. I want to see the wholesomeness of David's marriage to Abigail in light of what God did through her. I want the story to be wrapped up neatly and cleanly.

Rarely is life like that, though. Godly leaders demonstrate restraint, wisdom, and humility one moment only to disappoint us the next.

I want Abigail to be David's first marriage after Michal was taken from him. If Abigail came first after Michal, there's a neat bow to tie up this chapter.

But that's not supported by the text. Longman and Garland note in their commentary, "The NIV's translation 'David had also married Ahinoam,' which implies that his marriage to Ahinoam occurred before he took Abigail as his wife, is doubtless correct, since Ahinoam is always mentioned before Abigail when the two names occur together." (cf. 1 Samuel 27:3; 30:5; 2 Samuel 2:2; 3:2-3; 1 Chronicles 3:1-4)

NEXT WAVE OF SEXUAL MORAL REVOLUTION

This isn't primarily an academic discussion. This matters right now. We're already seeing the beginning of this, but I predict the next wave of sexual moral revolution will be mainstreaming polygamy. There are already so-called Christian influencers who appeal to verses like these to say the bible never forbids polygamy.

Here's what we need to remember, the Old Testament isn't a children's moral story. It doesn't wrap up the complexities in a neat bow every chapter.

Instead, the narratives of the Old Testament call the reader to consider the outcome of the characters' actions. Consider David and Ahimelech and the bread of the presence and the slaughter

of Nob. Ultimately David confessed to occasioning the death of all those people. But the narrator took a neutral position in reporting the action.

Here is another neutral report of an action. David had two wives at this point and he wasn't done taking them. That makes this morally complex. How do we account for David, a man after God's own heart, taking Abigail as a second wife?

Possibilities include ignorance of God's standard. There's an argument that the Law was sealed up and David would have been ignorant of it. Samuel was dead, so there's no spiritual father to guide him. That is how this chapter began, remember? That's a genuine possibility.

Another possibility is that David was a kinsmen redeemer and he was simply doing his duty as nearest relative to a childless widow. Kinsmen redeemer is a possibility.

Or another possibility is this was sin; straight up, pragmatic or lustful sin. What we do know is this will not be the last time David takes a woman he lusts after. For all his wonderful attributes, David was a lustful man who took whoever he wanted.

Of those options, I believe the last one best fits the trajectory of David's life—and it's the one many scholars land on. Peter Leithart writes in his commentary, "In the flush of this great deliverance, David sinned by taking another wife. Contrary to the law, David was beginning to multiply wives, and by the time he became king in Hebron, he had six sons, each of which had a different mother." (2 Samuel 3:2-5)

A PATTERN OF WEAKNESS

The fact is David's life demonstrates a pattern of weakness. He had a lust problem. David's sin, Leithart says, would have serious consequences for the nation.

And history proves it. Several of David's sons committed sexual immorality. Amnon raped Tamar, Absalom took David's harem and slept with them publicly. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. What was tolerated in one generation was magnified in the next. That's a strong warning for parents!

What we know from the whole life of David is that his marrying multiple wives was his downfall. Rather than being a good father to his children, raising them in the fear and admonition of the Lord, teaching them to observe God's Law, and raising up a good heir to the throne, David gave in to his lust, made practical, pragmatic decisions that ended up destroying not only his family but the entire nation.

So when we read the story of David taking Abigail and want to wrap it up as a beautiful moment, we can't ignore the rest of the story. We can't ignore his son raping his daughter, his sons murdering one another, Absalom defiling David's concubines on the roof, and the kingdom eventually tearing in two.

'THIS WAS SIN'

The Bible doesn't always stop and say, 'This was sin' in those moments. But it doesn't need to. God lets the consequences speak. And when you step back and look across Scripture, a pattern emerges—every time God's design for marriage is stretched or ignored, it produces conflict, division, and devastation in the next generation.

If David serves as an example for us and Nabal a warning in the previous passage, now David is the warning. This very moment, this very decision may well have been the beginning of the downfall of Israel as a unified nation. It reveals to us the power and consequence of even a single sin to divert the course of our lives.

So if this is what happens when God's design is ignored, what is God's design? God ordained marriage before any other institution. In Genesis 2 God ordained marriage when he said, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* Genesis 2:24

I want you to notice God started marriage the way He wanted to. Adam had 12 pair of ribs...God could have taken a rib, or even two, from each side and fashioned multiple wives for him. And from a sheer multiplication standpoint, from a pragmatic standpoint, that would have been a much more effective route to go.

ONENESS

So there's something we need to recognize in the fact that God chose to make for Adam one wife. A helper suitable for him. And the mandate, "the two shall become one flesh." Oneness. How does someone share oneness with multiple partners?

Paul says we join ourselves to others in sexual immorality. (1 Corinthians 6:16) So when we give ourselves to others, even if they are so-called wives, we are splitting our oneness. This is a rejection of God's created order.

From the beginning, marriage was about multiplication – *"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it...'"* Genesis 1:28 Sadly because of the fall of man, not every marriage can multiply. But for those who can, that's the original mandate to husband and wife.

And the purpose is to produce little image bearers and to raise them in the fear and instruction of the Lord and send them out as salt and light so the glory of God covers the face of the earth. That's what David should have done with Ahinoam and no one else.

But ultimately, marriage isn't about procreation as much as it is about proclamation. Proclamation of the gospel. Paul says, *"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."* Ephesians 5:32 Paul says the way wives submit to, and respect, their husbands and the way husbands love and cherish their wives, which he covered from verses 22 to 31 points to the union between Christ and the Church. No wonder Satan would target the family from the very beginning and continually wage war against it.

PERVERSION OF THE MOSIAC OF MARRIAGE

What began in the paradise of Eden in Genesis 2 finds its culmination in the paradise of heaven in Revelation 21 – another wedding. Christ, the bridegroom and His bride the Church, united at last, and forever. So when the future king of Israel steps out of the created order by marrying multiple wives, he does more than simply sin against the Lord.

He adds to the perversion of the mosaic of a bridegroom and his bride first made visible in the garden, tarnished in the fall, but perfectly recreated in Revelation by a better husband and a perfect shepherd king.

All of human history is about Jesus. Every character of the bible is either a precursor or an object lesson, an example or a warning. As in the case of David, often both and sometimes with barely any space between.

Every victorious leader of God's people in the bible points to the victory of Jesus over sin, death, and the grave! At the same time, every leader that falls on his face in sin is a reminder than no human king, no human leader is sufficient for the task of leading God's people perfectly.

No, we need a perfect king; a shepherd-king. Christ is that shepherd-king.

He is the Shepherd King who demonstrated divine restraint, never had to be talked down.

He is the Shepherd King who demonstrated divine wisdom, no one was ever sent to give Him some.

He is the Shepherd King who demonstrated divine commitment to His one bride, the Church, giving Himself up for her, making her holy, washing her in the Word, is preparing a place for her, and is one day going to call her to Himself!

DO YOU KNOW HIM?

So the question we ought to be asking isn't so much about David, but about you.

Do you know this King? Do you know this Savior? Do you know the Good Shepherd of our soul? Do you know *Him*, not just *about* Him.

Do you know His love? Do you know His grace? Do you know His holiness? Does His righteousness clothe you? Does His rod and staff comfort you? In Him do you find conviction over your sin and freedom from condemnation?

Do you hear His voice? And do you follow Him? Do you find rest in Him? Do you come to Him thirsty and find the water of life?

Do you take shelter in His wings like a chick under its momma hen? Do you find your strength in His power? "...for He who is in you is greater than He who is in the world." 1 John 4:4 Do you love Him? And if you love Him, do you obey Him?

Brother and sister, if the answer to any of these is 'no,' or 'not sure,' today sure would be a beautiful day to turn that to a resounding yes!

HE IS READY TO RECEIVE YOU

He is THE faithful shepherd king of whom David was merely a dim shadow. And He stands ready to receive you to Himself, offering you the full benefit of union with God through His Spirit.

He will never leave you nor forsake you.

How can we be sure? He not only left us with His Spirit to remind us who we are and whose we are, who seals us for heaven, but He also left us a reminder to feel and taste, to smell and see. A symbol of His self-sacrificing love. We call it communion and we're about to observe that together.

Before we do, why don't you get still in your mind and heart for a minute.

No matter where you are today, whether you relate more to David today than you do to David last week,

whether you're broken down or beaten up,

whether you're working on your own marriage or commiserating what you could have done to make it work,

whether you're feeling alone or wish you could get alone,

whether you're tired, frustrated, scared, or angry...

Jesus, the King who will never fail you, invites you to remember what He's done.

And to receive His grace with joy by faith.