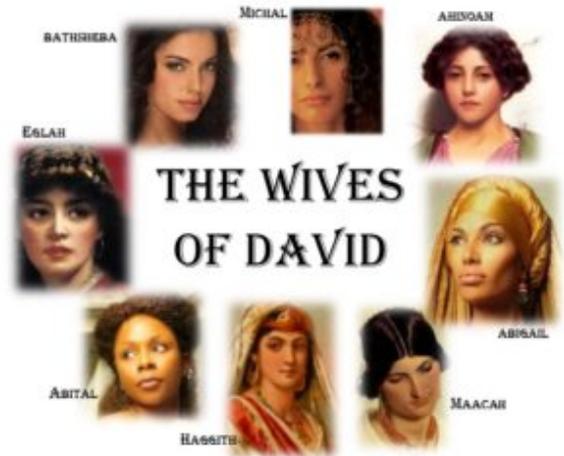


The Great Canadian Bible Study for 2021

The Wives of David

It is said that behind every great man is a woman. In David's case this meant many women. It is difficult to understand these marriage relationships from our 21st century perspective where we place high value on romance and finding our one true love or soul mate. "You can't choose who you love" and being "in love" seems to justify adultery, divorce, same-gender relationships and more. It is God, however who defines love and *demonstrates his own love in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us. (Romans 5: 8.)* A search of our souls would more readily demand we ask, "Whom do we love in the way that God loved us?"



For several reasons, ancient culture would understand the song, "What's love got to do with it?". First, royal marriages were rarely about love but mostly about political alliances. To keep kingdoms "in the family" a marriage was a form of peace treaty or blood bond. Secondly, a king's strength and greatness was measured by his sexual prowess and the size of his harem. The fertility of a king spoke to the fertility and wealth of the land he governed. The mightiest kings were to have 360 wives and concubines – almost one for every day of the year! You can imagine how great Solomon was considered with his 700 wives and 300 concubines. It is also clear in Scripture that for all of Solomon's wisdom, he failed God in marrying foreign wives and disobeying Deuteronomy 17:17 which stated that a king should not have many wives. [In a convoluted calculation by rabbis, they determined that number to be 18!]. The first wife was traditionally the most important politically and referred to as the queen, but with David it is unclear who he considers his queen and even which wife, if any he ever truly loved.

It puzzles me greatly as to why David is considered a man after God's own heart. He fails in so many ways to live up to the standards that I would look for in a man. In reality, he was not a good husband, father, or strong ruler, though he was a successful warrior. The worthiest character trait I discern in David is humility. He knows his failings as a husband, a father and a ruler and lays all of that at the feet of his God. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus describes himself as gentle and humble: "*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*" I believe David lived this verse, though he preceded Jesus. He took the yoke of God upon his shoulders and was gentle and humble in heart. And God could work with that.

This study is not about David, but about three of the women in his life that, for better or worse are a part of his story and thus part of Israel's story and God's story and just maybe part of your story and mine.

Open in Prayer – Use the words of Matthew 11:29 and pray that we might receive from Jesus the lessons he would reveal to us today.

Michal

READ: I Samuel 18: 16 – 29

As David had killed Goliath, Saul's eldest daughter, Merab was already promised to him in marriage (I Sam 17:25). Saul makes a grand gesture of the offer once more upon the promise that David will fight Saul's battles (and hopefully be killed in the process). David responds in humility that he and his family are unworthy of such an honour. It was Saul's duty to honour the original offer, but he quickly reneges and marries Merab to a wealthy and politically favorable alliance. There is a second daughter most willing to marry as she has already fallen in love with the ruddy young warrior. David is skeptical of this offer and tries to decline by using the excuse that he cannot pay the dowry befitting a king's daughter and thus Saul sets a unique price of 100 Philistine foreskins. David takes up the challenge, not for love of Michal, but in essence to win the bet.

1. What are your feelings toward Michal at this point in the story? If you were her mother, what warnings would you offer your love-struck daughter?

READ: I Samuel 19: 11 – 17

2. What risk has Michal taken for David?
3. What do you see in the character of Michal that is noteworthy and also what are some things that might trouble you about her actions or character?
4. How ought David to feel or act toward Michal from this experience?

READ: I Samuel 25: 44

5. This is an abrupt statement! Was this the consequence of Michal saving David's life, that Saul breaks the relationship and gives her to Paltiel? Saul already had his son, Jonathan protecting David and now Michal is as well! What do you imagine is happening to the heart and spirit of Michal through these transactions of her life?

READ: 2 Samuel 3: 1 – 5, 12 – 16

6. David has now married Ahinoam, Abigail, Maacah and Eglah all of whom have born him sons, thus increasing his political clout. Then, as Abner switches loyalty from Saul to David, David asks for his first wife, Michal back. Why was this important to him?
7. So far, we have no hint that David loved Michal. But look at the actions of Michal's second husband? What do they tell you?

READ: 2 Samuel 6: 14 – 16

8. Michal's heart has turned from deep love to hatred. Now everything that David does bugs her. I believe that Michal experienced being loved for the first time by Paltiel (whose name means "God has delivered"). Her love for David was never reciprocated as far as we can tell, and now that she is back in the court and can compare the difference, her heart has turned bitter. Note that that Michal never bore any children and I wonder if David did not sleep with

her, or if she was simply barren. This too would have added to the anguish of her heart as David's other wives were bearing sons for him. In what parts of Micah's story, if any, do you feel some sympathy for her?

Abigail, wife of Nabal

READ: I Samuel 25 (if time) or leader summarize

9. Verse 3: How is Abigail described? Her character is contrasted to that of her husband's and we sense this is a difficult life and marriage for her.
10. Verses 18 – 35: What is Abigail attempting to do by her actions? What does this reveal about her character and her loyalty to her marriage? In verses 28 – 30, in whom is she trusting and obeying?
11. Verses 36 – 38: How does God intervene to set Abigail free? Today, it may not be death, but a divorce that gives a woman a new start. God is gracious and cares for all who find themselves in challenging circumstances.
12. Verses 39 – 42: Verse 39 states that David "wooed" Abigail, yet he sends servants to "take her to him as his wife" – not exactly a romantic gesture! What do these verses continue to reveal about the nature and character of Abigail? Left a widow, Abigail may have had few choices regarding her future and David's kindness would certainly save her from poverty. Note in verse 43 that David also marries Ahinoam. It is Ahinoam who gives birth to David's first-born son, which would make her the official "queen" although there is really no mention of their relationship.

Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11)

Since this is the most familiar story of David's wives, we will not dissect David's adultery but to discuss these questions:

13. What might Bathsheba's part be in this event and what choices did she have through the course of this story? Do you feel she was complicit or a victim and why?
14. Name the many emotions that Bathsheba would have experienced. Ultimately, where would she find some semblance of peace?

Final thoughts

Many of you will be familiar with the Crawley family from the hit series, *Downton Abbey*. Much of its appeal was entering into the lives of women who also were making the best out of their cultural circumstance. A father with no sons and complicated inheritance laws created difficult decisions to be made for the future of the estate. The greatest hope rested in the good marriages of his

daughters to prominent families, calling upon those women to sacrifice their dreams for love and careers. Women today also face difficult choices around circumstance often beyond their control.

15. What choices did David's wives have in these relationships?

- a. Michal wanted to marry David, but she did not choose to be remarried to Paltiel nor returned to David. How might allowing God's love to fill her have prevented her heart from turning bitter? In what ways do women today turn to a man will fulfill their need to be loved?
- b. Abigail may not have chosen her marriage to a horrid man – it was most likely an arranged marriage, but she did choose to cover for his bad behavior and make the situation as best for them as possible. She did not choose his death but consented to marry David as protection. How did her choices make the best of a bad situation?
- c. Bathsheba did not choose to have a child by a man not her husband, but she deeply grieved the loss of that child. I assume she did not choose the death of Uriah but later chose to be with David, the father of her child – though perhaps that was not her choice either. She did choose to love and support her son, Solomon and to ensure that he became the next king (I Kings 1).
- d. Unwanted pregnancy is all too common a story in the lives of women. How might we empower young women to make better choices in the hopes that every child conceived would be desired?
- e. When we cannot choose the circumstance we are in, what choices can we make within those circumstances? How does your faith and trust in God enable you to make better choices?

The Scriptures do not explicitly tell us of the relationship these women had with God. Our story is different, for though we may face challenging circumstances and difficult choices, we have not been left alone. We have the love of God to fill us, the power of the resurrected Christ to fuel us and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us. One choice we can always make is to trust in our Triune God of love, presence and power. We see strengths to admire in these women we have studied: Michal's loyalty, Abigail's integrity, and Bathsheba's resiliency. How much more would these qualities have carried them if entrusted into hands of our all-loving God. Find God's grace in these stories and forgiveness. We have all made mistakes and poor choices in our journeys, but God is good and ready to do a new thing.

Close in prayer, giving thanks for God's presence, power, love, grace and future hope.

Your offerings will go to assist vulnerable women and children in the countries that CBM works in partnership with local mission.

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