

The Disaster of a King – 2 Samuel 12:1–10

BY

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Jennifer Aniston was interviewed in 2010, and stated that a woman does not need a man to have and raise children.¹ The comment that Aniston stated gives evidence that values of marriage are spiraling downward. With the breakdown of marital morals, the approach to theology within the church is a challenge. Yet, this is not a new topic. Numerous theologians have and continue to debate what is a permissible sexual act within the life of a Christian. Instead of coming to some sort of resolve, the topic of morals seem to grow with greater intensity. This, in effect, seems to only create additional confusion. The reason for this confusion is that there are some of these theologians who take a strong stance one way, and then there are others who take the opposite position with the same amount of zeal. To further confuse matters, each one of these theologians along with his different viewpoints will use the same passages of Scripture to support his opposing conclusions; both groups will argue that their biblical perspectives are the most conforming to the Scripture. One thing that the two different groups have in common is that each will argue a biblical perspective, attempting to convince their readers that their point of view is correct.

The first measure will be to establish the importance of the biblical institution of marriage. According to the Jew, marriage was a vital part of their community. Genesis 2:24 presents God's ideal paradigm for the union between a man and a woman. It states that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." The man and the woman have a purpose – to functionally become one (this is the goal). The discourse in Genesis 2:24 is to refine the interests

¹ Bill O'Reilly, "The O'Reilly Factor," Fox News.com. (August 10, 2010).

of a man and a woman to unite to become one without any outside influence. Thus, it is the ideal union between a man and a woman because it expresses the intention of God for the one-flesh relationship. It appears that the first union formed by God was to be the depiction of all ensuing unions for the foundation of community.

God seems to be concerned about man following an ideal paradigm. The Garden of Eden, the union between man and woman, the covenant's, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and God's chosen people were all to be models. These models were established by God to be the foundation of a community. However, it seems that the one-flesh relationship between the man and the woman is central within God's diagram of community. The narrative of David and Bathsheba seems to display this idea. The aim of this paper is to do an exegetical analysis of 2 Samuel 12:1–10 to understand why the ideal union was established in Genesis 2:24, and show how David's deviation from that ideal led to disaster for the kingdom.

Historical Context – The Author and His Audience

The Author: The author(s) of the Book of 2 Samuel is not stated within the Book of 2 Samuel.² This notion can provide problems.³ Yet, authorship is not the issue that this paper attempts to resolve. The concern for this paper is to examine 2 Samuel 12:1–10.

² Robert Bergen remarks, "In recent years scholarly works about 1, 2 Samuel . . . as a literary unity having been produced by an individual or group of individuals collectively known as the Deuteronomistic editors. The so-called Deuteronomistic (or Deuteronomic) school of writers was believed by many scholars to have produced a connected history of Israel that interpreted the course of events in the nation's history in light of the teachings found in the Book of Deuteronomy. Their writings 'stressed centralization of worship in Jerusalem, obedience to Deuteronomic law, and the avoidance of any kind of apostasy, all according to a rigid system of reward and punishment.'" Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 24–25.

³ A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol 11 (Dallas: Word, 1989), xxi–xxiii.

Samuel was concerned from the beginning about having a monarchy. His issue appeared to be that if the king acted like the other kings, he would compel the children of Israel to distance themselves from God. Thus, there was an immense amount of responsibility placed upon the role of king. And, the writer of Samuel allows the reader to watch Saul's catastrophic reign. It was so disastrous that God took the kingdom from Saul.⁴

Yet, David, did not heed the lessons that he had witnessed. He transgressed against God (adultery and murder), and created a chasm between God and the monarchy. In fact, David lost his kingdom and his harem to his son, Absalom.⁵ Youngblood states, "When David deliberately flouted God's will, he could count equally on the fact that he would be under the curse. And, so it would be with his descendants on the throne."⁶ Thus, the author notes that David's indiscretions, even though they were undisclosed, became the paradigm of failure. The general information that the author seemed to want to convey was that the political unrest created by the monarchy of David led to social discontent in the children of Israel.

⁴ Bergen notes, "Since the time of Rost's writings on 1, 2 Samuel, many scholars have accepted the assertion that these twenty-one chapters were originally an independent document written to defend David's right to rule following the death of King Saul. The sympathetic portrayal of David in these chapters, showing him to be a zealous worshiper of the Lord who used his great abilities in unswerving loyal service to the king, demonstrates that David was uniquely qualified to lead Israel following Saul's tragic death." Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 21.

⁵ Steven L. McKenzie notes that 2 Samuel 12:11 "continues the theme of taking wives. 'I will take your wives in your sight and will give them to your neighbor who will lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun.' The threat here is not to David's wives. Nor is it merely a matter of shaming him. It plays once again on the notion that to sleep with a member of the harem was to lay claim to the throne itself. David's neighbor could lie with David's wives in full sunlight only if David were deposed. These words threatened nothing less than David's removal as king, which occurred in Absalom's revolt. David's 'neighbor' turns out to be his own son!" Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 160.

⁶ Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, 562. Youngblood explains, "If the Davidic covenant was eternal in the sense that his line would continue forever (cf. 7:12–16, 25–29; 23:5; Ps 89:27–29, 33–37), it was also conditional in that individual participants in it would be punished when they sinned (cf. 1 Kings 2:4; 8:25; 9:4–5; Psalm 89:30–32; 132:12).

A central theme that the author of both books of Samuel seems to have had was that Israel was to be sovereignly led by God. In fact, Robert Bergen contends, “Certainly a central purpose for writing 1 and 2 Samuel was to communicate and reinforce religious beliefs of profound importance to the writer and his community.”⁷ Israel was a religious/covenant community, and this called for them to live by a certain standard. According to Youngblood, it meant that “the king was to administer the covenant, and that the prophet was to interpret its demands.”⁸ Kingship was to set the parameters of God’s covenant by living them.

2 Samuel 12:1–10, historically speaking, the author appears to present a narrative that infers that God established a covenantal structure for Israel.⁹ The children of Israel were expected to live by covenantal rules. Perhaps, this configuration is a position from the idea of the communal paradigm

⁷ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 43.

⁸ Ronald F. Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 561. Anderson notes: “2 Samuel and the Prophetic books (particularly Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) have in common certain Davidic themes and messianic motifs (cf. e.g., Is 4:2; 9:2–7; 11:1–5, 10; 16:5; Jer 17:25; 23:5–6; 30:9; Ez 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Hos 3:5; Mic 5:1–4). However, in the absence of direct citations it is difficult to say whether or not the prophets were familiar with the actual materials now contained in 2 Samuel. On the other hand, there is little doubt that the prophets knew of, and attached great importance to, the Davidic traditions including the divine promise (or covenant) to the house of David (see for instance, Is 55:3–4; Ez 34:23–24).” Anderson, *2 Samuel*, xxxviii.

⁹ Bergen notes: “Yahweh, the God who spoke gracious covenantal words to Noah (Genesis 9:1–17), Abraham (Genesis 15:18–21; 17:4–14), Isaac (Genesis 17:19, 21), Jacob (Ex 2:24), Eleazar (Num 25:12–13), and the people of Israel (Ex 24:8), is shown establishing a covenant with David in the books of Samuel (2 Samuel 7:8–16). In the covenantal promise with David the Lord bestowed eternal, unmerited blessings, while at the same time promising stern judgment for sin. The Lord’s covenant with David and his descendants was unconditional and eternal (cf. 2 Samuel 7:16; 1 Chron 7:14; Psalm 45:6; 89:36–37; Heb 1:8).” Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 43. Later, he states, “First and Second Samuel resonate with the central theological thesis of the Torah, namely that obedience to Yahweh brings about blessing while disobedience to him—even in the least detail—brings about judgment (cf. Genesis 22:15–18; Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28).” *Ibid.*, 44.

as established in Genesis 2:24. God formed a union between a man and a woman. This union was to be the standard that all unions were established. Hence, the union became the foundation of community. As a consequence, the king was to carry out this way of life. In fact, Deuteronomy 17:17 states that a king was not to be a polygamist.

David seemed to be determined to create a harem. He had numerous wives and concubines, only King Solomon, David's son, had more wives and concubines. Consequently, it does not appear that David loved any of the women in his harem. The problem is that he did not have any respect for them. This can be ascertained as he took Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, to be a part of his harem. Chisholm states, "David's insistence on building a harem culminated in the Bathsheba incident, where David, overcome by lust and greed, violated Uriah's wife and then tried to cover up his sin by ordering Uriah's death. David suffered the painful consequences of his blatant violation of God's law."¹⁰ Not only did David suffer, but all of the children of Israel suffered along with him.

The spiritual upheaval that the author of 1 Samuel 8:1–10 was concerned about came because King David could not fulfill God's ideal model. The result was that the children of Israel would experience social disorder.¹¹ Even though Israel did not commit the act, they had to live with the gratuitous effects of it.

The Reader: The matter for 2 Samuel 12:1–10 is that God created an ideal paradigm. The ideal model was in the relationship between the man and woman. Yet, this model was to characterize God's relationship with man,

¹⁰ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 110.

¹¹ John Goldingay observes, "In reality, settling in the land leads to the situation of moral, religious, and social collapse described in Judges, when 'there was no king in Israel' (Judges 21:25). Judges thus implies that the nation needed to become a state because the lack of firm central government meant everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes." John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Life*, vol. 3 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 543. However, it was not 'everyone doing what was right in their own eyes' it was King David.

and symbolize the structure of God's ideal kingdom. But, David broke all aspects with his adulterous act.

In 2 Samuel 12:1–10, the author presents the case that God had Nathan go and tell David of his iniquity – David committed adultery, and then murdered the husband. According to Jewish custom, marriage was a vital part of their community. Yet, David did not treat it with respect God's ideal paradigm. Genesis 2:24 emphasizes that God gave an ideal paradigm for a man and a woman to follow. This ideal pattern was a model for the family, community, and kingdom. It states that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” The man and the woman have a purpose – to functionally become one (this is the goal). The discourse in Genesis 2:24 refines the interests of a man and a woman into becoming a one-flesh union. It states that one man and one woman unite to become one without any outside influence. Thus, it is the ideal union between a man and a woman because it expressed the intention of God for the one-flesh relationship. Furthermore, it appears that the first union formed by God was to be the depiction of all ensuing unions. However, David did not value God's plan, Bathsheba, or Uriah. In fact, King David had Uriah, a faithful companion, murdered.

The Limit of the Passage

The parable that Nathan presented to David seems to be a complete narrative. In this story, Nathan challenges King David for his inappropriate behavior. As a king, David had a responsibility to God and to God's people.¹² The people wanted a king so that he could fight their battles for

¹² Merrill contends, “Kingship in Israel was expressly predicted and sanctioned by Moses and the patriarchs long before the institution itself. But until the Hebrew tribes underwent the metamorphosis from peoplehood to nationhood, a transition that occurred only after the exodus and Sinai experiences, they were not properly constituted to make kinship meaningful. In the providence of God it was only with the election of David, the ‘man after God's own heart,’ that the stage was set for human kinship in its pristine and finest form. David, then, was not just a king, but in line with the regnal and saving purposes of God was in a unique sense the son of God. That is, he was adopted by God to represent God on the earth and to establish a human dynasty over which God's very Son, Jesus Christ himself, would reign. Only David, therefore, could adequately serve as

them.¹³ However, David was not there to lead them into battle, he allowed his lust to overtake him, and take another man's wife. And, if that was not corrupt enough, David had Uriah murdered because he refused to be used to cover up David's sin.

Another reason for this notion is that verse 11 begins with the word yK. The word yk can be used to convey a new thought (clausal adverb). In other words, the writer initiates in verse 11 a new idea that is based on the knowledge from 2 Samuel 12:1–10.¹⁴ Perhaps a later textual addition was made to explain why David's kingdom became mass bedlam. And, as a reminder that God and not man was the real king.

Historical/Hermeneutical Context

Kingship was important for unity and solidarity within Israel. In fact, even though the beginning stages of kingship were shaky, it became a way of life for all of Israel.¹⁵ Fabry states, "The diachronic use of the *melek* group through the course of Israel's history shows that simple, fundamental idea of the exercise of power by a single individual over others was also able to establish itself and become accepted in Israel despite all the complications this kind of social system must have presented to traditional

prototype of the messianic King. And just as the Messiah would be prophet and priest in addition to king, so David functioned in those capacities as well, and in a way which allowed him to operate outside the normal bounds of those office." Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 209.

¹³ H. -J. Fabry, "\$lm," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 362–363.

¹⁴ Helga Weippert comments that "a new word of God proclaimed by Samuel in 2 Samuel 12 provides a counterpoint that, while it does not abolish the dynastic promise, nevertheless stands in its way as a hindrance. Yahweh will 'take' from David, not the kingdom, but the harem 'and give it to the one close to him' (2 Samuel 12:11). Absalom's rebellion is heralded. As David has already reached the peak of royal power, the counterpromise reduces him contrapuntally to his human measure." Helga Weippert, "'Histories' and 'History: Promises and Fulfillment in the Deuteronomistic Historical Work,'" in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, vol. 8 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 57.

¹⁵ Merrill states, "Kingship was part and parcel of God's program to demonstrate and effect his sovereign rule over creation." Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 208.

faith.”¹⁶ But, it was David, as king, that brought harm to the kingdom because of his sexual improprieties with Bathsheba.¹⁷

The biblical ideal of the union between a man and a woman seems to have its framework within being made in the image of God. Especially, given that Genesis 2:24 states that two people were to come together as one flesh. The basic connotation of the words “one flesh” seems to present the idea of complete unity and solidarity between the man and woman.¹⁸ The point is that Genesis 2:24 suggests that God created two individuals with “uniqueness of personalities.”¹⁹ But, God brought the two together for a

¹⁶ Fabry, “\$lm,” 360. Fabry notes, “The repertoire of notions associated with the word group surrounding *melek*, notions fairly sated by usage and experience, was in certain contexts able to crystallize into fixed notions of kingship, dominion, monarchical self-expression, and political value systems, i.e., into Romans representing a certain royal ideology or understanding of the state, in its own turn, such ideology exercised influence at the level of consciousness, style, and tradition.” Ibid.

¹⁷ Robert Chisholm states, “Despite David’s successes, all was not well. By building a harem, David planted the seeds of destruction. While in Hebron he fathered six sons from six different wives (2 Samuel 3:2–5). Prior to this David had only two wives (Ahinoam and Abigail; 1 Samuel 25:43; 30:5), excluding Michal, whom Saul had given to another man (1 Samuel 25:44). At least one of these marriages was apparently contracted for purposes of solidifying a political alliance. Maacah was the daughter of King Talmai of Geshur, which was located east of the Jordan River. This description of David’s expanding royal court and influence is disturbing in light of Deuteronomy 17:17, which stipulated that the king of Israel must not multiply wives.” Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books*, 110.

¹⁸ A. F. L. Beeston comments, “‘Flesh’ in this context can only, it seems to me, be a legal term for clan membership; to say therefore that a man who abandons his parental clan thereby becomes ‘one flesh’ with his wife implies entry into membership of the wife’s clan, with all its attendant rights and obligations—particularly, no doubt, in the domains of inheritance and the blood-feud system.” A. F. L. Beeston, “One Flesh,” *Vetus Testamentum* 36/1 (1986): 117.

¹⁹ Lee McGlone insists, “Intimacy ought not be understood as the loss of a person’s uniqueness, male or female, nor the absorption of one’s identity into that of another. The text infers that individuality, the uniqueness of personalities, was God’s idea. There were two persons created, both unique and yet capable of relating to the other in a way that enhanced meaningful existence. Their ‘oneness’ never negated their uniqueness. Within a family, healthy intimacy requires respect of each person’s individuality. There is a kind of intimacy, more a kind of dependency that requires the sacrifice of individuality. When intimacy is born of such selfishness that calls for the loss of another’s personhood, the

particular purpose – to be “one flesh.” Gordon Wenham argues that the understanding of “one flesh” involves the concept of kinship.²⁰ Perhaps, the basis for his opinion can be found in Genesis 2:23, as the writer of Genesis makes a proclamation about the woman as she is brought before the man. The man states, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of Man” the only place the words *rf"ib'l. dx'(a*, are used in the Old Testament is in Genesis 2:24.²¹ The other places the words are used as a collection, in the Bible, are in the New Testament (Matthew 19:4–6; Mark 10:8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31). Even though these passages are in the New Testament, they are passages used in support of the ideal as presented in Genesis 2:24. The early narratives of Genesis state that the Lord God created man and woman in His own image, and the Lord God instituted the union between a man and a woman. It seems that idea of a marital union as an institution is used in the sense of a divinely established order. Yet, David did not respect this rule. He disrupted the ideal paradigm by

end is more destructive than enriching. While leaning on another for strength, especially in times of particular need, is a part of what family is all about, dependency on another for the totality of one’s existence is a dangerous thing.” Lee McGlone, “Genesis 2:18–24; Ephesians 5:21–6:9,” *Review and Expositor* 86 (1989): 245.

²⁰ Gordon Wenham argues that “one flesh” did “not denote merely the sexual union that follows marriage, or the children conceived in marriage, or even the spiritual and emotional relationship that it involves, though all are involved in becoming one flesh. Rather it affiRomans that just as blood relations are one’s flesh and bone, so marriage creates a similar kinship relation between man and wife. They become related to each other as brother and sister are.” Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco: Word, 1987), 71.

²¹ Bruce Kaye observes, “The absence of any serious consideration of the term ‘one flesh’ by the Rabbis fairly reflects the attitude of the rest of the Old Testament in so far as the term does not occur again. Marriage is, of course, referred to in many passages in the Old Testament and there is legislative provision for certain aspects of marriage. It is apparent from this absence of any use of the phrase, and the presence of extensive discussion of the nature of marriage and of the appropriate legislative framework within which marriage can operate in Israelite society, that there is no fundamental theological or moral concept which is expressed by this phrase which was important in Israel’s thinking throughout the entire span of its history.” Bruce Kaye, “‘One Flesh’ and Marriage,” *Colloquium* 22/2 (1990): 49.

taking another man's wife and treating her as if she were his own. While Genesis 2:18 states that God said, "It is not good that man should be alone." Man was not to take another man's wife to occupy himself. He was to be faithful to the Lord by respecting another man's possessions, especially as the king of God's people. So, not only did David disrupt his relationship with man, He offended God.²²

God instituted the union between a man, a woman, and then family as a paradigm to bring harmony and stability to the world that He created. The reason for the ideal paradigm was that it was to be a contract between two people, a covenant. In fact, the union is called a covenant in Mal 2:14.²³ And, if that is the position of how the union between a man and a woman is to be taken in Malachi, then the union can be understood as a covenant throughout the Old Testament. Gordon Hugenberger comments that "although Genesis 2–3 lacks the term 'covenant [tyriB4],' for anyone with Malachi's penchant for covenant concepts, there is sufficient evidence in Genesis 2–3 to suggest the appropriateness of this designation for the relationship between Adam and Eve."²⁴ The covenant between a man and a woman was not meant for David and Bathsheba. A covenant according to Gleason Archer has a distinguishing feature. He states, "A general

²² Oliver O'Donovan states, "Marriage is not an institution of higher learning. Nobody invented it, and nobody can abolish it; it is a natural institution as opposed to a conventional one." Oliver O'Donovan, *Marriage and Permanence* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1978), 4.

²³ Pieter Verhoef contends that just because "marriage is nowhere else in the OT called a 'covenant' does not imply that it could not have this meaning." Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 274.

²⁴ Gordon Paul Hugenberger, *Marriage As A Covenant*, *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 157. Hugenberger also notes that "if the Old Testament can identify David's relationship with Jonathan as a 'covenant,' for example, which it does in 1 Samuel 18:3; 20:8; and 23:18, then clearly 'covenant' can be used for a relationship between private individuals and is not restricted to 'divine-human' relationships, on the one hand, or international 'treaty' relationships, on the other." 157. He further states, "Given the widely recognized purpose of covenant to create unity and, especially, given the tendency to employ familial terminology to articulate that unity, the implication of 'they become one flesh,' entirely comports with the assumption that Adam and Eve's marriage was viewed as a covenant." *Ibid.*, 163.

characteristic of the Old Testament *berit* is its unalterable and permanently binding character. The parties to a covenant obligated themselves to carry out their respective commitments under the penalty of divine retribution should they later attempt to avoid them.”²⁵ However, David and Bathsheba had no covenant – they had a sexual rendezvous. There was no agreement between them, for when she discovered that she pregnant she contacted David to find out what she should do. David distorted the covenant, and harmed God’s ideal paradigms.

A covenant is to be seen as an agreement that binds two people together. The knowledge of a covenant can be found in Genesis 17. The Lord let Abraham know that even at the age of ninety-nine he would be the father of many nations (17:1–8), and Sarah, not Hagar, would be blessed by being the mother of many nations (17:16). Ken Mathews observes in relation to this text, “The idea of ‘covenant’ is central to chapter 17; the term *berit* occurs thirteen times in nine verses (vv. 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19). The patriarchal promises of heir, numerous descendants, land, nations, and blessing all appear in this one chapter. Chapter 17, at the center of the Abraham narrative (chaps. 12–22), emphasizes the transformation of barrenness to fruitfulness at the personal, community, and national levels.”²⁶ In addition, Bruce Waltke writes that “total obedience is the necessary condition to experience the covenant promises. To walk before God means to orient one’s entire life to his presence, promises, and demands.”²⁷ Claus Westermann adds even more to this as he comments that “God orders Abraham to live his life before God in such a way that every single step is made with reference to God and every day experiences keeps him close at hand.”²⁸ However, David did not walk before the Lord. As a result, he failed to take his responsibility of being a

²⁵ Gleason Archer, “Covenant,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 277.

²⁶ Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 1B. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 195.

²⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis A Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 259.

²⁸ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 311.

king, faithfully, seriously. David should have been with his army, leading them into battle. Instead, he was at the palace with one of his faithful warrior's wife in a sexual act. The problem with David's unfaithfulness was that God intended for His people to be a faithful sign for all people to see.

God chose the act of circumcision for the sign of His covenant. God established covenants not because He was being legalistic but, rather because He was being personal. This is seen in the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. The Lord instructed Abraham to carry out the ceremony of circumcision on the eighth day. Mathews notes, "The 'covenant of circumcision' is a subsequent state in the revelation of the covenant made with Abram (Genesis 15:18, 'made a covenant,' *karat berit*) and formally ratified by animal rite (Genesis 15:17)."²⁹ Moreover, according to Sarna, the reason for observing the ceremony on the eighth day was to "avoid the physical and psychological effects on one at a mature age . . . the eighth day is particularly significant because the newborn has completed a seven-day unit of time corresponding to the process of Creation."³⁰ The rite of circumcision was not fully beneficial to the infant, for he was only eight days old. It was not until much later in his life, when he was married, that he was able to understand more meaningful the sign of circumcision. Once he was married, the mature male would experience intimacy during the act of intercourse, with the foreskin gone nothing was there to come between the man and woman in intercourse.³¹ Just as God, does not want anything to come between Himself and man in covenant relationship. The husband and wife experiencing the fullness of intimacy became the basis for understanding how God devised man to know Him.

Therefore, circumcision was not intended as a benefit for sexual gratification alone. It was to be a sign of covenant intimacy between God and man. Deuteronomy 10:16 states, "Therefore circumcise the foreskin

²⁹ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 195.

³⁰ Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, in *The JPS Commentary*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 125.

³¹ Not from a literal sense—but this was to be seen as a sign from God to the man as will later be discussed in this chapter.

of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.” Elsewhere, Deuteronomy 30:6 states, “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” Eugene Merrill comments, “Circumcision was the sign of outward conformity to the covenant ideal and was not only perfectly acceptable but required. However, it was not enough if it was only physical and formal. More important was an inner conformity to the requirements and purposes of God, a circumcision of the inner person.”³² Elsewhere, Sarna comments that “God’s promises demand an active response from their recipients. Circumcision is both a token of God’s covenant and a symbol of the Jew’s consecration and commitment to a life lived in the consciousness of that covenant.”³³ Perhaps, the idea is best stated as a knowing consciousness as seen between God and man and between husband and wife.

Literary Context

2 Samuel 12:1–10 tells a story of a king that was supposed to be godly, but instead he acted wickedly. According to 2 Samuel 11:2, King David saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing one evening. This led him to inquire about her. He found out that she was the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Perhaps it was because Uriah was a Hittite that David did not respect the union between Uriah and Bathsheba; for David sent for her. The text does not say; however, it does note that Bathsheba willingly appeared before David, and they had sex. She conceived, and sent word to David of her pregnancy. When David learned of Bathsheba’s pregnancy he sent for Uriah from the field of battle. However, when Uriah returned he did not go to be with his wife. Therefore, King David had Uriah sent to an area of heated battle so that Uriah was murdered.³⁴ Once Bathsheba heard the news of Uriah’s

³² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 203. Also see 388.

³³ Sarna, *Genesis*, 125.

³⁴ Baruch Halpern observes: “David has now sunk to or even below the level of his subordinates in earlier narratives; as king, he has become, in the end, the outlaw he once represented without incurring guilt. He has murdered not an enemy, nor even a former enemy, but a loyal and upstanding subordinate. He has claimed that subordinate’s wife. Nor does the husband simply drop dead at a convenient

death, she mourned. After a time of grieving, David sent for Bathsheba and married her. However, the matter displeased the Lord (2 Samuel 11:27). God established the union between a man and a woman as a monogamous relationship. This was the ideal model. But, King David did not respect God's ideal. And, it appears that David did not revere God's Kingdom. God had set up His Kingdom to be the ideal paradigm for all other kingdoms – man was to worship God.

2 Samuel 11:1–27 seems to be the foundation for the reaction that is found in 2 Samuel 12:1–10. The concern for 2 Samuel 12:1–10 is that God was not pleased with David. Thus, He had Nathan go and confront David of his sin.³⁵ Yet, Nathan did not provoke David by pointing out his sin. Instead, Nathan used a parable to allow David's sin to challenge his position. Stephen Andrews and Robert Bergen state, "Nathan did not directly condemn David for his sin. Instead, he let David condemn himself. The prophet played the role of an advocate for a person who was in need of justice."³⁶

The injustice came in the form of a hideous act. According to the author, Nathan told David a story of a poor man that had nothing but a prized ewe. The animal was like his daughter. The poor man treated the ewe as a part of the family, for the man loved the ewe. However, there was a rich man and he had was exceedingly rich (dam rbh). When a visitor came to town

moment, as Abigail's husband, had done earlier: David has usurped the role of Yahweh, by providing, violently, for himself. The stench of corruption cleaves to him, personally, rather than wafting up only from those around him." Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 36.

³⁵ Joyce Baldwin remarks, "There is nothing to suggest that it is a parable, and David, the supreme judge, who could be expected to pronounce on hard cases, paid attention to the details, which the prophet outlined in sixty-one carefully chosen words." Joyce Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 8 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 236. Robert Bergen suggests, "Such stories, not unlike political cartoons today, permitted persons of lesser social power to render judgment against the most powerful members of society." Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 369–370.

³⁶ Stephen J. Andrews and Robert D. Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Holman Old Testament Commentary, vol. 6 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2009), 275.

asking for assistance, the rich man did not take from his own flock, but took the poor man's only ewe.

David's anger toward the perpetrator appears to have been a self-righteous rage. Knowing within his heart what he had done, David calls for the man's life. A. A. Anderson states, "Perhaps, we should also note that *twm* !b refers essentially to a subjective judgment or evaluation, not to a legal decision (cf. the popular expression, 'He ought to be shot!')." ³⁷ Perhaps, God had Nathan meet David and tell him the story to provoke emotion. ³⁸

When Nathan told David that he was the offender, he wanted David to realize that his actions were not becoming of a King. As a king, over His people, God had provided and protected him. God chose David, not because he was significant within society, but because he was unimportant (1 Samuel 16:11). Andrews and Bergen note, "A lowly shepherd boy was anointed king over Israel. God had protected David, delivering him from the hand of Saul. David had received both material blessings—his master's house—and sexual pleasures—his master's wives, that is, Saul's harem."³⁹ David was placed over a representational ideal Kingdom. He was to be a model for the God's Kingdom. But, ignored the foundational ideal relationship between the man and woman. This model was to characterize God's relationship with man, and symbolize the structure of God's ideal kingdom. But, David broke all aspects with his adulterous act. Andrews and Bergen state, "The starting point for David's wrongdoing was the fact that he had despised the word of the Lord."⁴⁰

David was told that actions were to have great consequences. These consequences were to be experienced by David, his family, and the people of Israel and Judah. Verses 7–9 remind David why: 1) God gave him the

³⁷ A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 11 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 162.

³⁸ David G. Firth, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 427.

³⁹ Andrews and Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 276.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Andrews and Bergen contend that "David knew what God had said about murder and adultery, yet he rejected God's commands." *Ibid.*

Kingdom (he was not born a king); 2) God protected him from Saul (Saul sought to kill him, to preserve his kingdom); 3) God gave David Saul's house and harem; 4) God gave David the houses of Israel and Judah; and 5) God would have given more to David. David Firth states that the confrontation stresses "David's callousness in taking from Uriah and his role as king. This is shown to be especially heinous in the light of Yahweh's giving to him."⁴¹ God's grace had been ignored. However, God chose not to take David's kingdom from him as he had done with Saul.⁴² But David's kingdom was to struggle. Ronald Youngblood argues, "Since theft of a lamb was not a capital crime, David's outburst is an exaggeration designed to express the gravity of the sin involved in the callous ignoring of the poor man's attachment to his ewe. It reflects the inadequacy of the

⁴¹ Firth, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 427. Firth states, "Yahweh had given much to David so that he possessed everything he needed. This includes his anointing, saving his life from Saul and the gift of all that had been Saul's including his wives. Although Saul is known only to have had one wife and one concubine, this does not preclude a larger group, all of whom were apparently taken by David. Giving Saul's wives to David symbolized the gift of the kingdom, but Yahweh claims he would have given David more had he asked. This is contrasted with David's taking Uriah's wife. The oracle's climax is reached in v. 9 where Nathan turns from describing the past to interrogate David, asking why he despised Yahweh's word, rejecting what Yahweh had done for him. In context, Yahweh's word is not a specific promise but a reference to Yahweh's absolutely faithful character. Before David can answer, Nathan announces the specifics of David's sin, which is Uriah's murder and the taking of his wife, which is explained through David's ultimate action in killing Uriah through the Ammonites. It is not that murder is worse than adultery or the other way around. Everything David had done attacked Uriah and rejected Yahweh's grace." Ibid.

⁴² Robert Bergen contends that "this verse may be viewed as a key—a turning point—in the structure of 2 Samuel, the Lord furthermore suggested that David had not yet plumbed the depths of God's generosity in his behalf. After providing a relational context describing how David had been so richly blessed, the Lord made explicit the exact nature of the offenses committed. Fundamentally, David had rejected the terms of the relational framework that had bound the king to his God: David 'had shown contempt for the word of the Lord by doing what is evil' (v. 9) in the Lord's eyes. David had made a mockery of the Ten Commandments, the central tenets of the Lord's covenantal relationship with Israel, by committing the dual sins of murder and adultery. As is regularly the case with sin, David's transgression had not only violated his relationship with God (cf. 51:4), but it also had ravaged human relationships." Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 371–372.

civil law in this particular case. The rich man deserved death for his callous act, but was protected by the law itself.”⁴³ However, the rich man’s offense had not been unheeded by the Lord. God’s desire for His people was to live in an ideal Kingdom (Garden of Eden). But, since man wanted a king like the other kingdoms, they were to suffer the aftermaths created by their king.

Hermeneutical Understanding from a Current Analysis

Nathan’s confrontation of David exposed his arrogance. No longer was David the innocent shepherd boy, but he was a covenant breaker. This undoubtedly caused him great shame. What David was ashamed of was that he failed to be submissive to the Lord and His principles, and because of the loss of innocence, he attempted to hide his sin. No longer was he able to have a kingdom of peace; for his sin had separated him from God and his kingdom.

Since, the Garden of Eden man has continued to deviate from the ideal union. But Genesis 2:24 becomes the foundation of the ideal union, and it appears that it shaped Moses’ thinking throughout the remainder of the Law. In fact, Genesis 2:24 seems to have influenced all three sections of the Hebrew Bible – the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Thus, Genesis 2:24 seems to be behind the instructions in the Law concerning virgins (Ex 22:16–17); bodily discharges (Leviticus 15); sexual morality (Leviticus 18 (incest); Deuteronomy 22:13–30); and unfaithfulness of wives (Num 5:11–31). These instructions seem to become directions for how a man and a woman can find the proper mate, and live faithfully with the mate once that mate has been found, and the God that they serve.

Furthermore, the impact of God’s ideal union is seen in the Prophets. On numerous occasions, Israel was chastised for her unfaithfulness to the Lord (Judges 2:11–23; 8:33; 2 Kings 17:16; 23:9–10; Is 57:3–10; Jer 2:20; 3:1–13; 13:27; Ezekiel 16 and 23; Hosea 1–3). God created the ideal union for the man and the woman so that they could be a faithful couple and

⁴³ Ronald F. Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 943.

become fruitful and multiply. In the passages listed above, God became angry with Israel as she played the harlot with gods by following after them. According to Genesis 2:24, God created the ideal union so that man would learn and live out faithfulness. Originally, God placed the man in the Garden so he could serve the Lord, and guard his relationship with God. The Lord saw that it was not good for the man to be alone. So, He brought the woman to the man to help him in fulfilling his duty. Their duty to one another was to create a unit of solidarity, leaving all behind and cleaving to one another.

In the Book of Judges, lust for a Philistine wife makes Samson pursue a non-Jewish spouse much to the chagrin of his parents. Their concern is realized in the lack of fidelity found in the Philistines; for Samson's wife was given to his companion by his father-in-law. Hence, Samson killed many Philistines, because his wife was taken from him, and given to another man. Scripture states that if a person is caught in adultery then he shall die (Deuteronomy 22:22); for God made a man and a woman to unite for life (Genesis 2:24). Samson re-acted in a manner that fulfilled Scripture – he avenged what was rightfully his.

In a similar incident, after the death of Saul, David took Michal, his wife from Paltiel, Michal's husband to live under his dwelling (2 Samuel 3:14–15). It seems strange that David took Michal from her husband. However, Michal was originally David's wife. Saul, with his hatred toward David, made David leave Michal with her assistance (1 Samuel 19:11–19). Perhaps, David took Michal because he wanted to preserve what God originated; for Michal was his wife. God created man to be and have a faithful companion. David wanted to be a man of faithfulness. The reason that Genesis 2:24 becomes significant here, is because it implies that faithfulness is lived between a man and a woman as they work toward becoming one flesh. David had been granted Michal as his wife, therefore, he took her.

In another pericope from the Book of Judges, an unknown Levite had a concubine who was unfaithful; for she played the harlot (Judges 19:2). The Levite went and retrieved her. On their journey home, they stopped in

Gibeah. While they were there, the men of the town approached the house where the Levite was, and asked the keeper of the house for the Levite. They wanted the Levite. The man of the house refused to let them have him. Instead, he told them that they could have his daughter; which they refused. Thus, the man of the house gave the Levite's concubine to the townsmen who raped and killed her. This incident appears to be reminiscent of Genesis 19:1–11. In that passage, God destroyed Sodom because of its unfaithfulness. Perhaps, the concubine was destroyed because of her unfaithfulness. As stated before, God initiated the union between a man and a woman to be one flesh union (Genesis 2:24). She was killed because of her unfaithfulness.

In 1 Samuel, Elkanah had two wives that desired his attention. One, Peninnah, was able to have children and the other, Hannah, was not. There appears to have been consternation within the house because one wife could have children and the other could not (1 Samuel 1). This occurrence appears to be similar to Genesis 29:13–30:24 in that Peninnah and Hannah struggled for the faithful affection of Elkanah much like Leah and Rachel sought after Jacob's love. According to Genesis 2:24, God made a union for a man and a woman; anything outside of those boundaries creates uncertainty. God created the ideal union to bring stability and faithfulness (Genesis 2:7–25). In 1 Samuel 2, Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's two sons, are exposed as fornicators, for they lay with various women, so God killed them (1 Samuel 2:22–25; 4:17–18). Again, this experience is comparable to Er and Onan in that they all practiced sexual aberrance causing God to destroy them for their unfaithfulness. According to Genesis 2:22–24, God brought the man and the woman together to make them stronger in being faithful to God, by being faithful to one another.

Saul, David, and Solomon had numerous wives. In fact, the Bible states that David had numerous sons by his different wives. Yet, when David had an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, and the prophet Nathan rebuked him for it (2 Samuel 12:1–10). David took matters into his hands by killing Uriah. As a consequence, Nathan told David that he would suffer heartache for his deed (David's son Amnon raped Tamar, his half-sister, and Absalom, Tamar's brother, murders Amnon for his act

against his sister. Absalom, later, went into his father, David's concubines – 2 Samuel 16:22). The Bible, also states, that Solomon loved many foreign women, and because of this love his heart turned against the Lord (1 Kings 11:1–10). Each of these episodes appear illustrative of Jacob and his sons. In all of the cases presented, unfaithfulness seems to be a reoccurring theme. The problem appears to have been that faithfulness was not the initial starting point, and as a result, an ideal conclusion was not obtained. God created man to be faithful to Him. To help him, God formed a woman so that together they could learn to be faithful to each other and to God.

The ideal union is also encouraged within the Writings. One such instance is found in the Book of Ruth. Boaz and Ruth are brought together by some unfortunate circumstances. Boaz and Ruth form a unique relationship that promotes faithfulness to God and one another. This episode seems to be shaped by Genesis 2:24. God brought Ruth to Boaz so that he could care for her, and she could be a faithful helper to him.

In the Book of Ezra, the priests were encouraged to put away their pagan wives. The priest had taken for wives the daughters of Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. The concern was that the “holy seed” had become contaminated because the priests practiced unfaithfulness (Ezra 9:2). Edwin Yamauchi contends, “Marrying those who did not belong to Yahweh was infidelity for the people of Israel, who were considered to be the bride of Yahweh.”⁴⁴ By marrying foreign women, the priests had become unfaithful to God. Ex 34:11–16; Deuteronomy 7:1–4 and 20:10–18 forbid the children of Israel to marry the people of Canaan.⁴⁵ God had chosen Israel to be His people. By marrying other peoples, the children of Israel became unfaithful. Genesis 2:24 was set as a paradigm that when a man took a woman to be

⁴⁴ Edwin Yamauchi, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1988), 664.

⁴⁵ Mervin Breneman argues that rules “prohibited intermarriage with the nations of Canaan because that would lead to apostasy.” Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 247.

his wife, she was to be a faithful companion. The children of Israel were the bride of God; they were not to marry people from the land of Canaan.

In Proverbs 5 and 7, the ideal union allows the writer to provide marital and sexual instruction for the man; for he is not to chase after harlots or immoral woman. Rather, he is to be faithful in pursuing God's ideal union. Proverbs 5:1–7 states, My son, pay attention to my wisdom; lend your ear to my understanding, that you may preserve discretion, and your lips may keep knowledge. For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell. Lest you ponder her path of life—her ways are unstable; you do not know them. Therefore hear me now, my children, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Not to be overly redundant, but it seems that the Writings express that stability comes through faithfulness. The ideal union found in Genesis 2:24 is faithfulness, and it is the foundation for all unions between man and woman.

Not only does the ideal union of Genesis 2:24 permeate the Hebrew Bible, but it also extends into the New Testament.⁴⁶ Jesus taught that God created the ideal union for man (Matthew 19:1–10; Mark 10:1–12); and living outside of the ideal was sinful. Paul, also, promotes the ideal union as the manner in which a man and a woman are to live (1 Corinthians 7:2–5). He states that any type of sexual immorality is a violation of the ideal (1

⁴⁶ The usage of “one flesh” as used in Genesis 2:24 is not found in the Old Testament. However, it is used in the New Testament. **Matthew 19:4–6** – “And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?” “Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”” **Mark 10:8** – “and the two shall become one flesh; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh.” **1 Corinthians 6:16** – “Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, ‘The two will become one flesh.’” **1 Corinthians 15:39** – “All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish.” **Eph 5:31** – “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.”

Corinthians 6:12–20; 1 Thessalonians 4:2–3; Romans 1:26–27 – homosexuality; 1 Corinthians 5:1–5 – incest).⁴⁷ The New Testament explicitly teaches that the ideal union is commendable, but sexual deviance will be condemned by God. Moreover, Heb 13:4 states, “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

Conclusion

David’s sin was that he ignored God’s commands. God chose David to be king because of his “heart.” But, he became preoccupied with his haram. Perhaps to the point that he decided to include Bathsheba, but she was another man’s wife. By taking her as his own, David disrupted the covenant ideal of Israel. Genesis 2:24 seems to be the basis of covenant, for it is the ideal union, a one-flesh standard set forth by God as a foundation for God’s kingdom. While that is a profoundly simple idea, sin caused disruption of the ideal. And although sin has abounded throughout the entirety of the Bible and man/woman relationships have faltered in diverse ways and depths because of it; the standard of Genesis 2:24 never changed. The standard set forth in Genesis 2:24 was the thought behind the marriage laws in the Torah. It was the standard by which the prophets proclaimed judgment against unfaithful Israelites, and the ideal for wise and godly relationships in the Writings.

⁴⁷ **Romans 1:26–27** – “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”

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