

Scripture Guide

2 Samuel 13

Biblical Context

God's promise in 2 Samuel 7 to always keep an heir of David on the throne asks the question, of David's sons, who would be king? Keep in mind at this point in Israel's history, the monarchy is still very young and susceptible to attacks from both inside and outside the kingdom. This is the drama that unfolds starting in 2 Samuel 13 and carries on in 1 Kings (originally combined with 2 Kings in the Hebrew Bible). Below is a brief summary of all of David's sons mentioned in the Bible as potential candidates for the throne:

- **Amnon** - the firstborn of David, born by Ahinoam the Jezreelite. At Absalom's command, his servants killed Amnon when he was drunk for raping his half-sister, Tamar (2 Sam 13:1–29)
- **Daniel** (also called Keliab/Cheliab)¹ - the second in line, born by Abigail the Carmelite. Because he is not mentioned elsewhere and was among David's sons who could have inherited the throne, it is likely that he died young.
- **Absalom** - the third born, born by Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. He was killed by David's military captain, Joab, after he attempted to usurp his father's throne.²
- **Adonijah** - the fourth in line, born by Haggith, (2 Samuel 3:4). He attempted to usurp the throne during the life of David (1 Kings 1:11ff). Solomon had him executed after being warned to remember his place in the line of succession per King David's instruction regarding the crown.³
- **Solomon** - the second child born by Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:24), who would later take the throne (1 Kings 1:28-40).
- Other sons of David that are only quickly mentioned in Scripture include Shephatiah, Ithream, Shimea, Shobab, Nathan (not the prophet), Ibhaz, Elishama, Eliphelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet. Scripture also mentions unnamed sons of David from his concubines.⁴

¹ 2 Samuel 3:3

² "Absalom traveled to Hebron, where he declared himself king and gained the support of Ahitophel, David's counselor. At Ahitophel's council, Absalom "lay with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel" (2 Sam 16:22 NIV; compare 12:11–12), symbolizing the transfer of power from David to Absalom...

Absalom [dies] in pursuit of David...The events of Absalom's life are the consequences of David's sin and character (2 Sam 12:10–12). Absalom's pride, manipulation, and political ambition led to his downfall. God's purpose—for David to be king—was unmoved by Absalom's rebellion; Yahweh had ordained Absalom's downfall (2 Sam 17:14) and preserved David's reign." Reck, J. (2016). [Absalom, Son of David](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

³ "Adonijah launched a preemptive, bloodless coup before David's death, staging a celebration—with himself as king—near En-rogel. Attendants included Abiathar, a priest; Joab, the head of the army; and a multitude of chariots, horsemen, and others (1 Kgs 1:5). Glaringly absent (and not invited) were Solomon and his advocates—including the prophet Nathan, the priest Zadok, the general Benaiah, and David's mighty men (1 Kgs 1:10). Fearful for their own welfare, Nathan and Bathsheba provoked David into proclaiming Solomon as king (1 Kgs 1:11–40), to be co-regent until David's death. They predicated doing so on an alleged promise (not recorded elsewhere) made to Bathsheba that Solomon would succeed David. Solomon's coronation was staged at Gihon and was so boisterous that Adonijah's now-rebel camp fled at the commotion. Adonijah himself feared execution, but Solomon showed clemency instead (1 Kgs 1:50–53). However, soon after David's death, Adonijah petitioned Bathsheba to intercede with Solomon in order that Adonijah might marry Abishag, a young woman who had attended to David. Adonijah's justification to the queen mother: "You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel expected me to reign" (1 Kgs 2:15 NRSV)—would have constituted a challenge to the throne and its property, as the king's harem belonged to his successor. Construing this as a treasonous ruse by his older brother, Solomon ordered Adonijah executed (1 Kgs 2:13–25)." Cook, M. J. (2016). [Adonijah, Son of David](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁴ 1 Chronicles 3:1-9

One major problem that arises from all of these potential successors for the throne is, does the Bible endorse polygamy? After all, David had eight wives and Solomon would later have 700 wives and 300 concubines.⁵ To answer this, one needs to first understand the nature of Old Testament narratives - Biblical authors will often communicate historical events as a way to describe what's going on, not necessarily to commend or condemn those events. Second, often when polygamy occurs in the Old Testament, it almost always leads to breakdown.⁶ And while the Bible doesn't outright condemn the practice, neither does it endorse it. Rather, this is seen as a primary example of God patiently accommodating, regulating, and sometimes even redeeming the practice of polygamy in light of the pervasiveness of the wider culture's practice of it.⁷ Third, one needs to look at the original intention of marriage. In Genesis 1, prior to sin entering the world, the ideal was one man in covenant relationship to one woman.⁸ Once sin enters the world in Genesis 3, the picture of marriage and sex distorts the original, intended design. In fact, Jesus expresses the same idea in Matthew 19:3-9 regarding divorce. Divorce was a culturally pervasive practice but never apart of God's original design according to Genesis 1. Nevertheless, God patiently allowed it to happen and provided laws to regulate it and keep it from getting out of hand.⁹

Personal Application

We see this principle played out on a micro level in the lives of Christians. While followers of Jesus still wrestle with, confess, and repent of sin ongoingly, God in His grace bears with us and accommodates to us in our weakness. He does not approve or endorse of our sin, but God being rich in mercy is patient with us in light of our sin. At the same time, the church is where God's kingship rules and reigns. Though God accommodates to us and bears patiently with us, this does not give followers of Jesus permission to go along with the status quo of culture but rather to model a life of ongoing repentance, denying the world, and dying to self. To cite the New Testament writer Paul in Romans 6:1-4:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ 1 Kings 11:1-6

⁶ The most notable examples being Sarah telling Abraham to sleep with their handmaiden Hagar (Gen 16, Gen 22) and Jacob marrying Rachel and Leah, also sleeping with their handmaids (Gen 29-30). It's also important to note that the Bible makes explicitly clear that the dividing of the nation was a direct result of Solomon's polygamy in 1 Kings 11.

⁷ There are times in the Bible where men were encouraged to marry more than one woman, but this was done in order to ensure widows in the community were provided for and/or that their family line would continue (Genesis 38, Deuteronomy 25:5, Matthew 22:24). Interestingly enough in the New Testament, when widows needed financial and provisional assistance, rather than result to polygamy, the entire church stepped in to provide for their needs (Acts 6:1).

⁸ "Just because the Bible records something doesn't mean it's endorsing it...The laws that may seem to condone polygamy, don't actually advocate for it, but merely legislate what to do when it happens. Polygamy was assumed. In ancient contexts of warfare, there could be far more women than men. Polygamy could provide security for some of the unmarried women. The Bible does have an ideal, and yet it still practically addressed the reality of a broken world." *Religious News Service*. "From polygamy to incest, confronting the Old Testament's strange sexual standard"

<https://religionnews.com/2016/04/08/how-to-deal-with-the-old-testaments-regressive-sexual-standards/>

⁹ Jesus echoes this original marriage ethic in Mark 10:6-8 and Matthew 19

⁹Theologians draw out this tension through the terminology of God's moral will vs God's sovereign will. According to God's holy, morally-upright character, He doesn't want sin to happen; however, according to His sovereign will He allows sin to happen - and according to Genesis 50:20 - even uses sinful actions for His greater purposes.