

# Michal, the Daughter of Saul

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Well, I don't know about you, but certain things in movies annoy me. One thing that annoys me is when plots don't really make sense and characters are doing things that are totally irrational. That kind of annoys me. It also annoys me when books are turned into movies and they butcher it. It's pretty annoying. But another thing that annoys me, and I don't know if this annoys you, is when the good guys and the bad guys are so clearly defined as "good" or "bad," that it's almost unrealistic. And, I mean, that might be a strange thing to be annoyed about, but I get annoyed about strange things. But when you think about it, it kind of makes sense, you know? Because life is rarely that clear, right? Sometimes morality in life – you can't really tell who the good guy and bad guy is, right? You have Star Wars, for example. I mean, I like Star Wars, it's a nice movie. But the good guys and the bad guys are so clearly good guys and bad guys, it's almost unrealistic, right? And the bible kind of understands this. It does. Real life isn't as clear that you could determine who the good people are and who the bad people are; sometimes life is just messy. And the stories in the bible and, in the Old Testament particularly, capture life honestly.

One thing about Old Testament stories that we have to understand is that they're actually very well written. In fact, if you're just objectively looking at it, many of the stories are masterpieces. And especially when you consider at the time when the Old Testament was written, stories like this were hardly ever being written, right? When you think of a nation, I don't know, 2-3,000 years ago writing about their nation's origins or something, you think of, like, Homer's Odyssey and the Iliad or you think of the Romans who were writing about, you know, how they're connected to Romulus and Remus, who were raised by a wolf. Kind of interesting poems that are legendary and kind of crazy. But in the Old Testament, what we get are stories, narratives that take true historical events but they portray it as a narrative. The author of 1 and 2 Samuel, for example, could have written about the life of David as an epic story. But instead, what we get is an honest portrayal of a man who is after God's own heart, yet at the exact same time is just a sinful man like anybody else. And the Old Testament captures that for us very clearly.

So, in keeping with our series, which is considering more obscure or troubling stories in the Old Testament, we'll be considering an obscure story that reflects the reality of life, where you can't determine: Is this person in the right, or are they in the wrong? If you have your bibles, please turn to 2 Samuel 6. It's found on page 218 or 244 in the bibles in the seat in front of you. If 2 Samuel 6 sounds familiar, it should. Two weeks ago we considered another passage in 2 Samuel 6, which was Uzzah and the ark. In that story David learned about the holiness of God, and that God has to be approached *in faith*, otherwise it's dangerous to approach God. When we were considering *that* story, we stopped at verse 15; but right after verse 15 is *another* very interesting story that is sometimes really hard to deal with and is one that's lesser known. It's a story about David and his wife, Michal. And what makes this story very difficult is that it is very well written, because the author muddies up reality for us to determine who's going to be in the right and who's in the wrong here. If you're going to look just at this passage, it'll seem like there's going to be one clear good guy and one clear bad guy. But it's not that easy.

1 and 2 Samuel – so we're in 2 Samuel – but there's also 1 Samuel; originally, that was one whole book, and the author is assuming that we would have read 1 Samuel before we got to this part here. In the broader story, he helps to set us up to understand this story from two perspectives. One perspective that makes us sympathize with David, but in the broader story makes that more complicated. Who's going to be in the right? Is it David or is it Michal? Well, we'll take a look. 2 Samuel 6, I'm starting in verse 16, and I'm going to read from the ESV; I just like the way they translate it. So it'll be on the screen, but you can follow along. Starting in verse 16:

***As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart. And they brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed, each to his house.***

***And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" And David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord—and I will celebrate before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.***

(ESV)

So let's first consider this story in its immediate context, from the perspective of David. David had learned a mighty lesson from the Uzzah incident. He had learned that if our good God is not approached in faith, it is dangerous for a sinful person to dwell in His presence, because the Ark of the Lord is actually God's very throne. But God's presence is supposed to be a blessing! So, as David is approaching God in faith, *now* he's able to celebrate! And he's dancing like crazy, he's offering sacrifices, and he's throwing out food into the crowd like at a sporting event where they throw t-shirts or something. It's a celebration, and David is celebrating and dancing pretty hard. Things are going good, and he rightly celebrates because God's presence is what every single human being needs, and he recognizes that. And he's celebrating it. In fact, it would be wrong if he *didn't* celebrate.

But not everybody is dancing and celebrating. Verse 16 tells us that as the Ark of the Lord came into the City of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked out the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart. Now, this is a very interesting move by the author, because if you think about it, if you're telling a story, you could have stopped at verse 15 and then skipped on ahead to Chapter 7, but he doesn't do that. The author of 2 Samuel is having us focus on the fact that Michal was also there, and Michal was not impressed with David's actions.

Why? And what's interesting is the author doesn't tell us why in verse 16. He just says that Michal despised David in her heart, but doesn't tell us why. He'll tell us a little bit later on in verse 20, but he leaves us to think about it. Why on earth would she be hating him? He leaves us in the dark intentionally.

And, interestingly enough, the author continually describes Michal as the daughter of Saul, and not only in verse 16, but in verse 20, and in verse 23. He keeps on saying, "Michal, the daughter of Saul. Michal, the daughter of Saul." I mean, I get it – she's the daughter of Saul. Why mention it three times? And why not ever mention the fact that Michal is David's wife? Well, I don't think that's an accident. The author is actually setting us up to kind of understand where Michal is coming from, and her connection to Saul that's motivating that. If you notice in verse 20, David's coming back home to bless his household, right? Kind of oblivious to the fact that his wife is not very happy. David's coming into the house, but Michal goes out to meet him. This isn't going to be a private argument; she wants to make it public. Just the way David was dancing in a crazy way, so she's going to rebuke him publicly. It's like you're invited to a dinner party and the husband and wife start fighting; things are going to get awkward pretty fast because everybody's been watching this, and Michal wants this to be public. Michal was the daughter of Saul; she was connected to the way Saul ran the kingship. If you remember the story of Saul, why was Saul chosen to be king over Israel? He was the first king over Israel – why was he chosen? He was chosen because he was a tall, handsome man who would be able to lead Israel's armies with nobility and dignity, and they would be self-sufficient.

In fact, if we remember the story of Saul, Israel chooses Saul instead of God to be their king. They want to have a king just like anybody else, and that is the kind of kingship that Michal is used to. But David is different. David is a different kind of king; he is a king after God's own heart. He is a king who recognizes that he's just a person like anybody else and, though he's a king, he has to celebrate God's presence coming in because he desperately needs God's presence! Unlike Saul, who's self-sufficient and is able to rule the nation by himself, David recognizes that he has no power on his own, and he desperately needs God. And as a result, he's willing to look like a fool as he's celebrating God's presence coming into Israel. And so David makes this pretty clear in verse 22. Actually, I prefer the NIV's rendition of this. It says:

***"I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."***

(NIV)

The true king of Israel does not consist of self-made glory and pride. Even a disinterest in the affairs of God. Saul is okay to have the Ark of the Covenant – God's very throne – not abiding in his capital city! It was in some person's house in a tent somewhere for all the years he was king. He couldn't care less that God was in Israel. David was a different kind of king, and though he was king, he knew he desperately needed God, and *humility* is what was needed for a king to approach God in faith. And I think David's example here has a lot to tell each and every one of us about how we are to live before God before the world.

I don't know if anybody has said this to you, but I've heard it. Some people say that Christianity is a crutch for weak people; people who are weak need a god. Here's the facts, though: They're absolutely right. The thing is, we are weak people, and we are in desperate need of God, and the fact is that might seem undignified in the eyes of the world. But like what David says, we're going to become even more undignified because we have no other option *but* to rely on God, *but* to depend on God. We *do* need God. We *do* need God to help us! We *are* weak people! And the very fact we recognize that might seem undignified to the world, but we'll become even *more* undignified in the eyes of the world. It tells us that we shouldn't drive our sense of dignity by what other people tell us about who we are. Our dignity comes from our relationship with God, and God alone. Even if that means we've become undignified in the eyes of the world.

And so it seems kind of clear, that's basically what I'm thinking the story is telling us. So Michal is in the wrong here; Michal shouldn't be rebuking David. And David's in the right; he should be celebrating the presence of God coming into Israel. But life is *never* that simple. And the author of 1 and 2 Samuel complicates this image for us. He does so by mentioning Michal, the daughter of Saul. It's very interesting. So you have verse 16, where he introduces the fact that Michal hates David. But the author doesn't elaborate on why until verse 20, which means if we were just kind of reading this narrative really slowly and on our own, I'm just kind of thinking about it, if we had verse 16, the author is wanting us to kind of think, "Why on earth would Michal be hating David?" He leaves it up for us to think about. And since you would be assuming that we'd have already read 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel up to Chapter 6, you would assume that we would be familiar that this is not the first time Michal has been mentioned in this story. In fact, this is the very *last* time, this is actually the conclusion of Michal's story arc in 1 and 2 Samuel. This is the last time we're going to hear about Michal, and the author wants us to understand this story in light of that. It messes things up, but it's honest to life.

We don't have time to turn to every place where Michal is mentioned in 1 and 2 Samuel, but I'm going to try to outline what the author has already summarized for us, and you'll see it on the screen - there will be different passages we'll show. We'll show that he has carefully developed Michal so that we know *why* she would be hating David in Chapter 6. The first time Michal, the wife of David, is mentioned is in 1 Samuel 18. You don't have to turn there; I'll just kind of summarize it for you. But if you want to later on, check this whole story out - it is super fascinating. At that time, in 1 Samuel 18, Saul is actually still king over Israel, and David is one of his commanders. And Saul is getting a little upset and nervous about David's rising power. And so he comes up with this clever plan; he says, "You know, David, I'm going to give you my wife, Michal, as a wife..." Pardon me, I mean *daughter*, Michal... Oh, man. What?! Crazy! Plot twist! [laughs] "I'm going to give my daughter, Michal, to you as a wife, and if you accomplish this *impossible* military victory..." He's planning on Michal to die in trying to accomplish this military victory, so he's pretty clever, right? At that time, though, the author tells us only one thing about Michal: He says, "Now Michal, the daughter of Saul, loved David." That's the first thing we know about Michal, and it's the *only* thing we know about Michal. Not about her personality, nothing about what she looks like, only one thing: Michal loved David. And so, then we go on, David accomplishes that military victory, to Saul's surprise, and in verse 27-28 the author tells us,

***And Saul - probably reluctantly - gave his daughter Michal for a wife. But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, Saul was even more afraid of David.***

(ESV)

Because by giving David his daughter, he allowed David to marry into the royal line and increase in power. But again, the only thing we know about Michal is that she loved David. It's kind of like a fairy tale story for Michal, if you think about it. Here, Michal is madly in love with this heroic young gentleman who is willing to fight impossible odds in order to marry her. That makes a person feel pretty good, you'd think, right? It's pretty powerful. And he eventually accomplishes it, he eventually wins, and gets to marry her. But then things get complicated. Eventually, Saul is like, "Okay, I'm actually just going to straight-up kill David." And so, in 1 Samuel 19, Michal helps David to escape in 1 Samuel 19, escape from Saul killing him. And then David and Michal are parted. But Michal waits faithfully as David is off trying to flee and save his life. But David, on the other hand, finds another woman named Abigail. Abigail was a very wise woman who just took David by surprise, and he chooses to marry her, and, in fact, he takes *another* wife. And 1 Samuel 25 verse 43 tells us:

***David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives.***

(ESV)

Now, I don't know about you, but if I were Michal, would you not be feeling an intense sense of betrayal? Michal, whose *only* description thus far was that she loved David, now finds out that David has married two other people while he's gone. You could imagine that that would absolutely crush somebody. And then Saul sees an opportunity to get David out of his line, marries off Michal to another guy named Paltiel the son of Laish, and Michal is sent away... Yeah, that's a mouthful. Paltiel the son of Laish, right? And Michal is now married to another person. She has no control over this. She loved David, and was discarded by David, and now her father sends her off to somebody else to get married, as a person who was discarded.

But that's not the end of her story. Things get worse for her. In 2 Samuel 3, David becomes king. So Saul dies at the end of 1 Samuel, and then David becomes king, but it's kind of a contested kingship. Saul's son is wanting to become king, and so David, he has to somehow solidify his hold over the kingdom, so there's a lot of civil war that's going on, but eventually he's starting to get control. But people are still loyal to Saul. And so David comes up with this idea. He knows he has to consolidate his hold over Israel, the kingdom of Israel, and he realizes that he needs to have Michal be his wife. And so he commands that Michal be taken from her new husband and returned to him.

And it's at this point where we start to see that the author's repetition of the phrase, "Michal, the daughter of Saul," becomes incredibly powerful, because why is David interested in Michal? Is it because she's Michal, or is it because she's the daughter of Saul? Her connection with Saul is what he wants, not Michal. And so we have in 2 Samuel 3:15, he goes and he takes Michal from her husband, and the author doesn't have to say any of this, but the author narrates this for us, and it's important. It says:

***And Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband Paltiel the son of Laish. But then listen to this. **But her husband went with her, weeping after her all the way to Bahurim.** Which is miles and miles. **Then Abner said to him, "Go, return." And he returned.*****

(ESV)

David is seeking to consolidate his hold over Israel and, in the process, he takes Michal back from a husband whose only description is that he loved Michal! He rips her from Paltiel, who would walk for miles crying and weeping that his wife, whom he loves, is being taken away from him. And he has no power, he can't stop this, so he has to return home. That is the story of Michal. The author tells us Michal starts off saying, "Michal, the daughter of Saul loved David." But now, once we get to 2 Samuel 6 verse 16, it tells us Michal the daughter of Saul despised David in her heart. In the work of literary skill, the author has forced each and every one of us to hold two things in tension. The first thing is that David is, in fact, the king after God's own heart. He is the person whom God has chosen to lead Israel, and in this passage he is in the right. But at the *exact same time*, David is just a simple man, like anybody else. At one level, he is the king whom God desires, but at another level, he is the king that God does *not* desire. In Deuteronomy 17:17, God commands that the king is not supposed to be multiplying wives. Polygamy is not okay in God's eyes. And yet, here's David explicitly ignoring that rule and, in the process, breaking Michal's heart. And if you know the story of David, it's setting him up, ultimately, for the sin with Bathsheba. His treatment of his wives is one of his greatest failures, showing that he is just a person who's sinful.

So clearly, Michal is in the wrong in rebuking David here. David should not be more like Saul, but at the same time, we understand that sometimes emotional outbursts of anger are less due to a present evil in the moment than it is to an accumulation of emotional baggage that's accumulated over time and just can't be contained anymore. When Michal saw David dancing, she saw a person, she saw a king, whose power was being consolidated, who was getting more and more control, and it made her really mad. Michal once loved David, but as one author has said, she now finds herself the daughter of a rejected royal household, a consort of only marginal political usefulness to a now popular king, and the least favored of four or more co-wives, when originally she was the only one for David. And then the author leaves us with this tension, and it perfectly encapsulates both the story of David, what we see here, but the broader story of Michal. In verse 23, the author tells us this:

***And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.***

(ESV)

Now, why this is such a brilliant ending to this chapter is that it is entirely ambiguous. Is God punishing Michal for speaking against the Lord's anointing? I don't know; it doesn't tell us. Or is this another cruel act of David, refusing to let her have a child, and in that culture would be consigning her to disgrace? The author doesn't tell us, because sometimes in life it is hard to determine why things happen. It's hard to determine whether someone's in the right or in the wrong, and the author leaves this totally ambiguous. Yes, David is in the right, but also, at the same time, he's also the villain of this story.

The honesty of this narrative is something that is incredibly relevant to our lives today, where each day seems to have enough trouble of its own. I'm sure every one of us has experienced times where you've been sinned against or you've had evil happen to you and you have no idea why, and it doesn't seem just or fair or there seems to be no reason for it. And it makes you look forward to the Day of Judgment when God is going to tell it how it is. And He's going to reveal what was right, what was wrong, and He's going to settle the score. But right *now*, we've got no idea sometimes! We've got no idea why something happens to us. Life is just messy. And we don't know. And that messiness causes problems.

Spouses who've been abandoned by their wife or husband can feel Michal's pain pretty acutely here. But anybody who suffers unfairly without even knowing why can relate to what Michal's going through here. And the bible recognizes that such pain exists. Pain that makes us wonder, "Is God punishing me?" How do you know? You have no idea! You have no idea. Is it just that we're in a world that's cursed, and evil happens? Is that what's going on here? That's what we're living in right now. And the fact that the bible recognizes it shows us that the bible accurately informs us about how life really is. Life isn't awesome. Sometimes life straight-up sucks. But I'm absolutely amazed by the fact that God would choose to give us a story like this in the bible. Think about that! Michal would have had absolutely no idea that her private pain would be known by anybody. She had no hope that that would be the case. But then here we've got in the bible her story, and it's read by millions of Christians around the world. She had no idea! And yet, God still knew her pain, and God knows all of our pains. He knows everything about us and He sympathizes with us. He cares when nobody else recognizes or cares. Psalm 56 tells us this. It says:

***You have kept count of my tossings;  
put my tears in your bottle.  
Are they not in your book?  
Then my enemies will turn back  
in the day when I call.  
This I know, that God is for me.  
In God, whose word I praise,  
in the Lord, whose word I praise,  
in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.  
What can man do to me?***

(ESV)

So life isn't happy, but know that God is with you. God knows your pains, and one day, at the end of time, He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and He will make all things new. God cares about our private pains. But then we think about David. Well, what about David? Clearly, his approach to God is correct, and each one of us ought to be willing to be looking undignified as we show we desperately need God. But you think about it: How on earth could God have chosen *David* to be king? *David*, who just destroyed Michal's life! How could he be the Lord's anointed? And in the next chapter, in Chapter 7, God's going to make an eternal covenant with David, saying that his kingship will never pass away, and he will never fail to have a descendant who will be king. How on earth could you make that with David?

But then I realize that I am more like David than I realize. I would criticize God for choosing to dwell in David's city, but at the same time, God is here dwelling in Edmonton with us, who are often more like David than we realize. Because each one of us, both are wronged in the world *and* we have wronged others. We are sinned against *and* we have sinned. And yet, God is still with us. And if I'm criticizing God for dealing with David, I'd be criticizing God for dealing with me. And what's so fascinating is that if God wasn't dealing with David, if He didn't promise David an eternal kingship, you know what wouldn't have happened? Jesus Christ would never have been born, because Jesus Christ is in the line of David and, interestingly enough, unlike David, Jesus Christ is *our* king. But He's not a king like David was. He didn't become powerful or gain His authority by causing pain to others; rather, He became king by living like Michal did, by becoming a human and suffering pains just like us.

That's the kind of king we have. Not like a king or a prime minister or some other world leaders who will fail us; Jesus Christ *has* never failed us and He *will* never fail us, and one day He will make all things new. And He did it by living like Michal; suffering pains like we did, living in a sinful creation like us, and saving sinful people like us. Eventually, David will learn the consequences of his treatment of women once we hit the Bathsheba story later on in 2 Samuel.

But God doesn't wait until we're perfect in order to interact with us, right? God meets us where we are and He takes us to where He wants us to go. By choosing David, God shows that He's choosing us, and that He uses broken people like us to accomplish His purposes here on this earth. So each one of us today live in a harsh world and we add to the harshness of this world, but this story tells us that God both *knows* our pains *and* He's in the process of restoring our lives through our only King, Jesus Christ. In this life, we may not be able to get straight who's in the right and who's in the wrong. Sometimes, life is just messy and hard and brutal, but David and Michal's story tells us that God collects our tears, He is with us in our pains, and that in God we trust, not in ourselves. And with a God like that, we can face the troubles of each and every day. Amen.

[praying]

Dear Lord, thank You so much for inspiring stories like this, God. For giving us stories like this in Your word, that encourage us in our day to day struggles and trials. I pray, God, that we take it to heart, and that we know that You are with us, even if it doesn't feel like anybody else is with us, oh Lord. Please strengthen us as we leave from here this week. In Christ's name, amen.