

David's Wives

Part I – Ahinoam

By Mesu Andrews

Note to Reader

I'm so excited to begin a serial novella with our new year! David has always fascinated me and is beloved by God as the man after His own heart. However, the great shepherd-king of Yahweh's people wasn't perfect. We see his greatest flaw in the way he interacted with his family—and it all began with his wives.

David's Wives: Part I - Ahinoam is the first installment of a serial novella based on the limited truths we have about these women in 1 Samuel 21:1 through 27:1. As you'll notice in the *Author's Note* at the end of the story, I also used various other resources to fill in historical information that helped inform the creative fiction that makes what I hope to be enjoyable "edu-tainment." My goal is always to use the Truth of God's Word as the unchanging foundation of a story, add the building blocks of historical fact, then add the mortar of creative fiction to create a warm and inviting story that invites you to come in and live with the characters.

At this point, I hope to write only about the wives David gained while reigning in Hebron (before conquering the Jebusites in Jerusalem), but we'll see how it all fleshes out (no pun intended).

Chapter One

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at.

People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

1 Samuel 16:7

Ahinoam

The sun barely peeked over the horizon, but Abba and I had already begun the harvest on our single barley field. Abba used the scythe in long, steady sweeps almost like I used the broom to keep my kitchen clean. We’d found our rhythms years ago when Ima left. She’d betrayed us both when she absconded with the landlord’s steward.

“Smaller sheaths!” Abba grumbled over his shoulder.

“Yes, Abba.” I pulled another leather strap from the supply around my neck and bound a smaller batch of stalks together, then set them upright to dry. I’d been helping Abba with the harvest since Ima left when I was five—ten years ago. Did he think my brain left with her?

“Would you rather I work on laundry and mending?”

“I’d rather you bind the sheaths like I told you.”

“Yes, Abba.” He was always grumpy in the morning. Especially when we had only gruel to break our fast. We’d barely made it through the winter with our grain stores, and we’d sold our last goat two weeks ago to purchase this year’s scythe.

Working in silence, my mind wandered to the all-consuming question that kept me awake through the night. Would Abba accept the butcher’s betrothal request for me? He was nearly Abba’s age but had two young daughters and a babe in need of an ima. When he traded his scythe for our goat, he glimpsed me in our one-room house and thought Abba might be desperate

enough to trade me as well. Was he? We had nothing to offer for a bride price, and I was certainly no great gift. But Abba needed me—didn't he?

“Abba . . .” Before I could form a question, the ground's slight tremor halted us both.

Locking eyes with me, his expression turned as hard as stone. “Get to the house, Ahinoam.” We both started running, he beside me, stride-for-stride. Then we heard distant screaming in Jezreel. “Get under the floorboards,” he shouted.

We burst through the curtained doorway. He ran for his weapon and I for the loose boards in the far corner of the single room beneath his elevated mattress. Sliding under the wooden platform, I jiggled the two boards, lifted them, and shimmied through the narrow opening into a dark cavern barely deep and wide enough for my body. I pulled the boards over me, and Abba pounded them in place with his fist. My hand found my dagger waiting in the hole. I clutched the hilt, my only hope should I be found.

Aramean raiding parties had been attacking Israelite villages for years, but they'd ventured farther south than ever before since harvest began. We'd hoped Jezreel was far enough southwest to escape the raids, but my hopes died with the deafening sound of approaching hoofbeats. Peering through a crack between two boards, I saw Abba place his six daggers in their sheaths behind his back on his leather belt and then prayed to the only God I knew—not that He'd ever helped me before. *Yahweh, if you can hear me, protect the only family I have in this world.*

The shouts of blood-thirsty men assaulted our house, and Abba walked out to greet them. I wanted to cry out and stop him, but he'd taught me better. While hunting, the rabbit that runs gets boiled in the pot. The rabbit that stays hidden stays alive.

“I greet you, valiant men of Aram,” Abba said. “Take whatever you like. I will not resist you. It’s a shame you didn’t wait another week. By then I would have had the barley dried and winnowed for you.”

Beneath our curtained doorway, I saw many feet scuffling outside. Several sickening thuds were quickly followed by angry shouts in foreign words. Suddenly, Abba stumbled through the curtain, blood dripping from his eyebrow, nose, and mouth. He fell on the packed-dirt floor, rolled onto his back, and lifted both hands in surrender. One of the men knelt astride him, holding one of Abba’s daggers to his throat, shouting again in his foreign tongue.

Abba answered in words I’d never heard him speak. Words the man seemed to understand. Words that made a slow, terrifying smile curve the man’s lips. He stood, ordering some of his men to help Abba to his feet, and spoke in calm words.

Abba bowed, and the Aramean chieftain returned a bow, the two men seeming to have reached some sort of agreement. When the chieftain turned to leave, Abba called him back and extended his hand, tone demanding. Though I didn’t understand his words, it was clear he wanted his dagger returned!

Abba, no! I wanted to burst from my hiding place and tell the chieftain to take the dagger and go. To my astonishment, the Aramean laughed, but quicker than a viper’s strike, he sliced Abba’s extended hand. As if reaching for the wounded hand, Abba instead withdrew a small knife from his sleeve and threw it past the chieftain’s head and into the doorframe, barely missing the man’s right ear. Abba calmly repeated the words he’d spoken before, extending his bloodied palm, still demanding his dagger be returned.

The chieftain grinned, then chuckled, and suddenly broke into a full-bellied laugh while placing Abba’s dagger into his bleeding hand and offering another bow before ordering his men

back to their horses. When the curtain was drawn open, I saw the chieftain order five wounded men to throw Abba's daggers into the dust before leading away his troop.

I wanted to pound the boards loose and jump out, but Abba placed one hand behind his back, motioning me to stay hidden. He stood in the doorway, watching more raiders pass by, shrieking and urging their horses toward the next Israelite village. When the only sounds in Jezreel were the wails of the mourners, Abba finally knelt beside his bed.

“Come out, girl.”

He pried up one board with his dagger, and I pushed on both boards from beneath. When the boards popped up and scattered, I scurried across the floor and lunged at him with such force, I knocked him off his knees. He lay on his back, with me sobbing atop him.

“What happened? What did you say to those men?”

He nudged me aside, never one for affection. “I showed them my skill with daggers and then offered to train the chieftain's men if he'd leave my house in peace.”

“You'll help our enemy?” He'd trained men to throw weapons—daggers, axes, and even sharpened plow handles—in villages far and near. But only Israelites.

His head snapped toward me, a grin replacing his sour expression. “We won't be here when they return, Daughter. Collect only what you can carry on your back. We're off to find the renegade, David ben Jesse.”

I'd heard talk in Jezreel that this man, David—who married King Saul's youngest daughter—had barely escaped the royal household amid accusations of his part in a conspiracy.

“Why not go to the king, Abba? Wouldn't it be safer to plead with him for help?”

My question snuffed out the spark of life in his eyes. “The *king* has done nothing to help us. He's more interested in maintaining his throne and proving his battle prowess than feeding

his starving people.” Abba grabbed a cloth from a basket and tore a strip from it, wrapping his bleeding hand while he spoke. “There’s rumors the prophet Samuel anointed David as Israel’s *true* king. Men are drawn to him like moths to flame.”

I nudged aside his cumbersome attempt at a bandage and tied the cloth tightly with a knot to stop the bleeding. “If David ben Jesse is hiding from the king, how can we find him?”

“The king’s son, Jonathan, is the army’s tracker—and David’s best friend.” He smoothed my hair and held my gaze, a rare show of affection with approval in his eyes. “And the king’s men don’t have my Ahinoam to guide them, the best tracker in Israel.”

Without more words, we set about our task and were climbing the western mountains well before midday. By dusk, we reached Tirzah and the next day made the prophets’ camp in Shiloh. There, we heard Samuel’s anointing of David as king was true. “We don’t know how or when,” one of the prophets said, “but David ben Jesse will reign over all Israel. Samuel thought surely Yahweh would choose his taller, stronger brothers, but Yahweh made it clear that the youngest son—a shepherd, no less—was His choice for Israel’s true king.”

“A shepherd king?” Abba scratched his bearded chin, and the prophet continued affirming all the reasons the whole camp of Shiloh prophets believed Samuel’s report.

I needed no such convincing. The fact that David was the least of his brothers seemed right to me. King Saul was a giant among men. Strong. Brave. Even handsome, some would say. But he had no heart for his people. A shepherd, on the other hand, instinctively protected the flock in his care. Could protecting a nation be so different? For the first time ever, Yahweh’s decisions made sense.

“We wish to lend our protection to King David.” I blurted, interrupting the prophet.

He looked at me like I was a bug to be squashed. “A woman dressed in men’s traveling clothing is an abomination, and I’ll not abide—” My dagger sailed past the end of his nose, landing in the tree beside his head.

I had his full attention now. “As I said, my abba and I wish to protect King David. Where might we find him?”

After an audible gulp, the prophet looked from me to Abba—and back to me. “Perhaps you are a gift from Yahweh Himself. He’ll be difficult to find, but you should begin by seeking out his parents in Bethlehem. I suspect he’ll try to keep them safe.”

Three more days of hard travel, avoiding the mountain-ridge road and the king’s men, we arrived in Bethlehem. Much smaller than Jezreel, it was surrounded by sparse pastures with too many sheep to graze them. “Any king who grew up in this poor town has my allegiance,” Abba quipped as we passed by the flocks and approached the unwalled city.

Houses were built in clusters around a central courtyard. Women sat on low stools in the shade of acacia trees while children played in dusty streets. A group of men sat beside two wooden pillars at what had likely been a hoped-for city gate. Did they think a city wall would build itself?

We halted three paces from them. “We’re looking for David ben Jesse,” Abba said.

“You, the king, and everyone else in Israel.” The spokesman took a long draw from a wineskin while the other men snickered.

Abba’s dagger sank into one of the posts, sobering them all. We were finding our daggers to be the best method of introduction. “I intend to help protect him,” Abba clarified. “We’ve come from the prophets’ camp, and they said we might find his parents here.”

The spokesman dropped his wineskin. “Why didn’t you say so? Jesse, Nitzvet, and their sons left this morning for Adullum Cave.”

Abba walked toward them, menacing, though he was barely taller than me. “What’s in Adullum Cave?”

“The next king of Israel.” The man’s eyes were as round as pomegranates, but he managed a grin.

Abba nodded, reached over the man’s head, and pulled his dagger from the post. “Shalom to you, then.” He offered a respectful bow while replacing the blade in its sheath behind his back. “We would be much obliged if you wouldn’t mention to King Saul or his soldiers that my daughter and I passed through Bethlehem.”

“That’s a girl?” Another man asked.

I turned away quickly, hiding my humiliation, and Abba’s glare silenced any more mocking. He turned abruptly to leave, pebbles crunching beneath his feet, and I fell in step as we continued our quest. He reached for my chin, forcing me to look his way. “Will you let a lazy drunkard shame you, or will you get us to that cave he mentioned?”

Cheeks still burning, his question turned my fury into a challenge. I playfully shoved Abba’s shoulder. “I’ll find the cave, but can you keep up on the way?”

“You watch me.” He winked, a rare show of tenderness, making me even more determined to find and help protect Israel’s next king.