

Chapter 7

David – Summary and Conclusion

Over the last six chapters we had a look at some of the key events in the life story of David. In each of the chapters there were opportunities for pausing and reflecting. I hope these resulted in some personal insights for the reader.

In this last chapter we will do a high-level review and draw lessons from David's experiences and behaviours. Throughout, as applicable, I shall compare David's activities and actions with the Ten Commandments.

We first looked at David's rise from obscurity to fame – from shepherd to the third man in the kingdom of Israel – seemingly set for life. His childhood had prepared him for much of what was coming his way.

His courage was never in dispute – tackling a lion and a bear, Goliath the enormous Philistine warrior, later exploits as warrior and leader of men all speak to the fact that David was a man among men in the setting of his time. When Saul required of him to kill 100 Philistines as the bride price for Michal's hand, David went out and killed 200. Rising rapidly from obscurity to become a son-in-law to the king, best friend with the king's son and an esteemed warrior, David appeared to have it made. However, some hints of pride and a sense of achievement sneak into the narrative.

From this narrative we can draw some lesson points:

- David was available when God called him.
- David was close to God – and thus prepared for the service God called him to do.
- David had confirmation along the way that he was in line with God's plan.
- David appeared to lose track of the plan when he acted out of pride to double down on Saul's requirement for the bride price.

There is an implicit warning for us: pride and a sense of achievement can interfere with God's plan for us.

When at the peak of his achievements, David lost track of the plan God had for him. He broke the first commandment – having an idol in his house. Michal put the idol in David's bed, and it was good enough to fool the soldiers coming to arrest David.

David ran away, and in his running away he sunk deeper into the mire of his own making. *What a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive*¹.

- David lied to the priest at Nob about his supposed assignment – breaking the ninth commandment.
- He pretended to be what he is not.

David's lie to the priest at Nob indirectly resulted in the death of the entire village – David might have thought that by lying, he could give the priest an excuse when Saul discovered that

¹ From the poem Marmion by Sir Walter Scott

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the priest had helped David, but the opposite resulted. Saul executed those who, he thought, had helped David.

There is a warning for us in this: breaking God's rules always have consequences, for ourselves and quite possibly also for others.

In this episode there are four behaviour traits we can learn from:

- David pretended to be what he is not – and so do we when we start to drift away from God.
- David ate stale bread – metaphorically speaking, we do too, when we do not spend time mining the Word for fresh insights and spiritual “food”, but rely on being fed now and then by others.
- David joined the enemy by going to Gath – looking for comfort not among the people of God but among the ungodly. When we drift away, we also tend to feel more comfortable in the “world” than in the “church”.
- David changed his behaviour to survive among the ungodly – and we do too – camouflaging the fact that we are Christians in order to fit into our environment. So-called “submarine Christians” on the surface on Sundays and deeply submerged for the rest of the week.
- David regrouped and returned to God and his calling in Addulam.

You can indeed run, but you cannot hide from God².

David became king over Judah, and after a bitter civil war, finally over all of Israel. He conquered Jerusalem and brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The City of David became the center of political and religious power in Israel.

Again, David was at a peak in his life. David's cousin Joab was the head of the army, and the thirty “mighty men” of David formed the backbone of the army. Uriah, Bathsheba's husband and Eliam, Bathsheba's father, both counted among the “mighty men”.

The campaigning season was about to start and instead of leading the armies to war in order further to secure Israel's borders and enforce tribute from the surrounding states, David delegated that leadership to others and stayed in Jerusalem. Not only did he send the army off to the field, but he also authorised the Ark of the Covenant to be taken into the field. But David stayed home.

² See also “The Hound of Heaven”, by Francis Thompson, 1890.

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In this idle period David saw Bathsheba bathing on her rooftop and summoned her to the palace and to his bed. She appears from the narrative to have been a willing partner in this adulterous liaison.

Adultery led to murder. When the prophet Nathan confronted David with a parable of his sin (the poor man and his lamb stolen by the rich man), David pronounced punishment on the “man who did this”. The sentence was harsh: the man deserved to die, according to David and the rich man in the parable had to make four-fold restitution for the lamb. “You are that man”, Nathan dropped the hammer on David.

Nathan assured David that he (David) will not die, but that the consequences of this sin would haunt him and his family from this point forward. “The sword will never depart from your house”. The four-fold restitution took the form of the loss of four of David’s children (Bathsheba’s baby, Amnon, Absalom and Tamar. The males died, Tamar lived as a recluse – a living death).

The human actors in the drama, Uriah, Bathsheba and Eliam, are important but at the center of this sordid affair lies the fact that David broke 4 of the 10 commandments:

- #6: You shall not commit murder.
- #7: You shall not commit adultery.
- #9: You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour (lie).
- #10: You shall not covet your neighbours’ wife.

The episode involving David and Bathsheba is arguably the best-known bit of David’s life. It also contains some of the most important lessons we can learn from David’s story.

- David fell into temptation (James 1:14, 15) and there are two key reasons we can identify:
 - David was not where he was supposed to be – he was at home instead of in the field with his army. More significantly – he allowed the Ark to accompany the army, but he did not.
 - David was idle – not engaged in the work the Lord had given him. He was the king, and when not active in war he should have been managing the affairs of the kingdom.
- David succumbed to temptation and committed a sin that involved breaking 4 of the Ten Commandments. The consequences were far-reaching and had a major influence on his kingship and his family, his children and grandchildren.

David repented genuinely and completely and was forgiven. The sin was expiated – but he still had to deal with the consequences.

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Conclusion to the life and times of David:

As we have followed David's life from shepherd boy to king, we have come to know a man who was deeply flawed. He lied, committed genocide, committed adultery, committed murder and overall may not have left a very good impression. He broke more of the Ten Commandments at some point in time or another than what he appears to have kept.

Yet – at the beginning of his story we are told that God chose him to be the king of Israel because he was “a man after God's own heart”. How do we bring these two seemingly contradictory pictures together?

In David's life we can identify much of our own lives. True, we do not run around killing people and taking body parts as evidence anymore. But we fall short of that which God has called us to be – just like David.

David was forgiven and saved by God's grace through faith. And so are we.

A last comment:

For pause and reflection: We have sort of neglected the 10 Commandments in the 21st century; seldom do we read them or think about them. Someone once said that if the legal profession wanted to write the 10 Commandments in “legalese” it would comprise an entire library. Maybe we should realise again that the laws of the western world are, for the most part, founded upon the 10 Commandments. And more importantly, they are called the 10 Commandments, not the 10 Recommended Practices.

This is the end of the series on the life and times of David.

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