

DAVID: CHOICES OF THE HEART

INTRODUCTION

In the New International Version of the Bible, 1Samuels Chapter 13 verse 14 reads: “the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people”. The Good News Translation renders that same verse as follows: “the Lord will find the kind of man he wants and make him ruler of his people”. Acts Chapter 13 verse 22 states “God testifying concerning him: I have found David son of Jesse to be a man after my own heart”. I do not know the Christian man who would not want his testimony to be that he was ‘the kind of man God wants’ or would not deeply desire to share the heart of God. This leads us to the question; in what ways does the life of David clearly demonstrates the heart of God? Before addressing this question directly it is necessary to examine some contextual matters.

David was the last and least of Jesse’s eight sons. While his brothers were receiving their schooling David was assigned the task of looking after the family’s sheep. David’s assignment in the family is not unlike that of many children, whose families decided that they are among the most unlikely to succeed. Investments are then made in the children judged most likely to succeed and the others are given the family chores. The point is that David was marginal in the scheme of Jesse’s family. Throughout Scripture God seems to have a special affection for the marginalized. However, not all marginalized persons in Scripture are judged to share the heart of God.

David had ‘soul’. He was a passionate man. He was a poet and song writer. He was a musician who was particularly skilful with the harp. Saul’s attendants selected the boy David to play on his harp to calm the troubled spirit of the King. Indeed, this was his first employment in the palace and from which position the King appointed him as one of his armor-bearers. David loved to dance. Indeed, when he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem he organized a carnival parade with music and dancing. He himself danced with such vigor and abandon that most of his fine linen clothes fell off leaving him only in his ephod, underwear. When, as would be expected, his wife Michal chastised him for dancing in an unbecoming manner before the slaves girls and in a state of dress not befitting of the king, his answer was sharp and straightforward. He was rejoicing and celebrating in the Presence of the Lord was being brought to Jerusalem and that he was honoured to be the one to bring the Ark of the Covenant back among God’s people. He really did not care what she or others thought of him. He was worshipping the Lord. By today’s denominational practices David would not be Baptist or Methodist, and clearly not Brethren. More likely he would be Pentecostal or possibly Catholic. Scripture records the lives of many passionate people, but passion by itself does not appear to mark the heart of God.

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF DAVID'S LIFE

When we examine his poetry and songs recorded in the psalms we find evidence of a strong personal love relationship with God. A few quotes, with the personal pronoun, should be sufficient to establish this beyond doubt:

- “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Psalm 23 verse 1.
- “The Lord is my light and my salvation: Psalm 27 verse 1.
- “I praise you, Lord, because you have saved me and kept by enemies from gloating over me: Psalm 30 verse 1.
- “I come to you, Lord, for protection.” Psalm 31 verse 1.
- “Why art thou cast down oh my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me, hope thou in God” Psalm 42 verse 5.
- “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and fortress, in Him will I trust” Psalm 93 verses 1 and 2.

Certainly, a deep personal relationship with God must be pre-qualification for having the kind of the heart that God has and for being the kind of man that God wants. The assumption that also immediately follows from saying that someone has a deep and personal relationship with God is that such a person lives a holy and pure life. However, the account in the Bible of David's life totally and completely shatters this assumption. To say that David was not perfect is a great understatement. To gloss it over his life with the comment that David was a sinner like the rest of human kind is to ignore substance and engage in superficiality. David was a big-time sinner. He was a warrior who shed a lot of blood. He was the chief conspirator in the murder of Uriah the Hittite. He committed adultery with Bathsheba. Like most kings, princes, chiefs, emperors, presidents, prime ministers, generals and even some bishops, throughout history, he enjoyed the fact that his position of power seduced diverse women and also facilitated access to the sexuality of many other women. There is no question that he enjoyed this perquisite of the office of kingship. He had many wives and concubines. To be blunt David was a womanizer. David was a poor father in terms of disciplining his children. He knew that his son Amner had raped his half-sister Tamar but did nothing about it. He knew that Absalom her brother killed Amner in revenge but did nothing about it. 1 King 1: 5 and 6 records that David never admonished Adonijah, one of his older sons. At times David lacked faith. I Samuels 21: 12 and 13 shows he was afraid of the King of Achish, notwithstanding his defeat of Goliath. At times he was guilty of arrogance. For example, David ordered a census of his army contrary to the wishes of God.

David was a sinner and God punished and chastised him severely for his sins. Because of the blood that he had shed as a warrior God forbade him to build the Temple in Jerusalem, which was one of David's greatest ambitions. That honour went to his son Solomon. The child born out of the lust shared by David and Bathsheba died shortly after birth, to their great anguish. The prophet Nathan told David that for the murder of Uriah, his household would be cursed with turmoil. Absalom rose up in rebellion against him, and Adonijah sought to succeed him, when the latter thought that he would soon be dead. After the census of this army 70,000 men died of the plague in three days. And if you think that God overlooked his womanizing consider this. Toward the end of his life, when he suffered from some condition that made him feel cold even under blankets, his attendants, who knew him most intimately and therefore knew his taste for and in women, did a search in Israel for a beautiful young woman, Abishag, who was still a virgin. They got her to agree to look after David, particularly to warm him up in bed at night. After three months passed and he had not been intimate with her, they concluded that 'he got no heat'; 1 Kings 1:1 to 3. But think of the frustration, the agony and even humiliation of a womanizer having a young beautiful virgin in his bed every night and not being able to perform as before. If that is not payback to any womanizer I do not know what is.

Reading his poetry, listening to his songs, and reviewing his life there are many who could conclude that David was nothing but a hypocrite: professing a personal love relationship with God, always calling God's name yet living a life cluttered with public and private sins. God's punishment manifested in his personal life and consequences for the people of Israel was just proof of God's condemnation of his hypocrisy. This is a common view when we look in judgment on the sins of others.

In defense David might say that his life was just an open book of his struggles to live according to the word, the will and the way of God whom he loved, while at the same time living with the man that he was and in the times in which he lived. In this respect David is no different from the rest of us, if our lives were also up for public display. But David's response even when God punished him testifies to his love of God. Psalm 30 verse 5 states: "His anger lasts only for a moment, his goodness for a lifetime. Tears may flow in the night, but joy comes in the morning." In Psalm 16 verse 2 David states: "You are my Lord: apart from you I have nothing". Ron Edmonson probably sums up David's perspective best by stating that "David recognized that the only good in him, was the God in him."

God looked beyond David's sins and saw his heart. God's pronouncement on David, as recorded in Paul's declaration in Act Chapter 16 verse 22 is that David, the son of Jesse, was a man after God's own heart. To understand how this could be, it is necessary to look beyond David's flesh and consider his spirit. It is to probe beyond his flaws, faults, failures, failings and frailties and see the spiritual qualities in him that would win such approbation from the Father himself.

CHOICES OF DAVID'S HEART

The 'heart' speaks of spontaneity, unpretentiousness, openness and unashamed expose of the self that spring naturally from someone without filter or thought. Speaking from the heart connotes genuine and sincere expressions which reveal who persons are at the core of their being. Invariably, the 'heart' is associated with emotion and passion.

Choice is a decision between alternatives. It is a matter of will. Usually it comes after consideration, consultation, and calculation of the pros and cons of alternatives. Choice is usually cold and calculating. It considers the calculus of the options to be chosen before choosing.

Choices of the heart reveal spirit, disposition, nature and character. It signals the calculations of the will that that are made speedily and spontaneously: without a moment's thought. It speaks of the spirit that compels and inspires and at the same time constraints and restricts our actions.

God is omnipotent. He has the power to do anything he wants. He is omniscient he knows all things. But the Heart of God compels and constrains Him only to do that which is good, just, holy, right, noble and gracious. In what ways therefore did David manifest a heart that was like the heart of God?

Without in any way claiming that this list is exhaustive, or any in chronological order, I wish to suggest seven ways in which the life of David demonstrated the heart of God and in which he was the kind of man that God wants.

Confidence to Abide by God's Timetable

Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, was the first king of Israel. He ruled for forty years. David was born ten years after Saul was appointed King. It would appear that about half-way through his reign God came to the conclusion that Saul was in it for the benefits. Samuel, the last judge of Israel was instructed to anoint one of Jesse's sons to succeed Saul. It would appear that this anointing took place when David was between 10 and 13 years old. David was appointed King of Judah, at Hebron, three days after Saul was killed in a battle. He was 30 years old. Seven years later he became King of all Israel. The point of interest here is what David did for the 17 to 20 years between being anointed as Saul's successor and being appointed, King at Hebron. The question is; what choices governed David's actions during this period?

Let us immediately establish that David was not a modern politician. He did not set up a transitional team to guide him and to prepare for his takeover of the kingdom. David returned immediately to take care of his father's sheep in the wilderness. Out there he developed skills related to protecting the sheep from being stolen and slaughtered by lions and bears as well as seeking those that had strayed. It would also appear that he used some of his time to master the playing of the harp. The mastery of this instrument brought him to the attention of palace

personnel looking for someone's whose music could calm the king. His success in performing this function not only brought him into the palace but made him a favourite of the king.

Knowledge, that one day he would be king did not in any way hinder David from serving Saul dutifully and respectfully. Knowledge that he would one day sit on the throne did not prompt David to exert himself in any pompous way among the courtiers. He kept this knowledge to himself and behaved as would be expected of any boy accorded the privilege to enter the palace to serve the king. In a real way David humbled himself after being anointed.

At 20 years old David joined the army. With Goliath fame behind him, his leadership qualities become obvious and he became even more famous. Returning victorious from a battle of with Philistines David was greeted by some women with singing and dancing and shouts to the effect that Saul had killed his thousands but David his ten thousands. While these claims were certainly not true they indicated the growing popularity of David. Further, David was now the leader of a band of young warriors. Saul knew that his throne would not go to Jonathan his eldest son. However, he did not know who would succeed him. From this incident Saul became suspicious of David.

Maximum leaders seldom embrace successors that are not of their lineage or choosing. They are particularly aggressive to young upstarts that become popular with the people, even though polls were not taken in Saul's time. Saul banished David from the palace and actively pursued a plan to kill him. Saul was not about to accept God's judgment of him nor His plans for Israel. David was then 23 years old. On two occasions David owed his survival to the actions of two of Saul's children: first Jonathan, with whom David had developed a great friendship, and second by Michal one of Saul's daughters who had fallen in love with him.

On two occasions David had the opportunity to kill Saul but did not. The first instance was in one of the caves in the canyon called En Gedi in the territory of the Dead Sea. Saul had mistakenly wandered into the cave in which David and his men were hiding. David cut off a piece of Saul's robe and later displayed it publicly to demonstrate to Saul and his men that he could have killed the King. Saul expressed shame at trying to kill David and promises to cease such action, 1Samuel 24:6-17.

The second instance was under the cover of dark when David secretly, and at great risk, entered Saul's camp outside the city of Ziph while Saul and his men slept. Faced with the opportunity that he had actively sought, David decided; "As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The Lord forbids that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed." 1 Samuel 26: 9-12.

During the 17 to 20 years between his being anointed to be king and when he was appointed king, David's decisions and actions were constrained by the fact that Saul was the king, that God had anointed and appointed Saul as king. As such his obligation and duty was to serve and

honour the king who was on the throne. Saul's appointment was sacred and therefore outside the boundaries of his own action.

Further, God had anointed him to succeed Saul. However, it was up to God and not him to determine the date of his appointment. His obligation was to ensure that when that day came he was ready to be the king. The choices of David's heart during this period of waiting were governed by a sense of the sacred which set boundaries that should not be crossed and David's supreme confidence that God, who had called him for a specific purpose would determine the timetable for this appointment to the position for which he was appointed to fill.

Courage to Face the Enemies of God's People, while Others Fled

The account of David and Goliath is so well known and celebrated that it has become the most commonly used metaphor for combat between giants of any kind and underdogs of all types. In the circumstances it is necessary only to sketch the broad outline of the context of this epic event in the life of David and in the history of Israel.

David was still a youth at the time of this event. Two of his elder brothers were in the army. He was part of the supply line to his brothers. Excited to be near to the front lines and curious to find out what was taking place David learned of the giant Goliath, the champion of the Philistine army, who was challenging the army of Israel to send their champion to meet him in mortal combat. David was offended by the audacity of this giant who dared to oppose the army of God's people.

However, he was astonished to find out that no one in the army of Israel was prepared to take on this nine foot giant. Moreover, many of God's people were fleeing in fear. Not even the Saul, the king, who by all accounts was a big man, was prepared to take on Goliath. Possessed of the fervor of youth, unencumbered by experience, ignorant of the odds, dismissive of the risks involved, and fervent in faith in God, David volunteered to face Goliath. Probably to his surprise his offer was accepted.

Saul and his captains then attempted to put on regular armory on David. However, David became convinced that he could take on Goliath with the weaponry Goliath and other warriors regularly used. He must rely on the weapon he had come to master while tending his father's sheep against wild animals. Goliath had the advantage of size, strength and experience in regular warfare. The sling and stones gave him the advantages of speed, mobility and surprise. Goliath had never fought against the sling and the stone before. Armed with absolute faith in God and confident in his competence with the sling and the stone David formed the courage to face Goliath in mortal combat. And the rest they say is history.

When God's people were running away from the giant that confronted them, David's choice was to run to face the giant in the name of the Lord his God.

Commitment to Community in Sharing God's Bounty

- David had been fleeing Saul for over five years.
- Twice he escaped Saul's attempt to kill him by actions taken by two of Saul's children.
- Twice Saul publicly repented of his efforts to kill David after David showed that he could have killed him, but Saul still continued relentlessly to try to eliminate David.
- Fearful that Saul would succeed in killing him, David decided that his best bet for survival was to defect to the Philistines, the enemies of Israel.
- David and six hundred men and their households aligned themselves to Achish, king of Gath.
- In the deal made with Achish, David and his men were given Ziklag. From Ziklag David and his men fought against several tribes, particularly the Amalekites.
- All the armies of the Philistines massed to fight Israel
- David and his men marched with Achish.
- The kings of the Philistines refused to allow David and his men to be part of the army to fight the Israelites. They did not trust him to be loyal to them.
- David and his men return to Ziklag to find that the Amalekites had used the opportunity to take revenge.
- They burned Ziklag and took all the women and children captive, including David two wives.
- David's men threatened to stone him. Mutiny was on the horizon.
- David prayed to God to rescue him from the situation.
- Finding fresh faith, David and his six hundred men went after Amalekites.
- At the brook, Besor, two hundred men were too tired and weak to continue.
- David and four hundred men, continued, found the Amalekites, defeated them, recovered the women and children and seized all the spoils the Amalekites had amassed from raids.
- The four hundred men who fought the battle did not want those who stayed behind to get any share of the spoils, only to recover their families.

- David vetoed this approach. David saw the grace of God in the victory. He appreciated the value of the men who remained at the brook. Moreover, he remembered all who had supported them.

1 Samuels 30: 23-24: “My brothers you can’t do this with what the Lord has given us. He kept us safe and gave us victory over the raiders. No one will agree with what you say. All must share alike: whoever stays behind with the supplies gets the same share as the ones who went into battle.” David decided that all should share alike. In this decision we see David’s commitment to community when provisions were to be shared. For David these provisions came from God. All should benefit not just those on the front lines.

Contriteness and Confession when Confronted with Sin

The story of David and Bathsheba is one of the most famous stories of adultery and conspiracy to murder ever told. The bare bones of this story as set out in 2Samuel Chapter 11 are that it was springtime, the time of year when kings usually went war. David sent his army to war but remained in Jerusalem. One late afternoon having got up from a nap, he was strolling on his roof top when she saw a beautiful woman taking a bath. He sent for her. She was Bathsheba wife of Uriah the Hittite and granddaughter of one of his closest advisors. They made love. She became pregnant. David sent for Uriah and ordered him to go home to his wife. Uriah refused to go home out of loyalty to his colleagues at war. David sent Uriah back to the front-lines with a letter to Joab, his general, to have Uriah go into battle and then withdraw, leaving him surrounded by the enemy. Joab obliged. Uriah was killed. David took Bathsheba as his wife and thought that all was well.

2Samuel Chapter 12 records that Nathan the prophet went to David with the parable of a rich man who had many sheep and a poor man that had only one lamb, which he had bought, nurtured and cared for. One day visitors came to the house of the rich man, who decided to have a feast but instead of killing one of his sheep, took the lamb of the poor man and slaughtered it. David was outraged and promised to avenge this great wrong. Nathan then confronted David with the famous words: “thou art the man.” Nathan went on to make the link with his actions as king with Uriah and Bathsheba. David immediate response was “I have sinned against the Lord.” 2Samuel: 12 verse 13.

David was a man like many other men who are practically unable to see a beautiful woman without desiring her. His desires are clearly revealed in the account. Bathsheba’s desires are not so definitely determined. Granted that she was constrained to respond to David’s invitation to come to the palace, however, she was not obliged to participate in the love making and there is no indication whatsoever that what took place was not consensual. This would suggest, at least, that Bathsheba was not averse to having an affair with the king.

Further, both resumed their normal lives suggesting that what took place was largely out of passion and pleasure rather than as part of any long term commitment. Apparently, one night stands are not that modern after all. It was pregnancy that complicated the situation. What started out as pleasure, got complicated with pregnancy, initiated the attempt to deceive Uriah, followed by conspiracy to murder him, resulted in the death of Uriah and David accepting responsibility as father of the child by taking Bathsheba for his wife. Up to this point David does not appear to have borne any guilt or remorse for his actions. It is not unfair to infer that he thought that he had gotten away with it.

Confronted by Nathan with an instance of great injustice, David was very quick to see the sin of the rich man. David revealed the common human habit of quickly seeing the sin of others but tardiness in recognizing our own sins. His righteous indignation was instantaneous. But so too was his confession when Nathan pointed the finger on him.

It is important to pause and quickly note what David did not do when confronted personally with his sin. He did not:

- Defy Nathan using his prerogative of power and kingship.
- Resort to any technicality to make the wrong right. Some apologists have said that David did not commit adultery because at that time the practice was to regard soldiers going to war as being temporarily divorced from their wives. This was to prevent against any complication should soldier be missing after the battle and their wives attempt to marry again. David knew this technicality but did not use it.
- Justify this action by the claim that Uriah's death was not murder because he had defied a direct order from the king, an action punishable by death.
- Blame Bathsheba in a manner similar to how Adam blamed Eve for the fall in the Garden.
- Blame God in a manner similar to Adam: 'the woman Thou gavest me'.

David immediately accepted the verdict delivered by the prophet. He acknowledged his sin. His position as king did not absolve him from God's moral laws. Power had not perverted his sense of sin. He was contrite in his confession. Psalm 51 is widely regarded to have been written by David after his confession of guilt to Nathan. Verse 4 seems to express his contrite confession most eloquently: 'Against you, and you alone, have I sinned and done this evil in your sight. That you may be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.' (New Living Translation 2007)

Counting the Cost of Atonement

Exodus Chapters 20 to 31 records the commandments and detailed instructions that God gave to Moses concerning his people. Exodus Chapter 10: 11-15 sets out the specific instructions concerning taking a census of the people. God's instructions were that in taking a census, a count of the people, every man over 20 years old had to pay a price for his life to God, so that on plague would come upon him while the census was being taken. Every man, rich or poor had to pay the same price. The money collected was to be used for upkeep of the Tent of His Presence. The essence of this requirement is that the people belonged to God and owed him their lives.

2Samuel 24 verse states that the Lord, who was angry with Israel, instructed David to take a census. 1Chronicles Chapter 21 verse 1 states that Satan wanted to bring trouble to the people of Israel so he made David decide to take a census. Mark D Smith in his Bible Dictionary offered a resolution between these two seemingly conflicting accounts of David's motivation by opining that God permitted Satan to tempt David to take the census.

David instructed Joab, his general, to take the census. Joab raised an objection by asking, why do you want to do this thing and make the whole nation guilty? In so doing Joab brought to the fore both the motivation to order the census as well as the risks involved, given Moses' clear instructions regarding the taking of a census. Joab was joined by his captains in expressing reservations concerning the taking of the census. David insisted and the census was taken. The count was 800,000 men capable of military service in Israel and 500,000 in Judah.

After the census was completed David's conscience began to bother him. At the same time Gad, David's prophet, came to him and told him that God was giving him three choices. These were three days of famine in the land, three months of fleeing with his enemies in hot pursuit or three days of plague in the land. David considered the options and concluded that he did not want to be punished by people, but by the Lord for He is merciful. This choice was an epidemic in the land for three days. The epidemic happened. 70,000 men died. After three days, the plague reached the threshing place of Araunah, a Jebusite. On that day Gad advised David to go to Araunah's threshing floor and built an altar to God. David immediately did as he was advised.

When David arrived at the threshing place he was greeted by Araunah. David explained that he had come to build an altar in order to make a sacrifice to God with the hope that the plague would stop. Accordingly he proposed to buy the threshing place. On hearing this Araunah offered David the threshing place, oxen and the wood at no cost and with the hope that God was accepted David's offering. David insisted to pay for everything and did so. David's reason was simple. "I will not offer to the Lord my God burnt offering that doth cost me nothing" 2Samuel 24: 24.

David fell to the temptation of pride. He had been highly successful in military operations. He reigned at a time when the two great powers on either side of Palestine, Egypt and Mesopotamia

were in relative decline. He was able to acquire or reclaim territory for Israel that in other eras would not have been possible. Probably, he wanted to assess the military strength of Israel and Judah in order to determine his future options. In the process he began to forget God and his word. He persisted with the idea of the census even against the objection of this most faithful and loyal general.

Gad the prophet brought his error and its consequences to David. Gad also instructed him what to do after the plague struck. David acted immediately in both instances. In the choice of the punishment David was clear. Let it be at the hand of God and not man. David trusted God far more than he trusted any man. David's experience was that he could be confident that God would be merciful but the same could not be assured about man.

In the matter of the threshing place there could be no question that he had to pay for it. He was making a sacrifice to the Lord his God for a sin of the will that he had committed. Atonement is at a price and he had to pay it. His love for God could not be without personal cost. To David God was never an abstract concept or a remote idea. God was personal to him. Making an altar and offering a sacrifice was not a matter of ritual. It was a sincere admission of personal guilt, a genuine act of his repentance and a deep plea and prayer to God for forgiveness.

In the matter of the taking of the census David sinned. In accepting punishment David's choice of the heart was to be punished at the hand of God. His choice at the threshing floor was to count and pay the cost of the means of atonement.

Conscientiousness to Flee in Order to Preserve Jerusalem

Jerusalem was a Canaanite city-state located in the heart of Jewish territory. For 440 years after the children of Israel entered the promise land Jerusalem remained unconquered. It was a heavily fortified city occupied by the Jebusites, a tribe of the Canaanites. On its northern border was Mount Moriah. This was the place where Abraham took Isaac his son to sacrifice him to God but was ordered by God to sacrifice instead the lamb, caught in the ticket. This was the place where Jacob had his dream of the ladder ascending into heaven. Jerusalem was hallowed ground, in the eyes of Jews.

Moreover, this was not territory that any of the 12 tribes of Israel had ever occupied or settled. It was therefore ideal as the location of the capital of the kingdom and central to David's strategy for unifying the twelve tribes. David therefore conquered Jerusalem and bought the lands of Mount Moriah from its Jebusite owner. Jerusalem was to be the place at which the Temple would be built. He would not built it, but he chose the site, accumulated the materials, made the plans and drew up the duties of the Levites and others whose responsibility it would be to operate the Temple. As a first step in the implementation of this plan he moved the place of worship from Hebron to Jerusalem. The second step was to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

The people of Hebron did not take kindly to this shift in the centre of worship from Hebron to Jerusalem. This move downgraded the importance of Hebron. It undermined its economic base. Probably of greatest importance it removed the centre of worship outside of the territory of Judah. However, there was little they could do about it. The King had conceived and authorised this move. Further, David was a mighty king and of the tribe of Judah.

Although David had nothing to do with his own anointing as King and with it the shift of the tribe of the king from the tribe of Benjamin to the tribe of Judah, the Benjaminites held it against him. Saul the first king was from the tribe of Benjamin. God's rejection of Saul adversely affected his tribe. It was a matter of status and importance that the first King had come from the tribe of Benjamin and members of the tribe expected that their line would be the line of the kings of Israel. Many members of the tribe of Benjamin harboured resentment of David because of this shift in kingship to the tribe of Judah.

David's adultery with Bathsheba had damaged his moral standing and prestige in the Kingdom. The rape of Tamar by Amnon shortly thereafter was seen by some as the son following the abominable behavior of his father. The census was a source of great resentment. It resulted in the death of large numbers of men of many families. The plague was a direct result of David's error.

Absalom, David's son, child of Hebron, held a grudge against his father for not taking action with respect to the rape of his sister Tamar. He was not grateful for the fact that David took no action against him for the murder of his half-brother Amnon, in revenge. Absalom knew the pockets of resentment against David across the kingdom. He deliberately set out to gain popularity with the people by not requiring them to bow to him and by promising justice for all. He had no respect for the anointing of the Lord, following the example David had set, and wanted to be king at all costs.

Under the guise of going to Hebron to pay a vow that he claimed he had made to the Lord, at Hebron Absalom went to Hebron, and declared himself to be King. From there he launched a revolt against David. This action divided the tribe of Judah, for Hebron was part of the territory of Judah. It also galvanized other groups that had grudges and resentment against David. Most significantly, this challenge to David was arising from betrayal within his own household.

This was no clear cut situation like the confrontation with Goliath, the Philistine. To the contrary, David was as a youth faced the enemy from without, now as a mature man faced the adversaries from within. These adversaries were from his family, his closest advisors, his tribe and his kingdom. This was civil war led by David's son. All those who David had offended in changing the status by unifying the kingdom, or had been offended or outraged by his human weaknesses, or hurt by his decisions or had grievances with his government now found common cause in the revolt against him. Word came that Absalom had widespread support. Further, he was leading an

army to Jerusalem to overthrow David by force. The fear was that Absalom would destroy Jerusalem and kill most of its inhabitants, if this was necessary to become King.

David had to act decisively. Faced by the coalition of the aggrieved, David's choice was to flee Jerusalem in order to save the city and its inhabitants. This could not have been an easy choice for David. Jerusalem was his dream. This was where he understood the Ark of the Covenant would permanently reside. This was to be the city that would house the Temple. Jerusalem was key to the unity of the Israel and of God's chosen people. For all of these reasons and more, from David's perspective Jerusalem was far more important than him. If he was to be overthrown as king, and be killed, then let it elsewhere and not be at the expense of Jerusalem.

The scene at David's departure from Jerusalem was grim. Zadok and the Levites started to leave Jerusalem with David and carried the Ark of the Covenant with them. David sent them back. The Ark belonged in Jerusalem, no matter what was his fate. The Ark of the Covenant did not belong to him but to God's people. The Ark representing the Presence of the Lord had to remain in Jerusalem. David counseled some who were leaving with to stay in Jerusalem. He asked questions of others. David left Jerusalem barefooted and weeping as he climbed the Mount of Olives. His pain was manifest, 2 Samuel Chapter 15. But Jerusalem would not be put to the sword on his account.

To the point of the revolt by Absalom, David had been king for almost 30 years. This is a long time to be at the centre of governance of any people, doing what you are convinced is the will of God even against opposition, bringing up one's family while at the same time battling with one's personal demons. The consequences from all of these sources converged and congealed in the betrayal and revolt of Absalom. The situation was convoluted, complicated and in some respects contaminated.

However, the situation could not be ignored. A decision had to be made. Action had to be taken. The priorities had to be clear. If all went wrong, what was most important to preserve? The choice of David's heart was the preservation of Jerusalem. To David its preservation was more important than his life because Jerusalem was bigger than him. It was more important than his throne. It was related to the God's central purpose for his life. For all of these reasons, he fled Jerusalem to preserve it. Probably, it is for this reason that up till today the original urban core of modern Jerusalem is called the City of David. He gave up Jerusalem to preserve it and in its preservation Jerusalem has embraced him forever.

No Celebration in the Death of Rebellious Absalom

- David conceded Jerusalem but he did not concede the throne to Absalom.
- He left Jerusalem to fight the battle for the throne elsewhere.

- As the general he was David organized the people who rallied around him into three companies and appointed trusted men to be their leaders.
- David intended to go into battle with them, but the men would have none of it. They insisted that David remain behind.
- Word came that the battle had been won. Absalom's forces had been defeated. Absalom was killed.
- The intensity of David's grief on learning that Absalom had been killed is dramatically expressed in 2Samuel 18:33: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you – O Absalom my son, my son."
- So profound was his mourning that Joab had to rebuke David in the strongest manner. Joab charged David with humiliating the troops that had gone out and fought on his behalf by not celebrating the victory that had been won.
- It was only then that David decided to sit in the Gate and received his victorious troops.

There was no celebration in the death of his rebellious son, only open brokenness. The kingdom and Jerusalem had been saved. But there was no joy in the son who was lost, only deed sorry.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

David's life is not one of a sanctimonious spirituality. Rather, it is of a profound spirituality clothed in the clay of very human weaknesses and failings. At the core of David's being was a deep love of God and abiding personal relationship with God. During his entire life spirit and flesh comingled in triumph and tragedy; nobility and conspiracy; joy and pain; greatness and weakness; worship and waywardness.

It is very unlikely that in today's world David would be regarded as a role model as a husband or father. He probably would not have remained in office beyond the exposure of the relationship with Bathsheba. But that is judging David by the flesh, the outward appearance. When Samuel went to the house of Jesse to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the future king he was very impressed with Eliab, Jesse's eldest son. But God said to Samuel, "Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him, because I do not judge as people judge. They look on the outward appearance, but I look at the heart." God saw beyond David's flesh and saw his heart, the spirit. David's life, in terms of his choices of the heart, confirmed God's judgment of him, and underscores why the record of his life is set out in scripture for all to learn and understand.

Would that when God looks on each of us and sees beyond our fleshly failings he finds a heart like His.

Errol Miller

