

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 10 March 2002

**No.** T0205

**Speaker:** Mr. Cor Bruins

## Lessons from the Lives of Old Testament Characters: David

If I were to make a painting of the life of David I would use three dominant colours: white, which would tell of the fact that he was a good example for all of us to follow; black would warn us not to follow him, and gold would tell us that David was in many ways a wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The history of David occupies more space in the Bible than that of any other person (about 62 chapters, and the half of the book of the Psalms are attributed to him), except the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ with 89 chapters in the Gospels. Even Abraham's life covers only 14 chapters. David is cited 58 times in the New Testament. This shows the importance the life of this man had in the divine revelation. Indeed, we can say that the life of David marked an important epoch in the unfolding of God's purpose and plan of redemption.

Right from the beginning of the Book of Genesis it had been made known that the Son of God was to become incarnate, for none but a divine person could bruise the Serpent's head, and He was to do so by becoming the woman's 'Seed' (Genesis 3:15). God had made known to Abraham that the Redeemer would (according to the flesh) descend from him. In the days of Moses and Aaron, much had been typically intimated concerning the Redeemer's priestly office and ministry. But now it pleased God to announce that particular person in all the tribes of Israel from whom Christ was to precede, namely, David. This was a notable step toward advancing the work of redemption. David was not only the ancestor of Christ, but in some respects the most eminent personal type of Christ in all the Old Testament.

Let us hear what the prophets had said: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1) "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise up unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper" (Jeremiah 23:5). So, Christ, in the New Testament, is called "the root and offspring of David" (Revelation 22:16).

After the death of Joshua, the nation of Israel fell into a total moral and spiritual decline and for upward of five centuries a general state of lawlessness prevailed: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). But man's extremity is always God's opportunity. Even at that dark hour, God had ready the instrument of deliverance: "a man after His own heart", as Acts 13:22 describes him. But who he was, and where he was located, none but the Lord knew. Even Samuel the prophet had to be given a special divine revelation in order to identify him.

God had provided a king among the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite, and, as Micah 5:2 informs us, Bethlehem Ephrathah was 'little among the thousands of Judah'. How true it is that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). The seven sons of Jesse had been called by Samuel to sacrifice, and, apparently, the youngest was deemed too insignificant by his father to be noticed on this occasion. So David was sent for and anointed in the midst of his brethren.

As said before, David is a remarkable picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can highlight at least eight similarities:

- His service begins with his brethren in 1 Samuel 17:17: "And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren".
- Before his service to his brethren, David had already killed a lion in the desert. As a faithful shepherd, he had also killed a bear who attacked the sheep as a faithful shepherd. So he saved his father's sheep just before he was going to meet the real enemy of God's people: Goliath the uncircumcised Philistine (1 Samuel 17:37; Mark 1:13).
- Arriving at the camp, his faith in God and his service to his brethren is interpreted as presumption by his own brothers: "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I

know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle” (verse 28).

- David as a true warrior offers to meet with Goliath and put him to death, willing, if necessary to lay down his life for his brethren and the nation of Israel. He takes as his ‘weapon’ the word of God: “I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (17:45). So the Lord Jesus came in the name of His Father and spoke the words the Father gave Him to speak.
- He kills Goliath with his own weapon – Goliath’s sword – (verses 45, 51). We read of the Lord Jesus Christ: “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:14).
- The reward for David’s sacrifice was that he was given as a bride the daughter of the king, but this was rather the result than the purpose of his work (verse 25). God the Father gave to His Son the Lord Jesus a bride, the church, as a reward.
- And so David returned to King Saul with his trophies, the head and the armour of Goliath. We read in Psalm 68:18, “You led captives in Your train”.
- Amazingly, King Saul does not seem to recognise David, even although he had been a great help to Saul and brought him relief from his troubles (17:58)! Similarly, men did not recognise Christ for who He was: “We know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no-one will know where he is from” (John 7:27).

His career can be studied under different historical aspects. There is first of all the fact of his election and formation in order to be the king and the man after God’s own heart; then we can look at the moral aspects and learn much: what does his story teach us? Can we imitate him? How can we avoid the mistakes he made? But above all else, we can gather much profit from the practical lessons for our daily lives. We see his faith, for instance, which marked him from his youth. We see the discipline he received from the hand of God who educated His instrument. We see the responsibilities he was given, which under the government of God remained attached to his actions, and the resulting consequences. Also we notice his family life which was not at the height of his youth and inner life.

Let us look first of all at his character, his selection and his anointing. He was born in Bethlehem where later his Lord was also born. He was the son of Jesse and therefore a descendant of Boaz and Ruth. God planned his (and our) heredity, his temperament, his environment. Although his father ignored him and his brethren were unsympathetic, he was nevertheless God’s chosen instrument. This should be an encouragement to us all. We ought to hand over the control of our lives to God who has a plan for each one of us.

What a variegated character he had: he was a poet, an outlaw, a builder, and administrator, a shepherd, and a king! Yes, indeed, he was a very complex and fascinating person. He had a ruddy complexion we are told and was very handsome, with sparkling eyes and an attractive appearance (1 Samuel 16:12). He came to the throne of Israel at the age of 30 and reigned for 40 years (2 Samuel 5:4; 1 Chronicles 29:27). He was 70 years old when he died.

One of his distinguishing qualities was his versatility. He was equally adept with a staff or with a sling in his hand. He could use a sword and a sceptre with great skill. He was basically a godly man with a deep reverence for God and deep piety. Being of an unusually sensitive temperament rendered him susceptible to heights of delight and depths of depression. This is borne out by the many psalms he wrote. He was indeed capable of deep emotions, and could weep bitter tears unashamedly. Perhaps because he had been little loved and appreciated in his childhood and youth, he hungered for love and understanding. How well we can all identify with David! He was very zealous for the glory of his God.

He must have been a superb specimen of true manhood. Just think how he faced a lion and a bear and killed them with his strong bare hands. His heart also was full of confidence in his God. He dared to face the giant Goliath with the words: “This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I will strike you down and cut off your head” (1 Samuel 17:46).

Being a handsome man with an attractive character, he was the darling of the women in Israel who chanted his praises: “And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” (1 Samuel 18:7). The men also admired him. Jonathan’s heart was knit to David’s heart in a life-long devotion (18:1-2), whilst three outlaws risked their very lives to bring their friend and future king a drink of Bethlehem’s water. Even the priest, Ahimelech, was not able to refuse David the sacred bread and the sword of Goliath (Chapter 21). He had fame even outside his own country. King Hiram would give David anything he desired, and even his enemies cherished a secret admiration for him.

Having a deep confidence in his God, he never once took matters into his own hands in order to force the fulfilment of his destiny promised by the Lord. Listen to what he says in Psalm 40:1: "I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry". He was determined to receive the throne of the kingdom not from the hands of men, but only in God's time. He therefore accepted with great humility and whatever God sent.

He must have been about 16 years of age when the prophet Samuel anointed him in the midst of his brothers (1 Samuel 16:7). God had said to Samuel: "I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him" (Psalm 89:20). God is still looking today for men and women whom He might use for His glory. David was a saint of the Old Testament; that is someone who is set apart for God. As such, the Holy Spirit would only come 'upon' him (not indwell him as in the New Testament saints), and would give him power to act on God's behalf (1 Samuel 16:13-14). And yet for all this, he did not become inflated with pride and self satisfaction, but he went back to look after the few sheep of his father's. It was during those years as a shepherd, when in the lonely desert, that he learned to play his harp, and become a master with his sling and stones. He used his leisure time wisely and for the Lord.

Like all of us believers, David entered the school of faith, where his faith was to be put to the test. The New Testament principle with regard to a potential office bearer in the church is: "And let these also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless" (1 Timothy 3:10). So David, and we ourselves, must first be tested and proved in order to bear responsibilities. David was formed in the solitude of the desert and learned patience and courage. In the royal palace and in the service of King Saul he was also tested. He played the harp for the unfortunate king Saul to relieve him in his suffering. Being made a captain of the king's soldiers, and being very successful in all his campaigns, David became the object of the jealousy of King Saul, who tried to kill him several times.

Someone has said: "No man is fully accepted until he has first been rejected". This applied to David who was an 'outlaw' for about 9 years (1 Samuel 26:20). Although he was God's anointed king, all did not go smoothly for him. The way to the throne was strewn with obstacles.

David had many enemies, as well as friends. His best friend, Prince Jonathan, was willing to risk his life for him, and endured the wrath of his angry father Saul. The priest, Ahimelech, suffered terribly for the kindness he showed David. Over the centuries there have been countless true 'friends of Jesus' who have been willing to lay down their lives for Him in martyrdom. David's own experiences qualified him to speak words of consolation and encouragement to others, sown through deep trials. Many have been helped by his writings. In the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22), David shines as a true picture of Christ. Notice who they were who fled from Saul to be with David: all his father's household, "all those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered round him". Here he is a picture of Christ as the true 'gathering-centre' of His people.

Scripture adds: "and he became their leader". How happy we are if we have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus and acknowledge His Lordship in our lives day by day! King Saul, as a picture of the soul's enemy, did not cease to haunt and pursue David, forcing him to keep running from place to place. Nevertheless David did spare Saul's life on several occasions. We read in Romans chapter 12:21: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good".

It is a proof of divine inspiration of the Scriptures that the faults and failures of a servant are not glossed over, or ignored, but they are viewed in the Bible. David's very grave faults were not hidden. He was certainly a good man, but he was by no means faultless. His failures were neither few nor small. How much he is like us all! It must be said his defections were temporary and accidental rather than characteristic!

Think how God accepted his motives when David expressed the desire to build a temple, yet God denied him this privilege. David however did not sulk. The Bible always gives a true picture of its heroes, failures and shortcomings. And this shows how forgiving is our gracious God and Father. David is indeed a warning that even godly men and women may fall grievously. David lied, he committed adultery, he multiplied wives, he even murdered and could not keep control of his own sons. Yet God continued with him, restoring him and forgiving him.

As a family man he is a sad failure. He would be either over indulgent or abnormally harsh and severe. His many wives drew his heart away from the Lord. His children were rebels and caused him much grief.

Sad to say, he is a warning that godly men can, in a moment of time, tarnish the achievements of a life-time. Yet David could truly repent and sorrow for his sins, something that neither king Saul nor Solomon were able to do. God had richly blessed and increased David, he was fabulously rich and unfortunately his luxury made him independent. He allowed sloth to master him and leave him an easy prey to lust. He sinned with Bathsheba.

It makes one think that, had he been able to foresee the absolutely tragic consequences of this forbidden 'love', that he would gladly have plucked out his right eye to avert all this sickening incident. Unfortunately, although God forgave him, yet the sin left indelible marks on his family. His household was filled with deceit, intrigue, revenge, the ruin of a daughter's life, the death of his favourite son.

Someone said: "David lost the smile of God!" How unutterable sad. We have no excuse, we have all been warned. There is no such thing as a 'simple sin': "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer" (Psalm 32:3-4). David knew God too well to be happy when the Lord's face was turned from him.

Coming through deep repentance and sorrow and frank confession, David was finally able to say: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17) David's history tells of both the severity and compassion of our gracious God and Father. Indeed He is a pardoning God and full of patience and forgiveness. Are we as generous as God in forgiving others who may have trespassed against us? Do we know the liberating power of true forgiveness?

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