

What's the Message – Lesson 54

Today we begin our study of the second book of Samuel, with a look at three of David's major accomplishments, as well as his greatest failure.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Our prayer for you today is that God will use this lesson to provide you with a model for your life that is both positive and negative, and help you understand the kind of person God is looking for to be a worker in His kingdom. Amen.

Last time we saw the futility of hate, as Saul wasted his life in pursuit of a perceived threat to his position and power. Today we move forward into the kingdom of David, a notable person of the Bible about whom so much has been written that it fills books, and even movies. Much of the book of 1st Samuel, all of 2nd Samuel, and the early parts of 1st Kings and 1st Chronicles give us portions of the story of David's life.

So what did David accomplish? We have chosen three items of particular importance. The first example begins with the division of Israel after the death of Saul. The tribe of Judah chose David as their king, but the other tribes decided to follow the house of Saul with his one remaining son. For seven years there was civil war between the two camps. But, as we read in second Samuel chapter 3, *David grew stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.*

What God had ordained finally happened. As we read in 2nd Samuel chapter 5, beginning at verse 3: *So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years.*

Now that the kingdom had been united, David's first act was one of great political insight. A united people needed a central point of government, at a location that was politically neutral, a location that belonged neither to the north or to the south – a location that is parallel to building the capital of the United States in the neutral territory of Washington, D.C.

He chose Jerusalem, the fortified city of the Jebusites that sat high on a ridge, a city that had never been conquered by any of the Israelite tribes. But David and his private army did conquer it, and it became regarded as the city of David. Now the unified nation had a political headquarters that could serve all the people from a neutral site. The first major accomplishment had been achieved.

This astute act did not go unnoticed by the Philistines, however. It was seen as a clear threat to their goal of becoming the master of the entire area. So they came out, searching for David and his army to defeat him, once and for all.

But, as we read in chapter 5, verse 19, David inquired of the Lord: *Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand? And the Lord said to David, Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand.* This battle, and victory, was of importance, but it was not the final decisive one. Once again the Philistines tried to attack David, and once again David inquired of the Lord about what he should do.

The instructions were different this time. David was told to go around to their rear, and come against them from behind the balsam trees. The Lord told him: *When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then bestir yourself; for the Lord has gone out before you to smite the army of the Philistines.* This was the battle that settled the issue between Israel and the Philistines, and there was peace between them. Major accomplishment number two had been realized.

Now it seemed safe, and a proper time to bring the Ark of the Lord from its humble location where it had sat since the early days of Samuel, when the Philistines had captured it and then returned it because of the plagues the Ark brought upon them. As we read in 2nd Samuel, chapter 6, verse 15: *So David and all the house of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the horn.* And where was it brought to? The city of David, which now became not only its political center, but its religious center as well. Major accomplishment three had now been achieved.

Unification and peace brought with it more successes, and the territory of Israel expanded to reach the limits that had been set forth by Joshua hundreds of years before – from Dan in the north, and even beyond, to Beersheba in the south. It marked the flourishing of the golden age of Israel. But as before, prosperity was not something that Israel handled well.

And David was just as susceptible. Although he had turned to God for guidance so many times in the past, he was still vulnerable to human lust and sin. From the roof of his house, he saw a beautiful woman bathing, and decided he must have her. The king's wish was everyone's command, and it was done. The woman, of course, was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite who was away with the army of Israel attacking the Ammonites.

In an attempt to hide the fatherhood of the child that had been conceived, David had Uriah brought back from the battle, expecting him to go to his house and wife. But Uriah would not do so, and he slept at the doorstep of David. Frustrated by this, David sent instructions to his general to put Uriah at the forefront of the hardest fighting, then to draw back from him so that the Ammonites would kill him. And it happened just as David planned, and the king took Bathsheba as his wife. The first major failure of David had now occurred. It would not be his last.

However, as we see in 2nd Samuel chapter 11, verse 27: *But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.* So He sent the prophet Nathan to David, to confront him with his wrongdoing. And Nathan told David the story of the rich man with large herds and the poor man with only one little lamb.

To feed a visitor, the rich man took the poor man's only lamb and fed his guest. At this point of the story, David grew angry at the rich man and said to Nathan: *As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die. Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" . . . You have smitten Uriah with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife . . . now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me.* Even the king is not above the Law of God and must be punished.

And with that, Teacher, we have the highlights of the first 12 chapters of 2nd Samuel, with the three major accomplishments and one great failure of David. But again, other than material for book and movie writers, what is important here for us? What is the message we should apply to our lives?

With the groundwork of major themes of the Old Testament that have been set forth in our previous lessons, the message here should be as obvious as the proverbial nose on your face. When David looked to God for guidance he was successful beyond his wildest dreams. But when he acted on his own, especially out of the motivation of lust, the result and consequence was disastrous. David was a great man in many ways, but he was also very human, just like you and me.

The thing for all of us to remember is, that just like Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rehab and David, God can use imperfect mankind for His good purposes. None of us can fall back on the excuses of Moses that he was not a good speaker, or leader, and therefore not a good choice to do the work of God. If God can use the cast of characters just named, He can certainly use you, too. Because David is all so human, he is a fine example for us to follow in his faithful steps, and a classic example for us not to follow in his weakness.

Next time we shall see more of the consequences of David's sin.