

Message #24

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Life of David

6/14/2020

DAVID AND THE DANGER OF SUCCESS

2 SAMUEL 10-11:5

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

I have been reading up on the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 in recent weeks. I have been curious to see what the response was to the last worldwide pandemic. The Spanish flu was much more deadly than the coronavirus. The world death toll was estimated to be between 50 and 100 million people.

Medical knowledge was obviously much less back in that era, but the medical authorities did understand that it was a contagious disease. So governments shut down businesses and churches and public gatherings and encouraged people to wear masks and to practice social distancing. The public health response, however, was very inconsistent and much less centralized than it is today.

There was one other additional complicating factor. The epidemic happened in the midst of WW I. How did President Woodrow Wilson respond? What did he say and do about the epidemic? Absolutely nothing. From what the historians can tell, the President never made any public comments about it. His focus was upon the war effort. Ignoring the Spanish flu was a giant failure of leadership. Wilson had other significant failures toward the end of his life.

It is especially unfortunate because Woodrow Wilson was a Christian guy. He grew up in a home where his father was a Presbyterian pastor. He learned the Westminster Catechism where he was taught that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. He had regular devotions. Wilson had fourteen different nervous breakdowns earlier in his life. With God's help he overcame all of that. He was academically successful. He became president of Princeton University and then Governor of New Jersey.

But then there were some things that didn't seem quite right. He ran for reelection as President in 1916 with the slogan "He kept us out of the war." At the same time he was telling his cabinet that after his reelection the US would have to go to war. At peace negotiations in France after the war, he would not allow any other high level American negotiators to help him. He wanted to handle the negotiations himself. European leaders described him as "haughty, self-righteous, and egotistical." (Robert Brent Toplin, History News Network, 11/1/18) Then he came down with the Spanish flu. His long-time friend Colonel House stepped in for him. When Wilson returned to the negotiations, he blew up at House for what he did, and that friendship was ruined.

Back in the US he tried to convince the US Senate to adopt the Treaty of Versailles that ended the war and to back his new idea about the League of Nations. He refused to make any compromises. So the Senate would not give its approval. Wilson went on a cross country tour to drum up public support for these two proposals. But then he had a major stroke. He refused to give up power. Historians say that his wife largely did his job until he died. How did Wilson go off the rails? Pride was part of it. But there was something else.

King David, like Woodrow Wilson, overcame significant challenges to become leader of his nation. We have seen that fifteen years after being promised by the Lord that he would be king of Israel, he finally arrived at that position. In response to his effort to establish a central worship center and temple in Jerusalem, the Lord promised that He would make his name great, that He would give his people a permanent land possession and rest from their enemies. The Lord would also make of David's descendants a permanent dynasty with an eternal throne.

We saw last week in #8 of 2 Samuel that David beat up on all of his surrounding enemies and expanded the territory of Israel. In #9 he extended great kindness to a descendant of King Saul. In doing that, we saw that David was acting as a type of the coming Messiah. Today we shall see in #10 that David is continuing to ascend toward the top, but he is also reaching a point where he will have a great fall.

I.

Let's look, then (PROJECTOR ON--- I. DAVID AND THE RISE TO THE TOP), at #10 of 2 Samuel (which is found on p. 261 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) as we consider DAVID AND THE RISE TO THE TOP. In vv. 1-5 of #10 we will look at THE CHALLENGE FROM AMMON. (I. DAVID AND... A. THE CHALLENGE FROM AMMON)

In v. 1 we read, **“After this the king of the Ammonites died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place.”** As we saw with the same phrase “after this” in v. 1 of #8, this is not necessarily a chronological time indicator. The NIV gives a better sense of what the narrator was saying in its translation “in the course of time.” In fact, what we have in #10 seems to be a more detailed explanation of the fight with the Ammonites and the Syrians which was summarized in #8.

The Ammonites lived to the east of Israel. (DAVID 14 D) Brief mention was made in #8 vv. 11 & 12 that David had defeated the Ammonites during his reign. The author now proceeds to give details of that conflict.

Verse 2: **“And David said, ‘I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me.’ So David sent by his servants to console him concerning his father. And David's servants came into the land of the Ammonites.”** The Ammonites were descendants of Lot through his incestuous relationship with his daughter. They had often been at odds with the Hebrews. They teamed up with the Moabites against Israel at least a couple of times during the Judges period.

More recently, the Ammonites surrounded Jabesh-Gilead (DAVID 14E) and threatened to gouge out the eyes of the men of the city unless they surrendered. That was at the beginning of King Saul’s reign. He led the Israelites in defeating the Ammonites at that time. Saul ruled for 40 years. Now we are at least ten years into David’s reign and probably longer. So it was at least fifty years earlier that the Jabesh-Gilead incident happened. Nahash was ruling Ammon at that time. The Nahash mentioned here may have been Nahash, Jr.

The kindness, or loyalty, that David seeks to show Hanun is the same lovingkindness, or *chesed*, that David sought to demonstrate toward Mephibosheth. It is covenant love, which may have indeed been reflected in a treaty with Nahash. Perhaps the lovingkindness that Nahash had shown toward David involved support when David was on the run from King Saul. David sought to show this loyal love in his domestic policy toward the royal line of Saul in #9. Now he is seeking to show that loyal love in his foreign policy toward the new king of Ammon in #10. His sending of emissaries to visit the new king of Ammon is the same kind of diplomatic courtesy that is shown by nations today when there is a death of a head of state. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Notice the response of the Ammonites in v. 3: **“But the princes of the Ammonites said to Hanun their lord, ‘Do you think, because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honoring your father? Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it?’”** Perhaps

these royal advisors have witnessed King David's territorial expansion and victories over nearby countries and expect that David has eyes on Ammon next.

Verse 4: **“So Hanun took David's servants and shaved off half the beard of each and cut off their garments in the middle, at their hips, and sent them away.”** To treat diplomats like this was an invitation to war. We know from archaeological evidence that beards among men at this time and in this part of the world were normal. Old Testament scholar Kyle McCarter says that body hair was a sign of virility. To cut beards like this was “symbolic castration.” (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, August/September 1994) Likewise, the tearing of clothes to expose the men's bottoms was something that was done to prisoners of war.

Thus we read in v. 5, **“When it was told David, he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, ‘Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown and then return.’”** (DAVID 14E) Jericho was safely inside Israel proper. The need to stay there until their beards grew back shows something of the importance of how beards were regarded. Trouble is brewing.

B.

So in vv. 6-19 we learn about THE SUCCESS OVER AMMON AND THE SYRIANS. (I. DAVID AND... A. B. THE SUCCESS OVER...) According to v. 6, **“When the Ammonites saw that they had become a stench to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zobah, 20,000 foot soldiers, and the king of Maacah with 1,000 men, and the men of Tob, 12,000 men.”** (DAVID 14D) The Syrians north of Ammon were part of a confederation of city-states. The Ammonites realized that they could not take on Israel alone.

Verses 7 & 8: **“And when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the host of the mighty men. And the Ammonites came out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the gate, and the Syrians of Zobah and of Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah were by themselves in the open country.”** This confrontation reflects one part of the conflict with the Syrians summarized in #8 vv. 3-12. The city in view is Rabbath-ammon (DAVID 14D), which was the capital of the Ammonites. Today it is known as Amman, the capital of Jordan. Notice that David sends General Joab and does not go into battle himself.

We read in vv. 9 & 10: **“When Joab saw that the battle was set against him both in front and in the rear, he chose some of the best men of Israel and arrayed them against the Syrians. The rest of his men he put in the charge of Abishai his brother, and he arrayed them against the Ammonites.”** Joab

and Abishai were brothers. The third brother was Asahel, who was killed by General Abner, who earlier led the army of the northern Israelites. David made peace with Abner, but Joab went out and murdered Abner. David was upset with Joab, but he was David's nephew, and he was good at what he did and had loyalty from the army.

The Syrians were probably the tougher part of the enemies arrayed against the Israelite army, and Joab took them on directly. The Ammonites, however, had a greater sense of commitment to this conflict. For they were fighting for their homeland.

Verses 11 & 12: **“And he [Joab] said, ‘If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me, but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to him.’”** Though Joab has a mixed record in terms of his moral behavior, it is evident here that he has a definite faith in the God of Israel.

Verses 13 & 14: **“So Joab and the people who were with him drew near to battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. And when the Ammonites saw that the Syrians fled, they likewise fled before Abishai and entered the city. Then Joab returned from fighting against the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.”**

The Israelites were successful. Why did Joab and the army return to Jerusalem? Attacking a fortified city was a tough job. It usually involved a long siege. Perhaps the Israelites were not prepared to take on that job. Also it may have been later in the year after most of the harvest had been taken in. It was not a good time to begin a siege when the enemy city was well stocked.

According to vv. 15 & 16, **“But when the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered themselves together. And Hadadezer sent and brought out the Syrians who were beyond the Euphrates. They came to Helam, with Shobach the commander of the army of Hadadezer at their head.”** (DAVID 14F) The city of Helam was north of Ammon and east of the Sea of Galilee.

Verses 17 & 18: **“And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together and crossed the Jordan and came to Helam. The Syrians arrayed themselves against David and fought with him. And the Syrians fled before Israel, and David killed of the Syrians the men of 700 chariots, and 40,000**

horsemen, and wounded Shobach the commander of their army, so that he died there.” This time David leads his army into battle, and they win a significant victory.

Verse 19: **“And when all the kings who were servants of Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and became subject to them. So the Syrians were afraid to save the Ammonites anymore.”** This submission to Israel means that they became subject to King David’s rule. It would have meant that they had to pay regular tribute, or taxes, to him.

(PROJECTOR OFF) So it is that David has again achieved success. He is reaching the pinnacle of his career, both politically and spiritually. He has arrived here in the right way. He has trusted in God. David recognizes that the Lord has been the source of his success.

At the same time, success is always dangerous. Career success does not alone satisfy. In a 2005 interview on *Sixty Minutes*, quarterback Tom Brady was asked after winning his third Super Bowl title how it felt to be so successful. He replied, **“A lot of people would say, ‘Hey, man, this is what it is. I reached my goal, my dream, my life.’ But me, I think, ‘It’s got to be more than this.’ I mean, this can’t be what it’s all cracked up to be.”** Ultimate fulfillment in life can only be found in a relationship with God.

David had that, but the people of God are tempted to pride, along with everyone else, when they experience career success. As Tim Keller notes, **“More than other idols, personal success and achievement lead to a sense that we ourselves are God...”** (*Counterfeit Gods*, p. 75)

How do we avoid that temptation? (PROJECTOR ON--- ROMANS 12:3) The Apostle Paul writes in Romans #12 v. 3, **“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”**

How do we do that? Anglican theologian J. I. Packer says, **“We grow up into Christ by growing down into lowliness... Off-loading our fantasies of omniscience, we start trying to be trustful, obedient, dependent, patient, and willing in our relationship to God. We give up our dreams of being greatly admired for doing wonderfully well. We begin teaching ourselves unemotionally and matter-of-factly to recognize that we are not likely ever to appear, or actually to be, much of a success by the world’s standards. We bow to events that rub our noses in the reality of our own weaknesses, and we look to God for strength quietly to cope.... It is impossible at the same time to give the impression both that I**

am a great Christian and that Jesus Christ is a great Master. So the Christian will practice curling up small, as it were, so that in and through him or her the Savior may show himself great. That is what I mean by growing downward." (*Rediscovering Holiness*)

II.

In the first five verses of #11 we come to DAVID AND THE FALL TO SEXUAL TEMPTATION. (II. DAVID AND THE FALL...) This is the chapter which describes David's big time fall. In #9 David demonstrated *chesed* love toward Mephibosheth. In #10 he demonstrated *chesed* love to the new king of Ammon. But now in #11 David demonstrates eros lust toward Bathsheba.

We may wonder how the man after God's heart can be guilty of such terrible crimes. We need to keep in mind that this man who was central to God's kingdom program was the target of the Evil One's most vicious attacks. He also had a human nature common to all of us which is corrupt and subject to temptation. Great personal success also subjects us to the danger of pride and entitlement. The first lesson coming out of this chapter is this:

A.

We need to BE SINGULAR IN OUR ROMANTIC INTEREST. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. DAVID AND... A. BE SINGULAR IN OUR...) We have already seen warning signs in the tale of David's romantic life. He has acquired multiple wives. In the process he has caved in to his culture. In the Ancient Near East one evidence of the power and success of a king was having multiple wives and lots of children, especially sons.

In our culture there is still general recognition that adultery is wrong. But our society also says that sex before marriage is normal, cohabitation is acceptable, and gay marriage is just fine. Abortion for unexpected pregnancies is a constitutional right. God's Word says that all of these things are morally wrong. There are always negative consequences that result from acting contrary to God's creative design

In Moses' encounter with the Lord on Mt. Sinai God said that there were three things that the future kings of Israel were not to do. According to Deuteronomy #17 v. 16 (DEUTERONOMY 17:16), "**Only he [the king] must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.'**" David

did acquire some horses as a result of military conquest. He kept a few of them for chariots in his army. But he didn't seem to buy horses from Egypt, and he didn't keep them for himself.

The prohibitions continue in Deuteronomy 17 v. 17 (DEUTERONOMY 17:17): **“And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.”** We have seen that David did acquire silver and gold as a result of his military conquests, but he dedicated those treasures to the Lord, probably setting them aside for the future temple. But in regard to the acquisition of multiple wives, David blew it. He was disobedient. The Biblical pattern of one man and one wife was established at creation, according to the Book of Genesis.

We saw that after David fled from the Israelite capital, leaving his first wife Michal behind, he acquired a woman named Ahinoam of Jezreel. Then he acquired Abigail after her husband Nabal died. In 2 Samuel #5 v. 13 (2 SAMUEL 5:13) we read, **“And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron, and more sons and daughters were born to David.”** Yet this was still not enough for David. The reality is that the passion of sex is not satisfied by a harem, it is only increased. (PROJECTOR OFF) The people of God are supposed to be singular in their romantic interests.

In v. 1 of 2 Samuel 11 we read, **“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.”** David and his army beat up on the Syrians and the Ammonites the previous year. The Ammonite army retreated to the fortified city of Rabbah. The Israelites chose not to pursue things further that year. But now in the spring they proceeded to lay siege to the city. Spring was the proper time to do that. The rainy season was over and roads were passable. The maturing of early crops would allow the troops to live off of the land. At the same time an army would want to begin a siege before those crops were harvested so that the reserves in a fortified city would be lower.

But there is also a problem noted in v. 1. Kings were expected to go out to battle with their army in the spring. David doesn't. He stays home. Why? We are not told, but we can guess at some of the factors that may have entered his thinking. He had already proven himself in battle. General Joab was very capable of leading his armies. Laying siege to a city could be long and boring. It meant living in the field. Life was a lot more comfortable back in Jerusalem. The food was better. He had his wives around.

B.

This leads to the second lesson that I find coming out of this passage. We should STAY BUSY WITH THE WORK BEFORE US. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. DAVID AND THE... B. ... C. STAY BUSY WITH...) David was neglecting his kingly duties. He wasn't doing the work that he should have been doing.

I was listening to a health official from Clark County talking on public radio this week. She said that there has been a big increase in STDs among the elderly in our county. I am sure that there are a number of reasons for this. But I wonder if it may point to one danger that there is in retirement. Retirees have too much leisure time. There may not be enough meaningful activity in which we are engaged. Like David, we may be laying around instead of being actively engaged with the activity that God would have for us.

Look next at v. 2: **"It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful."** David's afternoon siesta stretched longer into the evening. He was being lazy. He proceeded to walk around on the roof of his palace, which was sure to have been taller than all of the other buildings around him. As he gazed down, he saw a beautiful woman.

When I was in college, I lived on the second floor of a ten story men's dormitory. Opposite us was a ten story women's dormitory. Some of the guys on the higher floors of my dormitory used to talk about how they would watch out of their window at night, looking down toward the women's dormitory, hoping to see young women who did not have their shades drawn. Something like that happened to David.

The woman may have been involved in the ritual of ceremonial cleansing. The text also does not say that she was completely naked. Perhaps she was. We also don't know if she was being carelessly immodest. It is theoretically possible that she was aware that David was in the palace above him and was intentionally trying to attract his attention. But the text does not place the blame for what happens upon her.

The text also describes this woman as "very beautiful." There are only three other women in the Old Testament who are given this description. They are Rebekah, Queen Vashti of Persia, and Esther. So this woman must truly have been gorgeous.

C.

This leads to our third lesson: GUARD YOUR EYES. (I. B. C. GUARD YOUR EYES) David did not turn away. He kept looking. His mind began to go in a wrong direction. James tells us in the first chapter (JAMES 1:14-15) of his epistle in vv. 14 & 15, **“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”** Death will be the result for David.

This is a challenge in our culture. We are regularly presented with sexual images. To pursue these images in unhealthy directions it used to mean buying a magazine or going to a seedy theater or visiting an adult bookstore. But today those images are at our fingertips. They are readily available on our computer screens and other electronic devices. The challenge is to guard our eyes. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Look at what happens next in v. 3: **“And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, ‘Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?’”** David is lured and enticed by his own desire. Perhaps he hoped that this woman might be single or widowed. But he learns that she is married. Furthermore, her husband is one of the top captains in his army. Bathsheba is also the daughter of Eliam, who is the son of Ahithophel, one of David’s royal advisors.

David has the opportunity to stop right here. The response of the servant who checked out Bathsheba is framed almost as a warning. Is she not the married wife of an army captain and the daughter of somebody important in government? Is she not off limits?

But David does not stop. Verse 4: **“So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house.”** We have a simple description of the wrongdoing. There is no indication that Bathsheba resisted, but there clearly is a power imbalance here. David is the king of the country, and he is the aggressor.

Some of your translations may leave the impression that Bathsheba cleansed herself after this sex act, but that was unlikely. That would be done back at her home. It is more likely that the text is indicating that she had finished the course of ceremonial cleansing prescribed in the Book of Leviticus after a woman had her period. It also means that she was entering the time in her cycle where she could get pregnant.

Thus it is that we read in v. 5, **“And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, ‘I am pregnant.’”** These are the only recorded words of Bathsheba in the story, but they are powerful. Now David has a problem on his hands from his one night stand. The consequences of his sin will mean death and disruption.

D.

The fourth lesson that we have here is simply: FLEE IMMORALITY. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. C. D. FLEE IMMORALITY) That is the simple warning that the Apostle Paul made in his first letter to the Corinthians. In #6 v. 18 (1 CORINTHIANS 6:18) he wrote, **“Flee immorality.”**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer explained the challenge in his book *Temptation* (pp. 116-117): **“In our members there is a slumbering inclination toward desire, which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power, desire seizes mastery of the flesh. All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is a sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money....**

“At this moment God is quite unreal to us. He loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real. The only reality is the devil. Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.... The lust thus aroused envelopes the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us. The questions present themselves as, ‘Is what the flesh desires really sin in this case?’ And, ‘Is it really not permitted to me, yes, expected of me now, here in my particular situation to appease desire?’ ...

“It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God.... Therefore the Bible teaches us in times of temptation in the flesh, there is one command: Flee! Flee fornication. Flee idolatry. Flee youthful lusts. Flee the lusts of the world. There is no resistance to Satan in lust other than flight. Every struggle against lust in one’s own strength is doomed to failure.”

In 1906 Woodrow Wilson’s wife, also the child of a Presbyterian minister, began a period of depression which lasted several years. In the winter of 1907 he went off to Bermuda without her. There Wilson met Mary Allen Hulbert, who was vacationing in Bermuda without her husband. Six years younger than Wilson, she was beautiful, vivacious, and fun-loving--- an opposite in personality to the more stuffy academic. She was unhappy in her marriage. Wilson was smitten. Thus began a relationship which lasted several years.

Some historians mark this as the point where he began to compromise on other standards of morality. Professor Marvin Olasky says, **“Because Wilson did not want to see himself as a sinner, he developed a sophisticated public theology in which his adultery was excusable because he was comforting a lonely woman.”** (*World*, 6/6/2020) His presidential campaigns were marked by claims of promoting morality in government while in 1916 he hid the fact that he was planning for war. In 1918 he was oblivious to the suffering that many American families were experiencing as victims of the Spanish flu, which was estimated to have killed 675,000 Americans. Playwright John Henry says, **“Wilson proclaimed he was to do God’s work by leading mankind to a higher moral universe while carrying on a secret romance that violated his marriage vows.”** (*Washington Post*, 9/16/2018)

The Bible warns us all: Flee immorality.