

Governed by Lesser Passions

The Singer, Part 12

2 Samuel 11:1-5

The story of Marcus Antony and Cleopatra has captivated the attention of generations over the past several thousand years. The adulterous liaison by this Roman ruler and the Queen of Egypt would become the fodder of gossip mills the world over – and even Hollywood movies just had to tell the story.

Both Marcus and Cleopatra deceived their spouses and their empires – eventually allowing their lust to replace their national loyalty – their kingdoms would never quite be the same. In fact, they would end up deceived themselves.

After losing a significant battle that would strip Marcus of his position and title, he fled to Egypt only to be told that Cleopatra had taken her life. So despondent, Marcus fell on his sword . . . and then as he lingered, just before dying, he discovered that she was still alive . . . but it was too late.ⁱ

At one point Marcus Antony was the silver-throated orator of Rome; a strong leader and a courageous soldier. The one thing he lacked – even from his earlier years – was strength of moral integrity. In fact, while he was still a young man, his tutor shouted at him on one occasion – “O Marcus, O colossal child . . . able to conquer the world but unable to resist temptation.”ⁱⁱ

There probably isn’t any biblical story that has captivated the attention of generations any more, over the past several thousand years, than the adultery of King David and Bathsheba.

What began with a look . . . that led to lust . . . that led to a liaison would give birth to a legion of consequences.

If you could write a caption over the next scene in King David’s life, it would be this same

lamenting description; “Oh David, oh Colossal King . . . able to conquer the world but unable to resist temptation.”

So far in our study of the life of the Singer of Israel – King David – the record of inspired scripture has often covered years of David’s life with only a few verses.

In one chapter he’s a young shepherd boy who takes on Goliath; in the next chapter he’s a seasoned soldier, married to the King’s daughter, leading his troops into one successful battle after another.

Most of the time, the biography of David is a blur – moving at blinding speed.

And yet now – in **2 Samuel chapter 11** – God slows the record down. In fact, Samuel will effectively devote two entire chapters that cover less than 10 months; the biblical narrative sort of slips into slow motion.

God obviously wants us to learn some lessons . . . and to learn them well, from these moments in David’s life.

And if I could offer a lesson or two before we dive into this well-known narrative, one of them would be this:

1. If King David can fall, we can too.

In fact, if David –

- the courageous giant killer;
- the fearless soldier of faith;
- the loyal citizen even to an unfaithful king;

- the man who waited for years in hiding and running in order to not run ahead of God;
- a man who delighted in the ark of God's covenant;
- the poet/singer who loved to sing to His great and glorious creator/God –

Listen, if this man can fall into sin, why in the world would we think we can't?

Why in the world would we *ever* be overconfident?

Let me give another foundational observation – and it's this:

2. No one falls into sin in a moment.

We need to backtrack just a bit . . . in fact, you can't understand *2 Samuel chapter 11* unless you understand what's been heating up in the oven for quite some time.

You might write into the margin of your Bible somewhere the reference *Deuteronomy 17*.

For the sake of time, I'll simply inform you that God through Moses predicted a time when the people would ask for a King.

And God revealed to Moses, back in *Deuteronomy 17*, three prohibitions for Kings: they were not allowed to multiply horses; they couldn't increase their personal wealth of gold or silver and thirdly, they couldn't multiply their wives.

In other words, kings were to model humility, non-materialistic pursuits and monogamy.

To do otherwise would effectively defy God's created order as well as abandon trust in His provision and protection. You see:

- multiplying horses related to military power
- increasing gold and silver related to materialistic pursuits
- multiplying wives related to moral purity

In a brutal, materialistic, polygamous world – the King over God's people was to set an example.

And we, sons and daughters of the King should do likewise.

If you study his biography with this in mind, David will consistently slay the enemies horses whenever victorious in battle; he will consistently bring the gold and silver into the temple; but when it comes to the matter of the opposite sex, he will fail.ⁱⁱⁱ

And King David was 2 out of 3. If this was baseball, he'd be a superstar; but this isn't baseball.

3. And keep in mind that what the Bible records isn't necessarily what the Bible condones.

You may have watched with a measure of confusion – not quite sure what to do with it – as David marries Michal, and then later marries Abigail; I mean you're happy for her that her husband Nabal has a heart attack and David scoops her up.

But you're not quite sure why God's hammer doesn't fall somewhere into their honeymoon; the scriptures are silent – leading many to believe God must not care; and polygamists to believe that David is actually setting an example.

But then David marries Ahinoam and then, when he moves to Hebron he adds four more wives and then he adds some concubines to the mix while he's at it. And he's not finished either.

In other words, as one commentator put it, his sinful compromises in this area of his life over the past 20 years have set the stage for this tragic, next step downward.^{iv}

And the Bible doesn't white out the sins of our spiritual forefathers.

And here's that lesson at the outset of our study . . . none of us fall into sin in a moment. It's usually a series of decisions, made over a period of time, compartmentalized; justified; rationalized; sanitized . . . sin is just the next step in a direction you've been facing for months or even years.

You don't fall into sin, you walk into sin.

Now up to this point in his biography, David has had tremendous obstacles and difficulties, but still he's experienced a rather amazing climb.

One author writes, "Now look at him; a humble beginning; a giant killer; two decades of leadership; choice men in the right places; a military force every foe respected; enlarged boundaries that now reached 60,000 square miles; no defeats on the battlefield; exports, imports, financial health, a beautiful new home, plans for the temple of the Lord . . . so what if he married a few more wives and privately created a harem; who would complain?"^v

And by the way, there's another lesson here at the outset that I want to record – David is about to pursue yet another woman when he has a harem and multiple wives already. Here's the lesson:

4. Sexual desire is never satisfied outside of God's created design.

It only increases . . . then digresses . . . and ultimately destroys.

Forbidden lust is like someone dying of thirst while begging for salt.

David's lust and polygamy and sexual compromises have eroded his integrity and he's about to take a step that even he would hardly imagine possible.^{vi}

We're about ready to get into this text, but let me say one more thing to set the stage: when you arrive at **2 Samuel chapter 11** you have reached the half-way point in David's life.

You could entitle the first half, The Triumphs of David; and from here on out, The Tragedies of David.

The hammer didn't fall during his honeymoon #3 or concubine #7 . . . but it *is* beginning to fall. And when it does, David – and the kingdom – will never quite be the same.

In fact, the failure of the average Christian to understand that this chapter spells the end of David's triumphs and the beginning of David's tragedies will most likely fail to connect the dots of his coming loss of family relationships, a coming political firestorm, intrigue and crime that will include murder, rape, jealousy, abandonment, treason, disloyalty, and multiple murders to come.

And that same person will also miss the genuine depths of David's confessions and the amazingly magnificent grace of God.

Now we're ready for *verse 1. 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. 2. It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch (bed) and was walking on the roof of the king's house . . .*

Stop here for a moment . . . the author is providing some hints at the outset of this narrative.

David was in bed, not in battle. Had he been where he belonged, perhaps this episode with Bathsheba might never have occurred.

Sometimes our greatest battles with temptation come when things are going well.^{vii}

At a future date his army commanders will convince him to stay home rather than go to battle,

lest he be singled out and killed – but that's not happening here.

At this moment, David is most vulnerable to the bait of Satan, chosen especially for this moment. He's bored with the mundane chores of predictable days – when there's more leisure than necessary.

These details here are not throw-away lines; they are intended to inform us.

David is luxuriating in the grandeur of his palace; his army is mopping up one more victory – I mean, it's not even close – a grateful nation surrounds his expanding kingdom; he's resting comfortably on the laurels of past heroic exploits; life couldn't be easier . . . here he is, the writer doesn't want us to miss this – he's lounging in bed in the late afternoon, with nothing to do.

Excavations have revealed that eastern monarchs frequently built gardens on their palace roof, with canopies or open sided dining rooms and even bedrooms where they could enjoy the cool evening breeze.

In the evening a king would be able to walk around his rooftop garden and enjoy some privacy, safely above the streets where he could also see his kingdom below.

And that's exactly where David was at the moment.

Then it happened. Verse 2 – 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.

The biblical record isn't into exaggerating. When it says that she was beautiful, it means it.

In fact, we're told that she was very beautiful. One commentator pointed out the fact that the Bible rarely uses the word "very" – the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Old Testament uses a word translated "exceedingly" – and you only find the word in the New Testament a dozen times. She is the perfect storm.

And I would agree with others that she bears some responsibility.

In his book on the Life of David, Chuck Swindoll writes on this text here that she was careless and foolish; from her own home she would often have looked out to the royal palace nearby – she [would have] known that she could be seen.^{viii}

Whether she knew it or not – we'll never know – and it probably wouldn't have mattered – David did see her and when he should have turned away, he stopped and looked again.

His looking turned into leering and quickly became lusting. Never mind a house full of wives and concubines.

Remember, lust is never satisfied . . . it always craves more.

Notice – *verse 3. And David sent and inquired about the woman. In other words, I’m going to add her to my harem. And one said, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.”*

This messenger deserves a medal, by the way. His answer is loaded with warnings.

Notice he doesn’t just give her name; he puts it into a rhetorical question, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam . . .”

In other words, “David, I know what you’re thinking, but c’mon, don’t you know she’s Bathsheba from the family of Eliam.”

Bathsheba woodenly translated means “Daughter of Seven” – which more than likely means, “The Seventh Daughter”^{xix}

Here’s a couple that just kept trying to have a son!

The messenger adds – notice, she’s *the daughter of Eliam*. And here’s where it gets interesting. *Eliam* was the son of Ahithophel, the trusted counselor to King David.

In other words, this is the granddaughter of David’s chief counselor; which explains to us why Ahithophel will later abandon David and support Absalom’s attempt to take the throne of Israel.

I could never understand why Ahithophel, so near the end of his revered and respectable career would suddenly leave David and actually tell Absalom how to kill his father. It finally made sense when I found out this connection . . . Ahithophel had been seething for years because of what David had done to rip his family apart.

But the messenger isn’t finished. Typical introductions stop with the name of a father or grandfather – the spouse is rarely included – but not here – he saves the best for last: *verse 3b. She is the wife of Uriah the Hittite.*

In other words, “That beautiful lady down there is married . . . she’s off limits!”

That alone should have stopped him cold.^x

But that isn’t all – not only is she married, she’s married to one of David’s mighty men. Uriah was one of the first few men to come alongside David in the early years and serve him at the risk of his own life.

He was a converted Hittite – who more than likely changed his name to Uriah – which means, “Yahweh is my Light”.^{xi}

David, that woman is the wife of one of your trusted warriors who even now is in battle on your behalf.

You see, this messenger knows what David’s thinking . . . which is why he effectively urges him in the way he reports back, “David, you can’t do this – she’s the granddaughter of your trusted counselor and the wife of your faithful friend.”

As if to say, “What are you thinking?”

But David is undeterred . . . his mind is consumed with lust . . . he’s set reason and logic and faith and worship aside.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote in his book entitled, *Temptation*, “In our members there is a slumbering inclination toward desire, which is both sudden and fierce . . . a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. It makes no difference whether it is a sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money . . . at that moment God . . . loses all reality. Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God . . . the powers of clear discrimination and decision are taken from us.”^{xii}

Powerful words.

There on that rooftop one late-afternoon, David didn’t begin to hate God . . . he simply began to forget God. And his reason and judgment and clear thinking vanished.

The following verse – and only one verse – informs us of their encounter.

We’re not told if she was surprised . . . or if she resisted. We’re not told if David tried to charm her or threaten her; not one word is recorded between them.

There is little doubt that God isn’t writing a movie script for Hollywood. He minimizes their encounter and deliberately boils it down to brute, bare, cold verbs.

Look at verse 4. So David sent messengers and took her . . . she came to him . . . he lay with her . . . she returned to her house.

No soft music . . . no romance . . . no connection . . . just cold, heartless, uncaring, selfish facts.

But I want to point out one thing that the author wanted us to clearly understand. It’s in that parenthesis, in my translation. It reads in the middle over *verse 4, (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.)*

Some translations will imply that she remained in David's house until she ceremonially purified herself from sexual intimacy – according to the Law, delivered in Leviticus 15.

And that would lead me to make some application from the fact that they both put on a religious show and kept up appearances between themselves, as if the law of God mattered . . . which people in sin often do.

While that application can be true, this Hebrew parenthetical statement is what Hebrew scholars call a circumstantial clause describing Bathsheba's condition at the time she came to David's bedchamber.

In English, it would be in the Perfect tense; which leads to a different observation entirely. The author here inserts this parenthesis, because he wants us to know that Bathsheba has come to David, having just been purified ceremonially from her menstrual cycle; he wants us to know how undeniably David and Bathsheba will be cornered. She knew that she could not be pregnant when she came to David, having just been ceremonially purified from her cycle which had ended – which left no doubt that the child she carried was not her husband's; she knew, it had to be David's.^{xiii}

David does all the talking in these *first 5 verses* – except for two Hebrew words that Bathsheba scribbled on a note and had delivered to the king a few days later.^{xiv}

And the content of that note offers no name, no explanation, no apology and no angry demand . . . just one sentence – recorded here in *verse 5. I am pregnant.*"

In other words, "What are we going to do?"

It's true, isn't it, that sin hides the facts and the results and the consequences

One author said, "Satan never tips his hand; he shows you the beauty, the ecstasy, the fun, the excitement, the adventure."^{xv}

Listen to some statistics from a survey of men who were involved in an adulterous relationship and left their spouse. These men were willingly tracked over the course of 10 years for the purpose of this particular study; ten years after the breakup of their marriage and home:

- 33% were intensely angry with life;
- 50% ended up divorced again – most of them from the woman they had believed were the answer to all their problems;

- 80% experienced the same or a loss of financial strength;
- 50% under the age of fifty were unhappily remarried;
- 66% over the age of fifty were unhappily remarried;
- 80% (get this) would remarry their former wives and regain what they lost if given the chance.^{xvi}

To the younger crowd, where sexual encounters are a rite of passage; nothing serious; no strings attached – the Great Destroyer and Deceiver never tips his hand to them either.

And the media centers of our culture are virtually silent, at his command, because moral issues shouldn't be moral problems – morality is a ghost of some Victorian past.

Don't let on that every day, 4,000 teenagers contract a sexually transmitted disease.^{xvii}

Don't let on that even though the world is bent on providing protection, The [Minnesota] Institute of Public Health reports that there are now 21 sexually transmitted diseases which cannot be prevented by contraception.^{xviii}

Don't publish the news that 30% of college aged women are, or will be by the time they graduate, infected with Herpes, a disease that will affect them for the rest of their lives.

Don't tell anybody that 300,000 people contract Hepatitis B every year, causing permanent liver damage, resulting in the death of at least 13 people in American every single day.^{xix}

Don't publish anything that could land in someone's hands that, according to the United States Public Health Service's Center for Disease Control, and I quote, "A new sexually transmitted infection is diagnosed every 45 seconds in America – and in its wake are pain, blindness, arthritis, infertility, brain damage, heart disease, and death. In spite of half a century of penicillin and wonder drugs, millions of people are contracting new generations of sexually transmitted diseases, including incurable strains now linked to cervical cancer which can be passed on to newborn babies."^{xx}

And we're not even talking about spiritual repercussions and character issues and emotional damage and despair.

But hey, just keep your eye on the commercials . . . listen to your friends and your world . . . it's all good!

Besides, you're a passionate person . . . you've got desires . . . they must be satisfied. And so you reach for another glass of salt water.

David Hegg, a pastor in California writes in his book, *The Obedience Option* of an interesting conversation he was having with a man who admitted to his immoral lifestyle. He claimed that he couldn't stop his pattern of sleeping with girlfriend – or any woman, for that matter. He told this pastor that, quote, “his lust was inevitable; therefore it wasn't his fault, especially since God had created him with such strong desires. He couldn't stop it . . . his lust was an irresistible force.”

David Hegg interrupted this man and said, “Suppose I came into your room and caught you and your girlfriend as you were starting this irresistible process. Suppose I took out ten crisp 100-dollar bills and told you that if you stopped and took your girlfriend home, I'd give you this \$1,000 dollars.” The young man laughed and said, “I'd take the cash.” Oh, David responded, “What happened to that irresistible force of lust?”

And for the first time, he realized a very simple truth; one passion may seem irresistible until a greater passion comes along; in other words, the only way to overcome a passion for sin is to develop a greater passion for righteousness.^{xxi}

For the believer, the temptation to sin is nothing less than a temptation to be governed by some lesser passion . . .

- A greater passion is Christ – to whom belongs our greatest adoration;
- A greater passion is for His word which we read and cherish and obey

- A greater passion is toward His church – the redeemed with whom we worship and serve;
- A greater passion is for the lost – those dying of thirst yet still begging for salt water.

Christianity isn't just getting rid of lesser passions . . . but exchanging lesser passions for greater passions.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians and said, “They – the unbelievers – are callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity – I mean they live for it . . . they're hungry of impurity – Paul writes, ***“But that is not the way you learned Christ, assuming you . . . were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self (lesser passions), which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*** *Greater passions to be pursued (Ephesians 4:25-32)*

As odd as it might sound, we need to pray that God will give us a greater passion for greater passions; that He will give us a longing to long for what we truly long for.

It isn't saltwater . . . is the clear refreshing stream that comes from a life surrendered to the Living Water of Life, Jesus Christ.

He happens to be the only Way worth traveling; the only Truth worth following and the only Life worth living.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/11/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcus_Antonius

ii Charles R. Swindoll, *You and Your Problems* (Insight for Living, 1989), p.

iii Adapted from Alan Redpath, *The Making of a Man of God* (Revell, 1962), p. 198

iv Adapted from Redpath, p. 197

v Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny* (Word Publishing, 1997), p. 182

vi Ibid

vii Adapted from Swindoll, p. 184

viii Ibid, p. 185

ix *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 3*, general editor, Frank E. Gaebelin (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 929

x Kenneth L. Chafin, *The Communicator's Commentary: 1,2 Samuel* (Word Books, 1989), p. 301

xi Ibid

xii Quoted in Swindoll, p. 185

xiii Adapted from Expositors, p. 930

xiv Dale Ralph Davis, 2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity (Christian Focus, 1999), p. 140

xv Swindoll, p. 187

xvi Tim Stafford, quoted by Robert Jeffress, The Solomon Secrets (Waterbrook Press, 2002), p. 103

xvii Adapted from Josh McDowell, Right From Wrong (Word Publishing, 1994), p. 159

xviii Ibid

xix Stafford, p. 118

xx Bruce K. Waltke, Proverbs: Volume 1 (Eerdmans, 2004), p. 379

xxi David Hegg, The Obedience Option (Christian Focus, 2011), p. 27