

# The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 25

June 16-22, 2014

## Acts 7:45

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### Introduction to the Context Bible

Have you ever wished the Bible was easier to read through like an ordinary book – cover to cover? Because the Bible is a collection of 66 books, it makes reading like an ordinary book quite difficult. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that the later writers of the New Testament were often quoting or referencing passages in the Old Testament. In fact, much of the New Testament makes better sense only if one also considers the Old Testament passages that place the text into its scriptural context.

You are reading a running commentary to The Context Bible. This arrangement of Scripture seeks to overcome some of these difficulties. Using a core reading of John's gospel, the book of Acts, and the Revelation of John, the Context Bible arranges all the rest of Scripture into a contextual framework that supports the core reading. It is broken out into daily readings so that this program allows one to read the entire Bible in a year, but in a contextual format.

Here is the running commentary for week twenty-five, along with the readings for week twenty-six appended. Join in. It's never too late to read the Bible in context!

### *Week Twenty-five Readings*

<b>6/16 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45</b> 1 Sam 31 1 Chron 9:35-10:14 2 Sam 1-2	<b>6/18 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45</b> 2 Sam 7-10 <b>6/19 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45</b> 1 Chron 11-13 <b>6/20 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45</b> 1 Chron 14-16 1 Chron 17-18	<b>6/21 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45</b> 1 Chron 19-20 2 Sam 11-12 Prov 19:22, 25 Pslm 51  6/22 Off
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## STEPHEN'S SPEECH (Acts 7:45)

We continue several weeks of reading in support of Stephen's speech to the authorities where Stephen defended his message that proclaimed a resurrected Jesus as both Lord and Messiah. Stephen told Old Testament stories to the authorities, and Luke gave a synopsis in Acts. We give the greater storyline through the contextual readings.

**READING PURPOSE:** For the Jews, the "golden age" of faith was centered on the reign of King David. Yet even David's reign was steeped in sin – adultery, murder, false testimony and more. While the Jews confronting Stephen were concerned with the temple, and were charging Stephen with undermining the people and places of their history (Moses, the temple, etc.), Stephen spoke the truth. People have never been faithful to God. Jesus is the only faithful one. People, even the best like King David, are sinners. Their closeness to God stems from a heart that seeks and wants God, not from earned behavior. We see this clearly in this week's readings that demonstrate the god, bad, and ugly of David, the intimate of God.

June 16-22     1 Samuel 31; 2 Samuel 1-12; 1 Chronicles 9:35-15:29; 17:1-20:8 and Psalm 51

David was special among the people we study in the Old Testament. As we noticed in earlier lessons, when Samuel anointed David,

The Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward (1 Sam 16:13).

This set David apart from many others in the Old Testament. God's Spirit did not indwell all his followers during the Old Testament. It is one of the profound meanings behind the prophecy through Joel that a day would come when God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh—male/female, young/old, master/servant (Joel 2:28ff; Acts 2). Pentecost saw the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel and also the promise of Jesus that "the Spirit of Truth" would come and *indwell* the believer in an intimate way (Jn 14:17ff).

So David, infused with God's Spirit, maintained an intimate relationship with God that is rarely seen among the characters on the pages of our Old Testament. We see this intimacy in the things David shared with God. David shared his joys and his sorrows. He shared his confidences and his fears. He proclaimed his praises; he even challenged God with his frustrations. For David, God was ever present. God was involved in all David did (though not always pleased), and in all that happened to David.

In this lesson, we will pull out of the contextual readings some passages about David that show this depth of intimacy in hopes of seeing some keys to help us in our own intimate walk with the LORD.

## **David's Prayer of Gratitude** (2 Sam. 7:18-29; 1 Chron. 13-15)

After David was recognized as King over Israel, he had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. David then sought to build a house for the Ark, but Nathan explained that David was not the one to build God's house (temple). As Nathan recounted God's words to David, the love and blessings of God were reinforced, even as David was declined the blessing of building the temple.

Nathan assured David that the LORD was fully invested in David. The LORD had pulled David from pasturing flocks to be prince of the people. The LORD accompanied David everywhere David went, cutting off David's enemies from harming him. The LORD promised to make David's name great in history, and promised that David's throne would endure through all eternity.

In response to this, David "went in [before the Ark?] and sat before the LORD" and lifted up an intimate prayer of gratitude to the LORD saying:

Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD. You have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord GOD! And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord GOD! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it. Therefore you are great, O LORD God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods? And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O LORD, became their God. And now, O LORD God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken. And your name will be magnified forever, saying, 'The LORD of hosts is God over Israel,' and the house of your servant David will be established before you. For you, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house.' Therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you. For you, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever (2 Sam 7:18-29).

In the prayer, we note several matters. First, the prayer is David's response to Nathan's report. Nathan had informed David of God's plans, where they conformed to David's plans and where they differed. For many, that would have ended the story. We might

expect to read, “And David did as he was instructed by Nathan.” Yet, David hears this news and doesn’t simply take it to heart. David goes into a separate place to have private prayer with God. We miss something if we fail to see David in communication with God about life, rather than simply living.

Second, as David prayed, his attitude was one of humility, service, faith, and praise. David’s **humility** is seen in his recognition that his life was God’s work, and that his “arrival” was unearned, but graciously given. “Who am I...and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?” In David’s life, he had moved from obscurity to the pinnacle of fame. David appreciated that this was the hand of God, not something “David had coming.”

David’s heart of **service** to God is seen in his constant usage of the term “servant.” More than anyone else in the Old Testament, David used the phrase of himself as a servant or slave of God.<sup>1</sup> Ten times in this passage David places himself as God’s servant. We should remind ourselves that the one sitting quietly before the Lord saying, “your servant” is the *King* of Israel. Every physical person in David’s life rightly called himself or herself a servant to King David, yet David was acutely aware that he as king was the servant for God. David’s actions were ones of service to God.

David’s attitude reflects a deep **faith** in God keeping his promises. David recounts the historic faithfulness of God in redeeming the people from Egypt and setting Israel up as a nation. David is confident that in like manner, the LORD would keep those promises he had just delivered through the prophet Nathan. In faith, David calls on God to do the very things he promised, “And now, O LORD God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken.” It might seem bold to call God to do as he says, but it is not boldness from David’s assertive rights. It is the boldness of faith. David knew God was faithful and had made promises; therefore, it was David’s courageous faith that brought forth this call to God.

In calling forth God to fulfill his promises, David’s faith moves readily into praise. “Your name will be magnified forever.” David calls God the “LORD of hosts” also translated “LORD Almighty.” Here, we also see David using the phrase “O Lord GOD” repeatedly. This Hebrew combination of *adonai* (“God”) and *Yhwh* (“LORD”) is somewhat rare in the Old Testament. It denotes an intimacy with the LORD, but even more, it denotes the praise that flowed from David’s lips. Yahweh was not simply Yahweh, but was David’s Lord as well as the God of Israel.

### **David’s Song of Thanksgiving** (1 Chron 16:8-36)

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<sup>1</sup> See count by Bergen, Robert D., *The New American Commentary – I and II Samuel*, (Holman 1996).

Sometimes things are right. The sun is out, the wind is behind us, and flowers are blooming. That is not to say that things are perfect, for every day has a share of troubles, but some days it just seems to click into place. Sometimes these “right” days can come and go without a significant pause to worship and praise the source of all good things. Intimacy with God; however, cries out for thanksgiving and praise on the good days, as well as for prayers of deliverance on the bad days.

David was having a great day. The Ark of the Covenant was finally moved successfully into Jerusalem. David had a tent pitched to house the Ark. Burnt offerings and peace offerings were set before God, and Jerusalem was at peace. David was moved to offer gifts to all the men and women of Israel. He distributed bread, meat, and raisin cakes. It was a great day!

This was the day that David set out ministers to worship. He appointed a set of Levites to “invoke, to thank, and to praise the LORD” (1 Chron 16:4). Some were playing harps and lyres, some were sounding cymbals, and some were blowing trumpets. This was David’s appointed day of Thanksgiving! David knew the source of the goodness, and he made sure that all Israel took time to acknowledge the LORD in worship.

1 Chronicles 16:8-36 gives a song of thanksgiving that is attributed to David. Whether all of this passage was David’s actual song, or whether it is representative of the song David gave the people is not told to us.<sup>2</sup> We do know that the song as written is a composite of major sections from three different Psalms.<sup>3</sup> The song contains elements of thanks, praise, encouragement, recounting of God’s past great deeds, along with an exhortation to an entire community or group of people to join with creation in worship of the LORD.

The song begins with a call to worship. The people are called to “give thanks” and “call upon” the name of the LORD. They are to sing songs, not just about God, but also *to God*. They are to seek him and his strength.

This phrasing in the Hebrew, as we will discuss much later in lessons on the Psalms and Hebrew poetry, is structured in a “parallel” pattern that gives some added meaning and emphasis to the passage. There are couplets, two groups of lines, which use the same basic thought in different words in ways that convey an added depth of meaning. For example, the couplet at verse 12 reads:

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<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew makes clear that the responsibility for singing Thanksgiving was given by David to Asaph, but not this particular song. See, Bergen.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Chron 16:8-22 comes from Psalms 105:1-15; 1 Chron 16:23-33 comes from Psalm 96:1-13; and 1 Chron 16:34-36 comes from Psalm 106:1, 47-48.

*Remember the wondrous works that he has done,  
His miracles and the judgments he uttered.*

This gives two lines that show differing shades of one idea: the wondrous works of the Lord are not just his miracles, but also his judgments.

A similar parallelism is in the next verse (13):

*O offspring of Israel his servant,  
Children of Jacob, his chosen ones!*

The parallel structure is shown in the obvious repeated thought that the offspring of Israel are the sons of Jacob. But the continued repeated thought adds the extra depth: they were not only God's servants, but God had actually chosen them!

This parallel structure teaches a point that David knew well as God's intimate, and therefore, we highlight it in this lesson. Verse 11 provides:

*Seek the Lord and his strength;  
Seek his presence continually!*

The Hebrew uses two different words that are each translated "seek." They convey the idea to look for, inquire about, or diligently try to find. The parallel structure teaches us more of the thought. Seeking the Lord is seeking his presence (literally his face). David recognizes that we seek the Lord, and even more, we seek the strength of God as we seek to be intimate with him, as we seek time before his presence.

This is David's own experience, and one he calls all to imitate in worship. We are to exalt God and seek his presence. We seek intimacy and we find his strength.

From here, the song moves to the recounting of God's great deeds throughout the earth. Woven into those memories are renewed calls to sing *to* the Lord, declaring his glory, his marvelous works, his greatness, splendor and majesty.

It is God who has strength and joy "in his place." This passage teaches an important concept. We find God's strength and the Lord's joy in his "place" or presence. As we draw near to God, as we share intimately in him, we find ourselves growing in his strength and joy - the blessings of intimacy!

The song ends with repeated cries of worship—a worship known by the heavens, the seas, the earth and the trees—a worship that places God where he belongs, as both creator and sustainer. May God continually allow praise from his people!

David's song of worship contained both proclamations of praise *about* God as well as *to* God. In other words, David not only sang about God's goodness; he sang directly to God about his goodness.

This is a good lesson for us in our worship. A worship of intimacy is not simply a worship that tells others about God's wonders. It goes further and in intimacy tells God directly. It is the difference between me telling you I love my wife and children, or me telling my wife, "I love you" and my children, "I love you." This greater intimacy does not leave us unaffected. As we draw near to God, we draw near the place of his strength and joy. Intimacy with God makes us stronger for this world. It instills a godly joy that is inaccessible anywhere else.

Let us make a point to not only praise God to others, but also to intimately praise him directly.

### **David – The Bathsheba Affair**

On July 21, 1683, the University of Oxford issued a *Judgment and Decree...against certain pernicious Books, and damnable Doctrines, destructive to the sacred Persons of Princes, their State and Government, and of all human Society*. This publication was the basis for the last government-sanctioned book burning in England (also occurring in Oxford).

Among those books burned was *Lex, Rex*, written by the Scottish Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford. The book was cited by Oxford for the dangerous doctrine that "if lawful governors become tyrants, or govern otherwise than by the laws of God and man...they forfeit the right they had unto government."<sup>4</sup>

Rutherford's book was alarming to the realm because even its title was against the King's interest. *Lex* is Latin for "law," and *Rex* is Latin for "king." The title *Lex Rex* puts the law as over the king rather than the king over the law. Within the book, in response to the question "whether the king be above the law," Rutherford wrote, "The law hath a supremacy of constitution above the king."<sup>5</sup>

In part of his argument, Rutherford reached back to the Biblical account of King Saul noting,

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<sup>4</sup> *The Judgment and Decree of the University of Oxford, passed in their Convocation, July 21, 1683, against certain pernicious Books, and damnable Doctrines, destructive to the sacred Persons of Princes, their State and Government, and of all human Society*. "The Third Proposition."

<sup>5</sup> Rutherford, Samuel, *Lex, Rex*, (1644) at Question XXVI.

God, in making Saul a king, doth not by any royal stamp give him a power to sin, or to play the tyrant.<sup>6</sup>

Rutherford is right for Saul, and also for his successor, King David. As we consider David in this lesson, we see that he found a time where he violated in rapid succession three of the Ten Commandments, but not without dire consequence to him and to his family. For David, as for all rulers, God's authority trumps that of the king.

### *The Story Line*

The story is one many know well. The story of David and Bathsheba has made its way into most every art form: plays, novels, short stories, novels, and more paintings than one could count. There are some subtleties to the story that only become apparent under a closer examination, so we consider 2 Samuel 11 in detail.

The David and Bathsheba story comes in the middle of a section of time and text where David had sent his troops to battle the Ammonites (2 Sam 10 and 12:26-31). This war had been ongoing for a year, and as spring time rolled around, it was the time between the winter rains and the summer harvest when kings and able-bodied men typically went off to fight. This year; however, David did not lead his troops.

David sent his troops while he stayed at home taking naps in the afternoon. The troops laid siege against "Rabbah" (which is today "Amman" capital of Jordan still carrying the name of the Ammonites.)<sup>7</sup> After a late afternoon nap, David was walking on the roof of his house when he spied Bathsheba bathing on her roof.

It is worth noting that typical Israelite homes of that day (and even many today) had flat roofs where people could live in a breeze absent down below in the enclosed part of their homes. David, as king, likely lived on the higher part of Jerusalem, while Bathsheba, married to one of David's key soldiers, lived close by.

Bathsheba was bathing as required by Leviticus 15:19-24. Her husband was Uriah the Hittite. Most scholars agree that Uriah was not a Hittite immigrant, but rather of Hittite heritage from earlier generations. His name is a typical



This figure of a woman bathing was found at nearby Achzib and dates from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is currently at the Israel Museum. See, King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Westminster 2001) at 70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, at Question XXVI, Assertion 3.

<sup>7</sup> See, McCarter, P. Kyle, *II Samuel: The Anchor Bible*, (Doubleday 1984), at 285; Anderson, A. A., *Word Bible Commentary 2 Samuel*, (Word 1989), at 153



Hebrew name which means, “Yahweh is my light.”<sup>8</sup> Bathsheba’s father was Eliam.

We know about both Eliam and Uriah from other places in 2 Samuel. 2 Samuel 23:34 says that Eliam was “the son of Ahithophel of Gilo.” Many scholars think this is the same Ahithophel that plays a significant role later in the story of Absalom’s rebellion against David. Both Eliam and Uriah were among David’s “mighty men,” a group of thirty men that were David’s elite special forces (2 Sam 23).

After finding out who Bathsheba was,

David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her...then she returned to her house (2 Sam 11:4).

It was not long before Bathsheba realized she was pregnant. She sent word to David who reacted swiftly. David sent a message to his general (Joab) instructing him to send Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, back to Jerusalem.

When Uriah arrived, he came before David. David asked,

...how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going (2 Sam 11:7).

The author chose an interesting Hebrew word in David’s questions. The verse uses *shalom* three times (“doing...doing...going”). *Shalom* means “peace,” or “wellness.” The ironic twist is that David inquires about the peace of the troops right before he sets up one of his mighty men to get killed.

David sends Uriah to his house in hopes that Uriah will be intimate with Bathsheba and thus cover-up David’s paternity. Uriah; however, did not go home, but slept the night in the guardhouse with the other servants of David.

The next day, David found out Uriah did not go home and asked Uriah why. Uriah answered, that the Ark of the Covenant was not in its Jerusalem home (it was with the Israelites at battle), nor were the other soldiers at home. It would be unseemly for Uriah to enjoy the pleasures of his house under those circumstances. (It is helpful to note that David had a policy of his soldiers staying celibate while fighting (1 Sam 21:5).)

David was not so quick to abandon his cover-up scheme, so he instructed Uriah to stay another night. This time David brought Uriah into his presence, feeding him and plying him with drink until Uriah was intoxicated. Even intoxicated, however, Uriah had enough self-control not to return to his wife for the night. As Peter Ackroyd put it,

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<sup>8</sup> See, McCarter at 285.

Uriah drunk is more pious than David sober.<sup>9</sup>

The following morning, David resorted to a more drastic action. He devised the murder of Uriah. David wrote a letter to his general Joab telling him to put Uriah in the front of the hardest fighting, and then draw back so that Uriah would be killed. In a lurid twist, David sent the note back to Joab *by Uriah!*

Uriah returned to the battleground and gave the letter to Joab. Joab read the letter, and then pursued his course that was David's plan with a slight modification. Joab set Uriah to a place where there were "valiant men" and when warriors came out of the city, Uriah died in the ensuing fight.

Joab sent word back to David about the death of Uriah, adding that others had died as well. David responded to the messenger,

"Thus shall you say to Joab, 'Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another. Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it.'" (2 Sam 11:25).

David then instructed the messenger to "encourage" Joab.

After Bathsheba learned her husband had died in action, she mourned for a set time and then David brought her into his house adding her as another wife. Most scholars typically assume the mourning time was seven days.<sup>10</sup>

Before chapter 11 ends, there is an added verse that, in the Hebrew, contrasts greatly with the verse above where David told Joab, "Do not let this matter displease you." The word translated "displease" is *r* (pronounced rah-ah) and means evil. The word for "you" is more specifically "your eyes." More literally we could translate it, "Do not let this matter be evil in your eyes." These same words are used in contrast three verses later where the ESV translates,

But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord (2 Sam 11:27).

This passage more literally says, "the thing David had done *was evil in the eyes of the Lord.*"

So put next to each other, we see David trying to reassure Joab that all is okay; he should not see this as evil. Yet God, who has been conspicuously absent from everything David has said or done, saw it for what it was: evil.

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<sup>9</sup> Ackroyd, Peter, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary, The Second Book of Samuel*, (Cambridge 1977) at 102.

<sup>10</sup> Scholars base this upon passages like Gen 50:10 where Joseph mourned the death of his father for seven days.

The story does not end there.

The Lord sends Nathan the prophet to David. Nathan does not confront David directly with his sin. Instead, Nathan tells David a story about a rich man with countless sheep who took a poor man's only sheep (family pet, actually) to feed a guest. David is really quick to see unrighteousness in the acts of others and announces,

As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die! (2 Sam 12:5)

At that point, Nathan tells David, "You are the man!" David cannot hide from God what he did. It was not simply a secret between Joab and David. The Lord saw it and proclaimed David's sin through Nathan in excruciating detail.

The Lord then pronounces judgment:

"You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife... Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house... Behold, I will raise up evil [same word "evil" used earlier in 11:25 and 27] against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes [also same word as 11:25 and 27] and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun" (2 Sam 12:9-12).

David sees his sin and confesses to Nathan. Nathan notes that the Lord accepted the repentance, but the earthly consequences will remain:

And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die (2 Sam 12:14).

Very old tradition places this as the time when David composed what we now call Psalm 51. The Psalm begins,

Have mercy on me O God, according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.  
Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,<sup>11</sup>  
so that you are blameless in your judgment (Psalm 51:1-4).

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<sup>11</sup> Literally "evil before your eyes." Here the same words as in 2 Sam 11:25 and 27 are used again. David recognizes that he did indeed do evil as the Lord correctly saw, regardless of what David told Joab.

David prays that God will hide his face from David's sin and not remove the Holy Spirit from David. With a broken and contrite heart, David repented in the Psalm and before God.

In the midst of this repentance, the story finished just as Nathan noted. David did not die, but the newborn child to Bathsheba did, in spite of David's prayer for God to spare the child. Similarly, the next several chapters record how the sword affected David's house.

Among David's children, one son (Amnon) falls in love or lust with his half-sister (Tamar). Through manipulation and deceit, Amnon rapes Tamar and then sends her away in disgust. Tamar's full-brother Absalom then has Amnon murdered in revenge.

Absalom flees from David his father, finally returning and mounting a coup against David. In fear, David flees Jerusalem with a minimal army. Much of Israel withdraws their support and throws it behind Absalom. Absalom also has the counsel of Ahithophel who, assuming he is the same one mentioned earlier, is no doubt upset knowing what David did to his granddaughter Bathsheba. Ahithophel throws his wise counsel behind Absalom.

Rather than follow Ahithophel; however, Absalom chooses to follow one of David's men who is acting as a double agent. This proves Absalom's downfall and David is restored to his throne, a broken man with a broken family. In spite of David's request otherwise, Absalom is killed by Joab.<sup>12</sup>

This sad tale raises a huge question: How did this happen to David?

### *What Happened to David?*

In his early years, David seems a totally different man than in his later years. David's rise to power is incredible. He eagerly goes into battle against gigantic odds, holy and set apart for God. He sees the spiritual battle his brothers and King Saul miss. He patiently waits for God's timing and seeks only what is right before God. He marries Michal honestly and is a good husband. He spends his days protecting Saul, even as Saul seeks to destroy him. As king, David is bothered by the idea that David sleeps in a house, while the Ark of the Covenant is in a temporary tent. David prays, and God honors his prayers. The Israelite people flock to David in support and recognition.

Yet with the downfall molded around the Bathsheba sin we see a totally different David, spiraling down. Rather than holiness, we see David violating the tenth commandment by coveting Bathsheba ("You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" Ex 20:17). Then

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<sup>12</sup> Another of David's sons is killed in fighting over the throne. After David dies, his son Adonijah was finally put to death after repeated attempts to take the throne from Solomon (1 Kings 1:5-53).

David violates commandment seven committing adultery (“You shall not commit adultery” Ex 20:14). After that, David seems to have no qualm over violating commandment six having Uriah killed (“You shall not murder” Ex 20:13).

After this, David’s rise to power is reversed. Rather than eagerly going into battle, he is hesitant, fleeing before the threatened coup of Absalom. David cannot see the spiritual battle, but shows muddy thought as he is told by his generals what to do. In contrast to his honorable marriage, David sinfully adds Bathsheba to his already large collection of wives and concubines. Instead of protecting Saul, David plots to kill Uriah. Instead of being concerned over sleeping in a home while the Ark is in temporary lodgings, David sleeps quite handily while the Ark is away for battle. It is Uriah who won’t sleep at home while the Ark is away. David is no longer effective in prayer, his prayers for his child are fruitless. David runs in fear rather than charging the giant fearlessly. David no longer attracts thousands; instead thousands quit him and throw support to Absalom.

What happened?

We see the facts of what happened, including those around the Bathsheba incident in alarming detail, but we are not told the *why*. The suggestions of scholars are as numerous as the motivators are for the sins of any man.

Some scholars see this in 20<sup>th</sup> century parlance as David’s mid-life crisis. Others see it as the incredible beauty of Bathsheba that got David’s mind racing past his self-control. Still others believe David had plenty of outlets for any hormonal impulse and see this more as an exercise in power or the thrill of the chase. One scholar terms the cause a “retirement neurosis.”<sup>13</sup>

I would suggest that David gives insight into the motivation in Psalm 51:10

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Somewhere David had lost his clean heart and was not walking by God’s Spirit. We cannot know exactly how David’s heart was sullied, but any of the suggestions above could be a part, as could most any other sin. As David recognized,

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Pslm 51:5).

The Bathsheba story is not the cause of David’s downfall; it is the story that shows his condition. As Tony Cartledge recognized,

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<sup>13</sup> See the compendium of suggestions in McCarter at 288-9.

David's battles turn inward. The focus of his energy turns from foreign and domestic matters to truly *internal* affairs, for David's greatest enemy is now himself.<sup>14</sup>

Comparing David's reactions as the sin unfolded with that of Uriah just underscored the deplorable state of David's heart. David went from bad to worse while Uriah steadfastly worked to live righteously.

The entire episode is fairly rare in ancient literature. Heroes like David are rarely shown with such clear criticism. In that sense, later rabbis tried to excuse the conduct of David. Some taught that David was not really violating commandments because soldiers might have given a decree of divorce before going off to battle in case something happened to them. In other words, they thought David was within his rights to share a bed with Bathsheba. They then added that Uriah's failure to go home to Bathsheba when David instructed him to do so was treason, for refusing to follow the king's directions. The penalty for treason was appropriately death, so, the rabbis explained, David did not really commit murder.<sup>15</sup> Of course, these ideas show the typical mindset rather than the biblical mindset. These rabbis shared the idea of David that this was not evil in his eyes. Yet God clearly saw the evil.

### *Conclusion*

*Lex, Rex* – the Law is King – Samuel Rutherford had a point. No king is above the law, as God gives the law. There is a moral code and a right and wrong that transcend the position of any human. It is a moral code that is rooted in the righteous character of God himself.

If man attempts to trump that moral code, such an effort might wear a complicated disguise, but it is really simple rebellion. It is as old as Adam and Eve – actually older. The adversary, Satan was in rebellion to God.

No one is above God and his directions. No rationalization is adequate, and no one is immune from temptation. Satan even took Jesus on in the wilderness, seeking to turn him from his purpose and God's direction. Heaven help any of us who get deluded into thinking otherwise

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<sup>14</sup> Cartledge, Tony, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel (Smyth & Helwys Publishing 2001) at 495.

<sup>15</sup> See, *The Jewish Study Bible*, (JPS 2004) and the Midrash cited at 1860. "The various verses that accuse David of adultery and murder are thereby reinterpreted; Uriah was guilty of disobeying the king's order to go home, and was therefore worthy of death as a rebel... his [David's] relationship with Bathsheba was not adulterous because all of David's soldiers gave their wives divorces before setting out to battle."

Proverbs 19:22, 25

David’s intimacy drove him to God in good times and bad. In his joys, he rejoiced with God. In his troubles, he sought God’s deliverance. In his fears, he sought God’s peace. In his blessings, he showered God with thanks. In his sin, he sought forgiveness from God.

The proverbs set within this week’s readings reflect the values placed on steadfast love (Prov 19:22), a love David had for God that was reflected in his treatment of enemies like Saul, friends like Jonathan, and strangers like Mephibosheth. We have also added the value of learning from reproof, something David did when confronted by Nathan with his sin (Prov 19:25).

For David, God was a companion. This is what Jesus was to the believer in Stephen’s day and what he is for the believer today. Jesus was not simply the Rabbi or Teacher for the apostles. He was their companion. God through his Spirit is a companion to those who follow him. He wants to be a close and intimate companion!

**Questions for Discussion**

1. How do you find intimacy with God when times are great? Is it easy to just experience the good times, failing to give thanks to God for them?
2. Contrast the difficult times of life. Do they more easily tune your heart and mind to God?
3. How do you handle sin in your life? Does it grieve you? Does it bring you to confession and repentance before the Lord? Are you able to perceive it driving a wedge between you and intimacy with the Father?

*Week Twenty-six Readings*

<p><b>6/23 Stephen’s Speech</b> Acts 7:45</p> <p>2 Sam 13-15</p> <p><b>6/24 Stephen’s Speech</b> Acts 7:45</p> <p>2 Sam 16-19 Prov 20:2</p> <p><b>6/25 Stephen’s Speech</b> Acts 7:45</p> <p>2 Sam 20-22</p>	<p><b>6/26 Stephen’s Speech</b> Acts 7:45-7:46</p> <p>2 Sam 23-24 1 Chron 22-23 Prov 19:21</p> <p><b>7/27 Stephen’s Speech</b> Acts 7:45-7:46</p> <p>1 Chron 24-26 Prov 19:20</p>	<p><b>7/28 Stephen’s Speech</b> Acts 7:47</p> <p>1 Chron 27-29</p> <p>7/29 <i>off</i></p>
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