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The Moral Conflicts of a Man after God's Own Heart

Stephen B. Putney¹

David is one of the most renowned characters in all of Scripture. Along with Jesus and Moses, he is one of the first characters introduced to children in church. What child in church has not heard of the shepherd boy who killed a giant with just a sling and a stone? What young person has not heard of the great king of Israel who replaced Saul on the throne? Children claim David as a hero who was almost perfect. Something happens though in the minds of teenagers; David is introduced, not only as a man of God, but as a lustful man who committed adultery, and then instigated a murder as a cover up for his actions.

Was David a godly man or an exceedingly wicked man? Maybe he was a man who faced moral conflicts. There appears to be enough evidence to support both his righteousness and his sinfulness. When Saul was rejected as king, Samuel told him, "The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart . . ." (1 Samuel 13:14). One thousand years later, the apostle Paul was preaching at Antioch in Pisidia, proclaiming Christ. In telling the story of the history of Israel leading up to the coming of Christ, he spoke of God's raising up of David after Saul. He said, "I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will." (Acts 13:22). Stephen had earlier preached Christ, also referring to David as one "who found favor in the sight of God" (Acts 7:46). So, was David really a man of God, a man of sin, or someone who traveled in both worlds?

The purpose of this paper is to examine the moral life and conflicts of David, primarily as found in 1 Samuel 13-30, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-2, and 1 Chronicles 11-29. Only slight reference will be made to the psalms of David, not because they are not helpful in gaining the broadest scope of knowledge of this subject, but because this paper would too easily become a book instead of a journal article. There will be extensive citation of the biblical text throughout the paper as David's life is examined morally.

It is imperative in this study that the meaning of the term heart be examined, along with what it means to be a man after God's own heart. Should the student of Scripture be more concerned with the heart of David, or, the heart of God, or both? Both the godly character and decisions of David will be observed as well as the ungodly choices that led David to sin against his God. This paper will also attempt to draw some conclusions about what it might mean to be a man after God's own heart today.

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The Matter of the Heart

Before determining what it means to be “a man after his own heart”, it is necessary to understand how the word “heart” (לֵב) is used in 1 Samuel 13:14. לֵב and לֵב are two words for “heart”, both having the same meaning. The words can be used of the physical organ, but this is not the most common usage. Brown, Driver and Briggs define the heart as the, “inner man, mind, will, heart”² The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology says, “the words have a dominant metaphorical use in reference to the center of human psychical and spiritual life, to the entire inner life of a person.”³ The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament says, “in its abstract meanings, ‘heart’ became the richest biblical term for the totality of man’s inner or immaterial nature. In biblical literature it is the most frequently used term for man’s immaterial personality functions as well as the most inclusive term for them since, in the Bible, virtually every immaterial function of man is attributed to the heart.”⁴

There are other usages of the word “heart”, but the context is always essential in determining just how the word is utilized in each case. As will be seen below, “heart” in 1 Samuel 13:14 is used metaphorically, as is the New Testament reference to this account in Acts 13:22. καρδία is the Greek word for “heart” and though it may be used in a variety of different ways, it most often “agrees with the OT use as distinct from the Greek. Even more strongly than the LXX, it concentrates on the heart as the main organ of psychic and spiritual life, the place in man at which God bears witness to Himself.”⁵ We will see that God and man both have a heart. The heart of both God and man refer to the inner being. In this article, “heart” will only be seen from this perspective. It is “the centre of the inner life of man and the

² Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (2000). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (electronic ed.) (523). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems.

³ Luc, Alex (1997). לֵב In William A. VanGemeren (Ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. (749) Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁴ Bowling, A. (1999). 1071 לֵב. In R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr. & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr. & B. K. Waltke, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (466). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁵ Vol. 3: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (611). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. See the complete article to understand usages of καρδία among the Greeks.

source or seat of all the forces and functions of soul and spirit”⁶ The writer went on to say, “The heart is the seat of understanding, the source of thought and reflection.”⁷

The Heart of God

Most of the time in the Old Testament, “heart” is used with reference to humans. It is used more sparingly with reference to God. The two Hebrew words are used 22 times in 1 Samuel with only two of the occurrences referring to the heart of God. 1 Samuel 2:35 says, “And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever.” The Lord planned to select a priest for Israel who would do what was in God’s heart and mind, unlike the sons of Eli who did only their own selfish will. This usage of heart is similar to its usage in 1 Samuel 13:14 when Samuel told Saul, “But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.” Both occurrences point to the Lord acting according to what was in His own heart.

If the heart refers to the inner person in humans who are made in the image of God, then surely God’s heart also refers to who He is, including His thoughts, plans, desires, and will. When He does something according to His heart, He stays in accord with His own nature and plans. What is it that the Lord thought about, planned, desired, and willed concerning David?

A Man after God’s Own Heart

When considering the idea that the Lord sought out a man after His own heart, there are two major views that must be entertained. The first explanation which is a very popular view holds that God chose David because he was a young man with a heart that was in step with the heart of God. With this view, it is believed that after Saul’s failure, the Lord looked around for a man whose character was in line with the character of God Himself. As He looked, He found David keeping his father’s sheep and the Lord knew He had someone who was living and

⁶. *Vol. 3: Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (611). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

⁷. *Vol. 3: Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (612). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

would continue to walk according to His own plans, purposes, thoughts, and desires. The Lord chose a man who lived on a very high spiritual plane.

In support of this first view is 1 Samuel 16:7. The prophet, Samuel, was sent by God to Bethlehem to anoint the next king of Israel. He thought that the oldest, Eliab, would surely be God's man, but the Lord spoke to Samuel telling him that Eliab was not the man because "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." It seems apparent that God's concern is the inner man, whereas, man is most impressed with what shows on the outside. Did the Lord look at the sons of Jesse and determine who had the best heart, the man who was most in tune with the character of God Himself? There is no doubt that the heart of man is extremely important to God. Psalm 78:70-72 tells us that The Lord "chose David his servant . . . to shepherd Jacob his people . . . with upright heart he shepherded them . . ." It is clear that the Lord chose David, but did He do so because of David's upright heart, or did the Lord choose David who then became a shepherd with an upright heart?

Jeremiah 17:9 relates just how deceitful the heart is, but the Lord Himself in verse 10 searches the heart and tests the mind to give to each person according to his ways and deeds. God knows the inner workings of man, even though man does not fully understand his own heart. Jeremiah 20:12 also says, "O Lord of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind . . ." There is just too much evidence throughout Scripture that the Lord is concerned with the heart of man, but does He choose men based on the quality of their hearts? Was it the heart of David that somehow impressed the Lord, causing Him to choose David?

The second main understanding of the "man after God's own heart" is focused on the Lord rather than the man. This view says that God chose a person according to His own sovereign will, not according to the goodness of the man. McCarter wrote, "This has nothing to do with any great fondness of Yahweh for David or any special quality of David, to whom it patently refers. Rather, it emphasizes the free divine selection of the heir to the throne."⁸ McCarter went on to add that the phrase 'according to one's heart' has to do with an individual's purpose or will.⁹ The equating of "heart" and "purpose" is directly found in Psalm 20:4, a psalm of David which says, "May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans!" The use of synonymous parallelism is obvious. The IVP Bible Background Commentary agrees with McCarter. The writers say, "This statement means that God was now going to select someone of his own choosing (according to his own will or purpose rather than according to the will and purpose of the Israelites). This wording does not concern the piety of David but demonstrates God's exercise of

⁸ McCarter, R. Kyle Jr. (1980) 1 Samuel. (229) Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.

⁹ Ibid.

will in rejecting Saul (a man fulfilling Israel's desire, 9:20) and replacing him with someone who was measured by a different criterion."¹⁰ Finally, John Goldingay concurs with these same thoughts. He wrote, "Other occurrences of such phrases imply this need not suggest he is a king who shares Yhwh's priorities or way of thinking. It simply identifies David as the king whom Yhwh personally chose and made a commitment to."¹¹

There are several scriptures that ought to be considered at this point in support of the second view. As Solomon blessed the people and reminded them of the words of the Lord to David, 2 Chronicles 6:6 says, "but I have chosen Jerusalem that my name may be there, and I have chosen David to be over my people Israel." Why did the Lord choose David? Why did He choose Jerusalem? There is no reason given as to why the Lord chose David, but it cannot be assumed that the Lord chose Jerusalem because it was a better or more spiritual place than any other site. When David was made king over all Israel, the tribes of Israel recognized that the Lord had said to David, "You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel." (2 Samuel 5:20). Again, no reason is provided as to why David was chosen. Psalm 89:20-21 is a similar passage. It reads, "I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him, so that my hand shall be established with him; my arm also shall strengthen him." The emphasis appears to be on God's choosing, not David's righteousness.

After David brought the ark of God to Jerusalem, the Lord made a covenant with him, promising to establish the throne of his kingdom forever. David responded in 2 Samuel 7:21, saying, "Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it." David praised the Lord greatly for being a God like no other; in fact, the only God who had graciously redeemed and established a people for Himself forever. The context seems to offer all the praise to God for working "according to your own heart", or according to His own mind, will, and plan.

There are other instances of the Lord choosing a man when it was clearly not because of the righteous heart of the man. Isaiah 44:28 speaks of Cyrus, king of the Persians and says, "He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill my purpose . . ." Isaiah 45:1 continues, "Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped . . ." The Lord chose Cyrus, a pagan king, and He can choose whomever He desires to accomplish His will.

Jeremiah 3:15 uses the phrase, "after my own heart" that seems to reference 1 Samuel 13:14. The shepherds that the Lord promised to give His people would

¹⁰ Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament* (electronic ed.) (1 Sa 13:14). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹¹ Goldingay, John. (2003) *Old Testament Theology (Volume 1)*. (557) Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

feed them with knowledge and understanding. If this is a direct reference to 1 Samuel, it could simply mean that the Lord would sovereignly choose those who would lead His people as David had done, but it must also mean that He would either select righteous men, or else, He would form them into godly leaders.

The second view has support theologically for the following reason: according to Scripture, there is no one who is good or righteous, and, if this is true, then the Lord could look at every person in every place and never find one who has a heart that is truly in accord with His own. Does this mean that David was just like every other sinful man? The answer to this question is both “yes” and “no”. David was a sinner and there is obvious evidence of this in Scripture, but there is also evidence that he was a man who walked with God. Support for this will be forthcoming in this paper.

The Moral Uprightness of David

There may be some debate as to whether God chose David because of David’s godly character, or whether God chose David for His own sovereign reasons, but there can be no debate as to the abundance of evidence for the godly moral character and lifestyle of David. It is clear that the Lord was concerned with the heart of David when He told Samuel, “the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7). When beginning this study, it was clear to this writer that there was much to say in David’s favor, but the overwhelming amount of material found in the biblical text was more than expected. There are some outstanding features that must be examined.

Value of Human Life

David had a very high regard for human life. Some may assume that this was not the case since David became a warrior of great renown, killing, or being responsible for the deaths of thousands. Others have written much about this issue in the Old Testament. The conclusion of this writer is that David did not kill for personal reasons; he took lives as God’s servant and under His direction. He truly did value human life.

There are several examples of this in Scripture. The most obvious example is found in his treatment of Saul. Even when it appeared that the Lord Himself had provided David opportunities to take Saul’s life, David would not do so. He knew that Saul was anointed as king and that he had no authority to take his life. 1 Samuel 24:5-7 tells the story of the time Saul entered the cave in which David and his men were hiding. David said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord’s anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is

the Lord's anointed." David would not kill Saul, nor would he allow his men to do so. A similar account is found in 1 Samuel 26:10-11 when David entered Saul's camp at night and took Saul's spear and jar of water, but refused to kill Saul. David claimed that this decision came from his own righteousness and faithfulness in 26:23-24 where he told Saul, "'Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation."

David's value of human life went far beyond his response to the Lord's anointed though. When he learned that Ishbosheth, son of Saul, had been murdered by Rechab and Baanah, his brother, David ordered that they be executed. They had assumed that David would reward them for killing the son of Saul and removing the threat he might cause to David. (2 Samuel 4:11). When Shimei cursed David as he was departing from Jerusalem, David refused Abishai's request to take off his head.

David valued people; it seemed to be a worldview issue with him. When his own men who helped him defeat the Amalekites returned victorious, David ordered that they share the spoils of war with those who had been too exhausted and remained behind with the baggage (1 Samuel 30:21-25). On another occasion, when the Philistines had a garrison at Bethlehem, David longed for a drink of water from the well in his hometown. Three of his mighty men broke through the Philistine defenses and drew water from the well so that David might drink. He poured it out before the Lord and said, "'Far be it from me before my God that I should do this. Shall I drink the lifeblood of these men? For at the risk of their lives they brought it.' Therefore he would not drink it" (1 Chronicles 11:15-19). When he realized what they had done, he felt great remorse for having expressed his wish openly. He valued the lives of his men over his own desires.

His value of life was exhibited in the kindness he so often demonstrated even after he became king over all Israel. He showed kindness to Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, by restoring to him all the land of Saul and by feeding him from his own table (2 Samuel 9:7). He also cared greatly for his own son, Absalom, commanding Joab and the army to "deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom" (2 Samuel 18:5). He wept publicly when he learned that Absalom had been killed.

When Shimei threw stones and cursed David as he fled from Jerusalem, David refused to allow his men to kill him. Later, after returning victorious from his short exile, Shimei fell down before David and asked for forgiveness for his sin. Abishai urged David to put Shimei to death because he had cursed the Lord's anointed. David addressed Shimei, promising that he would not die (2 Samuel 19:21-23).

David's care for others is also seen in his treatment of men such as Barzillai and the Gibeonites. Barzillai was an old man from Gilead who provided for David and his men when they fled from Absalom. David offered to bring Barzillai to Jeru-

salem so he could provide for him. Barzillai requested that he be allowed to remain in Gilead and David gave his consent, wanting what was best for his friend (2 Samuel 19:31-40). David also made things right for the Gibeonites who had been treated badly by Saul (2 Samuel 21:1-6).

Concern for Righteousness and Justice

When David became king, he “administered justice and equity to all his people” (2 Samuel 8:15).¹² The words *צדק* and *מִשְׁפָּט* are important parts of the character of God and are considered essential for the one who would honor Him. David fulfilled the dream of his people who had desired to have a king who would “judge” them (1 Samuel 8:20). He was the ruler that the people wanted, but also the king who was concerned about ruling according to the character of God. There is likely not a significant difference in the meanings of these two words. “. . . the terms **justice** and **equity** do not refer to two completely different things. Rather this is very likely a case where two nouns are used in place of a noun and an adjective to talk about a single idea.”¹³ Justice and equity (or justice and righteousness) are essential parts of God’s essence. As Psalm 89:14 says, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne . . .” The Lord rules with these two characteristics and those who desired to please the Lord also made them mandatory traits for ruling their people. For David, there was a concern to be just and righteous towards all his people. His belief in justice and righteousness also meant that those who did evil ought to be repaid by the Lord. 2 Samuel 3:31-39 relates the story of David’s mourning over the death of Abner at the hands of Joab. David said, “The Lord repay the evildoer according to his wickedness!” When Nathan told David the story of the rich man taking the only lamb of a poor man, David justly and righteously declared that the rich man deserved to die and must repay the poor man fourfold (2 Samuel 12:1-6).

The recording of David’s last words demonstrates his priority of ruling with justice and righteousness. 2 Samuel 23:3 says, “The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me; When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.” It is the ruler (David) who dawns, shines, and makes sprout those whom he leads with justice and righteousness.

¹² 1 Chronicles 18:14 is the parallel passage to 2 Samuel 8:15.

¹³ Omanson, R. L., & Ellington, J. (2001). *A handbook on second book of Samuel*. UBS handbook series (786). New York: United Bible Societies.

Was David truly a righteous man? A positive answer to this is found throughout his life and reign, but there appear to be two major supports for this assertion. The first is found in his song of deliverance from his enemies in 2 Samuel 22:21-25. It says:

“The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.
For I have kept the ways of the LORD
and have not wickedly departed from my God.
For all his rules were before me,
and from his statutes I did not turn aside.
I was blameless before him,
and I kept myself from guilt.
And the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to my cleanness in his sight.

As will be seen below, David was not morally perfect, but his general moral character was one of justice and righteousness. This is confirmed in the manner in which he treated his people. Some of his psalms confirm his emphasis on exalting the character of God as being just and righteous, along with his own need to be like God.

The second major support for David being a just and righteous man is found recorded after his death. The kings of Judah were compared to David as the prime example of what it meant to be a righteous king. Solomon was told by the Lord to walk before Him as David his father walked (2 Chronicles 7:17).¹⁴ Asa also “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 15:11). Jehoshaphat was commended “because he walked in the earlier ways of his father David” (2 Chronicles 17:3). Hezekiah also “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done” (2 Chronicles 29:2).¹⁵ Finally, we see that Josiah “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (2 Chronicles 34:2).¹⁶ It is clear that David was considered to be a man of God who was righteous and just.

Conversely, it is also clear that there were kings who came after David who were rebuked or condemned for not being like him. 1 Kings 11:6 says, “Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.” Why did he do evil? Verse four says that “when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not

¹⁴ Compare 1 Kings 3:14; 11:38; 15:5. 1 Kings 9:4 also confirms this, declaring that David walked with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing all that the Lord commanded.

¹⁵ Compare 2 Kings 18:3.

¹⁶ Compare 2 Kings 22:2.

wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.” The Lord said that Solomon’s kingdom would be divided and ten tribes given to Jeroboam because the people of Israel were not “doing what was right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did” (1 Kings 11:33-34). Jeroboam was later reproached because he was not “like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes” (1 Kings 14:8). 1 Kings 15:3 reiterates this rebuke of Jeroboam whose “heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father.”¹⁷

David’s valuing of human life and his commitment to justice and righteousness marked him as a man who had a heart for God and for his people. As will be noted below, he was not perfect, but the normal direction of his heart and the customary practice of his life were God-centered.

The Moral Failures of David

It is obvious to even the casual observer of the life of David that he was not without fault; in fact, some of David’s sins had enormous impact on his own life as well as the lives of his family and his people. A brief examination of some of his moral failures would be helpful at this point.

Speech

David was a man of integrity who customarily spoke truth. He claimed in Psalm 101:3, 8, “I will walk with integrity of heart within my house . . . No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes.” Nevertheless, David had his moments when he chose deceit and dishonesty for pragmatic reasons. In 1 Samuel 20, David asked Jonathan to tell his father, Saul, that he was going to Bethlehem to take part in an annual sacrifice. David’s story was contrived so that Jonathan might learn if Saul was actually angry with David and plotting to murder him. David planned the deceit and enlisted his best friend to lie to his father so they could determine Saul’s intent. It appears that David’s desire to protect himself from harm led to the invention of the story of a trip to Bethlehem. Bergen does not agree that this was a sin, writing, “Jonathan would have to tell his father a lie, but not one that would violate either the letter or spirit of

¹⁷ Compare 2 Kings 14:3; 16:2; 2 Chronicles 28:1 which refer to Amaziah and Ahaz as two other kings who did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord as David their father had done. Actually, Amaziah did right, but still not to the degree that David had done.

the Torah, since its purpose was to preserve innocent life.”¹⁸ This writer does not agree that lying is justified for what some would term “the greater good”.

It was almost immediately after this deception that David utilized the same ploy when he told Ahimelech the priest, “The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, ‘Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you’” (1 Samuel 21:2). David was escaping from Saul and chose to lie to the priest at Nob to he could receive aid in the way of food and a sword. It seems once again that pragmatism ruled David’s decision-making facilities; he was afraid and wanted to escape from Saul’s murderous intent and was willing to deceive to accomplish his goal.

Later, when David came to the conclusion he could not escape Saul while remaining within Jewish territory, he fled to Gath, a city of the Philistines. It was there that he was recognized as the one who was renowned for killing Philistines. Out of fear, David pretended to be insane so he could deceive Achish, king of Gath and save his own life (1 Samuel 21:10-15). His deception worked, later prompting him to once again deceive Achish when he and his men were given the town of Ziklag. David gained the trust of Achish by lying, saying that he was attacking the people of Judah when he was really carrying out raids on the tribal peoples of the south (1 Samuel 27:8-12).

Later, David attempted to deceive one of his own loyal soldiers, a man who had served him well. After David learned he had caused Bathsheba to become pregnant, he plotted to cover his sin by calling her husband, Uriah, back to Jerusalem, hoping that he would have sexual relations with his wife. David believed he could cover up his sinful act by causing Uriah to believe that the child to be born was his own. David’s attempt at deception failed because Uriah was a man of integrity who refused to spend time with his wife while the army of Israel was in combat (2 Samuel 11:6-13).

Although David can be considered to be a man of integrity, he had occasional lapses when he believed that truth could be compromised if the circumstances dictated. There were times when David felt threatened and chose to adopt a relativistic approach to telling truth.

Relationships and the Value of Human Life

David was a man who placed a high value on human life, but his relationships with women were not always ideal. He was first married to Michal, daughter of Saul, but she was given to another man after David was forced to flee from her father (1 Samuel 25:44). David had no power to restore his wife at the time, but when he became king of Judah, he had two other wives, Ahinoam and Abigail (2

¹⁸ Bergen, R. D. (2001). *Vol. 7: 1, 2 Samuel* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (213-214). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Samuel 2:2). When Abner turned his support from Ishbosheth to David, David required that he bring Michal back to him (2 Samuel 3:13-16). After he became king, he took even more wives and concubines for himself (2 Samuel 5:13). This practice may have been common for kings of that time, but cultural norms ought not to have dictated David's sexual morals (Genesis 2:24-25).

Even with all the wives and concubines David possessed, his self-control was weak. When he saw Bathsheba bathing on the roof of her home, he lustfully stared at her and then used his power to have her brought to him so he could have sex with her. His lust led to adultery (2 Samuel 11:2-5). Bathsheba was not his wife and David was clearly informed that she was the wife of another, Uriah the Hittite, one of his own soldiers.

David's devaluation of the life of Bathsheba led to his devaluation of the life her husband. When he found himself unable to deceive Uriah, he ordered Joab to place him "in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die" (2 Samuel 11:15). Uriah died, and along with him, some other Jewish soldiers. David had sinned, but instead of confessing and repenting of his sin, he chose to value his own reputation over the lives of his devoted soldiers. This was not a common practice for David as noted earlier in this paper, but this occurrence led to the death of some of his men, along with serious impact on their families. His earlier use of deception at Nob had even greater negative impact, leading to the murder by Saul of all but one of the priests.

There were other occasions when David did not value human life as he ought. When Nabal selfishly refused to provide aid for David and his men, David became enraged and ordered his men to march on Nabal's camp and execute every male (1 Samuel 25:13, 22). Fortunately, Nabal's wife, Abigail, had a cooler head and was able to appease David while saving the lives of her husband and all their people.

David, the man who so often valued human life, had his moments when he chose to value his own life over the lives of others, and, in effect, devalued their lives so that he could even justify taking their lives.

Another relational failure of David is found in the manner in which he raised his sons. Whether it was because he was a king that had little time for his children or because he believed his sons could do no wrong, or for some other reason, David remained largely uninvolved in their lives, especially at times when his guidance was most needed. When Amnon raped his half-sister, Tamar, David became angry, but took no action (2 Samuel 13:21). He later had opportunity to restore his relationship with Absalom after Absalom murdered his brother, Amnon, but instead, David chose to keep Absalom at a distance, effectively severing their relationship (2 Samuel 13:38; 14:24). Later, when David was old and Adonijah thought the throne would become his, Adonijah never even considered that his father would interfere. David had never asked, "Why have you done thus and so?" (1 Kings 1:6).

Pride

Closely attached to David's view of the value of human life was his view of himself. Pride was not noticeable at most times in David's life, but there was one significant moment when David's pride, not only affected him, but the whole nation of Israel as well. 1 Chronicles 21 and 2 Samuel 24 tell the story of when David ordered Joab to take a census of the tribes of Israel, probably in order to fully assess his military capacity. Joab argued against such an action, but David overruled him. After the census was taken, David was convicted of sin and confessed his pride to the Lord. There was a penalty that fell upon his people, leading to the death of 70,000 of them.

Conclusion

It can be argued that David was a man who had a heart for righteousness and justice (in other words, a man who had a heart like the heart of God). It may also be argued that David had some serious moral flaws. He was a man whom God chose according to His own sovereign purpose (probably not one whom God chose because he in some way impressed God). He was also a man who habitually valued human life very highly, but sometimes lost his focus on his God and did what seemed right in his own eyes. He loved righteousness and justice, but on occasion, was not so righteous or just in his treatment of people.

David was a man to whom other kings were compared. If they were kings who pleased the Lord, then they were like him, but if they did not please God, they were kings who were unlike David. David typically had a heart like the heart of God and it was demonstrated in his treatment of others, but there were also times when he failed morally, sometimes miserably. He was a man who faced moral conflicts and frequently responded just as the Lord would have him respond, but there were a few times when he did not.

Through this analysis, maybe it can be learned that those who follow the Lord are truly and completely dependent on the Lord for His grace and power. Maybe it can be learned that human life must always be valued and people must be treated justly and righteously. Maybe it can be learned that even those who have a heart for God and a heart like God still fail at times when they take their focus off God and turn it towards self. Maybe it can be learned that generally following in the steps of David may be a step towards having a heart like the heart of God.