

Chapter 12 – The Trials of a King

The story of David's murder-by-proxy of the amazingly faithful non-Israelite Uriah in order to cover up his adultery with (quite likely rape of) Uriah's wife Bathsheba is familiar to some of us, as is Nathan's parable used to confront David with his sin. It might appear that David's sins in this case are much worse than Saul's failure to kill all the Amalekites and Saul's rushing the sacrifice in what he regarded as a military emergency.

How did David and Saul's responses differ when God's prophet confronted each king with his sin?

How did God respond to each king's response differently?

Were there consequences for David's sin?

If Eli and Samuel had dysfunctional families, David's family is really a mess. Before we meet David's son Absalom in the summary on page 136, he has already murdered his half-brother for raping Absalom's sister, for which David gave him a mere slap on the hand. After wheedling his way back into court, Absalom set about undermining David's authority until finally he had enough followers to mount an attempted coup. Who knows what mild rebuke Absalom might have received if he had lived?

The chapter closes with David's collecting the materials for the building of the temple and designating Bathsheba's (second) son Solomon as the one who will succeed him as king. David's prayer on page 140 expresses the truth that even the magnificence of the future temple represents God's gift to the people, not their gift to God.

Chapter 13 – The King Who Had It All

Solomon started out relatively well.

Why was Solomon's prayer on page 144 so pleasing to God?

How are wisdom and discernment different from knowledge and intellect?

The pursuit of wisdom was an international phenomenon in the Ancient Near East. We have already seen how important the "wise men" were in Egypt (see page 146), both in the time of Joseph and in the time of Moses. Edom was

also known for its many wise sages. But Solomon's name is the one most associated with wisdom in the Bible.

On page 154 we find the qualification to what in chapter 11 had appeared to be an absolute promise of an eternal Davidic dynasty: God's demand for exclusive worship and obedience. The religious "high" experience of the temple dedication did not last long enough to keep Solomon on the straight and narrow.

It is important to note that God's prohibition against marrying non-Israelites was a little easier to obey when you were in the habit of killing people rather than marrying them. But peace, wealth and power meant the centuries-old practice of sealing treaties with intermarriage. The idea was that if you married your daughter off to the king next door, then her sons would become the leaders of the neighboring country and if you went to war against your neighbor you would be killing your grandchildren. It didn't always work, but the practice lasted in Western Europe until modern times.

These foreign wives of Solomon's found themselves in an alien country where they had nothing in common with anyone and their religion may have become very important to them. Solomon, overcome not only with love for his wives, but also with his international reputation for sophistication may have thought that there could be no harm in a little prayer to Ashteroth with his Sidonian wife before bedtime. Over time he lost his focus on the one true God and all his accomplishments were eclipsed by idolatry. It wasn't as though he hadn't been warned

Thoughts on Christian maturity

If you read David's prayer on page 140 carefully, you find that what David is expressing is amazed gratitude to God for the fact that God's people have been given so much to give: "Who am I and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand." This kind of extravagant joy in giving is available to anyone. But it comes only to those who know that they own nothing and that giving to Kingdom purposes does not diminish their financial security because God is faithful.

Have you ever prayed for wisdom and discernment and felt that God answered? Share your experience with the group.

How can you tell the difference between what you want and what God's will for you is?

When we pray for guidance as individuals and then act on what we believe is God's guidance, we grow from the experience even if we later decide that we misheard God or heard God only partially. And God does not abandon us because of poor decisions when we have done our best to hear God.

The difficulty is expanded when a group of Christians is praying for guidance, especially when there is no one powerful person (like a king or a church official) who has the authority to make a decision after hearing what all the people think they have heard from God. This is the point at which we Baptists often give up discernment for democracy. We go with what most of the people want because we don't know how to find out what God wants. There is no easy solution to this problem.

If your group has time to discuss this, can you come up with some ideas about how a group of Christians could put aside what they want as individuals in an attempt to discern God's will? Is it even important what God wants if a majority of folks in a congregation vote for a certain direction?