

"A STUDY IN STRIDES AND STUMBLES...DAVID"

INTRODUCTION

David vies with Joseph when it comes to breathtaking biography. His story is so lasting and so appealing because so many powerful themes seem to be woven through that story.

If you are looking for the Cinderella story, you will find it in the conquest of Goliath by a shepherd boy with a slingshot. If you like mystery and intrigue, it is waiting for you in the game of hide-and-seek that David played with a jealous King Saul. If you seek a story of two friends, you will find it in the friendship between David and Jonathan. If you want a parable about sin and its consequences, you will read it in the story of David and Bathsheba. Or if you seek a drama about the gulf between a father and his son, you will do no better than to read the tragedy of the rebellion of Absalom against David. There is no more colorful character in the Old Testament than David, the shepherd boy who became the King of Israel.

IT ALL BEGAN

It all began one day, as far as the written record is concerned, when Samuel, God's prophet and kingmaker, stopped by the farm of Jesse in the neighborhood of Bethlehem. One by one Jesse introduced his sons - seven of them - but Samuel was not satisfied that any one of these should be God's anointed one. "Aren't there any more?" he asked Jesse. And it developed that there was one more - the baby of the family, hardly a man yet - out watching the flocks. His name was David. How could his father have known that day as he called the youth in to receive a stranger's blessing that here was the beginning of a destiny that should find echoes in the song of the angels centuries later, "For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord?"

Things began to happen then. Israel was at war with the Philistines, and the three eldest sons of Jesse were at the front. David had been dispatched by his father to take some food to his brothers and check on their welfare. Like any normal boy, he kept his ears and eyes open, hoping for a little excitement. But the soldiers of Israel were only talking about a strange turn of events - how the Philistines boasted a soldier of unusual stature and strength who daily challenged the Israelites to send any one of their number in combat against him - and on the outcome of that personal encounter would depend the outcome of the war.

You know the story - how David volunteered for the position of challenger, and at last King Saul gave his approval. And David, without any armor, started off to do battle with Goliath with only five stones and a boy's slingshot, while his countrymen must have shuddered at the prospect of the slaughter that awaited the boy, and Goliath roared with great laughter at the suggestion of so easy a victory.

But one moment and one stone later the Philistine was on his face, and the Israelites were presented with the incredible fact of victory. With our sophisticated wisdom we are apt to smile knowingly and say, "Sounds like something out of a fairy tale" until you stop to think about some other things - the mighty British Empire being brought to its knees by one man - Gandhi - following World War II and the people of India receiving their independence. Or think of the injection of a tiny amount of vaccine and the crippling effects of polio once and for all being overcome. The continuing influence of a baby born in a manger in Bethlehem and the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. History is forever giving us footnotes to a theme entitled, "See how the mighty have fallen".

ON TO THE PALACE

It was natural, of course, that the king should lavish attention and favor upon the youth who had saved his kingdom. Even more so when it became evident that the shepherd boy could play a harp and that his music would soothe the moods of melancholy which the King knew all too often. So nothing would do except that David should leave the farm of his father and come to live in the palace. But Saul was a tragically mixed-up person. Insecure and immature, he simply could not take in stride what the Gallop Polls were saying: that David was leading him ten to one in popularity throughout the land. He reacted with jealousy toward the rising young star on the political horizon of Israel. Nothing would do now except to get rid of David as a threat to the throne. He tried half a dozen schemes, one after the other, to have done with the youth once and for all.

To David's credit let it be said that he never took advantage of the situation. A lesser person, finding himself in a position of favor in the royal household, would have grasped every opportunity to further his own political ambitions, to shape his own future. Most of us would have acted differently from the way David did. David had some admirable powers of self-restraint. Again and again in the biblical accounts of the years of tension between Saul and David, we find this compliment to David's conduct, "And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways".

One reason, perhaps, was the solid friendship between David and Jonathan. Jonathan was the King's son, and from the beginning there was a wonderful bond of complete understanding and loyalty between these two fine young men. Circumstances changed drastically in the years after David came to live at the palace, but the friendship never changed.

In the years that followed, Saul pursued David relentlessly with a fury and a hatred that became an obsession. David had to flee beyond the borders of Israel to find refuge. Meanwhile Saul's troubles piled up; the Philistines were hammering again at Israel. Saul's three sons were killed, including Jonathan, and the king himself was wounded. Shortly thereafter he took his own life. There is tragedy reflected here in Saul's suicide. He had started his career midst such promise and expectation, but as his power and his prestige grew, his soul seemed to shrink, and he could never think of anyone or anything but himself.

DAVID WAS TO HAVE HIS TURN

But now David was to have his turn as the leader of his people. For thirty-three years, David ruled over the united Kingdom of all Israel. And his reign stands out as one of the most outstanding in the history of Israel, and in later generations David's name became a symbol for the kind of ruler that the great prophets of the Old Testament yearned for. He was a wise administrator, a skillful commander-in-chief, a man of great vision and most of all a man who never forget the grace of God. "He ruled justly over men, ruling in the fear of God".

And yet, even so, his personal life on occasion was something of a mess. If only he had possessed the wisdom as a father and as a husband that he had as a king and general, but he didn't. His son, Absalom, handsome and headstrong, caused him heartache and a father's indecision - "sparing the rod and spoiling the child" eventually brought him grief.

And then there was that affair with Bathsheba that caused gossip in the

kingdom and brought outrage into the heart of many a person, outraged as they saw their own ruler disregard one of their commandments. It was Nathan the Prophet who had the courage to tell the king he had sinned. And remember how he did this. He told the king a story about a rich man who appropriated the only lamb that a poor neighbor had possessed. And David, who had a great heart, couldn't stand a story like that. "If it's true" he stormed, "The man who has done this deserves to die". And Nathan looked at him and said straight to his face, "You are the man". That scene provides one of the great moments in Old Testament history, as a ruler is criticized to his face by one of his subjects.

At the end of his reign and just before his death, David called Solomon to him and entrusted him with the leadership of the kingdom. "Be strong" he charged his son, "And show yourself a man and keep the charge of the Lord, your God....walking in his ways and keeping his statutes". One somehow senses that for all of David's mistakes and weaknesses, nonetheless he had earned the right to speak those words. And we see here a man for whom we feel an amazing kinship, sympathy and regret at his sorrows and sins, and gratitude for his goodness and his greatness.

This then, in general, is the story of his life...highlights, so to speak. Let's look now at several of the factors which conspired to make his name an honored name in the Old Testament. No. 68

HONEST ABOUT HIMSELF

First, dwell on the fact that he was honest about himself. His ego was neither two sizes too small or two sizes too large for the role he was given to play. The people of the country loved him; he was given great power. I suppose that any leader who is given such a popular and overwhelming mandate to rule finds an inner struggle to maintain an even disposition, an honesty with himself. David never deceived himself with any inflated notions about his importance or his indispensability. Whenever he was the hero of the hour, he kept his head. A sign of good and great leadership.

Thus it was even in the aftermath of the trianble that involved David and Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. From Adam to this day people have sought refuge from responsibility for their transgressions by passing the blame to someone else and by refusing honestly to appraise themselves. But not David. Without in any way condoning his sin, it is still a mark of basic spiritual greatness that he could simply say, "I have sinned against the Lord". It has been pointed out that Hebrew religion reached a new high here in the concept of individual honesty and responsibility. It was David's clear insights about himself at work again. What was that motto that Harry Truman had on his desk when he was in the White House. "The buck stops here".

HE HAD A FRIEND

Consider a second contributing factor to David's greatness. He had a friend. You cannot explain David without Jonathan. Jonathan was a magnificent character. When the two first met, it was Jonathan who was in the ascendant position - the King's son and heir to the throne. David was just a farmer's son just come to the city. But in time it was the other way around. David was clearly headed for the positions of leadership, and Jonathan knew that his would never be "the kingdom and the power and the glory". Yet, it never made the slightest difference in the friendship between the two.

Neither exploited the other; neither ever read Dale Carnegie's book, "How to Win Friends and Influence People". There was a complete understanding and deep trust; the kind of friendship that adds immeasurably to the soul's dimension.

We have talked often enough about the high office of friendship in explaining the stature of so many people who have grown into greatness. Have you ever wondered what the lack of real friends has done to others? Someone has raised the question as to what Karl Marx might have thought or been if he had not had such difficulty in his personal relationships? Or Hitler? Or any one of the ten most wanted men on the FBI list? So much of the greatness in the world has its roots in some strong and sustaining friendships; so much of the wicke and the weak has developed because there seemed to be nobody who cared.

If you have a friend, which is another way of saying, "If you are a friend", you possess one of this world's richest blessings. George Eliot put it this way:

"Oh, the comfort....the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but to pour them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping and then, with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away".

"The inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person" - David could write feelingly on that subject.

HE HAD HIS GOD Which leads us to the one other observation about David. Not only did he have good insights about himself, not only did he have a friend, but most of all, he had his God. There is a clear picture here of a man who walked with God.

You see it first when he stands before Goliath: "The Lord....will deliver me". You see it in that long stretch of years when he was taunted by Saul, in the way that he kept his own attitudes free from revenge and bitterness. You see it in the question which David asked God when the news of Saul's death reached him: "What shall I do now?" You see it in the confession of his sin, "I have sinned against the Lord". You see it in his valedictory message to Solomon, "Walk in the Lord's way and keep his statutes".

The simple fact is that David knew a God who accomplished things. Whether or not David actually wrote the 23rd Psalm is unimportant. The spirit of perfect certainty is his. "He leadeth me". It may sound like a strange question to raise in our day in a land which calls itself religious, but the question nonetheless persists, "Do we know a God who actually does things in our lives?", or is our acquaintance limited to a theory behind the universe, or a dull, formal religion, or at best, to an ambulance service to be called in time of emergency?

It is a tremendous moment in a person's life when passive belief in God turns into the amazing discovery that God actually does things if we will let Him, if we will take the time to ask the question that David asked, "What do you want me to do?" And then if through prayer and service we will let him do it. And how often we repeat those words in a creed in our service, "We believe in the one God, Maker and Ruler of all things, Father of all men....we believe in the Holy Spirit, God present with us for guidance, for comfort and for strength". Well, do we? If we do, we know what David was talking when he wrote, "He leadeth me" and what Paul centuries later was talking about when he wrote, I can do all

things in Him who strengthens me". David had his God. He believed in a God who did things - who led him....who restored him....and because of this, he did not want.

PRAYER We thank Thee, O God, for thy servant David....and for the great faith that anchored his soul and his life. Let that faith be in us. As we walk through the dark, difficult and dangerous valleys of life today, may our faith in Thee be strong....evan as was David's. In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen

LAITY APPLICATION FOR SERVICE ON CONFERENCE AGENCIES

Each of the Commissions/Committees/Agencies of the New York Annual Conference should be comprised of clergy, laymen and laywomen. The Conference/District Committees on Nomination are charged with the responsibility of nominating persons to such positions.

This is a request for information from any lay persons who may have an interest in any of the Conference agencies listed below.

Interested lay persons are asked to check the agencies in which they have interest/skills. Each applicant will be considered by the Committee for present and future openings.

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

DISTRICT _____

Please check which category applies:

<input type="checkbox"/> High School Youth	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Married
<input type="checkbox"/> Young Adult (18-30)	<input type="checkbox"/> Female	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic Minority Person	<input type="checkbox"/> Single	

Please check agencies in which you have interest and skills:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Council on Ministries | <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Committees</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Council on Finance and Administration | <input type="checkbox"/> Camping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Board of Pensions | <input type="checkbox"/> Communications |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Board of Trustees | <input type="checkbox"/> Research and Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nominations | <input type="checkbox"/> Equitable Salaries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black College | <input type="checkbox"/> Hunger/Lifestyle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Status & Role of Women | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic Minority Local Church |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conference Sessions | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Councils</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Commissions</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> Adult/Family Life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stewardship | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Young Adult |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evangelism | <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Singles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Global Concerns/Missions | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health and Welfare | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Campus Ministry | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church and Society | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worship | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parish Development | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Religion and Race | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laity | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership Development | |

DEADLINE: Please return this form to Nominations Committee, 210 Boston Post Road, Rye, N. Y. by JANUARY 15, 1981