

Introduction to David: A Man After God's Own Heart



In this series, we will be looking at the life of King David, one of the most famous kings not just in biblical history, but in all history. His story is so well known that we call any underdog story a “David and Goliath” story.

David is an interesting character in Scripture because he is venerated and described as “a man after God’s own heart” even though he committed some of the most egregious sins against God and other people (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). God’s love for David is one of the greatest pieces of evidence of His grace, mercy and forgiveness. It shows us that He is ready and willing to forgive anyone who has a truly repentant heart, no matter how great their sin (1 John 1:9). God doesn’t expect His people to be perfect, even His leaders. But He does expect that when they sin, they will confess, accept the consequences of their sin, repent, and turn back to Him (Matthew 18:15–17; Luke 17:1–3; Galatians 2:8–11; 6:1–3).

When David committed his grievous sin, he first tried to cover it up and fix the situation himself (2 Samuel 11). But when Nathan confronted him, David repented, confessed his sin, and accepted the consequences of his actions (2 Samuel 12; Psalm 51). David’s psalm of confession is one of his richest psalms and one of the most revealing of his heart (his “inner person”) and his great trust in the Lord.

David confessed that he had sinned and done what was evil in God’s sight, and he understood that our sins are not only against people, but against God Himself (51:3–4). He even confessed that the depth of his sin went well beyond his individual actions but was a sin nature into which we are all born (51:5). Yet, he trusted that God would have mercy. Not because David deserved it, but because of God’s character as a God of abundant mercy (51:1–2). He knew that only God could wash him thoroughly from his sin and give him a clean heart and a right spirit (51:2, 7–10). This is the nature of a

person after God's own heart. Not that he or she does everything perfectly, but when the person does sin, he or she repents and turns back to God.

In 1–2 Samuel, David is contrasted with Saul, his predecessor, who served as Israel's first king. In contrast to Saul's great stature and strength, David was chosen for his heart and his faith. David's was a life of trust in God and worship of Him alone. David had a long, difficult journey to the throne, and through it he learned trust in God through personal experience. Once he ascended to the throne, Israel entered the "golden age" of their monarchy, when they had the most land under their rule, enjoyed peace from their enemies, and consolidated worship of God at Jerusalem.ⁱ

Though it was his son Solomon who would build the temple, David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and established a group of worship leaders, musicians and singers there. David's reign became the standard by which all future kings were judged, based on whether they worshipped God alone or allowed idolatry in Israel. Throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles, Israel's kings were judged not only by whether they did "evil in the sight of the Lord" by not following God "wholly" and worshipped other gods, as Solomon did (1 Kings 11:4–6), but also by whether they walked in the ways of their father David, by tearing down all the high places, ridding the land of idols, and leading Israel to worship God alone, as Josiah did (2 Kings 22:2).

Though David sinned greatly and made many mistakes, he never worshipped other gods, and he led the nation to following Yahweh alone. His heart was not divided between other gods and Yahweh. His heart's desire was to follow God and do His will. This is what the Old Testament used as its measure of whether a king was "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:8–14; Acts 13:22). We see this both in the way the Bible contrasts David with his predecessor Saul, who offered false worship (1 Samuel 13:8–14), and in the way it contrasts David with his own son Solomon, who started off well but was eventually pulled away from worshipping God alone. "When Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Kings 11:4) This is why David could be called a man after God's own heart even though he sinned grievously. Being "a man after God's own heart" doesn't mean you do everything perfectly; it means your heart is wholly committed to the Lord.

ⁱ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W.W. Norton & Co, 1999).