

DAVID, A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART... REALLY?

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Christians sometimes get things wrong!

We are becoming increasingly alarmed at articles written under the title "David, a man after God's own heart". It is misleading and causes unnecessary confusion

Let it made clear, we are not contradicting the Scripture which does call David a man after God's own heart in 1 Samuel 16.14 and the apostle endorses this in Acts 13. 22. It is also clear that David was accepted as God's choice, the Lord's anointed (1 Samuel 16. 6)

But this description of David as a man after God's own heart was made when he was a young man. In his youth he was an athlete (1 Samuel 17. 34 -36). He was a poet writing many psalms. He was a harpist and a fine musician and was employed to play music before King Saul who was subject to moods and depression (1 Samuel 14. 14ff.)

David had immense courage. He fought Goliath and won (1 Samuel 17) but I note his real purpose in verse 26, "What shall be done for the man that kills this Philistine?" In other words, "What's in it for me?". Then he brags about a time when he was a shepherd and killed both a bear and a lion single handed... that was worrying his sheep

Nevertheless he became the champion of Israel and his heroic act caused prince Jonathan, the son of Saul, to love David. 1 Samuel 18. 1 refers to Jonathan being knit with the soul of David and that Jonathan loved David. This has given rise to speculation about a possible homosexual relationship but the truth is that we do not know the extent of their friendship and it would be wrong to accuse them of being homosexual

The praise levelled at David for his heroic act made him popular with the people. He was a superstar and had celebrity status and he loved it

David was a proud man and yet we read that God resisteth the proud (James 4.6, 1 Peter 5, 5)

He was considered a threat to Saul's kingdom because of his popularity. It is therefore not surprising that Saul was worried. David leaves court and returns to his farm. Saul plans David's murder (1 Samuel 19.1) and David runs away and becomes an outlaw but not before he has secured Jonathan's support and thereby turning Jonathan against his own father (1 Samuel 20. 1ff.)

This begins David's decline! He deceived Ahimelech the High Priest to give him the hallowed bread to eat (1 Samuel 21. 1) This shewbread was a sacrifice to God and eaten by the High Priest and his sons and by none other (Leviticus 24. 5ff.). David knew the law and that he was breaking it and he was performing deception

Is this the action of a man after God's own heart? The Lord Jesus in Matthew 12. 4 states that David ate the shewbread which it was unlawful for him to eat!

To add to David's deception, he then pretends to be mad because he is frightened of Achish the king of Gath. Where was the courage he had when he had faced Goliath?

At the end of 1 Samuel 20, David had met Jonathan and they kissed and wept together. This is a very difficult friendship to understand. But an outcome of it was Saul's treachery and pursuit of David

To David's credit he encounters Saul and cuts off Saul's skirt but spares his life admitting that the removal of Saul's skirt was a sin (1 Samuel 24. 5). He wanted Saul to know that he had been there.

Sinful David, is this the behaviour of a man after God's own heart?

His behaviour becomes even more disgraceful. He asks help from Nabal, but Nabal is churlish and David takes great offence at this and sets out to kill him. That is an extreme reaction

When Nabal dies of a heart attack, David takes his wife Abigail to be his wife. He did not waste much time did he?

But there is some credit due to David. He prevents Abishai from killing Saul while he is asleep. (1 Samuel 26). This act caused Saul not to pursue David any more, and Saul is about to go to war with the Philistines

But more deception from David. In 1 Samuel 29 he joins forces with the Philistines to fight against Israel and Saul, to fight against the people of God. Excuses may be found to exonerate David but this behaviour is sinister

A man after God's own heart?

It recalls what Paul said to the Galatians in chapter 5. 7, "Ye did run well but who hath hindered thee?"

It is recorded that David mourned over the death of Saul and Jonathan and there is a distressing verse in 2 Samuel 1. 26 where David says that the love he had for Jonathan was greater than any love he had for any woman. Nevertheless David had already bore six sons of his two wives

Polygamy as such was not prohibited in the Old Testament

And David is made king. As king he made and administered the law and his law superseded the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law forbade adultery but David was not only an adulterer but had many mistresses

It is often forgotten that God did not intend Israel to have a king. The people clamoured for a king because the nations round about had kings. The people of Israel pleaded with the prophet Samuel that they should have a king and God told Samuel, "They have not rejected thee but they have rejected Me that I should not reign over them." (1 Samuel 8. 7)

And David the king takes more wives and concubines, that is to say mistresses, and has another thirteen sons. (2 Samuel 5. 13). Having even one mistress was against the law. The commandment is, "Thou shalt not commit adultery".

In the time of David anyone found guilty of adultery was stoned to death

This presents a great problem. Should David have been so punished? Is having more than one wife allowed in God's law? That David had mistresses and sex with them which produced children is he not guilty of adultery? Is he not violating the seventh commandment?

I have heard Christians answer this by saying,

"He was God's anointed".

"God did not object!".

"He was the king and his word was law!".

The most shocking events in David's life begin with the recovery of the ark of the covenant in 2 Samuel 6. It was known that no one was allowed to touch the ark but Uzzah did in order to rectify its stumble. God struck Uzzah dead and David was furious and, for three months, hid the ark in the house of Obededom. He was wrong to be angry with God but right to be afraid of God. Only moments before he had been in high spirits. When he did bring the ark into Jerusalem he disgraced himself. All he was wearing was a linen ephod tied around his waist.

Now the linen ephod was the vestment worn by the High Priest (Exodus 28. 4, 39. 2) and its improper use was a snare as Gideon found out (Judges 8.27), This linen ephod could only be worn by the High Priest. Was this ephod,

which wore improperly by David, the property of Abiathar the High Priest, who was the son of the previous High Priest, Ahimelech, whom David had also deceived

Whoever owned this linen ephod David had it tied around his waist. The ephod was a tunic worn from the shoulders down. David should certainly not have it tied around his waist

It is like schoolboys today who use the arms of a jumper to tie it around their waist

Then we read that David danced before the Lord and Christians take the expression danced before the Lord to indicate God's approval. That is really false. Everything we do is before the Lord. God sees all things (Genesis 16. 13)

I remember a little girl in Sunday School asking, "Does God see me picking my nose?"

The reply was, "Everything we do is before the Lord. He sees everything".

David's wife saw David dancing and leaping, and despised him and understandably so. Later she upbraided him with the sarcastic words, "How glorious was the king of Israel today who uncovered himself today in the sight of even the young handmaids as one of the vain young fellows uncovers himself!".

David was naked under the ephod and showing his manhood in public even to young girls. He was uncovered. He was an absolute disgrace. His excuse that it was before the Lord was no excuse. This was indecent exposure as set out in the law that God gave to Moses

The Bible records that his dancing before the Lord was vile which means morally disgusting and wicked. Therefore Christians cannot use David's example to justify dancing in Christian worship

Is this the conduct of a man after God's own heart?

The fact that David's wife, Michal, had no children was not a punishment for what she said. What she said was right. But the accuser of the king could only be a man of God, the prophet, and Nathan was going to do that

When Christians justify dancing in modern worship because David danced before the Lord they ignore the example that David set which was disgusting, immoral and sinful

Joyce Baldwin in her exposition of the books of Samuel states that David's dancing was a whirling and he was using an old ritual dance since David paid attention to the ritual requirements which God had laid down. Baldwin also states that David was wearing the priestly ephod which she asserts he had every right to wear but all of these assertions are not sanctioned in the Old Testament. The commentator also asserts that Michal despised David for the qualities that made him great but Baldwin does not explain that he uncovered himself before the young female servants but asserts that he had stripped off his royal robes. The facts are that he was being vile, his own words, wearing the linen ephod improperly and was displaying his sexuality in a fit of uncontrolled excitement

Laurence Porter rightly points out that Michal despised David for uncovering himself and in front of his servants' maids as a vulgar fellow shamelessly uncovers himself. There is no doubt that he was showing his genitalia

We must remember that with the Mosaic law, there were legal matters and moral matters and these have to be distinguished. As regards legal practice it has to be realised that constitutionally the kings of Israel were above the law since the kings administered it

A few chapters later, David becomes a murderer. In 2 Samuel he sees a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, and wants her for sex. Let us not be coy about this and dress it up. But she is married to a soldier Uriah. David arranges for Uriah to be in the forefront of battle and be killed. What an evil mind David had

David had sex with Bathsheba even though she was married to Uriah. David committed adultery in breach of the law of God.

A man after God's own heart?

- With Uriah dead, David takes Bathsheba to wife and they have a child who dies in infancy.

To David and the people of Israel the death of Uriah would not have been considered to be of great importance since Uriah was a foreigner. He was a Hittite. Had Uriah been an Israelite there might well have been serious repercussions

Later, David and Bathsheba had a son, Solomon, who, in his adult years, became very wicked (1 Kings 11) building temples to pagan gods. He had seven hundred wives, mostly princesses, and 300 mistresses. He was a serial adulterer and a serial idolater.

And it grieves me when some Christians talk of typology and say that David and Solomon are both types of Christ. That is blasphemous. In Christ was no sin (1 Peter 2.22) and there was plenty of regular sin in both David and Solomon. Philippians 2. 9 states that the Lord Jesus is higher than all others. Who can compare with Him? Who can be a type of Christ?

There are things in the Bible that are hard to understand and perhaps it is pointless to try to understand such things. There are matters on which it appears that God is silent such as the matter as why he apparently allowed David to have mistresses. Abraham had a mistress and the result was Ishmael and the beginning of the conflict between Arabs and the Jews and it has to be noted that Abraham's wife, Sarah, persuaded her husband to have Hagar as his mistress

It has been rightly said that when God is silent about something it is best for us to be likewise. It is not for us to question God

In 2 Samuel 7, Nathan the prophet comes before David and tells him the story of a rich man taking a poor man's ewe which was a family pet. The rich man insisted that the ewe be slain and cooked for him to eat. Nathan asked what should be done to this rich man. "The man that has done this must surely die", thundered David

And Nathan points the finger at David and shouts, "Thou art the man!".

We spoke earlier of the Mosaic law being in two parts, the legal and the moral. There is no doubt about the moral question: David was treacherous to a faithful servant and deserved punishment

It is to be noted that David repented and that Psalm 51 is the acknowledgment of his sin and his penitence. It is a very beautiful work of sublime poetry and verse 17 is very telling, "A broken and contrite heart, O Lord thou will not despise".

Repentance is to admit sin, confess it and, with God's help, not to repeat such a sin

What is recorded in 2 Samuel 12. 13 is that Nathan tells David that God has pardoned the king but does not save the child born to David and Bathsheba

One of David's daughters was a beautiful woman called Tamar and he also had a son called Amnon. Amnon raped his sister Tamar. Another brother Absalom had Amnon murdered

Note the parallel in David's own life. He had illegal sex with Bathsheba. His son Amnon had illegal sex with Tamar. David had Uriah killed. Absalom had Amnon killed

One could exclaim, "What a family!".

Many of the people were now turning against David largely due to his disgrace of his dancing at the return of the ark. Perhaps the news of his outrageous behaviour with Bathsheba and her husband has become known. Many are beginning to support Absalom to be king. There is war between David and his armies and Absalom and his armies This was a family at war. How much of this is due to the bad example set by David?

A man after God's own heart?

There are many theologians and fine Christians who take the view that David being a man after God's own heart is an opinion of the Old Testament chronicler and a statement repeated by the apostle Paul.

David's sins were many and they were gross, outrageously wrong, coarse, vulgar, disgusting and repulsive. But what is greater than all of this is the mercy and forgiveness of God

But things do not improve for David. Joab kills Absalom and David laments, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I would have died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

There is no doubt that David meant this. He must have realised that he had brought trouble on his own house and family. One recalls Proverbs 11. 29, "He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind".

Towards the end of his life, David falls into more sin. In 2 Samuel 24 he numbers the people and determined how many men he could raise as an army and, because of this, the Lord was angry with David. The king should have trusted the Lord who would fight for David in any just cause

The book of 1 Kings begins with David old and not being able to keep warm so that his bed is stacked with blankets. His servants agree to find a beautiful young virgin to sleep with him ostensibly to keep him warm. Abishag is found

This raises questions and moral issues

Where were David's wives and could not one of them sleep with him? Bathsheba was still in the royal palace

Why did the person to sleep with David have to be young, beautiful and a virgin?

Then there is another fight for the throne even before David dies. The family is at war again with Solomon versus Adonijah and their respective supporters

Solomon becomes king and, like his father, he started well but it did not last. The Lord had to raise up armies to punish Solomon because Solomon was wicked (1 Kings 11)

However, David is mentioned in Hebrews 11 in the so-called hall of fame. For all his grievous sins he was never an idolater as was his evil son, Solomon, who is not mentioned there.

There was a day when the Jews were telling the Lord Jesus what a wonderful man Solomon was

The Lord replied, "Consider the lilies of the field. They toil not neither do they spin and yet I tell you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these".

And it must be remembered that in those days, lilies were weeds and used for fuel

Obviously the Lord did not think highly of Solomon and how can some Christians assert that Solomon is a type of Christ?

David, a man after God's own heart... really? Yes, to begin with, but a man that is an adulterer, a murderer who commits outrageous sins is hardly a man after God's own heart. We must use this expression with care and not indicate, imply or suggest that David was always a man after God's own heart

To balance matters, it may well be true to say that David's initial desire was to be man after God's own heart but sin and desire for other things seriously hindered that spiritual desire

God is greater than the heart of any man (1 John 3. 30).

We must also stop and prevent comparing sinful men with the sinless Christ.

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Answers to questions received

You must first understand that David was often a rebel and, apparently, did not have the necessary respect for the office of High Priest. In 1 Samuel 21, he ate the shewbread which it was unlawful to eat and could only be eaten by the High Priest.

The ephod was part of the vestments worn by the High Priest. These vestments really consisted of two garments, a tunic or apron, and the robe underneath. There was also a turban. This was the uniform of the High Priest and, for example, in the UK, the police have a uniform and it is a punishable offence for anyone else to wear it. So it was with the Jews (read Alfred Edersheim etc.). The vestments were worn by the High Priest in his duties which included the times when he was making atonement for the sins of the people. The tunic had shoulder pieces and was tied with a girdle at the waist. This is confirmed by Hebrew historians and Hebrew Christians who say that these tunics were tailor-made and were not all the same.

They were consecrated garments.

The High Priest, Abiathar, fled from Saul and joined David in the cave at Adullam and brought the ephod with him (1 Samuel 22.20 etc.). It has often been said that David could bend Abiathar around his little finger and this is probably why Abiathar later joined the rebel Adonijah. David certainly had Abiathar's predecessor Ahimelech under his power.

In the original translation of the Old Testament, it says that David was wearing the priestly garment, the ephod. It also says that he exposed himself to the girls along the street like a common pervert which is how the Living Bible renders it. Other versions, which are true to the original, says that David acted like a common rake, a mountebank and David himself refers to himself as a vulgar, shameless person and as a base and vile fellow

I do not agree that the King James version is a poor translation which some are asserting.

To be uncovered means to expose oneself, to show one's sexuality. Leviticus 18 tells us that we are not to see the nakedness of others or to show our nakedness to others. In Isaiah 47, a women with bare thighs was naked which creates problems for swimming and other sports. As well as Leviticus 18, Exodus 28.42, 32.25 etc., these verses all confirm that nakedness or showing your sexuality was an abomination and sinful. Often God uses stripping someone naked as a sort of ultimate punishment as in Hosea 2. 3, for example. To be uncovered was only allowed in marriage (Hebrews 13. 4).

David uncovered himself and he does not dispute it. He was like a vulgar fellow who shamelessly uncovers himself. Whether he was wearing a linen ephod or the ephod of the High Priest does not really matter. Whether it was a tunic and whether it was sleeveless is also comparatively irrelevant. He was uncovered! The ephod was girded around him (verse 14). It does not say he was wearing it properly. The word girded often means around the waist or on the lower part of the body. Girded means encircling one's loins or preparing to put on one's underwear. It can also mean to prepare for a fight or conflict. After the giving of the ten commandments in Exodus 20, the Lord states that 'ye shall not go up steps to the altar lest thy nakedness be seen', that is to say discovered or uncovered (verse 26). Men wore knee length tunics whereas women wore ankle length tunics. To show one's underwear was sinful; to show one nudity was an abomination.

The consequences of the first sin was nakedness and shame.

David was singing, dancing and celebrating the return of the ark to Jerusalem. He was eating and drinking wine (2 Samuel 6. 19). Some have suggested that he was drunk! He had made the requisite sacrifices to God and was now revelling in what he regarded as his victory. It was a party and judging from David's behaviour it was wild, or, if you wish to be diplomatic, it was a happy occasion!

Recall the apostle Peter, who dived into the sea as he did not want the Lord to see him naked because it was sinful.

All that we do is before the Lord. It does not mean that the Lord approved of it.

Ask yourself, Did God approve of David's dancing and showing himself to girls along the street?

You must also remember that David was angry with the Lord for smiting Uzziah (the word is grossly indignant) and his subsequent vile dancing indicated his disregard for the Lord and a total disregard for the sanctity of the human body even though he had offered sacrifices. They were having the party before Uzziah was slain (2 Samuel 6. 5)

As to Michal, what she said was not wrong to say as a wife, but the law says that only the prophet could rebuke the King as had Nathan the prophet. While she had no children, search the Scriptures and you will see that she fostered some.

Now there are people who interpret this another way and in so doing ignore parts of the text.

There are also people who use this second interpretation to justify their types of worship. Some say that dancing is an acceptable part of worship because David danced before the Lord. But his dancing was vile and explicit and, therefore, sinful!

In the USA, there are over 15,000 'Christian' cults many of which advocate free sex and being uncovered.

In all of this, you must remember that David was a changeable character. He was not always a man after God's own heart! He was the king and he made the law even though it sometimes conflicted with the law of God. He would have agreed with Ecclesiastes 8.4 that the word of the King was power. However, David often said that he delighted in the law of God but consider how many times he violated God's law.

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