

If I were to mention David in the Bible what would you think of first?

Maybe you would recall the story of David and Goliath, in which David, the youngest of his brothers, leaves the family sheep in the fields and goes to the Israelite army facing the Philistines, the army where his older brothers are fighting.

David convinces the king, Saul, that he should face Goliath. The young David is so small he cannot walk while wearing armor, so he faces and defeats Goliath using only a slingshot. David goes on to become a king respected and admired by the Israelites.

Or perhaps you would remember the story of David and Bathsheba that we just read.

A narrative in which the esteemed king David commits both adultery and murder. Both of these narratives are important stories in the Bible, and yet they show drastically different sides of David's character.

Essentially, in 2nd Samuel 11, King David sees a beautiful woman, and although he knows she is married to Uriah the Hittite, he commands his messengers go and take Bathsheba from her home, and he lay with her. When David learns that Bathsheba is pregnant, he calls for his soldier, Uriah, to come to the palace under the pretense of discussing the battle. David attempts to trick the soldier into going home, hoping that Uriah will just assume that he is the one who got Bathsheba pregnant.

However, Uriah does not go home. Instead, he sleeps outside the palace gates, in the field with all the other servants.

When King David hears this, he gets Uriah drunk, but even then, Uriah does not go home.

So David tells the commander, Joab, to put Uriah at the front line of the battle, and then retreat, so Uriah will be killed in battle.

Throughout the narrative we learn of David's lies and deceit. His minute of desire turns into a story of adultery and murder.

David makes bad decision after bad decision.

He inquires about the beautiful woman he sees, and learns that she is married to his soldier Uriah, but that does not stop him from summoning her to the palace.

Here in verse 4, although the NRSV translations reads "So David sent messengers to get her..." a more correct translation of the Hebrew word לְקַחְהָ would actually be "take"; "David sent messengers to take her."

In a patriarchal Biblical society, Bathsheba would have not been able to refuse King David.

There would be no way for her to resist a man, much less a king.

When David learns that she is pregnant, he frantically tries to get Uriah to go home, using the euphemism "wash your feet", but when that falls through, the King plots to get Uriah killed.

Uriah is portrayed as the moral character in this narrative - he is loyal. He refuses to go home to eat, drink, and lay with his wife while the other soldiers and servants remain sleeping in a field outside the palace gates. Even when he is drunk, Uriah remains outside the palace gates.

It is difficult to reconcile the young David who defeats Goliath and rises to power *appointed* and *anointed* by God with the King David from this narrative.

Many Biblical scholars over time have tried to "soften" the story, unable to believe our hero David could fall in such a way.

Some have used Bathsheba as a scapegoat, saying she *wanted* to be seen by King David, that she was *asking for it* by bathing outside, moving David from perpetrator to victim.

Others rationalize, arguing that Uriah was an absent husband, perhaps even abusive. They label the marriage "bad" because Uriah was a Hittite, while Bathsheba was an Israelite.

There are some that romanticize the relationship, saying that David was *in love* with Bathsheba, turning the story from one of lust and power to one of love and romance.

There are no clues anywhere in the text that hint of these sort of justifications.

In a similar way, we tend to try to rationalize our own sins. There is a defense mechanism that we put into play to try to soften the blow of our sins.

And yet, just because we have not committed adultery or murder does not mean we are better than David. It does not mean that at one time or another we have not used our power to exploit others. But it is always to see the sins of others than our own sins.

When writing obituaries it is typical to focus on the many positive aspects of a person's life. It is rare to read an obituary lists out a person's sins.

During my first semester of seminary my Old Testament professor asked the class to split into small groups and write an obituary for David, but we were invited to write the obituary focusing on his entire life, not just the good aspects. My groups obituary included:

David was born in Bethlehem to Jesse and Jesse's girl. David was the youngest of seven boys. Much to his parents' relief he overcame his early fixation with shepherding, proving himself by killing Goliath. [He was the reigning Slingshot Champ]. David was a free spirit and a talented player. He had a complex relationship with his father-in-law, King Saul. David married Michal, daughter of Saul and his very, very close friend, was Jonathan, son of Saul. David is remembered fondly by all of his wives and some of his concubines. As King, David solidified the twelve tribes, established God's city of Jerusalem, and slayed all day. In David's free time he enjoyed taking in the scenery around the palace. David is preceded in death by his beloved parents and his slightly less beloved brothers. David is survived by many of his nineteen kids and counting.

David is known as Israel's greatest king. His name even means "beloved one."

But, when we dig a little deeper and look over his entire life, we learn that he was not immune to temptation.

He abused his power to commit adultery and murder.

He succumbed to human weakness, although he was a king, both anointed and appointed by God.

As Christians, we must not attempt to romanticize or rationalize or soften the story of David. What David did was terrible.

He is a fallen hero, and we must recognize the sin in his life.

But there is good news for us in this story. David is still a beloved part of God's family. He is still known as the greatest king of Israel.

In fact, Christ is called the "son of David" no less than 15 times in the synoptic Gospels.

Knowing that David was a sinner too, we are able to face the reality of our own sins, knowing that we are still a part of God's family.