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The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham . . . (Matt. 1:1).

As we pick up the New Testament Scriptures and begin to read, we are immediately informed that Jesus Christ was the "son of David." Whatever other genealogical references were deemed necessary or appropriate, we are not allowed to forget that Jesus was the "son of David." Even reference to Abraham is placed in a secondary role.

As word came down from heaven to those immediately involved in the birth of Christ there was constant reference to David:

- The angel who appeared to Joseph called him - "Joseph, thou son of *David*" (Matt. 1:22).
- Gabriel informed Mary that the child in her womb would inherit the throne of his father *David* (Lk. 1:32).
- When the tongue of Zacharias was loosed the Holy Spirit inspired him to bless God for: ". . . raising up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant *David* . . ." (Lk. 1:68).

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- When the angel informed the shepherds of the nativity he said, “. . . unto you is born this day in the city of *David*, a Savior which is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:11).

Surely these references to David are not accidental nor incidental in the Holy Scriptures. God was obviously trying to communicate something which He considered both significant and important. Jesus had many, many ancestors. The genealogical record in Luke 3 traces the lineage of Jesus clear back to Adam and ultimately to God. Every one of these ancestors was an essential link in achieving the incarnation, but reference to David is given special priority.

The Gospel records are filled with numerous references to Jesus as the “Son of David” (Matt. 9:27; 20:30; Mk. 10:47; Lk. 18:38, etc.). Even the Canaanite woman who begged for mercy called Him, “O Lord, thou Son of David” (Matt. 15:22). His triumphal entry into Jerusalem gathered about Him a frenzied mob tearing branches from Palm trees and throwing their garments on the roadway before Him. They were shouting, “Hosanna to the son of David.” Even little children in the temple picked up the refrain and echoed the oft repeated and inescapable fact that Jesus was the “son of David” (Matt. 21:15).

The First Mention of David in the Bible

The first mention of David in the Bible is found in the book of Ruth. The book was obviously written after David was born, but covers a period of history several centuries before when Israel was ruled by judges (Ruth 1:1).

The last verses of the book of Ruth give us a part of David’s genealogy. Interestingly enough, the record begins with “Pharez” (Ruth 4:18).

Pharez, you will recall, was conceived in unusual circumstances and born in a certain amount of controversy.

Tamar, his mother, had suffered the loss of two husbands, Er and Onan. Judah, her father-in-law, had promised her his third son, Shelah, when he was old enough for marriage.

Judah, however, did not keep his promise. Tamar therefore disguised herself as a harlot and seduced Judah. When she gave birth to twins one infant extended his hand from his mother’s womb. The midwife tied a scarlet thread upon his hand and said, “This came

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out first" (Gen. 38:28). The legal definition of firstborn involved the one which first opened the womb. But it came to pass that the boy with the scarlet thread drew back and the other twin was born first. They called him "Pharez" which means "breach." The baby with the scarlet thread was called "Zarah" which means "dawn."

The genealogy of Judah to David was not reckoned through "Zarah" who was the legal firstborn, but through Pharez. This genealogical record is found in the book of Ruth, who was herself a foreigner from Moab and a convert to Judaism. It needs to be remembered that this genealogical record is not just that of Judah and of David, but also of the Christ.

Thus, the first time we find the name of David mentioned on the pages of the Bible it is done so in association with individuals and events which challenge our thinking and lead us to ponder the marvelous way that God works. Surely we have a God who is not bound by law or legal systems.

What David Did?

Once while Jesus and His disciples were walking through a field on the sabbath day, His disciples were hungry and began to pluck the ears of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees criticized them for doing that which was not "lawful," Jesus responded.

Have ye not read what David did (Matt. 12:3)?

The incident before us is of such significance that it is repeated three times in the Gospels (Matt. 12:1-4; Mark 2:23-28; Lk. 6:1-5). Each time Jesus specifically stated that David did something which it was not "lawful" for him to do.

A closer consideration of this "crime" reveals that David entered into the house of God and ate the shewbread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests. Yet, remarkably, David was not condemned . . . even though he did that which was not lawful to do.

Jesus asked His contemporaries to consider this story. He expected them to ponder what David did and to gain understanding and insight into what He was doing.

In the light of these probing questions of Jesus perhaps it would be appropriate for us to take a closer look at what David did. With

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everything which God does, the closer we examine it the more beautiful it becomes. A snowflake, for example, is beautiful when seen on a mountaintop or a frosted tree, but it is even more beautiful when it is seen closely and magnified a thousand times. That which man does, by contrast, is more ugly and disgusting the more closely it is examined. The picture which looks so beautiful from across the room loses a great deal of its beauty when examined with a magnifying glass. The closer we examine David, the uglier he becomes.

I Samuel 20

Let us begin our story with I Samuel 20. David was now suspicious and afraid of the wrath of King Saul. He consulted with Saul's son, Jonathan, to map out a strategy for survival. A certain signal was agreed upon if it was safe for David to remain, and another signal was determined if David was to flee. It was not safe. Saul even hurled his javelin at Jonathan himself. David therefore arose from his hiding place and fled for his life.

I Samuel 21

The fleeing David arrived at Nob and spoke with Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech was afraid and wondered why David was alone.

At this point it is difficult to believe what we are about to read. For David, the man after God's own heart, told a terrible lie. A lie that would not only cost Ahimelech his life, but which would take a great many other lives as well. It resulted in the deaths of 85 priests as well as all the men and women and children who lived in the city of Nob (see I Sam. 22:18-19). Since you as a busy reader may not take the time to check out this Scripture, we here reproduce it for your convenience.

And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg and the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.

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David was later to admit to Abiathar: "I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house" (I Sam. 22:22).

David told Ahimelech,

The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place (I Sam. 21:2).

This, however, was not true. David was not on an urgent matter for the king; as a matter of fact, if Saul had known where David was he would have killed him.

If Ahimelech had only known the truth, he might not have been so willing to provide David with Holy Bread and the weapon of Goliath, and he and his colleagues might not have been condemned for what Saul considered an act of high treason.

Be that as it may, we are left to wonder at "what David did." Nadab and Abihu died for offering strange fire (Lev. 10:1ff.). The men of Bethshemesh died for looking into the Ark (I Sam. 6:19). Uzzah died for touching the Ark (II Sam. 6:7). Saul was rejected by God as King for presuming to function as a priest (I Sam. 13:13) . . . But David did that which was not lawful for him to do . . . and somehow . . . some way . . . he was not condemned.

Other Things Which David Did!

The incident with Ahimelech is just the tip of the iceberg. David did a great many other things which boggle the mind of a Bible student. Take, for example, his association with Achish, the King of Gath. Initially, David survived in Gath by pretending he was crazy,

. . . and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate and let his spittle fall down upon the beard . . . (I Sam. 21:13).

Later, however, David became more bold and aggressive. He was given the city of Ziklag, by Achish (I Sam. 27:6) and used this city as a staging base to attack the enemies of Israel.

And David and his men went up, and invaded the Geshurites, and the Gezrites, and the Amalekites: . . . and David smote the land, and left

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neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned and came to Achish (I Sam. 27:8-9).

When Achish inquired what he had been doing, David lied to him. He said he had made war "against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites." And because David had killed all the witnesses, there was no one to inform Achish what had actually happened:

"So did David, and so will be his manner all the while he dwelleth in the country of the Philistines" (I Sam. 27:11).

Achish thought David was being abhorred by Israel. In reality, he was being joined by men from Israel (see I Chron. 12:1-17) and was sending spoils to his friends there which he had taken from the enemies of God (I Sam. 30:26-31).

When the stage was set for Saul's final battle, David lined up to fight with the Philistines against Saul. The princes of the Philistines questioned the wisdom of trusting David. They said,

Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands? (I Sam. 29:5).

Achish had been totally deceived. Note his defense of David.

. . . David . . . hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day? (I Sam. 29:3).

Then Achish called David, and said unto him, Surely, as the Lord liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host is good in my sight: for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day . . . (I Sam. 29:6).

And Achish answered and said to David, I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God; . . . (I Sam. 29:9).

Fortunately for Achish, the princes of the Philistines prevailed, and David was not permitted to join their ranks in the battle against Israel. We have reason to believe that David would never lift his hand against Saul and if his men had been permitted to infiltrate the Philistine army the outcome of the battle might have been much different (see II Sam. 1:15-16).

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David and the Moabites

We know that David had ancestral roots in Moab because he was born from descendants of Ruth. Some have speculated that David's mother may have been a Moabite, because he left her and his father in Moab for protection while he was fleeing from Saul (I Sam. 22:3-4).

Later, however, David smote Moab and put them to death in an unusual manner. He cast them down to the ground and began to measure with a line. He killed all those in the first measurement, and also the second, but saved alive the final one-third of the people (II Sam. 8:2). So the Moabites became David's servants and brought him gifts.

David and the Ammonites

When David conquered Ammon he tortured them with great severity.

And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon . . . (II Sam. 12:31).

Keil and Delitzsch in commenting upon this passage say:

So far as the circumstances themselves are concerned, the cruelties inflicted upon the prisoners are not to be softened down, as Daaz and others propose, by an arbitrary perversion of the words into a mere sentence to hard labour, such as sawing wood, burning bricks, etc.

Translating from the Hebrew they insist that "he cut (sawed) them in pieces" and insist that the meaning cannot be more precisely determined.

God's Assessment of David

When Samuel came to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be the next king, we are explicitly informed,

. . . the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart (I Sam. 16:7).

The idea that David might be the next king did not seriously enter the mind of his family, and even after he had been anointed in the

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midst of his brethren, the firstborn son, Eliab, looked upon him as the victim of pride and a naughty heart (I Sam. 17:28).

But the Lord does not see things as man sees them. We look only upon the externals . . . God looks upon the heart.

Years after the death of David the inspired author of the Kings would write,

. . . David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite . . . (I Kings 15:5).

Though his exploits in war prevented him from the privilege of constructing the temple, he is remembered in sacred history as a man who found the blessedness of an imputed righteousness without works. His iniquities were forgiven, and his sins were covered (Ps. 32; Rom. 4:6-8).

Moreover, he provides us with many profound considerations as we seek to understand the nature of God and His marvelous grace.

Surely the Lord is trying to teach us something.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions (Matt. 22:41-46).

Perhaps it is not the time for us to be asking questions either. Maybe we need to meditate upon David as he relates to law and grace and our own personal need for faith.

Without faith it is impossible to please God . . . and the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Why do you suppose that Jesus was called the "Son of David" before he was called the "Son of Abraham" in Matt. 1:1?
2. How was it possible for Pharez to be a part of the Messianic line when his twin brother came out first (Gen. 38:28)?

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3. When Samuel came to Bethlehem to anoint a king, why do you suppose David was not among the candidates but was out in the field with the sheep (I Sam. 16:11)?
4. In your judgment which of David's sins was the worst?
5. How was it possible for David to be a man after God's own heart when he did so many things that were wrong?
6. Why was King Saul not known as a man after God's own heart (I Sam. 13)?
7. How was David able to do that which was not lawful, and not be condemned for it (Matt. 12:1-4)?
8. Explain I Kings 15:5: "Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matters of Uriah the Hittite."
9. Explain: ". . . for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (I Sam. 16:7).
10. Which is more important to God, what a person does with his body, or what he has in his heart?

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