



What We Can Learn from King David's Fall

We can avoid tragedy by learning from the chain of bad choices that separated David from the Spirit.

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The Old Testament is filled with good examples to emulate and bad examples to avoid. What makes it especially applicable, however, is its stories of good people who often try to do what is right but also make mistakes. King David is one such example.

The Book of Mormon prophet Moroni said, “Give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been” (Mormon 9:31). We can apply this same principle to King David’s life. We do not glorify the mistakes he made, but thankfully we can learn from them.

A Good Start Isn’t Enough

King David was foreordained to accomplish great things. And as a young man he had great zeal for the Lord and rose to great heights. But foreordination is no guarantee. Rather, it is an opportunity that depends upon faithfully living the gospel. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained: “God foresaw the fall of His beloved David but did not cause it. (See D&C 132:39.) Sending for Bathsheba was David’s decision.”¹

President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018) said, “David commenced well the race, then faltered and failed to finish his course.”² David’s failure, however, did not come all at

once but by degrees. A series of bad choices ultimately led to his downfall. Examining these choices can help us avoid the same types of mistakes.

The Beginning of Bad Choices

The story of David and Bathsheba begins with the Israelite army fighting a battle against the Ammonites at Rabbath-Ammon, modern-day Amman, Jordan. But the account adds what turns out to be an ominous detail: it was the time of year “when kings go forth to battle . . . but David tarried still at Jerusalem” (2 Samuel 11:1). Kings were expected to lead their armies into battle, but David decided to stay home instead.

Elder Hartman Rector Jr. of the Seventy encouraged Church members to “be where you should be when you should be there.”³ Whether it is attending Church meetings, helping with a service project, or magnifying callings, we should always fulfill our covenant responsibility to be in the right place, at the right time, doing the right things. Being “anxiously engaged in a good cause” (D&C 58:27) can safeguard us against many temptations, because, as President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) taught, “idleness leads to evil.”⁴

One evening, King David “walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing

herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman” (2 Samuel 11:2–3). In Jerusalem, there are often comfortable evening breezes, and even today people will go out on the roof to cool off. David’s palace was probably on the crest of a densely populated hill, today called the City of David, where it would have been common to see others below on their roofs.

However, as President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, taught, David “allowed himself to look upon something he should not have viewed.”⁵ Another pivotal mistake was that when David found out Bathsheba was married, he did not let the issue go. The king knew Jehovah had commanded Israel to honor marital vows with complete fidelity (see Exodus 20:14, 17), yet “David sent messengers, and took her” (2 Samuel 11:4).

How Was It Possible?

How could such a great hero, so favored by the Lord, have made such misguided choices? In his younger days, “David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him” (1 Samuel 18:14). Yet in the face of temptation, David gave in to lustful desire. Modern revelation again teaches us that “he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 42:23). The loss of the companionship of the Spirit certainly hindered David’s ability to choose wisely.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen of the Seventy observed that David “somehow developed too much confidence in his own ability to handle temptation. He was tragically willing to flirt with evil, and it ultimately destroyed him.”⁶ A better course of action would have been to follow the example of Joseph of Egypt, who, when confronted with temptation by Potiphar’s wife, wisely “got him[self] out” (Genesis 39:12). As President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) counseled: “The time to protect against the calamity is when the thought begins to shape itself. Destroy the seed and the plant will never grow.”⁷

Multiplying Bad Choices

His judgment impaired by the loss of the Spirit, David then committed adultery with Bathsheba and conceived a child out of wedlock (see 2 Samuel 11:4–5). As Alma explained, sexual immorality is “an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost” (Alma 39:5).

Upon learning that Bathsheba was pregnant, the king compounded the tragedy by trying to hide his sin. David summoned Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, who was in the Israelite army fighting against the Ammonites. When Uriah arrived in Jerusalem, David twice tried to convince him to go home and be with his wife so that everyone would think that the child was Uriah’s. In stark contrast to David, however, Uriah refused to spend time at home while his fellow soldiers were at war. (See 2 Samuel 11:5–13.) If there are any heroes in this story, Uriah the Hittite is one of them. Though not an Israelite by lineage, Uriah’s faithfulness to





the Lord is manifest by his name (“My light is Jehovah” in Hebrew) and by his actions.

David’s situation went from bad to worse. Modern revelation teaches that when a priesthood holder—as King David was—attempts to cover his sins, “the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:37). The loss of the companionship of the Spirit as well as of his priesthood authority continued to erode the king’s capacity to make righteous decisions. It was while in this diminished spiritual state that David arranged for the murder of Uriah. Ironically, Uriah carried the letter containing his own death sentence back to the battlefield, where he died at the hands of the Ammonite soldiers. (See 2 Samuel 11:14–17.)

David’s downfall was not determined by one fatal mistake but rather a series of increasingly unwise and selfish decisions. It is important to remember that at any time during this devastating progression, David could have chosen to humble himself and seek repentance. Tragically, however, David admitted his guilt only after he was confronted by the prophet Nathan (see 2 Samuel 12:13). And while the Lord offers forgiveness to those who fully repent, He does not necessarily remove the negative consequences of sinful behavior. As President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994)

taught, “It is better to prepare and prevent than it is to repair and repent.”⁸

Stay Close to the Spirit

One of the central lessons for us from the story of David and Bathsheba is the importance of the Holy Ghost and its role in helping us make good choices. Nephi taught that if you “receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5), thus helping us to be in the right place at the right time to avoid temptation. By extension, the Holy Ghost can also show us what we should not do, giving us courage to flee temptation when we are confronted by it.

David’s poor choices progressively hindered his ability to be filled with and use the precious gift of the Holy Ghost. In our own lives, it is critical that we live worthy of the companionship of the Spirit so that this precious gift may help us navigate the difficult roads of life. ■

NOTES

1. Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (1979), 19.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “Finishers Wanted,” *Ensign*, June 1989, 3.
3. Hartman Rector Jr., “Following Christ to Victory,” *Ensign*, May 1979, 30.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Converts and Young Men,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 49.
5. Dallin H. Oaks, “Pornography,” *Ensign*, May 2005, 90.
6. Bruce C. Hafen, “The Gospel and Romantic Love,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1982, 67.
7. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (1969), 114.
8. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 221.