

David and Bathsheba

Key Verse:
“You shall not commit adultery.”

Exodus 20:14

Extra: Comment on David’s confession: “I have sinned against the LORD.”

Level 5 lesson 37

Read: 2 Samuel 11:1-13; 12:1-14
Further Reading: Exodus 20:1-21

Today’s sad story is a reminder that we can’t afford to ‘play’ with sin in our hearts and lives. King David committed some most terrible sins in this story. But, none of us should think that we are any better than him. The potential for committing the same horrible sins is within all our hearts. In fact it’s ‘but by the grace of God’ that we must live and be on our guard against sin.

SINFUL CONDUCT

So what happened to David? Well, instead of leading his troops into battle, he decided to stay in his comfortable palace in Jerusalem. One day, he saw a beautiful woman, called Bathsheba, bathing nearby. David followed the lustful desires in his heart and kept watching. He pursued her and soon committed adultery with her (Matthew 15:19); even though she was the wife of Uriah, one of David’s most faithful soldiers.

Hoping to hide their sin, David recalled Uriah from the battle, pretending to want a report on the war. In reality, he wanted Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba, so that any resulting child would be considered his. Uriah was a loyal and genuine man though, and He refused to enjoy time with his wife while his fellow soldiers were suffering on the battlefield (v11)

Now David was getting desperate to cover his sin, so he sent Uriah back to the war zone with a letter for General Joab. David’s letter ordered Joab to place Uriah on the frontline of the battle, and then to pull all the other soldiers back so that Uriah would be left exposed to the enemy.

David’s instructions were obeyed exactly, and sadly, Uriah was killed, along with other troops. So Joab sent a messenger back with the news, and told him that if the King became angry about the army’s defeat, he was to then say, “Your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead.” When David heard this last part, he took no further action. But now David had added murder to his sin of adultery!

Shortly afterwards, David married Bathsheba and they both probably hoped that they could go on as though nothing had happened. Isn’t that typical of us, too? We forget that “nothing is hidden from the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13)!

Of course, behind all this was the enemy of us all, Satan. God had promised that the Messiah would one day come from David’s family. Satan wanted to thwart God’s plan by causing David’s downfall or death if possible. However, Satan could never succeed in this because God’s covenant, or promise, was unconditional.

SERIOUS CHARGE

God was not going to overlook David’s crimes though, because “the thing David had done displeased the Lord.” So God sent Nathan the Prophet to confront David. “Once there were two men,” started Nathan, “one very rich, the other very poor. The poor man owned just one little lamb, which he and his family loved. One day a traveller visited the rich man, but instead of using one of his own sheep, he stole the poor man’s only lamb to feed him!”

David was furious at hearing of this heartless, cruel sin. “As surely as the Lord lives,” he cried indignantly, “the man who did this deserves to die!” “YOU are the man!” cried Nathan, pointing accusingly. “You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.” This charge was followed immediately by a judgement... “The sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me, so I am going to bring calamity upon you.”

SINCERE CONFESSION

Overcome with guilt, David humbly confessed, “I have sinned against the Lord!” In response to his sincere confession, Nathan assured him, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die... but the son born to you will die.” David was forgiven, but the judgement of God remained, just as Nathan had outlined.

Dear readers, did you know the accusing finger of God is pointed at you also? Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” That includes you and I! Have you ever confessed, like David, “I have sinned against the Lord”? Ask Christ to forgive and save you, and the blessing of sins forgiven can be yours, too! There may still be consequences of our sin to deal with, but God will give us grace to bear these. This lesson shows us again, the importance of getting right with God while you are young.

Later, God granted David and Bathsheba another son; they called him Solomon and we read “the Lord loved him” (ch12:24). What consolation for them and what a wonderful example of God’s incredible grace upon repentant sinners!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What should we all acknowledge as we read of David’s sin?	.....
2. Why do you think David fell into such sin?	.....
3. How could he have avoided it?	.....
4. What consequences did David have to suffer?	.....
5. How do we receive forgiveness for our sin?	.....

My Name is Age

Introducing Thessalonians

Key Verse:
“You yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.”

1 Thessalonians 4:9

Extra: What characterised the Thessalonian Christians?

Level 5 lesson 38

Read Acts 17:1-10

Before we begin studying 1 Thessalonians, let’s look briefly at Acts 17:1-10 where we find how the church in Thessalonica was actually started. You may remember, Paul and Silas had left Philippi (where they’d been beaten up and thrown in jail for their faith), and gone up to Thessalonica (the northern-most port on the Aegean coast). This was a thriving city, full of businessmen and traders; but also a place of idol-worship and immorality.

Amongst all that however, there was a Jewish synagogue, and as usual, Paul went there first, to reason with the Jews from the Scriptures. His message was that Christ (their Messiah) was meant to suffer and rise again from the dead, and that Jesus “whom I preach to you” really was ‘the Christ.’ We can appreciate that this message was hard for the Jews to accept. It meant that their promised Messiah had at last come to them, as sent from God, but they had rejected and crucified Him!

Quite apart from any guilt they would have felt, this was a foreign concept of Messiah’s coming for them. They had always expected the Messiah to come and reign in majesty and glory, as Psalm 96:10, 146:10; Isaiah 9:6-7, 24:23, and Jeremiah 23:5 would suggest. Paul did not deny that, but his message, based on Old Testament passages such as Psalm 22:14-18, Isaiah 53 and Psalm 16:10 was that their Messiah must first come to suffer and die. After rising again on the third day, and ascending to Heaven, He would come again a second time to reign in righteousness and glory.

Some believed him, including some Greeks who followed the Jewish faith and even many of the important women of the town; but the majority of the Jews not only refused to believe, they became very hostile to the Christian message! Paul could only preach three times in the synagogue; for the rest of his short stay in Thessalonica, he had to preach elsewhere to the Greeks and other Gentiles. However, the unbelieving Jews wanted to get rid of him totally; they caused a huge uproar in the city, accusing him of rebellion against Caesar by proclaiming Jesus to be another King.

Soon a large angry crowd had gathered and together with the city’s leaders, they marched down to where Jason, one of the new Christians lived. They were ready to really beat Paul up and throw him out of town! However, Jason prevented them from doing this, by promising that Paul and Silas would leave straight away.

So sadly, Paul and Silas left Thessalonica much earlier than planned. They left behind a brand new church in a hostile, pagan city. It was a church with no mature leaders, little knowledge or teaching, and without the complete Word of God (the New Testament had not yet been completed). But they did have the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them. After spending a short time in Berea, Paul travelled on to Athens and then back to Corinth.

A few months later, Paul sent Timothy back to help the new church at Thessalonica and to report back on its progress. No doubt Paul wondered if the new church had been destroyed by persecution or perhaps had even “self-destructed!” However, Timothy brought back a good report and this letter, written just a few months after Paul’s time with them, really shows Paul’s joy at the news of how these new Christians were living.

We can hear it in his words: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ when He comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)! And in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, “Now about brotherly love, we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.”

Yes friends, in spite of their lack of teaching, these people were genuine Christians; doers of God’s Word, not just hearers! Nevertheless, because they were such a young church and had received so little teaching, they were confused and uncertain about some important matters of doctrine. We too, can study and appreciate the instruction which the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gave to this new, first century Christian church.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why do you think that it was so hard for the Jews to accept that Jesus was their Messiah?	.....
2. Why do you think it would be difficult for the new church at Thessalonica to continue?	.....
3. Why did Paul send Timothy back to Thessalonica?	.....
4. What was he so pleased to learn from Timothy’s report?	.....
5. How can we be “genuine” in our Christian faith?	.....

True Faith

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

Key Verse:
**“Christ in you,
 the hope of
 glory.”**

Colossians 1:27

Extra: What does it mean to be “in Christ”?

Level 5 lesson 39

Right here in the very first verse, we read a very important description of the church at Thessalonica: it is described as being “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”. What does that mean? It simply means that they had a living relationship with Almighty God. Christians are not just linked with Christ in some club membership; they are IN Christ — being a part of God’s life! Paul wanted these new Christians to fully experience and enjoy God’s grace and peace in their daily life. Put simply, grace is God’s undeserved favour to sinners, and peace with God is the result. Once a person has repented and confessed his sin to God, there is no need for him to feel guilty about it; his sin has been thoroughly dealt with through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian is now forgiven and has peace with God. As we come to truly appreciate these facts, we know in an ever-deepening way, the peace of God in our hearts. Someone might think, “Wow! I can do what I like now, and just say a quick sorry to God and everything will be OK!” Paul quickly squashes any such hypocritical thoughts, by listing three things which show who are true ‘born again’ believers: 1) their work of faith, 2) their labour of love, and 3) their patience of hope.

A WORK OF FAITH

A true, saving faith in Christ is always evidenced by a life changed for the better. Sure, we are not saved by works, but genuine faith and true salvation always produce good works. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear that salvation is by God’s grace through faith. If our faith is in Christ and HIS work, then our works are a result of that faith. Faith is intangible, so we can’t see, hear, or touch it. But we can know if a person has genuine saving faith by looking for evidence — and doing good works is the first evidence Paul lists. True faith is much more than simply saying ‘I believe in God.’ The Apostle James spelt this out clearly in James 2:17 where he wrote, “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” He went on to warn in James 2:19 that even the demons “believe in God, and tremble” — but they are not saved! Their faith is not ‘backed up’ by their actions; they have never repented of their sin and turned to Christ for forgiveness.

However, everyone who genuinely believes and repents will be indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit, who then begins to produce the fruits of righteousness in their lives. These are good works, which everyone can see. Christians may fail at times and be disobedient, but they will always have a desire to obey and will have a “bad conscience” when they don’t. A Christian’s life should be characterised by good works, not by sin.

A LABOUR OF LOVE

A true Christian is not only marked by ‘what’ they do, but ‘why’ they do anything. The motivation for any work we do for the Lord should be love. The love spoken of here is ‘AGAPE’ love, God’s love. It is a love that gives, a love that works. It is best seen, perhaps, in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He GAVE His only Son”... in order to GIVE us eternal life.

A by-product of our love for Jesus is that we will love other Christians. Jesus said in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Paul is glad to hear that the Thessalonian believers were noted firstly for a faith that works, and secondly for a love that labours.

A PATIENT HOPE

The Christian’s hope is a hope that endures through all the changing circumstances of life; a hope that doesn’t fade away or die. It may sometimes become blurred and seem distant, but it is real and certain. A true Christian never loses hope of the Lord Jesus coming back again. It is firmly based on historical fact, (Christ lived, died, and rose again from the dead, and He has promised to return!) and the reality of our present condition, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). That’s why Paul described the Christian life as a life lived, looking for the “blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ”(Titus 2:13). Every Christian should be eagerly awaiting the Lord’s return to take us to be forever with Him. This is the Christian’s sure and certain hope! This is what sustains a Christian, enabling him to face any situation with calm confidence.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Which comes first, faith or good works?	.....
2. Why is it impossible to be saved by good works?	.....
3. What are the three hallmarks of a true Christian?	.....
4. What is the Christian’s sure and certain hope?	.....
5. On what is this hope based?	.....

From Idols to Christ

Key Verse:
**“You shall have
 no other gods
 before Me.”**

Exodus 20:3

Extra: Comment on the Thessalonian example of getting rid of idols and then serving God.

Level 5 lesson 40

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10
Further Reading: 1 John 3:1-3

The Holy Spirit brought real conviction and assurance to the Thessalonian believers, and they followed the Lord even though it meant suffering persecution for their new faith. Turning from their old ways of life and idolatry resulted in anger and hostility from others, often from their own families! Yet even under these difficult circumstances, they were able to live life full of the “joy of the Lord,” and people soon noticed!

The news of their changed lives spread like ‘wildfire,’ even to other towns! Some of these people met Paul in Corinth, and told him how the Christians in Thessalonica had “turned from idols to serve the living and true God.” What a wonderful testimony!

As you already know, idol worship of any sort is a very great sin. The first of God’s Ten Commandments says, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3), while the second says, “You shall not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath. You shall not bow down to them or worship them” (Exodus 20:4). In Isaiah 44, God points out the plain stupidity of idol worship. He describes how a man cuts down a tree and with one part of it makes a fire to keep warm and cook his food. Yet from another part, he makes an idol and worships it, as if it had some power. How ridiculous!

SERPENT ON A POLE

Some of you may remember the story of the bronze serpent on a pole (Numbers 21). When the people of Israel became discouraged in the desert and spoke against God and Moses, God sent poisonous snakes among them as judgement. They cried to the Lord and confessed their sin, so God instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Whoever was bitten by a snake and looked up at the bronze snake on the pole would live and not die.

Six hundred years later, the people of Israel were bowing down to this snake on a pole, burning incense to it and worshipping it! When King Hezekiah saw this, he broke it in pieces! The snake on the pole was a good thing, made on God’s own instructions and many lives had been saved because of it; but when it became an object of worship, it had to go (2 Kings 18:4)!

Even today, Christians must be careful not to break these commandments. We must worship God alone: not saints, not images of God, Jesus, or Mary, nor any other thing. Really, anything which comes before God in our lives is an idol of sorts — even good things can be! Some people love their ‘things’ more than they love God. There is nothing wrong with owning a house or a car or a boat or tending a garden, but if any of these things come before God, they become an idol. To have a good education is a wonderful thing, but even education can become an idol.

Paul commends the Thessalonian Christians because they had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. Isn’t that wonderful! When we become Christians, we don’t turn from serving idols of one sort or another to nothing, but to serve “the living and true God”. What could be more fulfilling than that?

EAGERLY WAITING

Paul also commends the Thessalonians for eagerly waiting for Christ’s return. In the short time that the Apostle had been with them, he had evidently told them of the coming again of the Lord Jesus and the Thessalonian Christians were known to be waiting for this. The Lord Himself said in Luke 12:35-36, “Be dressed, ready for service.....like men waiting for their master to return.....” and again in Matthew 24:42 He said, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come!” Yes friends, we are to live constantly expecting the return of our Lord Jesus at any moment! As we do this, it has a purifying and motivating effect on our lives. The Apostle John wrote, “Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him, purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What kind of testimony did the Thessalonian Christians have, and how can we be like them?

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2. Why do you think we should not worship idols?

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3. Name some things, not mentioned in this lesson, which could become idols in our lives?

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4. What will have a purifying effect on our lives and why?

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5. How do we ‘eagerly’ wait for Christ’s return?

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