

# 2 SAMUEL—WEEK 6

## THE ANATOMY OF FAILURE



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is Bathing Bathsheba by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1656)  
On display in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, Germany*

David tries to make peace with the son of a trusted neighbor, but is rebuffed sharply. The son and his allies set themselves up to learn a tough lesson. Then David sets himself up to learn a tough lesson. David stays home from war and succumbs to the temptation of seeing Bathsheba bathing.

But it gets worse. David conspires to kill Bathsheba's husband. The LORD is not pleased.

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2 Samuel, Week 6 — The Anatomy of Failure  
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1 2 Samuel 10:1–8

*It happened after this that the king of the people of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place. Then David said, “I will show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness to me.”*

*So David sent by the hand of his servants to comfort him concerning his father. And David’s servants came into the land of the people of Ammon. And the princes of the people of Ammon said to Hanun their lord, “Do you think that David really honors your father because he has sent comforters to you? Has David not rather sent his servants to you to search the city, to spy it out, and to overthrow it?”*

*Therefore Hanun took David’s servants, shaved off half of their beards, cut off their garments in the middle, at their buttocks, and sent them away. When they told David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, “Wait at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return.”*

*When the people of Ammon saw that they had made themselves repulsive to David, the people of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth Rehob and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand foot soldiers; and from the king of Maacah one thousand men, and from Ish-Tob twelve thousand men. Now when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the army of the mighty men. Then the people of Ammon came out and put themselves in battle array at the entrance of the gate. And the Syrians of Zoba, Beth Rehob, Ish-Tob, and Maacah were by themselves in the field.*

This is all on Hanun and the princes of the Ammonites. Their stupidity and immaturity are 100 percent responsible for the war and all the tragedy it yields.

At root, their error is projection. They assume that David is just as evil as they are. The idea that David is sincere hasn’t even crossed their minds.

They aren’t sincere and they can’t imagine anyone who is.

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Projection is so common, it’s essentially universal. The only thought processes we’re intimately familiar with are our own. If someone thinks in a completely different way, we’re not going to understand how.

The classic example of this is the way we project our thinking onto animals. I recently learned this the hard way by seeing, first hand, why gardeners should never feed squirrels. The squirrels weren’t thinking about how I’m friendly; they were just salivating. Salivating squirrels will eat anything, including my wife’s basil plants. Yes, they’d prefer the peanuts I was putting out, but they’re not leaving empty.

Never forget this when sharing the gospel. Many people cannot imagine that you don’t have some kind of selfish purpose behind your message. The first step is often to just show that you’re sincere. Starting off with the gospel may not work best. Establish sincerity first. That may take time if they’re not expecting it.

In that case, sincerity will impress them, which can make them open to your teaching.

2 2 Samuel 10:9–19

*When Joab saw that the battle line was against him before and behind, he chose some of Israel's best and put them in battle array against the Syrians. And the rest of the people he put under the command of Abishai his brother, that he might set them in battle array against the people of Ammon. Then he said, "If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me; but if the people of Ammon are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. Be of good courage, and let us be strong for our people and for the cities of our God. And may the LORD do what is good in His sight."*

*So Joab and the people who were with him drew near for the battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. When the people of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fleeing, they also fled before Abishai, and entered the city. So Joab returned from the people of Ammon and went to Jerusalem.*

*When the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered together. Then Hadadezer sent and brought out the Syrians who were beyond the River, and they came to Helam. And Shobach the commander of Hadadezer's army went before them. When it was told David, he gathered all Israel, crossed over the Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in battle array against David and fought with him. Then the Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen of the Syrians, and struck Shobach the commander of their army, who died there. And when all the kings who were servants to Hadadezer saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and served them. So the Syrians were afraid to help the people of Ammon anymore.*

Joab sees that he's surrounded. As dumb as the Ammonites were in instigating all this, at least they were clever enough to hire some help.

But their strategy proves disastrous. The Syrians aren't all that loyal to "the cause," and they run away when *Joab and the people who were with him drew near for the battle*. They don't even start to fight. When the Ammonites see the Syrians fleeing, they panic. The whole thing turns into a rout.

The now embarrassed Syrians try to regroup at Helam and make a stand there, but they get slaughtered and end up subjugated.

Needless to say, they've now lost interest in teaming up with the Ammonites ever again.

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Notice that in verse 17, David personally joins the battle. *When it was told David, he gathered all Israel, crossed over the Jordan, and came to Helam.*

This is specifically mentioned here to set up the contrast with chapter 11, where David fails in his duties.

Here, he joins the fight and the victory is total.

But he's about to do the exact opposite.

3 2 Samuel 11:1–9

*It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.*

*It happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I am with child."*

*Then David sent to Joab, saying, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah had come to him, David asked how Joab was doing, and how the people were doing, and how the war prospered. And David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah departed from the king's house, and a gift of food from the king followed him. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house.*

Verse one here, and 1 Samuel 21:5, tell the whole story of what's going on.

*Then David answered the priest, and said to him, "Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day." — 1 Samuel 21:5*

Verse one shows how very wrong David is. He's supposed to go to battle with his troops. He should have never been in a position to see Bathsheba bathing in the first place.

1 Samuel 21:5 shows the rule that sex makes you unclean and thus unable to go to battle without going through purification. This explains why Uriah wouldn't sleep with Bathsheba. It also adds to David's sin. His sleeping with Bathsheba precludes him from going to war quickly should he be needed.

Suddenly, David is anything but the mighty warrior king he's known as.

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So, as we pause here, in the middle of this well-known story, David is under incredible pressure. The combination of his actions threatens to expose him as a phony.

But David isn't a phony. His behavior here is out of character. In his commentary on this section in the Encouraging Word Bible, Max Lucado describes this as altitude sickness.

*"He's been too high too long. The thin air has messed with his senses. ... Too long at the top will do that to you. Too many hours in the bright sun and thin air leaves you breathless and dizzy."*

Few things in this life are as dangerous to the soul as success.

4 2 Samuel 11:10–17 (ESV)

*When they told David, “Uriah did not go down to his house,” David said to Uriah, “Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?” Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.” Then David said to Uriah, “Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.*

*In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.” And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died.*

Watch David slide down the slippery slope. In yesterday’s reading, David doesn’t go to war like he’s supposed to. Then he pulls his lazy butt out of bed in the evening (!) and sees Bathsheba bathing outside. He inquires as to who she is and finds out that she’s the wife of one of his mighty men, Uriah the Hittite (see 2 Samuel 23:39). Despite this, he fetches her and gets her pregnant. Then he tries to cover this up by getting Uriah to come home from the war and spend the night with Bathsheba. That doesn’t work because Uriah doesn’t want to defile himself, which would prevent him from returning to his band of brothers.

In today’s passage, David gets increasingly desperate. He tries getting Uriah drunk, thinking that’ll weaken him and then he’ll sleep with his wife. When that doesn’t work, David panics and devises a plan to get Uriah killed. He instructs Joab to do his dirty work. That means Joab knows all about David’s plan.

He may not know why David wants Uriah dead, but he knows enough.

To cover up his adultery, David commits murder. That just makes it worse. Nothing is covered up.

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This should scare us. David didn’t change; he just let his guard down. He got lazy. He forgot who he is.

In each step that David took down the slippery slope, he was thinking like an atheist. All his spiritual learning, all his heart for the LORD, was pushed aside by his ego and then by stress. He got distracted.

Christians would benefit from some of the same training as martial artists. Martial arts students are taught to deal with the unexpected psychological and physiological aspects of conflict by practicing "conflicts" in controlled situations. Christians can do this by examining our own struggles and failures in the light of spiritual warfare. We forget that we have a competent enemy. We’re more vulnerable than we realize.

We need training.

5 2 Samuel 11:18–27

*Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war, and charged the messenger, saying, “When you have finished telling the matters of the war to the king, if it happens that the king’s wrath rises, and he says to you: ‘Why did you approach so near to the city when you fought? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who struck Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman who cast a piece of a millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you go near the wall?’—then you shall say, ‘Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.’”*

*So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent by him. And the messenger said to David, “Surely the men prevailed against us and came out to us in the field; then we drove them back as far as the entrance of the gate. The archers shot from the wall at your servants; and some of the king’s servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.”*

*Then David said to the messenger, “Thus you shall say to Joab: ‘Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another. Strengthen your attack against the city, and overthrow it.’ So encourage him.”*

*When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when her mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.*

So, with Uriah dead and David now Bathsheba’s husband, the child isn’t quite so suspicious. David does lose another week though while Bathsheba goes through the traditional mourning period. The child will seem to be that much more premature.

Still, it looks like David got away with it—to an atheist! The Hebrew words in verse 31 translated as, “*displeased the LORD*,” are literally, “was evil in the LORD’s eyes.”

David is about to get lit.

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The conversations between Joab, David, and the messenger are cryptic. They involve Hebrew idioms and “spin doctoring” that could only be understood in the light of detailed historical context that we don’t have access to.

But one thing is obvious. No one is telling it straight because the truth is simply too ugly to talk about. What has happened is deeply, deeply evil and everyone knows it (well, maybe not the messenger, but he probably knows it too).

The result is the word salad that is 2 Samuel 11:18–25.

Uriah the Hittite is dead, and no one seems to care except Bathsheba.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What attitudes in others affect how well you listen to them?
2. When have you seen someone's help do more harm than good?
3. How does success change people?
4. How can Christians be trained to not get distracted from their faith?
5. Have you ever personally seen a cover-up fail?

*Items for prayer:*