The Inevitable Failure of Mankind: David’s Broken Covenant

The story of David and Bathsheba narrates the transgressions which David unfortunately committed. These transgressions occurred after David and God established a covenant. Sins like David’s occur frequently in the Bible, often after a covenant with God has been established. The story of David and Bathsheba reinforces the concept of inevitable human failure.

After the downfall of Saul, God establishes a covenant with David. This covenant establishes the Davidic kingship forever, yet still preserves the previous Mosaic covenant. God explains that David and his descendents will be punished when "[they] commit iniquity," implying that God will still enforce the laws established at Mount Zion with Moses (2 Sam 7:14). Up to this point, David has been seen as the "shepherd of [the] people [of] Israel"; David is innocent of any sins committed against the Lord (2 Sam 5:2).

Yet, in spite of his virtuousness, after he enters into a covenant with God, David falls into temptation and sins. It is in the story of David and Bathsheba that one sees David's failure to uphold the covenant. David, who had usually been one step ahead of his adversaries, is depicted as not following the ways of kings: "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem" (2 Sam 11:1). This lack of motivation to follow the mortal ways of kingship adumbrates David's mishap with God. Soon after David "displeased the Lord" and broke
not one but three commandments established in Exodus 20. David not only coveted his neighbor's wife but also slept with her and then killed her husband to hide her pregnancy (2 Sam 12:1). However, David's dishonor towards God is not the first broken covenant in the Bible; the story of David and Bathsheba only reiterates what has been a constant struggle between man and God.

This same model is depicted in Genesis with Adam and Eve's failure to obey God's one restriction. God created man and woman "in his own image," implying that they were god-like and perfect. Yet, regardless of their perfection, they sin after God declares that they should not eat "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:17). The story in Genesis becomes a literary parallel to the story of David and Bathsheba. David was perfect and a man of God, but after the establishment of the Davidic covenant, David commits catastrophic sins. Nevertheless, this story of David's fall from grace is only one example of human failure after the creation of a pact between man and God.

Therefore, the question arises: why does God continue to establish covenants with mankind, if mankind inevitably breaks these promises? It is true that God cares about his reputation, which is why he must uphold his covenants. Moses reminded him of this after the Israelites failed to uphold the Mosaic covenant:

> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

(Ex 32:13-14).

Yet, God is searching for ultimate praise and worship from those who are of lesser power than him, just as any other god in the ancient world would: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol...[and] bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God" (Ex 20:3-4). If God did not yearn for
adoration, the first two commandments would not focus on him and how he should be
honored. It is to his dismay, that, as God, he chose mankind, who turned out to be
incapable of not sinning, to follow his commandments and laws without failure.

Nonetheless, for Jews, the idea of man's inevitable failure coincides with the
Deuteronomic History, for it gives explanation to the struggles that their people had to
face, are facing, or will face in the future. Man's inescapable failure allows Jews to
understand why they have had to face struggles in their history. It is their lack of
commitment to divine law that led to their destruction by Assyria and Babylon and,
ultimately, to the demise of the Davidic kingdom: "Ah, sinful nation, people laden with
iniquity... Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very
presence aliens devour your land" (Isa 1:4,7). Man's failure led to God's punishment and,
therefore, to the struggles they had to face. One is able to see that David faced a similar
struggle, for God chose him for his virtue, but then he spoiled his righteousness after
entering a covenant with God and faced many obstacles for the rest of his life.

Although the story of David and Bathsheba concludes with God showing mercy
upon his chosen and granting him an heir to his throne (Solomon), a higher question still
remains. It is understood that the story of David and Bathsheba literally reinforces the
idea of a broken covenant. The story, theologically, also gives explanation to the
sufferings that come to pass after said event. Yet the story fails to reveal what causes men
to quickly lose faith and violate their pact with God.