

2 Samuel 12: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 2 Samuel chapter 12 And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor.

The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children.

It used to eat of his morsel, and drink from his cup, and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him.

But he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him. Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

Nathan said to David, You are the man. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah.

[1 : 09] And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour.

And he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this son, for you did it secretly. But I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the Son. David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.

And Nathan said to David, The Lord also has put away your sin, you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.

Then Nathan went to his house, and the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. David therefore sought God on behalf of the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.

[2 : 22] And the elders of his house stood beside him to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. On the seventh day the child died, and the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead.

For they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm. But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead.

And David said to his servants, Is the child dead? They said, He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes.

And he went into the house of the Lord and worshipped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, What is this thing that you have done?

You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food. He said, While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?

[3 : 30] But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me. Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her.

And she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah because of the Lord.

Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and took the royal city. And Joab sent messengers to David and said, I have fought against Rabbah. Moreover, I have taken the city of waters.

Now then gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called by my name. So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah and fought against it and took it.

And he took the crown of their king from his head. The weight of it was a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone, and it was placed on David's head. And he brought out the spoil of the city, a very great amount.

[4 : 30] And he brought out the people who were in it, and set them to labour with saws and iron picks and iron axes, and made them toil at the brick kilns. And thus he did to all the cities of the Ammonites.

Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem. After chapter 11 ended by speaking of the Lord's displeasure at David's sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah, in chapter 12 of 2 Samuel, God sends his prophet Nathan to confront David concerning that sin.

Nathan is the latest of several messengers who have been going to and fro. David had used various messengers to help him to commit his sins. Now the Lord sends a messenger to challenge him in his sin.

One of the larger concerns in this section, as James Jordan observes, is that of the dynasty. In the earlier chapters of the book, the fate of Saul's dynasty, as David rises to power, is a prominent concern.

Now the reader should be asking the question of the fate of David's dynasty. The Lord has promised great things concerning it in chapter 7, but David has now compromised his house and his rule.

[5 : 34] As we saw in the previous chapter, David by his sin had tied himself to Joab, and Joab's violence would increasingly undermine David's kingdom. Rumours of David's sin had presumably spread among the servants.

All the messengers being sent to and fro were made complicit in the sin or certain parts of it, and they would be spreading the word around. They did not look at David in the same way again. There seemed to be divergences from the instructions given to servants in the preceding chapter as well.

As David would now be able to command less authority as a result of his reputation as a righteous and upstanding man, his capacity for rule would be weakened. His own treachery would lead to people in his administration rising up against him.

The more that David became entangled personally with his sin, the more the people around him were made complicit in it, and the more the people who were around him were either corrupted by David's sin or elevated on account of their corruption.

Of course, all of this contrasts with the faithful servant, Uriah, who is killed by David. He is killed precisely on account of his loyalty, the fact that he will identify with the men in the field rather than going to sleep with his wife and enjoy the pleasures of home.

[6 : 44] Then his faithfulness as a message-bearer is exploited as David makes him carry his own death warrant to Joab. Sin, by its very nature, cannot easily be compartmentalised. We may think that we can play with sin for a while, all the time keeping it in a safe corner of our lives, but we will soon find that it starts to infect everything else.

The question then of how David's rule can be restored and who will inherit the kingdom after his death will become much more prominent issues in the chapters that follow. David's sons will start to assume a much greater place in the narrative.

To be restored from the high-handed intentional sins that he committed concerning Bathsheba and Uriah, David would have to repent. As David acknowledges in Psalm 51, which he composed after being confronted by Nathan in verses 16 and 17, For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it.

You will not be pleased with the burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Nathan, when he confronts David, confronts him with a story, some regarded as a sort of parable.

It is offered to David as a case that, as the ruler, he must judge. The story is fundamentally one of cruel oppression, with theft as a part of it. The rich man possesses large flocks and herds, but the poor man possesses just one new lamb, to which he is deeply attached.

[8 : 08] The lamb is his only possession, and he loves it as if it were a member of his own family. He treats it not as mere livestock, but as if it were his own daughter. Within the parable, then, the sin of the rich man is most especially felt in his oppression of the poor man.

It is not just the act of stealing, but it's from whom he is stealing that is especially highlighted. The parable particularly focuses upon David's adultery. He takes the daughter-like sheep from the bosom of the poor man.

We should remember that this is being directed to David, who is the shepherd of Israel. He has a great many flocks and herds of people that he guards and looks after. However, Uriah was, as it were, the shepherd of just one person, his wife Bathsheba.

David, as the shepherd guardian of the whole nation, steals for the sake of his own pleasure from a poor shepherd, Uriah, the man with just one new lamb. David, when he hears the case, is infuriated, and declares judgment upon it.

The man must die because of his oppression, and the lamb must be restored fourfold, according to the law of Exodus chapter 22 verse 1. As a leader, David was subject to a higher judgment.

[9 : 18] The Lord had shown great mercy and grace to David. He had given the kingdom of Saul into David's hands. He had given Saul's house and even his wives into David's hand. The reference to Saul's wives being given into David's arms does not mean that David slept with them, but it means that he was made the guardian of the harem of the kingdom.

David had struck down Uriah with the sword, indeed with the sword of the enemies of the Lord, the Ammonites, and now as a result of his sin, the sword would not depart from his house. He had declared that the man who took the sheep of the poor man would have to pay back fourfold.

He would pay back fourfold from his own family. Evil would rise up for David from his own household, and as he took the wife of another secretly, his own wives and concubines would be taken openly, and someone would sleep with them in the presence of all Israel.

David had utterly scorned the Lord in his sin. He had caused surrounding nations to blaspheme. If rumours concerning the sin of David were going round the palace, they had likely reached the ears of his enemies also.

When people see the people of the Lord behaving in exactly the same way or worse than those around them, they can despise the Lord, thinking him little more than the false gods. Perhaps the service of the Lord is just a mask used by hypocrites to cover up their sin, and to make themselves seem better than others.

[10 : 34] The Lord has placed his name upon his people, yet when his people sin brazenly, much like their neighbours, his name is blasphemed. This is a classic example of what it means to bear the name of the Lord in vain.

In such situations, the punishment of the unrighteous people of God is part of the means by which the Lord will vindicate his great name. In the parable, David is judged as a shepherd, not just as a private individual.

In chapter 7, the Lord had said that when the Davidic king sinned, he would be judged with the rod of men. The king's personal sins could lead to consequences for the nation. And part of the tragedy is that the sin of David primarily leads to consequences for his house.

Four of his sons will suffer premature deaths, a number of them as a result of violence. His own wives and concubines will be taken and raped by one of his sons. The consequences of the sins of such a wicked shepherd will not merely fall upon himself, but upon all the people that he is associated with and looks after.

The judgment upon David first falls upon his young son. David pleads before the Lord for the life of his child. For a number of days he fasts before the child dies. All the time that the child is approaching death, David is mourning on account of the child, praying in God's mercy that he would spare the child.

[11 : 53] But the child's life is taken. David, when he hears the news, arises from the earth, washes and anoints himself and changes his clothes. It's a resurrection. The death due to him, as it were, has been born by his son, and now he can be restored.

Following the death of that son, another child is born to David and Bathsheba. The child is called Solomon, maybe a name suggesting the peace with God that David now enjoys.

The birth of Solomon is a sort of resurrection for David. The Lord loves Solomon and gives him the name Jedidiah, beloved of the Lord. His name might remind us of David's name, which also means beloved.

As Peter Lighthouse observes, both Solomon and Absalom have peace as part of their name. However, only Solomon lives up to that name. Solomon also receives a name from the Lord and is called beloved by the Lord.

He is born as a sign of David's restoration and resurrection. All of these things suggest that he is the rightful heir of the throne. Following the birth of Solomon, Joab sends news to David that the Ammonite city of waters has been taken and that Joab has been fighting against Rabbah.

[13 : 00] So David goes up against Rabbah and captures it. He receives the crown from the king of Rabbah and places it upon his head. He also receives very great spoil and reduces the Ammonites to servitude.

David going up from Jerusalem to fight at Rabbah returns us to the very beginning of the story. As Peter Lighthouse has observed, there is a there and back again pattern to the story. It begins with Joab besieging Rabbah but David's staying behind in Jerusalem.

Then David sleeps with Bathsheba and she becomes pregnant. David arranges for Uriah's death. Bathsheba mourns for Uriah and then in the middle, Nathan confronts David's sin.

And then it goes back. David mourns for his infant son, much as Bathsheba had mourned for Uriah. David's son dies, much as he had arranged for Uriah's death.

David sleeps with Bathsheba again and she becomes pregnant again. And then at the end, David goes to Rabbah and finishes the siege and returns to Jerusalem. However, this return movement is a restoration of David.

[14 : 01] David receives a crown. He receives a great victory and he is established once again with an heir to his throne, an heir who will be blessed by the Lord. However, even though David is restored before God, the consequences of his sin with Bathsheba have only started to play out.

In the chapters that follow, we will see the bitter fruit that the sins of David bore in the lives and actions of his children. A question to consider.

Looking at Psalm 51, written after David was confronted by Nathan concerning his sin with Uriah and Bathsheba, what more can we learn about the character of David's restoration? Why was David restored while Saul was not?

Why was David's■■■■■