

NATHAN CONDEMNNS DAVID

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Samuel 12:1-9, 13-15

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 12

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 12:1-9, 13-15

I. Tale of Two Men

2 Samuel 12:1-6

1 And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

2 The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

3 But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

4 And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

5 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:

6 And he shall restore the lamb four-fold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

1a. Biblical narratives often present people's actions without offering God's evaluation of their deeds. But the writer

of 2 Samuel could not resist the arresting understatement, "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (11:27).

Nothing is known of the prophet *Nathan* other than what is recorded in conjunction with David's reign. Prophets existed in Israel's history before the monarchy, but their number and role seem to have increased after a human king was enthroned. True prophets were called directly by *the Lord*. Among their important roles was to hold Israel's civil authorities in check. All in all, the prophet Nathan demonstrated respect for the Lord's anointed and fear of the Lord that led him to take on a potentially suicidal mission before *David*.

1b. Nathan could have chosen a more direct approach to confronting David, but he chose to start with a parable. Old Testament prophets often used metaphors and symbolism to speak against evil in their nation or even to entrap the king with his own ruling.

2-3a. Since farm animals were an indication of wealth, the difference in power and status between the two men was made more apparent from the description of what both men possessed. Nathan's choice of *flocks and herds* as the principal indicator of wealth likely resonated with David, who grew up working as a shepherd for his family. It also set up the potential conflict

between the two as more emotional than if only gold was at stake.

3b. With expert rhetorical flair, Nathan piled on more detail about the nearness and dearness of the *one little ewe lamb* to the poor man. David had protected his father's sheep fiercely. Nathan's story would have stirred David's sympathies even before the crime was revealed.

4. In the days before hotels and restaurants, it was unremarkable for a *traveller* to seek room and board from a private citizen. Any virtuous person, wealthy or not, in the ancient world practiced hospitality to prevent a stranger from becoming the victim of violence.

The rich man followed convention by preparing a meal for the visitor. But such hospitality, he may have reasoned (falsely), was the responsibility of the whole town, and not just himself. He therefore confiscated *the poor man's lamb* for the occasion. No one hearing the story would believe that the man was justified in this.

5. The differences in status and resources between the two men, combined with the rich man's heartless action, made the guilt of the rich man appallingly clear. *David's* initial instinct as judge was to pass the death sentence on the man for his egregious behavior.

6. Perhaps realizing that death was not a prescribed punishment for the theft of a *lamb*, no matter how precious, David gave a more realistic verdict.

David did not realize that he had stepped on a land mine that Nathan had planted. The psychological concept of projection can give some insight into David's words here. Though he was not consciously thinking of his own sin, he could harshly rebuke someone else exhibiting the same kind of behavior. This suggests that David subconsciously was quite aware of his guilt and felt the shame of his actions but had not yet confessed it to himself or the Lord.

II. Tale of the King

2 Samuel 12:7-9

7 And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

8 And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

9 Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

7a. Clues in the surrounding text indicate that this conversation between *Nathan* and *David* took place months after the offenses occurred, on the occasion of the child's birth. By then David had had time to rationalize his sins away. But try as he might, he could not forget what he had done, and he now stood exposed before an all-knowing, all-seeing God.

7b. Nathan reminded David of the favor that the Lord had shown him. Very clearly he must have remembered the day he was summoned from the pasture to be *anointed as king*. He also could not forget his years of fleeing from *Saul*.

8. For a new king to assume possession of the former king's *wives* and his *house* was the apparent custom of the day. This does not mean that David married the women but, instead, that they were part of the package deal now under his control of *Israel* and *Judah* as *Saul's* successor (2 Samuel 5:1-5).

God gave David the promise of an ongoing dynasty and a name like the greatest

men on earth (2 Samuel 7:9). How much more could David possibly want?

9a. Disobeying *the Lord* in the face of such extravagant evidence of favor was a wicked, sinful betrayal. David had violated the foundational commandments against coveting, adultery, and murder.

9b. For the first time, Nathan named *Uriah the Hittite*. He called Bathsheba only Uriah's *wife*, not by her own name, emphasizing that David *has taken a wife* who was not his to take.

III. Moving Beyond the Tales

2 Samuel 12:13-15

13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

14 Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

15 And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

13a. Prophets often spoke truth to power only to find that power was not willing to listen or made excuses. But unlike Saul before him, *David* offered no excuses. Nor did he lash out at *Nathan* for denouncing him. Instead, he confessed the awful truth in the plainest language.

David was anointed king because he was a man after God's own heart. His confession here is surely one indication of why. Contrasting David with a later king, the Lord said that David had "followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes" (1 Kings 14:8). Only once later did the Lord add the qualifier, "save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (15:5).

This should hearten the believer who

continues to struggle against sin; confession allows the heart to once again be fully devoted to the Lord. With this admission of sin, David would at last begin to unburden himself. He had felt the weight of his sin in his bones (Psalm 32:3-4). David went on to write a penitential prayer for cleansing and restoration (Psalm 51). Confession was the first step on the path to forgiveness for David, and is for us.

13b. *David* deserved to die for his crimes. But *the Lord* once again showed himself to be compassionate, gracious, and forgiving of transgression and sin. Even so, David would experience the consequences.

14. David brought dishonor not only to himself but also to God. Not only had David's sin of adultery snowballed into murder; it would cause *enemies* who did not honor *the Lord* (and possibly even people within Israel) to *blaspheme* Him! Far from shepherding the people in greater faithfulness to their God, David had demonstrated blatant disregard for God's standards.

The death of this innocent *child* is stunning as a punishment for David's sin. But while it may seem to go against God's own declaration that He does not punish the child for the parent's sin, we need not assume that the child's death was a form of punishment for the baby. His death along with the record of Nathan's prophecy would be concrete evidence to the nation that the Lord saw David's sin.

15. Bathsheba is again referred to as *Uriah's wife* to highlight the depravity of David's acts. For the next seven days, David would watch and pray as *the child* sickened and eventually died.

A sense of God's mercy and forgiveness would come with Solomon's birth. He continued the royal line that led to Jesus. Through the prophet Nathan, the Lord confronted David. But the Lord did not give up on David or his enduring dynasty.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

NATHAN CONDEMNS DAVID

Into the Lesson

Think of a public figure who was caught in a crime or scandal. Outline the main details of the case. Was the outcome satisfactory or not to most?

Today's text leads us to consider a bigger, behind-the-scenes picture of scandals and crimes.

Into the Word

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-6. How would you "modernize" the story that Nathan told David? (Example: instead of a sheep, perhaps it could be a family's pet that is taken).

What response to Nathan's description of David's misdeed would you consider just in our time?

Read 2 Samuel 12:7-9, 13-15. Provide a grade from A+ to F- for Nathan and David regarding the thoroughness of each man's declaration. Be prepared to explain why you gave that grade.

Nathan: _____

David: _____

Into Life

Cross-reference today's passage with Psalm 51, the song David wrote in association with his repentance.

What kind of modern-day scenario would call for the kind of confrontation that Nathan used?

In what kinds of situations would Nathan's technique be ineffective?

In what kinds of situations would Nathan's technique be seen as downright manipulative?

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Confess your sins and turn to the Lord.