

2 Samuel 12:1-31, and Psalm 51:1-19

David Confronted by Nathan

This happened after the child was born. So David had gone nine months without having to wrestle with his sin and therefore without any fellowship with God. Somehow he was able to push everything to the back burner in his mind and carry on.

The Parable

2 Samuel 12:1-4 - "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. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: 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. 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."

The traveler was Satan, who "goes about seeking whom he may devour."

- **1 Peter 5:8** - "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

The Talmud (Succah 52a) explains that the evil inclination comes first as a wayfarer who will not stay long or expect to exert any influence on his host. Once it has succeeded in causing the person to sin, it becomes a visitor, who stays for a while. Eventually he becomes a master and completely dominates his host.

Apparently David knew he had sinned, since he tries to cover it up. But he pushed it so far out of his mind that he didn't recognize himself in Nathan's parable. Now we would call that "compartmentalization."

2 Samuel 12:5-7 - "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: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man..."

The psychological principle is that we are most against what we are ourselves subject to.

Adultery is a kind of theft - taking something that does not belong to you.

The punishment for the thief in the parable was clear from the Law:

- **Exodus 22:1** - "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall

restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep."

Rashi - One who robs the poor is as if he takes his life, for it is written: "the life of the owners he [the thief] takes" (**Proverbs 1:19**).

David actually did "pay fourfold" Rashi explains: He was smitten through four children; the child born to Bathsheba (See **verse 18**), Amnon (**2 Samuel 13:19**), Tamar (**2 Samuel 13:14**), and Absalom (**2 Samuel 18:15**).

It took Nathan's "Thou art the man" to bring David to the point of repentance. Maybe he was just waiting for an opportunity to confess.

David already had six wives at this time. But Uriah had only one, which David had taken.

If this man in the parable deserved to die, who had only taken the poor man's ewe lamb, then how much more ought David to die, who had not only committed adultery with Bathsheba, but had slain Uriah?

God's View of David's Actions

2 Samuel 12:7-10 - "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; 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. 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."

"your master's wives" - Rashi believes this is just speaking about Saul's daughter, Michal. The word may be rendered as "women" or "wives." But some of the rabbis say that Eglah, David's sixth wife, had been the wife of Saul.

"such and such things" - In Hebrew this translates to the fact that God would have given David "this much and this much again," or up to 18 wives.

God's Judgment

2 Samuel 12:11-12 - "Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

Absalom later went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel, (**2 Samuel 16:22**). In fact he did in on the same terrace from which David looked down and lusted after Bathsheba.

David's Confession and Forgiveness

2 Samuel 12:13 - "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."

"I have sinned against the LORD" is really just two Hebrew words, *hata al-Yahweh*. This is a short confession, but as we see from **Psalm 51**, a deep and full one. There was no excuses, dancing around or blaming others. He didn't say "mistakes were made." It wasn't merely an error or a slip up.

God's forgiveness was immediate. God did not demand a time of probation.

"put away thy sin" = *awbar* - "to pass over." This is an alternate word used of the death angel "passing over" Israel to smite the Egyptians:

- **Exodus 12:23** - "For the LORD will pass through (*awbar*) to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over (*pāsaḥ*) the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you."

"When God forgave David in **2 Samuel 12:14**, telling him he would not die, the message was also that the evil power David had created through his deed would be destroyed as a result of his repentance. This is why the prophet Nathan could say that "God has also removed your sin and you will not die." The sin man committed created the lethal force [like a prosecuting angel] which has the power to kill the sinner. Once the sin has been removed [by the sin offering], the force that potentially could have killed the sinner has been neutralized, is unable to kill. In other words, it is not God who kills but the forces created by the sinner are what cause death." (from Or HaChaim on **Leviticus 16:7** describing the Yom Kippur offering)

All this, however, was looking toward the Messiah and His sacrifice: who "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." (**Hebrews 10:12**)

Although David is forgiven, there are still consequences in this world.

The Death of Their Child

2 Samuel 12:14-15 - "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. And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick."

That a baby would be struck down with a mortal illness as judgment for another's sin is beyond our abilities to understand.

It could be that "the Lord struck the child" is sort of an idiom for "the child got sick," since

God is doing everything anyway.

But elsewhere the Law says "Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin." (**Deuteronomy 24:16**)

Also **Ezekiel 18:20** - "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son" (See Also **Jeremiah 31:30**)

Some note that the principle in Ezekiel 18 and Deuteronomy 24 are talking about civil law, while God was delivering a divine judgment on David.

One way of looking at this is that God called David's son home to Himself prematurely so that his holy name and great glory would not be dragged through the mud of David's sins.

In fact, David doomed his son when he pronounced his own sentence on himself in his response to the parable - the repayment "fourfold," meaning four of his sons would die.

Ultimately, we can't see into the mind of God: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (**Exodus 33:19**) We don't define what is just or fair, God does. (See Abraham's offering of Isaac in **Genesis 22:1-19**, and the discussion of Pharaoh and free will in **Romans 9**)

God is love (**1 John 4:7**). But He's a God of both justice and mercy.

We're finally brought to a conclusion: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it." (**Psalms 139:6**)

One comfort in this tragedy was that David expressed the belief that he would see his son again in heaven - he would "go to him."

Prayer for their Child

2 Samuel 12:16-19 - "David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead."

The child died possibly on the seventh day after it was born. David probably fasted for

only a few days.

2 Samuel 12:20-23 - "Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

There is an insight into prayer here. David was told that the child would die, but he prays anyway: "Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?"

This principle is stated again in Joel

- **Joel 2:12-14** - "Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?"

It was also seen by King Hezekiah (**2 Kings 20**), who was told by the prophet Isaiah that he would die. The Talmud says (Berachos 10b) that Hezekiah responded, "I have a tradition from our ancestor (David): 'Even if a sharp sword rests on a man's neck, he should not stop praying for mercy.'"

Still, true prayer is ultimately radical submission and surrender to God'. "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me. Yet not My will, but Yours be done." was Jesus' position (**Luke 22:42**). God can't be manipulated.

Notice that the baby was not named. The child had died before having lived 30 days, and therefore had the status of a miscarried fetus. There was no obligation to undergo any period of ritual mourning.

2 Samuel 12:24-25 - "And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD."

In **1 Chronicles 22:8-9** David explains to Solomon the reason for his name: "But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall

be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days."

Solomon means "peaceable" or "his peace." His reign was peaceful, and he was another type of Messiah, the Prince of Peace. Nathan brought him another name, Jedidiah, which signifies "the beloved of the Lord". The same phrase is used of Jesus:

- **Matthew 3:17** - "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

David's Repentance

Repentance involves looking to Jesus, accepting His offering for sin on the cross and acknowledging our own death.

This goes all the way back to Cain, who was told that if he did wrong the sin offering was at the door (**Genesis 4:7**)

[See <https://petergoeman.com/perhaps-sin-is-not-crouching-at-the-door-genesis-47/>]

- **Genesis 4:7** - "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin (ḥaṭṭā'āt) lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

David's path to repentance is described in **Psalms 51**, see below.

But David's sin brings forth death when the child of this union falls ill and dies, which we see in the next chapter.

- **Galatians 6:7-8** - "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."

"Reaping what you sow" is different from "Karma." It's not a rigid, automatic law, but it's the judgment of a just and merciful God.

This judgment would also give rise to turmoil in David's own family, and rebellion by his son.

But he could be comforted in recalling God's promise to him:

"When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you." - **2 Samuel 7:12-15**

Psalm 51 - A Model for Repentance

David's repentance is expanded in the psalm he wrote concerning this incident, "When Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba."

It is a model for repentance and confession. In addition, David asks God to "create a pure heart" for him so he won't follow the same path again. And he hopes to teach others to learn from his experience and repent, so "sinners shall be converted unto thee."

Psalm 51:1 - "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

Psalm 51:2 - "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

- **1 Corinthians 6:11** - "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Psalm 51:3 - "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me."

Continually before me, whenever I look at myself.

Psalm 51:4 - "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."

Rashi - "Against You alone have I sinned": Therefore, it is in Your power to forgive [me]. Even in my sin against Uriah, I sinned against You, for You warned against the matter."

Others were injured by his actions, but it was God's law that he transgressed.

"In order that You be justified in Your conduct": like במנהגך, in Your conduct. I had the strength to overpower my evil inclination, but, so that they should not say, "The servant overpowered his master," for I said to You (**Psalm 26:2**), "Test me, O Lord, and try me," and You tested me and I was not found perfect, in order that You should be justified and not I (Sanh. 107a).

Another explanation: "in order that You be justified in Your conduct": If You forgive me, You will be justified in Your judgment against all the wicked who do not repent, so that they will not be able to say, "If we had repented, it would not have availed us."

Psalm 51:5 - "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Psalm 51:6 - "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part

thou shalt make me to know wisdom."

Rashi -in the inward parts, in the hidden places: Heb. בטחות. These are the "reins," which are smooth. Menachem, however, associated it with (**Genesis 21: 16**): "as it were a bowshot (כמטחוי קשת)"; and so (**Job 38: 36**): "Who placed wisdom in the inward parts (בטחות)." And their interpretation is an expression of drawing, for just as a bow is drawn, so is their yearning for knowledge.

Psalm 51:7 - "Purge (purify) me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Hyssop was what they used to apply the blood on the doorposts at Passover. Rashi also reminds us that hyssop was used to sprinkle waters of purification from the ashes of the Red Heifer on those who had touched a dead body (**Numbers 19:13**).

Psalm 51:8 - "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice."

bones = *`etsem* - Here it can mean the bodily form, essence, substance. Bones indicated a person's strength.

broken = *dakah* - crushed, collapse, crush to pieces (Used in verse 17 "contrite" to describe David's heart)

Psalm 51:9 - "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities."

- **Psalm 22:1** - "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" (**Luke 23:34**)
And yet later in the psalm....

- **Psalm 22:24** - "He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He heard."

Psalm 51:10-11 - "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me."

- **Ezekiel 36:26** - "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

Psalm 51:12 - "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit."

Free = *nadiyb* - freely given, willing, generous, liberal

Psalm 51:13 - "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

Rashi - They will repent if they see that You forgive me.

Psalm 51:14 - "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness."

bloodguiltiness = *dam* - blood. i.e. the sentence of death as the punishment for his crimes.

Psalm 51:15 - "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

Like in **Lamentations 5:21** - "Turn thou us to thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned" - God must do it.

Psalm 51:16 - "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering."

- **Isaiah 1:11-16** - "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil"

Psalm 51:17 - "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

"broken" = *shabar* - shattered, crushed, broken

"contrite" - *dakah* - collapsed, crushed to pieces

Psalm 51:18 - "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

Do good = *yatab* - to act fitly, rightly, with acceptance toward

Rashi saw this as David's request for God "to build Your Temple in its midst in the days of my son, Solomon."

The combination of our confession and repentance with God's mercy are what build up the walls of the New Jerusalem.

Psalm 51:19 - "Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with

burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar."

- **Romans 12:1** - "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Victory Over the Ammonites

David himself, finally morally restored, accompanied by the ark of God, leads the final attack on the Ammonite royal city of Rabbah. The result:

- **2 Samuel 12:30** - "And he took their king's crown from off his head, the weight whereof was a talent of gold with the precious stones: and it was set on David's head."

This probably meant the crown was *valued* at a talent of gold because of the precious stones embedded in it. But some rabbis maintained it *weighed* one talent, so it had to be held up over David's head by a special magnet as he sat on his throne.

- **2 Samuel 12:31** - "And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem."

The rabbis disagree over the meaning of this verse.

Some, as in the King James, interpret it to mean David used these implements to kill or torture the Ammonites, as in **1 Chronicles 20:3** - "...cut them saws and harrows of iron and with axes" and to "put through the brick kiln" so as to experience part of the pain of what it meant to "pass their children through the fire" to Molech.

But the punishment of the Ammonite residents of the city was probably not as grisly as those rabbis and the King James translation makes it sound. It was probably more like forced labor.

The NET translation: "He removed the people who were in it and made them do hard labor with saws, iron picks, and iron axes, putting them to work at the brick kiln" (**2 Samuel 12:30-31**).

So, this would be another example of a transformation of something evil into something useful to Israel and to God, with the treasures possibly used later in the construction of the Temple.

The things we previously used to worship idols and glorify self are transformed into ministries and gifts that God can use to build up His kingdom.