

2 Samuel 10

A Good Warning About Bad Habits

After this the king of the Ammonites died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place. And David said, "I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me." So David sent by his servants to console him concerning his father. And David's servants came into the land of the Ammonites. But the princes of the Ammonites said to Hanun their lord, "Do you think, because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honoring your father? Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it?" So Hanun took David's servants and shaved off half the beard of each and cut off their garments in the middle, at their hips, and sent them away. When it was told David, he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, "Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown and then return."

When the Ammonites saw that they had become a stench to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zobah, 20,000 foot soldiers, and the king of Maacah with 1,000 men, and the men of Tob, 12,000 men. And when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the host of the mighty men. And the Ammonites came out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the gate, and the Syrians of Zobah and of Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah were by themselves in the open country.

When Joab saw that the battle was set against him both in front and in the rear, he chose some of the best men of Israel and arrayed them against the Syrians. The rest of his men he put in the charge of Abishai his brother, and he arrayed them against the Ammonites. And he said, "If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me, but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to him." So Joab and the people who were with him drew near to battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. And when the Ammonites saw that the Syrians fled, they likewise fled before Abishai and entered the city. Then Joab returned from fighting against the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.

But when the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered themselves together. And Hadadezer sent and brought out the Syrians who were beyond the Euphrates. They came to Helam, with Shobach the commander of the army of Hadadezer at their head. And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together and crossed the Jordan and came to Helam. The Syrians arrayed themselves against David and fought with him. And the Syrians fled before Israel, and David killed of the Syrians the men of 700 chariots, and 40,000 horsemen, and wounded Shobach the commander of their army, so that he died there. And when all the kings who were servants of Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and became subject to them. So the Syrians were afraid to save the Ammonites anymore. – 2 Samuel 10 ESV

Chapter 10 provides a glimpse into that part of David's role as king of Israel that required him to defend and protect his kingdom. One of David's primary responsibilities as king was to finish what Joshua and the people of Israel had begun when they first entered the land of promise. Chapter 8 chronicled David's victories against the Philistines, Moabites, Amalekites, Edomites, Ammonites, and Syrians. But in Chapter 10 David is forced to go to war yet again, because the newly crowned king of the Ammonites chose to reject his offer of peace. David had sent emissaries to Hanun, the new king of the Ammonites, offering his condolences over the death of his father. But Hanun's princes and advisors saw David's overtures as a veiled attempt to spy out the city and report back to David concerning its defenses. So, they took the men, shaved off half their beards and cut off the lower portions of their garments, leaving them exposed, and then sent them on their way. This intentional slight left David with no alternative but to declare war on the Ammonites. In response, the Ammonites sought out the services of Syrian mercenaries to assist them in their coming battle with Israel.

The noteworthy aspect of this scenario is that it reveals how David handled these continuing military excursions. This event most likely took place early in David's reign. He spent the formative portions of his rule dealing with the enemies that surrounded Israel and was constantly having to go to battle with one nation or another. David was the warrior-king, and fighting was part of his job, which he did well. But even in this case, we see David setting a dangerous precedent by sending Joab, his military commander, to do battle with the Ammonites while David remained behind. It is also notable that David does not seem to seek the counsel of God before going into battle. It appears that he took the debasing treatment of his men by the Ammonites as a personal slap in the face and was determined to do something about it. So, he sent his troops, under the leadership of Joab, to deal with the Ammonites. But Joab found himself outnumbered, and it would only be through his skillful leadership that the enemy was defeated. But even Joab recognized that any hopes of victory were up to God. Just before the battle, he told his men:

"Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to him." – 2 Samuel 10:12 ESV

Joab was doing his job, but he was also relying on God. But David remained in Jerusalem. He would not enter the fight until after the Ammonites and Syrians were routed by Israel. When he received word that the Syrians had mustered their own army against Israel, he led his troops into battle, and ultimately defeating the Syrians.

So why is all of this so important? It sets up Chapter 11, where David, the warrior-king, once again faces battle, but chooses to stay behind in Jerusalem. David had established a very unwise and unhealthy habit. Chapter 11 will open with the seemingly innocuous words, "In the spring of the year, the time **when kings go out to battle**, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. **But David remained at Jerusalem**" (2 Samuel 11:1 ESV).

Yet again, David sends Joab and his troops into battle while he remains safe behind. At a time when most kings were leading their troops in battle, David chose to stay behind and delegated his duties to Joab.

But David's primary responsibility as the king of Israel was to secure the land and to remove the pagan nations from among them. God charged him with the duty of carrying out the command originally given to Moses and then passed on to Joshua.

"...but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded, that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God." – Deuteronomy 20:17-18 ESV

As long as nations were threatening the physical and spiritual well-being of Israel, David had one job to do: Fight. He wasn't to delegate that responsibility to another. But David appears to have had a problem with shirking responsibility. You can see it in his role as a father. Time and time again, David failed to lead his growing family well. His obsession with women led to him having many children, but it is one thing to bring children into the world and another thing to father and guide them once they are here. David appears to have left much of the training of his children up to his many wives. And, as we shall see, this abdication of his God-given responsibility would come back to haunt him.

David enjoyed victories over the Ammonites and the Syrians, mainly due to the leadership and faith of Joab. But David's decision to remain at home while his armies went into battle was going to prove to be a bad habit that produced less-than-ideal results. When we fail to do what God has called us to do, because we are distracted by the cares of this world, we may experience success in life, but the time will come when our victories turn into defeats. In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul reminded them that their salvation had been for a purpose. They had been saved, not because they were good people who deserved it, but because God had something for them to do.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. – Ephesians 2:8-10 NLT

Like David, we are here for a reason. We have a God-given job to do. We cannot afford to shirk our responsibility or decide to delegate our job to someone else. When we fail to do what God has called us to do, we risk His discipline. He won't fall out of love with us, but He will allow us to experience the painful lessons that come with disobedience.

2 Samuel 11:1-13

Feeding the Monster Within

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. 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. 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. — 2 Samuel 11:1-13 ESV

There is a saying found in the Book of Proverbs that reads: "Stolen bread tastes sweet, but it turns to gravel in the mouth" (Proverbs 20:17 NLT). This little proverb is highly applicable to the story found in Chapter 11 of 2 Samuel. What makes it even more interesting is that the Book of Proverbs, in which it is found, was compiled by Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba. It's a simple proverb, but it carries profound weight. What is forbidden often has a strong appeal to us, and when we get what we desire, it can provide a short-lived sense of gratification. But the proverb goes on to warn that the forbidden, once consumed, quickly loses its appeal and can have serious consequences. Stolen bread that turns to gravel in the mouth would not only leave a disappointingly bad taste in your mouth, but a face full of broken teeth as well.

The tale of David and Bathsheba is one of the most well-known stories in the Bible. How would you like it if one of the worst sins you have ever committed was chronicled in a book for everyone to read? One of the things that makes the Bible so compelling is its brutal honesty. It

reveals the good, the bad, and the ugly aspects of humanity. It doesn't attempt to paint a rosy picture about mankind but goes out of its way to expose the influence of sin on the lives of even the most faithful characters. All you have to do is look at the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Noah, Peter, and a host of other biblical characters to realize that sin is an ever-present problem even for the godliest individuals. And David was no exception.

As has been pointed out before, David had an inordinate affection for women. His attraction to women was his Achilles' Heel, his weak spot. He had already amassed for himself a collection of wives who had fathered him many children. And this had been in direct disobedience to the command of God. Yet, David's growing collection of wives never seemed to scratch the itch he had. His lust was never satisfied. Enough was never enough. He had more than enough wives to satisfy his sexual needs, yet David seemed to harbor an insatiable desire for the forbidden, an overwhelming drive for "stolen bread." He wanted what he could not have.

In the case of Bathsheba, David was in the wrong place at the wrong time. The passage makes it painfully clear that it was spring, "the time when kings go out to battle" (2 Samuel 11:1 ESV). But David chose to remain in Jerusalem while his troops went off to war. As the warrior-king, it was his responsibility to lead his troops into battle. He was to be the protector of the kingdom. But David delegated his God-appointed role to Joab, and this was the first step in David feeding the monster within. David knew he had a problem. He was well aware of the lust that lurked within himself. By staying home in Jerusalem, David set himself up for failure. He created the ideal opportunity for his lust to get the better of him. He was not doing what he was supposed to be doing. He was not where he was supposed to be. And Satan, the enemy, took advantage of the situation, knowing David's weakness and casting the perfect bait to lure David into sin. The apostle James reminds us:

"...remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death." – James 1:13-15 NLT

Full fish don't usually take the bait. Well-fed fish are not as susceptible to the lure. David's lust for women had yet to be satisfied because he had a heart problem. He had an insatiable desire for the opposite sex that never seemed to be satiated. No amount of wives was going to satisfy what was, in actuality, a spiritual problem. By staying in Jerusalem and refusing to go to war, David set himself up for failure. He found himself with idle time and an overactive libido. It just so happened that, as he awoke from an afternoon nap, he went onto the roof of his palace and spied a woman bathing. His desires enticed him and dragged him away. He saw, and he had to have. He lusted, and he had to satisfy that lust, even though he knew that Bathsheba was the wife of one of his warriors. She was married, but that fact carried no weight with David. David's lust led him to commit adultery, and, before he could realize it, the sweetness of the stolen bread turned to gravel in his mouth.

Bathsheba broke the news to David that she was pregnant. The text points out that Bathsheba, having just finished the cleansing for her menstrual cycle as prescribed by the law, was ready to conceive. And she did.

This surprising bit of news threw David into overdrive. He immediately attempted to do damage control, trying to devise a way to cover up his sin. He called Uriah home from the battle front, naturally assuming that Uriah would make a beeline to his home, have sexual relations with his wife, and the problem would be solved. But what David didn't take into account was Uriah's dedication to the king and allegiance to his fellow soldiers. He wasn't going to allow himself the pleasure of his wife's company while his brothers were still at war. So, he slept with the servants of the king. Even when David got Uriah drunk, this faithful servant refused to go home. The contrast between Uriah's behavior and that of David is stunning. Uriah was a Hittite, a non-Jew, yet he proved to be more faithful than the man after God's own heart. His response to David's enticement to go home and sleep with his wife reveals a great deal about Uriah's integrity.

"The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, and Joab and my master's men are camping in the open fields. How could I go home to wine and dine and sleep with my wife? I swear that I would never do such a thing." – 2 Samuel 11:11 NLT

David's attempt at a cover up was blowing up in his face. His little deception was falling apart right before his eyes, and David was growing desperate. He had committed adultery. Now he was attempting to cover it up. He was also trying to get another man to sin against his own conscience. All in an attempt to cover up his sin. David had made the mistake of feeding the monster within and now he was being devoured by it. His life was being consumed by his own sinful nature.

The apostle Paul gives us a less-than-attractive list of the "fruit" that comes as a result of giving our sin nature free reign in our lives:

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. – Galatians 5:19-21 NLT

It all had begun with David not being where he was supposed to be. Staying home in Jerusalem wasn't necessarily a sin, but it proved to be unwise. Had David gone off to war like he was supposed to do, he wouldn't have been on his rooftop that day. He wouldn't have seen Bathsheba bathing. He wouldn't have lusted. He wouldn't have committed adultery. And there would have been no sin to cover up. Take a look again at the passage in James: "Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death." Do you see the pattern?

Temptation – desire – enticement – sinful action – increased sin – death

The key to defeating the monster within is to starve it. Paul reminds us, “So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves” (Galatians 5:16 NLT). As long as David fed the monster within, he was going to find himself devoured from within. But if he chose to listen to the Spirit of God, and do what God called him to do, this whole affair could be avoided.

2 Samuel 11:14-27

Sin Always Leads to Death

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. Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting. And he instructed the messenger, "When you have finished telling all the news about the fighting to the king, then, if the king's anger rises, and if he says to you, 'Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who killed Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman cast an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so 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 him to tell. The messenger said to David, "The men gained an advantage over us and came out against us in the field, but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall. Some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also." David said to the messenger, "Thus shall you say to Joab, 'Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another. Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it.' And encourage him."

When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. And when the 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. – 2 Samuel 11:14-27 ESV

The apostle James wrote this clear and convicting description of sin:

Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. – James 1:14-15 NLT

This entire affair surrounding David's life and recorded for posterity in Chapter 11 of 2 Samuel, is a tragic illustration of James' words. David had desires. He had a strong attraction for the opposite sex that he found difficult to control. It had already led to his growing collection of wives. And when he had spied Bathsheba bathing on her rooftop, his desire for more kicked into high gear. The *sight* of her was not enough. He had to *possess* her. His desires enticed him and lured him into committing an even greater sin than his lust for Bathsheba. When James speaks of being "enticed," he uses the Greek word *exelkō*, which refers to a hunter or fisherman drawing his prey out of hiding by tempting them with something they desire. The Devil presented David with an enticing treat and he took the bait. His desires gave birth to sinful

actions, and he committed adultery with Bathsheba. But it didn't stop there. His sin grew. Her pregnancy resulted in David having to attempt to cover his sin by committing additional sins. He lied. He manipulated. He called Uriah, her husband, back from the front in order to entice him into have sexual relations with his wife, all so David's sin might not be exposed. When that didn't work, David's sin gave birth to death; he concocted a plan for Uriah to be killed in battle, and he sent the Uriah back to the front unknowingly carrying his own death warrant in his hands.

This story is meant to shock us, but it should not surprise us. It shocks us because it involves David, the man after God's own heart. But just because David held a special place in God's heart does not mean that David was immune to sin. He was human and had flaws and weaknesses. David's sins, just like ours, were potentially deadly. In this case, David's growing number of sins finally led to literal death, but not his own. It was Uriah who would die, and, along with him, a number of other innocent soldiers were exposed unnecessarily to the same deadly circumstances. David's sin gave birth to death. The Greek word James used is *apokyeō* and it means "to beget, to bring forth from the womb, to produce or generate."

Like the unexpected pregnancy of Bathsheba, there would come a time when David's sins inevitably delivered. There would be a byproduct to his sexual escapade.

It is interesting to note, that in the garden, God warned Adam about the consequences of disobedience to His commands.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." – Genesis 2:16-17 ESV

The day came when Eve, Adam's wife, listened to the enticing words of Satan, and chose to disobey God and eat of the forbidden fruit.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. – Genesis 3:6 ESV

And the apostle Paul reminds us that Adam's sin, by eating the forbidden fruit along with his wife, resulted in death.

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. – Romans 3:12 NLT

For the first time, death became an inevitable and unavoidable reality for mankind. Adam and Eve would know the pain of physical death. But it also brought about the even more hideous reality of spiritual death – eternal separation from God – the fate of all those who do not accept God's gracious offer of salvation through the death of His Son Jesus Christ.

Adam and Eve would live long after their sin, but it would not be long before their sin gave birth to death – the death of their own son, Abel, at the hands of his brother, Cain. Sin always brings forth death. It may not be physical in nature, but it will always be spiritual. Sin separates us from God and causes suffering for others. It damages and destroys. It grows and spreads like a cancer, infecting our lives and contaminating those around us. Uriah was the innocent victim of David's selfish sin. The men who died at his side were also the undeserving victims of David's disobedience. And the only thing David had to say for what he had done was, "Well, tell Joab not to be discouraged. The sword devours this one today and that one tomorrow! Fight harder next time, and conquer the city!" (2 Samuel 11:25 NLT). No remorse. No repentance. No regret.

And David was not yet done. He still had the pregnancy of Bathsheba to cover up. So, barely giving her time to mourn the loss of her husband, David sent for the grieving widow and married her. Doing so provided a perfectly good explanation for her soon-to-be-obvious pregnancy. But while David may have thought his act of indiscretion had gone unnoticed, God knew, and would discipline David for his sin.

The apostle Paul tells us that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23 ESV). Ultimately, he is referring to the spiritual death that follows our physical death. There is an eternal separation from God that will be the lot of all those who have sinned, unless they place their faith in the redemptive work of Christ. Paul goes on to say, "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

As Christians, we will sin in this life. But we will never have to face eternal separation from God in the next life. Jesus has provided us with eternal life and the guarantee of our status as sons and daughters of God, and heirs of his Kingdom. But sin will still have ramifications in this life. It will still produce death. David's sin, as long as it remained unconfessed and unforgiven, would continue to have deadly consequences. It would kill David's fellowship with God. It would destroy David's peace and contentment. And it would result in yet another death, one that would come close to home and leave David devastated. Sin is deadly, and while believers can rest in the knowledge that spiritual death is no longer a threat, we must never underestimate the fatal effects of sin while we live on this earth. Our sins have consequences.

2 Samuel 12:1-14

Sin Against God

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 traveler 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. 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 neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" 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." – 2 Samuel 12:1-14 ESV

When David received the news from Joab that Uriah had been killed in battle (just as David had commanded), he responded in a very flippant manner: "Do not let this matter displease you..." (2 Samuel 11:25 ESV). The Hebrew word he used, *yara`*, can also mean "evil." In other words, David was telling Joab not to view what he had done as evil or sinful. He wasn't to grieve over it or be upset about it. The prophet Isaiah wisely wrote, "What sorrow for those who say that evil is good and good is evil, that dark is light and light is dark, that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter" (Isaiah 5:20 NLT). David was attempting to negate the gravity of his sin and was even unwilling to see what he had done *to* Uriah and *with* Bathsheba as wrong, and he didn't want Joab to be displeased about his role in the affair.

But David forgot about the displeasure of God. What he had done was sin, and God hates sin. He is the holy and righteous God who must deal justly with sin. He can't ignore it, excuse it, or turn his back on it. Because David was the king of Israel, he was held to an even higher standard

by God. He was God's chosen representative and the leader of God's people. As the old proverb states: "As is the king, so are the subjects."

What is amazing about this story is that it took a third party to bring David to a point of repentance. It was not until Nathan, the prophet, showed up at David's doorstep, that David had second thoughts about what he had done. Even Psalm 51, written by David as a result of the affair involving Bathsheba and Uriah, was composed after God had used Nathan to convict David. The description attached to the psalm explains this fact: "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba."

It was because God sent Nathan and Nathan had exposed David's sin, that David realized the gravity of what he had done. It took the somewhat deceptive tactics of Nathan to get David to recognize the reality of his sin and the depth of God's displeasure. But, once convicted, David cried out to God for mercy.

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!*

*For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment. – Psalm 51:1-4 ESV*

While David may have been able to dissuade Joab from being displeased with his role in Uriah's death, David could not convince God that what he had done was a good thing. God was displeased. He was angry, and His was a righteous indignation. He had taken David's actions personally.

"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." – 2 Samuel 12:9 ESV

God reminded David that He had been the one to put him on the throne. David's reign had been His doing. He reminded David, "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul" (2 Samuel 12:7 ESV). He even reminded David of what happened to Saul, who had also multiplied wives for himself, in direct violation of God's command.

“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. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more.” – 2 Samuel 12:8 ESV

This was not God giving His approval of Saul’s collection of wives. And it cannot be used to say that God was transferring the rights to Saul’s many wives to David. This would be in direct contradiction to God’s own commands regarding the king and his wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). God was simply stating that the sins of Saul had led to his fall. David had taken ownership of all that had belonged to Saul because God had made it possible. And David’s response had been to disobey God.

God gave David some very bad news regarding his sin: “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” (2 Samuel 12:10 ESV). David’s sin was going to have dire consequences. He would receive God’s forgiveness, but that would not change the fact that God would also punish him for what he had done.

“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 neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.” – 2 Samuel 12:11-12 ESV

This devastating news got David’s full attention. As a result of what he heard, David responded: “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Samuel 12:13 ESV). He owned up to his sin. He admitted that what he had done was a sin against God Himself; he had violated the law of God. But he took responsibility for it and repented of it. As a result, Nathan gave David a good-news, bad-news report:

“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.” – 2 Samuel 12:13-14 ESV

Years later, in one of his psalms, David would say of God, “as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12 ESV). David would come to love and appreciate the forgiveness of God. But he would also know the discipline of God.

The most perplexing aspect of this story is the death of the child born to David and Bathsheba. This innocent child was the result of their adulterous affair but had played no part in it. He had been the unwitting byproduct of their sin. Yet, it was the child who died. We must always keep in mind the passage about sin found in the first chapter of James.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. – James 1:14-15 ESV

To blame God for the death of the child would be wrong. It was the sin of David that caused the child's death. The sad reality about sin is that the innocent always suffer the most. When we sin, we almost always try to justify or rationalize our actions by claiming that we are not hurting anyone else. But sin always has more than one victim. If we look at the list of sins found in Galatians 5, we will see that they are all other-oriented. Our sins are always damaging to others. It was David's sin with Bathsheba and his role in the death of Uriah that led to the loss of his own son. He could not point his finger at God and attempt to blame Him. As the remainder of the chapter will reveal, David prayed to God for his son's healing, but he would not blame God for his sickness. He knew where the blame belonged. David had taken another man's wife and shown no pity. He had arranged for the murder of her husband and had shown no remorse.

But David was going to learn a powerful and life-changing lesson from this dark moment of the soul. He would later write the following words that reflected his new understanding about sin and repentance.

*For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. — Psalm 51:16-17 ESV*

2 Samuel 12:15-23

The Child Died

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. 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 worshiped. 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?' 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." – 2 Samuel 12:15-23 ESV

This is a difficult passage. It involves the death of an innocent child, apparently as the result of God's direct intervention and discipline. The prophet Nathan told 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." – 2 Samuel 12:13-14 NLT

Verse 15 seems to make God's involvement in the situation quite clear.

And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. – 2 Samuel 12:15 ESV

The Hebrew word translated as "afflicted" is *nagaph*, and it means "to inflict" (as in a disease). It's the same word used in Exodus when God "struck" the firstborn of the Egyptians as part of the tenth plague.

*At midnight the Lord **struck** down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. – Exodus 12:29 ESV*

What are we supposed to do with this information? It raises a host of ethical and moral questions. Why would God punish an innocent child for the sins of his parents? What had the

child done to deserve death? Is God a vindictive god who lashes out in anger, inflicting pain on the innocent to get the attention of the guilty? Why didn't God kill David, since he was the one who sinned and commissioned the murder of Uriah? These kinds of questions are legitimate and perfectly logical for us to consider as we deal with this passage. But the conclusions we draw or the answers we walk away with must be based on a biblically accurate understanding of God.

Let's take a closer look at what is going on in this story. David, the king of Israel, was God's appointed and Spirit-anointed leader. He represented God on behalf of the people. He was to rule and reign over them, modeling his leadership after that of a lowly shepherd. He was to serve his people and selflessly care for them. But when David sinned with Bathsheba, he was not acting as a shepherd. He didn't have the best interests of the flock at heart. The 2 Samuel passage that records David's sin tells us that when he was informed that Bathsheba was a married woman, he "sent messengers and **took her**, and she came to him, and he lay with her" (2 Samuel 11:4 ESV).

The phrase "took her" is the Hebrew word *laqach*, which means "to seize, snatch, or take away." David stole another man's wife. This is made clear when we examine the story Nathan the prophet used to convict David. He made up a sad tale about a poor man who had a lamb that was like a member of his household. One day, a wealthy man, who received a surprise visit from a friend, decided to take the poor man's lamb to feed his guest. The text states, "but he **took** the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him" (2 Samuel 12:4 ESV). Nathan used that same Hebrew word, *laqach*. The rich man snatched or stole the poor man's lamb. He took advantage of the poor man, even when he had plenty of lambs of his own.

When Nathan finished telling David his heart-wrenching story, the king responded in righteous indignation.

"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." – 2 Samuel 12:5-6 ESV

But the whole point of the story was that David had stolen Uriah's "lamb." He already had more wives than he needed and far more than God had commanded but he used his divinely ordained power to take advantage of a member of his flock. Not only that, but David got Bathsheba pregnant. He took what was not his, and expected to receive blessings from his own disobedience. Despite his sin, he saw nothing wrong in having an heir who would be the fruit of his immoral act. But as king, David was going to be held to a higher, more stringent standard.

We know David loved this child. He prayed to God desperately and intensely, asking that he might be spared.

David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. – 2 Samuel 12:16 ESV

For seven days, David fasted, wept, and prayed, begging that God might show grace and allow his son to live. But God did not answer David's prayer. At least not in the way David desired. His son died, and it was a devastating blow. However, David seemed to understand that this judgment from God's hand was deserved and anything but unfair. He doesn't rail at God or shake his fist in indignation. The text states, "David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped" (2 Samuel 12:20 ESV).

But again, we are left with the question, "Why?" Why did God choose to allow the death of the child? As the king of Israel, David had broken his covenant with God and with his people. He had stolen what was not his. He had taken what had belonged to another and tried to garner blessings through his sin. The literal "fruit" of David's sin with Bathsheba was their son. That son did not belong to David any more than Bathsheba did. He was a stolen blessing. It reminds me of the story of Esau and Jacob, the twin sons of Isaac. Esau was the older of the two, having come out of the womb first, with Jacob literally holding on to his heel as he made his grand entrance into the world.

Isaac's wife, Rebekah, had been barren and unable to have children, but in answer to Isaac's prayer, God caused her to conceive. He told her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23 ESV). But when the two boys became adults, Jacob, with the help of his mother, concocted a plan to steal from Esau the birthright that rightfully belonged to him as the firstborn. Keep in mind, God had already promised Rebekah that Jacob would rule over Esau. The older was going to serve the younger. But in an act of distrust and self-reliance, Rebekah and Jacob came up with a plan to trick the dim-sighted Isaac and cause him to give Esau's blessing to Jacob. When Esau discovered what they had done, he was furious. He also called what they had done precisely what it was: Stealing. He said, "For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing" (Genesis 27:36 ESV). He used the very same Hebrew word, *laqach*. Jacob **snatched** what did not belong to him. God had promised that the blessing would be his, but Jacob decided to take matters into his own hands. His actions, like those of David, would result in punishment. Because of Esau's wrath, Jacob was forced to run for his life and spent years in self-imposed exile. He had the birthright and the blessing, but no joy. He had the legal claim to inherit all that belonged to his father, but not the pleasure of getting to live with his family.

Jacob would eventually be restored to a right relationship with Esau, and it would be God's doing. David would eventually have another son by Bathsheba. It would be Solomon. He lost the first son as punishment for his sin. But God eventually blessed David with another son who would grow up to be the heir to the throne and the man who would build the Temple.

David sinned. The child died. And while the child's death was God's doing, it was not God's fault. He was justly meting out the punishment David deserved. David took something that didn't belong to him: The wife of another man. He also took the life of an innocent, faithful husband and servant. As a result, God took the life of David's son. Uriah's death was

undeserved. So the child's death was earned, not by the child, but by the king whose immoral actions brought about the child's very existence. This story is not intended to be a model or illustration for how God deals with ALL sin. It simply shows us how God chose to deal with the man He had anointed to be king over His people. David was being held to a higher standard. He should have known better. He should have lived differently. And he had no one to blame but himself.