

The Weight of the Crown

David's Grievous Sin

2 Samuel 11-12

Mark Vroegop

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." Then Nathan went to his house. And the LORD afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick (2 Sam. 12:7-15).

Our text today is the darkest moment in the life and reign of David. There will be other failures and disappointments in David's life and in his reign. The narrator pulls no punches. The reason, as I've said many times, is that these books are not merely about Samuel, Saul, and David. 1 & 2 Samuel is about God—about his glory, his mercy, and his grace.

Keep in mind that these books are pointing us toward our need for another kind of king and leader – the Messiah. David is not our ultimate example or our hero. True, he is called a man after God's own heart, but that phrase has been taken to merely mean that David's heart was better than others. The phrase has more to say about God's gracious choice of David (i.e., chosen after God's heart). As you will see next week, and in the chapters that follow, David has some glaring problems.

It's almost as if the narrator wants readers to be really sure that when we talk about the reign of David that we do not become guilty of immortalizing or creating a mythology about him. Why? Because all of this text is about God—even the texts reflecting David's failures.

Second Samuel 11-12 is the account of David's sexual sin with Bathsheba, his attempted manipulation of Bathsheba's husband, the calculated murder of Uriah, the confrontation by the prophet Nathan, and David's repentance. There's a lot here. And there are some important lessons to be learned.

I'm going to do my best to walk through this text and highlight several key points. As I do, let me offer a few introductory thoughts:

- While this text is about sexual sin, it's also about sexual sin in the context of a powerful king.
- These chapters are part of a bigger biblical ethic regarding sexual morality, and it's not a comprehensive picture.
- I have multiple audiences in mind as we walk through this text, and I'm going to do my best to care for everyone:
 - People who have sexual sin in their past and are battling for righteousness
 - People who have been victimized by others and are trying to heal
 - People who are presently involved in sexual sin and need freedom
 - People who are fighting against sexual sin and need encouragement
 - People in positions of authority who need to be especially mindful of how power can be abused
- This sordid tale is also about God's beautiful grace to terrible sinners.

So, with that introduction to 2 Samuel 11-12, and our present context, let's look at (1) the scandal, (2) the cover-up, and (3) the rebuke.

Scandal

Two weeks ago, we learned about the Davidic Covenant and the blessing of God on David's life. Last week, we witnessed the application of that in battles that Israel faced, including the war with the Ammonites. We see quickly how the blessing of God can be taken for granted and compromised.

In 11:1 we are told that a battle is being fought with the Ammonites near the city of Rabbah, but David is in Jerusalem. We're left to wonder if David should have been with the troops or if he's back in Jerusalem because of his confidence in Joab. Regardless, verses 2-3 highlight a series of terrible decisions:

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?" (2 Sam. 11:2-3).

A few things to note. Because of the elevation of the palace, David had a unique view of the city. It's noteworthy that David's position as king creates the situation. Given the kind of homes and the kind of ceremonial bath that Bathsheba is taking, she's not being a temptress or doing something inappropriate. The focus of the entire text is on David.

Take special note of the words "sent and inquired about the woman." David had an opportunity to flee from this tempting moment. Proverbs 7:25 says, ". . . do not stray into her paths" and 2 Timothy 2:22 says, ". . . flee youthful passions." You don't beat sexual temptation with an argument; you beat it with speed. The story could have ended here. "David, get off the roof!" But instead, he's curious. He wants to learn more about the woman he saw.

Brothers and sisters, winning the battle with this kind of temptation requires killing curiosity of this kind. We live in a world constantly trying to get your attention or people who are trying to get your attention. We need to fight for righteousness by fleeing and by resisting the impulse to know, see, or learn more when it comes to sexual temptation.

The text even tells us in verse 3 that one of his advisors said, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” It’s hard to miss what is happening here. The advisor’s words cut against the objectification of this woman. She has a name. She’s someone’s daughter. And she’s someone’s wife.

“She was the daughter of one of David’s best fighters (cf. 23:34), the granddaughter of his most trusted counselor (cf. 16:23; 23:34), and the wife of one of his inner circle of honored soldiers(cf. 23:39).”¹

But these words also clearly identify that Bathsheba is off limits. She’s Uriah’s wife. By mentioning that Uriah is a Hittite, the narrator is helping us see that he’s a proselyte (a believing Gentile) who will be more righteous than David.

David has blown through several roadblocks already. But it gets worse:

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 (2 Sam. 11:4).

The verbs in these first four verses are important: David saw, David inquired, David sent, David took, and David lay with her. As we’ll see later, the absence of any condemnation of Bathsheba suggests that there was no choice on her part. David is the king. He’s the focus and for good reason. He’s the king. This is more than just sexual sin. It’s a misuse of David’s position as well. Samuel warned the people that kings would “take.” And here is David taking another man’s wife.

It’s outrageous. It’s selfish. It’s destructive. It’s scandalous.

We can see it so clearly right now, can’t we? This all seems so preventable. And it is! Get off the roof, man! Don’t ask who she is! Don’t send for her! But David’s greed got the best of him.

Oh, brothers and sisters, don’t let it get the best of you! Don’t let it have one more day of victory in your life. Get off the roof!

Cover-up

The situation gets even worse when Bathsheba informs David that she’s pregnant (v. 5). With Uriah away at battle, there will be questions. So, David uses his authority to try to make it look like Uriah is the

¹ Robert D. Bergen, [1, 2 Samuel](#), vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 364.

father by inviting him to return home from the frontlines (vv. 6-7). After an update on the battle, David encourages Uriah to go home and sends a gift with him (v. 8). He's pretending to be generous, but he's actually deceitful and manipulative. However, his plans fail as Uriah refuses to go home, and he sleeps elsewhere.

Robert Bergen in his commentary explains why:

"All sanctioned military activity was a form of service to the Lord, and it required the Lord's blessing for success. In order to maximize the probability of receiving that blessing in military endeavors, David seems to have required soldiers carrying out military assignments to keep themselves in a state of ritual purity, which necessarily meant refraining from all sexual contact (cf. 1 Sam. 21:5; Exod. 19:15). If Uriah had had sexual relations with Bathsheba, he would have rendered himself temporarily unfit for military service (cf. Lev. 15:18) and thus unfit for service to the Lord."²

The picture here is of an honorable Gentile soldier in stark contrast to David, the manipulative king. When David learns that Uriah has not gone home, he asks him directly about it.

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" (2 Sam. 11:11).

David persists by inviting him to the royal palace for dinner where Uriah gets drunk. But Uriah still refuses to go home and sleep with his wife (v. 13). A soldier drunk with wine has more ethics than a king drunk with lust and power.

With the failure of the "go home" plan, David plots Uriah's murder. He sends a letter to Joab by Uriah's own hand, instructing him to put Uriah in the most dangerous position possible and then retreat from him (v. 15). David's instructions are clear and awful. Well, this plan worked. Uriah was killed.

We are left to wonder about the ethics of Joab. When he sends a messenger to report on the battle losses, he gives him specific instructions on what to say if King David is angry at the loss: "Your servant, Uriah the Hittite is dead also" (v. 21). When David receives this news, his message back to Joab is calculated:

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" (2 Sam. 11:25).

² Robert D. Bergen, [*1, 2 Samuel*](#), vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 365–366.

The chapter ends with Bathsheba grieving her husband's death. David brought her into the palace as his wife where she gives birth. Yet the chapter closes with a somber statement: "The thing David had done displeased the Lord" (v. 27).

Rebuke

The Lord sends the prophet Nathan to David. Now, there are always two kinds of prophets. There are wilderness prophets who call out sinful actions with direct, blunt words. And there are palace prophets who work with greater diplomacy.

Nathan is a palace prophet who rebukes David with a story. In verses 1-4, Nathan tells David about a rich man and a poor man.

"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" (2 Sam. 12:2-6).

Using David's outrage, Nathan confronts him directly: "You are the man!" (v. 7). And he continues, highlighting David's selfishness:

"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" (2 Sam. 12:7-9).

The consequences would be severe with chaos in David's house (vv. 10-12). By God's grace, David receives this rebuke with heartfelt repentance: "I have sinned against the Lord" (v. 13). He's granted forgiveness, but despite his fasting and pleading, his child born to Bathsheba falls ill and dies (vv. 15-23).

And without taking away from the tragedy, the narrator identifies God's grace to David with the birth of another son named Solomon (vv. 24-25) and the final defeat of Rabbah, the capital city of the Ammonites.

Considerations

I started this sermon by addressing five groups of people. I'm sure there are more. But let me offer a few encouragements.

- People who have sexual sin in their past and are battling for righteousness: Make the next chapter of your life one that is marked by faithfulness, purity, and consistency. Fight against shame and embrace the daily grace of Christ-loving faithfulness.
- People who have been victimized by others and are trying to heal: You know a unique pain, and may the Lord grant you grace to find healing, forgiveness, and wholeness.
- People who are presently involved in sexual sin and need freedom: There's a whole new life of grace available to you. Turn from your sinful ways, and if you need help, we have lots of people and groups to walk with you.
- People who are fighting against sexual sin and need encouragement: Get off the roof, man! Let's heed the warning in David's life and double-down on our efforts to flee and resist immorality.
- People in positions of authority who need to be especially mindful of how power can be abused: If you occupy a seat of authority, be mindful and careful to use your authority to help and bless others instead of using them.

These chapters are a dark spot in David's life. But this story isn't just about David, and it won't be the final story. The story is also about God. And God is still gracious. Dale Davis once again hits the bullseye when he says:

"Just because David is Yahweh's beloved and chosen king does not mean he retains the kingdom by any merit but only by grace . . . In 1–2 Samuel *all* human leadership is flawed, which means that the kingdom—if there is to be one—can only be established and maintained by God's grace. Hence 1–2 Samuel makes us lift our eyes to wait for the Messianic King."³

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³ Dale Ralph Davis, [*2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 160.