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Nathan Rebukes David

Second Samuel 12: 1-14

Nathan Rebukes David DIG: Why does Nathan speak to David with a parable? Why does the absence of justice and mercy in Nathan's account enrage David so much? How could David have fed contentment and avoided coveting? What is God's perspective on gratitude? Who will lie with David's wives in broad daylight? How does David's response to Nathan's rebuke compare with Sha'ul's response in similar situations (First Samuel 13:11-12, 15:13-26)?

REFLECT: In what ways has a lack of gratitude led you to sin as it did David? When reminded of all that God has done for you, might you be kept from intentional, premeditated sin? We reap not only what we sow, but also what others have sown. How are you suffering because of what someone else has done? Who might be suffering because of what you've done? Who is the "Nathan" in your life? How did you respond? Are our sins ever really secret?

984 BC

God's displeasure: But the things David had done were evil in the eyes of ADONAI (Second Samuel 11:27b). Opposed to countries such as Egypt, where Pharaoh was regarded as divine, in **Isra'el, the king** had to submit to **God** who had chosen **him** and observe all the commandments given in the Torah (**Deuteronomy 17:15-20**). It was the task of **the prophet** to encourage **the king** to fulfill these obligations, and to rebuke **him** in **YHVH's** name if **he** failed to do so. **Samuel** had found **Sha'ul** stubbornly opposed to accepting rebuke. Now **Nathan** was to discover how **David** would react to the truth about **his sin**. Much depended on **the prophet's** method of approach, which in this instance, provides a model and reveals exceptional insight into human reactions to personal guilt and the failures of other people.³³⁵

The trial: Therefore, perhaps after a year, **ADONAI sent Nathan to David.** It

wasn't an easy task, **David** had been covering **his** sins for at least six months. But it was obvious that **Nathan** had prepared carefully for **his** encounter with **the king**. So **when Nathan came to David he** presented the case as if asking for a ruling on an injustice. **He** said: **There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. The lamb shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.**

Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him (Second Samuel 12:1-4). David listened intently to the carefully chosen Hebrew words of **Nathan**.

David burned with righteous anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die because he did such a thing and had no pity” (Second Samuel 12:5-6). We must pause a moment to notice how **David** had become very harsh towards other people. The Torah does not say anything about the robber of **a lamb** being killed, although it certainly says **he** had to restore the loss **four times over (Exodus 22:1)**. But **David** said the man who behaved like that should be killed. Many have seen in **David's fourfold** restitution an allusion to the death of **four** of **David's sons**, namely **Bathsheba's first son (Second Samuel 12:15-19), Amnon (Second Samuel 13:28-29), Absalom (Second Samuel 18:14-15) and Adonijah (First Kings 2:25).**

Have you ever noticed that when you are sinning in your own life you become very critical of sin in the lives of other people? The person who hides an uneasy conscience and a sense of guilt may strike out in anger against the sin of another. Is that why some of us are so merciless with another believer whose halo slipped? Is that why we have no gospel for the believer who falls? It may not be because we are so very holy, but because we are so unholy, that we condemn the thing in another that we refuse to face in our own lives. Let us not forget the words of our **Master: Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone (John 8:7).**³³⁶



The verdict: **Nathan** had skillfully presented **his** case and gained an opening that enabled **him** to deliver the punch line. **The prophet** realized that though **David** was very angry, **he** was also unguarded and ready for **the sword of the Spirit** to pierce **his heart (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews. 4:12)**. With one quick thrust, **Nathan** said: **You are the man** (two words in Hebrew: *ata ha'ish*)!³³⁷ Two simple Hebrew words, yet what volumes they speak! All of **David's** defenses came crashing down with those words. **He** stood naked before **his judge**. **He** had condemned **himself!**

Nathan had come to deliver the judgment of **Ha'Shem**, and therefore, **he** dare not soften the impact of **his** words. Indeed **the prophet** spoke in the first person as if **God Himself** was speaking: **This is what YHVH, the God of Isra'el** says: **I anointed you king over Isra'el and I delivered you from the hand of Sha'ul. I gave your master's wives into your arms** (by law of succession, Sha'ul's wives belonged to **David**). **I gave you all Isra'el and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more.** The real sin was this: **Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in My eyes?** The Torah said not to murder (see commentary on **Exodus, to see link click Dp - You Shall Not Murder**), commit adultery (see commentary on **Exodus Dq - You Shall Not Commit Adultery**), or covet your neighbor's wife (see commentary on **Exodus Dt - You Shall Not Covet Anything That Belongs To Your Neighbor**). **David** did all three.

You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. Although **David** had arranged **his** death from afar, **he** was just as guilty of murder as if **he** had thrust **Uriah** through with **his** own **sword**. **You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites, Isra'el's enemy, making it all the worse**

(Second Samuel 12:7-9).

It would be difficult to find higher testimony to Hebrew standards of life, and to Hebrew theories of society, than the condemnation that the writer, and everyone else, passes on **David**. To the eastern mind, for a king to take the wife of a subject is quite normal and natural, for the sovereign is well within his rights. Few men in **David's** position would have felt it necessary either to conceal the act or get rid of the husband. But in **Isra'el** a man was a man, even though he were a subject and of foreign birth, and his rights of property and person must be respected. Characteristic also is the rebuke of **Nathan** and the repentance of **the king**. Neither would have been conceivable in any other nation of the ancient east, and the fact that the story comes to us from a hand of a contemporary, adds to our sense of the very high standard of religion and morals that were already unmistakable in **Isra'el**.

The sentence: Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised Me and took the wife of **Uriah the Hittite to be your own (Second Samuel 12:10)**. **David's** dynasty, unlike **Sha'ul's**, would continue. But that good news was modified by the ongoing war and bloodshed. The whole nation would be continually reminded of **David's sin** as they fought continuing battles and witnessed the chaos in **his** family.

This is what ADONAI says: Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives, just as you took **Bathsheba**, and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight **(Second Samuel 16:21-22)**. **You did it in secret. But what you did in secret, I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Isra'el (Second Samuel 12:11-12).**

The rabbis teach that Nathan's rebuke was not that David committed any real sin, but Nathan's words were only moral in nature and not legal. In this way they explained away David's actions and his sins.

The pardon: The condemned prisoner knew that the verdict was true and the sentence was just, so without any argument, **he** confessed: (two words in Hebrew: *chatati YHVH*) **I have sinned against YHVH** (see [Df - O God, A Broken and Contrite Heart You Will Not Despise](#)). Such a confession could have been regarded as political suicide, but **the king** humbled **himself**. **Nathan** replied

immediately: **The LORD in His mercy has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.** That was like music to his soul! **Sin** is desperate and dangerous, and it always, always brings judgment, yet it cannot extinguish the love of **God**. **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (First John. 1:8-9).**

The Torah tells us what **David** deserved – **death (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22)**, but grace shows us what **David** received – forgiveness and commuting of **his** death sentence.³³⁸ **David's sin** was forgiven, **but** there would be consequences: **Because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for God, the son born to you will die (Second Samuel 12:13-14).** When the **LORD** restores us, **He** uses the rod also, and life is never quite the same again. Sometimes we have to drink the bitter cup. We can be forgiven, but still have to reap what we have sown. Shortly, one of **David's** sons would rape his sister, and **his** son Absalom became a murderer and even tried to overthrow his father to be **king of the Land**. Consequently, there were many stormy days and nights ahead for **David**, but **he** knew it was not the judgment of a vindictive **God**, but the chastisement of a loving heavenly **Father**. **For ADONAI disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6a CJB).**

As that chastisement cut **David** to the heart, then, praise **God, YHVH** healed the wound. The pendulum began to swing back the other way, voices began to speak kindly to **him** again, and love came to **his** path at the end of **his** journey. The loyalty of the people returned to **him**, and before **he** went to rest with **his** fathers **he** would still say: **The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD rescues him from them all (Psalm 34:19).**

God sets our **sins** before **His** face; even our most secret **sins** are revealed in the light of **His** countenance. **He** breaks our hearts and humbles us and brings us to confession and repentance in order to make us holy, to restore to us **the years that the locusts have eaten, and to present us faultless before the throne (Joel 2:24; Jude 1:24).**³³⁹