

2 SAMUEL

Part Two: David's Sin and its Consequences (Chapters 11-16)

CHAPTER 11: David's sins of lust, adultery, murder and abuse of power

"From the roof David saw a woman bathing who was very beautiful." (v.2)

It has been said that "idle hands are the devil's playpen." We have also heard the saying that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

With his generals and soldiers out fighting his battles, David has idle time on his hands. On one particular evening after siesta, he takes a stroll on the roof of his palace and his eyes catch sight of the beautiful Bathsheba who is bathing. David begins to lust after her. Right at this point, David could have saved himself much trouble and sin by turning from his lustful desires. Instead, he allows his lust to lead him to break three of the commandments: coveting another man's wife, adultery and murder. Worse still, the woman he covets is the wife of Uriah, one of his most faithful soldiers. Bathsheba conceives a child.

Immediately, David sets in motion a plan to cover up his sin. First, he calls Uriah home from the battlefield pretending to show interest in the battle he is engaged in. Then for the next three evenings, he tries to have Uriah sleep with his wife to make it appear that he was the father of the child. During war, soldiers refrain from sexual relations with their wives, and Uriah, being a good soldier, refuses to cooperate. He tells the king that it would not be right for him to enjoy the comforts of his home and wife, while the Ark of the Lord is on the battlefield and his fellow soldiers are sleeping in tents. Uriah proves himself much more loyal to his king than David is to his God.

When Uriah refuses to go along with David's wishes, David goes deeper into sin by plotting to have his faithful soldier killed on the battlefield. David has already abused his position of power by having Uriah's wife sent over to him to satisfy his lustful desires. Now he abuses his power for a second time by asking his loyal general, Joab, to arrange for the murder of Uriah on the battlefield. David even has the callousness to have Uriah carry the letter concerning his own demise to Joab. Because Joab does not follow David's plan exactly, several other innocent Israelite soldiers are killed.

With Uriah out of the way, David now takes Bathsheba as his wife—another abuse of power. This is the third time David has taken another man's wife to be his own. Previously, he took Abigail from Nabal (1Sm 25:2-42). Then he took back Michal from Paltiel (2Sm 3:12-16). Kings in biblical times frequently had many wives. David's taking of Abigail and Michal was not condemned, but his extreme ruthlessness in this case will not be ignored—at least not by God. Chapter 11 ends with the words: *"But the Lord was displeased with what David had done"* (v.27).

Pause: Among other things, David's sin involved an abuse of power. In your opinion, why do people abuse positions of power? What can help us from committing this sin?

CHAPTER 12: The prophet confronts the king; truth speaks to power

"Then Nathan said to David: 'You are the man!'" (v.10)

Nathan's parable is the most famous one in the Old Testament. Like many of the parables of Jesus, it is told in order to get the listener to judge himself. The parable is a heart-rending story of a rich man abusing his power. Because it may have been dangerous for Nathan to directly confront the powerful king, he tells him a story that sounds like a real-life incident.

In the parable, Nathan tells the story of a poor man (Uriah) whose beloved lamb (Bathsheba) was taken in a terrible act of greed and power grab by a rich and powerful man (David). The picture of the lamb's intimate life with his master reflects a happy marriage. As David listens to the story, he is outraged at the wickedness of the greedy, rich man, saying he deserves to die. In imposing the punishment for the thief, namely, the restitution of the stolen lamb to its owner four times, David inadvertently foretells the loss of his four sons (12:18; 13:28; 18:15; 1Kgs 2:24-25). Having told his parable and listened to David's reaction, Nathan exclaims: *"You are the man!"*—you are the greedy, rich man who has abused your God-given power in a most horrible way.

Verses 7-12—David’s punishment. Two principles are involved in the punishment that Nathan hands down on David. First, *the punishment must fit the crime*. For his crimes of adultery and murder, lust and violence will turn and afflict his own family. “*The sword shall never depart from your house*” (v.10). David’s wives will be given to an unnamed neighbor. Second, *justice must be seen to be done*. While David acted in secret, his depravity has become a public scandal. God would be no less public in his punishment of David.

David being king could have struck down Nathan for his condemning words. Instead, he showed humility and sincere repentance: “*I have sinned against the Lord*” (v.13). Psalm 51 is regarded as David’s act of contrition for his sin.

Pause: It took great courage for Nathan to confront an all-powerful king. Have you ever had to confront a family member, boss or fellow employee about his/her wrong-doing? If so, what was that experience like for you? Or what do you think that experience might be like for you?

“A time to weep and a time to refrain from weeping.” (Ecc 3:4)

Verses 15-25. We have witnessed David’s greatness in the noble way he treated Saul. Now we have witnessed David’s fall from grace, his feet of clay. In these verses, we receive another picture of David’s greatness. We may think that David might not have wanted the child that Bathsheba conceived as a result of her relations with David. Quite the contrary, he wants the child very much—fasting, praying, sleeping in sackcloth and interceding to God for the child with all his heart. But once David finds out that it is not God’s will for the child to live, David stops his prayer and fasting. In his commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel, Walter Brueggemann writes: “*Painful as is his grief, David moves quickly from the feeble realm of death to the vitality of life. He dresses, he worships, and he eats* (v.20). *He resumes life. His advisers did not expect his great grief earlier, nor did they expect him to shake off the grief so soon*” (v.1).

Pause: What are your thoughts and feelings about David’s approach to his son’s sickness and death?

Verses 24-25—Solomon is conceived. Bathsheba’s conception of Solomon, David’s successor, is another example of God “writing straight with crooked lines.” Who would ever say that the future king would come from a union brought on by lust and adultery? God’s ways surely are not our ways (Is. 55:8).

Bathsheba is one of five women mentioned in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus. The inclusion of rather imperfect women and men in Jesus’ genealogy shows that in his incarnation, Jesus embraced both the wounded, sinful part of our human nature, as well as our noble traits.

Verses 26-31 describe how David’s loyal general Joab made sure that David received the glory for conquering Rabbah.

CHAPTER 13: Rape of Tamar

“*Then Amnon conceived an intense hatred for her, which far surpassed the love he had for her.*” (v.15)

The numerous sons born to David’s wives caused him much grief and trouble: death (12:16-19), rape (13-14), murder (13:28), rebellion (15:13) and greed (1 Kgs 1:5-6). All of these sad events are a fulfillment of Nathan’s prophecy (2Sm 12:10-12). As we shall see, David’s son Absalom will feature a great deal in chapters 13-18.

Verses 1-22—Rape of Tamar. Amnon is David’s firstborn son and the beloved of his father. Like his father, he finds himself overwhelmed with love for another woman, Tamar, who is his half sister (and Jonathan’s sister). Amnon’s lust for Tamar may have gone nowhere if his cousin Jonadab had not planted an evil scheme in his mind, one that included David.

When Amnon asks Tamar to lie with him (v.11), she gives him several reasons why his proposal is not wise nor good: a) such action is an intolerable crime in Israel; b) Tamar would have to live in shame the rest of her life; and c) Amnon would sooner or later be exposed. Finally, Tamar suggests that Amnon need not be devious. The king who knows much about lust would permit a proper relationship. But Amnon will not listen to Tamar’s wise words. He not only rapes her but immediately turns his lust into hatred. “*Then Amnon conceived an intense hatred for Tamar*” (v.15). Desire becomes repulsion. Now Amnon wants Tamar out of his sight.

When Tamar leaves Amnon's house, he may have hoped that she will keep the sordid event quiet. But Tamar has no such intentions. Her dress and her tears indicate that something very bad has happened to her. When her brother Absalom meets her, he advises her "not to take the affair to heart." This could be interpreted as an attempt to minimize a terrible event. But that would be wrong. Absalom is filled with hatred for Amnon and patiently waits for the day he can avenge Tamar's horrible violation. While the text says that David is furious with Amnon, it does not say that he did anything to punish him. David is so compromised by his own past, that he is now in a weakened position to do anything much.

Verses 23-3—Absalom's plot to kill Amnon. Patient but determined, Absalom waits two years to avenge his sister's rape by Amnon, a crime his father has failed to punish. David, like Samuel and the priest Eli, all show themselves to be weak fathers. In committing their terrible crime, both sons deceived or tricked their father: Amnon, when he pretended to be ill, and Absalom, when he asked that his brother should attend a feast as David's representative.

Pause: In chapter 13, we read about some violent events within David's family. These kinds of terrible events continue to occur today. What happens within families to make them do terrible things to each other?

CHAPTER 14: Joab's intervention; Absalom's return

Then David said to Joab: "*I hereby grant this request. Go, therefore, and bring back young Absalom*" (v.21).

It seems David has conflicting feelings towards Absalom. On the one hand, Absalom is a murderer and deserves to be banished. On the other hand, he is a son, whom David perhaps wanted home. Building on the latter sentiment, Joab, David's top general, engages a woman skilled in speech and acting to instigate Absalom's return. The wise woman from Tekoa creates a scenario about two sons on whom she asks David to make a judgment. The depiction presented by the woman is very much like David's situation with his two sons who are trying to kill each other. In his commentary on 1 & 2 Samuel, Walter Brueggemann writes: "*The aim of the story is to invite David to perceive reality in a way he normally didn't perceive it and as a result to invite him to act in a way he was not thinking of acting. The purpose*

of the woman's 'theater' was to enable David to move beyond any vengeful thoughts he had towards Absalom. When the "killer" is acknowledged to be a beloved son, vengeance can be overcome. The woman wants David appropriate for himself the powerful truth of the imaginative scenario of the two brothers. It is outrageous to keep a son away when you want him home.... David seems to think that there is virtue in keeping a grudge alive; the woman counters with the assertion that real virtue is not in keeping the banished one away but in bringing him home.... The king's role is not to execute vengeance but to be bulwark against unwise, unnecessary vengeance.... True wisdom consists in moving beyond vengeance to forgiveness" (pp 293-294).

Verses 18-19. David recognizes the hand of Joab in the story, but he is not mad with him. While the king allows Absalom to return home, he is not yet ready to see him. "*Let him go to his own house; he shall not appear before me*" (v.24). Obviously, David is not ready to reconcile with his son. Then the narrator pauses to tell us about Absalom's physical beauty (vv 25-27).

Verses 28-33—Reconciliation of sorts. After two years of waiting for a reconciliation with his father, Absalom takes the initiative and seeks to get Joab to speak to his father. But Joab refuses to return his calls or "emails." Then Absalom has his servants burn Joab's field to get his attention. It works. Absalom, filled with courage, tells Joab to go and offer the king an ultimatum: welcome him home with full pardon or kill him. How will the king react to the ultimatum? His response to Absalom thus far has been unpredictable. Their reunion may turn hostile, as between a demanding, uncompromising king and a guilty subject. Or it may prove to be amicable, as between a yearning father and his wayward son. The reconciliation turns out to be somewhere in between. Absalom is not condemned, but neither are words of forgiveness spoken, only a kiss. Soon we will find out that Absalom was not happy with the outcome of the encounter with his father.

Pause: What spoke to you most in chapter 14? In recent years, have you experienced a significant change in mindset about some issue? If so, what helped to bring about that change?

CHAPTER 15: Rebellion of Absalom

“Thus says the Lord, ‘I will bring evil upon you out of your own house. I will take your wives while you live to see it, and will give them to your neighbor. He shall lie with your wives in broad daylight.” (2Sm 12:11).

In the chapters ahead, we will see the fulfillment of the above words spoken by the prophet Nathan to David after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba. Absalom’s revolt against his father is the third consequence of David’s sin. The first was the rape of Tamar by her brother Amnon, and the second was the murder of Amnon by his brother Absalom. And now we read how Absalom, the heir to the throne after Amnon’s death, cannot wait to be king. Fearing perhaps that David may not appoint him king, Absalom decides to take things into his own hands. He begins by accumulating chariots, horses and runners, and sets himself up as judge for those seeking justice. It seems David is neglecting this part of his duty. By judging in favor of litigants, Absalom becomes popular with the people. He “stole the hearts” of the people (v.6).

Verses 7-12—Absalom declares himself king. After spending four years creating discontent in Jerusalem and attracting lots of support for himself, Absalom now asks for permission to go and worship in Hebron, the place David where became king. He uses worship as a cover for his conspiracy against his father. Once he gets to Hebron, Absalom puts his coup into action. He sends spies throughout the land declaring himself king. Then he wins the support of Ahithophel, a high-ranking member of David’s government (v.12). Absalom shows himself to be utterly unscrupulous and disloyal to his father—one totally unfit to be king.

Verses 13-23—David flees Jerusalem. When one of David’s servants tells David that “*the Israelites have transferred their loyalty to Absalom*” (v.13), David decides to flee Jerusalem. By noting that ten concubines have been left behind, the narrator is preparing us for the fulfillment of one element of Nathan’s prophecy (12:11). We note that along their journey, David halts at the Mount of Olives (the place of Jesus’ agony in the garden). As the king and his faithful followers travelled, “*everyone wept aloud*” (v.23).

Verses 24-31. When the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, bring the Ark of the Covenant out of Jerusalem, David tells them to take it back. “*Take the ark of God back to the city. If I find favor with the Lord, he will bring me back and permit me to see it and its lodging. But if he should say, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ I am ready; let him do to me as he sees fit*” (vv 26-27).

The above words of David may help to explain why God looked upon David as a man after his own heart. Despite his many failings, David was a humble man, one who recognized his sins and submitted his will to God’s will. We will see another example of this humble attitude in 16:5-14.

But it should be noted that David has another reason for sending the priests and the Ark back to Jerusalem. They can act as spies and bring David information on what is happening in the city.

When David hears that one of his trusted servants, Ahithophel, has become an advisor to Jonathan, he prays that his political advice may become political folly (v.31). David then helps to answer his own prayer by asking his trusted friend Hushai to defect to Absalom and become a spy for David (vv 32-37). As we read chapters 15-16, we notice David developing a network of military and intelligence agents to outflank Absalom at every move.

CHAPTER 16: David and his enemies

“Perhaps the Lord will look at my affliction and make it up to me with benefits for the curses he is uttering this day.” (v.12)

If chapter 15 described the loyalty of some people for David, chapter 16 recounts in three *episodes* some of the problems David had to deal with.

Verses 1-4. In the *first episode*, Ziba comes with three kinds of provisions: transport, food and drink. Without verifying Ziba’s assertion that his master Meribbaal (Saul’s grandson) is waiting to take David’s kingship in Jerusalem, David impulsively gives all of Meribbaal’s estate to Ziba. This action was intended to serve as a warning on the severe consequences that would befall anyone from Saul’s house who would seek to take the kingship from David.

Verses 5-14. In the *second episode*, Shimei, also from the house of Saul, curses David and his men and throws stones at them. Shimei's presence shows that Saul's people are still very bitter towards David. Shimei interprets Absalom's rebellion as God's punishment on David for his evil acts towards the house of Saul. Abishai is ready to knock off Shimei's head, but David will not allow this act of violence. First of all, he does not want to provoke Saul's supporters to join Absalom. Secondly, perhaps God is using Shimei to punish David. David is happy to place his trust in the Lord's mercy (v.12).

Verses 15-22. The *third episode* takes place in Jerusalem where Hushai, David's spy (see 15:32-37), must prove to Absalom that he is a reliable defector. Hushai shows himself to be a "*master of deception and double-talk*" (Brueggemann). When he says: "*Long live the king!*" (v.16), he really means David, but he is happy when Absalom assumes he is referring to him.

In verse 20, Absalom seeks the advice of Ahithophel who encourages him to "*have relations with his father's concubines whom he left behind to take care of the palace*" (v.21). This action makes it clear that the relationship between Absalom and his father is truly broken and that Absalom is now in charge.

Pause: Have you ever been cussed out? If so, what was that experience like for you? When torn between the counsel of two parties, how do you decide which advice to follow?