

# SECOND SAMUEL

## Chapter 12

### *Nathan Rebukes David*

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup> The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, <sup>3</sup> 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. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. <sup>4</sup> “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.” <sup>5</sup> David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! <sup>6</sup> He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.” <sup>7</sup> Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. <sup>8</sup> I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. <sup>9</sup> Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. <sup>10</sup> 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.’ <sup>11</sup> “This is what the LORD says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. <sup>12</sup> You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’” <sup>13</sup> Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. <sup>14</sup> But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, <sup>a</sup> the son born to you will die.” <sup>15</sup> After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife had borne to David, and he became ill. <sup>16</sup> David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. <sup>17</sup> The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. <sup>18</sup> On the seventh day the child died. David’s servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, “While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate.” <sup>19</sup> David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead.

“Is the child dead?” he asked. “Yes,” they replied, “he is dead.”<sup>20</sup> Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate.<sup>21</sup> His servants asked him, “Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!”<sup>22</sup> He answered, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.’<sup>23</sup> But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”<sup>24</sup> Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him;<sup>25</sup> and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and captured the royal citadel.<sup>27</sup> Joab then sent messengers to David, saying, “I have fought against Rabbah and taken its water supply.<sup>28</sup> Now muster the rest of the troops and besiege the city and capture it. Otherwise I will take the city, and it will be named after me.”<sup>29</sup> So David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbah, and attacked and captured it.<sup>30</sup> He took the crown from the head of their king—its weight was a talent<sup>d</sup> of gold, and it was set with precious stones—and it was placed on David’s head. He took a great quantity of plunder from the city<sup>31</sup> and brought out the people who were there, consigning them to labor with saws and with iron picks and axes, and he made them work at brickmaking. He did this to all the Ammonite towns. Then David and his entire army returned to Jerusalem.

**12:1-15** The Lord, being ever patient (2Pt 3:9), gave David nearly nine months to repent before sending Nathan to him. Cf v 14. Nathan chose his words to generate maximum pity and empathy in David, who had been a shepherd. (TLSB)

**12:1** *The LORD sent.* Prophets were messengers from the Lord. Here the Great King sends his emissary to rebuke and announce judgment on the king he had enthroned over his people. (CSB)

*Nathan.* See note on 7:2. (CSB)

God’s prophet and David’s royal court preacher/counselor. (TLSB)

*There were two men.* Nathan begins one of the most striking parables in the OT.

TOWN – Townspeople would have only a few animals. (TLSB)

**12:3** SHARED HIS FOOD – ESV has “morsel” Indicates the small amount of food the man had. (TLSB)

SLEPT IN HIS ARMS – Young lambs were often kept as pets. (TLSB)

**12:5** *As surely as the LORD lives.* See note on 1Sa 14:39. (CSB)

Words of a formal oath, calling on the Lord to judge the actions of those involved. (TLSB)

DESERVES TO DIE – Punishment that exceeded legal requirements. Cf Ex 22:1. (TLSB)

**12:6** *four times over.* In agreement with the requirements of Ex 22:1. (CSB)

**12:7** YOU ARE THE MAN – David had rightly spoken his own judgment in vv 5–6. Greg: “[Nathan] had come as a physician to a sick man; he saw that the sore must be cut; but he doubted of the sick man’s patience. Therefore he hid the medicinal steel under his robe, which he suddenly drew out and plunged into the sore, that the patient might feel the cutting blade before he saw it, lest, seeing it first, he should refuse to feel it” (*NPNF* 2 12:26). (TLSB)

Note Psalm 51:11-12 TLSB – *Your presence.* To be denied access to the earthly tabernacle of God’s mercy is the worst of all possibilities to David. *take not.* The tragic example of Saul’s rejection (1Sm 16:14) might have motivated this urgent request as David contemplated the ultimate end of a hardened heart: separation from God. “When holy people—still having and feeling original sin and daily repenting and striving against it—happen to fall into manifest sins (as David did into adultery, murder, and blasphemy [2 Samuel 11]), then faith and the Holy Spirit have left them. The Holy Spirit does not permit sin to have dominion, to gain the upper hand so it can be carried out, but represses and restrains it from doing what it wants [Romans 6:14]. If sin does what it wants, the Holy Spirit and faith are not present” (SA III III 43–44). *Holy Spirit ... willing spirit.* Bas: “It is called ‘Spirit of God,’ ‘Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father,’ ‘right Spirit,’ ‘a leading Spirit.’ ... Names are borne by the Spirit in common with the Father and the Son, and He gets these titles from His natural and close relationship” (*NPNF* 2 8:15, 30).

**12:8** *your master’s wives.* Earlier narratives refer to only one wife of Saul (Ahinoam, 1Sa 14:50) and one concubine (Rizpah, 2Sa 3:7; 21:8). This statement suggests that there were others. But since it was customary for new kings to assume the harem of their predecessors (see note on 3:7), it may be that Nathan merely uses conventional language to emphasize that the Lord had placed David on Saul’s throne. (CSB)

Lit, “women.” Earlier accounts attribute only one wife to Saul (1Sm 14:50). The plural refers to the harem of women that David was at liberty to take to himself. Nothing else indicates that he took any of those women as his wives. (TLSB)

*I gave you the house of Israel and Judah.* See 2:4; 5:2–3. (CSB)

**12:9** *despise the word of the LORD.* See notes on 11:4, 27. (CSB)

Not a reference to David’s feelings but to his actual rejection of God’s Word. (TLSB)

*You killed him.* David is held directly responsible for Uriah's death even though he fell in battle (see 11:15). (CSB)

The guilt of the murder is on David, even though he did not actually swing the sword or shoot the arrow. (TLSB)

**12:10** *the sword will never depart from your house.* Three of David's sons came to violent deaths: Amnon (13:28–29), Absalom (18:14) and Adonijah (1Ki 2:25). (CSB)

Though forgiven, David's sin produced a train of tragic consequences in the royal family: incest and fratricide, insurrection and violation of his wives by a son, and the death of David's infant son. Forgiveness does not necessarily remove the natural consequences of sin. (TLSB)

**12:11** *Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you.* David was driven from Jerusalem by Absalom's conspiracy to seize the kingship from his own father (15:1–15). (CSB)

God would not personally cause this evil, but His providence would prevent neither Absalom's rebellion (ch 15) nor his taking of David's wives (16:20–22). (TLSB)

*he will lie with your wives in broad daylight.* Fulfilled at the time of Absalom's rebellion (see note on 16:22). (CSB)

**12:12** The Lord will allow this to be done openly, to show that the king is not above the Law and that he dare not despise God's Word. (TLSB)

**12:13** *I have sinned against the LORD.* David recognizes his guilt and confesses his sin in response to Nathan's rebuke (see Ps 51). Notice the contrast between David's confession and Saul's (see note on 1Sa 15:24). (CSB)

“David is rebuked by Nathan in this way. Terrified, he says, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’ This is contrition. Afterward, he hears the Absolution.... This voice encourages David, and through faith it sustains, justifies, and enlivens him” (Ap XIA 56). Cyr Jer: “Straightway the Prophet appeared as accuser, and the offender confesses the fault. And because he candidly confessed, he received a most speedy cure. For Nathan the Prophet who had uttered the threat, said immediately (TLSB)

No pretense or cover-up here. This is a model confession. (CSB)

*The LORD has taken away your sin.* David experienced the joy of knowing his sin was forgiven (see Ps 32:1, 5; cf. Ps 51:8, 12). (CSB)

1 John 1:9 says it well, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

*You are not going to die.* The Lord, in his grace, released David from the customary death penalty for adultery and murder (Lev 20:10; 24:17). (CSB)

You see the swift relenting of a merciful God” (*NPNF 2 7:10*). (TLSB)

**12:14** *you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt.* David is required to suffer the disciplinary results of his sin in a manner open to public view. But see NIV text note. (CSB)

YOUR SON WILL DIE – Forgiveness frees us from eternal consequences and punishments of sin, but not necessarily from temporal consequences and discipline. Cf Ex 34:7; Is 55:8. “A punishment is also added, but this punishment does not merit the forgiveness of sins. Nor are special punishments always added. In repentance these two things ought always to exist, namely, contrition and faith” (Ap XIA 56–57). (TLSB)

**12:1–15a** By preaching the Law, Nathan leads David to condemn his own sin. Once David repents, Nathan announces the Gospel: the Lord has put away his sin. Nevertheless, his child of adultery will die. Avoiding the responsibility of our sins does not lead to healing. Instead, repentance is the only right preparation for the Gospel. By receiving the Gospel of forgiveness, we are set free from our sins and made alive. • Gracious Lord, thank You for putting Jesus away on the cross, that I would not be put away in my sins. Amen. (TLSB)

**12:15** *the LORD afflicted the child.* The Lord allowed illness to come to the child and to take his life. (TLSB)

**12:16** *sought God.* With devout prayer. (TLSB)

*went in.* Into his palace. Cf v 20. (TLSB)

**12:18** *seventh day.* Child was not circumcised. Cf Gn 17:12. (TLSB)

**12:20** *anointed himself.* With olive oil, much as we use lotion today. (TLSB)

*he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped.* In this way David clearly demonstrated his humble acceptance of the disciplinary results of his sin. Notice again (see note on v. 13) the contrast between David’s attitude and Saul’s (see note on 1Sa 15:25). (CSB)

To acknowledge the Lord’s hand in the child’s death and to offer his humble acceptance of the results of his sin. David sees the limits of God’s patience toward him. (TLSB)

**12:23** *Can I bring him back again?* The dead are out of reach of our prayers. We cannot weep them back to life. Yet fasting and mourning are appropriate to honor the dead and to remember our own mortality. Cf 1:12. (TLSB)

*I will go to him.*† Like the child, David will die and join him in the grave (see note on Ge 37:35). Perhaps hope of eternal life is also expressed. (CSB)

In death. Some commentators think David showed confidence that his son was in heaven. However, the text does not specifically promise this. Rather than speculating on the final outcome of David's child, we should hold to Scripture's clear teaching: (1) All people are conceived in sin and deserve hell (Ps 51:5). (2) God delivers salvation through the Word and Sacraments (Jn 3:5; Rm 10:17; Col 2:11–12; 1Pt 3:21). (3) God's ways do not always make sense to us (Is 55:8). (4) Yet, God is gracious, hears our prayers, and works all things to our good (Ps 34:17; 103:8; Rm 8:28). The child was in God's hands. We trust Him to do what is right and best.

**12:15b–23** David prays for his child's recovery until the child dies. David then goes to worship in the Lord's house. When suffering the earthly consequences of our sin, we also should acknowledge that we deserve them, and we should continue to worship the Lord, who gave His Son for our sins, that we may live. • “The will of God is always best And shall be done forever; And they who trust in Him are blest; He will forsake them never. He helps indeed In time of need; He chastens with forbearing. They who depend On God, their friend, Shall not be left despairing.” Amen. (LSB 758:1) (TLSB)

**12:24** *Solomon*. See 1Ch 22:9 and NIV text note. (CSB)

**12:25** *Jedidiah*. See NIV text note. The giving of this name suggests that the Lord's special favor rested on Solomon from his birth. And since the name also contained an echo of David's name, it provided assurance to David that the Lord also loved him and would continue his dynasty. (CSB)

Solomon “Jedidiah.” (TLSB)

**12:24–25** David comforts Bathsheba, and she bears him a son. God gives the child a name indicating His love. When caught up in our grief, let us not forget our family responsibilities. In Baptism, the Lord gives us a new, eternal life and gives us the name “Beloved of the Lord.” • Loving Lord, thank You for loving us and giving us a new life and name in Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

**12:26** *Joab fought against Rabbah*. The writer now returns to the outcome of the attack against the Ammonites (11:1, 25), which provided the background for the story of David and Bathsheba. Even while the Lord was displeased with David, he gave the Israelites victory over a people that had abused them. (CSB)

**12:27** *city of waters*. So called because Rabbah was on both sides of the river Jabbok. (TLSB)

**12:28** Joab wanted the victory to be credited to David. (TLSB)

**12:30** *the crown ... was placed on David's head*. A crown of such weight (see NIV text note) would have been worn only briefly and on very special occasions. Perhaps it was worn only once in a symbolic act of transferring to David sovereignty over Ammon. (CSB)

**12:31** *consigning them to labor*. Victorious kings often used prisoners of war as menial laborers in royal building projects (see 1Ki 9:20–21; cf. also Ex 1:11). (CSB)

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**12:26–31** Joab does not take credit for the victory over Rabbah but invites his master David to join him in conquering the city. We, too, should be loyal to our employers, parents, pastors, and other leaders, not seeking to exalt ourselves at their expense. Christ, the Son of David, is the great King of glory, yet He humbled Himself and gives us the benefits and glory of His victory over the devil. • Gracious Savior, You alone give the victory to me and to all who believe in You. Grant that in all things I take no glory for myself, but that I glorify You now and forever. Amen. (TLSB)