

Why Is the Story of David and Bathsheba Significant?

An Old Testament KnowWhy¹ relating to the reading assignment for Gospel Doctrine Lesson 24: “Create in Me a Clean Heart” (2 Samuel 11-12; Psalm 51) (JBOTL24AB)



Figure 1. Angelika Kaufmann: “Thou art the man!”

Question: Why is the story of David and Bathsheba significant?

Summary: Chapters 11 and 12 of 2 Samuel are among the treasures of scripture. There are several reasons for their importance:

- Historically, these chapters constitute the turning point that marks the end of the rise and the beginning of the fall of the house of David;
- Doctrinally, the setting provides a context for discussions of the consequences of adultery and murder, and of abuses stemming from David and Solomon’s often politically motivated taking of “many wives and concubines”;
- As a literary composition, we can experience and appreciate how an inspired and skilled author selectively presents details with incredible focus and economy of expression, thus revealing with exceptional clarity the central messages of the story;
- As a tragic personal account of the steps leading to temptation and damning sin, we can draw moral lessons that can fortify and protect us against similar mistakes.

Because of the incredible richness of this account, it is best discussed verse by verse. Before entering into detailed commentary, three questions relating to the story will be discussed as background.

The Know

We will begin by a discussion of these three questions:

- What is the attitude of scripture about David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and the fact that both he and Solomon married "many wives and concubines"?
- Did David commit an unpardonable sin in the murder of Uriah?
- What is missing from the common interpretation of the parable the prophet Nathan related to David?



Figure 2. James Tissot (1836-1902): *The wives of David*

What is the attitude of scripture about David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, and the fact that both he and Solomon married "many wives and concubines"?

In Jacob 3:24, we read: "David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was an abomination before me." Some see these teachings of Jacob as a direct contradiction of D&C 132, the revelation concerning celestial and plural marriage.³ However, the context of this verse, as well as subsequent revelation on the subject, makes it clear that scripture does not condemn the principle of plural marriage per se, but rather the fact that David and Solomon made marriages that were not approved by the Lord:⁴

David also received many wives and concubines, and also Solomon and Moses my servants, as also many others of my servants, from the beginning of creation until this time; and in nothing did they sin save in those things which they received not of me.

David's first great sin was in coveting the wife of Uriah,⁵ which led to adultery — an act strongly censured in scripture⁶ and specifically characterized by President Spencer W. Kimball, then an apostle, as the “sin next to murder.”⁷ Although David's sin in this regard was confined to “the case of Uriah and his wife,”⁸ Solomon made many marriages for personal and political reasons that were condemned by the Lord. The most serious consequences of these marriages was that Solomon's seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines “turned away his heart”⁹ from the Lord to other gods — for this reason God allowed the Kingdom of Israel to be divided after Solomon's death.¹⁰

Jacob 3:30 makes it clear that plural marriage is an exception to the Lord's more generally approved marriage practice. In other words, monogamy is the rule unless His people have been specifically commanded to the contrary: “For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.”¹¹

Did David commit an unpardonable sin in the murder of Uriah?

David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba led to the even greater sin of his murder of her husband Uriah, followed by a host of personal tragedies from which he never fully recovered.¹² While sexual sins can be “forgiven to those who totally, consistently, and continuously repent in a genuine and comprehensive transformation of life,”¹³ the sin of murder,¹⁴ along with the sin against the Holy Ghost,¹⁵ is an exception.

In D&C 42:18, we read: “He that kills shall not have forgiveness in this world nor in the world to come.”¹⁶ President Kimball explained the meaning of this verse as being that “The murderer denies himself salvation in the celestial kingdom, and in this sense he cannot be forgiven for his crime.”¹⁷

Speaking of the consequences of David's sin of murder, President Kimball wrote:

For his dreadful crime, all his life afterward he sought forgiveness. Some of the Psalms portray the anguish of his soul, yet David is still paying for his sin. He did not receive the resurrection at the time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter declared that his body was still in the tomb.¹⁸ President Joseph F. Smith made this comment on David's position:¹⁹

But even David, though guilty of adultery and murder of Uriah, obtained the promise that his soul should not be left in hell, which means, as I understand it, that even he shall escape the second [i.e., spiritual] death.

In other words, David's resurrection will be to only a telestial glory.²⁰

The Prophet Joseph Smith underlined the seriousness of the sin of murder for David as for all men, and the fact that there is no forgiveness for it:²¹

A murderer, for instance, one that sheds innocent blood, cannot have forgiveness. David sought repentance at the hand of God carefully with tears, for the murder of Uriah; but he could only get it through hell:²² he got a promise that his soul should not be left in hell. Although David was a king, he never did obtain the spirit and power of Elijah and the fullness of the Priesthood;²³ and the Priesthood that he received, and the throne and kingdom of David is to be taken from him and given to another by the name of David in the last days, raised up out of his lineage.

Brother Hoyt W. Brewster summarized David's situation as follows:²⁴

Though he prevailed over the mighty Goliath, clothed only in the armor of righteousness, he later lost the battle with Bathsheba for lack of such armament.²⁵ David's is the tragic story of one whose faith brought him to great heights yet who sold his eternal soul through his sinful seduction of another man's wife and the eventual murder of that faithful man.²⁶ His heinous deed was so great that "he lost everything."²⁷ ... In spite of being eventually redeemed from hell, David has forever lost the crown of exaltation which he might have worn in the celestial kingdom, for "no murderer hath eternal life."²⁸ "Even David must wait for those 'times of refreshing,'²⁹ before he can come forth and his sins 'be blotted out,'³⁰ ... 'many bodies of the Saints'³¹ arose at Christ's resurrection, ... but it seems that David did not. Why? Because he had been a murderer."³²

See the Appendix below for an extensive discussion by Elder Bruce R. McConkie on David's loss of blessings and on what are called in scripture the "sure mercies of David."³³

What is missing from the common interpretation of the parable the prophet Nathan related to David?³⁴

In a brilliant article, Hebrew Bible scholar Joshua A. Berman explains why the common interpretation of the prophet Nathan's parable illustrating David's sin is wanting.³⁵

Like the parables of Jesus, the purpose of the story was both to reveal and to conceal. On the one hand, the story needed to conceal enough of the specifics of David's situation that he did not recognize at first blush that he was the central figure of the story, thus provoking him by artifice to severely condemn the perpetrator of the crime. On the other hand, the story needed to sufficiently revealing that David would immediately recognize himself when Nathan declared "Thou art the man"³⁶ — and that later reflection on the story in the days that followed would further enrich his understanding.

The parable is told briefly, in four verses:³⁷

And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto

him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

	Parable of the Rich Man's Adultery	Parable of the Rich Man's Murder — Bathsheba as Traveller	Parable of the Rich Man's Murder — Child as Traveller
Rich Man	David	David	David
Poor Man	Uriah	Bathsheba as Uriah's wife	Bathsheba
Poor Man's Ewe	Bathsheba	Uriah, husband of Bathsheba	Uriah, husband of Bathsheba
Traveller	—	Bathsheba seeking shelter from David	David's unborn child

Figure 3. Three interpretations of Nathan's parable

The table above summarizes the three interpretations of the parable discussed by Berman. The theme that runs through each of them is “royal abuse of power.”³⁸ The Lord’s “special concern for the poor is a major theme of the Bible. And as his representative, the king and other judges were supposed to protect against abuse by the powerful.”³⁹ Instead, the rich ruler took and slaughtered the poor man’s lamb.

The most common interpretation of the parable is shown in the leftmost column. This interpretation best fits David's sin of adultery. His passions having been incited by his lustful regard, the rich and powerful David, already possessing "exceeding many flocks and herds,"⁴⁰ took the "one precious lamb of the poor man (a lamb that was like a "daughter" to [Uriah]; Hebrew *bat* ["daughter"] is the first syllable of the name Bathsheba)." ⁴¹

Although on the surface these similarities to David's situation seem compelling, scholars have long wondered about details of the parable that do not correspond to the story⁴² — in particular the event that motivated every subsequent happening in the story: the arrival of a traveler.

Most scholars attribute any divergences in the parable from the actual situation as trivial, no more than necessary obfuscations to ensure that David does not recognize himself in the parable until after he passes judgment on the perpetrator of the crime. However, Berman sees this approach as too facile.

He suggests the following alternate mapping of the parable, as shown in the middle column of the table above:⁴³

The wayfarer who appears at the rich man's doorstep is Bathsheba seeking protection from David upon learning of her pregnancy.⁴⁴ The rich man wishes to provide for his guest, even as David wishes to do the right thing and assume responsibility for Bathsheba's welfare. The rich man could have taken from his own flock but instead performed the cruel deed of stealing his neighbor's ewe and slaughtering it for the sake of the wayfarer. Similarly, David could have protected Bathsheba by paying a price himself and confessing his infractions.⁴⁵ David, though, was unprepared to pay a price in his stature as king and instead does a dastardly deed in the service of a warped sense of responsibility to Bathsheba: he slaughters Uriah. ...

David ... may have rationalized things [in thinking that he had no choice but to save the pregnant Bathsheba from the stigma of bearing an illegitimate child, and perhaps even from death on account of adultery]. Certainly, Israelites aware of the new marriage would have applauded the king's move, a seeming act of grace toward the widow of a fallen war-hero. Yet, precisely because the marriage was technically lawful, and because from an ethical side there is merit to David's sense of responsibility to provide for Bathsheba's welfare, the prophet needs to rip the mask off of David's actions and reveal the atrocity for what it is. When an innocent man is murdered, the heinous nature of the crime cancels out any residual good that may have come of it. The ends can never justify the means.

In arguing for an interpretation where Bathsheba plays both the role of the poor man and the traveler⁴⁶ and Uriah is represented in the slaughtered ewe, Berman points out that the repeated Hebrew root for "came/come to him" in 2 Samuel

12:4 mirrors the report of when Bathsheba “came in unto [David]” in 2 Samuel 11:4. He further observes:

Although the ewe is feminine and Uriah a man, the text establishes an unmistakable lexical equivalence between them. Nathan claims that the ewe would “*eat* of his bread, *drink* of his cup and *lay* in his bosom.”⁴⁷ These three actions of the ewe — eating, drinking, and laying intimately — are precisely those ascribed by the author to Uriah and his married life in chapter 11. Although Uriah presently refuses to visit his home, he describes what would normally go on at home in a language using these very same terms, as the formulation of verse 11 shows: “How can I go home and *eat*, and *drink*, and *lay* with my wife? This triad of terms appears nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, and suggests an intentional mapping between Uriah and the ewe.

According to Berman, the second interpretation does not invalidate the first one. Instead, the parable masterfully combines the Lord’s indictment of both of David’s grievous sins: adultery and murder. As further evidence for this, he notes a departure from prophetic convention when Nathan issues not one but two separate divine condemnations of David after he finishes the parable: one that highlights his crime of murder⁴⁸ and the other that highlights his sin of adultery.⁴⁹

Going further, Berman asks us to consider the timing of Nathan’s confrontation with David. The Bible makes it clear that the Lord did not send Nathan until after the baby was born, seven or eight months after the king’s infractions.⁵⁰ Why would the prophet tarry in his condemnation?⁵¹

One could posit that the prophet wished to grant David a grace period in which to “come clean,” as it were. With no penitential overtures taken by the king, the prophet acts. Yet it can be no coincidence that the prophet times his censure to coincide with the arrival of the child. We may speculate that the child’s birth represented a moment of closure on the entire episode. ... The arrival of a healthy child ... would signal to David that indeed the Lord had granted him clemency and that the episode was behind him.

With this newfound appreciation of the timing of Nathan’s censure of David, we are ready to understand Berman’s formulation of a third interpretation of the parable, shown in the rightmost column of the table above:⁵²

Within these coordinates, each character in the parable is equivalent to a separate and distinct character in the surrounding narrative. Bathsheba here occupies the role of the poor man alone, while the attention now focuses upon the unborn child for whom David seeks to provide shelter, even as the rich man in the parable strove to provide the wayfarer [KJV “traveller”] seeking shelter. The image of a wayfarer is an apt one to portray the unborn child destined to perish soon after birth. A wayfarer, by definition, is one who arrives on the scene, but quickly departs. By depicting the newborn child to

David as but a wayfarer, Nathan wished to suggest to David that the child would be but a temporary presence in his life. ...

As he rises from mourning, David states,⁵³ “*I am going toward him*, but he will not return to me.” ... The language of “going” as a reference to moving from this world to the next in death and life, matches the use of the term ... wayfarer ... to describe the fetus, one who is as of yet unborn, but on his way to this life. ...

As Nathan related the parable to the king, its connection to David’s misdeeds needed to remain opaque. Once Nathan reveals to David that he is the rich man, it becomes incumbent upon the king to probe its complexity and appreciate its multi-faceted comment on his behavior.

Commentary on 2 Samuel 11-12

With the discussions above as background, we will now examine the rich lessons of chapters 11 and 12 of 2 Samuel in detail, verse-by-verse. This section will draw directly on masterful scholarly commentaries of others, especially those of Robert Alter,⁵⁴ Everett Fox,⁵⁵ and Dennis and Sandra Packard.⁵⁶

Chapter 11

1 ¶ AND it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth [to battle], that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.

after the year was expired. “The most plausible meaning is the beginning of the spring, when the end of the heavy winter rains makes military action feasible.”⁵⁷

David sent Joab. “David, now a sedentary king removed from the field of action and endowed with a dangerous amount of leisure, is seen constantly operating through the agency of others, sending messengers within Jerusalem and out to Ammonite territory. Working through intermediaries, as the story will abundantly show, creates a whole new order of complications and unanticipated consequences.”⁵⁸

But David tarried still at Jerusalem. “[The ‘But’ signals a contrast:] Kings going forth to battle and King David staying home. ... [The contrast] emphasizes David’s idleness, indicating that something was amiss with him from the very beginning of the story. In later chapters, we see David fighting in battle, ignoring his men’s pleas that he ‘go no more out with us to battle’ lest he be killed and ‘quench ... the light of Israel.’⁵⁹ But in this chapter he tarries still at Jerusalem.”⁶⁰



Figure 4. David sees Bathsheba from his roof

2 And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman [was] very beautiful to look upon.

in an eventide. “A siesta on a hot spring day would begin not long after noon, so this recumbent king has been in bed an inordinately long time.”⁶¹ “Although it may not have been uncommon at the palace to take an afternoon ‘siesta,’ it is certain that Joab and the army didn’t have the leisure for one.”⁶²

from the roof he saw. “The palace is situated on a height, so David can look down on... Bathsheba bathing, presumably on her own rooftop. This situation of the palace also explains why David tells Uriah to ‘go down’ to his house. Later in the story, archers deal destruction from the heights of the city wall, the Hebrew using the same preposition, *me’al*, to convey the sense of ‘from above.’⁶³

3 And David sent and enquired after the woman. And [one] said, [Is] not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?

[Is] not this Bathsheba. “[T]he one who was sent to inquire after the woman gives his report in the form of a question.... Why? This was the proper way to speak to the king. For the sake of appearances, a servant wouldn’t want to tell the king something the king didn’t already know — hence, he asks a question.”⁶⁴

Uriah the Hittite. “A high-ranking officer in David’s army.⁶⁵ His name, ironically, is a pious Israelite one, meaning ‘YHWH is my light.’⁶⁶ “Because Uriah was a Hittite, a foreigner[or at the very least the descendant of a foreigner] dwelling among the Israelites, David should have been especially careful not to abuse or afflict him. The Lord’s commandment to Israel was, ‘Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt,’⁶⁷ and ‘The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself.’⁶⁸ And Uriah was an especially deserving stranger. The way he shows reverence for ‘the ark’ in verse 11 and the fact that he was fighting in Israel’s army suggest that he was a convert to the Lord, and probably strong in the faith, as was the convert Ruth, the Moabitess.”⁶⁹

4 And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

David sent... and took her and she came in unto him, and he lay with her. “It is not uncommon for biblical narrative to use a chain of verbs in this fashion to indicate rapid, single-minded action.”⁷⁰ The setting and situation described here of aristocracy coercing commoner invites an instructive comparison to the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife.⁷¹ This account is told from the perspective of David’s prevailing assertiveness, whereas the Genesis account is told from the perspective of Joseph’s prevailing resistance.⁷² “Though such affairs were tolerated in the non-Israelite nations, David’s situation is different: he has a knowledge of God’s law.”⁷³

Joshua Berman concluded that Bathsheba was “an innocent victim. There is no overt censure of Bathsheba anywhere in the narrative. Moreover, she along from among David’s wives emerges as the mother of the heir to the Davidic dynasty. It would be incongruous for the author to sternly censure David while so entirely exonerating his mistress for the very same adulterous act.”⁷⁴ The royal instructions of the mother of King Lemuel of Massa⁷⁵ in Proverbs poignantly recall her helpless situation:⁷⁶ “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of the destitute.”⁷⁷

“In all of this, David’s sending messengers first to ask about Bathsheba and then to call her to his bed means that the adultery can scarcely be a secret within the court.”⁷⁸ “David seems to be taking no great pains to keep the affair a secret, so we might expect Joab and Uriah to have found out about it ‘through the grapevine,’ even before David sent for Uriah.⁷⁹ There was, for one thing, open communication between the palace and the camp of Israel. There was also enough time, since it would have taken Bathsheba about two months to know she was pregnant. Then, too, when Bathsheba found out about her condition, she ‘sent and told David’—via a messenger, no doubt. Once again, word was likely to get around.”⁸⁰

for she was purified from her uncleanness. “The reference is to the ritually required bath after the end of menstruation. This explains Bathsheba’s bathing on the roof and also makes it clear that she could not be pregnant by her husband.”⁸¹



Figure 5. Arent de Gelder (1645 – 1727): Bathsheba makes an appeal to David

5 And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I [am] with child.

I [am] with child. “Astonishingly, these are the only words Bathsheba speaks in this story.”⁸² “Her message, short and to the point, seems a plea for help. With her husband away, she was liable by Jewish law to be stoned to death for adultery.”⁸³

6 ¶ And David sent to Joab, [saying], Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David.

Send me Uriah the Hittite. “If he didn’t already know, Joab must have wondered what business David had with Uriah, a subordinate. It would have been in keeping with Joab’s character ... for him to have made secret inquiries to find out.”⁸⁴

7 And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded [of him] how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered.

David demanded [of him] how Joab did. “Here it seems that David, needing a pretense for calling Uriah home from the battlefield, makes small talk, pretending to check up on Joab by getting Uriah’s report. ... David’s speech seems perfunctory — he’s really not interested in Joab, the people (the army), or the war, and the short phrases with the repeated *hows* and *dids* help convey this. Notice we aren’t told Uriah’s answers. They don’t matter to David.”⁸⁵

8 And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king’s house, and there followed him a mess [of meat] from the king.

Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. “David’s plan to cover his sin seems simple enough: get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba so the child will appear to be Uriah’s.”⁸⁶

and there followed him a mess [of meat] from the king. “David’s intent, it seems, isn’t to feed Uriah but to make sure that he goes home. The unusual word order in the sentence points to this. The normal construction would be, ‘A mess of meat from the king followed him.’ The act of following is emphasized by placing the phrase ‘followed him’ at the beginning of the clause.”⁸⁷

9 But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house.

But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house. “Perhaps Uriah knows what’s going on and doesn’t want any part of it. Verses one through eight of this chapter begin with *and*; verse nine begins with *but*... [This] tells us that Uriah’s refusal to go home is significant: David’s plan has gone awry.”⁸⁸ “It should be remembered... that soldiers in combat generally practiced sexual abstinence.”⁸⁹

with all the servants of his lord. “The ‘all’ suggests that enough of the servants were there to tell Uriah whatever David’s servants might have heard about the affair and to confirm anything Uriah might have already heard. It also emphasizes that there were many witnesses to Uriah’s not going home.”⁹⁰

10 And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from [thy] journey? why [then] didst thou not go down unto thine house?

They ... told David, saying, Uriah went not down. “The servants must have known what David was up to. They probably enjoyed their role in the intrigue, implying, ‘What are you going to do now?’ when making their report to the king.”⁹¹

David said unto Uriah, ... Why ... didst thou not go down. “[David’s question of Uriah makes] too much of the fact to maintain his innocent front. [This tells us that David’s state of mind] is getting more desperate. The pretense isn’t working. He probably suspects that Uriah knows, and asks the question to probe more deeply.”⁹²

11 And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? [as] thou livest, and [as] thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing.

The ark, and Israel, and Judah ... and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord. “[Uriah’s response implies that everything important is on the front.] Why does he make a point of this? David should be out there too, and this is what Uriah seems to be telling him. ... [Uriah twice refers to Joab as his lord,] as if he’s saying his place is with Joab, not at the palace covering up for David.”⁹³

abide in tents... are encamped in the open fields. “[Uriah describes the resting places of the army, not their fighting.] Why? He seems to be drawing a contrast between where he has been sleeping and where David has been sleeping.”⁹⁴

shall I then go to mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? “Uriah now spells out all that David left unsaid when he urged him to go down to his house. The crucial detail of sleeping with Bathsheba comes at the very end. ... If Uriah does *not* know that David has cuckolded him, he is the instrument of dramatic irony — the perfect soldier vis-à-vis the treacherous king who is desperately trying to manipulate him so that the husband will unwittingly cover the traces of [David’s sin]. If Uriah *does* know of the adultery, he is a rather different character — not naïve but shrewdly aware, playing a dangerous game of hints in which he deliberately pricks the conscience of the king, cognizant, and perhaps not caring, that his own life may soon be forfeit.”⁹⁵

“Interesting variations on the triad, ‘to eat, and to drink, and to lie with my wife,’ recur throughout this story. In verse 13, Uriah eats and drinks before David, but lies on his bed with the servants. In 12:3, the lamb in Nathan’s parable eats of the poor man’s own food, drinks of his own cup, and lies in his bosom. In 12:16, David abstains from eating and drinking and lies on the earth. Then, in 12:20, David first eats (the drinking is implied) and then lies with Bathsheba. What does the repetition emphasize? It emphasizes David’s indulgence and, by contrast, Uriah’s sacrifice. While Uriah is on the battlefield serving his king, David is home, not only eating, drinking and lying with *his* wives (presumably), but also with Uriah’s wife. The sin is all the worse because it has been by the joint occurrence of Uriah’s allegiance to David and David’s neglect of duty that the adultery has so easily taken place. If Uriah had been less dutiful, he could have been home watching out for his wife.”⁹⁶

[as] thou livest, and [as] thy soul liveth. “The normal way to swear the oath seems to have been ‘as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth.’”⁹⁷ Is the variant we see here deliberate or a corruption of the text? “Garsiel observes that when Uriah swears emphatically by David’s life..., he does not add the deferential ‘my lord the king.’”⁹⁸

12 And David said to Uriah, Tarry here to day also, and to morrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow.

Tarry here. David “apparently wants more time to make his plan work and so tells Uriah to ‘tarry’ as he himself has been tarrying.”⁹⁹

13 And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.

David called him. “The verb here has the idiomatic sense of ‘invite.’”¹⁰⁰

he did eat and drink before him. “The preposition [*before*] is an indication of hierarchical distance between subject and king.”¹⁰¹ “[A]t that time, if you had eaten with someone, you were especially obliged to treat him as a friend. The implication of Christ’s statement, ‘He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me,’¹⁰² seems to be that Judas’s betrayal was worse because he had eaten with Christ.”¹⁰³

he made him drunk. “Plying Uriah with wine is a last desperate attempt, and a rather crude one, to get him to [*lie*] with his wife.”¹⁰⁴

he went to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord. “It’s funny that Uriah’s bed with the servants should be called *his bed*. It’s the historian’s way of saying David’s ploys are getting a bit old in the face of Uriah’s steadfastness. Uriah’s insistence on sleeping with the servants must have shown David that it wasn’t for a whim or for an over-zealous loyalty that he wasn’t going down to his house.”¹⁰⁵



Figure 6. Pieter Pietersz Lastman: *King David Handing the Letter to Uriah*, 1611

14 ¶ And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent [it] by the hand of Uriah.

sent [it] by the hand of Uriah. “The letter would be in the form of a small scroll with either a seal or threads around it. David is counting on the fact that Uriah as a loyal soldier will not dream of opening the letter. If he does not know of the adultery, he has in any case no personal motive to look at the letter. If he does know, he is accepting his fate with grim resignation, bitterly conscious that his [David] has betrayed him and that the king is too powerful for him to contend with.”¹⁰⁶

15 And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.

that he may be smitten and die. “With no possibility of making Uriah seem responsible for Bathsheba’s pregnancy, David compounds the original crime of adultery by plotting to get Uriah out of the way entirely by having him killed. What follows in the story makes it clear that bloodshed, far more than adultery, is David’s indelible transgression.”¹⁰⁷

“David appears without sympathy, vicious and vengeful. Uriah has thwarted his attempts to protect Bathsheba and himself, and Uriah must pay.”¹⁰⁸

16 And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men [were].

Joab... assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men [were]. This phrase indirectly attests to Joab’s assessment of Uriah’s faithfulness and courage.

17 And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell [some] of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also.

fought with Joab. “Here ‘Joab’ must mean ‘some of Joab’s men.’”¹⁰⁹ Joab was no fool and would not have “put himself in the same death trap that he put Uriah in.”¹¹⁰

There fell [some] of the people of the servants of David. “[O]ne of the salient features of this story is the repeated alteration of instructions by those who carry them out. It is, indeed, a vivid demonstration of the ambiguous effecting of ends through the agency of others which is one of the great political themes of the story. The canny Joab immediately sees that David’s orders are impossibly clumsy (perhaps an indication that the Machiavellian David has suddenly lost his manipulative coolness): if the men around Uriah were to draw back all at once, leaving him alone exposed, it would be entirely transparent that there was a plot to get him killed. Joab, then, coldly recognizes that in order to give David’s plan some credibility, it will be necessary to send a whole contingent into a dangerous place and for many others beside Uriah to die. In this fashion, the circle of lethal consequences of David’s initial act spreads wider and wider.”¹¹¹ “If David won’t look out for Joab, Joab will look out for himself. ... Joab, unlike Uriah, acts as an accomplice.”¹¹²

18 Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war; 19 And charged the messenger, saying, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king,

And charged the messenger. “Why does Joab instruct the messenger so elaborately in verse 20 and 21? What is he up to? Joab is likely angry at David for having put him in an awkward position. His instructions to the messenger seem calculated to put David in his place. Joab’s apparently stupid move is really David’s fault, but Joab wants David first to condemn it before he lets the responsibility be known. This foreshadows Nathan’s parable in chapter 12. Nathan, too, relates an incident calculated to arouse David’s wrath without letting David know that he himself is the one to be condemned.”¹¹³

20 And if so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight? knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall?

21 Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the wall, that he died in Thebez? why went ye nigh the wall? then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.

did not a woman cast a piece of millstone upon him from the wall. “The story of the ignominious death of Abimelech at the hand of a woman¹¹⁴ may have become a kind of object lesson in siege strategy for professional soldiers—when you are laying siege against a city, above all beware of coming too close to the wall. One suspects also that Joab’s emphasis on a woman’s dealing death to the warrior—Abimelech had asked his armor bearer to run him through so that it would *not* be said he was killed by a woman!—points back to Bathsheba as the ultimate source of this chain of disasters.”¹¹⁵

Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. “Joab obviously knows that this is the message for which David is waiting. By placing it in the anticipatory ‘script’ that he dictates to the messenger, he is of course giving away the secret, more or less, to the messenger. Might this, too, be calculated, as an oblique dissemination of David’s complicity in Uriah’s death, perhaps to be used at some future point by Joab against the king? In any case, given David’s track record in killing messengers who bear tidings not to his liking,¹¹⁶ Joab may want to be sure that this messenger has the means to fend off any violent reaction from the king, who would not have been expecting a report of many casualties.”¹¹⁷

22 So the messenger went, and came and shewed David all that Joab had sent him for.

23 And the messenger said unto David, Surely the men prevailed against us, and came out unto us into the field, and we were upon them even unto the entering of the gate.

and we were upon them even unto the entering of the gate. “The astute messenger offers a circumstantial account that justifies the mistake of approaching too close to the wall: the Ammonites came out after the Israelites in hot pursuit; then the Israelites, turning the tide of battle, were drawn after the fleeing Ammonites and so were tricked into coming right up to the gates of the city.”¹¹⁸

24 And the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants; and [some] of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.

And thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. “The messenger has divined the real point of Joab’s instructions all too well. He realizes that what David above all wants to hear is the news of Uriah’s death, and rather than risk the whole

outburst, indicated by the prospective dialogue invented by Joab with the reference to the woman who killed Abimelech, the messenger hastens to conclude his report, before the king can react, by mentioning Uriah's death. Thus the narrative makes palpable the inexorable public knowledge of David's crime."¹¹⁹

"[Although it] appears from the King James Version that the messenger isn't crafty enough to wait for David's response before telling him of Uriah's death, ... in other versions, the *New English Bible* and the *Jerusalem Bible*, for example, the servant does wait, and David repeats the anticipated questions before hearing that Uriah is dead. The effect is to emphasize David's gullibility and Joab's ability to manipulate him."¹²⁰

25 Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him.

the sword devoureth one as well as another. The literal Hebrew term used here for 'devoureth' is 'eats,' recalling again a key leading word in this account [3, p. 202]. "The king responds by directing to Joab what sounds like an old soldier's cliché (on the order of 'every bullet has its billet'). These vapid words of consolation to the field commander are an implicit admission that Joab's revision of David's orders was necessary: David concedes that many a good man had to die in order to cover up his murder by proxy of Uriah."¹²¹

encourage thou him. "[David] may have felt uneasy about having put Joab in such a bad position, not because of any moral qualms, but because Joab was a person to be reckoned with—he was in charge of the army... David plays the magnanimous monarch, treating Joab as a well-meaning but blundering child in need of encouragement. His condescending attitude may have been calculated to arouse Joab's wrath, in return for Joab's design to arouse his."¹²²



Figure 7. James Tissot: *Bathsheba mourns for her husband Uriah*

26 And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband.

the wife of Uriah. “She is not called ‘Bat-Sheva’ again until David’s crime has been punished by the death of their child.”¹²³

she mourned for her husband. “Does Bathsheba really mourn for her husband, or is the mourning merely perfunctory? There is no indication in the narrative of how she felt toward Uriah, or toward David, for that matter. Perhaps in her situation, affection was only a secondary consideration.”¹²⁴

27 And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

when the mourning was past. “Normally, the mourning period would be seven days. ... She does, of course, want to become David’s wife before her [condition] shows.”¹²⁵

David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. “Throughout this story, David is never seen anywhere but in his house. This sentence at the end strongly echoes verse 4: ‘David sent ... and fetched her and she came to him and he lay with her.’”¹²⁶ The narrative again emphasizes the rapid execution of David’s single-minded purpose and indirectly “suggests that Bathsheba had little to say about the matter.”¹²⁷

But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord. “[The fact that the account begins the phrase with another significant *But*] indicates that David’s plans are about to go awry as they did following the previous *but* when Uriah refused to go down to his house.”¹²⁸ The contrastive use of the term “displeased” as applying to Joab in verse 25 and the Lord in verse 27 “seems to be saying that David should have been more concerned about displeasing the Lord than displeasing Joab. ... [The term ‘displeased’] is an ironic understatement [of the Lord’s feelings], saying more by saying less.”¹²⁹ “Only now, after the adultery, the murder, the remarriage, and the birth of the son, does the narrator make an explicit moral judgment of David’s actions. The invocation of God’s judgment is the introduction to the appearance of Nathan the prophet, delivering first a moral parable ‘wherein to catch the conscience of the king’¹³⁰ and then God’s grim curse on David and his house.”¹³¹

Chapter 12

1 ¶ AND the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

And the Lord sent. “The second stage of the story of David and Bathsheba — the phase of accusation and retribution — begins with a virtual pun on a prominent thematic word of the first half of the story. David was seen repeatedly ‘sending’ messengers, arranging for the satisfaction of his lust and the murder of his mistress’s husband through the agency of others. By contrast, God here ‘sends’ his prophet to David — not an act of bureaucratic manipulation but the use of a human vehicle to convey a divine message of conscience.”¹³²

Nathan. David’s most recent child had been given the same name as this prophet,¹³³ perhaps indicating something about the prior relationship between them. In *Doctrine and Covenants* 132, Nathan is specifically mentioned by the Lord as one of the prophets who had authorized David’s multiple marriages: “David’s wives and concubines were given unto him of me, by the hand of Nathan, my servant, and others of the prophets who had the keys of this power; and in none of these things did he sin against me save in the case of Uriah and his wife.”¹³⁴

There were two men. “Nathan’s parable, from its very first syllables, makes clear its own status as a traditional tale and a poetic construction. The way one begins a storyteller’s tale in the Bible is with the formula ‘there was a man’ — compare the beginning of *Job*, or the beginning of the story of Hannah and Elkenah in 1 Samuel 1. The Hebrew prose of the parable also is set off strongly from the language of the surrounding narrative by its emphatically rhythmic character, with a fondness for parallel pairs of terms. ... [T]he two ‘men’ of the opening formula are at the end separated out into ‘rich man,’ ‘poor man,’ and ‘the man who had come’ (in each of these cases, Hebrew *‘ish* is used). This formal

repetition prepares the way, almost musically, for Nathan's two-word accusatory explosion, *'atah ha'ish*, 'You are the man!'

Given the patently literary character of Nathan's tale, which would have been transparent to anyone native to ancient Hebrew culture, it is a little puzzling that David should so precipitously take the tale as a report of fact requiring judicial action. Nathan may be counting on the possibility that the obverse side of guilty conscience in a man like David is the anxious desire to do the right thing. As king, his first obligation is to protect his subjects and to dispense justice, especially to the disadvantaged. In the affair of Bathsheba and Uriah, he has done precisely the opposite. Now, as he listens to Nathan's tale, David's compensatory zeal to be a champion of justice overrides any awareness he might have of the evident artifice of the story."¹³⁵

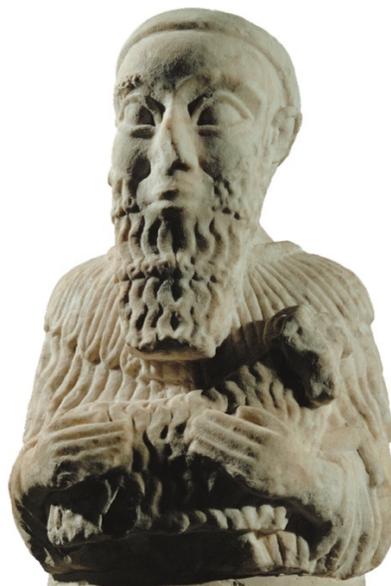


Figure 8. Man carrying small lamb¹³⁶

**2 The rich [man] had exceeding many flocks and herds:
3 But the poor [man] had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.**

It did eat... drank... and lay... and was unto him as a daughter. "[T]he 'eat/drink/lie' sequence echoes Uriyya's earlier refusal of 11:11 ... and the coincidence of *Bat-Sheva's* name [*bat* = daughter] is surely no coincidence. So while the unwitting king angrily condemns the rich man of the parable, the audience, its ears tuned aright, can feel the trap being sprung."¹³⁷

lay in his bosom. "Compare verse 8, 'thy master's wives into thy bosom.'"¹³⁸

4 And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

And there came a traveller unto the rich man. "Such occurrences were very common in biblical lands until recent days, and are still to be seen in some feudal countries. The rich men not only did not pay taxes and other levies to the government but also they were allowed by kings and princes to collect for themselves from the poor, to confiscate the fields of the widows and the orphans, and to seize their sheep. ... The prophet composed the parable to see how David would react. This is still done by the Eastern diplomats and government officials." 139 See 2 Samuel 14:7 where the wise woman of Tekoah uses the same approach.

he spared to take of his own flock. Alter translates this phrase more literally from the Hebrew: "it seemed a pity to him to take from his own sheep." "The Hebrew uses an active verb, 'he pitied,' preparing for a literal ironic reversal in verse 6, 'he had no pity'—or, 'he did not pity.'" 140

dressed it. "When [this Hebrew] verb has as its direct object a live edible animal, it means to slaughter and cook." 141

5 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, [As] the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this [thing] shall surely die:

David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. "Nathan's rhetorical trap has now snapped shut. David, by his access of anger, condemns himself, and he is now the helpless target of the denunciation that Nathan will unleash." 142

the man... shall surely die. "Actually, according to biblical law someone who has illegally taken another's property would be subject to fourfold restitution (verse 6), not to the death penalty. (The Hebrew phrase is literally 'son of death' — that is, deserving death just as in 1 Samuel 26:16.) David pronounces this death sentence in his outburst of moral indignation, but it also reflects the way that the parable conflates the sexual 'taking' of Bathsheba with the murder of Uriah: the addition of Bathsheba to the royal harem could have been intimated simply by the rich man's placing the ewe in his flock, but as the parable is told, the ewe must be slaughtered, blood must be shed. David himself will not be condemned to die, but death will hang over his house." 143

6 And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

he shall restore the lamb fourfold. "Unfortunately, David cannot restore fourfold to Uriah that which he has taken, because Uriah is gone. It is interesting in this light, though, to read D&C 132:39, which says that in the next life David will lose

his wives — just as the rich man [in the parable was condemned by David to lose] his sheep.”¹⁴⁴ “As the Talmud (Yoma 22B) notes, the fourfold retribution for Uriah’s death will be worked out in the death or violent fate of four of David’s [sons]: the unnamed infant son of Bathsheba,¹⁴⁵ ... Amnon,¹⁴⁶ ... Absalom¹⁴⁷ [and Adonijah¹⁴⁸].”¹⁴⁹ The Septuagint, “perhaps in the interest of a further reminder of Bathsheba, reads ‘sevenfold’ (instead of fourfold); the number “seven” (Hebrew *šeba*) corresponds to the second element in the name Bathsheba.”¹⁵⁰



Figure 9. Nathan rebukes David

7 And Nathan said to David, Thou [art] the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

Thus saith the Lord God of Israel. “After the direct knife thrust of ‘You are the man!’, Nathan hastens to produce the prophetic messenger formula in its extended form, in this way proclaiming divine authorization for the dire imprecation he pronounces against David and his house.”¹⁵¹ “The author of the David story continually exercises an unblinking vision of David and the institution of the monarchy that exposes their terrible flaws even as he accepts their divinely authorized legitimacy.”¹⁵²

8 And I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if [that had been] too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

thy master's house. “This refers to the house of Saul, who was king before David. Saul’s house included both his family (‘thy master’s wives’) and his kingdom (‘the house of Israel and Judah’).”¹⁵³ Some read “thy master’s house” as “thy master’s daughter,” i.e., Michal.¹⁵⁴

thy master's wives. “[T]here is no mention elsewhere of David’s having taken ... possession of his predecessor’s consorts,¹⁵⁵ though this was a practice useful for its symbolic force in a transfer of power, as Absalom will later realize.”¹⁵⁶

And if [that had been] too little, I would moreover have given unto thee. “In the first part of the speech, there are several ironic echoes of David’s prayer in chapter 7, in which David thanks God for all His benefactions and professes himself unworthy of them.”¹⁵⁷

9 Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife [to be] thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

Despised the commandment of the Lord. “[The Lord] reminds David of all He has done for him and then asks why David has despised Him in return. ‘Despise’ is a strong word, one the Lord uses more than once. The first time, He says David has ‘despised the commandment of the Lord’; the second time, He says David has despised *Him*.¹⁵⁸ In despising the commandments, David has despised the Lord Himself.”¹⁵⁹

thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword. “The obliquity of working through agents at a distance, as David did in contriving the murder of Uriah, is exploded by the brutal directness of the language: it is as though David himself had wielded the sword. Only at the end of the sentence are we given the explanatory qualification ‘by the sword of the Ammonites.’”¹⁶⁰

10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.

The sword shall never depart from thine house. “As Bar-Efrat notes, David’s rather callous message to Joab, ‘the sword sometimes consumes one way and sometimes another,’¹⁶¹ is now thrown back in his face. ... One of the most extraordinary features of the whole David narrative is that this story of the founding of the great dynasty of Judah is, paradoxically, already a tale of the fall of the house of David”¹⁶²: “Because David has destroyed Uriah’s house with murder (‘thou has killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword’¹⁶³) and adultery (‘and hast taken his wife to be thy wife’¹⁶⁴), his own house will be plagued in like manner with murder (‘the sword shall never depart from thine house’¹⁶⁵) and adultery (‘I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun’¹⁶⁶). Notice the

Lord says He will ‘take’ David’s wives, just as David has taken Uriah’s. The words ‘give’ and ‘take’ recur throughout the narrative. At first the Lord gave, but when David started to take from others, the Lord took from him.”¹⁶⁷ For David, this is not just a temporary loss but an eternal one, as the Lord makes clear when he says that David “hath fallen from his exaltation, and received his portion; and he shall not inherit [his wives and concubines] out of the world, for I gave them unto another.”¹⁶⁸

Given the great blessings that David had previously been promised, were these tragic events a reversal of what God had originally expected and planned? Elder Neal A. Maxwell replies to this question as follows: “Foreordination is like any other blessing — it is a conditional bestowal subject to the recipient’s faithfulness. Prophecies foreshadow events without determining the outcome, this being made possible by a divine foreseeing of outcomes. ... God foresaw the fall of David but was not the cause of it. It was David who saw Bathsheba from the balcony and sent for her and who ordered what happened to her husband, Uriah. But neither was God surprised by such a sad development.”¹⁶⁹

11 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give [them] unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.

12 For thou didst [it] secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.

before the sun. “The calamitous misjudgments that defined David’s dealings with Bathsheba and Uriah were a chain of bungled efforts at concealment. Now, in the retribution, all his crimes are to be revealed.”¹⁷⁰ The word “sun” appears in verses 11 and 12 to emphasize the “public nature of David’s punishment. ... In all likelihood, many people had heard of David’s sin, so to counteract the bad effects of his example on the people, the Lord’s displeasure had to be made obvious to everyone. David had publicly shamed the Lord; the punishment is a humiliation to David in kind.

The rest of David’s life is a fulfillment of Nathan’s judgment against him. His problems begin when his son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar, and Absalom, her brother, takes vengeance by killing Amnon. Then Absalom rebels against his father, David, and as part of his rebellion becomes the ‘neighbor’ spoken of in verse 11 to lie with his father’s wives in the sight of the sun.¹⁷¹ And because David is king and ruler over the house of Israel and Judah, the damage doesn’t stop at his own doorstep. The rebellion of Absalom was a political event that affected all Israel. [“...[F]urther ‘evil’ from the house of David will persist to his deathbed, as Absalom’s rebellion is followed by Adonijah’s usurpation.”¹⁷²]¹⁷³

Did the Lord engineer all this trouble in order to punish David? The trouble that followed David to the end of his life was according to the pronouncement of the

Lord, but it was also the expected consequence of his own bad example before his children and people.”¹⁷⁴

13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

I have sinned against the Lord. “Compare this with the prodigal son’s confession, ‘I have sinned *against Heaven*.’”¹⁷⁵

The Lord also hath put away thy sin. The Jewish Study Bible translates the Hebrew for “hath put away” as “‘transferred,’ namely to the young child.” The Joseph Smith Translation renders this as “The Lord also hath *not* put away thy sin *that* thou shalt not die,” which seems to make more sense in this context. “The Lord has just told David that the sword will never leave his house, and he is about to tell him that Bathsheba’s child will die. This is inconsistent with the Lord’s having put away his sin.”¹⁷⁷ This is the only change that Joseph Smith made to these two chapters.

14 Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also [that is] born unto thee shall surely die.

the child ... shall surely die. “Does it seem right that the Lord should take the child instead of David? It may have been that if the child had lived, others would have died spiritually. David himself may not have fully realized the seriousness of his sin and begun to repent of it if the child hadn’t died. Then, too, the very existence of the child would have been a painful reminder of David’s sin — a reminder that others might have used to justify their own sins. ... By the child’s death, the Lord showed his displeasure with David for all to see. As for the child, the Lord doubtless took him to his bosom, sparing him from what might have been a very difficult life.”¹⁷⁸ President Kimball has written that “the gospel teaches us there is no tragedy in death, but only in sin.”¹⁷⁹

15 ¶ And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

Uriah’s wife. “At this point, she is still identified as wife of the husband... betrayed in conceiving this child.”¹⁸⁰ “David’s responsibility in the death of the child is emphasized by doing this.”¹⁸¹

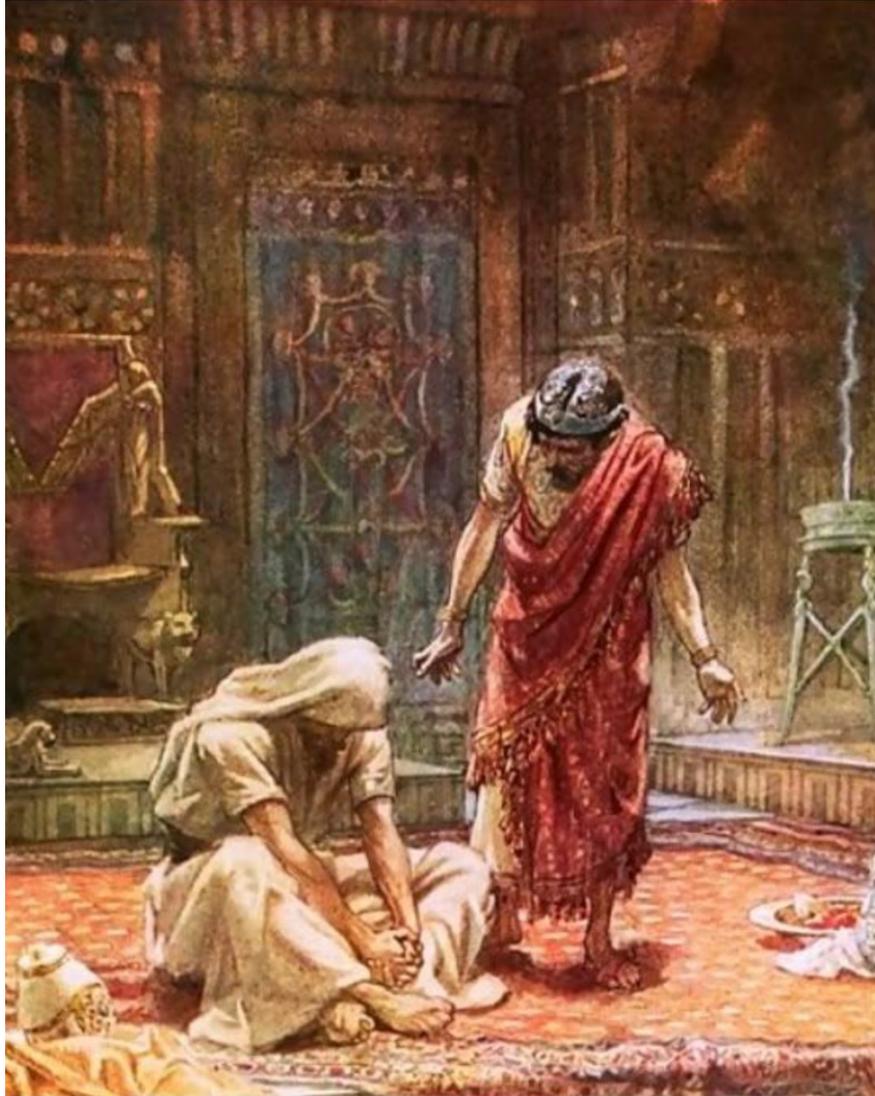


Figure 10. James Tissot: *The sorrow of King David*

16 David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.

David fasted ... and lay all night upon the earth. “David’s acts pointedly replicate those of the man he murdered, who refused to go home and eat but instead spent the night lying on the ground with the palace guard.”¹⁸²

17 And the elders of his house arose, [and went] to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.

he would not, neither did he eat bread. The “incident of the child’s death is gone into at ... great length [in this passage, in order to provide] clues to David’s state of mind following Nathan’s visit.”¹⁸³

18 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead?

on the seventh day. “Seven days were the customary period of mourning. In this instance, David enacts a regimen of mourning... before the fact of death.”¹⁸⁴

how will he then vex himself. Alter translates this as “He will do some harm.” “Presumably, the courtiers fear that David will do harm to himself in a frenzy of grief.”¹⁸⁵

19 But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead.

He is dead. “In Hebrew, this is a single syllable, *met* ‘dead’ — a response corresponding to idiomatic usage because there is no word for ‘yes’ in biblical Hebrew, and so the person questioned must respond by affirming the key term of the question. It should be noted, however, that the writer has contrived to repeat ‘dead’ five times, together with one use of the verb ‘died,’ in these two verses: the ineluctable bleak fact of death is hammered home to us, just before David’s grim acceptance of it.”¹⁸⁶

20 Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed [himself], and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.

David rose ... washed ... anointed [himself] ... changed his apparel ... worshipped ... did eat. “This uninterrupted chain of verbs signifies David’s brisk resumption of the activities of normal life, evidently without speech and certainly without explanation, as the courtier’s puzzlement makes clear. ... David here acts in a way that neither his courtiers nor the audience of the story could have anticipated.”¹⁸⁷

21 Then said his servants unto him, What thing [is] this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, [while it was] alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread.

What thing [is] this that thou hast done? “The servants question David directly ... instead of circumspectly, as would be expected.”¹⁸⁸

22 And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell [whether] GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?

While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept. “Does this [phrase indicate] that [David] took a pragmatic, calculated approach to the whole situation, showing grief as long as the Lord might concede? This seems unlikely given that one of the first things David does after the child dies is to worship. A pragmatist would have been angry that his plan had failed. Apparently, David was hoping that the Lord would change his mind, but when he sees that there is no hope, he reconciles himself to the Lord’s will.

[Has] David, at this point, ... repented of his sin? David is sorrowful, but there isn’t much evidence that he has repented. True, he has acknowledged his sin, but that’s just a beginning. Psalm 51, written by David ‘when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba,’ [preface to Psalm 51], contains another open acknowledgment of his sin. Verse 10 of this psalm says, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me,’ implying that, though David recognized his sin, his heart was not yet clean, nor his spirit right. In the *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* we read, ‘David sought repentance at the hand of God carefully with tears, for the murder of Uriah; but he could only get it through hell.’¹⁸⁹ Part of this ‘hell’ is indicated in later psalms, which show little of the optimism of Psalm 51. For example, Psalm 102:9-10 reads, ‘For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.’¹⁹⁰

23 But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. “If the episode of Bathsheba and Uriah is the great turning point of the David story, these haunting words are the pivotal moment in the turning point. As we have repeatedly seen, every instance of David’s speech in the preceding narrative has been crafted to serve political ends, much of it evincing elaborately artful rhetoric. Now, after the dire curse pronounced by Nathan, the first stage of which is fulfilled in the death of the child, David speaks for the first time not out of political need but in his existential nakedness. The words he utters have a stark simplicity—there are no elegies now—and his recognition of the irreversibility of his son’s death also makes him think of his own mortality. In place of David the seeker and wielder of power, we now see a vulnerable David, and this is how he will chiefly appear through the last half of his story.”¹⁹¹

24 And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him.

David comforted Bathsheba his wife. “Now, after the terrible price of the child’s life has been paid for the murder of her husband, the narrator refers to her as David’s wife, not Uriah’s.”¹⁹² “Comforting Bathsheba is David’s first unselfish act toward her in this story. ... Bathsheba must have needed comfort: she has ... been

seduced, her husband has been killed, she has been perfunctorily remarried, and she has lost the child conceived in the seduction—all in about a year's time.”¹⁹³

went in unto her ... lay with her ... she bare a son. Echoing 2 Samuel 11:27, the actions leading up to the birth of the baby are described in rapid-fire succession. The description of the first birth followed a period of mourning by Bathsheba; significantly, the second birth is preceded by David's mourning. The author having informed us of the king's sorrow and his desire to comfort Bathsheba, we are now inclined to believe that David is no longer acting unfeelingly and mechanically but rather in a spirit of tenderness born of abject humility. The brief verse opens with a loving act of David, and closes with an act of love from the Lord. The birth of a new child must have been a comfort to both parents.

he called his name Solomon. The Hebrew text is ambiguous about which parent named the child, and Alter observes that “[a]s a rule, it was the mother who exercised the privilege.”¹⁹⁴ However, David had been told in a previous revelation that he would have a son for whom God “would establish the throne” and that “his name [should] be Solomon.”¹⁹⁵ “The [name *Shelomo's*] connotation of peace (or ‘well-being,’ another meaning of the Hebrew *shalom*), appears in the name of another son, Avshalom [Absalom],”¹⁹⁶ but neither Absalom nor the usurper Adonijah's claims for the throne were ultimately upheld, since David had already sworn to Bathsheba that her infant would one day be his [David's] successor.¹⁹⁷ “The Lord's loving Solomon, who will disappear from the narrative until the struggle for the throne in 1 Kings 1, foreshadows his eventual destiny, and also harmonizes this name giving with the child's second name [perhaps his throne name?], Jedidiah, which means [‘beloved of Jehovah’ (see v. 25)].”¹⁹⁸ The name “David” has the similar meaning of “beloved,” “hinting at a resolution of the story.”¹⁹⁹

25 And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.

And he sent by ... Nathan ... and he called his name Jedidiah. “The first *he* refers to the Lord; the second to Nathan.”²⁰⁰ “It remains something of a puzzlement that the child should be given two names, one by his mother and the other by God through His prophet. One common suggestion is that Jedidiah was Solomon's official throne name. ... Nathan's intervention will [later] prove crucial in securing the throne for Solomon.”²⁰¹ Perhaps the Jedidiah was given by the prophet at the occasion of the promise David made to Bathsheba about her son becoming his successor.²⁰²

because of the Lord. Alter translates this as “by the grace of the Lord.”²⁰³



Figure 11. James Tissot: *The mighty men of David*

26 ¶ And Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city.

Joab fought against Rabbah. “It is possible, as many scholars have claimed, that the conquest of Rabbah, in the siege of which Uriah had perished, in fact occurs before the birth of Solomon, though sieges lasting two or more years were not unknown in the ancient world.”²⁰⁴ Why, after the peace of the preceding scene, does the author abruptly focus our attention again on the war? “The war frames this story of David’s sin — showing us ... David’s state of mind before he sinned, and his state of mind after. These last events [of chapter 12] seem a reminder that the comfort David felt from Nathan’s second visit wasn’t to last. David’s punishment, pronounced by Nathan, had just begun.”²⁰⁵

27 And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, I have fought against Rabbah, and have taken the city of waters

I have fought against Rabbah. “Joab is actually sending David a double message. As dutiful field commander, he urges David²⁰⁶ to hasten to the front so that the conquest of the Ammonite capital will be attributed to him. And yet, he proclaims the conquest in the triumphal formality of a little victory poem (one line, two parallel versets) in which it is he who figures unambiguously as conqueror. This coy and dangerous game Joab plays with David about who has the real power will persist in the story.”²⁰⁷

city of waters. “This refers to the city’s water supply, without which the city couldn’t last long.”²⁰⁸ Joab is announcing, in essence, that victory is imminent.

28 Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it: lest I take the city, and it be called after my name.

lest I take the city, and it be called after my name. “Joab treats David like a subordinate, ordering him around. He lets David know that he [Joab] deserves the glory, but for the sake of appearances David had better get to it. Having acted as David’s accomplice in the sin, Joab feels entitled to lord it over David. David follows Joab’s instructions, but resentfully, as the next few verses show.”²⁰⁹

29 And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it.

30 And he took their king’s crown from off his head, the weight whereof [was] a talent of gold with the precious stones: and it was [set] on David’s head. And he brought forth the spoil of the city in great abundance.

And he took their king’s crown ... and it was set on David’s head. “The crown would have weighed close to 100 pounds—too much for either the Ammonite King or David to carry on his head. [The Septuagint reads] that the crown was from off the head of the Ammonite idol Milcom, and [some English translations say] that only the precious stone from it was set on David’s head. But the Lord’s instructions, to the contrary, were: ‘Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.’²¹⁰ It’s not clear just how blasphemous this act was. At least it shows a reckless disregard for appearances — perhaps David’s way of slapping Joab (who’s been so concerned about appearances) in the face. ... David seems to be asserting himself, showing how great and exalted he is, perhaps to compensate for his lack of involvement in the war.”²¹¹

31 And he brought forth the people that [were] therein, and put [them] under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem.

put [them] under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron. “The meaning of the entire sentence is a little uncertain, but the most plausible reading is that David impressed the male Ammonites into corvée [slave] labor.²¹² Some have suggested that the Ammonites were forced to tear down the walls of their own cities with the cutting tools listed in the catalogue here, though the reference to the brick mold at the end indicates some sort of construction, not just demolition.”²¹³ “David may not have been unusually harsh for his time, but he was harsh nevertheless, perhaps for a token of bravery to compensate for his

irresponsible leadership in the war, or perhaps as a general reaction to the frustration he was feeling. David's salvation was yet to be worked out."214

The Why

Robert Alter summarizes the tragic story of David's fall as follows:

The Book of Samuel is one of those rare masterworks that ... evinces an unblinking and abidingly instructive knowingness about man as a political animal in all his contradictions and venality and in all his susceptibility to the brutalization and the seductions of exercising power. And yet, David is more than a probing representation of the ambiguities of political power. He is also an affecting and troubling image of human destiny as husband and father and as a man moving from youth to prime to the decrepitude of old age. The great pivotal moment of the whole story in this regard is when he turns to his perplexed courtiers, after putting aside the trappings of mourning he had assumed for his ailing infant son, now dead, and says, 'I am going to him. He will not come back to me.' These ... words ... have no conceivable political motive[; they] give us a glimpse into his inwardness, revealing his sense of naked vulnerability to the inexorable mortality that is the fate of all humankind. For the rest of the story, we see David's weakness and his bonds of intimate attachment in fluctuating conflict with the imperatives of power that drive him as a king surrounded by potential enemies and betrayers.215

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Further Study

For Gospel Topics Essays on the Church website concerning "Plural Marriage in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," see <https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints?lang=eng>

For additional in-depth perspectives on this topic from a reliable source, see "Joseph Smith's Polygamy" (<http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/>).

This piece from Book of Mormon Central discusses one of the Psalms that was attributed to David after the Bathsheba incident: <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/why-did-lehi-quote-from-a-psalm-of-repentance-in-his-dream>

For other scripture resources relating to this lesson, see The Interpreter

Foundation Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Index (<http://interpreterfoundation.org/gospel-doctrine-resource-index/ot-gospel-doctrine-resource-index/>) and the Book of Mormon Central Old Testament KnoWhy list (<https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/tags/old-testament>).

Appendix: Elder Bruce R. McConkie on David’s Loss of Blessings and the “Sure Mercies of David”²¹⁶

David knew he had forfeited his claim to eternal life and the continuation of the family unit in the realms ahead. Yet he importuned the Lord for such blessings as he still might receive. And though a just God could no longer confer upon his erring servant the fulness of that reward which might have been his, yet according to the great plan of mercy, which causes the resurrection to pass upon all men, he could bring him up eventually to a lesser inheritance. His soul need not be cast off eternally to dwell with Lucifer and those who are in open and continuing rebellion against righteousness.

True, because of his sins, he had cast his lot with the wicked “who suffer the vengeance of eternal fire,” and “who are cast down to hell and suffer the wrath of Almighty God, until the fulness of times, when Christ shall have subdued all enemies under his feet, and shall have perfected his work.”²¹⁷ But in that day when death and hell deliver up the dead which are in them,²¹⁸ David and his fellow sufferers shall come forth from the grave. Because he was a member of the Church and had entered into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage and then had fallen into sin, the revelation says of him: “He hath fallen from his exaltation, and received his portion.”²¹⁹

Implicit in this historical recitation of what David did to lose his salvation, and in the doctrinal laws which nonetheless guaranteed him a resurrection and a lesser degree of eternal reward, are two great truths: (1) That the Holy One of Israel, the Holy One of God, the Son of David, would die and then be resurrected; and (2) that because he burst the bands of death and became the first-fruits of them that slept, all men also would be resurrected, both the righteous and the wicked, including saints who became sinners, as was the case with David their king.

These two truths became known as and were called “the sure mercies of David,”²²⁰ meaning that David in his life and death and resurrection was singled out as the symbol to dramatize before the people that their Holy One would be resurrected and that all men would also come forth from the grave. David knew and understood this and wrote about it. So also did Isaiah, which means the principle was known and taught in ancient Israel; and both Peter and Paul made it the basis of persuasive New Testament sermons, in which they identified the Holy One of Israel as that Jesus whom they preached.

Speaking of his own resurrection and that of his Lord, David wrote: “My flesh also shall rest in hope,”²²¹ meaning, ‘My body shall come forth from the grave,’

“For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,”²²² meaning, ‘My spirit shall not remain in hell forever, but shall be joined with my body when I am resurrected.’ Death and hell shall thus deliver up dead David who is in them. Then David came forth with the great Messianic pronouncement, “Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”²²³ That is, ‘The Holy One of Israel shall come forth in his resurrection before his dead body is permitted to decay and become dust.’

With accusing words, Peter charged his fellow Jews with taking “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs,”²²⁴ and causing him to be “crucified and slain”²²⁵ by wicked hands. But God hath raised him up, Peter testified, “having loosed the pains of death.”²²⁶ Then Peter quotes the whole of that Messianic message with which we are now dealing, doing so with some improvement over the way it is recorded in the Old Testament. Peter says: “For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.”²²⁷

This prophecy means, Peter says, that David “spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption.”²²⁸ Then the Chief Apostle bears testimony of the fulfillment of the prophecy. “This Jesus hath God raised up,” he says, “whereof we all are witnesses. ... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ.”²²⁹ He is the Lord who was ever before David’s face. He is the Holy One who should come forth from the grave. Thus Peter has used David’s words to prove the Holy One would be resurrected, and he has used his own testimony and that of his fellow apostles to prove that he was resurrected.

Lest his hearers be left in doubt, however, as to David’s personal state, the Chief Apostle says, “Let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. ... For David is not ascended into the heaven.”²³⁰ Further, David has not yet been resurrected, for he is numbered with “the spirits of men who are to be judged, and are found under condemnation; And these are the rest of the dead; and they live not again until the thousand years are ended, neither again, until the end of the earth.”²³¹

Isaiah recorded the Lord’s invitation that men should come unto him, believe his word, live his law, and be saved. Part of the invitation was couched in these words of Deity: “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people.”²³² That is to say: To all who will believe in him, the Lord of heaven will make the same covenant that he made with David, in that they too will know of their Messiah’s resurrection, and that the souls of all men are thereby raised from the grave. David had the promise

that he would be saved from death and hell, through Christ, and all the faithful could have that same assurance, though, as here expressed, David is made the illustration, the “witness,” the symbol of these great truths.

Paul preached that of David’s seed “hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.”²³³ He said that those at Jerusalem, “and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets”²³⁴ who had prophesied of him, caused that he be put to death. After he was slain, Paul says, “they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.”²³⁵

Having so taught and testified, Paul followed the same course we have seen Peter pursue; he turned to David and his great Messianic utterance about the resurrection, but he wove in also Isaiah’s Statement about the sure mercies of David. “As concerning that he raised him up from the dead,” Paul said, “now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he said also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.”²³⁶²³⁷

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Endnotes

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- 1 Used with permission of Book of Mormon Central. See <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/reference-knowhy>.
- 2 D&C 132:1, 38, 39. See also Judges 8:30-31; 1 Chronicles 7:4; 2 Chronicles 11:23; Jacob 1:15; 2:24-33; Mosiah 11:2; Ether 10:5.
- 3 For example, Mark Twain once quoted Jacob 2:23-26 and sardonically concluded: "Polygamy is a recent feature in the Mormon religion, and was added by Brigham Young after Joseph Smith's death. Before that, it was regarded as an abomination" (M. Twain, *Roughing*, pp. 72-73).
- 4 D&C 132:38.
- 5 Matthew 5:28; Exodus 20:17.
- 6 Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:18; Proverbs 6:32; Jeremiah 3:8-9; 5:7; 7:9; 23:14; 29:23; Ezekiel 16:32; 23:37; Hosea 4:2, 13-14; Matthew 5:27-28; 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; John 8:3-11; Romans 2:22; 13:9; Galatians 5:19; James 2:11; 2 Peter 2:14; Revelation 2:22; Mosiah 2:13; 13:22;

Alma 16:18; 23:3; 30:10; Helaman 4:12; 7:5; 3 Nephi 12:27-28, 32; D&C 19:25; 42:24-26, 75, 80; 59:6; 63:16; 66:10; 132:41-44, 63.

7 S. W. Kimball, *Miracle*, p. 61. Cf. Alma 39:5: “These things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost.” See also D&C 19:25.

8 D&C 132:39.

9 1 Kings 11:4.

10 1 Kings 11:1-13; cf. Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Ezra 9:1-2.

11 Brian J. Baird has argued that this verse should be interpreted specifically in terms of levirate marriage “by which a man was responsible for marrying his dead brother’s wife if that brother died before having an heir” (B. J. Baird, *Understanding Jacob’s Teachings*, p. 227). While Baird’s conclusion seems a plausible conjecture about how Jacob’s teachings might have been interpreted by his contemporary hearers, two secondhand reports of the words of an angel commanding the Prophet to commence the practice provide evidence for a more general application of this verse in Joseph Smith’s time:

The Lord ... sent an holy angel with a drawn sword unto [Joseph Smith], saying unto him ... that the time has now come that I will raise up seed unto me as I spoke by my servant Jacob as is recorded in the Book of Mormon, therefore, I command my people. (Oliver Preston Robinson ed., *History of Joseph Lee Robinson* (n. p.: History Comes Home, 2007), 27, as cited in B. C. Hales, *Encouraging Joseph Smith*, p. 65).

An angel came to [Joseph Smith] ... Joseph said he talked to him soberly about it, and told him it was an abomination and quoted scripture to him. He said in the Book of Mormon it was an abomination in the eyes of the Lord, and they were to adhere to these things except the Lord speak. (Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, *Remarks*, April, 14, 1905, Brigham Young University, vault MSS 363, fd. 6, 2–3, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, as cited in *ibid.*, p. 70).

Also attesting a more general application of this phrase are the words of Lehi to his sons when he instructed them to take wives of Ishmael’s family so that they might “raise up seed to the Lord” (1 Nephi 7:1).

Elder Orson Pratt, in commenting on this verse, interpreted similarly (O. Pratt, *The Seer*, 1, February 1853, pp. 30-31):

Thus we see, that a man among the Nephites, by the law of God, had no right to take more than one wife, unless the Lord should command for the purpose of raising up seed unto Himself. ... [Without] such a command, they were strictly limited to the one wife doctrine: “otherwise” says the Lord, “they shall hearken unto these things”; that is, without an express command, they should hearken to the original law limiting them to one wife.

With specific respect to Jacob’s words “concubines [ye] shall have none” (Jacob 2:27), Hugh W. Nibley concluded that the Lord “doesn’t like the concubine system at all” (H. W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 23). Rodney J.

Turner gave a similar opinion (Morality and marriage in the Book of Mormon, in M. S. Nyman *et al.*, Jacob, p. 289):

I [do not] believe [that] there [will] ever be concubinage again. Those lesser times with their lesser laws are gone forever. Every sealed woman is a full wife with access to every right and blessing enjoyed by her sisters. For the Lord has revealed that the purpose of plural marriage is not to gratify the lusts or ambitions of men, but to magnify celestial women. It is to recognize their divine right to self-fulfillment, worthy husbands, and honorable motherhood; and to thereby raise up a holy posterity to themselves and to their God. Eternal marriage (whichever form) is the only way the immortality and eternal life of man and woman-the endless work of God-can continue (see D&C 132:63; Moses 1:38-39)”

12 2 Samuel 11-24; 1 Kings 1-2:10.

13 S. W. Kimball, *Miracle*, p. 14.

14 President Kimball acknowledges that “even among wilful murderers there are grades and categories” and “they certainly will suffer different degrees of punishment hereafter” (*ibid.*, pp. 129-130). And “of course, the laws both of the land and of God recognize a great difference between murder or wilful slaughter and manslaughter which was not premeditated. Likewise men unfortunately must take others’ lives in war. ... There are mitigating circumstances but certainly the blame and responsibility rest heavily upon the heads of those who brought about the war [cf. Message of the First Presidency, 6 April 1942, Message of the First Presidency, 6 April 1942, 159-161; W. Shakespeare, *Henry V*, 1:2:9-32; 4:1:130-146], making necessary the taking of life. It is conceivable that even in war there may be many times when there is a legitimate choice and enemy combatants could be taken prisoner rather than be killed” (S. W. Kimball, *Miracle*, p. 129).

With respect to Church members, excommunication of those who have committed murder is required in most circumstances (*ibid.*, p. 131). With respect to non-members who have murdered, President Kimball states that “missionaries do not knowingly baptize such people. Rather than assuming this great responsibility, they refer the problem to their mission presidents who in turn will wish to refer the matter to the First Presidency of the Church” (*ibid.*, p. 130). In support of this position, President Kimball cited the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 10 March 1844, p. 339; see also p. 188):

Peter referred to the same subject on the day of Pentecost, but the multitude did not get the endowment that Peter had; but several days after the people asked, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter says, “I would ye had done it ignorantly” (Acts 3:17), speaking of crucifying the Lord, etc. He did not say to them, “Repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins”; but he said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

This is the case with murderers. They could not be baptized for the remission of sins, for they had shed innocent blood.”

15 See JST Matthew 12:31-32. President Kimball also writes: “The sin against the Holy Ghost requires such knowledge that it is manifestly impossible for the rank and file to commit such a sin. Comparatively few Church members will commit murder wherein they shed innocent blood, and we hope only a few will deny the Holy Ghost” (S. W. Kimball, *Miracle*, p. 123).

For a discussion of the kind of knowledge required for one to become a “son of perdition,” see J. M. Bradshaw, *Faith, Hope, and Charity*, pp. 100-102; J. M. Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Oath*, pp. 63-64.

16 D&C 42:18. Cf. D&C 42:79.

17 S. W. Kimball, *Miracle*, p. 127.

18 See Acts 2:29-35.

19 J. F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 434.

20 B. R. McConkie, *Promised Messiah*, pp 271-275.

21 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 10 March 1844, p. 339.

22 Elsewhere Joseph Smith taught that “such characters cannot be forgiven, until they have paid the last farthing” (*ibid.*, p. 188).

23 The implication is that had David received these blessings — i.e., the fulness of the priesthood (having been ordained a priest and king unto the most high God) and having received the fulness of the sealing blessings — he could not have been resurrected to a kingdom of glory. See also D&C 132:19, 26, 27.

24 H. W. Brewster, Jr., *Encyclopedia*, s.v., David, pp. 121-122.

25 cf. 1 Samuel 17; 2 Samuel 11-12.

26 Cf. T. S. Monson, *Prophet's Voice, Finishers Wanted*, pp. 386-387.

27 J. F. Smith, Jr., *Answers*, 3:145-146. Cf. D&C 132:38-39.

28 1 John 3:15. Cf. J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, p. 188.

29 Acts 3:19. Cf. *Ibid.*, 10 March 1844, p. 339.

30 Acts 3:19. Cf. *Ibid.*, 10 March 1844, p. 339.

31 Matthew 27:52.

32 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, p. 188.

33 Acts 13:34. Cf. Isaiah 55:3.

34 2 Samuel 12:1-23,

35 J. A. Berman, Double meaning in the parable of the poor man's ewe (2 Samuel 12:1-4).

36 2 Samuel 12:7.

37 2 Samuel 12:1-4.

38 H. W. Attridge *et al.*, *HarperCollins Study Bible*, 2 Samuel 12:4.

39 L. T. Dennis *et al.*, *ESV*, 2 Samuel 12 :4. See, e.g., Exodus 23:6; Leviticus 19:15; Proverbs 31:9; Isaiah 3:14.

40 2 Samuel 12:2.

41 V. P. Long, *2 Samuel (Zondervan)*, 2 Samuel 12:1-6.

42 J. A. Berman, Double meaning in the parable of the poor man's ewe (2 Samuel 12:1-4), pp. 3-4.

43 Ibid., pp. 8-9, 13.

44 2 Samuel 11:5.

45 Berman further observes (J. A. Berman, Double meaning in the parable of the poor man's ewe (2 Samuel 12:1-4), p. 8 n. 19):

Note that it is not obvious, (as per Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, p. 123) that the rich man's "abundant flocks and herds" (12:1) refer to David's numerous wives. Rather, from Nathan's explanation of the parable in 12:7-8, it would appear that the rich man's (i.e., David's) riches are the totality of his kingdom: "That man (i.e., the rich man) is you! Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: It was I who anointed you king over Israel and it was I who rescued you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and possession of your master's wives, and I gave you the House of Israel and Judah, and if that were not enough, I would give you twice as much more" (my translation here follows NJPS).

46 In his full article, Berman justifies the idea that "Bathsheba can inhabit two roles in the parable because the ordeal she suffers transports her through multiple identities across the story. ... At the outset of the narrative, Bathsheba inhabits but a single role: she is the wife of Uriah the Hittite (11:3). Yet in the continuation of the story her primary interaction is with David, to whom she urgently turns, seeking protection" (ibid., p. 10).

47 2 Samuel 12:3.

48 2 Samuel 12:9.

49 2 Samuel 12:11.

50 2 Samuel 11:27; 12:1.

51 J. A. Berman, Double meaning in the parable of the poor man's ewe (2 Samuel 12:1-4), p. 14.

52 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

53 2 Samuel 12:23.

54 R. Alter, David.

55 E. Fox, Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David.

56 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting. The Packards' commentary follows the interpretive approach advocated by the late BYU professor and eminent Shakespeare scholar Arthur Henry King (A. H. King, Afterword; see also A. H. King, Class Notes; A. H. King, Arm; A. J. Birch, King; J. M. Bradshaw, Moses Temple Themes (2014), pp. 5-6).

57 R. Alter, David, p. 249.

58 Ibid., pp. 249-250.

59 2 Samuel 21:16-22. Cf. 1 Samuel 18:16 where his willingness to personally lead troops into the fray endears him to the people.

60 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, pp. 108-109.

61 R. Alter, David, p. 250.

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- 62 D. Packard *et al.*, *Feasting*, p. 109.
- 63 R. Alter, *David*, p. 250. See 2 Samuel 11:21, 24.
- 64 D. Packard *et al.*, *Feasting*, p. 110.
- 65 Cf. 2 Samuel 23:39 where Uriah's name is ironically displayed in the prominent last position of the list of David's valiant soldiers.
- 66 E. Fox, *Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David*, p. 199.
- 67 Exodus 22:21.
- 68 Leviticus 19:34.
- 69 D. Packard *et al.*, *Feasting*, p. 110.
- 70 R. Alter, *David*, p. 251.
- 71 See Genesis 39.
- 72 Cf. R. Alter, *Narrative*, p. 10.
- 73 W. C. Skousen, *Fourth*, pp. 115-116. Cf. J. F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 434.
- 74 J. A. Berman, Double meaning in the parable of the poor man's ewe (2 Samuel 12:1-4), p. 2 n. 6.
- 75 Modern translations generally take the word "prophecy" in Proverbs 31:1 as a mistranslation of "Massa," a nation in north Arabia. "Most suppose that [King Lemuel] was not an Israelite (which is consistent with the fact that the words for 'son' in 31:2 and 'kings' in v. 3b have Aramaic spellings, and with the absence of the special name Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, from any of the sayings)" (L. T. Dennis *et al.*, *ESV*, 31:1-9).
- 76 Indeed, "Jewish legend identifies him as Solomon, making this advice from his mother Bathsheba; but there is no evidence for that" (NET Bible, NET Bible, Proverbs 31:1).
- 77 H. W. Attridge *et al.*, *HarperCollins Study Bible*, Proverbs 31:7. Verse 8 in the King James Version.
- 78 R. Alter, *David*, p. 251.
- 79 2 Samuel 11:6.
- 80 D. Packard *et al.*, *Feasting*, p. 111.
- 81 R. Alter, *David*, p. 251.
- 82 *Ibid.*, p. 251.
- 83 D. Packard *et al.*, *Feasting*, p. 112. See Leviticus 20:10.
- 84 *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 85 *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 86 *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 87 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 88 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 89 R. Alter, *David*, p. 252. See e.g., 1 Samuel 21:6.
- 90 D. Packard *et al.*, *Feasting*, p. 113.
- 91 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

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- 92 Ibid., p. 114.
- 93 Ibid., p. 115.
- 94 Ibid., p. 115.
- 95 R. Alter, David, p. 252.
- 96 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 114.
- 97 Ibid., p. 115. See 1 Samuel 20:3; 1 Samuel 25:26; 2 Kings 2:2; 2 Kings 4:30.
- 98 R. Alter, David, p. 253.
- 99 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 115.
- 100 R. Alter, David, p. 253.
- 101 Ibid., p. 253.
- 102 John 13:18, citing Psalm 41:9.
- 103 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, pp. 115-116.
- 104 R. Alter, David, p. 253.
- 105 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 116.
- 106 R. Alter, David, p. 253.
- 107 Ibid., p. 253.
- 108 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 117.
- 109 Ibid., p. 117.
- 110 Ibid., p. 117.
- 111 R. Alter, David, p. 254.
- 112 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 117.
- 113 Ibid., p. 118.
- 114 Judges 9:52-54.
- 115 R. Alter, David, p. 254.
- 116 See e.g., 2 Samuel 1:14-15; 4:12.
- 117 R. Alter, David, p. 255.
- 118 Ibid., p. 255.
- 119 Ibid., p. 255.
- 120 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, pp. 118-119.
- 121 R. Alter, David, p. 255.
- 122 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 119.
- 123 E. Fox, Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David, p. 202. See 2 Samuel 12:24.
- 124 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 119.
- 125 R. Alter, David, p. 256.
- 126 Ibid., p. 256
- 127 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 119.
- 128 Ibid., p. 120.
- 129 Ibid., p. 120.
- 130 W. Shakespeare, Hamlet, 2:2:605, p. 1159.

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- 131 R. Alter, David, p. 256.
- 132 Ibid., p. 257.
- 133 See 2 Samuel 5:15.
- 134 D&C 132:39.
- 135 R. Alter, David, p. 257.
- 136 Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY, National Museum, Aleppo, Syria, published in V. P. Long, 2 Samuel (Zondervan).
- 137 E. Fox, Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David, p 189.
- 138 R. Alter, David, p. 258.
- 139 G. M. Lamsa, Light, pp. 333-334.
- 140 R. Alter, David, p. 258.
- 141 Ibid., p. 258.
- 142 Ibid., p. 258.
- 143 Ibid., p. 258.
- 144 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 125.
- 145 2 Samuel 12:14, 18.
- 146 2 Samuel 13:28–29.
- 147 2 Samuel 18:14–15.
- 148 1 Kings 2:24–25.
- 149 R. Alter, David, p. 258.
- 150 V. P. Long, 2 Samuel (Zondervan), 2 Samuel 12:6. Cf. Proverbs 6.31.
- 151 R. Alter, David, p. 259.
- 152 Ibid., p. 260.
- 153 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 122.
- 154 A. Berlin *et al.*, Jewish, 2 Samuel 12:7. See 2 Samuel 3:13–16.
- 155 “The Talmud (Sanhedrin 18a) and a number of modern scholars have speculated that David’s wife Ahinoam, the mother of Amnon (see 2 Samuel 3:2; 1 Samuel 25:43), was the same as Saul’s wife, Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz (1 Samuel 14:50)” (ibid., 2 Samuel 12:7).
- 156 R. Alter, David, p. 259. See 2 Samuel 16:20-22; compare Reuben’s similar symbolic usurpation of Jacob’s authority recorded and condemned in Genesis 49:4 and I Chronicles 5:1.
- 157 Ibid., p. 259.
- 158 See verse 10.
- 159 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 122.
- 160 R. Alter, David, p. 259.
- 161 2 Samuel 11:25.
- 162 Alter, 1999 #310}, p. 259.
- 163 verse 9.
- 164 verse 10.

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- 165 verse 10.
166 verse 11.
167 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 123.
168 D&C 132:39.
169 N. A. Maxwell, Small Moment, p. 97.
170 R. Alter, David, p. 260.
171 See 2 Samuel 16:20-22.
172 1 Kings 1-2.
173 R. Alter, David, p. 260.
174 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 123.
175 A. Berlin *et al.*, Jewish, 2 Samuel 12:13. See Exodus 34:7.
176 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 124. See Luke 15:21.
177 *Ibid.*, p. 124.
178 *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.
179 S. W. Kimball, Tragedy, p. 101.
180 R. Alter, David, p. 260.
181 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 126.
182 R. Alter, David, p. 261.
183 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 126.
184 R. Alter, David, p. 261.
185 *Ibid.*, p. 261.
186 *Ibid.*, p. 261.
187 *Ibid.*, p. 261.
188 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 126.
189 J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, p. 339.
190 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 127.
191 R. Alter, David, p. 262.
192 *Ibid.*, p. 262.
193 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 127.
194 R. Alter, David, p. 262.
195 1 Chronicles 22:9-10.
196 E. Fox, Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David, p. 207.
197 1 Kings 1:17; 30.
198 R. Alter, David, p. 262.
199 E. Fox, Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David, p. 207.
200 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 128.
201 R. Alter, David, p. 263. See 1 Kings 1:1-30
202 See 1 Kings 1:17, 30, which retrospectively reports the oath David had made.
203 R. Alter, David, p. 263.

204 Ibid., p. 263.
205 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, pp. 128-129.
206 verse 28.
207 R. Alter, David, p. 263.
208 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 129.
209 Ibid., p. 129.
210 Deuteronomy 12:2-3.
211 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 129.
212 Cf. David's treatment of the Moabites in 2 Samuel 8:2.
213 R. Alter, David, p. 264.
214 D. Packard *et al.*, Feasting, p. 130.
215 R. Alter, David, pp. xviii-xix.
216 Acts 13:34. Cf. Isaiah 55:3.
217 D&C 76:105-106.
218 Revelation 20:13.
219 D&C 132:39.
220 Acts 13:34. Cf. Isaiah 55:3.
221 Psalm 16:9.
222 Psalm 16:10.
223 Psalm 16:10.
224 Acts 2:22.
225 Acts 2:23.
226 Acts 2:24.
227 Acts 2:25-28.
228 Acts 2:31.
229 Acts 2:32, 36.
230 Acts 2:29, 34.
231 D&C 88:100-101.
232 Isaiah 55:1-4.
233 Acts 13:23.
234 Acts 13:27.
235 Acts 13:29-31.
236 Acts 13:34-37.
237 B. R. McConkie, Promised Messiah, pp. 271-275.