

2ND SAMUEL

Week 18, chapter 12

As we continue with the story of David and Bathsheba in 2nd Samuel 12 today, we find ourselves deep into that part of the Bible that causes us to look back to the God-principles set down in the Torah, back to the history of Israel as a people, and forward to future Hebrew kings and then to Messiah because it all connects. Thus as you have noticed (and will notice more and more, like in our lesson today) our study will often refer to past and future Biblical events and people for the purpose of linking other parts of the Scriptures to whatever our current study might be.

We left off last time by briefly looking at Psalm 32 that was written by David during this spiritually dark period of his life. We'll shortly look at yet another Psalm that sheds even more light on our present chapter in 2nd Samuel.

First, let's get into our beautiful balloon and float upward to get a panoramic view of the Scriptural landscape. Some say that at this point in David's life God had departed from David, and others say that it was the King who had pulled away from God. I say that while David had certainly decided to harden himself against Yehoveh's ways, that he never renounced the Lord nor probably even doubted the Lord. Rather he did what most of us have done (and will do) at one time or another: we make a conscious moral choice to appease our own desires above all else and to put God on the shelf for awhile because it is clear that what we want is the furthest thing from the Lord's commandments and will.

As a result of King David's decisions and behavior had the Lord departed from David? Perhaps, but I think only in a rather poetic sense. The Lord cannot attach Himself to sin, or be in such proximity to it as to put His holiness into danger of defilement. And neither does He force His way into the life of someone who doesn't want Him there. The most I think I can say with some certainty about this issue is that the Prophet Natan coming to David with God's oracle (even though it was a severe, chastising oracle of divine retribution as well as forgiveness) is proof of itself that Yehoveh had not abandoned King David. But (just as we can sense when we find ourselves in open rebellion against the Lord) there is also the reality that

the relationship had been damaged and become more distant. Who hasn't felt at times like your prayers were bouncing off the ceiling; or experienced a sensation of foreboding with an invisible but very real barrier between yourself and the Lord's comforting presence?

I think that the issue of whether or not the Lord has departed from David (as some commentators insist upon) versus David turning his back on God is almost as important as the one that shows us how to regain our standing before the Father by means of sincere confession and repentance (an example that David demonstrates). The best example of a man who indeed was at one time in relationship with God but then God removed Himself must be David's predecessor King Sha'ul. In fact I have no doubts that the Scriptures' purpose in spending much time in presenting Saul's life story and then immediately following it with David's is to draw a stark contrast between the two.

Listen to a few excerpts from 1st Samuel that describes God's relationship with Saul, and then how it digressed and finally ended.

(1Sa 10:17-21 CJB)

17 Sh'mu'el summoned the people to ADONAI in Mitzpah.

18 He said to the people of Isra'el, "Here is what ADONAI the God of Isra'el says: 'I brought Isra'el up from Egypt. I rescued you from the power of the Egyptians and from the power of all the kingdoms that oppressed you.'

19 But today you have rejected your God, who himself saves you from all your disasters and distress. You have said to him, 'No! Put a king over us!' So now, present yourselves before ADONAI by your tribes and families."

20 So Sh'mu'el had all the tribes come forward, and the tribe of Binyamin was chosen.

21 He had the tribe of Binyamin come forward by families, and the family of the Matri was chosen, and Sha'ul the son of Kish was chosen.....

24 Sh'mu'el said to all the people, "Do you see the man ADONAI has chosen, that there is no one like him among all the people?" Then all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

Without doubt the Lord chose Saul. There was no mistake. But in time Saul would pull away from God and so God would take away the Kingship He had given to him.

(1Sa 13:13-14 CJB)

¹³ Sh'mu'el said to Sha'ul, "You did a foolish thing. You didn't observe the mitzvah of ADONAI, which he gave you. If you had, ADONAI would have set up your kingship over Isra'el forever.

¹⁴ But as it is, your kingship will not be established. ADONAI has sought for himself a man after his own heart, and ADONAI has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you did not observe what ADONAI ordered you to do."

1 Samuel 16:1 ADONAI said to Sh'mu'el, "How much longer are you going to go on grieving for Sha'ul, now that I have rejected him as king over Isra'el? Fill your horn with oil, and set out; I will send you to Yishai the Beit-Lachmi, because I have chosen myself a king from among his sons." (1Sa 16:1 CJB)

The Lord replaced Saul with David. Therefore since there can be but one anointed King of Israel, the Lord left Saul. But of course we find Saul openly defiant and trying to kill David. Saul is not merely committing bad behavior, he is trying to thwart and defeat God's will in a similar way that the Evil One does.

(1Sa 16:14 CJB)

¹⁴ Now the Spirit of ADONAI had left Sha'ul; instead, an evil spirit from ADONAI would suddenly come over him.

(1Sa 18:9-12 CJB)

⁹ From that day on, Sha'ul viewed David with suspicion.

¹⁰ The following day an evil spirit from God came powerfully over Sha'ul, so that he fell into a frenzy in the house. David was there, playing his lyre as on other occasions. This

time Sha'ul had his spear in his hand;

¹¹ *and he threw the spear, thinking, "I will pin David to the wall!" But David dodged out of the way twice.*

¹² *Sha'ul became afraid of David, because ADONAI was with him and had left Sha'ul.*

In the era of the kings it was always that the Lord provided a prophet for the King of Israel, and the prophet's purpose was to deliver the Lord's direct instructions to the king. So later we find that Saul's prophet, Samuel, retreated back to his home in Ramah and refused to have anymore to do with King Saul because the Lord had no more oracles for Saul because the Lord had abandoned Saul.

Thus when we see in 2nd Samuel 12 the first words of the first verse, "Adonai sent Natan to David", that is firm evidence that the Lord had not abandoned David. In fact in this chapter, perhaps as nowhere else, we see the stark distinction that the Lord draws between Saul and David, and we see the results of what occurs when that distinction is carried out to its logical and eternal conclusion. Even though David had sinned grievously with adultery and murder, and from a behavior standpoint wasn't any better than Saul, Saul died in all of his unrighteousness, separated from God. Yet here we find these words of divine mercy and grace spoken through **Natan** to David:

(2Sa 12:13 CJB)

¹³ *David said to Natan, "I have sinned against ADONAI." Natan said to David, "ADONAI also has taken away your sin. You will not die.*

What separated David from Saul and brought such a different end result? Trust. Saul believed in Yehoveh, but he didn't trust in Him. There is an overwhelmingly crucial difference between those two conditions: belief is NOT trust.

(James 2:18-19 CJB)

¹⁸ *But someone will say that you have faith and I have actions. Show me this faith of*

yours without the actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions!

19 You believe that "God is one"? Good for you! The demons believe it too- the thought makes them shudder with fear!

Belief in God is even for demons. Belief in God is a natural condition for any human or spirit being. Saul had belief. But trust is another issue and it is trust not belief that saves one from destruction.

It is the Psalms that highlights David's **trust** in God, not simply an acknowledgement of God's existence and authority. So as we get ready to move forward be aware: asking yourself or asking another person if they "believe in God" is a hollow, meaningless question. Mere belief in God or disbelief in God brings the same results (eternal death) because trust and not belief is the redemptive issue. This is not a matter of semantics. Saul of course believed in the God of Israel. David also believed in the God of Israel. Saul and David both committed the worst of sins. The only thing that separated the two was David's **trust** in the God of Israel, which opened the door for God's grace upon him. Grace is ONLY available to those who trust. The only difference between a saved Believer and an unsaved person is trust; because we are very likely to have similar behavior (or at least we did at one point).

Let's re-read the first half of 2nd Samuel chapter 12.

RE-READ 2ND SAMUEL 12:1 – 14

As chapter 11 concluded, it seemed as though King David was above the Law. Adultery, murder: who, exactly, had authority to punish the King of Israel according to the Torah Law for these capital offenses? Civilly and practically speaking, the only way this tended to happen to a king was through insurrection and revolution (far too drastic to even consider, let alone be successful). But no one was in the mood for that because 1) Israel was in a protracted and difficult war with a number of enemies, and 2) most of Israel preferred David regardless of his questionable and even immoral behavior. But that doesn't mean that justice is averted. Yehoveh is king over the king. Sin will be paid for. So while we see that the civil code of justice as prescribed in the Law of Moses (the part that is carried out by human authority) won't be applied to David, divine justice will be (because that's the part that is carried out by the Lord

Himself).

Natan is sent by Yehoveh to confront David. But **Natan** does NOT present his story as having come from the Lord as part of an oracle. In other words, Nathan doesn't say, "King, I have a message from God for you". Rather the king grants an audience to Nathan who has something personal that he wants to say to David. So the Prophet presents David with the case of a wealthy and greedy man who takes advantage of a poor and powerless man. It is presented NOT as a parable or a story with a punch line but rather as a real and actual matter for the King to judge and then to administer justice (something kings do regularly as part of their position).

The story is essentially that a wealthy man who had vast flocks and herds of animals decides to entertain a guest who has suddenly shown up, and part of the entertainment of course involves a festive meal. A poor man who was under the control of the rich man had a single lamb as a possession. So not wanting to take from his own limitless supply of lambs, in a heartless act the rich man takes the poor man's one and only lamb and has it cooked as the meal.

Naturally, just as all of us who are reading the story do, David impulsively sees the wrong in such a terrible thing and says that the rich man should die for his over-the-top callousness and harm done to the poor man, and that the rich man should provide restitution that is 400% greater than what he took.

Then Nathan springs the trap: "You are that man", he says to David.

Only beginning in verse 8 does Nathan cease speaking to David from his own heart in his own words and begin to recite God's oracle to David (as a Prophet typically does).

Sheep were often pets in that era, in the same way that dogs and cats are in our Western culture. So this story is not about the poor man's supply of meat being taken from him. Rather this is a man (and his family) who has a great emotional attachment to the lamb the same way one would to their beloved family pet. Now as we work our way through this story that is meant

to be an analogy to what David did to **Uriyah**, we have to be careful not to make the comparisons too technically literal at every detail. Even so, there are some choices of words used that help to make the connection in an unmistakable way; and one of these is in identifying the poor man's lamb as a "small ewe"; in Hebrew a **kibсах qatan**. **Kibсах** means ewe-lamb, a female sheep. **Qatan** means little in the sense of "small because it is young" (like we would say a "little child" to get across that this was not an adolescent but a child that was somewhat younger than that). The idea is to compare this young lamb to Bathsheba, and thus the tradition is that Bathsheba was not a fully mature woman but rather a younger girl (perhaps 16 or 17 years old). This is further validated when there is no mention in the Scriptures of Bathsheba having any children; so she and **Uriyah** were likely not married very long (a year or two at most).

The rich man's large herds of cattle and sheep are illustrative of David's enormous harem. The idea being that David had so many wives and concubines that it is incredulous to think that he was sexually bored by having relations with the same women because the variety was nearly unlimited. And therefore to be covetous of the poor man with his one single lamb that meant everything to him is all the more wicked.

That the rich man should die was NOT a judicial order by David to go and fetch the imaginary rich man and execute him. The Law does not allow a man to be executed because he stole another man's sheep and ate it. Rather it was just an expression of shock and anger that anyone could be as pitiless as to do such a thing, he doesn't deserve to live.

The real issue here is not stealing. And the focal point is not the ewe-lamb. It is all about the poor man who was victimized, and it is a story of the abuse of power of the powerful over the powerless.

Look at verse 4. The Talmud has a very interesting and profound take on this passage that we'd do well to note. The Sages explain that the person who comes to visit the rich man as his "guest" is referred to 3 times, and each time by a different connotation. And the Sages say that this guest or wayfarer represents the **yetzer hara**, the evil inclination. Follow me please, because this is fascinating.

First this guest is called a traveler or wayfarer (a **helek**), then a visitor (an **arach**), and then finally a man (an **ish**). Remember now that the term **ish**, man, also has the sense of "master of his domain". In the Hebrew male dominated culture men were always in charge of their

household; and men were seen as the vehicle to carry out God's instruction in Genesis to have dominion over the earth. So when studying the Bible we must not think of man and woman (***ish and ishah***) strictly in the sense of male and female. For the modern Westerner male and female are rather sterile scientific and medical terminology that doesn't carry any more than basic biological characteristics in its intent. But inherent in the Hebrew words ***ish*** and ***ishah*** are the understood foundational God-ordained roles that each are to play throughout their lives.

So the guest comes as a ***helek***, after staying for awhile become an ***arach***, and then finally assumes the role of an ***ish***. The Rabbis say that at first the evil inclination arrives as a wayfarer (***helek***) who says he will not stay long or exert any long term influence on his gracious host. Once it has succeeded in causing the person to sin it becomes a visitor (an ***arach***) who stays for awhile causing trouble. Eventually it stays long enough to become the master (the ***ish***) and the evil inclination completely dominates his host. And thus is the insidious nature and method of our evil inclinations, our ***yetzer hara***. I readily confess that I don't know for certain if this was indeed an underlying intent of this Scripture passage or merely great lesson that comes from allegory. But at the least it is certainly an apropos description of how evil comes into us stealthily; then we "invite" it to stay because we like it and so it grows until it takes over and controls every aspect of our lives (an unintended consequence).

So, to be clear, the guest is the evil inclination that took over David, the little ewe is Bathsheba, and David is the rich man while Uriyah is the poor and powerless man. Notice that nowhere in the story does the rich man kill the poor man; so that's why we must not go overboard in trying to make every last aspect of this story fit the precise series of events in the David/Bathsheba/Uriyah story. And since this was a personal story told to David by ***Natan*** (not a direct oracle from God) no doubt if the Prophet had concocted a story that had the powerful man killing the powerless man, David would have instantly figured out that this was about him and so the end result of David's self-incrimination and eventual admission of guilt wouldn't have happened. Nathan cleverly led David into it.

Verse 5 has David ordering restitution to the poor man of 4 times the value of the lamb (in other words, the rich man was to give the poor man 4 lambs in return for the 1 he took from him). The number 4 is not an arbitrary choice.

^{CJB} **Exodus 21:37** *"If someone steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters or sells it, he is to pay five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.*

Once David has been allowed to finish his rant and pronounce the awfulness of anyone who would do such a thing (that man should die!), and he orders the penalty (a 400% restitution), Nathan springs the trap. "You are that man". Suddenly David's world has been rocked. I can only imagine the fallen look on his face and the wheels that began to turn in his mind. It was always going to take a lot to get this powerful man's attention. He had the world by a string; many beautiful women and scores of children. Rich, powerful, living in a glorious capital city. He was feared and respected; the first King in history to unite the 12 tribes of Jacob and reign over a sovereign nation of Israel. Sometimes the Lord has to take extreme measures to rescue those He loves.

Verse 8 begins God's verdict upon David and the administration of His divine justice since there is no way that David would ever submit to the standard civil and human justice called for by the Torah Law.

The first thing God does is to remind the King of Israel that indeed he does have a master, even though he has been behaving as though he were untouchable. It is Yehoveh, God of Israel, who has anointed David as king, not the people. It is Yehoveh who rescued David from the previous king, Saul, not David's cleverness. It is Yehoveh who gave David his master's house and gave him Judah and Israel to rule over.

Let's dissect that for a moment. The master that is being referred to here is King Saul (David's former master). And his master's wives are referring to Saul's harem. Interestingly, there is no record of Saul having established a substantial collection of wives and concubines. However we must remember that there was an interim king of sorts who ruled in between Saul and David: **Ishbosheth**. Very likely **Ishbosheth** expanded whatever limited harem he inherited from his father Saul and quickly expanded it (since he had practically nothing else to do anyway as Abner really ran the Kingdom and **Ishbosheth** was a puppet). So from a practical standpoint David inherited a harem that was started by Saul but had been passed down to Saul's son **Ishbosheth** and multiplied before David received it.

Saying that David had received his master's (Saul's) household is probably referring to Michal, Saul's daughter. It is certainly not referring to a dwelling place and David didn't inherit Saul's family. And we also know that Saul's house can't be referring to Saul's estate because that was given to Mephibosheth after it had been run by a gentile overseer (**Tziva**) for a number of years.

And says the Lord, if this was not enough He would have given him more. What is the “this” that is being referred to (“this” wasn’t enough)? Everything in general, or was it something in specific? The Rabbis say (and I fully agree) that since this entire episode revolves around the story of the rich man with all the flocks and herds (the big harem), then the “this” was referring to the size of David’s flocks (his harem and family....or better, the number of women needed to gratify him). No matter, the essence of the statement is that David had been richly blessed by God’s blessing and if more blessings were needed God would be the source. So for David to go “help himself” to another man’s wife equated to contempt for the Lord’s commands and for the Lord’s gifts to him.

Before we discuss that contempt, please notice once again how the kingdom that David rules over is said to consist of Judah and Israel. I probably overdue it a tad in emphasizing it at every opportunity, but the reason is that understanding this reality is the key to understanding some basic doctrinal issues of Christianity and Judaism (and especially end times issues) that have ventured far off of the reservation because the significance of Judah and Israel as separate entities is set aside.

Please notice something else that kind of pops up out of nowhere and frankly ought to shake us to our core. David wasn’t satisfied with the gifts and blessings that the Lord had provided especially for him; he wanted what another man had (even a much poorer man). This problem may be one of the most prevalent and troublesome issues that individuals who form the community of Christ deal with. Who among us has not belittled the spiritual gifts that we have received (even in a kind of insincere humility), and instead coveted the spiritual gifts that the Lord had given to someone else. God gave you the important gift of being a gracious host but you prefer to be a teacher. God gave you the important gift of administration, but you want to possess the gift of evangelism that your friend has. The Lord has given you the marvelous gift of exhortation, to support and comfort those with other gifts; but you want the gift of giving (meaning you want more money so that you can enjoy giving more). No matter what gift we are given, we seem to either want more or want another gift that we see someone else has received. That is sin. In fact this passage calls it outright contempt for God (scary). This contempt (perhaps even rejection) of the gifts that God has graciously provided to you is (from a spiritual standpoint) essentially sin that has sprung from the same well as David’s wicked desire to possess another man’s wife (and was willing to do anything to get her). Something to ponder.

Verse 9 has Adonai saying to David that David murdered Uriyah. The CJB has it right in using the word murder instead of the more standard translation of killed. Killed is a somewhat neutral term that merely explains that you ended the life of some creature under some set of circumstances. But the Hebrew word used here is **harag** and (as it pertains to the death of a human being) it refers to killing that is intentional and not appropriate. And the Lord says that

David did the killing; the idea of course is that the one who orders the killing is equally guilty as the one who did the killing. Thus while David probably had put it out of his mind or rationalized it away that he did not personally apprehend blood-guilt for **Uriyah's** death (after all the enemy killed **Uriyah** in battle, David didn't lay a hand on him), the Lord imputes blood-guilt to David because David arranged it and intended it. It is probably just now that David is starting to realize that his destiny is Sheol due to his arrogance and criminal acts; and that there is no escaping it because 1) there is no sacrificial atonement for murder, and 2) the condition of his afterlife is at stake; and it is not decided by men, but by Yehoveh. David knew that he was an eternally dead man walking.

But now the other shoe drops. Verse 10 is the pronouncement of the first part of David's sentence. For his blood-guilt the sword will never leave David's house. Since **Uriyah** died by the sword, the Lord will reciprocate in like kind. Thus this part of the sentence is as payment and consequence for David's murder of **Uriyah**. This is an application of the principle that we learned a long time ago in Torah study called Lex Talionis; an eye for eye. Proportional punishment. Only the Lord can take this to a whole different level (a spiritual level) than can man.

Let's go back to when David pronounced the sentence that the rich man had to compensate the poor man by giving him 4 sheep in return for the 1 he stole from him. This exact punishment is going to be wrought upon David, in time, but at a supernatural level that David could never have imagined. As a fourfold retribution for Uriyah's death, four of David's children will die; Bathsheba's baby at God's hand, and Amnon, Absalom, and Adoniyah in violent deaths that the Lord essentially arranged through the hands of men.

In fact, even David's own callous words that he sent by messenger back to Joab upon getting the good news of Uriyah's death would be thrown back in his face. Recall that upon hearing that several Hebrew soldiers had to die in order for David to achieve Uriyah's death, David said that Joab shouldn't feel bad about it since "the sword devours in one way or another". Now this is applying to his own family; his treasured sons (even his firstborn) are dying violent deaths in almost willy-nilly fashion. Those soldiers who died just so David could have Uriyah eliminated had families who felt the devastation of those deaths; but there was some comfort because so far as they knew it was by means of an honorable death in battle for the sake of their people and their land. They had no idea that the whole thing had been contrived by their own king. But each time David lost a son he was all too aware of what was happening; his sons' death were the consequences (even years later) for David's total disregard for those Israelite soldiers whose lives he saw as having no value, and for taking Uriyah's life for no other reason than to steal the one thing of value that he had: his wife, Bathsheba.

We'll continue this next time.