David and Bathsheba

Bible Stories Anthology — 2 Samuel 11–12; Psalm 51

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

Thou Art the Man

He was the greatest king Israel ever had. He had killed Goliath, spared Saul twice when he could have killed him, brought the ark of God to Jerusalem, written psalms that believers still sing three thousand years later, and received from God a promise that his throne would last forever. God Himself called him **"a man after mine own heart"** (Acts 13:22).

And one spring evening, with his army away at war, he got up from an afternoon on his bed, walked out on his palace roof, and saw a woman bathing.

What followed is the most unflinching account of a good man's fall anywhere in literature. Adultery. A pregnancy. A cover-up that failed. A loyal soldier sent back to the front carrying his own death warrant. A murder dressed up as a casualty of war. And a year of silence, while David went on ruling, worshipping and pretending.

Then God sent a prophet with a story about a rich man and a poor man's lamb. David was outraged at the rich man — and the prophet looked at him and said four words in Hebrew, two in English: *Thou art the man.*

What David did next is why this story is in the Bible. He did not make excuses. He said, *I have sinned against the LORD.* And the prophet answered, *The LORD also hath put away thy sin.*

David was forgiven at once. The consequences followed him for the rest of his life. Both are true, and both are told.

The Setting

When. Some years into David's reign, about 1000–990 B.C. by the reckoning most often used. David was king over all Israel, ruling from Jerusalem, which he had captured and made his capital. He had defeated the Philistines and most of Israel's neighbours. God had just promised him an everlasting dynasty (2 Samuel 7). He was at the height of his power.

The war. The Ammonites, east of the Jordan, had insulted David's ambassadors and hired Syrian armies against Israel (2 Samuel 10). Now, in spring, Israel's army under Joab was besieging **Rabbah**, the Ammonite capital — the site of modern Amman, Jordan.

Where. Jerusalem. David's palace stood on the ridge of the City of David, the highest point of the old city, looking down over the houses around it. Its flat roof, like all roofs in the land, was a living space — cool in the evening, and with a view over the neighbourhood.

Who. Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam and the wife of **Uriah the Hittite**. Uriah was one of David's **"mighty men,"** his thirty-seven elite warriors (2 Samuel 23:39). The list also names an Eliam, **"the son of Ahithophel"** (23:34) — David's chief counsellor — and he was very likely Bathsheba's father. These were not strangers. They were David's own inner circle.

The administration. The **Mosaic Law**, which forbade adultery and murder on pain of death (Exodus 20:13-14; Leviticus 20:10).

The Story, Told Faithfully

When Kings Go Forth to Battle

> **2 Samuel 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.*

"At the time when kings go forth to battle." Spring, after the winter rains, when roads were passable and there was food in the fields for an army.

"But David tarried still at Jerusalem." The word *but* is the first warning. It was the time when kings went to war, and this king stayed home. The narrator does not say it was wrong for a king to send his general. He simply sets the two facts side by side: *kings go forth … David tarried*. As the library's study *Overcoming Temptation and Sin* notes, David's fall began when he was not where he was supposed to be.

Saw, Enquired, Took

> **2 Samuel 11:2** *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 eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed." In the heat of the Middle East, people rested in the afternoon. David got up in the late afternoon — idle, with his men at war.

"From the roof he saw a woman washing herself." Houses were built around open courtyards, and from the high roof of the palace David could see down into them. She was bathing, as the next verses

show, to complete the ritual purification the Law required after her monthly period (Leviticus 15:19-28). Scripture does not say she was on a roof or that she meant to be seen.

"He saw." Like Eve at the tree, like Achan among the spoils, like Samson at Timnath, it began with the eyes. **"Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"** (Matthew 5:28).

> **2 Samuel 11:3** *And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?*

"David sent and enquired." The second step. A look can be turned away from. David did not turn away; he asked who she was.

"Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" The servant's answer was a warning wrapped in a question. *She is married. Her father is Eliam. Her husband is one of your mighty men.* Every name was a reason to stop.

> **2 Samuel 11:4** *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 messengers, and took her." The verbs are all David's: *sent*, *took*, *lay*. Bathsheba's only verbs are that she **"came"** and **"returned"** — she was summoned by the king, and in that world a woman summoned by the king had little power to refuse. Scripture does not tell us what she felt or whether she was willing, and this series does not guess. What it does show is where it places the blame: when Nathan comes, his parable pictures her as an innocent lamb taken by a rich man, and every word of judgment falls on David.

"For she was purified from her uncleanness." This detail is placed here deliberately. Her bath had marked the end of her monthly impurity, which means she was not pregnant when David took her. The child that followed could only be David's.

The chain. The library's study *Overcoming Temptation and Sin* traces this same pattern in Eve, Achan and David: **see**, **desire**, **take**, **hide**. **"Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"** (James 1:14-15). In David's case the words are almost literal.

"I Am With Child"

> **2 Samuel 11:5** *And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.*

Three words in Hebrew: *harah anoki* — "pregnant am I." The first and only words from Bathsheba in the whole chapter. Under the Law, both the man and the woman taken in adultery were to die (Leviticus 20:10). Her husband was away at war. Everyone would know.

The Cover-Up

> **2 Samuel 11:6** *And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David.*
>
> **2 Samuel 11:7** *And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered.*

> **2 Samuel 11:8** *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.*

"Send me Uriah." David's first plan: bring Uriah home, send him to his wife, and let everyone assume the child was his.

"David demanded of him how Joab did." A show of interest in the war — a pretext for the visit.

"Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet." Washing the feet after a journey was what a man did when he came home to rest. It was also, as Uriah's answer shows, a polite way of saying *go home and sleep with your wife.*

"A mess of meat from the king." A gift of food from the king's table — a present, and a push.

> **2 Samuel 11:9** *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.*
>
> **2 Samuel 11:10** *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?*
>
> **2 Samuel 11:11** *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, abide in tents." The ark of the covenant was with the army in the field. Uriah — a Hittite, a foreigner by birth — would not enjoy home comforts while God's ark and his comrades were camped in the open. Soldiers on campaign were expected to keep themselves from their wives (compare 1 Samuel 21:4-5). Uriah kept the rule.

"As thou livest … I will not do this thing." Uriah swore by the king's own life. The contrast is devastating. The foreign soldier was faithful to God, to the army and to his king. The king of Israel had betrayed all three. *I will not do this thing* — the very thing David had done.

> **2 Samuel 11:12** *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.*
>
> **2 Samuel 11:13** *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.*

"He made him drunk." David's second plan. If Uriah would not go home sober, perhaps he would go home drunk. **"But went not down to his house."** Uriah drunk was more faithful than David sober.

A Letter Carried by the Dead Man

> **2 Samuel 11:14** *And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.*
>
> **2 Samuel 11:15** *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.*

“Sent it by the hand of Uriah.” David’s third plan, and the darkest thing he ever did. He trusted Uriah’s loyalty so completely that he gave him his own death warrant to carry — sealed, and certain not to be opened.

“That he may be smitten, and die.” The man who had once refused to lift his hand against Saul, **“the LORD’s anointed”** (1 Samuel 24:6), now ordered the death of one of his own faithful men.

> **2 Samuel 11:16** *And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were.*
>
> **2 Samuel 11:17** *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.*

“There fell some of the people of the servants of David.” Joab did not follow the order exactly — a man left alone would have looked like murder. He sent a group close to the wall. Others died with Uriah. David’s sin cost the lives of men who had nothing to do with it.

“Let Not This Thing Displease Thee”

> **2 Samuel 11:19** *And charged the messenger, saying, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king,*
>
> **2 Samuel 11:20** *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?*
>
> **2 Samuel 11:21** *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.*

Joab knew that going close to a city wall was a basic military blunder. So he coached the messenger: *if the king gets angry about the losses, just tell him Uriah is dead too.*

“Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth?” Joab referred to a famous lesson from military history. *Jerubbesheth* is Jerubbaal — Gideon — with the name of Baal replaced by *bosheth*, “shame,” as the later scribes often did. Gideon’s son Abimelech, who murdered his seventy brothers to become king, was killed when a woman dropped a millstone on his head from a tower (Judges 9:53). Joab’s choice of example is chilling: a king killed because of a woman, near a wall.

> **2 Samuel 11:25** *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.” *These things happen in war.* David shrugged off the death he had arranged.

“Let not this thing displease thee.” Literally, *let not this thing be evil in your eyes.* Hold on to that phrase.

> **2 Samuel 11:26** *And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband.*

> **2 Samuel 11:27** *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.*

"She mourned for her husband." Bathsheba grieved. The narrator calls her **"the wife of Uriah"** — not Bathsheba — reminding us whose wife she was.

"When the mourning was past." Mourning for a husband usually lasted seven days. As soon as it was over, David married her. To the people of Jerusalem it would look like a king kindly taking in a fallen soldier's widow — and the child born a little early would be his.

"But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." Literally, *but the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the LORD.* David had told Joab, *let not this thing be evil in your eyes.* The narrator answers him with the same words: it *was* evil — in the eyes that matter. This is one of the most deliberate pieces of wordplay in the Old Testament. David had fooled everyone except God.

A Year of Silence

The Bible does not say how long passed before God sent Nathan, but the child had been born by then (12:14), so it was many months — probably close to a year. David went on ruling, judging, worshipping. He wrote about that time later:

> **Psalm 32:3** *When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.*
> **Psalm 32:4** *For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.*

"When I kept silence." On the outside, all was well. Inside, David was being eaten away. Hidden sin does not stay hidden in the heart; it wastes the soul. **"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper"** (Proverbs 28:13).

The Poor Man's Lamb

> **2 Samuel 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.*
> **2 Samuel 12:2** *The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:*
> **2 Samuel 12:3** *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.*
> **2 Samuel 12:4** *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 the LORD sent Nathan." God did not leave David in his sin. He sent a prophet. This was grace, before a single word of judgment.

Nathan's courage. Nathan was the prophet who had brought David God's promise of an everlasting house (2 Samuel 7). Now he had to confront the most powerful man in the land, who had just shown he would kill to protect his secret. Nathan did not accuse. He told a story — a **parable**, a short story that sets one thing beside another so that the hearer judges himself before he knows it.

“One little ewe lamb … lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.” Every detail points to Uriah and Bathsheba: the poor man with one precious possession, the lamb that lay in his *bosom* — the same word used for a wife. And the rich man who had **“exceeding many flocks”** — David, who had several wives.

“Took the poor man’s lamb.” The same verb as 11:4: David *took* her.

> **2 Samuel 12:5** *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:*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:6** *And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.*

“David’s anger was greatly kindled.” The shepherd king was outraged at a man who would steal a poor man’s lamb. He could see the sin clearly — in someone else.

“Shall surely die … and he shall restore the lamb fourfold.” The Law required fourfold restitution for a stolen sheep (Exodus 22:1). David sentenced the man to death and fourfold repayment. He had just pronounced his own judgment.

“Thou Art the Man”

> **2 Samuel 12:7** *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;*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:8** *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.*

“Thou art the man.” In Hebrew, two words: *Attah ha-ish.* The trap closed.

“I anointed thee … I delivered thee … I gave thee … I gave thee … I would moreover have given.” God listed what He had done for David. The sin was not only against Uriah. It was ingratitude to the God who had given him everything, and who would have given more if David had only asked.

> **2 Samuel 12:9** *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.*

“To do evil in his sight.” The same phrase again: evil in the LORD’s eyes.

“Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword.” God named it murder. David had not held the sword, but God said, *you* killed him. The Ammonite sword was only David’s instrument.

> **2 Samuel 12:10** *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.*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:11** *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.*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:12** *For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.*

"The sword shall never depart from thine house." David had used the sword secretly; the sword would come into his own family openly. It did: his son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar and was murdered by her brother Absalom (2 Samuel 13); Absalom rebelled and was killed (2 Samuel 18); and another son, Adonijah, was executed after trying to seize the throne (1 Kings 2).

"I will take thy wives … and give them unto thy neighbour … in the sight of this sun." Fulfilled when Absalom, in open rebellion, pitched a tent **"upon the top of the house"** — the same palace roof — and took his father's concubines **"in the sight of all Israel"** (2 Samuel 16:22). As this series understands it, and as the library's study *God: Deliverer, Not Destroyer* sets out, "I will raise up evil … I will take" is the Hebrew idiom by which God is said to do what He *permits*: David's sin opened the door, and his own son walked through it. The measure matched the sin: done secretly on the roof, repaid openly on the roof.

"For thou didst it secretly." David thought he had covered it. **"Be sure your sin will find you out"** (Numbers 32:23).

"I Have Sinned Against the LORD"

> **2 Samuel 12:13** *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." In Hebrew, two words: *chata'ti la-YHWH.* Nathan's two words, *Attah ha-ish*, were answered by David's two words. No excuses, no blaming Bathsheba, no blaming Joab, no *but*. Saul, when confronted, had made excuses and blamed the people (1 Samuel 15:15, 20-21). David simply confessed.

"Against the LORD." David had sinned against Uriah, against Bathsheba, against his soldiers and his nation. But he saw that every sin is first a sin against God.

"The LORD also hath put away thy sin." Instantly. The Hebrew says God *caused it to pass over*, carried it away. There was no probation period, no penance first. The moment David confessed, God forgave.

"Thou shalt not die." Under the Law, both adultery and murder carried the death penalty, and David had sentenced himself to death moments before. God set the sentence aside. This is pure grace — mercy that the Law itself could not give.

The Child

> **2 Samuel 12:14** *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.*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:15** *And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.*

"Howbeit." *Nevertheless.* Forgiveness did not erase every consequence.

"Thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme." Here is the reason given. David was God's anointed king. His sin, once known, gave the enemies of God occasion to mock the LORD and His people: *this is what the God of Israel's king does.*

"The LORD struck the child." This is one of the hardest verses in the Old Testament, and it should not be passed over. As this series understands it, and consistently with the library's study *God: Deliverer, Not Destroyer*, the Hebrew regularly speaks of God *doing* what He *allows* in a world broken by sin, and this

death came as the consequence of David's sin, as Nathan had said. The other reading — that God directly took the child's life as a judgment on David — is held by many, and the text does not settle the matter in so many words. What the text does make plain is that the child suffered for no sin of his own, that the cause lay with David, and that David himself did not accuse God.

> **2 Samuel 12:16** *David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:17** *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.*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:18** *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?*

For seven days the king lay on the ground and prayed. On the seventh day the child died, and the servants were afraid to tell him.

> **2 Samuel 12:19** *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.*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:20** *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.*

"Came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped." The first thing David did after hearing the worst news of his life was to worship God. He did not turn away from God in bitterness. He went to Him.

> **2 Samuel 12:21** *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.*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:22** *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?*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:23** *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.*

"Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me?" David prayed because he knew God's heart was gracious. He had just experienced it.

"I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." David would one day join his son in death; the child would not come back to this life. As the library's study *Where Are the Dead Right Now?* sets out, the dead sleep in the grave until the resurrection, and David's own hope was the resurrection: **"I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness"** (Psalm 17:15). The child rests with his father, awaiting the day God raises the dead.

Solomon — "Beloved of the LORD"

> **2 Samuel 12:24** *And David comforted Bath-sheba 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.*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:25** *And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.*

“David comforted Bath-sheba his wife.” For the first time the narrator calls her by her own name and **“his wife.”** She too had lost a husband and a child. David comforted her.

“He called his name Solomon.” *Shelomoh*, from *shalom*, “peace.” After the sword and the death, a son named Peace.

“And the LORD loved him.” Of all David’s sons, God chose this one — the son of the woman whose marriage began in sin — to succeed David and build the temple.

“He called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.” God sent Nathan — the same prophet who had said *Thou art the man* — with a second name for the baby: *Jedidiah*, “beloved of the LORD.” The name *Jedidiah* shares its root with *David* (*dod*, “beloved”). It was God’s way of telling David that he and his house were still loved. Grace had the last word.

The chapter ends with Joab capturing Rabbah and inviting David to come and take the final victory in his own name, which he did (12:26-31). The treatment of the Ammonite captives in 12:31 is read by many modern translators as being put to forced labour with saws, picks and axes and in the brick-kilns, rather than being put to death by them; the Hebrew allows either.

Psalm 51

The title of Psalm 51 in the Hebrew Bible says it was written **“when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”** It is David’s own record of his repentance.

> **Psalm 51:1** *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*
> **Psalm 51:2** *Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*
> **Psalm 51:3** *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*
> **Psalm 51:4** *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

“According to thy lovingkindness.” *Chesed*, God’s covenant love. David did not appeal to his own record. He appealed to God’s character.

“Transgressions … iniquity … sin.” Three words for wrongdoing: *pesha’*, rebellion, stepping over the line; *’avon*, iniquity, twistedness; *chatta’ah*, sin, missing the mark. And three words for cleansing: **blot out**, **wash**, **cleanse**. This piling up of words is the figure **synonymia**: David used every word he had.

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.” David had sinned grievously against Uriah and Bathsheba. But he saw that all sin is, at bottom, rebellion against God. **“And done this evil in thy sight”** — the same phrase, *evil in thy eyes*. Paul quotes the rest of this verse in Romans 3:4 to show that God is always right when He judges.

> **Psalm 51:7** *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*
> **Psalm 51:10** *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*
> **Psalm 51:11** *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.*
> **Psalm 51:12** *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*

“Purge me with hyssop.” Hyssop, a small bushy plant, was used to sprinkle blood at the Passover (Exodus 12:22) and water in the cleansing rituals of the Law (Leviticus 14; Numbers 19). David asked God to do the cleansing Himself.

“Create in me a clean heart.” *Bara’* — the same verb as **“In the beginning God created”** (Genesis 1:1). David did not ask God to repair his old heart; he asked for a new creation.

“Take not thy holy spirit from me.” David had seen God’s spirit depart from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14). He feared the same.

“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.” David had not lost his salvation; he had lost the *joy* of it.

> **Psalm 51:16** *For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.*
>
> **Psalm 51:17** *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

“Thou desirest not sacrifice.” There was no sacrifice in the Law for deliberate adultery and murder. David could bring nothing but himself. **“A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”**

And Psalm 32 records the other side — what it felt like to be forgiven:

> **Psalm 32:1** *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*
>
> **Psalm 32:5** *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

“Whose sin is covered.” David had tried to cover his sin, and failed. When he uncovered it, God covered it.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

Bathsheba in the Messiah’s line. Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus Christ names her, without her name but with her history: **“David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias”** (Matthew 1:6). God did not hide the story; He wrote it into the family tree of the Messiah. The Messiah came through Solomon, the son God loved, born of a marriage that began in sin and was redeemed by grace. Luke’s genealogy traces Jesus through another son of David and Bathsheba, **Nathan** (Luke 3:31; 1 Chronicles 3:5) — perhaps, as many have suggested, named for the prophet who brought his father to repentance.

The Son of David who had no sin. David’s sin brought the sword into his house and death to an innocent child. Jesus Christ, the Son of David, was the innocent one who died for the guilty. **“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”** (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was crucified, raised, and ascended to God’s right hand, where He makes intercession for those who come to God by Him (Hebrews 7:25).

The King who never fell. Scripture’s verdict on David was that he **“did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD … save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite”** (1 Kings 15:5). Even the best king fell. Israel needed a King who would never fall, and God promised Him to David’s line.

To the Grace Administration

Righteousness without works. When Paul explains how God counts a person righteous by faith and not by works, the example he chooses is David — the adulterer and murderer, forgiven:

> **Romans 4:6** *Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,*
> **Romans 4:7** *Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*
> **Romans 4:8** *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*

If God could forgive David for this, there is no sin He cannot forgive. **"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"** (Romans 8:1).

Confession restores fellowship. A believer in the grace administration is a son of God by the new birth, and that sonship cannot be lost. But sin breaks fellowship, as David found in his year of silence. The way back is the same: **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9).

Godly sorrow. David's grief led him to God. **"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death"** (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Sowing and reaping. Forgiveness is immediate; consequences may remain. **"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"** (Galatians 6:7).

Restoring the fallen. God sent Nathan to restore David, not to destroy him. **"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"** (Galatians 6:1).

Guard the first step. David's fall began with idleness and a look. **"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"** (1 Corinthians 10:12). Believers are no longer slaves to sin, and God always provides a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The spirit is not taken. David prayed, *take not thy holy spirit from me.* Believers in this administration are **"sealed with that holy Spirit of promise"** (Ephesians 1:13); the gift is not withdrawn. What can be lost is the joy — and it can be restored.

To the Topic of Sin, Confession and Restoration

- **Sin usually begins where duty is neglected.**
- **See, desire, take, hide** — break the chain at the first link.
- **Cover-ups multiply sin:** adultery led to deceit, drunkenness and murder.
- **We see sin clearly in others and miss it in ourselves.**
- **God sends His word to bring us back.**
- **Confession without excuse** is met by immediate forgiveness.
- **Forgiveness is complete; consequences may remain.**
- **Grace has the last word** — Jedidiah, beloved of the LORD.

The Main Takeaway

When kings went to war, David stayed home; he saw Bathsheba, enquired, took her, and when she conceived he tried to cover it — bringing Uriah home, making him drunk, and finally sending him back with the letter that ordered his death — then married the widow, and "the thing that David had done displeased the LORD"; God sent Nathan with the parable of the poor man's lamb, David condemned the rich man, and Nathan said, "Thou art the man"; David answered, "I have sinned against the LORD," and was told at once, "The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" — forgiven completely, though the sword never left his house — and from that marriage God gave Solomon, "beloved of the LORD," through whom came the line of the Messiah, and David's confession became Paul's great example of the man "unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works."

- **Sin begins with a look** and grows by steps.
- **Hidden sin wastes the soul;** confession brings it into the light.
- **God sends His word** to restore the fallen.
- **Confession without excuse** receives immediate forgiveness.
- **Consequences may follow forgiven sin.**
- **No sin is beyond God's grace.**
- **God writes redemption into the Messiah's family tree.**

For Our Learning — The People

- **David.** King of Israel, "a man after [God's] own heart"; committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged Uriah's death; confessed, was forgiven, and wrote Psalms 51 and 32.
- **Bathsheba.** Daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah; taken by David, widowed, married to him; mother of the child who died, and of Solomon and Nathan; named in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.
- **Uriah the Hittite.** One of David's mighty men, a foreigner by birth, faithful to God, the army and the king; killed at Rabbah on David's order.
- **Joab.** David's nephew and commander, who carried out the order and covered it in his report.
- **Eliam.** Bathsheba's father; very likely the Eliam son of Ahithophel listed among David's mighty men.
- **Nathan the prophet.** Sent by God with the parable; declared both judgment and forgiveness; later gave Solomon the name Jedidiah.
- **The child.** Born to David and Bathsheba; died on the seventh day of his illness.
- **Solomon (Jedidiah).** Son of David and Bathsheba, "beloved of the LORD"; David's successor and the builder of the temple.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Spring as the season for war.**
- **The afternoon rest** in the heat of the day.
- **Flat roofs** as living space, overlooking courtyards.
- **Ritual purification** after a woman's monthly period (Leviticus 15).

- **Washing the feet** on coming home.
- **Gifts of food from the king's table.**
- **Soldiers on campaign keeping from their wives.**
- **Sealed letters** carried by royal messengers.
- **Siege warfare** and the danger of going near the wall.
- **Mourning periods** for the dead.
- **Parables** as a way prophets confronted kings.
- **Fourfold restitution** for a stolen sheep (Exodus 22:1).
- **Fasting and lying on the ground** in grief and prayer; washing and changing clothes to end mourning.
- **Hyssop** used in cleansing rituals.
- **Given names and names from God** (Solomon/Jedidiah).

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Idiom** — "wash thy feet" (11:8), go home and rest; "lay in his bosom" (12:3); "in the sight of this sun" (12:11), openly.
- **Paronomasia / repetition** — "let not this thing be evil in thine eyes" (11:25) answered by "the thing … was evil in the eyes of the LORD" (11:27).
- **Parable** — the rich man, the poor man and the ewe lamb (12:1-4).
- **Metaphor** — "the sword devoureth" (11:25); "the sword shall never depart from thine house" (12:10).
- **Idiom of permission** — "I will raise up evil against thee … I will take thy wives" (12:11); "the LORD struck the child" (12:15).
- **Erotesis (rhetorical question)** — "can I bring him back again?" (12:23).
- **Synonymia** — "transgressions … iniquity … sin"; "blot out … wash … cleanse" (Psalm 51:1-2).
- **Metaphor** — "whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7); "the bones which thou hast broken" (Psalm 51:8); "my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (Psalm 32:4).

What the Bible Actually Says

- **"David tarried still at Jerusalem"** at the time when kings went to war.
- **Bathsheba was bathing for ritual purification;** scripture does not say she was on a roof.
- **David "sent," "took," and "lay";** Nathan's parable places the guilt on David.
- **Uriah refused to go home because the ark and the army were in tents.**
- **David made Uriah drunk,** and then sent him back with his own death warrant.
- **Others died with Uriah.**
- **"The thing that David had done displeased [was evil in the eyes of] the LORD."**
- **David confessed without excuse;** Nathan declared him forgiven at once.

- **The sword never left David's house,** and Absalom took his concubines on the same roof.
- **David worshipped God when the child died.**
- **God named Solomon "Jedidiah," beloved of the LORD.**
- **Paul uses David as his example of righteousness "without works"** (Romans 4:6-8).

God's Will and Intent

- **God wants His people pure** in heart and eye.
- **God sees what men hide.**
- **God sends His word to bring sinners back,** not to destroy them.
- **God forgives completely** those who confess.
- **God allows consequences** so that sin is not taken lightly.
- **God's grace has the last word** — even in the Messiah's own family tree.
- **God was preparing the Son of David who never sinned,** Jesus Christ — crucified, raised, and ascended — through whom He counts righteous everyone who believes.