
The King's Severe Chastening

2 Samuel 12¹²

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In the context, we have seen David sinning against the Lord.

His lust has led him into adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his trusted military people. His lies tried to cover up the adultery and the pregnancy. Finally he plotted the murder of Uriah, her husband, in order to be able to marry her. Now the consequences come...

Months, and maybe a whole year, had gone by since David had covered up his adultery with Bathsheba by arranging the death of her husband Uriah. The son of that illicit union was rocking in his cradle. Some think that David may have felt comfortable within himself by this time – so at ease with his sins, perhaps, that he rarely spared them a thought. However, the Psalms do not reflect that. He had a bad conscience. It is difficult to imagine him not being aware in his soul that he had broken covenant with Yahweh and was sliding into deep inner turmoil. In Psalm 32:3–4 David remembers and records his experience during this time:

‘When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For night and day
your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.’

One author has put it this way:

Certainly, if David had any peace of mind, it was entirely self-deceit and an illusion. He was deeply bogged down in a practical spiritual deadness brought about by living in unrepented of sin, unreconciled to the Lord and therefore without that living awareness of union and communion with the Lord that is alone the fruit of a practical discipleship that does the will of the Lord from the deepest commitment of heart and mind. Accordingly, the king was in desperate need of recovery and restoration to the holiness of life to which he was called and committed, both by God and his own past confession. There is, as the saying goes, none so blind as those that will not see, and it is clear from the transition between chapters 11 and 12 that seeking forgiveness of God was not prominent in David's immediate plans. [Keddie, p.107-108]

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But God will not relent. If David will not repent with the powerful prodding of his conscience, then God will send a counselor, a preacher, a prophet. This man of God will be an instrument in the Lord's hands so David will see, repent and turn from his sin.

With His Conviction (v. 1–13)

Nathan's Prophetic Confrontation (v. 1–12)

The Lord sends Nathan the prophet to confront David regarding his sin.

The Penetrating Story (v. 1–6)

The prophet Nathan comes and tells a story.

¹ And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds, ³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.” ⁵ Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, ⁶ and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”

Nathan begins with opening window. The window is the story of how a rich farmer with many lambs takes the sole lamb of a poor farmer. He does so simply because he wants to entertain a visitor and is unwilling to take of his own sheep. So he takes the much loved and precious lamb of a lowly farmer.

David is furious. He is indignant at the injustice. He vows to execute the offender unless he pays back the poor farmer fourfold. He condemns the rich farmer for his callousness and heartless disregard for the poor man.

The Pointed Indictment (v. 7–9)

Nathan turns the window into a mirror.

⁷ Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. ⁸ And I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. ⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

As one author puts it, “With devastating simplicity, the sword of divine conviction transfixed the king as he reveled in the full flight of his righteous zeal against the

robber of the poor man's ewe lamb. "You are the man." Nathan declares that David is the rich farmer in the story.

Nathan indicts David for his great sins against the abundant goodness of God. God had elevated him to the kingship over Saul. God had provided him with wives. But he was not satisfied with God's provision for him.

Nathan indicts David for his attitudes that led to his sin. David has despised and disregarded the Word of God. Disbelieving and despising the Word always leads to disobedience.

The Painful Chastening (v. 10-12)

Nathan announces the painful chastening that will follow.

¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' ¹¹ Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'"

As chastening for David's sin, the Lord will bring terrible troubles into David's family. This turmoil will last throughout the rest of David's rule, even to the end of his life.

God will raise up those who will do evil deeds against David. This worked itself out as two of David's sons led rebellions against him.

God will allow David's wives to be taken sexually. What he did in secret with Bathsheba against Uriah, will be done against him in public. God will ensure that the reputation that David sought to protect is destroyed.

The chastening for David's sin involves others. Some of his family will sin against him. Some of his family will be sinned against. All because of David's sin.

David's Personal Confession (v. 13-14)

¹³ David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die."

David acknowledges his sin. Here we have the simple record of his confession. Psalm 51 and Psalm 32 go down deep into his grief and sorrow for his sin. There we see depth and power of a true work of the Spirit in the heart. When David confesses his sin, God forgives him. Nathan declares to him that the Lord has forgiven him. Though he deserves capital punishment (stoning) according to the Mosaic Law, God will not let him die for this sin.

However, David will not escape the chastening God will bring. What David did is evidence that he has disdained the Lord. David will not be subject to death over

his sin. The baby, however, will die. Now we must submit our sense of justice and fairness to God's. To many, this seems wrong. Why should the baby die? God deemed it to be the wise and best course. We may disagree, but we are to submit to the providences of God.

In His Chastening (v. 15–25)

With the Loss of a Child (v. 15–23)

David's chastening begins with the death of Bathsheba's first son

David's Agonizing Struggle (v. 15–19)

Nathan goes to his house and God comes to David's house.

¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house. And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. ¹⁶ David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. ¹⁷ And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. ¹⁸ On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm." ¹⁹ But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead."

The child that is born to them does not thrive and becomes sick. For seven days David fasts and prays, asking God to spare his son. He refuses all care and serving. His attendants become very worried about him.

But The first hard chastening from the loving Father falls. Seven days after his birth, the baby dies. The attendants are afraid to tell David. Their reasoning is entirely normal. Their expectations that he might do something terrible tells us how deep his travail in prayer and fasting was. David sees them anxiously whispering among themselves – and they confirm that the baby is dead.

David's Humble Submission (v. 20–23)

David's response is wholly unexpected but deeply spiritual.

²⁰ Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. ²¹ Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." ²² He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' ²³ But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

David submits to the chastening hand of God. After the baby's death, David breaks his fast, ceases his mourning, and worships God. This is a part of his repentance from his sin. He is earnest in his prayer that God will see fit to show further mercy. Since God chose not to, David is accepting the chastening and consequences for his sin.

His servants do not understand. They are thinking like the world. Why would their king weep, fast and pray that the child would live then simply get up, wash and call for food? Notice his answer. While the child lives, God may show His grace and allow the child to live. But now, David has God's answer. He testifies that one day he will join the baby in death, but the baby can never return to him.

Some would say this is evidence that infants are covered under grace. That is misreading and over-loading this text. It isn't the purpose of the text. It almost seems to be intentionally vague. David is probably referring to the grave, not paradise. Whether or not infants have been covered by Jesus' redemption is an open question in the Bible.

With the Gift of a Child (v. 24–25)

But there is mercy in the midst of chastening.

²⁴ Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him ²⁵ and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord.

Let us not forget that this is Bathsheba's child as well. She is grieved over his death. David comforts her probably with what we have seen in the context. Later Bathsheba gives birth to Solomon, whose name means "peace." The Lord, however, tells David that his name should be Jedidiah, meaning "beloved of the LORD."

Think of the mercy and grace here. The next king of Israel will be the son of David and Bathsheba...

With His Conquests (v. 26–31)

David returns to the battlefield where he belongs.

The Enemy's Final Defeat (v. 26-29)

²⁶ Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and took the royal city. ²⁷ And Joab sent messengers to David and said, "I have fought against Rabbah; moreover, I have taken the city of waters. ²⁸ Now then gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called by my name." ²⁹ So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah and fought against it and took it.

David now goes out in to the battlefield to finish what was begun. This is continuing the recording of David's decisive victories. Joab had launched a successful siege of the city. He is prepared to finish and take the city. But he calls for David to come. Joab

does not want the glory for himself, but for his king. David gathers up the rest of the army and joins the battle to bring about the fall of the city and the victory. And so, captures the Ammonite city of Rabbah,

The Enemy's Great Spoils (v. 30)

³⁰ And he took the crown of their king from his head. The weight of it was a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone, and it was placed on David's head. And he brought out the spoil of the city, a very great amount.

In a symbolic act of victory, David removes the massive gold crown from the head of the Ammonite king and places it his own head. He has vanquished them and now he is their king. David raids the city treasury and takes their wealth. Our narrator says that it was "a very great amount." Indeed.

The Enemy Set to Labor (v. 31)

³¹ And he brought out the people who were in it and set them to labor with saws and iron picks and iron axes and made them toil at the brick kilns. And thus he did to all the cities of the Ammonites. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

David enslaves the conquered Ammonites. The other nations have become vassals, voluntarily serving but with a certain amount of freedom. The Ammonites have been a continual threat to Israel. David knows this. And so he sets them to hard labor in his many and varied building projects.

Reflect and Respond

May God grant that we will not cover, but be quick to repent and confess our sins...

Psalm 51:1–4

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your
words
and blameless in your judgment.

God chastens His children – all of them. When we sin, we will be corrected and we may be chastened. We all must humble ourselves under God's mighty hand and accept the chastening He directs.

Thinking about chastening points us to **Hebrews 12:3–11**:

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

May our lives be all covered with that harvest of righteousness which Jesus Christ produces to the glory of God.