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Israel and Judah: 8. Bathsheba and Rabbah

by David Sielaff, April 2015

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Israel and Judah: 8

Bathsheba
and
Rabbah

King David and Israel's armies were victorious in several battles because "Yahweh saved David everywhere he went" (2 Samuel 8:6, 14; 1 Chronicles 18:6, 13). The Ammonites precipitated a war, although other, more powerful conspirators used them for their own purposes. A grand alliance of enemies formed to attack Israel on two occasions, God continued to give Israel the victory.^a The enemies were defeated and the Ammonites retreated to their capital of Rabbah (2 Samuel 10:6–14). Joab was sent to attack Rabbah. David stayed in Jerusalem and encountered Bathsheba.

Rabbah is a city located east of the Jordan River. In the time of David, Rabbah was the capital of the Ammonite kingdom. Today, Rabbah is known as Amman, the capital of the nation of Jordan. Israel's siege and assault on Rabbah began after the wars precipitated by the actions of the Ammonite king, Hanun, who ascended the throne of his father King Nahash. This attack upon Rabbah was retribution by Israel against the Ammonites conspiring to destroy Israel.

The siege of Rabbah began in late spring after the crops were harvested, about a year after the wars ended. The siege continued through the events of David's encounter with Bathsheba, a period of almost two full years. This means that Rabbah endured a long siege with a source of water and plenty of stored food. It is important to realize that siege battles can be costly to the attacker as well as to the defender. The defender brings all storable food into the granaries, denuding the countryside of all possible food for the enemy.

The besieging army must continuously have their supplies brought to them during the two years of the siege. Not all of Israel's army was besieging Rabbah. Only at the end was the full force of Israel's army brought forth to attack and capture Rabbah. Victory came for Israel only after the source of water for the city was captured. So, let us continue the story:

^a See the narrative of the war and battles in "[Israel and Judah: 7. Conspiracy and War](#)." This series of articles begins with the death of Saul and the enthronement of David as God's anointed king of Judah in "[Israel and Judah: 1. Saul and David](#)."

TEXT: *Israel Attacks Rabbah*

2 Samuel 11:1

¹ It came to be at the year's return, the season when kings march forth, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all of Israel. They brought ruin to the sons of Ammon and besieged on Rabbah, while David remained in Jerusalem.

1 Chronicles 20:1a

^{1a} It came to be at the season of the year's return, the season when kings march forth, that Joab led out the combat force of the host and brought ruin to the land of the sons of Ammon; he came and besieged Rabbah, while David remained in Jerusalem. [end text]

One must ask, in the first verse, what is meant by the season **“when kings march forth”**? This is the time after the crops are harvested in late spring. Only then could the people and the nation afford to gather their soldiers to fight battles.^b There were very few professional soldiers. David’s “mighty men” were probably close to being professionals, as was the bodyguard of every king, Israelite or gentile. Therefore, most armies had a core of professional military men, supported by a mass levy of occasional or part-time troops, mostly farmers, who were called to fight when needed. However, such troops cannot be kept from their fields too long or the economy would suffer.^c Boyd SeEVERS explains:

“Like other armies of the time, the Israelites probably campaigned between the spring and fall harvests, the two times when the men were most needed in the fields. The regular campaigning season began ‘in the spring at the time when kings go off to war’ (2 Samuel 11:1; cf. 1 Kings 20:26). At that point, one’s own harvest would have been done and the enemy harvest would be available to plunder. ... Armies would fight through the dry summer months and return before the fall harvest and the advent of winter rains that made travel difficult, if not impossible.”

• **Boyd SeEVERS, Warfare in the Old Testament**^d

The first verse of 2 Samuel chapter 11 says that **“all of Israel”** went with Joab to ruin Ammonite lands. It seems that once the siege began and the capital of Rabbah was surrounded (so that few within the city could escape), many Israelites went home.^e The professional soldiers stayed, as did enough levy troops to maintain the siege. They were likely paid from the plunder of the other Ammonite cities and towns.

So, at the season **“when kings march forth,”** David does the opposite: **“David remained in Jerusalem.”**

^b A near identical expression is used in 1 Kings 20:22, 26:

²² **“Then the prophet came close to Israel’s king and said to him, Go, reinforce yourself; realize and see what you should do; for at the return of the year the king of Syria will be coming up against you. ...**

²⁶ **It came to pass at the return of the year that Ben-hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek for the battle against Israel.”**

^c Israel’s troops were organized according to the tribal structure (1 Chronicles 27:1). All men twenty years and older (Numbers 1:2–3, 45, 26:2) were liable to fight, although Moses allowed exceptions. This force was mostly infantry. They were the levy troops and the professional military. **“The selfsame farmer who served in the ranks of the army was needed to produce the surplus yield to keep the war effort going. The longer he was kept under arms, the greater the danger of his private economic ruin and the collective influence on the economic health of the nation as a whole.”** Chaim Herzog and Mordechai Gichon, *Battles of the Bible* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1997), p. 111.

^d Boyd SeEVERS, *Warfare in the Old Testament: the Organization, Weapons, and Tactics of Near Eastern Armies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2013), p. 68. Most historians of ancient warfare note these same facts. Few armies marched and fought before the fall harvest or in the winter when food is scarce.

^e At the end of the siege, Joab asks King David to be present so Israel’s king can have the glory of capturing the city. David gathered all the troops (presumably from around Israel) to supplement the besieging army for the final assault. (2 Samuel 12:29).

The next portion of the account (about David and Bathsheba) only appears in Second Samuel, with no parallel account in First Chronicles. Like other serious problems in David's life, this one begins with a question. Again, it is likely that David already knew the answer to the question.

David was about to commit a multitude of sins which would affect his kingdom, his kingship, and the trust of his "mighty men." It would even affect the future succession and lives of his royal family and heirs. Repercussions for David's dynasty would last many generations, until Nebuchadnezzar ends the kingship of Judah. Nor would David's evil actions remain secret. All the facts would become public knowledge ... immediately.

TEXT: King David, Bathsheba, and Uriah

2 Samuel 11:2–13

² It was at eventide, and David arose from on his bed. When he walked about on the housetop of the royal palace, he saw from on the housetop a woman bathing. The woman was exceedingly good in appearance,
³ and David sent someone to inquire about the woman. He reported, "**Is this not Bathsheba daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite?**"

⁴ David sent messengers that he might take her; she came to him, and he lay with her — she had just hallowed herself from her uncleanness. Then she returned to her house.

⁵ When the woman became pregnant, she sent to tell David, saying, "**I am pregnant.**"

⁶ At this David sent word to Joab, saying, "**Send Uriah the Hittite to me.**" And Joab sent Uriah to David.

⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked him about Joab's well-being and the soldiers' well-being and about any accomplishment in the war.

⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "**Go down to your house and bathe your feet.**" So Uriah went forth from the royal palace, and a helping from the king's table was brought forth after him. ⁹ Yet Uriah lay down at the portal of the royal palace with all the other servants of his lord and did not go down to his house.

¹⁰ When they told David, saying, "**Uriah did not go down to his house,**" then David asked Uriah, "**Have you not come from a journey? For what reason did you not go down to your house?**" ¹¹ Uriah replied to David,

"The coffer^f and Israel and Judah are dwelling in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping on the face of the field. Then how can I enter my house to eat and to drink and to lie down with my wife? By your life and by the life of your soul, I shall assuredly not behave in this manner!"

¹² Then David said to Uriah, "**Stay in this place today also, and tomorrow I shall send you off.**" So Uriah remained in Jerusalem on that day, and on the morrow. ¹³ And David invited him that he might eat and drink in his presence; and he made him drunk. Yet in the evening, he went forth to lie down on his bedding among the other servants of his lord; and he did not go down to his house. [end text]

Verse 2. Was David waking from an afternoon nap after a long day ruling Israel? We do not know. We do know that David's palace was at the top of the City of David, just south of where David wanted to build the Temple, and where Solomon later built it. He looked upon the rooftops of the homes down the eastern slope of Mount Zion. On one of the rooftops below, he saw her bathing. "**She was exceedingly good in appearance.**" Most translations have it that she was "**very beautiful.**"

Verse 4. David sent "**messengers,**" plural, to solicit Bathsheba's appearance before him. This indicates that David did not hesitate to have his will with her. She did not resist the invitation, cooperating in the

^f "Coffer," means the Ark of the Covenant. Uriah's statement is unclear. Does Uriah mean that the ark was with Israel's army, or simply that the ark, like the army, both dwell in "booths" or tabernacles (tents)?

adultery. Bathing, “**she had just hallowed herself from her uncleanness,**” meaning she ritually cleansed herself after her menstrual period. This told the readers that the child to be born could not be Uriah’s.

Verse 5. After her encounter with David, she misses her next cycle. She is pregnant.

Verse 6. Uriah received a royal summons from his King!

Verses 8–10. Robert D. Bergen writes in his commentary on *1, 2 Samuel*:

“In an effort to appear generous and appreciative of Uriah’s efforts and information, David directed Uriah to ‘go down to your house and wash your feet’ (v. 8). David’s reference to foot-washing was a suggestion that he receive gracious domestic hospitality (cf. Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24) from his wife; implicitly it was an order to spend a night of marital intimacy with Bathsheba. To encourage the celebrative moment in the household, David sent ‘a gift’ — probably of food and wine — to Uriah’s residence. However, neither David’s directive nor his gift achieved their intended purpose, for Uriah ‘did not go down to his house’ (v. 9).”

• **Robert Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, p. 365**^g

Verse 10. David asks Uriah, why didn’t you go home? Would this question have seemed strange to Uriah? Or, would Uriah have seen this as his superior showing concern for his welfare?

Who Was Bathsheba?

Verse 3. She is identified according to her father’s lineage and as Uriah’s wife. The name “Bathsheba” means either “seventh daughter” or “daughter of an oath.” She is called by another term, “Bathshua,” in 1 Chronicles 3:5. It could mean “daughter of prosperity.”^h Occurring only once, this might not be a name but a description. In other words, perhaps Bathsheba was the daughter of a prosperous father, Eliam (2 Samuel 11:3).

Eliam was likely the same man who was one of David’s “**mighty men**” (*gibborim*), a commander of soldiers, “**Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite**” (2 Samuel 23:34). She was the wife of one of David’s “**mighty men.**” This would explain how she met Uriah, her father and Uriah were comrades in arms. During this time of many victories over wealthy enemies, successful military commanders would share in the plunder of enemy armies and cities.

The text makes no mention of Bathsheba having any children by Uriah, and we can only wonder if he was sterile. Her first child with David — her firstborn son — would die soon after its birth as part of God’s judgment against David.ⁱ There is no mention that the death is a judgment upon Bathsheba.

Who Was Uriah?

Uriah was a Hittite, a foreign soldier and perhaps a mercenary, one of King David’s “mighty men,” one of the first “Thirty.”

- 1 Chronicles 11:26, 41: “**These are the valiant masters of war [gibborim]: Asahel brother of Joab, Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem, ... Uriah the Hittite, Zabad son of Ahlai, ...**”

^g Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), p. 365.

^h The patriarch Judah married a Canaanite woman named Shua. Originally, the term “Bethshua” apparently meant “daughter of Shua,” referring to the daughter of Judah and Shua (from Genesis 38:2–5 and 1 Chronicles 2:3). Edward J. Bridge, “Bathsheba, Daughter of Ammiel,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2013, 2014).

ⁱ Bathsheba had four children from David who survived to adulthood, all born in Jerusalem. A list of the males born to David and Bathsheba are given in 1 Chronicles 3:5. This may indicate birth order, with Solomon being born last of the four sons. This is unlikely, however. Solomon is mentioned in Jesus’ genealogy of Matthew 1:6 (Bathsheba is referred to, but not named), while his brother Nathan is mentioned in Jesus’ genealogy in Luke 3:31.

- 2 Samuel 23:23, 39: **“These are the names of the masters of war [*gibborim*] of king David: ... Uriah the Hittite; thirty-seven in all.”**

Chaim Herzog explains the structure of Israel’s army under David and later Solomon:

“David’s regular army had two corps, the *gibborim* (‘mighty men’ of the King James Bible) and the foreign mercenaries. The *gibborim* comprised two regiments that were built around the nuclei of the first and second ‘Thirty’. The first ‘Thirty’ was the band of loyal followers and retainers that had formed around David in his exile, and each of them had proved his mettle by prodigies of valour, which served as the theme of tales and ballads sung all over Israel. The second ‘Thirty’ was a similar troop that had formed when David attained the crown of Judah.”

• *Herzog, Battles of the Bible, p. 112*

These men were professional soldiers; individually they were weapons specialists. Uriah was at the siege of Rabbah serving his king. He trusted David to promote his welfare, when possible, in return for Uriah’s professional military service. Instead, he was set up to be intentionally killed, which was murder. The proximity of Uriah’s house to David’s palace illustrated his importance in the social hierarchy of David’s administration.

David’s conspiracy against Uriah, his loyal subject and a ranking soldier, begins in verse 6. David hopes to cover his adultery by having Uriah sleep with his wife Bathsheba, so the child could be said to be Uriah’s child. Apparently, Uriah and Bathsheba were childless so Uriah would have been thrilled to have his wife pregnant. David’s ploy does not work. Uriah’s sense of honor does not allow him to go to his wife, although Uriah’s reasons are somewhat difficult for us to understand today.

Uriah says to his king, his trusted sovereign (verse 11): **“By your life and by the life of your soul, I shall assuredly not behave in this manner!”** Men were suffering in the field of battle, risking death daily, yet David the King was at his leisure at his palace with his own wives. Uriah says, without any apparent rebuke toward his king, “I shall take no comfort, not even the comfort of my own wife while my fellow soldiers are at risk.” He considered himself still on duty. He even cites loyalty to David as one of his reasons, in verse 11 above.

Uriah not only expects David to understand, he expects David to honor his commitment. What did Uriah do? The first night **“Uriah lay down at the portal of the royal palace with all the other servants.”** The second night, after David got him drunk, Uriah **“went forth to lie down on his bedding among the other servants of his lord.”** In both cases, Uriah placed himself to sleep to protect the king’s life, the same king who would plot his murder. One can only wonder how this struck David. He was likely shamed, but then shame must have turned to anger. Uriah acted with nobility, but David’s plan was thwarted by Uriah’s sense of honor. David took more drastic steps.

Had Uriah heard rumors about his wife and David? There is no indication from the text, or from Nathan’s later statements, that Uriah had any such thoughts. But, why did he not even greet his wife at their house? Did he speak or communicate with her at all while in Jerusalem? His apparent innocence accentuates David’s guilt. David takes pen in hand ...

TEXT: David’s Murderous Letter

2 Samuel 11:14–27

¹⁴ It came to be in the morning that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

¹⁵ He wrote in the letter, saying, **“Get Uriah to the forefront, in face of unyielding fighting; then you all will turn back from behind him, so that he will be smitten and will die.”**

¹⁶ So it was when Joab kept guard over the city that he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew that there were men of valor. ¹⁷ When the men of the city sallied forth and fought against Joab, then some of David’s servants among the soldiers fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died.

¹⁸ Joab sent word and told David all the details of the fighting. ¹⁹ He instructed the messenger, saying, “When you finish reporting to the king all the details of the fighting, ²⁰ then it may occur that the king’s fury flares up and he says to you,

‘For what reason did you come so close to the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? ²¹ Who smote Abimelech son of Jerub-besheth? Did not a woman fling on him the rider section of a millstone from on top of the wall at Thebez so that he died? Why did you come so close to the wall?’^j

[Joab continued] Then you must say, *‘Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite, he also died.’*”

²² So the messenger went off; he came and told David all that Joab had sent him to report.

²³ The messenger said to David, “**The men had the mastery over us and sallied forth against us into the open field. But we drove them back as far as the portal of the gateway. ²⁴ Then the shooters shot at your servants from on top of the wall, and some of the king’s servants died; moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite, he also died.”**

²⁵ David replied to the messenger, “**Thus shall you say to Joab, ‘Let not this matter be displeasing in your eyes, for the sword shall devour as this one just as that one. Intensify your fight against the city, and demolish it.’ So encourage him!**”

²⁶ When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband Uriah had died, she wailed over her spouse. ²⁷ After the period of mourning had passed, David sent and had her gathered to his palace; she became his wife and bore for him a son.

But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of Yahweh.

[end text]

Verse 14. Unknowingly, Uriah carries his own death warrant. Uriah’s situation in this narrative is truly tragic.

Verse 15. David knew that Uriah was a heroic warrior among several others, a true leader who led his men as he went into battle — from the front. He commanded Joab to abandon Uriah to the enemy. This was a betrayal of a member of David’s own military family, the band of brothers, who all fought with him, and were fighting for and risking death at Rabbah in David’s service.

Verse 16. It seems Joab did not have long to wait before combat began. He placed Uriah where he thought the battle for that day would be the most dangerous. The “**men of valor**” refers to the best Ammonite warriors.

Verse 17. The Israelites did not attack the well-defended walls of Rabbah. The Ammonite troops surged out of one of the city gates and attacked Israelite troops where Uriah was. They intended to gain an advantage or hopefully even break the siege of their city. The narrator tells us that Uriah and his men were exposed, took casualties, and died. Uriah was among the dead.

Verses 18–22. Joab was worried that he would be blamed for Uriah’s death and would receive a reprimand. Along with notice to David about Uriah’s death, he gave a self-serving explanation on how in battle, bad things happen that cannot be foreseen. He is trying to give David a “story” to tell the court and the people.

Verse 23. The messenger explained to David the events of combat that day, which generally fit the narration of verses 16 and 17, but with additional details. He describes a seesaw battle. The Ammonites rushed out of the city, were driven back to the city gate, and the Israelites likely tried to assault the gate. This can be done successfully when the defenders of the open gate are losing the fight, panic, and think they

^j Abimelech son of Jerub-besheth, is also known as Abimelech son of Jerubbaal. Jerubbaal was another name for the judge Gideon. Abimelech was his son. His full story is given in Judges chapter 9. Abimelech died as Joab said when a millstone was thrown down from a tower and severely injured him, cracking his skull (Judges 9:50–54). Like King Saul (1 Samuel 31:1–6), he asked his armor bearer to kill him, which was done.

might be left outside to be killed. So, the defenders rush inside with the attackers following close behind. If sufficient numbers of attackers can keep the gate open while more Israelite troops enter, the city can fall.

That scenario did not happen. The Israelite attack was halted by a shower of arrows from the city walls and above the gate. It was at that time Uriah was killed, likely leading the assault. The messenger leaves out any information about troops being pulled back from supporting Uriah's assault, so we do not know if that happened.

Verse 25. David sends an obscure, even a cryptic return message to Joab. He confirms that no one can be blamed for Uriah's death (meaning Joab will not be blamed), even though David himself was the cause. David thought it was "their little secret."

Verses 26 and 27. The only person who mourns Uriah's death is his wife Bathsheba. David does not mourn his loyal subject, his brother-in-arms, and member of his military family.

After News of Uriah's Death

Verses 26 and 27. Bathsheba is no longer referred to by name, but simply as "Uriah's wife." This is to point out that death ended her marriage and she was free to marry David. She "**wailed**" (lamented) about his death, as was the custom. It is doubtful the body was preserved. It was likely buried near Rabbah. There is no indication of a public display of mourning by David to honor a great warrior.

David married Bathsheba as soon as the period of mourning was completed. This continued David's attempt to cover her pregnancy. It also provided social protection for Bathsheba. She moved into the palace. As an adulteress alone in the world without a husband to protect her, in Israelite society she would have been in a difficult situation. As one of David's wives, her public status was increased as well as her safety. She had an even more powerful protector than Uriah, the King of Israel.

God knew David's heart, as per 1 Samuel 16:7 ("**Yahweh sees into the heart**"), and in this instance, YHWH was angry with David and with his actions.

TEXT: The Prophet Nathan Confronts David about his Sin

2 Samuel 12:1-6

¹ Then Yahweh sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said to him,

"There were two men in a certain city; one was rich and the other was destitute. ² It came to be that the rich man had very many flocks and herds. ³ Yet the destitute one had nothing at all save one small ewe lamb which he had bought. He tended it, and it grew up together with him and his children: it ate from his morsel and drank from his cup and nestled in his bosom; it was like a daughter to him.

⁴ **Then a wayfarer came to the rich man, and he spared taking some from his own flocks or from his herds to prepare for the traveler who had come to him; rather he took the ewe lamb of the destitute man and prepared it for the man who had come to him."**

⁵ So David's anger grew very hot against the man, and he said to Nathan, **"As Yahweh lives, the man who did this is a son of death! ⁶ As for the ewe lamb, he should repay sevenfold ^k for it inasmuch as he did this thing and because he did not take pity."** [end text]

Verse 3. The reference to the "lamb" eating from the poor man's table and nestling in his bosom when sleeping, "**like a daughter,**" is a not too subtle reference to David sleeping with Uriah's wife after intercourse. Yet David's anger prevented him from noticing the reference to himself and his evil acts.¹

^k The Hebrew has "fourfold." The Concordant Literal Version follows the Greek LXX which has "sevenfold."

¹ Bergen, *I, 2 Samuel*, p. 370.

King David's self-righteous anger is almost amusing as well as frightening, as we read about him entering the trap Nathan set for him. David thought he was clever. He thought he covered all contingencies. He thought he was getting away with adultery, and with the help of accomplices, betrayal, and murder. And, he was able to marry the woman he wanted, and he had a child on the way that was his.

Verse 5. As the king, and judge over God's people, and after hearing the evidence presented by Nathan, **"David's anger grew very hot."** He is feeling the same rage as God does, and David pronounces the death penalty upon the person who has done such great evil. This could have been God's judgment upon David.

TEXT: Nathan Pronounces God's Judgment on David

2 Samuel 12:7–15

⁷ Then Nathan said to David,

"YOU ARE THE MAN! Thus said Yahweh Elohim of Israel: It was I Who anointed you as king over Israel, and it was I Who rescued you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I also gave you ~~the daughter~~ [the Hebrew is "house," which makes more sense] of your lord, and the wives of your lord into your bosom." ^m I gave you the daughters of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would add for you as this way and as that way.

⁹ **For what reason have you despised the word of Yahweh by doing what is evil in His eyes? Uriah the Hittite have you smitten with the sword; you took his wife as your wife and had him killed by the sword of the sons of Ammon.**

¹⁰ **Therefore [1] the sword shall not withdraw from your house for the eon, inasmuch as you despised Me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to become your wife. ¹¹ Thus said Yahweh: Behold, [2] I am raising up over you evil from your own house; [3] I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your associate; and he will lie down with your wives before the eyes of this sun. ¹² [4] For you acted in secret, but I shall do this thing in front of all Israel and in front of the sun."**

¹³ Then David said to Nathan, **"I have sinned against Yahweh."**

Nathan replied to David,

"Now Yahweh, He has remitted your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Only because you made Yahweh's enemies spurn, yea spurn Him by this thing, surely [5] the son born to you, he shall die, yea die."

¹⁵ Nathan went to his house, and Yahweh struck the boy whom Uriah's wife had borne for David, and he became mortally ill. **[end text]**

Nathan lists God's gracious acts toward David,

1. YHWH anointed David king over Israel (verse 7),
2. He rescued David from the hands of Saul (verse 7),
3. He gave David all of Saul's property ("house" = property, verse 8),
4. He gave David all his wives, including Saul's daughter (verse 8).ⁿ

Verse 9. Yet David **"despised the word of Yahweh"** by doing two evils: (1) causing the death of Uriah and (2) taking Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, who God did not give to him. David cannot defend the evil he has

^m The same Hebrew word used in verse 3.

ⁿ Some mistakenly think that polygamy exists only because men are evil, yet here is a clear statement from God through Nathan that God gave David all of his "wives," plural, except Bathsheba. God even says (verse 8), I would have given you more wives if you had asked. But David wanted a wife that was not his, the wife of another.

done, he had no reason except lust, an unstated and illegitimate motive. YHWH's restatement of David's crimes showed his undeniable guilt.

Verse 10. God pronounces punishment. Most commentators think it is a four part punishment, but I think [4] below is overlooked as a separate punishment. Therefore, I set out the punishment in five parts.

God's Punishments for David

[1] David's descendants (not just those on the throne) will be under threat of the sword **"for the eon."**^o

[2] Evil shall strike at David from his own house, meaning his own family.

[3] David's own "wives" will be seized and sexually violated — in public.

[4] David's secret sins regarding his affair with Bathsheba will become public knowledge immediately.

[5] The son to be born (that very day) shall die.

Verse 13. God tells David that he will not die, yet the Law of Moses is clear about the penalty for adultery (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22).^p He is given a reprieve from death. He shall not die, but his punishment shall be severe.

Verse 14. His newborn son will die. David will live. Hoping to save his son, David takes action. Where there is life there is hope.

From here on, the first three judgments against David will be on his mind until the day he dies. He will not wait long until they begin. The fourth judgment happens immediately with Nathan's revelations on behalf of YHWH. The fifth judgment from YHWH begins as soon as Nathan departs.

TEXT: David's Appeal to God on Behalf of His Son

2 Samuel 12:16–25

¹⁶ So David appealed earnestly to the One, Elohim, on behalf of the lad; David also abstained for a fast; he went and lodged for the night lying on the earth.

¹⁷ Then the elders of his household arose beside him to raise him up from the earth; but neither would he get up nor have a repast of bread with them.

¹⁸ It was on the seventh day that the boy died. Yet David's servants were fearful to tell him that the boy was dead; for they said, **"Behold, when the boy was alive, we spoke to him, but he would not hearken to our voice. How then can we tell him that the boy is dead? He might do something vicious."**

¹⁹ When David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the boy was dead. So David asked his servants, **"Is the boy dead?"** And they replied, **"He is dead."**

²⁰ Now David arose from the earth; he bathed, rubbed himself with oil and changed his raiments. Then he entered the abode of Yahweh and prostrated himself in worship. When he came back to his palace and asked for bread, they set it before him and he ate.

²¹ His courtiers asked him, **"What is this thing you have done? You fasted and lamented for the sake of the boy while he was alive; but just as you hear the boy is dead, you arise and eat bread."**

^o It is not clear which eon is being referred to. It is likely referring to a period from David until the destruction of the kingdom of Judah during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

^p In 2 Samuel chapter 7 David thought YHWH was giving him a death sentence. That incident was the reason for David's composition of Psalm 30. See my article, "[The Tomb of David and Psalm 30](#)." David had that same fear that God would pronounce death upon him, but Nathan quickly allayed his fears. David will not die.

²² He replied,

“I fasted and lamented on behalf of the boy while he was alive because I thought, Who knows? Yahweh may be gracious to me and keep the boy alive. ²³ But now that he is dead, why then should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, yet he will not return to me.”

²⁴ Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba; he went to her and lay with her. When she bore a son, she called his name Solomon. As for Yahweh, He loved him; ²⁵ He [YHWH] sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet; so he called his name Jedidiah, for the sake of Yahweh. [end text]

Verse 16. By fasting and lying in the dirt, David is acting in ways usually associated with mourning. He did not mourn for Uriah who is dead, but he is mourning for his child who still lives. He understands the likely outcome of God’s sentence of death upon the child. David continues for 7 days pleading with God to spare the child. He likely took these actions in the tent, directly in front of the Ark of the Covenant where God is symbolically seated.

Verse 18. The baby dies seven days after birth. Robert Bergen notes:

“As on previous occasions (cf. 1 Sam 16:12–13; 2 Sam 7:4–17), when the Lord made a destiny-shaping pronouncement concerning David’s life, he conveyed it through a prophet. In this instance ‘the LORD sent Nathan to David’ (v. 1), apparently on the day that Bathsheba gave birth to the baby (cf. vv. 14, 18).”

• *Robert Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, p. 369*
(*underline emphasis mine*)

The child began his terminal 7-day illness immediately after Nathan left David’s presence.

Verse 24. David consoled Bathsheba, she who mourned her husband now mourns for her infant son. Still married and loved by David, Solomon was born 9 or 10 months later. She had three other sons besides Solomon. Bathsheba named him Solomon, which means “peace.”^q Nathan (as the agent of YHWH) called him Jedidiah which means “beloved of Yah” or “beloved of God.” This meant that God had forgiven David and this child would live.

Psalm 51 and David’s Repentance

Psalm 51 is a memorial to David’s repentance before God for his actions regarding Bathsheba and Uriah. David lost much in this episode. Everything that was done was by David’s controlling hand. He was the sole actor who made things happen. His guilt was obvious and known to all.

David had one thing in his favor. It separated him from his predecessor, King Saul. It separated him from most human beings. David repented to God in a heart-felt way that God accepted and respected. We know David’s thoughts about his repentance to God because we have them written down for us to read.

TEXT: David’s Prayer of Repentance

Psalm 51, A Davidic Psalm

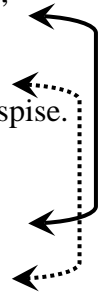
Permanent. When Nathan the prophet came to him after he had come to Bathsheba.

¹ Be gracious to me, O Elohim, according to Your benignity^r;
According to Your many compassions wipe out my transgressions.

² Rinse me abundantly from my depravity,
And from my sin cleanse me.

^q Some manuscripts read “he” named Solomon, presumably meaning David.

^r In Hebrew, *chesed*, “loving kindness.”

- ³ For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin is in front of me continually.
- ⁴ Against You, against You alone have I sinned,
And done what is evil in Your eyes,
So that You may be justified when You speak,
And be cleared when You judge.
- ⁵ Behold, I was with depravity when I was travailed in birth,
And in sin when my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Behold, You delight in truth even in the hidden parts,
And in the secret parts You cause me to know wisdom.
- ⁷ Expiate me [purge me] with the hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Rinse me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear elation and rejoicing;
Let the bones You have crushed exult.
- ⁹ Conceal Your face from my sins,
And all my depravities wipe out.
- ¹⁰ Create for me a clean heart, O Elohim,
And renew within me an established spirit.
- ¹¹ Do not fling me from Your presence,
And do not take Your holy spirit from me.
- ¹² Do restore to me the elation of Your salvation,
And stabilize me with a willing spirit.
- ¹³ Let me teach transgressors Your ways,
That sinners may return to You.
- ¹⁴ Rescue me from bloodguilt, O Elohim, the Elohim of my salvation,
That my tongue may be jubilant at Your righteousness.
- ¹⁵ O Yahweh, open my lips,
That my mouth may tell forth Your praise.
- ¹⁶ For You are not delighting in sacrifice, that I should give it;
An ascent offering You are not holding dear.
- ¹⁷ The sacrifices to Elohim are a broken spirit;
A broken and crushed heart, O Elohim, You shall not despise.
- ¹⁸ You shall build up the walls of Jerusalem.
- ¹⁹ Then You shall delight in righteous sacrifices,
ascent offering and wholly fumed offering;
Then young bulls shall be offered up on Your altar.
- 

[end text]

The introductory information before verse 1 is not part of the original biblical text. It was added later (as were all psalm titles) at a time unknown to scholars. That being said, Psalm 51 is a prayer by David to God. It was composed after David's son died.

Verse 2. David seeks and desires God to rinse his depravity from him and for God to cleanse him of his sins.

Verse 3. David says he lives with his sin continually, every moment.

Verse 4. David's sin is against God only, not against man. It is possible to sin against man. See

1 Samuel 2:25, where the concept of mediation is mentioned. (God later revealed that we do indeed have such a mediator, and only one, Christ Jesus, according to 1 Timothy 2:5). How can David say such a thing? What about Uriah? Was not David's sin against him also? Yes, it was. But David is focusing on God's righteous judgment.

Look at a comparison of 2 Samuel 12:9, and 13 with Psalm 51:4:

2 Samuel 12:9, 13	Psalm 51:4 (2x)
⁹ For what reason have you despised the word of Yahweh by <u>doing what is evil in His eyes?</u>	⁴ Against You [Elohim], against You alone have I sinned, And <u>done what is evil in Your eyes,</u>
¹³ Then David said to Nathan, <u>"I have sinned against Yahweh."</u>	⁴ <u>Against You</u> [Elohim], <u>against You alone have I sinned,</u> And done what is evil in Your eyes,

The apostle Paul quotes the second part of Psalm 51:4 in Romans 3:4:

Psalm 51:4	Romans 3:4
⁴ Against You, against You alone have I sinned, And done what is evil in Your eyes, <u>So that You may be justified when You speak,</u> And be <u>cleared when You judge.</u>	⁴ May it not be coming to that! Now let God be true, yet every man a liar, even as it is written: <u>"That so You should be justified in Your sayings,</u> And shalt <u>be conquering when Thou are being judged."</u>

Verse 5. This passage is paralleled in Psalm 58:3, **"From the womb, the wicked are estranged; From the belly, they stray who are speaking a lie."** There are other expressions of wickedness, for example Genesis 8:21, **"the bent of the human heart is evil from its youth."** Job spoke of himself as unclean (Job 14:4, 15:14, and 25:4).^s Verse 5 is not only David's condition, but it was also the condition of David's dead son. There had to be a death for a death. David was allowed to live, but his son received some of David's punishment. Everyone in David's time knew, and throughout history have known, about David's sin (as in Psalm 90:8).

Verse 8. It is unclear what David meant by crushed bones. Lying on the ground seven days mourning for your dying infant son could affect the bones. Or, perhaps his newborn son died from a bone condition.

Verse 10. David wants God to perform another creation — He wants God (Elohim) to "create" within him a new heart. The same Hebrew word *bara*, "create," is used here as in Genesis, in Isaiah 65:17 for a new heaven and earth, and in Isaiah 43:7 for a transformed nature of man.¹

Verse 14. Bloodguilt. It is a figure of speech for murder. David admits to it. He is also the indirect cause (through God's punishment) for the death of his first son born to Bathsheba. He asks God to somehow forgive him. David asks God to give him the words to express adequately his true sorrow for having sinned.

Verse 16–19. These verses do not express a rejection of the sacrificial worship according to the Law of Moses; rather it tells us about David's lack of proper attitude to give sacrifice at that time.^u

Verse 17. The proper sacrifice to God is **"a broken and crushed heart,"** a repentant heart. This will provide for David the clean heart and the renewed spirit he desires in verse 10, and his **"clean heart"** will allow

^s Michael Goulder, *The Prayers of David (Psalm 51–7)*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 102 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), p. 52.

¹ Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, p. 53.

^u Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, p. 66.

him to approach God for proper physical sacrifices indicated in verse 19.

Bathsheba is not mentioned in Psalm 51, but only in the introduction which gives the reader the occasion of its writing. She is not mentioned by name, nor is the incident alluded to in David's psalm. To sum up:

“... [Psalm] 51 is not a confession of sins unknown but presumed, to placate God's anger and to achieve a return to health. It is entirely taken up with a deep and real sense of sin. The speaker cannot get away from what he has done: it 'is ever before' him (v. 3), it obsesses him.”

• *Michael Goulder, The Prayers of David, p. 52*

God uses David in Psalm 51 to express our need for a clean heart, a heart that only Christ can provide for us. A new creation is necessary. God provides that for us through Christ. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, and Ephesians 2:10.

TEXT: *The Finale, Israel Conquers Rabbah*

2 Samuel 12:26–31

²⁶ Joab had been fighting against Rabbah of the sons of Ammon and had seized the royal city. ²⁷ So Joab sent messengers to David, saying,

“I have fought against Rabbah and have just seized the water city. ²⁸ Now gather together the rest of the soldiers, and encamp against the city proper. Seize it, lest I myself should seize the city and my name would be called over it.”

²⁹ So David gathered together all the soldiers and marched to Rabbah;

he fought against it and seized it.

³⁰ *He* took the crown of Milcom off its head; *its weight* was a talent of gold, with precious stones in it; and it was put on David's head. The amount of loot of the city that he brought forth was very great.

³¹ As for the people who were in it, he brought them forth and *consigned them* to raze it down with iron threshers and with *iron* severing instruments, *or assigned them to brickwork.*

And he did *this* to all the cities of the sons of Ammon. Then David and all the soldiers returned to Jerusalem.

1 Chronicles 20:1b–

^{1b} *Then Joab smote* Rabbah *and demolished it.*

² *David* took the crown of Milcom off its head, *and found it to be* a talent of gold *in weight*, with precious stones in it; and it was put on David's head. The amount of loot of the city that he brought forth was very great.

³ As for the people who were in it, he brought them forth and *set them to work* to raze it down with iron threshers and with severing instruments.

So David did to all the cities of the sons of Ammon. Then David and all the soldiers returned to Jerusalem. **[end text]**

Verse 27. Israel's forces have captured a portion of Rabbah containing the water supply. Only a citadel remained to be captured. Joab requested David's presence, so David could have the honors of victory.

“Rabbah of the sons of Ammon” was the full name of the city. This was where Og of Bashan had his bed (Deuteronomy 3:11). It lay just east of the territory assigned to the Israelite tribe of Gad (Joshua 13:24–25). Ammonite prisoners were used as forced labor to remove stone from stone, brick from brick with iron tools until every building in the city was razed to the ground.

Not only did David and Israel's army do this to Rabbah, but the same was done **“to all the cities of the Sons of Ammon.”** In other words, Israel practiced a “scorched earth” policy upon the Ammonite people.

Rabbah was the only Ammonite city to be named in Scripture. (The city was rebuilt and later prophecies refer to the city of Rabbah in Jeremiah 49:2–3; Ezekiel 21:20, 25:5; and Amos 1:14.)

This was similar to what happened later to Jerusalem in 70 AD when the Romans forced Jewish captives to remove every stone from another not only of the Temple, but also for the city of Jerusalem — just as Jesus prophesied:

“And as He draws near, perceiving the city, He laments over it, ...

for the days will be arriving on you, and your enemies will be casting up a rampart about you, and will be surrounding you, and will be pressing you everywhere, and will be leveling you and your children in you, and they will not be leaving a stone on a stone in you, because you knew not the era of your visitation.”

• **Luke 19:41, 43–44**

We will read later that when David fled from Absalom, he received aid from the Ammonites who were faithful vassals at that time (2 Samuel 17:27). They learned their lesson. They did not betray David to the usurper Absalom. Still later we have information that the city of Rabbah was rebuilt because prophecies are given about its future destruction by later prophets (Jeremiah 49:2–3; Ezekiel 25:5; Amos 1:14).

It says in the Concordant Literal Version that David **“took the crown of Milcom off its head.”** The King James Version and other translations render “Milcom” as **“of their king”** according to the Hebrew: **“he took the crown of their king from his head”** (2 Samuel 12:30). The actual Hebrew consonants in the text are *MLCM* or מלכּם. The usual spelling for “king” is *MLC* without the final *M* at the end, which could indicate a plural. If “king” or “kings” are the correct translation, then this means the king of Ammon was captured and his crown seized. That would have been Hanun, son of Nahash, who is named in 1 Chronicles 19:1–4.

So, what justifies the CLV using the term **“Milcom”** rather than **“of their king”**?^v The difference is vowel pointing which is a judgment call by the Jewish scribes who created the vowel systems. The Greek and Latin translations from the Hebrew have “Milcom” instead of “*melek*” in Hebrew.

Some translations render it **“off his head”** instead of **“off its head.”** Either could be correct, the crown was on the head of either the king or a pagan idol. It was fair game for plunder. Why did David not destroy this crown as other later kings of Judah would have done? The answer is simple. While David was king, idolatry was not a problem in Israel. Perhaps David did break up this crown and distribute its wealth as part of the riches dedicated for the Temple as mentioned in 2 Samuel 8:11–12 and 1 Chronicles 18:11.

Future Problems for David

David’s problems continue as Nathan prophesied in 2 Samuel 12:10: **“the sword shall not withdraw from your house for the eon.”** The most serious challenges David will face shall arise from within his own family. David’s decisions will be challenged, his right to rule will be questioned, and David’s throne will be threatened. The rebellion of David’s son Absalom will be presented next time. Until then, remember how the author of First Kings later sums up David’s reign:

“David did what was upright in the eyes of Yahweh, and he did not withdraw from anything that He had enjoined on him, all the days of his life, except, surely, in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.”

• **1 Kings 15:5**

David Sielaff, April 2015

^v Milcom is another name for the pagan god Moloch (alternatively spelled Molech). Children were burned alive as a human sacrifice to Milcom/Moloch (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2–5; 1 Kings 11:5, 7, 33; 2 Kings 23:10, 13; Jeremiah 32:35). Such was the legacy of practices of the children of **“righteous Lot”** (2 Peter 2:7). See Dr. Martin’s article [“Lingering Idolatry in the Temple of God”](#) where the Moloch/Molech/Milcom is identified with the anointed cherub of Ezekiel chapter 28.