

“Thoughts on King David: Shepherd, Hero, King, *Sinner*”  
A Dialogue Sermon for Three Readers  
2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois  
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A Dialogue Sermon written for Three Voices  
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M: Today we return to King David. The prophet Nathan pays David a visit and tells him the story we just read. It makes sense that we review David’s story found in the books of Samuel.

Samuel tells the story of the emergence of a nation-state called Israel. “The end of the book of Judges describes a state of political chaos and moral decadence that results in idolatry and barbarous behavior (Judges 17-21), a time when ‘there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes’ (Judges 17:6, ff). There is little reason to think that Israel could survive” this internal and external chaos.<sup>[1]</sup>

By the end of Second Samuel, however, Israel comes out standing on her own two feet socially and politically, a transformation marked by political centralization and the emergence of a more solid government.<sup>[2]</sup>

R/J: Yawn. *Yawn!*

M: Yes, this history may sound a little stale, but the human drama is juicy. The first part of the story involves the first King of Israel, Saul. And Saul proves to be both prelude and foil to David and *his* story.

Read the first and second books of Samuel for yourself. It reads a little like a daytime soap opera, and a little like a military history of a violent age. We see on these pages, says Walter Bruggemann, “a world in which love is possible and hatred goes crazy.”<sup>[3]</sup> Here’s a summary:

\* \* \*

R: We meet David in chapter sixteen of First Samuel. He’s a small, good-looking shepherd who leaves his father Jesse’s flocks at Bethlehem to visit his older brothers who stand with the Israelite army arrayed against the Philistine army. By the end of chapter seventeen, David is a hero having felled the might Philistine of Gath named Goliath.

J: King Saul set David over armies, and David won battles. King Saul is jealous of David, but this seems like a minor story-detail in light of David’s winning victory. That grit of jealousy will become a flesh-eating poison in the mind of Saul. David becomes dear friends with Saul’s son, Jonathan. “Jonathan loved David as his own soul” (I Sam. 18:1).

R: David and the increasingly jealous Saul have a falling out. Saul offers his daughter Michal in marriage to David so long as David kills more Philistines and brings back proof. The proof is 100 enemy *Foreskins!* (I Samuel 18:25ff).

J/R: *Saul is jealous of David. And the jealousy grows, and grows, and grows.*

J: Like a sickness.

R: Like an obsession.

J: Saul is jealous of David because David is beloved by the people and cannot lose against the Philistines (I Sam. 18:7-9).

R: Saul plots to kill David. Jonathan intervenes.

J: There is more war, more fighting, and for David, more victories.

R: Saul attacks David (I Samuel 19:8). David escapes.

J: At home, David escapes again; his wife Michal guides David out the window (v. 12).

R: David runs. Saul chases. Jonathan goes to bat for David. It doesn't work. David flees; priests help him. Saul kills the priests in a blood bath. More running. More cat and mouse. Abigail feeds David. David marries Abigail (25:41).

J: David also marries Ahinoam.

R: King Saul gave David's first wife, the wife he left behind when he fled, to another man (25:43).

J: David lived in the land of the Philistines for a year and four months (27:7), and plundered the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, taking away their sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels, and their clothing—but leaving neither man nor woman alive (27:8).

R: The Philistine army, of which David is now a part, (surprise!) has faced off again against Israel. King Saul, trembling with fear that God has left him, gets advice from a medium at Endor.

J: We're talking here of *necromancy, black magic, witchcraft*—This is in the Bible; I'm not making this stuff up!

R: The medium at Endor conjures the prophet Samuel from his grave who tells Saul that God will give the Israelites over to the hands of the Philistines.

J: Meanwhile, Achish, the King of Gath, dismisses David from the Philistine army because his generals suspect David won't be faithful in battle against his old friends the Israelites.

R: When David returns home to Ziklag, the city had been burned to the ground and the women and children have been taken hostage, including David's two wives (30:2).

J: David and six hundred men chase the kidnappers down, attack them from twilight until the evening of the next day (30:17), and recover all people and flocks taken from Ziklag.

R: While David restored Ziklag, Achish and the Philistines scattered the fleeing Israelites. Saul is surrounded and commits suicide; his sons, including David's dear friend Jonathan (*soul of my soul*), are slaughtered. Their naked bodies are nailed to a wall at Beth-shan.

J: That concludes First Samuel.

M: In Second Samuel, the story of David continues at this break-neck speed, in often grotesque detail. David had remained faithful to Saul, according to Saul the respect that a King appointed by God deserved. David is faithful to God and faithful to the King. David is described as a military genius, ruthless in battle.

David weeps over the death of King Saul and his friend Jonathan. David's lament is a foreshadowing of even greater lament to come; we'll talk about that story next week (Second Samuel 18/Absalom). David's grief is recorded beginning in verse 17 of chapter 1:

J/R/M: How the mighty have fallen! (v. 19b).

J: O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,  
who clothed you with crimson, in luxury,  
who put ornaments of gold on your apparel (v. 24).

R: I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;  
greatly beloved were you to me;  
your love to me was wonderful,  
passing the love of woman.

J/R/M: How the mighty have fallen!

M: David becomes king of the House of Judah at Hebron, though the houses of David and of the late-Saul wage war a long time (3:1). Executions and atrocities on one side are matched by executions and atrocities on the other. David soon becomes King of Israel. Since before David presented Goliath's head to Saul, we have been awaiting this coronation. "The religious and political futures of Israel now focus on David."<sup>[4]</sup> He's 30-years-old and will reign forty-and-one-half years, consolidating power in Jerusalem.

David achieves a measure of economic and political security (2 Sam. 5:11 ff) in Jerusalem. In a deft move involving both politics and piety, David brings the ark of God into Jerusalem, dancing before it with all his might. The prophet Nathan expresses God's favor of David, and David prays like he dances—with all his might. Battle strife continues with victories over Moabites, Ammonites, and Arameans.

M: And then—

R: And then David, while walking on his rooftop, spies the beautiful—

J/M: *OOoooh!*—

R: Bathsheba.

M: David wants Uriah's wife for his own, and what the king wants, the king gets.

R: He takes advantage of her. He gets her pregnant.

J: King David—the musician, the deft statesman, the brave leader, the fierce warrior—begins a calculated cover-up.

M: He tries to pin the pregnancy on her husband, his general, Uriah the Hittite. David pulls Uriah out of the battle line to inquire about the war. David tells Uriah to take a little vacation, to go home, to visit your wife, *wash your feet* (wink, wink). But as long as his fellow soldiers are in the field, as long as the battle still rages, Uriah refuses to partake in that kind of pleasure.

R: So, David shifts to plan B. David gets Uriah drunk in hopes that he'll do the tango with Bathsheba, thereby pinning the pregnancy on Uriah, not David.

J: But no. Uriah remains faithful to king and country, putting his duty as a soldier and leader of men first and foremost.

R: On another day, David would fully recognize, understand, and appreciate Uriah's honor.

J/R/M: But not today.

R: David needs to cover up an embarrassing pregnancy. He can marry Bathsheba—

J/R: —*if Uriah is dead!*

R: So . . . David sends Uriah back to the front, and arranges for Uriah to be killed in battle.

M: And he thinks all is well. He takes Bathsheba as his wife, she bears David's 8<sup>th</sup> (or 17<sup>th</sup>) child, depending how you count (See 1 & 2 Samuel, and I Chr. 3:6ff).

J/R: Then the prophet Nathan pays David a visit.

M: Nathan catches David in his horrible game. Nathan asks, "Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in God's sight? You have killed Uriah. You have taken his wife to be your wife." And Nathan conveys God's judgement, "Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you in your own house."

J: God is appalled at David's sin. David has brought shame upon his family, upon God's people, and upon God's law.

M: And David repents. David is said to have written Psalm 51 as a response to Nathan's visit. It's part of David's confession. Listen:

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

J: Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.

M: *I feel as if my body is filled with broken bones,  
that's how upset I am with myself.  
I feel that the wind has been knocked out of me!  
I have gone astray.  
I have lost sight of your purpose, O God.  
You require your children to walk in justice, fairness and love.  
I have chosen another walk instead.*

M/J/R: **Have mercy on me, O God.**

R: Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

M: As the book of Chronicles talks about David's life, the story of Bathsheba is glaringly absent. We should be glad that the book of Second Samuel includes it. It is important that people of faith know that mighty David not only was a man of godly accomplishments and power, but he was also a man with a giant ego, weakness, and deceit. We learn in the example of David that humankind is capable of good and evil.

J: How easy it is to stray off the path. You can be strolling on your rooftop one minute, and the next . . .

M: This "sordid and disillusioning tale" serves as a cautionary tale for all of us. We all can make mistakes. We all can make a bad situation worse. Honesty is the best answer, but not always the answer we choose.

J: There are other lessons, but this needs to be clear: This is a tale about a fallen hero. David isn't a lonely romantic who fell into the arms of abandoned army wife. Bathsheba didn't seduce David, or trick him, or cause this to happen. She's not the bad guy. Nope: David did it. A bible hero has done a bad thing.

M/J/R: "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

M: See how the mighty have fallen...

R: David repented. God forgave. (His and Bathsheba's first child died as David's punishment—which seems cold and unfair, but that's how the writer interpreted that tragic death, as God's punishment.)

J: And God still did good through this imperfect, all-too-human king. King David was still part of God's good plan.

M: We all are part of God's good plan. May God use our successes and failures for good in the world.

R: David and Bathsheba, after all, became the parents of Solomon.

J: And later down the familial line, there came another son.

J/R/M: His name was Jesus.

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R: His name was Jesus.

M: His name was Jesus.

J/R/M: Thanks be to God. AMEN.

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a                      26When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. 27When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

1But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD, and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. 2The rich man had very many flocks and herds; 3but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him.

4Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him."

5Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; 6he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

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 rescued you from the hand of Saul; 8 I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added 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.

10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. 11 Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within 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 very sun. 12 For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

13 David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

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<sup>[1]</sup> p. 957, Vol II, *New Interpreter's Bible*.

<sup>[2]</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>[3]</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Power, Providence, and Personality*, p 47-48, as quoted in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. II*, p 1123.

<sup>[4]</sup> p. 1246, *New Interpreter's Bible*, *ibid.*