

Chapter 2 – The Case of David's Turn

A Turning Away from God

One of the most famous episodes in the Bible is the adulterous affair between David and the wife of Uriah the Hittite (and those details are found in 2 Samuel, starting in 11:1 and continuing through 12:15).

You can put your Bible study method to the test by doing what you would normally do when you consider a passage. Set this book aside and get your Bible. Read 2 Samuel 11:1-12:15 and any other relevant verses, then jot down your thoughts about this passage of scripture.

Then consider the biblical evidence this case study presents and see if the evidence-based method modeled herein would help you to get better results.

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The Case of David's Turn

David

The prominence of David is made clear in a number of Bible verses. For example, the opening of the book of Matthew says, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1). In this verse David is singled out with Abraham as an ancestor in the line of Jesus.

When the prophet Samuel gave the following rebuke to king Saul, his words included a striking compliment regarding the man who would replace Saul (i.e., David) – "But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people" (1 Sa 13:14). In his address to the men of Israel in Acts 13, this compliment was cited by the apostle Paul when he linked David to Jesus:

"He [God] raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to *his* promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus" (Acts 13:22-23).

Those verses are where we are told about David being a man after God's own heart. In contrast 1 Kings 15:5 says, "David did *that which* was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." Those words might well bring to mind the time when David numbered the people and seventy thousand men died as a result (cf. 2 Sa 24:1-15, 1 Chr 21:1-14), or other episodes in his life. Still, unlike any other thing, "the matter of Uriah the Hittite" is singled out as the only time when David turned aside from something the LORD commanded him. This should arrest our attention. (It also teaches us that in the sight of the LORD "the matter of Uriah the Hittite" is different from all the other things David did that were less than ideal.)

David Takes Uriah's Wife

2 Samuel 11:1-5 is the only place where scripture records David's adulterous affair with the wife of Uriah the Hittite:

"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. And it came to pass in an evening, 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. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And *one* said, *Is* not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? 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. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I *am* with child."

Notice what occurred as David acted on his lustful thoughts. When "David sent and enquired after the woman" scripture notes this: "And *one* said, *Is* not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" A superficial look at those verses may lead some people to assume "enquired after the woman" means David asked about the identity of a beautiful stranger. This would, in turn, tend to lead one to see the statement about "the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite" as being nothing more than a report about the identity of the woman (in response to his inquiry).

Yet, it turns out there are details in scripture that indicate the words "*Is* not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite" may have been a rebuke to David, and not merely an answer to a question about the woman's identity. Even if those words were not a rebuke, the evidence will show scripture is not simply describing an adulterous union that followed a momentary lapse of judgment on the part of David. What he did was far, far worse.

David and Uriah

After "the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I *am* with child" (2 Sa 11:5), the plot thickened as David schemed to avoid having to deal with the awkward result of his affair with Uriah's wife. This is what happened next:

"And David sent to Joab, *saying*, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David. And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded *of him* how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered. 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. 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 Sa 11:6-9).

Since Uriah was on the battlefield, people would know he was not the father of the child his wife was carrying. Clearly, David's scheme was to have the battle-weary Uriah spend the night with Bathsheba before she began to show. Then everyone, Uriah included, would mistakenly assume Uriah was the father of the child. But things did not work out the way David planned, because Uriah's affinity for his brethren who were on the battlefield moved him more than his own desires for comfort or pleasure:

"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? 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" (2 Sa 11:10-11).

Uriah's character deterred him from seeking his own pleasure on that night, so David came up with another plan. David told Uriah to stay in Jerusalem one more night, in the hopes of weakening Uriah's resolve by getting him drunk:

"And David said to Uriah, Tarry here today also, and tomorrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow. And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk: and at evening he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house" (2 Sa 11:12-13).

When his scheming proved to be no match for Uriah's integrity, David turned to desperate measures. As you will see, it may not have been fear of public embarrassment that led David to do what he did next. It could be David actually feared what this man of character might do upon learning what David had done to his wife (while he had been busy risking his life in battle on behalf of David and the nation).

David's Betrayal

David betrayed Uriah when he chose to commit adultery with his wife. Yet something convinced David that rather than risk having to face Uriah in the future, he had better get rid of him once and for all. So David arranged for Uriah to be killed in a way that would make it seem as if Uriah was a casualty of war (and leave everyone, except himself and Joab, thinking Uriah simply died an unfortunate death):

"And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent *it* by the hand of Uriah. 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. And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men *were*. 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" (2 Sa 11:14-17).

Uriah's blood was not the only blood on David's hands, for scripture notes, "there fell *some* of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also" (2 Sa 11:17). When a messenger told David what had happened, he had a very nonchalant reaction to the loss of innocent life which he has caused: "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" (2 Sa 11:25).

Upon hearing about the soldiers who died as a result of his plan to get rid of Uriah, "the sword devoureth one as well as another" was David's response. Indeed, it is very sad, and very telling, that the one who was called the man after God's own heart could sink to such a low level.

David Does Uriah Dirty

The closing words of 2 Samuel 11 are as follows:

"And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. 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" (2 Sa 11:26-27).

David probably thought he had gotten away with his dastardly deeds. However, the LORD had other plans (as we will see when we consider the rebuke that was delivered to David by the prophet Nathan). Still, since David was in such a hurry to get rid of Uriah we ought to ask, Why? Should we assume fear of embarrassment over being caught in a garden-variety act of adultery was what moved David to arrange for the speedy demise of Uriah?

Given David's background, he must have known his directive to Joab would result in others being killed along with Uriah. The question is, would a fear of having his adultery exposed have been a sufficient motivation to drive David to kill Uriah and sacrifice the lives of others in the process? [Note: his plot also turned Joab into a co-conspirator in the deaths of all those men.] While David, certainly, did not want his adultery with Bathsheba to become public knowledge, it turns out his affair with Uriah's wife went far beyond the sin of adultery. He had something else to hide!

While scripture did say, "thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" (Ex 20:17), there are different ways to violate the law. Adultery is wrong. However, the problem is compounded when a man commits adultery with the wife of his cousin or his brother or his friend or a national hero, etc. Things like that lead people to view the offense differently, and David knew he had stepped over the line.

Uriah the **What**?

In 2 Samuel 11 and 12, Uriah is named 22 times. There we read of David's adulterous affair, David ordering the death of Uriah, and the LORD sending Nathan to rebuke David. Apart from those passages there are only three other Old Testament references to Uriah.

We looked at one of them earlier, 1 Kings 15:5 where David's actions in this matter are referred to in terms of David turning aside from the commandment of the LORD "in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."

The other two verses where "Uriah the Hittite" was named turn out to be critical to a fuller understanding of the depth David had sunk to in this affair. Those verses are 2 Samuel 23:39 and 1 Chronicles 11:41. Taken out of context those verses tell us little, since they merely have his name documented and included in a list of other names. On the other hand, his name takes on great significance when those verses are read in context, because they are found in passages which tell us about David's "mighty men" (cf. 2 Sa 23:8-39, 1 Chr 11:11-47). Both passages have some men being described as "more honorable," but merely to be included in the list would have set those men apart from all of the other men in Israel.

Out of the thousands who served in the armies of Israel and out of all the men who lived in Israel in those days, very few ended up having their names noted in scripture with such a praiseworthy designation. Of all the names in the list of David's "mighty men," one of them truly jumps off the page – "Uriah the Hittite" (2 Sa 23:39, 1 Chr 11:41).

Uriah the "mighty" is not an idea that is often taught. Nevertheless, it is biblical. The reputation of Uriah is further confirmed when the term "the valiant men of the armies" (1 Chr 11:26) is applied to a group of men that explicitly includes "Uriah the Hittite" (1 Chr 11:41).

Half the Facts Versus Have the Facts

If we fail to consider the whole counsel of God and base our thinking on David's affair with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah *only* on what we see in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, then our judgment of this episode will be based on incomplete data. This is because Uriah was not merely a soldier in the army; he was more like a war hero. Just as recipients of the Medal of Honor are highly esteemed by members of the U.S. military, the "mighty men" and "the valiant men of the armies" were probably held in high esteem by their fellow soldiers in Israel.

If we let scripture be a light to our path, then David's actions take on a wholly different quality. In our day, it would be akin to the difference between the Commander in Chief having an affair with the wife of a private in the army versus him sleeping with the wife of a war hero. David did not betray just anybody; he betrayed a man of renown.

Knowing who Uriah was starts to explain a lot of things. The palace was surely in the good part of town and Uriah lived within eyeshot of the king's palace with a relatively unobstructed view (cf. 2 Sa 11:2). One might expect to find a hero being rewarded for his efforts and this could be why Uriah ended up living so close to the king's palace.

The history of Uriah also reveals something else which casts a very dark cloud on the actions of David. David knew Uriah! Only a handful of men made the list of mighty men. So, David did not merely know of Uriah in the way one could be said to know a passing acquaintance. In addition, Uriah and Bathsheba lived in David's neighborhood. Since Uriah was one of the "mighty men," David may have feared for his life after he got Bathsheba pregnant. Also, if the army learned one of the "mighty men" had been stabbed-in-the-back by David, it would create a far more problematic situation than would have been posed by the pregnancy of a stranger's wife. David had one heck of a motive to get rid of this threat to his reputation, his reign, and/or his life.

Uriah: A Man of Character

Uriah was one of "the valiant men of the armies" (cf. 1 Chr 11:26 & 41), so this may explain his affinity for his fellow troops and his willingness to deny himself pleasures that were denied to them because they were in an ongoing battle. [Another possibility is his act of self-denial could have been out of respect for the words "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lv 19:18).] As David found out, even getting Uriah drunk was not enough to compromise Uriah's loyalty to his fellow warriors.

Uriah's place among the "mighty men" casts David's affair with Bathsheba in a different light, and there is a question that is raised by the details found in scripture. If David knew Uriah before he slept with Uriah's wife, then was he also aware of her prior to the night of their adulterous get together? Is there reason to think he had been lusting after Uriah's wife **before** he decided to take her on the fateful night?

"And it came to pass in an evening, 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" (2 Sa 11:2). Reading those words in isolation could give one the impression of David accidentally spying Uriah's wife and being so smitten with her beauty that it drove him to behave badly in a spur of the moment decision. But is this conclusion justified by the evidence? Not if one considers all the facts.

Why Did David Stay Behind?

David was a man of war. Yet, in telling us about David's affair with Uriah's wife scripture says, "at the time when kings go forth *to battle*," he did not do so. Instead, "David tarried still at Jerusalem" (2 Sa 11:1).

The subsequent verses go on to tell us how he became involved with Uriah's wife, and how her pregnancy ultimately led him to kill one of his own "mighty men." The question remains, why did he stay behind? It was "the time when kings go forth *to battle*," but David "tarried still at Jerusalem." Why did he choose to act un-kingly and send his men off to war while he stayed home?

What if David knew Uriah's wife? Then he also knew staying behind while Uriah and his fellow soldiers were away would provide a window of opportunity in which Bathsheba would be separated from Uriah for an extended period of time. This verse records the time when David decided he would make his move: "David sent and enquired after the woman. And *one* said, *Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?*" (2 Sa 11:3).

Was David asking about a female whom he innocently laid eyes on as she happened to be "washing herself?" Notice the response to his inquiry: "And *one* said, *Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?*" While this may seem to be a mere report of information, those words may actually have been a warning and/or a rebuke to David, given the people who are mentioned. Ask yourself, why was her marriage cited last? Was this detail less important than who her father was?

Who was Bathsheba?

Why was Eliam (Bathsheba's father) mentioned first? Was it because he was a man of renown, who would also have been known to David? Like Uriah, Eliam was one of David's "mighty men." 2 Samuel 23:8 begins this way, "These *be* the names of the mighty men whom David had," and in the middle of the list it says, "Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite" (2 Sa 23:34).

So David messed with the wife of one of his "mighty men" and defiled the daughter of another of his "mighty men" in the same act. But wait, there is even more. Eliam was "the son of Ahithophel." Ahithophel is mentioned 20 times in the KJV. Note two things about him:

- (A) he was "Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor" (2 Sa 15:12), and
- (B) "the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom" (2 Sa 16:23).

So, what does this tell us?

It tells us the object of David's lust was not only the wife of one of his "mighty men." Bathsheba was also the daughter of another of those "mighty men" and she was the granddaughter of "David's counsellor." Therefore, given all of those close relationships to David, the chances of the beautiful Bathsheba being unknown to David are slim indeed!

Bathsheba lived in David's neighborhood and she also moved in the same circles. This is why David's problem of a pregnant Bathsheba was exponentially more complex. He did not kill Uriah simply because he wanted to avoid a public relations problem or a soiled reputation from being labeled an adulterer. The woman David defiled had ties to three men who were all close to him, notable, and/or very influential.

Moreover, even if someone still wants to assume David did not know Uriah's wife and had never laid eyes on her until he saw her "washing herself," there is still a problem. David was told:

- (A) she was married,
- (B) who she was married to, and
- (C) who her father was (which would also have established who her grandfather was).

In spite of the personal ties he had to those men, David would not be denied his moment of pleasure. What in the world had happened to the one who was called, "a man after mine own heart" by God?

A Message from the LORD

As 2 Samuel 11 is about to end, it looks like David's cover up worked. Then the very last sentence says, "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (2 Sa 11:27), and the opening of the next chapter tells of a message the LORD sent to David:

"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. The rich *man* had exceeding many flocks and herds: 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. And there came a traveler 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 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: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity" (2 Sa 12:1-6).

David apparently knew scripture so well that, without even thinking about it, he could immediately recall the "fourfold" prescription of the following penalty: "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep" (Ex 22:1). Still, as we learn from many of the confrontations between Jesus and the religious experts of his day, just because people know the words in scripture does not guarantee they understand or obey those words.

In Exodus it also says, "thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" (Ex 20:17). So David adopted a pick and choose approach to God's word prior to his adultery (instead of being diligent and showing respect for "every word of God"). When he pronounced the "fourfold" judgment he was totally blind to his own hypocrisy. However, this would change when Nathan spoke the words of rebuke that have become one of the most notable lines in all of the Old Testament, "Thou *art* the man":

"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; 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. 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. 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 Sa 12:7-10).

In 2 Samuel 7-10 we see Nathan, on behalf of the LORD, giving David an in-your-face rebuke. So, what are we to make of the first six verses of the chapter?

Get to the Point?

Though "the LORD sent Nathan unto David," Nathan did not go in and wag his finger in the king's face, and declare him to be an adulterer. Given all the '*give it to me straight,*' '*cut to the chase,*' '*get to the point*' kind of talk men like to toss around, it is likely many people think that approach to the truth is better. Is it? Nathan did not do that. Instead, he spent time presenting a teaching parable first.

When the LORD takes the time to paint a word picture of "two men in one city" it is worth our consideration. So, take a break from this book. Open your Bible, reread Nathan's words, and jot down your thoughts about them. Then come back to this case study and see if scripture can provide additional illumination on this topic.

End of Part One of the Case of David's Turn

The Case of David's Turn (Part Two)

Truth and Consequences

Now we will look at something David wrote following his adultery with the wife of Uriah. Then we will consider the *timing* of David's turn, as this may have something to do with why that instance of adultery was uniquely grievous in the eyes of the LORD. After that, we will examine Nathan's parable to see what it can teach us today.

Nathan pronounced a judgment, "The sword shall never depart from thine house" (2 Sa 12:10), and it was fulfilled in David's life from then on. The situation eventually led to this passage: "The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps 51:17). Those words have been a comfort to many readers of the Bible. But to fully grasp the truth behind those words, we need to consider them in their context and we find the context in this verse: "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone into Bathsheba" (Ps 51:1).

When we know what occurred before David wrote Psalm 51, we can better appreciate having words like these included in scripture:

"Behold, thou [God] desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps 51:6-10).

Actions have consequences. Moses made a statement along that line which should give us pause even to this day, "be sure your sin will find you out" (Nm 32:23). In the case of David, this is exactly what happened.

The moment of truth came when David looked to God's standard, and it led him to express righteous indignation:

"As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this *thing* shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity" (2 Sa 12:5-6).

Undoubtedly, David assumed Nathan had presented him with a case requiring the king's judgment, and this is what occurred. However, he had no idea he was pronouncing judgment on himself.

Fit for a King

David knew what scripture said. Scripture contains special counsel and obligations for kings, including the following passage:

"And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of *that which is* before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, *to the right hand or to the left*" (Dt 17:18-20).

It says, "he shall **read therein all the days of his life**" and this should lead us to consider how those words are connected to the daily needs mentioned in other Bible passages such as:

- "He [Jesus] said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily" (Lk 9:23);
- "Give us day by day our daily bread" (Lk 11:3).

Did David "write him a copy of this law in a book" and "read therein all the days of his life" as a king was supposed to do? Apparently not, otherwise it may have kept him from taking Uriah's wife. How come? Because he missed out on the benefits set forth in the passage:

"That he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and **that he turn not aside from the commandment**, to the right hand, or to the left" (Dt 17:19-20).

[We are told, "David did *that which* was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kgs 15:5). So, the question arises, might David's "turn" have been avoided if he had written out a copy of God's law and read from it "all the days of his life" as scripture said? (Would doing so still benefit people today?)]

A Royal Mess

The "well of Bethlehem" passage was considered in the introduction and it showed how much David valued the lives of his men in the days before he ascended to the throne. Nevertheless, David needed to be especially vigilant after he began to reign. Why is this? Stewardship!

He did not become king by accident of birth or conquest of a nation. "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel" is the declaration found in 2 Samuel 12:7.

David had been given the position. So, he was obliged to do right by the LORD who had blessed him with that leadership opportunity. Yet, in his choice to commit adultery with Uriah's wife, he did the opposite.

"Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight?" (2 Sa 12:9) One can almost hear the disappointment in those words, then the LORD expressed an even more personal note of indictment: "Thou hast despised **me**" (2 Sa 12:10).

David's violation of the LORD's trust made things exponentially worse than if the same deeds had been done by another man; and why this is true is made clear in these words, "By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" (2 Sa 12:14). David's behavior was a reflection on the LORD, because the LORD had entrusted him with the position.

In Matthew 8:9 the term "a man under authority" described a man in a position of authority, who knew his orders were obeyed because of the authority of the one who had put him there. David "despised the commandment of the LORD," even though "the LORD God of Israel" was the one who anointed him "king over Israel" and had given him "the house of Israel and of Judah" (cf. 2 Sa 12:7-10).

Since his adultery was with the wife of one of his own "mighty men," it would have made the whole affair even more heinous in the eyes of men. Therefore, his actions did all the more to discredit the LORD who had made him king.

David was surely surprised when he heard, "thou *art* the man," and the words "thus saith the LORD God of Israel" (2 Sa 12:7) that came next were even weightier. But focusing solely on those items leads some people to gloss over Nathan's parable, missing an important lesson.

Nathan's report led David to unwittingly pronounce a judgment on his own behavior. He did not see himself in the parable, so his judgement regarding Nathan's report was not tilted in his favor by his own pride or prejudice. When Nathan went on to rebuke him, David learned he had actually pronounced judgment against himself.

The parable was a wake-up call for David, and it turns out the parable might also offer us a wake-up call regarding our Bible study method.

More than Meets the Eye

Here is just the parable portion of Nathan's message:

"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. The rich *man* had exceeding many flocks and herds: 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. And there came a traveler 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" (2 Sa 12:1-4).

Does it help people see the truth in the parable if a teacher tells them, '*David was the rich man, Uriah was the poor man, and Bathsheba was the lamb,*' or might it lead them to miss something in God's word?

"Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him" (Prv 30:5) and looking to "every word of God" in this case can help to keep us from missing truth that is hidden in plain sight.

In the parable "The rich *man* had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor *man* had nothing, save one little ewe lamb" and the rich man "took the poor man's lamb." Do those characters in the parable readily correspond to what actually occurred? Yes. David already had multiple wives, and he also had an unknown number of concubines. Moreover, as king, he probably could have had his pick of almost any unmarried woman in the nation. In spite of this, he took Uriah's wife.

So, one can see some correlation between the parable and reality on those points. But if we think identifying "the rich *man*," "the poor *man*," and "the poor man's lamb" means we understand Nathan's parable, then we will be turned away from seeking the whole truth.

If our method of assessing truth leads us to assume we have solved the parable of "two men in one city" by seeing the rich man as David, the poor man as Uriah, and the lamb as Bathsheba, then our method will blind us to something God's word intended for us to wrestle with.

Who is the "traveler?"

Begging the Question

If "**every** word of God" is worthy of attention, then we also need to take note of the parable's fourth character. The passage is begging the question, who is the "traveler?" If our method led us to overlook this fourth character, then we know something about our method has to change. However, some who ignored the "traveler" will choose to tell themselves their method of assessing biblical truth works just fine and will dismiss the fourth character in the parable as irrelevant so they can avoid having to deal with this evidence. But is he irrelevant?

Is it reasonable for a person who says they respect the authority of the Bible and every part of God's word matters, to then argue out of the other side of their mouth that something in scripture is irrelevant? No. Either everything in God's word matters or some things can be dismissed as irrelevant, but people cannot have it both ways.

Those who say the "traveler" is irrelevant assume they get to dictate when scripture matters. By that standard, nothing in scripture matters unless *they* say it does. But is that a reasonable measure to use when weighing the words of scripture if one is really seeking the truth? No, because the truth matters whether we like it or not. A love of the truth would never lead one to downplay or turn from the light of God's word.

Attention to Detail

Diligence is encouraged in scripture. Readers of this case have had a chance to ponder the "traveler" and some will say he is unimportant, while others will realize he is worthy of attention. Those who respond to the biblical evidence (by changing their approach to scripture when it comes to this passage) will learn a lesson that could affect how they perceive other parables in the Bible.

Giving heed to what men say about God's word is not the same as giving heed to God's word. The truth is, men who claim the "traveler" in the parable is unimportant, do scripture an injustice.

Several facts testify to the importance of the "traveler." For example, in Nathan's parable he is referred to three times. Does this suggest he was irrelevant? No, it does not.

He is called by three different terms: "a traveler," "the wayfaring man," and "the man that was come to him," but a common factor clearly links all those terms. What those terms have in common is they all refer to the one who "came" to the rich man in the parable of Nathan, and in a few moments, we will take a look at this link.

Beyond his being mentioned three times, there is something else about the "traveler" that should immediately arrest our attention. But before we get to this, if you think it is not wise to simply brush aside the "traveler," then go back and look at the parable. Note everything we are told about "the rich *man*," "the poor *man*," "the poor man's lamb," and the "traveler." Then try to cite biblical evidence to prove each one's identity. [Those who are tempted to skip this step will, if they do so, only cheat themselves out of an exercise that can help to acclimate them to a better Bible study method.]

Hidden in Plain Sight

On many issues people who read God's word will often discover the answer was there all along, hidden in plain sight. Much of the time what keeps us from seeing it is a tradition we have been taught or an assumption we have made which leads us to overlook a truth that is clearly proven by the evidence in scripture.

If we take scripture at face value, we would be forced to conclude the trouble between the "two men in one city" (i.e., "the one rich, and the other poor") started when, "there came a traveler unto the rich man" (2 Sa 12:4). This is no small matter.

Why did the coming of the "traveler" prompt "the rich man" to take "the poor man's lamb" and how would this information help us identify the figures in the parable? The way to identify the figures in a parable is to let scripture show us how to do so. The attributes that are tied to each character must be the measure of whom that figure represents. Letting the attributes in God's word define the terms allows scripture to lead us to the answer.

In the case of Nathan's parable, what do we see? Among the details included in the parable were the following points:

- (A) "the rich *man* had exceeding many flocks and herds,"
- (B) "the poor *man* had nothing, save one little ewe lamb," and
- (C) the rich man "took the poor man's lamb."

Since the parable is followed by Nathan's rebuke of David for taking Uriah's wife to be his own wife, it is easy to see a correlation between those attributes in the parable and reality on those points. However, the LORD inspired Nathan to go beyond a report of those three items. So, we should resist the methods of those who simply say, '*David is the rich man, Uriah is the poor man, and the lamb is Bathsheba,*' for doing so teaches people to be blind to the parable's fourth character.

The LORD led Nathan to include details about a "traveler," therefore one should not take away from God's word by acting like those details are not there or do not matter.

Letting God's Word Teach Us

A dictionary lists various attributes to help define a word and, in much the same way, the attributes recorded in scripture define the words or figures that have those attributes. In this case, the "traveler" is also called a "wayfaring man." It would be good if we looked to see how those terms were used elsewhere in scripture. Yet before doing so, we should first make sure we have considered all of the other details in the immediate context that is being studied.

We are told "a traveler" came "unto the rich man." He did not "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." Why did "the rich man" take "the poor man's lamb?" It was "for the wayfaring man that was come unto him." Notice the "lamb" was taken by "the rich man" and it was served to "the wayfaring man."

We need to go where scripture leads. If "the poor *man*" was intended to portray Uriah and "the poor man's lamb" portrays Bathsheba, then what must we conclude? The one who "took the poor man's lamb" was "the rich man," so this would have to be David because David was the one who took Uriah's wife. But in the parable "the poor man's lamb" is taken for and served to "the wayfaring man." Thus, scripture confronts us with this question: Who got the "lamb?"

When Nathan delivered the LORD's message to David it included this rebuke: "thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife" (2 Sa 12:10). David took Uriah's wife and it is clear he took her for himself. Since "the wayfaring man" (i.e., the "traveler") got the "lamb" in the parable and David got Uriah's wife in reality, the evidence proves the "traveler" in Nathan's parable was David himself.

Of course, not everyone overlooks the parable's fourth character. Some who notice the "traveler" say, '*Satan is the traveler*,' and others awkwardly try to deal with the "traveler" by saying, '*the traveler is sin*.' However, several things are true. First, nowhere in Nathan's parable do we find any mention of Satan, the devil, demons, evil angels, etc., nor did the God-inspired writer of scripture use any of those terms anywhere else in the passage.

Second, a concept (sin) did not get Uriah's wife pregnant, David did. Sin never happens apart from a person (i.e., sin does not do itself), and superficial efforts to explain away the "traveler" need to give way to a diligent effort to thoughtfully weigh all the biblical evidence so we can do justice to the text.

Again, the attributes in the passage tell us "the poor man's lamb" was taken **by** "the rich man". It was taken for and given to a second figure. If "the poor man's lamb" portrayed Uriah's wife, then there is no way to get around the facts. Uriah's wife was taken **by** David and she was taken for and given to David. Thus, "the rich man" and the "traveler" portrayed the same person, David, before and after he gave into lust.

An Assumption and an Opportunity

What seems to blind many to the possibility that the "traveler" is David is a false assumption; they assume a fourth figure in the parable has to be a fourth person in reality. This is a good lesson in the application of Jesus' words "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you." For, if we assume each character in a parable must correspond to a different person, then we will be unable to see any truth which does not fit our assumption.

When one of our assumptions is not true it will have the same effect as any prejudice. It will lead us to weigh the data using a false balance and the conclusions we reach will not be justified by the evidence. While it may *seem* reasonable to assume each character in a parable corresponds to a different person, we are not being led by God's word if we force scripture to conform to our understanding.

If biblical evidence could prove God's word demanded a one-to-one correspondence between parable and reality, then we would have a biblical justification on this point and we would not need to make an assumption. On the other hand, if we found even one time in scripture where one or more figures in a parable represented different aspects of the same person, what would we know? We would know it could also occur in other parables!

If a one-to-one assumption kept us from seeing the truth in this case, it could also do so on other parables. Hence, the correction offered by a biblical understanding of Nathan's parable can be far-reaching. This does not prove we have misunderstood other parables because of a false one-to-one assumption, but the possibility is there. So, the most reasonable thing to do would be to revisit the other parables in scripture and take another look at them in light of the realization that each character does not have to correspond to a different person.

Picture It This Way

No doubt, some recognized the "traveler" was David the moment they became aware of the fourth character. Still, seeing the "traveler" as David is only part of the lesson. If we initially missed the truth, then we need to figure out why we missed it.

Seeing David as both "the rich man" and "the wayfaring man" may cause some to bristle, for it might seem to be unreasonable given what is said of the "traveler" in the parable. We are told "there came a traveler unto the rich man" and twice more it refers to him as the one who "was come" to the rich man. So, is it reasonable to speak of a man coming to himself? Scripture does, and here are two examples so you can see how this expression was used:

- "when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger" (Lk 15:17);
- "when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews" (Acts 12:11).

The first verse is from the parable of the prodigal son and the second is from the record of Peter being delivered out of prison in the Book of Acts. In both cases, a man *coming to himself* is a word picture that portrays a man having a moment of internal dialogue. He was doing what we all do; he was talking to himself. So, to think a man could not "come to himself" is to judge based on an assumption which cannot stand up to biblical scrutiny.

[Note the Hebrew word used in 2 Samuel 12:4 to tell of the figure who "came," was also used to refer to the coming of feelings such as: "fear", "pride", "shame", and "desire" (cf. Prv 1:27, 11:2, 13:12).]

According to scripture a man can "come to himself." The question is, did David do this when he chose to commit adultery with Uriah's wife?

Consider something Jesus said about adultery: "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Mt 5:28). Some say that means '*thinking about adultery is the same as doing it*'. But Jesus did not say thinking about doing wrong is the same as doing wrong! The word "already" lets us know he was explaining a sequence – **before** a man can look "on a woman to lust after her," something must occur first. The man must have "committed adultery with her already in his heart" because thoughts come before the behaviors they produce. So, in his statement, Jesus applied this truth to instances of lust (i.e., the act of looking "to lust" comes second; adultery in the "heart" comes first).

James 1:14 says, "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed," so this tells us what happened in the case of David's pursuit of Uriah's wife. Moreover, James 4:1 offers some additional insight on the problem of lust: "From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *Come they* not hence, *even* of your lusts that war in your members?" This is found in the New Testament, yet there

is every reason to think the problems between the "two men" in Nathan's parable sprang from the same root cause. Truly, David turned out of the way and traveled away from the LORD when he sold himself on the idea of sleeping with Uriah's wife. But when he talked himself into it, who was involved in the conversation? He had the conversation with himself, and convinced himself to do it.

The Ultimate Reality

David was called a man after God's own heart (cf. 1 Sa 13:14, Acts 13:22-23). In order for David to do what he did to Uriah and with Bathsheba, **he first had to turn away from God** and there are many verses that make this point. First, note the LORD's rebuke of David, "Thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife" (2 Sa 12:10). The sequence of those words may tell us something. Would it be correct to say that before David made his move on Uriah's wife, he first had to choose to ignore the LORD's authority and despise the counsel of the LORD that is provided in scripture?

What Jesus said about one who looks "on a woman to lust after her" lets us know it only happens when the one doing the looking "hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Scripture tells us David "saw a woman washing herself" who was "very beautiful to look upon," and this would seem to qualify as looking "on a woman to lust after her" (and he may have even done so before that fateful night).

David "committed adultery" with Bathsheba "in his heart" prior to their physical union. The words of Jesus indicate it took place *before* David looked on her "to lust after her." In order for David to commit adultery "in his heart," he had to turn away from the light of scripture and the commandment that said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14). David was rightly portrayed as a "traveler" because he moved away from being a man after God's own heart. He had the same body, but there was a man of a different character residing therein.

The Other Giant

David is famous for defeating Goliath in a great moment of courage and faith. When he was king and turned away from the LORD, David became his own worst enemy. Though David did not see it when he decided to take the wife of one of his "mighty men," his decision to turn away from the LORD put him in opposition to the LORD. Ironically, a giant named Goliath was the one who was in opposition to the LORD when David challenged him so many years before.

"David did *that which* was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kgs 15:5). Notice what this reveals about David's behavior "in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." The rebuke is **not** primarily against an act of lust. It was a rebuke of the time when David "turned" – because in his choice to turn "aside" from the commandment, he was turning his back on the LORD.

Stories and old movies would use the image of a person dressed in white whispering good advice in their own right ear while at the same time the person was also pictured as dressed in black and whispering contrary advice in their other ear. It portrays one individual weighing their choices from two different perspectives. Which side will win? Unfortunately, when it came to Uriah's wife, David elected to cater to the appetites of "the wayfaring man that was come unto him." To do so, however, he had to first disregard what he knew to be right.

"The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe" (Prv 29:25). Unlike David's actions when he was standing before Goliath, his actions after he got Uriah's wife pregnant were founded on a fear of man: worrying about getting caught, the cover-up, etc. If a fear of God had been motivating David's actions, then he would not have done what he did. Notice how the principle of "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" played out in David's life. When he went against part of God's law, the rest of God's word was made of no effect unto him because he was not under God's authority (and in this state even murder seemed reasonable to him). "Purge out therefore the old leaven" is the advice of 1 Corinthians 5:7, and David had to repent of his disregard for the authority of God.

A Lesson in Humility

The LORD's rebuke was a lesson in humility for David and it is also a lesson for us. What it can teach us about our failure to be diligent in holding fast to God's word as the standard of truth should humble us. David had disrespected the authority of God, but if we intentionally disregard a truth of scripture, are we not doing likewise?

As with everything in God's word, the verses on David's adulterous affair with the wife of Uriah have much to teach us. The method used in this case study has shown how letting God's word be the sole measure of truth can illuminate truths in scripture. Still, there remains much we have not considered. The many Psalms of David, the things that happened in David's life after he was rebuked by Nathan (i.e., by the LORD), how a son of David and Bathsheba fits in the lineage of Jesus, and many other things linked to David's adultery are available for your further consideration. [Proverbs 6 was not available to David, but it has some strong words to say regarding "he that goeth into his neighbor's wife" (Prv 6:29). This and other passages of scripture can shed even more light on the time when David "turned" aside.]

If you were previously satisfied with the usual treatment of the figures in Nathan's parable, you now know your method of assessing truth needs work. Explanations of the parable which ignore the "traveler" lead people to miss the whole truth, so a change of method is in order if we want to better understand God's word. If this study did its job, then it has shown there is no substitute for letting God's word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path as we move through scripture.

While the first part of this study covered details about David, Uriah, and Bathsheba, one does not need all of that information to recognize there is a problem with the usual way of teaching Nathan's parable. There is a fourth character in the parable, but many people overlook this character or assume he is irrelevant merely because they do not see how a fourth figure can fit into the parable. However, those who gloss over or ignore the "traveler," will not see how Nathan's parable can help us to rightly discern other Bible parables.

The Conclusion of the Case of David's Turn

The importance of the "traveler" was not lost on David. When Nathan said, "Thou *art* the man," David did not have to wonder which man in the parable Nathan meant because David had taken "the poor man's lamb" **for himself**. In the parable, the LORD provided David a portrait of his actions, and the LORD can use this same parable to teach us.

If we ignored the "traveler," then we need to figure out why we did so. Receiving biblical correction involves more than switching our view on a particular point. In order to stand corrected, we also have to correct our method of assessing truth and this should be stressed when we share this insight with others.

If we have ever heard or read a teaching on Nathan's parable, then those things have shaped how we see it. Part of what leads people to miss the truth is when sermons or books treat the opinions of men as a reliable source of truth (rather than teaching people to weigh the biblical evidence). We must distinguish between the opinions of men and the evidence. If we do not do so, then we will be misled because we have used a false balance and our conclusions will not be based on the authority of God's word, even though we will be deceived into mistakenly assuming they are.

The evidence-based method used herein lets scripture teach us how to view the opinions of men and gives us a way to test our own beliefs. The Bible says, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prv 3:5), and one way we can do that is to always put our ideas to the test. The data we should judge by is the evidence in the word of God, and we know it is reliable because "all scripture *is* given by inspiration of God" (2 Tm 3:16).

The end of the Case of David's Turn