

2 SAMUEL—WEEK 7

A LESSON IN GRACE



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Bathing Bathsheba by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1656)
On display in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, Germany*

Nathan lowers the boom on David, but the LORD's penalty isn't as severe as what David wanted to do with the rich man in the parable. Grace becomes the overwhelming theme of what happens next. God even blesses David and Bathsheba's marriage (to an astounding extent).

Now back to the war. David shows grace to the defeated Ammonites. Is he teaching what he just learned?

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. To subscribe to the daily DEEP email, visit our website at www.ailbe.org and click the sign-up button at the bottom.

There, you will also discover many other resources, including many email newsletters, such as our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletter *Crosfigell*, and *the DEEP*.

We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

All the individual weekly study guides are available for download here:

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/itemlist/category/91-deep-studies>

2 Samuel, Week 7 — A Lesson in Grace

Copyright 2023 F. Michael Slay

The Fellowship of Ailbe

www.ailbe.org

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV stands for the English Standard Version. © Copyright 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NIV stands for The Holy Bible, New International Version®. © Copyright 1973 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV stands for the King James Version.

1 2 Samuel 12:1–9

Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: “There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”

So David’s anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.”

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon.’ ”

Nathan’s parable is chock full of puns and analogies that David should catch. The lamb *ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom*. That’s notably similar to the things that Uriah did *not* do with Bathsheba when he was called back from war by David. In particular, the Hebrew word translated as lay (כָּבַד, sha-kav) also can mean sex. Even more pointed is the line *like a daughter to him*. The name Bathsheba is literally “daughter seven” in Hebrew. Nathan is punning on her name.

Of course, David didn’t yet realize that Nathan is telling him a parable. He was thinking that this is an incident that has actually happened in his kingdom. Nathan cleverly took David back to his roots. He was once a poor boy, guarding sheep. David can empathize with the poor man in the parable.

So, he passes a sentence of death on this rascal. Everything is set up perfectly.

Then Nathan springs the trap. “*You are the man!*” And he lays David bare.

The word “anointed” is also particularly significant here. David is far more blessed by the LORD than the rich man of Nathan’s parable. *And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!*

But that’s only half the meaning of anointed. It also means that as God’s chosen king, David’s sin reflects on God. The shame isn’t confined to David.

And if Nathan knows the whole truth, maybe everyone knows, or will.

David’s cover-up has blown up in his face, and the shrapnel is everywhere.

2 2 Samuel 12:10–15a (ESV)

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’” David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.” Then Nathan went to his house.

Notice that the first thing Nathan says after David repents is, “*The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.*” Having just pronounced a sentence of death on the rich man of the parable, David has to have a knot in his stomach. He’s wondering what God’s judgement will be. So Nathan doesn’t leave David twisting in the wind. God won’t apply David’s judgement to David.

But the first part is even more important. “*The LORD also has put away your sin.*” The Hebrew word translated as, “*has put away*” (הֶעָבִיר, hay-ahvir) is a conjugation of the word for to cross (as in “why did the chicken cross ...”). Here, it literally means “made to pass.” “Has put away” is a fair translation. The sin isn’t stuck to David like a permanent tattoo.

It has passed on.

While God *has put away* the sin, He hasn’t erased it from David’s conscience. This powerful combination presages the gospel. David is intensely aware of his guilt, even though the LORD has put it away. In a sense, this magnifies his feelings of guilt. Grace eliminates restitution, so David feels guilty about that too.

David’s heart has always been in the right place, and now it’s just bursting. Great poetry results.

Have mercy on me, O God,
 according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
 blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
 and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions,
 and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
 and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
 and blameless in your judgment. — Psalm 51:1–4 (ESV)

3 2 Samuel 12:15b–18

And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill. David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them. Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said, "Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he would not heed our voice. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!"

David breaks every rule in the book—not God's rules, but the traditions everyone expects. Nathan has said the child will surely die, but in the language of prophesy, this is not a done deal. So David goes nuclear on praying for the child. This is so intense that it looks like extreme mourning.

But it's not. This is just David being overwhelmed by guilt. David has tossed the rule book because he couldn't care less about things like that. His every action is motivated by his overwhelming desire to atone for his sin.

But that's not how it works. The LORD has already *put away* David's sin. Atoning for it isn't on the table.

God's grace to David is almost driving him nuts.

*If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat;
And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;
For so you will heap coals of fire on his head,
And the LORD will reward you. — Proverbs 25:21–22*

The reference to burning coals may be from an Egyptian penitence ritual of carrying burning coals in a pan on one's head. In any case, the idea is that grace puts pressure on the recipient.

This leads to a very advanced lesson—grace has teeth. This only makes sense when we consider how important character development is to God.

We see this in the parable of the prodigal son. It's the key to understanding the book of Job. It's part of the message of the cross.

God means for us to grow. Many of His actions are designed for that purpose.

C.S. Lewis says it best in his chapter on Charity in *Mere Christianity*:

But the great thing to remember is that, though our feelings come and go, His love for us does not. It is not wearied by our sins, or our indifference; and, therefore, it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins, at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to Him.

4 2 Samuel 12:19–25

When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?”

And they said, “He is dead.”

So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, “What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food.”

And he said, “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”

Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. Now the LORD loved him, and He sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.

When the child dies, David seems to *stop* mourning. Now his servants are really perplexed. David seems to have it all backwards. You’re supposed to mourn for a week *after* the child dies, David.

But David’s grief isn’t simply about the child; he’s grieving for his own sin and for the child paying what David rightfully owes. His mission to keep the child from dying has failed, but it’s over. “*But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?*”

But then we hit the creepy line, “*I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*” The second part is just the answer to the question, “*Can I bring him back again?*” But the first part sounds like a reference to David ultimately meeting this son in the afterlife.

This supports the doctrine that those who die in infancy go to heaven.

The last paragraph isn’t entirely about what happened immediately afterwards. 1 Chronicles 3:5 indicates that Solomon wasn’t even Bathsheba’s next son. Instead, it shows simply that Bathsheba and David were eventually reconciled.

We shouldn’t gloss over that, thinking it was easy. Bathsheba could have easily spent the rest of her life plotting paybacks for David. Many women would have—with plenty of justification. Her pain was great. We aren’t told exactly how this played out, but it’s a good reminder that sin’s tentacles reach a long way.

Then Bathsheba bears the royal and messianic line. Wow. God blesses her and her marriage to David greatly. All that sin, all that pain, is not the end of the story.

God has yet another trick up His sleeve. He glorifies Himself in amazingly glorious ways.

5 2 Samuel 12:26–31

Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the people of Ammon, and took the royal city. And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, "I have fought against Rabbah, and I have taken the city's water supply. Now therefore, gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called after my name." So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah, fought against it, and took it. Then he took their king's crown from his head. Its weight was a talent of gold, with precious stones. And it was set on David's head. Also he brought out the spoil of the city in great abundance. And he brought out the people who were in it, and put them to work with saws and iron picks and iron axes, and made them cross over to the brick works. So he did to all the cities of the people of Ammon. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

Why did Joab not want to *take the city and [have] it be called after my name*? Is there something wrong with his name?

There's nothing wrong with the name Joab; it's a concatenation of an abbreviation of God's holy name (Yahweh) and an abbreviation of the Hebrew word for Father (abba)—"Yo-ab." (Note: there's no "J" in Hebrew. In every case, it's actually a "Y".) So, it loosely means Yahweh is father. No problem there. So, why is Joab insisting that David show up for the ending?

He wants it to look big. It's not Joab's victory; it's Israel's victory. It's not the end of a battle; it's the conclusion of a war. Joab wants to make it look significant and enduring.

All of this pomp and circumstance is made possible by the fact that they had captured the city's water supply. A city can't survive long without water, so surrender was imminent.

That allows them to choreograph their triumphal entry.

But next David is remarkably merciful towards the Ammonites. Recall how, in chapter ten, he sent emissaries to Hanun, the new king of Ammon (and the son of Nahash, David's friend). Hanun's advisors insisted that the emissaries were spies and treated them shamefully. That's what started this war.

David had no special instructions from the LORD to do anything in particular to the Ammonites. He decides, on his own, to let them live. We read of no special punishment for Hanun or any of his advisors.

In context (everything with Bathsheba, Uriah, Nathan, and the child) David's grace to Hanun, his advisors, and all the Ammonite people raises an interesting question. Is David teaching them the grace lesson he just learned?

The penalties loaded on the Ammonites are great, but they're not ultimate penalties. Thus, grace heaps burning coals on their heads. Also, while the text doesn't explicitly state that the Israelites told the Ammonites the whole truth about how this war started, how could they not have?

Imagine the weight of knowing that all this didn't have to happen—that David wanted to be friends.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. When have you been called out by a friend (or called one out yourself)?
2. Has guilt ever changed you?
3. Have you ever had trouble accepting forgiveness?
4. What's your favorite example of a marriage being saved?
5. How did you learn about grace?

Items for prayer: