

Sunday School Lesson

NATHAN AND DAVID
2 Sam. 7; 11; 12; 1 Kings 1:5-40
(Lesson for May 10)
GOLDEN TEXT—He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.—Jer. 23:22.
THE LESSON AS A WHOLE
Approach to the Lesson—Happy is the man who has a real friend in time of need. Happier still is he if that friend is a man of God. In David's hours of emergency God provided him with a devoted friend, the Prophet Nathan.

The sheer nobility of the prophet appears in each of the three encounters with David described in the lesson. Understand the king's varied problems, study Nathan's contribution to their solution, and you will appreciate the spiritual greatness of the man of God.

David's throne was safely established. His enemies were overcome. The kingdom was united. He had leisure to plan, hope, and dream. Why should he not erect a stately temple for his God—an architectural masterpiece to glorify the One who had delivered him from his enemies? But Nathan arrived, and his plans were changed.

Later on, enjoying his leisure hours on his rooftop, David beheld and coveted his neighbor's wife. A twofold sin followed, adultery and the murder of the woman's husband. Would the king's crimes go unchallenged? No, Nathan arrived and the monarch was called to account! Toward the close of David's life his son Adonijah led a revolt. Schism threatened the kingdom. Would the dastardly plot succeed? No, Nathan intervened and Solomon was crowned king!

What sterling qualities of soul did this amazing prophet possess that he could meet each crisis so effectively?

Verse by Verse
2 Sam. 12:—"The Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he said, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor." The prophet was God's messenger to a sinful king. His parable commences mildly but proves to be pointed and piercing. The use of dramatic stories or action to stress important points is often found in the Bible (e.g., 1 Kings 20:35-41; Matt. 13:3).

Verse 2—"The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds..." Nathan emphasizes the vast possessions of David, the "rich man" who had great treasure and also numbers of wives and concubines (2 Sam. 5:13).

Verse 3—"But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he... bought and nourished..." It grew up with his children... did eat

of his own meat... lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter." The "poor man" represents Uriah; the "lamb," his wife, Bathsheba. Note the touching details. With rare skill Nathan depicts the contrast between David's riches and Uriah's poverty, and the tender bonds which united Uriah and his be-
reaved wife.

Verse 4—"There came a traveller unto the rich man and he spared to take of his own flock... to dress... but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it..." Two vices are pictured in this parable: greedy self-interest and heartless lack of consideration for one's neighbor. Nathan added just enough detail to arouse the fury of David, whose "judgment and justice" were widely known (2 Sam. 8:15).

Verse 5—"David's anger was greatly kindled... he said, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die..." Nathan performed his task well. David was infuriated. Note (1) his oath; (2) his immediate verdict of death.

Verse 6—"He shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and... had no pity." Such restoration was part of Israel's legal code (Exodus 22:1; Luke 19:8). Nathan's portrayal of the rich man's pitilessness had found its mark in David's normally generous heart.

Verse 7—"Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord... and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul." Nathan now thrusts the sword of logic into the depths of David's conscience. Intense drama is in the words, "Thou art the man." The king had not only harmed a neighboring family; he had defied the all-knowing God.

Verse 9—"Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah... hast taken his wife... hast slain him with the sword... of Ammon." The prophet twists the sword which he has already driven into David's self-consciousness. Note: the Ammonite may have actually killed Uriah, but the king was guilty of his death. The double crime of murder and adultery may have seemed shrewd and successful. But actually it was an act of rebellion against the word of God.

Verse 10—"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me..." David's subsequent history attests the truth of this prophecy. See, for example, the death of his sons Amnon and Adonijah. God will simply not be mocked!

Verse 13—"David said unto bosom, and was unto him as a daughter." Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord... Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." David, convicted, deeply repentant, and recognizing that his crimes are actually against God, is forgiven and escapes the punishment normally meted out to adulterers and murderers (Lev. 20:10; 24:17).

Verse 14—"Howbeit, because... thou hast given... occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child... shall surely die." The honor of the Almighty seemed at stake! It must be vindicated. The baby to be born, although not responsible for David's crimes, would not survive. Sin may wreak havoc not only upon its perpetrators and their victims, but upon the innocent as well.

The Heart of the Lesson
Wanted: men of God today who will walk in the footsteps of the Prophet Nathan!

David had a grandiose but misdirected plan. He would build his God a temple. What was Nathan's reaction? Did he encourage the king in the project? No, Nathan was a man of profound spiritual insight. When "the word of the Lord came" (2 Sam. 7:4) to him, he understood its meaning and faithfully relayed its message to the ruler. Solomon, not David, would be the temple builder. Nathan's desire was to know and declare the will of God, not to cater to royal whims. He would make known the counsel of God at any cost.

Years passed. David yielded to the lust of the flesh. As though to cover up his adultery, he had an innocent husband murdered. What would the prophet do now? Cover up the crime? Minimize its horror in order to curry favor with his king? Never! Sin is sin whether in palace or hovel. With rare skill and penetrating analysis Nathan withstood David to the face: "Thou art the man." The prophet was a man of resolute courage. He was not intimidated by royalty when the Law of God had been broken.

David had grown old (1 Kings 1:1). His son Adonijah plotted to seize the throne, against the revealed will of God and David's personal desires. What would Nathan do now? Join forces with the rebel and leave the aging king to his fate? No, indeed. Nathan was a prophet of unswerving loyalty. He revealed the "foul plot and arrested it."

The word "Nathan" means "gift" (Heb.). The prophet was indeed God's gift to David, a great but erring king. Nathan's loyalty to David withstood the pressure of his day. Let us ever be loyal to those who have reposed their confidence in us.

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