

DAVID'S SIN AND REPENTANCE

2 Samuel 8:1-12:13

Key verse 12:13

"Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'
Nathan replied, 'The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not
going to die.'"

God established the kingdom of David. There were two purposes in doing this. The first was that God really wanted David to shepherd his people, as he had shepherded them. The second was that God wanted to raise his people as a priestly nation through David's kingdom, so that his people might fill the earth with the knowledge of God. God blessed David and his people when he established his kingdom. So David and his people had to maintain God's blessing. But to maintain God's blessing might be the hardest thing for David. In today's passage we learn how David sinned against God, and how he repented.

I. David shows God's kindness to others (8:1-10:19)

First, David's victories. (8:1-18) Until David's time, Israel had been an oppressed nation. Her battles had been defensive attempts to survive in the midst of powerful enemies. Under David, Israel became an empire. Also,

David subdued Israel's ancient enemies: Philistia, Moab, Edom, Aram. He extended the borders of Israel to the Euphrates by defeating Hadadezer king of Zobah, the major power of the time. David consolidated his empire with strategically located garrisons. Thus, he brought neighboring nations under the aegis of his control.

Why was he successful in whatever he did? It was because God blessed him with victories everywhere he went, on the basis of the promises God had given his servant Abraham. David was worthy of receiving God's blessing because he loved God more than God's blessing. For example, David took much plunder from his enemies, especially from Hadadezer king of Zobah. David, however, did not keep any of the plunder for himself; he totally dedicated to the Lord all of the plunder taken from the enemies. Even though David was a young and victorious king in his 'thirties,' he served God's will in his own generation; he reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for his people. David wanted to please God by attempting to help his people grow in the knowledge of God and by raising his people as a priestly nation. David was a king. But, in essence, he was a servant of God who knew God's heart. He also was a shepherd of his people who honored them as God's precious children and as his own brothers. David was a man of great ability. So he could have done everything all by himself--as Saul had done. But he did not do so. He co-worked with his men. David appointed Joab over the army, Jehoshaphat as the recorder and Zadok and Ahimelech as priests. David had gained their respect as their leader and never lost it; his secret was that he always thanked and honored God; thus he could also treat his men with thanks

3

and honor. In this way, he could maintain their respect to the end.

Second, David shows kindness to Saul's family. (9:1-13) What did David do in times of God's blessing? Did he attempt to retaliate against his old enemies, as the heroes and heroines in history usually had done? No, never! To our surprise, David was ready to show kindness to the family of Saul, even though Saul had made him a high level political criminal and had sought to rid the earth of him. Even if he had just ignored Saul's family, we could admire him highly; but David was willing to show his kindness to Saul's family. It was because David was a man of God, and because he remembered his covenant friendship with Jonathan.

In the past, David was in an adverse situation in which he could have been destroyed; he was utterly helpless. He thought his loyalty was betrayed, and that there was no way to restore his relationship with King Saul. So, he had to run for his life. In this time of distress, Jonathan came to David and made a covenant of eternal friendship. In this way, Jonathan encouraged him. (1 Sa 20:8) In the course of running for his life, David had become exhausted; then, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. Probably, at that time, David had wanted to give up on his life rather than be driven anymore as a political criminal. At this crucial moment, Jonathan, Saul's son, again came to the Desert of Ziph to help him to find strength in God. He said, "Don't be afraid. My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel." (1 Sa 23:14-18) As the saying goes, Jonathan was a friend in need, so he was a friend indeed. He also was a true friend in

4

God. In this way, Jonathan proved that he loved the truth of God, and that he loved God more than his own life. To David, Jonathan was an unforgettable friend to whom he owed his life. As long as David remembered God's grace, he could not forget Jonathan's friendship and his kindness--especially his covenant friendship with him.

One day David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Then David was told that there was still a son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet. When he was five years old, the news about the deaths of Saul and Jonathan came. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and was crippled. When David was told that a son of Jonathan was still alive, he was indeed happy, thinking that he could pay back his debt to Jonathan. So David immediately sent for Mephibosheth. As soon as David saw him he said to him, "Don't be afraid, for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table." (9:7) David not only restored his land and his personal property, he also promised to treat him as one of his own royal sons by letting him eat at the king's table. So Mephibosheth lived like the king's son in Jerusalem, and he always ate at the king's table. Mephibosheth did not deserve the favor David bestowed on him. But in David's eyes he deserved it because of his father Jonathan, who had been faithful to David even at personal risk and cost to himself. David had not forgotten God's grace to him through Jonathan when he was in the midst of adversity. David was a man who

5

knew God's grace. So, he was able to show such marvelous kindness to Mephibosheth. His kindness stemmed from God's grace. It is very important for all of us to know God's grace personally so that we can be gracious to others.

Third, David shows kindness to Hanun. (10:1-19) Hanun became king of Ammon at the death of his father Nahash. Many say that perhaps a formal treaty existed between the Israelites and the Ammonites. But there is no record of this. Since David lived in exile and sought refuge with such neighboring people as the Philistines when he was running for his life from Saul, we can guess that he made a personal relationship with Nahash during this time.

At the news of Nahash's death, David sent a delegation to pay his condolences to Hanun. The prince who had just succeeded his father as king did not know how to deal with the delegation. So he sought counsel from his nobles. Their counseling was very negative. They suggested that the delegates were spies who had come to spy out the land, not to express David's sympathy concerning Hanun's father. When Hanun heard this, he was so upset that he seized David's men, shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their garments in the middle at the buttocks, and sent them away. The young king did to David's men something a mischievous child might have done. What Hanun did seems funny. But his childish act offended the national pride of Israel. David did not sit quietly. He sent his army to destroy the Ammonites. Hanun's small mistake sparked a war of

6

international proportions. When Hanun king of Ammon saw David's men coming, he realized he had made a big mistake. But it was too late to restore a national relationship with David. In his perplexity Hanun hired twenty thousand Aramean foot soldiers first; later, he hired some more. These were under the control of Hadadezer, the most powerful ruler of the whole area. This time Hanun made an even greater mistake because of his fear.

When Joab, the commander-in-chief of David's army, saw the superior number of enemies, he said, "Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight." (10:12) The Israelites fought for their homes and for God's people. On the other hand, mercenaries fought for wages. Superior numbers and better weapons did not win the day. David's men who fought with courage and spirit won the victory. Hanun's failure teaches us that we must learn how to accept others' kindness, not to mention how to show kindness to others, as well.

II. David's sin and repentance (11:1-12:13)

First, David's sin. (11:1-27) In ancient times, kings went off to war in the springtime, and during the wintertime they came back to their base camp and stationed there until the new springtime came. One springtime, David sent Joab, his army commander, out with the whole Israelite army to fight, but he remained in Jerusalem. David was successful, so he thought that he could stay at home. Humanly speaking, it was reasonable for him to do so.

7

But from God's point of view, he was guilty of negligence, since he was assigned to unite the kingdom of Israel and expand its territory all the more. Ignoring his mission, David took a vacation and slept late while his soldiers were engaging in a bloody battle to destroy the Ammonites. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful. David found out who she was. She was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of his most loyal generals. David should not have molested the wife of one of his generals. But he brought her to his palace and slept with her. Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, "I am pregnant." To a servant of God, it was tragic news. David immediately thought about how to cover up his sin. David sent word to Joab to send Uriah the Hittite to him; he thought he could make Uriah sleep with his wife. When he was brought to him, David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." But Uriah did not go down to his house. Instead, he slept at the entrance to the palace with his master's servants.

When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?" David appeared to be mindful of Uriah. But in reality, he was only eager to cover up his sin. On the other hand, Uriah appeared to be unfaithful to his wife. But he was not. He was very faithful to God. Thus he was faithful to his wife. He was also very loyal to his king and to his master Joab. What he said to David was heart-moving. Look at 11:11. "Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's

8

men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" Uriah's loyalty was indeed remarkable. Nevertheless, David tried again to make Uriah go home and wash his feet. But it did not work as David had arranged. When David knew that he failed to cover up his sin, he decided to destroy Uriah by putting him in the front line where the fighting was fiercest. When David heard of Uriah's death, he brought Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, to his palace and made her one of his wives, and she bore him a son. In this way, the anointed servant of God and the shepherd of his people turned out to be a thief, a liar and a murderer. The author of this book comments on this event: "But the thing David had done displeased the Lord." (11:27b) David was a man with God's Spirit and a good shepherd of his people. But when he became lazy, he was vulnerable to Satan's attack, and soon he became the prey of Satan. Here we learn that laziness is not a small matter for any human being, for it is against God's truth in the creation of mankind. (Ge 1:28). We also learn that no man is perfect. Only God is perfect.

Second, David's repentance. (12:1-13) Because of his sin, David became very defensive and self-righteous. No one could dare tell him anything. David was too sensitive to hear anything. Everyone kept himself or herself in acquiescence. But God did not leave him alone. God sent Nathan the prophet to help him repent. When Nathan went to David he told him a parable. It was a story about a rich man. This man had a large flock of his own sheep. But he did not take a sheep from among his own sheep to

cook for his guest. Instead, he took the ewe lamb of a poor man who had only one ewe lamb, which he loved like his only daughter. David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes?' Nathan also told him about the future calamities and disgrace that would come upon him.

What was David's response to Nathan's rebuke? In ancient times, it was common sense that no one had the right to rebuke a king. If anyone offended a king's pride, he could not expect to survive on the earth. Now David was the king over his people. So he could have done away with Nathan with his power and authority. But he did not do so. Rather he humbled himself and repented his sin before the old man. As we know well, it is not at all easy for anybody to repent his or her sin. Especially, for a king, repentance is not necessary, for the king himself is the law. But to our surprise, David repented his sin. With our common sense, it is hard for us to understand how he could repent his sin. But when we think of him from God's point of view, we see that he could repent his sin because God intervened in his life by sending Nathan the prophet. God's grace is always

10

deeper than the ocean. As God loved him so much that he took him from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over his people Israel, so God could have abandoned him, for David despised his love. But God did not do so. Rather God gave him the spirit of repentance by giving him a clear message through Nathan. David realized God's love through this message, even though it was a heart-breaking one.

David's repentance was "thorough" and "sincere." Look at 12:13a. "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'" Psalm 51 tells us how David repented. David knew he should have been abandoned by God because of his sins. But he depended on God's love and compassion when he asked God to blot out his transgressions and to wash away all his iniquity. He asked God's forgiveness. (Ps 51:1-3) Even though David sinned against God, we see the true greatness of a man, David. Even though he was a king, David honored God as God. David knew that his sin was not before men but before God. So he said, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." (Ps 51:4a) David could have acted like an ordinary king by justifying his sins after damaging and destroying others' lives. But David maintained his position as a king ordained by God by his repentance before God.

When David enjoyed his physical pleasure he was not happy because sin was living in him; the Holy Spirit left him, and evil spirits came into him and tormented him. So he cried out, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence

or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." (Ps 51: 10-12) David knew that there was no method for the grace of forgiveness other than the repentance of sins. If his sin problem could have been solved by offering a huge sacrifice, he would have offered a large number of mooing bulls and bleating sheep. But David knew that God would not take pleasure in burnt offerings. He knew that God would accept his re-pentance only when he repented with a broken spirit and contrite heart. In short, David repented his sin before God with a broken spirit.

In this passage we learned why David sinned against God, and how he repented his sin before God. David sinned against God when he had a vacation spirit. Probably he wanted to rest only physically. But when he rested physically, his spirit rested simultaneously. Thus, he became vulnerable to Satan's attack. After committing sin, David suffered from unutterable troubles and distress and the torment of the evil spirits. David realized through this experience that it was indeed good to dwell in the house of God. (Ps 84:10) David also learned that repentance to God must be with a broken heart. Most of all, David learned that the grace of God's forgiveness of sin is truly life-giving. David said, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him..." (Ps 32:1,2a) It is indeed marvelous to know that Abraham became the ancestor of faith with his absolute faith in the promises of God, but David became our ancestor of faith through his sincere repentance. David's true greatness does not lie in his

human greatness, but in his act of thorough and sincere repentance, and in his faith in the grace of God's forgiveness of sin. In the secular world, deceiving or being deceived is what matters, and devious people are frequently recognized as great men. But in the spiritual world, those who have faith in the promises of God and who repent of their sins before God are highly honored as spiritual men who are pleasing to God. David was known to be the greatest man who ever lived. But we must know that he became the greatest man through his "repentance." May God richly bless you when you repent of your sins before God sincerely.