
2SAMUEL 12: 1 The LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

The Lord sends Nathan the prophet to reprove David; which he does by means of a curious parable, 2Sam 12:1-4. David is led, unknowingly, to pronounce his own condemnation, 2Sam 12:5, 2Sam 12:6. Nathan charges the guilt home on his conscience; and predicts a long train of calamities which should fall on him and his family, 2Sam 12:7-12. David confesses his sin; and Nathan gives him hope of God's mercy, and foretells the death of the child born in adultery, 2Sam 12:13, 2Sam 12:14. The child is taken ill; David fasts and prays for its restoration, 2Sam 12:15-17. On the seventh day the child dies, and David is comforted, 2Sam 12:18-24. Solomon is born of Bath-sheba, 2Sam 12:25, 2Sam 12:26. Joab besieges Rabbah of the Ammonites, takes the city of waters, and sends for David to take Rabbah, 2Sam 12:27, 2Sam 12:28. He comes, takes it, gets much spoil, and puts the inhabitants to hard labor, 2Sam 12:29-31.

Verse 1

There were two men in one city - See a discourse on fables at the end of Jdg 9:56 (note), and a discourse on parabolic writing at the end of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew.

There is nothing in this parable that requires illustration; its bent is evident; and it was construed to make David, unwittingly, pass sentence on himself. It was in David's hand, what his own letters were in the hands of the brave but unfortunate Uriah.

2SAMUEL 12: 2 The rich man had very many flocks and herds,

2SAMUEL 12: 3 but the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and raised. It grew up together with him, and with his children. It ate of his own food, drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was to him like a daughter.

Verse 3

And lay in his bosom - This can only mean that this lamb was what we call a pet or favourite in the family, else the circumstance would be very unnatural, and most likely would have prevented David from making the application which he did, as otherwise it would have appeared absurd. It is the only part of this parable which is at variance with nature and fact.

2SAMUEL 12: 4 A traveller came to the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man who had come to him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man who had come to him."

2SAMUEL 12: 5 David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this is worthy to die!

Verse 5

The man - shall surely die - Literally מוֹת בֶּן בֶּן מַוֶּתֶת, "he is a son of death," a very bad man, and one who deserves to die. But the law did not sentence a sheep-stealer to death; let us hear it: If a man steal an ox or a sheep, he shall restore Five Oxen for an ox, and Four Sheep for a sheep, Exo 22:1; and hence David immediately says, He shall restore the lamb Fourfold.

2SAMUEL 12: 6 He shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity!"

2SAMUEL 12: 7 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 out of the hand of Saul.

Verse 7

Thou art the man - What a terrible word! And by it David appears to have been transfixed, and brought into the dust before the messenger of God.

Thou Art this son of death, and thou shalt restore this lamb Fourfold. It is indulging fancy too much to say David was called, in the course of a just Providence to pay this fourfold debt? to lose four sons by untimely deaths, viz., this son of Bath-sheba, on whom David had set his heart, was slain by the Lord; Amnon, murdered by his brother Absalom; Absalom, slain in the oak by Joab; and Adonijah, slain by the order of his brother Solomon, even at the altar of the Lord! The sword and calamity did not depart from his house, from the murder of wretched Amnon by his brother to the slaughter of the sons of Zedekiah, before their father's eyes, by the king of Babylon. His daughter was dishonored by her own brother, and his wives contaminated publicly by his own son! How dreadfully, then, was David punished for his sin! Who would repeat his transgression to share in its penalty? Can his conduct ever be an inducement to, or an encouragement in, sin? Surely, No. It must ever fill the reader and the hearer with horror. Behold the goodness and severity of God! Reader, lay all these solemn things to heart.

2SAMUEL 12: 8 I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that would have been too little, I would have added to you many more such things.

Verse 8

Thy master's wives into thy bosom - Perhaps this means no more than that he had given him absolute power over every thing possessed by Saul; and as it was the custom for the new king to succeed even to the wives and concubines, the whole harem of the deceased king, so it was in this case; and the possession of the wives was a sure proof that he had got all regal rights. But could David, as the son-in-law of Saul, take the wives of his father-in-law? However, we find delicacy was seldom consulted in these cases; and Absalom lay with his own father's wives in the most public manner, to show that he had seized on the kingdom, because the wives of the preceding belonged to the succeeding king, and to none other.

2SAMUEL 12: 9 Why have you despised the LORD's word, to do that which is evil in his sight? You have struck Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

Verse 9

Thou hast killed Uriah - Thou art the Murderer, as having planned his death; the sword of the Ammonites was Thy instrument only.

2SAMUEL 12: 10 Now therefore the sword will never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'

2SAMUEL 12: 11 "This is what the LORD says: '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 neighbour, and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this sun.

Verse 11

I will take thy wives - That is, In the course of my providence I will permit all this to be done. Had David been faithful, God, by his providence, would have turned all this aside; but now, by his sin, he has made that providence his enemy which before was his friend.

2SAMUEL 12: 12 For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.'"

2SAMUEL 12: 13 David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin. You will not die.

Verse 13

The Lord - hath put away thy sin - Many have supposed that David's sin was now actually pardoned, but this is perfectly erroneous; David, as an adulterer, was condemned to death by the law of God; and he had according to that law passed sentence of death upon himself. God alone, whose law that was could revoke that sentence, or dispense with its execution; therefore Nathan, who had charged the guilt home upon his conscience, is authorized to give him the assurance that he should not die a temporal death for it: The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. This is all that is contained in the assurance given by Nathan: Thou shalt not die that temporal death; thou shalt be preserved alive, that thou mayest have time to repent, turn to God, and find mercy. If the fifty-first Psalm, as is generally supposed, was written on this occasion, then it is evident (as the Psalm must have been written after this interview) that David had not received pardon for his sin from God at the time he composed it; for in it he confesses the crime in order to find mercy.

There is something very remarkable in the words of Nathan: The Lord also hath Put Away thy sin; thou shalt not die; *גַּם יְהוָה הֵעִבִּיר חַטָּאתְךָ לֹא תָמוּת* gam Yehovah heebir chattathecha lo thamuth,

Also Jehovah Hath Caused thy sin To Pass Over, or transferred thy sin; Thou shalt not die. God has transferred the legal punishment of this sin to the child; He shall die, Thou shalt not die; and this is the very point on which the prophet gives him the most direct information: The child that is born unto thee shall Surely die; מות ימות moth yamuth, dying he shall die - he shall be in a dying state seven days, and then he shall die. So God immediately struck the child, and it was very sick.

2SAMUEL 12: 14 However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the LORD's enemies to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die."

2SAMUEL 12: 15 Nathan departed to his house. The LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it was very sick.

2SAMUEL 12: 16 David therefore begged God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night on the earth.

Verse 16

David - besought God for the child - How could he do so, after the solemn assurance that he had from God that the child should die? The justice of God absolutely required that the penalty of the law should be exacted; either the father or the son shall die. This could not be reversed.

2SAMUEL 12: 17 The elders of his house arose beside him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.

2SAMUEL 12: 18 On the seventh day, the child died. The servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead; for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he didn't listen to our voice. How will he then harm himself, if we tell him that the child is dead?"

2SAMUEL 12: 19 But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; and David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?"

They said, "He is dead."

2SAMUEL 12: 20 Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his clothing; and he came into the LORD's house, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he ate.

Verse 20

David arose from the earth, and washed - Bathing, anointing the body, and changing the apparel, are the first outward signs among the Hindoos of coming out of a state of mourning or sickness.

2SAMUEL 12: 21 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 was dead, you rose up and ate bread."

2SAMUEL 12: 22 He said, "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows whether the LORD will not be gracious to me, that the child may live?'"

Verse 22

Who can tell - David, and indeed all others under the Mosaic dispensation, were so satisfied that all God's threatenings and promises were conditional, that even in the most positive assertions relative to judgments, etc., they sought for a change of purpose. And notwithstanding the positive declaration of Nathan, relative to the death of the child, David sought for its life, not knowing but that might depend on some unexpressed condition, such as earnest prayer, fasting, humiliation, etc., and in these he continued while there was hope. When the child died, he ceased to grieve, as he now saw that this must be fruitless. This appears to be the sole reason of David's importunity.

2SAMUEL 12: 23 But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

Verse 23

I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me - It is not clear whether David by this expressed his faith in the immortality of the soul; going to him may only mean, I also shall die, and be gathered to my fathers, as he is. But whether David expressed this or not, we know that the thing is true; and it is one of the most solid grounds of consolation to surviving friends that they shall by and by be joined to them in a state of conscious existence. This doctrine has a very powerful tendency to alleviate the miseries of human life and reconcile us to the death of most beloved friends. And were we to admit the contrary, grief, in many cases, would wear out its subject before it wore out itself. Even the heathens derived consolation from the reflection that they should meet their friends in a state of conscious existence. And a saying in Cicero De Senectute, which he puts in the mouth of Cato of Utica, has been often quoted, and is universally admired: -

O praelarum diem, cum ad illud divinum animorum concilium coetumque proficiscar, cumque ex hac turba et colluvione discedam! Proficiscar enim non ad eos solum viros de quibus ante dixi; sed etiam ad Catonem meum quo nemo vir melior natus est, nemo pietate praestantior: cujus a me corpus crematum est; quod contra decuit ab illo meum. Animus vero non me deserens, sed respectans, in ea profecto loca discessit, quo mihi ipsi cernebat esse veniendum: quem ego meum catum fortiter ferre visus sum: non quod aequo animo ferrem: sed me ipse consolabar, existimans, non longinquum inter nos digressum et discessum fore. Cato Major, De Senectute, in fin. "O happy day, (says he), when I shall quit this impure and corrupt multitude, and join myself to that divine company and council of souls who have quitted the earth before me! There I shall find, not only those illustrious personages to whom I have spoken, but also my Cato, who I can say was one of the best men ever born, and whom none ever excelled in virtue and piety. I have placed his body on that funeral pyre whereon he ought to have laid mine. But his soul has not left me; and, without losing sight of me, he has only gone before into a country where he saw I should soon rejoin him. This my lot I seem to bear courageously; not indeed that I do bear it with resignation, but I shall comfort myself with the persuasion that the interval between his departure and mine will not be long."

And we well know who has taught us not to sorrow as those without hope for departed friends.

2SAMUEL 12: 24 David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her, and lay with her. She bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. The LORD loved him;

Verse 24

David comforted Bath-sheba - His extraordinary attachment to this beautiful woman was the cause of all his misfortunes.

He called his name Solomon - This name seems to have been given prophetically, for שלמה sholomah signifies peaceable, and there was almost uninterrupted peace during his reign.

2SAMUEL 12: 25 and he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he named him Jedidiah, for the LORD's sake.

Verse 25

Called - Jedidiah - יְדִידִיָּה, literally, the beloved of the Lord. This is the first instance I remember of a minister of God being employed to give a name to the child of one of his servants. But it is strange that the name given by the father was that alone which prevailed.

2SAMUEL 12: 26 Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city.

Verse 26

And took the royal city - How can this be, when Joab sent to David to come to take the city, in consequence of which David did come and take that city? The explanation seems to be this: Rabbah was composed of a city and citadel; the former, in which was the king's residence, Joab had taken, and supposed he could soon render himself master of the latter, and therefore sends to David to come and take it, lest, he taking the whole, the city should be called after his name.

2SAMUEL 12: 27 Joab sent messengers to David, and said, "I have fought against Rabbah. Yes, I have taken the city of waters.

Verse 27

And have taken the city of waters - The city where the tank or reservoir was that supplied the city and suburbs with water. Some think that the original, לַחֲדָתִי אֶת עֵיר הַמַּיִם lachadti eth ir hammayim, should be translated I have intercepted, or cut off, the waters of the city: and Houbigant translates the place, et aquas ab urbe jam derivavi; "And I have already drawn off the waters from the city." This perfectly agrees with the account in Josephus, who says τῶν τε ὑδάτων αὐτοὺς ἀποτεμνομενός,

having cut off their waters, Antiq., lib. vii., cap. 7. This was the reason why David should come speedily, as the citadel, deprived of water, could not long hold out.

2SAMUEL 12: 28 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."

2SAMUEL 12: 29 David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it.

2SAMUEL 12: 30 He took the crown of their king from off his head; and its weight was a talent of gold, and in it were precious stones; and it was set on David's head. He brought out the plunder of the city, exceeding much.

Verse 30

The weight whereof was a talent of gold - If this talent was only seven pounds, as Whiston says, David might have carried it on his head with little difficulty; but this weight, according to common computation, would amount to more than one hundred pounds!

If, however, מִשְׁקָלָהּ mishkalah be taken for the value, not the weight then all is plain as the worth of the crown will be about 5075 15s. 7d. sterling. Now this seems to be the true sense, because of the added words with the precious stones; i.e., the gold of the crown, and the jewels with which it was adorned, were equal in value to a talent of gold.

2SAMUEL 12: 31 He brought out the people who were therein, and put them under saws, and under iron picks, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick kiln: and he did so to all the cities of the children of Ammon. David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

Verse 31

He brought forth the people - And put them under saws. From this representation a great cry has been raised against "David's unparalleled, if not diabolic, cruelty." I believe this interpretation was chiefly taken from the parallel place, 1Chr 20:3, where it is said, he cut them with saws, and with axes, etc. Instead of וַיַּשֶּׂר וַיַּשֶּׂר vaiyasar, he sawed, we have here (in Samuel) וַיַּשֶּׂם וַיַּשֶּׂם vaiyasem, he put them; and these two words differ from each other only in a part of a single letter, ר resh for מ mem. And it is worthy of remark, that instead of וַיַּשֶּׂר וַיַּשֶּׂר vaiyasar, he sawed, in 1Chr 20:3, six or seven MSS. collated by Dr. Kennicott have וַיַּשֶּׂם וַיַּשֶּׂם vaiyasem, he put them; nor is there found any various reading in all the MSS. yet collated for the text in this chapter, that favors the common reading in Chronicles. The meaning therefore is, He made the people slaves, and employed them in sawing, making iron harrows, or mining, (for the word means both), and in hewing of wood, and making of brick. Sawing asunder, hacking, chopping, and hewing human beings, have no place in this text, no more than they had in David's conduct towards the Ammonites.

It is surprising, and a thing to be deplored, that in this and similar cases our translators had not been more careful to sift the sense of the original words by which they would have avoided a profusion of exceptionable meanings with which they have clothed many passages of the sacred writings. Though

I believe our translation to be by far the best in any language, ancient or modern, yet I am satisfied it stands much in need of revision. Most of the advantages which our unbelievers have appeared to have over certain passages of Scripture, have arisen from an inaccurate or false translation of the terms in the original; and an appeal to this has generally silenced the gainsayers. But in the time in which our translation was made, Biblical criticism was in its infancy, if indeed it did exist; and we may rather wonder that we find things so well, than be surprised that they are no better.